

SERIOUS ERRORS MADE CONCERNING THE FELLOWSHIP AMONG THE CO-WORKERS

Recently, a former co-worker accused the North American co-workers of drifting toward organization and hierarchy by allegedly giving serious consideration to centralizing ownership of the local churches' meeting halls. This is a gross misrepresentation of what actually happened in a North American co-workers' fellowship. Moreover, in spreading his false account, this brother violated three important biblical principles:

1. The contents of fellowship among the leading ones, whether among the elders or among the co-workers, should not be disclosed beyond that fellowship;
2. At the conclusion of such a fellowship, whatever the outcome, all the participants should speak the same thing in order to maintain the one accord among the churches; and
3. The leading ones should take care not to cause others to overstep what God has measured to them.

A Gross Misrepresentation

The former co-worker's story is factually in error. The North American co-workers asked the Defense & Confirmation Project (DCP) to look at ways to provide the churches in the United States with greater legal protection. During a meeting in which DCP was to give a presentation regarding issues and recommendations, a brother asked a question concerning ownership of church meeting halls in another country. Contrary to this former co-worker's account, this was not part of DCP's presentation. A brother serving in that country responded that the law did not allow the local churches to own their own properties but required all properties to be held by a single legal entity. There was never a proposal that the churches in the U. S. adopt this practice. Neither was there criticism of those in that country who had done so due to legal necessity. The former co-worker's claim that the co-workers ever considered taking over ownership of all the church meeting halls in the U. S. is a fabrication. There was never such a proposal, and the subject of centralizing meeting hall ownership was not even discussed.

The Pattern of Acts 15

However, even if there had been such a proposal and such a discussion had taken place, this former co-worker would still have been wrong to spread rumors to generate antipathy toward the co-workers. This is clear from an examination of Acts 15, which is the only chapter in the Bible that records a gathering of apostles and elders. In that chapter the apostles and elders met to consider a problem that threatened the truth of the gospel and the one accord among the churches. Verse 5 presents the issue at hand: "But certain men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up from among them, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." Verse 6 says, "And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter." Concerning the next verse Brother Lee commented, "We should note the phrase *when much discussion had taken place* (v. 7). Even though the word *much* indicates that considerable discussion had taken place, the content of the discussion was not recorded. Only the facts that Paul, Barnabas, and Peter spoke were recorded" (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee [CWWL], 1956, vol. 2, 425*). The outcome of that meeting, as reflected in the decision pronounced by James, was not entirely consistent with God's New Testament economy (vv. 13, 19-20). Nevertheless, Acts says that "it then seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church" to send men to the Gentile churches with Paul and Barnabas (v. 22). Moreover, the apostles and elder brothers wrote to the believers in the Gentile churches, testifying that the leading ones had "become of one accord" (v. 25) and relaying the decision that "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (v. 28). The result was that the saints there "rejoiced at the encouragement" (v. 31).

Acts 15 contains many principles to follow in meetings of the co-workers and the elders. There should be much and thorough fellowship with freedom in the Spirit. If and when the sense of the Spirit's feeling is clear, a decision can be articulated by a senior brother. Whatever the outcome of the meetings, all the brothers should be one and speak the same thing, not criticizing any decision or lack thereof or other meeting participants. All this implies maintaining a principle of confidentiality regarding the elders' and co-workers' meetings. Brother Lee observed, "The fellowship in the elders' meetings must be carried out with a proper confidentiality. No administration, whether of a government or a corporation, allows people to release the details of its deliberations to others. If an employee in a corporation releases news about the decision made by the management, he will probably be fired" (*CWWL, 1989, vol. 2, 340*).

For a brother to speak to others about what was said in a co-workers' or elders' meeting, even if it is accurate (and it was not accurate in this case), is to spread gossip, to undermine the saints' confidence in the leadership in the churches and in the recovery as a whole, and to sow discord. Brother Lee commented:

Regardless of what you hear and see, especially concerning the matters discussed in the meetings of the elders and co-workers, you should not spread them to others. This is not because we have anything dark to hide, but it is for the benefit of others. Any matter related to the administration of the church should remain only in the fellowship and should not be carelessly spread outside before it is decided. If we carelessly spread information, this shows that our learning is short. If we all would understand this limitation and hold on to it, then there would be no gossiping, no scandals, and no problems in the church. (*Being Apt to Teach and Holding the Mystery of the Faith*, 23)

Sadly, this brother's manifest intent is to scandalize the co-workers in the saints' eyes. He has often claimed that others have overstepped boundaries, yet he has neglected Brother Lee's fellowship concerning the boundary of place: "In the elders' meetings, anything related to the church and to the Lord's testimony can be discussed. But when the setting is changed and the place changed, the same things cannot be discussed. This is the consideration of place" (*The Elders' Management of the Church*, 142).

Moreover, of the decision made in Acts 15 Brother Lee observed, "Once they made a decision concerning the problem of circumcision, no further opinion was expressed" (*CWWL*, 1957, vol. 2, 250). This again should be a pattern to us. Expressing a contrary opinion about the outcome of a leading ones' fellowship fosters dissent and tears down God's work (251). In the present case the brother admitted that he said nothing in the meeting, yet he has written copiously to others attacking the co-workers with his false account of what happened. Speaking of the elders' meetings Brother Nee said, "If someone does not speak in the meeting of the overseers, yet goes out and speaks to others, he is a person with a double tongue. Such a person cannot be in our midst" (*CWWN*, vol. 51, 19). Though some of these principles were stated in the context of the eldership, they apply to the co-workers' fellowship as well.

Inviting Overstepping

Spreading one's dissenting opinions or criticisms invites the recipients to overstep their own measure. God has given a measure to every member of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:3; Eph. 4:7). When each member functions within its measure, there is a beautiful expression of the Body of Christ (v. 16). In 2 Corinthians 10:13 Paul spoke of the "God of measure." In this verse *measure* refers to the scope of one's function in the Lord's service. To go beyond that measure brings disorder into the Body. This is what this dissenting former co-worker has incited others to do.

God has measured the leadership in the work of the Lord's recovery to a group of co-workers. They are in His hand and subject to His discipline. However, for a worker to spread criticisms among others is not only for him to overstep his measure but also to invite others to join him in that overstepping.

According to Ephesians 4:16, the usefulness, the function, of every member is according to its measure and can neither be too much nor too little. When the function expressed in some brothers exceeds their measure, it is abnormal. We must speak the truth in the Lord. In some local churches some brothers have stepped over their measure. They should leave certain things, which are outside their limit, for the other brothers, because God has not measured that much to them. (*The Church as the Body of Christ*, 182-183)

During the turmoil in the late 1980s, a dissenting co-worker spread rumors concerning a certain matter to a leading brother from another place. That brother asked Brother Lee about those rumors. Brother Lee asked him simply, "Has this been measured to you?" The brother testified that this simple word made him clear.

Conclusion

Normally, the contents of a co-workers' fellowship should not be disclosed. Those who violate this principle often give biased representations and draw others who lack direct knowledge into their dissenting opinions and into overstepping their measure. We correct this false account here in the hope that some who may have been stumbled by this former co-worker's railings may be rescued from participating in his dissent. His conduct in this matter strongly validates the removal of him from participation in the work and in the lead in the church where he was.