

## RESTORING FELLOWSHIP IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

The fellowship of life in the Body of Christ is a most precious and vital matter (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:1-7). We should grieve whenever a brother or sister loses that fellowship for whatever reason, whether it be the church's discipline exercised on that member, an accumulation of real or imagined offenses, or simply a drifting away. As those who love the Lord and His church, we should have an enlarged heart to seek to restore those who have been stumbled (2 Cor. 6:13). We must have the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ (Luke 15; *The Collected Works of Witness Lee [CWWL], 1994-1997, vol. 5, 20-25*).

As we co-labor with the Lord to restore others to the fellowship of His Body, the way in which we conduct ourselves matters greatly. Speaking on 2 Corinthians 10:1, Witness Lee commented, "Paul tells us that he entreated the Corinthians through the meekness and forbearance of Christ. But he does not tell us the purpose of his entreaty. He tells us how he entreated, but he does not say why he entreated" (*Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, 438). Brother Lee then explained, "This indicates that Paul's way of entreating is more important than the purpose of his entreaty" (438). He added, "We should learn of Paul to pay even more attention to the way we do something than for our purpose in doing that thing. Actually God cares more for the way we do things than for our purpose, our goal, in doing them" (439).

### "Restore Such a One in a Spirit of Meekness"

Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, even if a man is overtaken in some offense, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, looking to yourself lest you also be tempted." As Brother Lee noted, "In Greek the word for *restore* is the same as the word for *mend* in Matthew 4:21" (*CWWL, 1964, vol. 4, 37*), which indicates that James and John were mending their fishing nets when the Lord called them. Thus, restoring a saint who has stumbled is a kind of mending work, repairing the damaged fellowship in the Body.

Galatians 6:1 speaks of "a spirit of meekness." As Brother Lee pointed out, this spirit "is our regenerated spirit, indwelt by and mingled with the Holy Spirit. Such a spirit is the issue of living and walking by the Spirit [in Gal. 5:16, 22-23, 25]. Notice that Paul speaks of a spirit of meekness. The meekness we need must be in our spirit. The source of what we do should be our spirit, not simply our kind heart" (*Life-study of Galatians*, 255). Meekness is a quality of our regenerated spirit. Watchman Nee described Galatians 6:1 as a kind of fatherly care by one who is more mature in the Lord, as implied in "you who are spiritual." He added, "But even one who is spiritually more advanced than another should never take a 'better-than-thou' position, as if he is looking down from a pedestal to correct an inferior" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee [CWWN], vol. 46, 1271*). Brother Lee also commented, "We should not go to this fallen brother to rebuke or condemn him. We should not contact him like a lawyer or a policeman to imprison him. We have to love him, cover him, pray for him, and restore him in a spirit of meekness" (*CWWL, 1988, vol. 3, 567*).

### Entreating through the Meekness of Christ, Not Rebuking

In 2 Corinthians 10:1a Paul wrote: "But I myself, Paul, entreat you through the meekness and gentleness of Christ." From this we can realize that the meekness needed to restore and entreat others is not a meekness we might have naturally but the meekness of the Christ who indwells our regenerated spirit. Paul lived Christ, so he lived out the virtue of Christ's meekness (see *The Conclusion of the New Testament: Experiencing, Enjoying, and Expressing Christ, Volume 1 (Messages 265-322), 3231-3232*). We may naturally associate meekness with weakness, but this thought does not apply to the meekness of Christ in our spirit. In fact, Brother Lee told us, "The meekness of a transformed person is always full of life and full of power. Such meekness is living and refreshing and brings you into the presence of the Lord" (*CWWL, 1963, vol. 4, 168*). Meekness is an essential virtue in keeping the oneness in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:2-3). The apostle Paul charged his younger co-worker Timothy to exercise meekness in correcting those who oppose, hoping for their repentance (2 Tim. 2:25). This does not mean that we compromise the truth or that we tolerate gross sin, idolatry, or heresy. Rather, it means that if we are not meek but arrogant toward those who oppose, they may be hardened rather than helped. The same is true when we seek to restore others to the fellowship of the Body.

Often, rebuking others offends and hardens them. The offense caused by the rebuke then becomes another obstacle to restoring fellowship. Brother Lee told us, "To be a good elder, the first thing that one must learn is to not rebuke people. Through many mistakes we have learned that rebuking never works" (*CWWL, 1991-1992, vol. 1, 159*). Some may argue that the Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Paul rebuked the Corinthians. Paul, however, suffered great affliction and anguish of heart until he heard from Titus that the Corinthians had received his word (2 Cor. 2:4; 7:6-7).

Brother Lee noted, “This indicates that there was a danger in Paul’s rebuke to the believers” (160). Of the Lord Jesus’ rebuking certain people, Brother Lee said simply, “We are not the Lord Jesus” (160). Neither are we Paul. Some brothers are quick to exercise “authority” by rebuking others. This expresses their natural disposition, not the Lord. Brother Lee referred to such a practice as “foolishness” (160).

### **Restoring by Bringing the Lord to People and People to the Lord**

Seeking to restore others involves bringing the Lord to them and bringing them to the Lord. First John 5:16 tells us that we should ask in prayer so that we may give life to recover others to the Lord. In this verse the Lord does not give life directly, but the one who asks becomes a channel to bring the Lord as life to others in his contact with them. As Brother Lee explained, “This does not mean that the asker has life of himself and can give life by himself to others. It means such an asker, who is abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), becomes the means through which God’s life-giving Spirit can give life to the one he asks for” (*Life-study of First John*, 331).

The elders should be patterns in such shepherding care to restore those who have fallen away (1 Pet. 5:1-2). In the last volume of the *Elders’ Training* books Brother Lee told us:

The elders should contact people in a way that is full of love, concern, and sympathy in a meek and humble spirit (Gal. 6:1), not in a way to convince, to catch, to arrest, but to recover, to bring people back to the Lord. Their contact should be with the full realization that what the people need is the Lord and what can solve the people’s problems is to meet with the Lord. In their contact with others, they should avoid a superiority complex, argument, offense, or any form of humiliation, always remembering well that the church is neither a police station nor a law court and that we are neither the policemen nor the judges. (*CWWL, 1991-1992, vol. 1, 161*)

### **“Confess Your Sins to One Another”**

James 5:16a says, “Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.” In examining James 5:14-16 we should note that the confession and prayer is mutual—“to one another” and “for one another”—and between two parties—the one who is sick and the elders of that one’s local church (v. 14). Brother Nee said, “We have to confess our sins to one another because something is wrong in the Body of Christ, and the mutual confession of sins is needed. The sick have to confess to the elders, and the elders have to confess to the sick” (*CWWN, vol. 38, 493-494*). Some sicknesses may be due to [partaking of the Lord’s table unworthily](#) (1 Cor. 11:30), which is a matter of not properly discerning the fellowship of the Body (vv. 27-29). The principle in James 5 applies not only when someone is physically ill but also when a brother or sister becomes spiritually “sick” and loses the proper fellowship in the Body. The sick one must confess his or her attitude and conduct that led to the loss of the fellowship. As for the elders, according to Brother Nee, “It may be that the elders have been lacking in love. It may be that the elders have been negligent in care. Therefore, the elders have to confess these sins” (494; see also *CWWN, vol. 44, 833*). This word to the elders applies to all the saints as well, especially to those who bear a burden for others’ care. In some cases our actions and ways may have offended and stumbled others. Of course, we should confess such mistakes and seek forgiveness from those we have offended. But we should also admit any failures and shortcomings in our shepherding care. We should not be hindered by thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think but should humble ourselves to be patterns in confessing and seeking forgiveness (Rom. 12:3; 1 Pet. 5:3, 5).

### **Summary**

If we allow the loving and forgiving heart of the Father and the shepherding and seeking spirit of the Son to abide in us, we will spontaneously desire to restore those who have fallen away from the Lord and the fellowship of His Body. To carry out such a burden, we must deal with any attitude of superiority, of judging others, or other form of pride so that we may contact others in a spirit of meekness, a meekness that is not ours but is the meekness of Christ lived out through us. We must pray ourselves into oneness with the Lord so that we can become a channel to give life to others, bringing the Lord to people and people to the Lord. As the Lord leads, we may confess our failures, including shortcomings in our shepherding care, to those who have stumbled and may gracefully receive their confession and repentance in return. If we seek and practice in this way, we will remove ourselves as a hindrance and open the door for the Lord to restore the proper fellowship in the Body.