

Ministry Excerpts Pertinent to Facing a Recent Situation

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| On Dealing with Saints' Problems..... | 1 |
| On the Error of Autonomy | 3 |
| On the Apostles' Right and Responsibility toward the Churches and the Elders | 8 |
| On Local Administration in View of the Body of Christ | 21 |
| On Seeing, Knowing, Caring for, and Honoring the Body..... | 23 |
| On Autonomy Independence Being a Different Teaching, a Wind of Teaching | 27 |
| On Overemphasizing Spirituality or Scriptural Teachings Being to Teach Differently | 29 |

On Dealing with Saints' Problems

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1950-1951, vol. 1

"The Recovery of the Church According to the Pattern on the Mountain"

pp. 156-157

If a problem concerns right and wrong, we should understand the problem, but we should not arbitrate between right and wrong. We have the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life in us. To touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is to touch Satan, and to touch the tree of life is to touch God. If we remain in right and wrong, good and evil, we are touching death, and the result is surely death. Suppose a brother and his wife have a fight one day. Because both are believers, they cannot divorce each other. Nevertheless, the sister may come to the elders, recount everything, and ask if her husband was right. Normally, when we hear about arguments, we ask who initiated the argument, and if this sister is asked, she would probably say that her husband initiated everything. Some of the elders may agree with her according to the saying: "A fight between two eventually becomes a fight among three." At first one fights against one, and then two fight against one. Not only so, if some other elders do not agree with her, they may be dragged into the argument as well, so that the argument becomes two against two. Soon, the argument will spread to other brothers and sisters, and they will all become involved in the argument.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1960, vol. 2

"The Elders' Management of the Church"

p. 245

Suppose a brother has difficulty with his wife at home. The matter can be brought up in the elders' meeting, and the elders can discuss ways to help the situation. The elders can know about this, for they are the elders in the church, and they are responsible for caring for the brothers and sisters and shepherding them. But under different circumstances and with other brothers and sisters present, the elders should not bring up the matter, for if others know about it, it will be unfair to the couple involved. Here is the need for the boundary. In order to administrate a church properly, there is the need to distinguish these boundaries.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1984, vol. 2

“Elders Training, Book 4: Other Crucial Matters Concerning the Practice of the Lord’s Recovery”

p. 433

In the past we all thought that there was the need of making a public announcement. We must see, however, that to make a public announcement of a kind of excommunication involves a person’s name, position, and status in today’s society. This is serious and very risky. This involves families and human relationships. In this matter we have been under the influence of the tradition of Christianity, but in my experiences over the past fifty years I have surely learned that to make a public announcement, especially in a matter concerning immorality, is not so safe and profitable. If in a public meeting you announce a certain person’s being excommunicated, he could appeal to a court of law and say that you are spoiling his name. He would claim that since you said that he committed immorality, you must provide the evidence in a court of law. This would cause much trouble. This one may have committed that sin, but according to law, you must present the evidence. This sinning one may not have that much growth in the Lord, but he may hold a high position in society. He would vindicate himself by bringing this case to the law court to clear up his name. This shows us the turmoil that such a public announcement could cause. Also, such a public announcement could damage families. This could also cause a young female to have no way to go on, humanly speaking, and no way to live, especially in the Far East.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985, vol. 1

“Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord’s Recovery, Book 6: Everyone Functioning for the Increase of the Church”

pp. 494-495

Fourth, the discussions in the elders’ meetings must concern the church as a whole. It is best to not discuss problems related to someone’s family, social status, legal issues, moral and ethical relationships, and so forth. Of course, some discussions are unavoidable. For example, something may have happened between the brothers and sisters that is of concern to the elders. Given this concern, there may be a need for discussion, but if a discussion can be avoided, it should be avoided. The elders’ meetings must have a mandatory principle of discussing such matters only in the elders’ meetings; such matters should not be discussed outside of the meetings, even between the elders. In today’s society there is a high regard for the law, and any discussion of problems related to people’s personal reputation, family, social status, and so forth may unintentionally infringe upon the law.

A brother sued the elders in one church because a responsible one openly discussed a problem related to the brother’s reputation and social status. This created legal problems for the elders and the entire church.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985, vol. 2

“The Propagation of the Gospel and the Administration of the Church”

p. 426

When the elders meet to discuss matters, it often involves the saints’ personal matters, reputations, families, and status and position in society. Sometimes it even involves legal issues. In the elders’ love for a particular saint and in their desire to perfect him, there will be a need to discuss and fellowship about his situation in the elders’ meetings, but if the elders leak this information, it will affect the saint’s personal reputation and may even damage his family and go against the law. Such things have occurred in Christian groups. Thus, we should not disclose someone’s shortcomings or

weaknesses to others. This can be likened to a doctor who examines and treats patients but then discloses their condition to others. This involves the law, and the brothers must be careful.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1986, vol. 1

“Elders’ Training, Book 8: The Life-Pulse of the Lord’s Present Move”

p. 306

During the eighteen years that I was with the co-workers under Brother Nee’s leadership, I never caused any problem, nor did I get involved with any problem. By the Lord’s mercy I was a pure person. Brother Nee had two great crises during that time—one was due to his marriage, and the other one was due to his pharmaceutical business. I was the main one to get the situation solved in both of these matters. The latter time forced Brother Nee to be away from his ministry for six years. By the Lord’s mercy I went to Shanghai, and that brought in a situation that enabled Brother Nee to return to his ministry. A revival was brought in mainly through messages I gave on the tree of life. Nearly all those who did not feel happy with Brother Nee repented. No one proposed or advised this, but they all repented to Brother Nee.

My point is this—with the elders, the co-workers, and all the brothers, the basic need is to keep yourself from being involved in any problem in the church life. We all must learn to be wise not to create any trouble or to speak a light word concerning anyone in the recovery. We should just say something positive.

On the Error of Autonomy

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 3

“Building Up the Body in Oneness”

pp. 283-285

ALL THE LOCAL CHURCHES BEING ORGANICALLY RELATED IN ONE BODY

In addition to saying that the apostles no longer have authority over the elders and over the churches, some are saying that one church cannot touch the affairs of another church. In other words, every local church is completely autonomous. How could such a speaking be right? Although there are many local churches, there is only one Body of Christ in the universe. Does Christ have many bodies, with every local church being a separate body? Is the church in San Francisco one body, and the church in Berkeley another body? Ephesians 4:4 clearly says that there is “one Body and one Spirit.” From the day of Pentecost until the Lord comes back, all the churches are just one Body. The church in San Francisco and the church in Berkeley are related in this one Body.

Some have said that Brother Lee’s teaching is to federate the churches, just as the fifty states are federated. It is shameful to refer to the local churches as a federation. The churches are not a federation, an organization without life. All the churches combined together are the Body of Christ, which is an organism. How can we say that the shoulder and the waist of our human body are autonomous? If one of the members of our body is separated from the body and becomes autonomous, it will die. Every member of the body has an organic relationship to the body. Likewise, all the local churches on the whole earth are one organism, the Body of Christ. It is impossible for any of the local churches to be autonomous, to be independent from the other churches. To say that all the churches added together are a federation is a shame to the church. The church is not a federation. The church is the Body of Christ. It is an organism, and all its parts have a relationship in life. Thus, it is impossible for any local church to be absolutely independent from the other local churches. To say that the local churches are autonomous is a serious deviation from the truth.

It is absolutely wrong to say that the church in San Francisco has nothing to do with the church in Anaheim or with the church in Taipei. This is impossible. All the churches together are one organism, the Body of Christ. The parts of an organism can never be severed from each other. Today the earth has become very small because of the modern means of communication. What happens in one part of the earth is known all over the earth in a very short time. The church is not an organization but an organism. When the churches come together, they are not a federation; they are the one Body of Christ. Since the churches are one Body, there is an absolute relationship of life between them. Regardless of our nationality or spiritual condition, we all have one common life (Col. 3:4). We also have one Spirit, that is, the Spirit of God. This Spirit is our oneness (Eph. 4:3). All the members of our human body have only one blood circulation. Hence, it is impossible to separate the members of our body. It is not only impossible to separate the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers from the churches; it is also impossible to separate the churches from each other. Of course, there is a separation between the churches because of geography. This spontaneously produces a separation in certain practical affairs. But as far as the fact and the life are concerned, all the churches are one Body.

A CONCLUDING WORD

At this point we should have a clear understanding of the relationship between the apostles and the elders and between the local churches. This relationship is continuous; it can never be broken. In certain practical affairs, because of the separation of geography, the churches are somewhat independent, but even this is not absolute. Because the churches are all one Body, we cannot say that there is absolutely no relationship between the churches. Christians cannot be absolutely separate, nor can the churches be absolutely separate. Moreover, the apostles and the elders cannot be absolutely separate, nor can the full-time workers and the churches be absolutely separate. Although there are distinctions between the churches, the elders, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers, in the end all of these are one Body. The parts of the Body cannot be absolutely separated. In the meetings of the church the distinctions between the apostles, the prophets, the elders, and the other saints are not important. Everyone has a mouth, and everyone can speak. What matters in the church meetings is life, Christ, and the Body.

“The Body of Christ”

p. 386

In God’s economy and in the Body of Christ *independence* is a devilish word. We Christians should never be independent. We should not be independent of God or of one another. We cannot go on in the Christian life if we isolate ourselves from one another. Furthermore, no local church can be absolutely independent from the other local churches. The local churches should be dependent on one another. The church in Seattle should be dependent on the church in Spokane, and the churches in the United States should be dependent on the churches in England. We must be careful concerning the creeping in of different teachings related to matters such as autonomy and federation.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 4

“A Timely Trumpeting and the Present Need”

p. 25

The last time I went back to the United States, I heard that some have brought in the teaching of autonomy. Immediately, I strongly reprovved this error. This kind of speaking and practice cannot be brought into the Lord’s recovery. Everyone likes this practice because everyone likes to be independent and equal. No one likes to be under anyone else. But we have to realize that the church of Christ is not a political institution. The church of Christ is an organism just like our body. The Bible says, “The church, which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22-23). This is not an illustration but a

statement of a fact. In Ephesians 1:19-22 we are shown that all of Christ's attainments in His resurrection and ascension are for the church. Verse 23 continues to say that this church is "His Body." Christ is the Head (5:23), and the church is His Body. This is a definite fact.

Take our human body as an example. It is impossible for an arm to form an autonomy. If the arm is an autonomy, and the palm is another autonomy, while the nose, the eyes, and the legs are all different autonomies, the body is completely separated and dismembered, and there will not be a body anymore. For this reason, we must see that the church is not a political institution. The church is absolutely an organism. Since the church is an organic body, there is no way for it to be separated or autonomous. The Bible uses our organic body to describe the church, the Body of Christ. This is a most thorough description, and by it many problems can be avoided. If the state-federated government of the United States is used as an illustration of the churches, it puts the church in a political realm. This is completely wrong and will kill the church.

"The Perfecting of the Saints and the Building Up of the Body of Christ"

pp. 95-96

The second wind some are emphasizing is that every local church should be absolutely autonomous. The local church is established on the principle of one city, one church. In a certain sense, the administration is by locality. For example, whether a church should break the bread on the Lord's Day morning or the Lord's Day evening, or whether it should meet in one central hall or in a few dozen halls are matters related to the local administration of a local church. But on the other hand, the church is the Body of Christ. It is universal. All the millions of saved ones throughout the centuries are in this Body. The life within this Body is the life pulse of every member. It is like the blood circulation; you can never separate it into different parts. As far as the different parts of our body are concerned, you may say that this is the hand and that is the leg. But as far as the blood circulation is concerned, you cannot say that this is the blood of the hand and that is the blood of the leg. Hence, the management of a local church is, on the one hand, local in its administration yet, on the other hand, not isolated in its communication. Not only is there the mutual sharing of finances; even in other practical affairs we see the same thing. The churches in the various localities are managed separately, yet they are not separated absolutely. They are still the universal, corporate Body of Christ. For anyone to stress the autonomy or independence of a local church is too much. It destroys the oneness of the Body of Christ.

"The Building Up of the Body of Christ"

p. 310

Some have said that the local church is an autonomous congregation: each should be governed by itself, and all the localities are separate. Seemingly, this saying is correct. Actually, it is wrong because each church is not an individual body. The Body is the sum total of all the churches added together. In a body one cannot carve out any autonomy.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 1

"Questions, Answers, and Fellowship Concerning the Organic Practice of the New Way"

pp. 377-379

THE ERRONEOUS TEACHING OF AUTONOMY

The Lord's recovery came to the United States in a definite way in 1962. In the early years everything was wonderful. There had been trouble in mainland China from different teachings and later in Taiwan, but in the United States for twenty-five years, from 1962 until 1987, different teachings were not a problem among us in the Lord's recovery. However, in the fall of 1987 a different teaching came in that had originated with the open Brethren. It was their teaching of the autonomy of local assemblies. This teaching had damaged them to the uttermost by creating an

opening for division to come in. Based on this teaching, certain ones could be divisive yet feel justified.

Autonomous means “self-governed, independent.” In his book *The Churches of God* the Brethren writer G. H. Lang taught that local assemblies are autonomous. Lang’s thought was that every local assembly is absolutely independent after it has been established, regardless of who established it. This teaching brought in many divisions, especially among the open Brethren. In many localities there were two or more open Brethren assemblies. Whenever some in an assembly became unhappy, they felt free to set up a separate assembly even in the same city. This practice has caused much damage.

According to the New Testament, each local church is autonomous in local business and administrative affairs. For instance, what time the saints will meet for the Lord’s table is decided by each local church. However, in the building up in life and the Lord’s testimony, no church can be autonomous. The churches should be the same in these crucial areas. Paul wrote that he taught the same thing in all the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 4:16). First Corinthians 1:2 says, “To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours.” *With all those who call* indicates that this Epistle was intended not only for the believers in the church in Corinth but also for all believers in every place. This Epistle is both local and universal. In the realm of teaching, life, and testimony, all the churches should be the same. None should be autonomous.

The New Testament also reveals that the churches are not autonomous with regard to the apostles. In Acts 19 Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus. Once the local church was established there and the elders were appointed, Paul did not end his involvement with Ephesus. Instead, he remained there for three years. In Acts 20 he called for the elders in Ephesus and reminded them, “You yourselves know...how I was with you all the time...how I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house” (vv. 18, 20). Paul visited the houses of the saints in Ephesus. It is in this way that the apostles are able to perfect the saints (Eph. 4:11-12). Paul perfected the saints not only publicly but also in personal conversation in their homes in Ephesus for three years. He said, “I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). In verse 31 he said, “For three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.” Even near the end of his life and ministry, Paul did not forget the church in Ephesus.

THE PROBLEM OF DIFFERENT TEACHINGS

The autonomy of the local churches is an example of a different teaching and a wind of teaching. Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error.” A wind of teaching may not be heretical; it may be scriptural, but it is different from God’s central purpose.

In 1 Timothy 1:3-4 Paul writes, “I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.” Different teachings are versus God’s economy, which is His administration to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen people to produce the church, the Body of Christ, for His expression. As the Body of Christ, the church is unique and organic. It is not a political or organizational entity composed of autonomous parts, nor is it a federation. Instead, it is a living organism. If we see the organic aspect of the church, this will save us from many different teachings.

Teachings that differ from God’s economy may not be heretical, yet they will cause trouble and damage among the churches. My burden is not to refute different teachings but to release the

genuine truths pertaining to God's economy. Other teachings may be correct, yet they are vain if they are not in the line of God's economy.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 4

“Talks Concerning the Church Services”

p. 207

First Corinthians 12:28 says, “God has placed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.” *Administrations* is related to the managing of the elders; *help* is related to the service of the deacons. God has placed the gifted persons in the church: first the apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then the elders who administrate and the deacons who help. All these people are in the church. The “church” does not refer just to the local churches but also to the universal church. We should behave, act, and move as one church. Paul does not say “in the churches” in the way of autonomy, but he says God placed “in the church” as a whole. The churches are separate, but all the local churches are still one church. There are many local churches, but we all have to consider that we are just one church. Regardless of who you are, whether you are an elder or a deacon or a prophet or a teacher or an apostle, you have to consider that you are just part of this unique church. God placed the apostles, the prophets, the teachers, the helping deacons, and the administrating elders in the church. We all are one church. We consider all the local churches with all the serving ones as one church. This is not a federation. This is an organism. As Paul used the word *church* not *churches* in this verse, we should consider all the churches as one church. Locally, there are many; universally, they are just one.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1990, vol. 2

“The Mysteries in God's New Testament Economy”

p. 196

In the organic Body of Christ, in the living in the universal new man, which is constituted of God as life, and in the living in God's house of life and in God's kingdom of life, there are no lifeless organizations such as a universal federation or local autonomies. There is obviously the need in the churches in all the localities to have some administrative arrangements for the business affairs. Seemingly, these administrative arrangements are nonorganic. Actually, the administrative arrangements for these business affairs also have to be under the ruling of the Holy Spirit and according to His leading. For example, when the apostles set up elders in a locality, they must do so under the Holy Spirit's leading (Acts 20:28a). This shows us that in the church, even in the arrangements of business affairs, there is the need for the ruling and the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is different from worldly business organizations, workers' unions, or ethnic associations. They do not have the Holy Spirit. They only have human beings. We who are the church have the Holy Spirit in each one of us. Even arrangements in business affairs, which may seem organizational outwardly, must also be done under the leading of the mysterious Holy Spirit within us. Actually, there is not much administrative work in the church. The main work is the shepherding, the teaching, and the leading. These are the three things that local elders should do.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 2

“The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life”

p. 98

In the recent turmoil some began to teach different things other than God's economy (1 Tim. 1:3-4). They were teaching that the local church should be autonomous. This wrong teaching comes from G. H. Lang's book *The Churches of God*. In the spring of 1988, certain ones worked together to spread this book. How can the local churches of the Body of Christ be autonomous? Just as no part of our

human body can be autonomous in relation to the other parts, none of the churches of the Body of Christ can be autonomous in relation to the other churches.

“The Training and Practice of the Vital Groups”

p. 270

The building up of the Body of Christ is on the local ground in the oneness of the unique Body of Christ. Some dissenting ones taught wrongly that the local churches are autonomous. No local church, however, can be autonomous, because the entire church is an organism, an organic Body. No part of our physical body is autonomous. Our nose cannot tell the other parts of our physical body not to touch it or interfere with it. If our nose did this, it would become a dead nose. As long as any member of the body is living, it is altogether not autonomous. Some have overstressed the local churches and neglected the oneness of the Body. We surely stand on the local ground, but we do this in the oneness of the unique Body of Christ.

Life-study of Genesis

p. 456

The Lord has led us to release the matter of the church ground of locality in the United States. Ten years ago the church ground of locality was strongly opposed. Now it has become a hot item on the market. People are talking about the local church, and many are proclaiming that they are the local church in their locality. However, so many groups have not become local churches but local sects. Some have said to us, “We are the local church here. Don’t come to bother us.” Others say, “We are the local church here and we have the autonomy.” What is this autonomy? It is the dividing of the land for the sake of the self. When people say, “Don’t bother us—we are the local church in this locality,” in God’s sight they are a local sect, not a local church. Today the divisive people will use any excuse to be divisive. Yes, all the local churches are locally independent, yet universally they are one Body. We may say that there are many local churches, but we can never say that there are many bodies. Although there may be a thousand local churches, the Body of Christ universally is still one. Christ does not have more than one Body. If the brothers here in Anaheim would proclaim that they are the church in Anaheim and that others should not bother them, they immediately become a local sect. They have divided the land.

On the Apostles’ Right and Responsibility toward the Churches and the Elders

The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 22: The Assembly Life & The Prayer Ministry of the Church

p. 30

Accusations against the elders. The books of Timothy tell us, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19, KJV)... The apostles and those whom they have specifically assigned should be responsible for handling such accusations. I would draw your attention again to the fact that because there are no official apostles today, there are no official elders. There is only a group of people who are doing a part of the work that the apostles did at the beginning. Since they are responsible for appointing elders, they are also responsible for dealing with elders.

The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Vol. 51: Church Affairs

p. 143

After the meeting in Hangkow, some brothers misunderstood. They thought that though the elders are appointed by the apostles, they did not have to listen to the apostles. This is impossible. When

there were brothers who did not respect the elders and problems occurred, the letter of accusation by two or three was sent to Timothy. In other words, the authority for the appointment of the elders is with the apostles, and the authority for the removal of the elders is also with the apostles. A local church cannot expel an elder; rather, the apostles need to bear the responsibility of removing elders. This is the reason why the letter of accusation by two or three was sent to Timothy.

[Note: Brother Lee spoke on this point numerous times, including: *The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 126, 140, 172-173, 294; 1988, vol. 4, 209-210; 1991-1992, vol. 2, 120-121; 1991-1992, vol. 4, 307-308, 514.]

The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 57: The Resumption of Watchman Nee's Ministry

p. 74

NO LOCAL CHURCH BECOMING A HEAD CHURCH

Factually speaking, the church in Antioch could not have become a head church either. In fact, Antioch never exercised supervision over other churches. One local church cannot exercise supervision over another church. However, the work has the right to exercise supervision over a local church. The church in Antioch never exercised supervision over another church, but the apostles who went out from Antioch did exercise supervision over other churches. When a problem arises in a local church, the matter has to be brought to the attention of the workers. First Timothy 5:19 indicates that an accusation against an elder must be accompanied by the word of two or three witnesses. An accusation could not be based on rumors or hearsay; there had to be witnesses, and the accusations had to be presented to Timothy. Timothy was a worker. Therefore, he could deal with the problem of the elders in a locality. Antioch was only one local church. Jerusalem was also another local church. As far as being a church is concerned, the question of a head church does not exist. But as far as the work is concerned, it is something different.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1965, vol. 4

“The Way of the Lord's Recovery”

pp. 185-186

After Establishing a Church and Appointing Elders for Its Administration, the Apostles Still Being Responsible for and Having Authority concerning the Church

The elders, standing on the ground of the local church, are responsible for the administration of a church. Although this administration is independent of other localities, it is not independent of the apostles. At least two passages in 1 Corinthians demonstrate the apostles' responsibility for and authority concerning the church. The first is in chapter 5, where Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to rebuke them for tolerating the sin of the evil brother and to tell them to remove him from their midst (vv. 1-5). The apostle Paul gave such a command to the church there because the church had failed to fulfill its duty. The second passage is in chapter 11, which Paul concludes by saying, “The rest I will set in order when I come” (v. 34). From this we can see that although the apostles commit the local administration to the elders, they still bear a responsibility toward the church and have authority concerning it. If the local elders were independent of the apostles, Paul could not have spoken to them as he did. That Paul was able to say, “The rest I will set in order when I come” is proof that he still bore a responsibility in Corinth.

In 1 Timothy 5:19 Paul said, “Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except based upon two or three witnesses.” This was Paul's instruction to Timothy, a young apostle, concerning dealing with elders. Here we can see that problems with elders in a church should be presented to the apostles and decided by them. By this we can see that the local churches cannot declare

independence from the apostles. After a church had been established and its elders had been appointed, if the church became independent to the extent that the apostles could not intervene in its affairs, Paul would not have charged Timothy as he did here.

**Because the Church's Administration Is Not Independent of the Apostles
the Elders Needing to Administrate the Local Churches
according to the Leading of the Apostles**

After the apostles establish a local church, they appoint elders and commit to them the authority and responsibility for the administration of the church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). However, although this administration is independent from that of other localities, the three portions of Scripture in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy mentioned above clearly prove that this independence is not also toward the apostles. For a church to stand independent of the apostles is equivalent to its rejecting the apostles. This is an abnormal condition, not mere independence.

Under normal circumstances a local church acts according to the leading of the apostles, and the elders administrate the church according to this principle. In this case the independence of administration is not a problem. The basic work of the church is carried out by the apostles; the churches are established by the apostles and go on according to the apostles' leading. When a local church acts in a proper manner, there is no need for the apostles to intervene, but this is not to say that the apostles cannot intervene. Although a local church is under the leading of the elders, if the elders or the church do not act according to proper principles under the leading of the apostles, the apostles still have the right to intervene.

**The Apostles Leading, Supporting, Adjusting, and
Building Up the Churches Instead of Controlling Them**

First Corinthians 5 is a good example of the apostles' intervention. When Paul felt that the church in Corinth should remove the evil brother from their midst, he commanded them rather than simply fellowshiping with them. Paul even said that, in the name of the Lord, he had delivered the evil brother to Satan that he might be disciplined (vv. 4-5). If the elders in Corinth had not dealt with this situation according to Paul's leading, they would not have been a good pattern. This would have been equivalent to rejecting the leadership of the apostle. The elders in a local church should properly lead the church according to the work carried out by the apostles. If the elders fulfill their responsibility, it will be neither necessary nor appropriate for the apostles to intervene. However, if the elders in a certain church do not act according to the proper principle, refusing to lead the church according to the work of the apostles, the apostles have the position to intervene, because it is their work that leads the churches on. The apostles' intervention is not to control the churches but to lead, support, adjust, and build them up.

p. 189

NOT ALL FULL-TIME SERVING ONES BEING APOSTLES

It is worth our attention to note that not all full-timers are apostles. A brother who has been saved only a few years and is only beginning to learn to serve the Lord as a "young Timothy" is not an apostle. Although many saints may be involved in the Lord's work, not every one is an apostle. Consider the co-workers of Paul. Although Luke, for example, was in Paul's company, we do not see from the Bible that he was an apostle, but the Bible does indicate that Timothy and Silas (that is, Silvanus) were apostles (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2:6). This shows that among those who walk and work with the apostles, some are apostles and others are not.

pp. 189-190

**Only the Serving Ones Who Are Able to Raise Up Churches
and Assume an Overall Leadership in the Churches Being Apostles**

In God's administration it is incumbent upon the apostles to appoint elders. Who then are qualified to be called apostles? The principle is clear that apostles are those who are able to raise up and lead the churches. Whether a full-time co-worker can be an apostle depends solely on whether or not he has the ability to lead the churches. If he is not capable of leading the churches in an overall manner, he is only a full-timer who participates in the work; he is not qualified to stand in the position of an apostle. This kind of full-timer has a share in the work, but he should not intervene to touch the elders in the affairs of a local church, as an apostle does.

p. 191

Respecting the Arrangement of the Senior Brothers and Not Making Independent Decisions

In 1932 I began to have a share in the work, and in 1946, after the conclusion of the war with Japan, I went to Nanking. Prior to that time I had appointed elders only in Chefoo. The initial arrangement of responsibilities in Nanking was carried out under the direction of Brother Watchman Nee. During the war, when communication was interrupted, the church had enlarged, and its needs had increased. It was only then that I sought the Lord's leading and appointed several other brothers to be elders. That was the only occasion up until 1946, other than in Chefoo, in which I appointed elders, and I did this in no other place. Moreover, it was under Brother Nee's assignment that I participated in that responsibility.

We need to know that not everyone who is a full-timer in the work may appoint elders or intervene in the elders' affairs. We must learn this lesson, because the appointment of elders is not a simple matter. In my own experience, I was not able thirty years ago to discern who could bear specific duties in the church. If I had appointed elders at that time, I might have appointed the wrong ones. Since this responsibility is placed in our hands, we need to be experienced to a certain degree. Some insurance companies do not insure persons who have only recently obtained a driver's license, and those that insure such persons charge high fees, having little confidence in the new drivers. This is not unreasonable. We must admit that experience is valuable. Simply that we love the Lord, are zealous for Him, have some growth in Him, and are willing to consecrate ourselves to serve Him full time does not mean that we are competent to be co-workers and apostles who appoint elders in the churches.

p. 194

Based on *The Normal Christian Church Life*, some claim that it is permissible for elders to reject the apostles. This is not noble, and it was not Brother Nee's intention in writing this book. If certain elders take the matters spoken of in this book as a basis for rejecting the apostles, they have lost their genuine position as elders before the Lord. We must realize that even the Bible is not an organizational code of laws for the churches. It simply gives us a lane in which to "drive," or a pathway for our going on. We must all learn to live in spirit. Everything is a matter of being in spirit, of having a proper motive, and of fearing the Lord.

If someone is doing a work with the intention of controlling the churches in every place, his work will be rejected by the Lord. The work of the co-workers is to support rather than to control the churches. However, if certain ones misbehave in the churches, the co-workers should correct them. The apostle Paul is our example. In dealing with those who created problems in the church, his attitude was firm and serious. For the benefit of the church he could not allow people to divide and damage the Body of Christ as they wished. However, Paul had no intention to control the churches. He simply rendered support, leading, and teaching to the churches.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1967, vol. 1

“Knowledge Concerning the Church”

pp. 203-204

Elders Needing to Acknowledge the Authority of the Apostles

During one turmoil, a brother cited a portion from *The Normal Christian Church Life* to support his claim that the apostles had no involvement in the affairs of the church once elders were appointed and the church was placed in the hands of the elders. In *Church Affairs* Brother Nee said that elders are the overseers of the church and that the highest authority in a local church lies with the elders. However, he also pointed out that the authority of the elders was entrusted to them by the apostles. The apostles placed authority in the hands of the elders so that the elders could directly administrate the local church. Hence, every elder, every overseer, should learn to listen to the apostles. Since elders are established by the appointment of the apostles, elders cannot overthrow the authority of the apostles. The church does not necessarily have to receive the apostles' commands, but the elders should learn to listen to the apostles. Some brothers think that they do not have to listen to the apostles even though they were appointed by the apostles. This is not according to the Word. First Timothy 5:19-20 indicates that when there was a dispute in the church involving a brother who had something against the elders, they had to go to Timothy to resolve it. In other words, while the authority to appoint an elder lies with the apostles, the authority to remove an elder also lies with the apostles. A local church cannot remove an elder; instead, the apostles should bear this responsibility.

All these things speak of the activity of man's flesh. We should never use words in *The Normal Christian Church Life* to justify our fleshly actions. Even though the apostles have handed the church over to the elders, the elders should administrate in the church according to the apostles' teaching. If the elders depart from the apostles' teaching, the apostles must take action. This is only reasonable. In the last few years, people have slandered us by saying that we use the work as a means to control the churches. May the Lord cover us with His blood; we have worked for many years, and we are not afraid of any slander. Every action that is taken should be taken for the sake of necessity, not for the sake of control. In church affairs there is no outward constitution or organization. It is easy to lift a portion from *The Normal Christian Church Life* to support one's arguments, but if a local church takes this way, the church will be a fleshly church.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 3

“The Local Churches and the Body of Christ”

pp. 120-121

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the gifted persons—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—labor to perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry, which is not merely the building up of the local churches but the building up of the Body of Christ. The local churches cannot be completely autonomous, for the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are gifts to the universal Body of Christ. Although they labor in the local churches to perfect the saints, their work is for the building up of the one universal Body. Verse 16 refers to the gifted ones as joints of the rich supply to the Body. Thus, neither of the Brethren teachings concerning the church is right. The local churches should not be organized into a federation, but merely to build up autonomous local churches neglects the building up of the Body of Christ.

p. 126

The Normal Christian Church Life says that after the apostles appoint the elders in a locality and hand over the church to them, the apostles have no part in managing the church's affairs. After this book was published in 1939, some saints misused this word to say that apostles have no right to

interfere with the churches. In 1948 Brother Nee had a formal training for co-workers and elders at Kuling Mountain. There he said that some misunderstood his word in *The Normal Christian Church Life*. As recorded in the book *Church Affairs*, Brother Nee said, "After the meeting in Hangkow [referring to messages published in *The Normal Christian Church Life*], some brothers misunderstood. They thought that though the elders are appointed by the apostles, they did not have to listen to the apostles. This is impossible" (p. 143). This relates to today's church life.

p. 136

The care of the apostles for the churches is another strong indication that the local churches are not autonomous. In Acts 14:23 Paul appointed elders in several churches that he had recently established. Because those churches were less than one year old, the ones appointed as elders could not have been mature. Thus, for the churches to go on, there was the need of continued care from the apostles. All the writings of the apostles were for the care of the churches. The apostles never stopped caring for a church, even after establishing its elders. When Paul was put into prison, he still took care of the churches.

p. 140

Once the apostles had established the churches, appointed elders, and placed the churches in the elders' hands, the apostles did not keep their hands off the churches. To teach that the apostles should leave the churches alone is the wrong teaching of autonomy. In Acts the apostles continually cared for the churches. In 2 Corinthians 11:28 Paul speaks of his anxious concern for all the churches. He stayed in Antioch to perfect the saints. After the apostles established the churches and appointed elders, the apostles continued to visit and teach the saints in these churches. They also wrote Epistles to teach the saints.

In 1937 in Hangkow Brother Watchman Nee spoke the messages that were published in *The Normal Christian Church Life*. Eleven years later, in 1948, at Kuling Mountain, he said, "After the meeting in Hangkow, some brothers misunderstood. They thought that though the elders are appointed by the apostles, they did not have to listen to the apostles. This is impossible" (*Church Affairs*, p. 143). The thought of the local churches being autonomous comes from the British Brethren. Brother Nee corrected this misunderstanding in a definite way. He said that the apostles stay with the elders, teach them, and train them. This is to perfect the saints. The apostles are not finished dealing with the elders after they have appointed them.

"The Apostles' Relationship with the Churches and Their Perfecting of the Saints"

pp. 165-166

Some saints may feel discouraged and disappointed because of the negative situation of a church, as indicated by things such as arguments or opinions among the brothers. However, in the New Testament the apostles exhort us to love one another and to forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ also forgave you." Actually, it is precisely because the church will inevitably be involved in negative situations that it cannot be separated from the apostles but instead needs the apostles' enlightening, instructing, reproof, and correcting.

In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul said to the Corinthian believers, "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?" (v. 21). Actually, when Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, he hoped to come to them in love and a spirit of meekness, not with a rod. In 1 Corinthians Paul dealt with many problems in the church in Corinth. In chapters 1 through 4 he dealt with the matters of divisions among the Corinthians; in chapter 5, with the matter of a sinful brother by charging the saints to remove the evil person from their midst; in chapter 6, with the matter of lawsuits among the saints; in chapter 8, with the eating of things sacrificed to idols; and in chapter 11, with head covering and the Lord's supper. Then at the end of chapter 11 Paul still had

many other things to charge the church in Corinth, but he could not write them at the time; thus, he said, "The rest I will set in order when I come" (v. 34). Paul's word here shows that he not only cared for the matters of the church in Corinth but also desired to personally set them in order for the church. I believe that when Paul wrote this Epistle, there were already elders who were administrating the church in Corinth. Nevertheless, Paul still desired to personally set things in order for the church. This proves that the apostle did not take his hands off the church after he appointed the elders; on the contrary, the apostle still bore the responsibilities of teaching, nurturing, and overseeing the church on the spiritual side.

"The Need for Revival in the Lord's Recovery Through Prayer"

p. 213

Because of certain misunderstandings, some have improperly spoken of the autonomy of the local churches. In the New Testament there is no mention of either autonomy or federation. First Corinthians demonstrates that after establishing elders in the church, Paul did not stay away from the church. This Epistle is full of instructions, showing that the church in Corinth was still under the teaching and building hand of the apostle Paul, who established that church. Paul even gave a command to the church concerning an evil member (5:1-5, 11). This was a matter of the administration of the church, and in this matter Paul intervened in the affairs of the church. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the apostles never intervene in the affairs of a local church. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul says that he taught the same thing "everywhere in every church." This shows that Paul strongly intended for all the churches to be the same in teaching. After giving explicit instructions to the church, in 11:34 he says, "The rest I will set in order when I come," showing that when he came to Corinth in person, he would continue to intervene in the church's affairs.

Most of the Epistles were written to local churches; even those to Timothy and Titus were concerning the church. All these matters are a strong proof that after establishing elders in a local church, the apostles did not stay away. Otherwise, how could the apostles perfect the saints (Eph. 4:11-12)? Acts 16 shows that Paul was busy with the churches in Derbe and Lystra. If the apostles stayed away from the church, they could not have been nursing mothers cherishing their own children, and fathers exhorting and consoling them (1 Thes. 2:7, 11). The local churches are not autonomous. Moreover, the totality of all the churches is not a federation but an organism, the one organic Body of Christ. No part of such an organism could ever be autonomous.

"Building Up the Body in Oneness"

p. 254

At the end of the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul said that when his letter was read among them, they should cause it to be read in the church in Laodicea, and the Colossians should also read the letter that he wrote to the Laodiceans (4:16). Many of Paul's Epistles were written to a specific church, yet eventually they were written to all the churches. Eventually, what Paul wrote to every church specifically was written to the entire Body of Christ without regard for space and time. Thus, what we should do is not merely build up our own church locally but build up the Body of Christ universally. Every local church is a part of the Body of Christ, which is indivisible. If we divide the Body, it will cease to be in a practical way. Therefore, we must practically keep the oneness in and among the local churches. If all the saints say that they are the church in a particular city and that they have nothing to do with the other churches, this will divide the Body. Then there may be many local churches, but there will be no Body in reality. The Body will be cut to pieces.

Therefore, it is wrong to teach that the local churches are autonomous. The truth is that not one church is absolutely autonomous. By writing two letters to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul surely "interfered" with that church. In his first Epistle he told the Corinthians that it was wrong for

them to say, “I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ” (1:12). If we say that we belong to a certain gifted member of the church, we divide the Body of Christ. Paul not only interfered with the church in Corinth; he also gave a command to the church to remove a sinning brother (5:13). After rebuking the saints for their disorderly conduct related to the Lord’s supper, at the end of chapter 11 Paul said, “The rest I will set in order when I come” (v. 34).

pp. 280-281

In 1 Timothy Paul instructed Timothy, who represented Paul in the apostolic work, not to receive an accusation against an elder except based upon two or three witnesses (5:19). He also instructed Timothy to reprove a sinning elder before the whole church (v. 20). To whom should an accusation against an elder be made? The answer is clearly that it should be made to the apostles. This is another strong proof that after an apostle has appointed elders, the elders are still under the apostle’s authority and management. After they have appointed men as elders, the apostles still have the authority to deal with the elders, even to judge, condemn, and reprove the elders. This is the clear word of the Bible.

pp. 282-283

According to the teaching of the New Testament, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers cannot stay away from the churches. These gifted ones must perfect the churches continually. New ones are being added to the churches constantly, and these new ones need to be perfected by the gifted members. After a class of students graduates from a university, the professors do not retire, and the university does not close its doors. Semester after semester a new group of students enters the university, and these students must be educated by the professors in the university. Likewise, a local church, including the elders, needs the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to perfect them year after year.

In the future, if a storm comes into the church life and some say that after the elders are appointed, the apostles can no longer touch the church, we should all be clear regarding the truth. We should be clear that after the apostles appoint the elders, they can still go back to visit the churches again and again and can even write letters to the churches. While they are staying in one locality, they can write letters to the churches in other localities. The apostles can not only contact the churches and the elders but can even charge them, command them, and in some matters come personally to set things in order. There is no such thing as an end to the apostles’ involvement with the churches.

Ephesians 4:11 and 12 make it very clear that Christ, the Head of the Body, has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers not to do a temporary work but to do a long-term work to perfect the saints. At a critical juncture Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). In 1 Corinthians 4:21 Paul wrote, “What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?” When the Lord was on the earth, He used a whip of cords to cleanse the temple (John 2:15). The apostle’s speaking of his coming with a rod indicates that he had his apostolic authority.

“Being Perfected to Build Up the Body”

pp. 292-293

Some claim that after the apostles establish a church and appoint elders, they should keep their hands off the church. Such ones claim that each local church is an autonomous entity that should have nothing to do with the apostles or other churches. This claim contradicts the teaching of the New Testament. According to the New Testament, the apostle Paul visited and wrote Epistles to the churches that he had established (Acts 18:18-21a, 23; 19:1-7; 20:13-38; Eph. 1:1). For instance, in his first Epistle to the church in Corinth, Paul instructs and rebukes the Corinthians concerning a number of matters (4:14; 6:5; 15:34). In 4:21 Paul indicates that he could come to the Corinthians with a rod for discipline. In this Epistle he exhorts the church in Corinth to deal with many

problems in the church, including division (1:10-13), an evil brother (ch. 5), lawsuits among believers (6:1-11), and the abuse of freedom (vv. 12-20). In 11:34 Paul says, "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, that you may not come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come." It is significant that after charging the saints in Corinth to take care of many matters, Paul says that he will set in order the remaining matters during his next visit to them. This demonstrates that after establishing a church, the apostle Paul continued to care for that church by visiting and by writing to it.

p. 294

Some who read Brother Nee's book *The Normal Christian Church Life* hold the concept that once the apostles have appointed elders in a particular local church, the apostles do not have the right to intervene with the affairs of that church under any circumstances. However, this is a misunderstanding of Brother Nee's word. In 1948, eleven years after sharing the messages in *The Normal Christian Church Life*, Brother Nee released the messages contained in the book entitled *Church Affairs* in order to correct this misunderstanding. In this book Brother Nee points out that after the elders have been appointed by the apostles, the elders should take the lead in the church according to the apostles' teaching. If the elders lead others astray or are wrong in a certain way, the saints can bring accusations against them to the apostles. If the leading brothers in the churches do not see the truth concerning the apostles' continuous care for the churches and insist that the churches are fully autonomous, they will bring in confusion and division. We should practice the truth concerning the apostles' continual care for the local churches. Since the Lord's recovery has been built upon truth and life, in order to be preserved in the recovery, we need to practice the truth.

"Caring for the Church According to the New Way in the Organic Union with the Lord"

p. 439

Because of certain misunderstandings, some have improperly spoken of the autonomy of the local churches. In the New Testament there is no mention of either autonomy or federation. First Corinthians demonstrates that after establishing elders in the church, Paul did not stay away from the church. This Epistle is full of instructions, showing that the church in Corinth was still under the teaching and building hand of the apostle Paul, who established that church (5:1-5, 11). Paul even gave a command to the church concerning an evil member. This was a matter of the administration of the church, and in this matter Paul intervened in the affairs of the church. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the apostles never intervene in the affairs of a local church. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul says that he taught the same thing "everywhere in every church." This shows us that Paul strongly intended for all the churches to be the same in teaching. After giving explicit instructions to the church, in 11:34 he says, "The rest I will set in order when I come," showing that when he came to Corinth in person, he would continue to intervene in the church's affairs.

Most of the Epistles were written to local churches; even those written to Timothy and Titus were concerning the church. All these matters are a strong proof that after establishing elders in a local church, the apostles did not stay away. Otherwise, how could the apostles perfect the saints (Eph. 4:11-12)? Acts 16 shows us that Paul was busy with the churches in Lystra and Derbe. If the apostles stayed away from the churches, they could not have been nursing mothers cherishing their own children and fathers exhorting and consoling them (1 Thes. 2:7, 11). The local churches are not autonomous. Moreover, the totality of all the local churches is not a federation but an organism, the one organic Body of Christ. No part of such an organism could ever be autonomous.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 4

“The Perfecting of the Saints and the Building Up of the Body of Christ”

p. 95

The first wind of teaching says that after the apostles appoint the elders, they can no longer be involved with the matters of a local church. This kind of speaking is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. The New Testament shows that after the apostles appointed the elders, they entrusted to the elders the responsibility of caring for and leading the church, yet they themselves never removed their hands. On the contrary, the apostles continued to perfect the saints and even to teach the elders. According to the record of Acts and the Epistles, after the apostles appointed the elders, they did their best to visit and strengthen the churches (Acts 15:36, 40-41; 1 Cor. 4:17; 11:34b). Paul even stayed in Corinth for a year and a half and in Ephesus for three years. During his last preaching journey, on his way back to Jerusalem, he sent for the elders in Ephesus to come to him that he might remind them, charge them, admonish them, and teach them. In his first letter to the Corinthians he rebuked and instructed the Corinthians again and again. He even said that the remaining matters he would set in order when he came (v. 34b). This clearly shows that in order to perfect the saints, the apostle cannot give up the church and takes his hands off after he appoints the elders. To say that the apostles cannot henceforth be involved with the church is a wrong teaching. Some are blowing this wind and are even practicing this openly. As a result, this has become a problem among us.

“Messages in Preparation for the Spread of the Gospel”

pp. 209-210

As a matter of fact, the apostles never abandoned the churches after they established the elders. Paul not only wrote letters to the churches and visited them, but he also stayed in Ephesus for three years. According to the record in Acts 20, during Paul’s last journey to visit Jerusalem, in the midst of his busy schedule, he sent men to Ephesus to invite the elders; he spoke to them, telling them that from the first day that he set foot in Asia he taught them publicly and from house to house (vv. 18-20). Within Paul’s charge there were also exhortations and warnings. He did this not only to the church in Ephesus but to the church in Corinth as well. Actually, every letter of Paul’s was written to churches where elders were already established.

After Paul appointed elders in every place, even though he might not have been able to visit those places personally, he wrote letters to fellowship with them. He said to the church in Corinth, “The rest I will set in order when I come” (1 Cor. 11:34). If the apostles took their hands off the churches after the elders were appointed, to whom then were all the Epistles in the New Testament written? Paul said that “the anxious concern for all the churches” pressed upon him daily (2 Cor. 11:28). Some among us have misapplied the words of Brother Watchman Nee in his book *The Normal Christian Church Life*, claiming that the apostles should not touch anything in a local church after they have appointed the elders. Those saying these kinds of things have not read Brother Nee’s book *Church Affairs*, written ten years later. In that book Brother Nee says that after the apostles have appointed the elders, they still have to stay there to teach and to lead the elders, showing them how things should be done. If we do not check with the Bible and do not verify the facts, we will easily take in all kinds of hearsay.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 1

“The Lord’s Present Recovery concerning the Building Up of the Body of Christ”

p. 109

We should not allow the teaching concerning the autonomy of the local churches to creep into the church life, for this erroneous teaching will damage the churches. Some dissenting ones insist that

after the apostles establish a church and appoint elders, the apostles should keep their hands off of the church, leaving the church as an autonomy. Such a teaching of autonomy is not scriptural. For instance, after helping to establish the church in Ephesus and appointing the elders there, the apostle Paul did not keep his hands off of that church. Instead, at one point he remained with the church for three years, declaring to the saints there all the counsel of God, admonishing them with tears night and day, and teaching them both publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:18-38). This indicates that instead of taking his hands off of the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul stayed with that church in order to continue to perfect them. The teaching of autonomy is wrong, and we must reject it.

p. 378

See from “The New Testament also reveals...” to “...Paul did not forget the church in Ephesus” on page 6.

pp. 400, 401

Question: Is the concept of the autonomy of the local churches contrary to the perfecting work of the gifted ones in different localities?

Answer: ...The different teaching of autonomy was secretly brought in among the churches in the Lord’s recovery to separate the local churches and keep them from being helped by the gifts. Some even say that once the apostles have appointed the elders in a local church, the apostles should leave that church alone and keep their hands off of it. If this were true, there would be no way for the perfecting in Ephesians 4:12 to be fulfilled. An apostle may remain in a locality or visit it for an extended period in order to perfect the saints. This is the New Testament revelation, and this has been our practice for many years (Acts 20:20, 27, 31). For instance, after Brother Watchman Nee moved to Shanghai in 1927 and helped establish the church there, he remained there for more than twenty-five years. He stayed until he was imprisoned. If a church insists on its autonomy and does not welcome gifted ones, its saints cannot be perfected, and it will experience spiritual poverty and scarcity.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 3

“The Exercise and Practice of the God-ordained Way”

pp. 406-407

There is a different teaching regarding “autonomy,” which originated with some of the Brethren teachers. The teaching of autonomy says that once the apostles establish a church and appoint the elders, the apostles should keep their hands off the church and not touch the saints. If this were the case, how could the apostles perfect the saints? This is altogether a strange teaching, a wind of teaching. How can saints be perfected if the perfecting ones stay away from them? By reading the New Testament you can see that the truth is that the apostles were always with the saints and contacting the churches. Paul established the church in Ephesus and appointed the elders there, but he never abandoned Ephesus. He visited Ephesus again and again; even once he stayed there for three years (Acts 20:31). Surely he did not keep his hands off the church. This teaching of autonomy was published in a book by one Brethren teacher, and we rejected it years ago.

Paul did not stay away from the churches. He not only visited the churches but also wrote many epistles to the churches. After establishing a church with the appointment of the elders, the apostles repeatedly went back to the churches they had established. When they could not go to visit for a period of time, they cared for the churches by writing letters. They never gave up their care for the churches.

In Acts 20 while Paul was going back to Jerusalem the last time, he could not forget about the church in Ephesus, having labored so much on them. He was very concerned about them. Therefore,

when he came to Miletus, he sent word to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church (v. 17). He reminded them, saying, "I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house" (v. 20). He also said, "I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God" (v. 27), and "for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears" (v. 31). Surely the apostle did not take his hands off the church; rather, he continued to perfect them by teaching them, admonishing them, etc., all the time. The teaching of autonomy is a wrong teaching, and we must reject it.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1991-1992, vol. 2

"The Work and Warfare to Build Up the Body of Christ"

pp. 120-121

The dissenting ones also wrongly stressed that after the apostles appointed elders, they took their hands off and left the churches to the oversight of the elders. Their claim was an indication that they were lacking in the basic knowledge of the Bible. The New Testament record in Acts 20:17-31 shows that the apostle Paul did not keep his hands off the church in Ephesus after the appointment of elders in that city; rather, for three years he did not cease admonishing each one in Ephesus with tears (v. 31). When the dissenting ones had no way in the Scriptures, some among them pointed to Brother Watchman Nee's statement in *The Normal Christian Church Life* that after the apostles established churches, they left and went elsewhere. I pointed out in response that the messages in Brother Nee's book were given in 1937 and published in Chinese the following year. However, about ten years later he released the messages now published in *Church Affairs*. In the first chapter of *Church Affairs* Brother Nee emphasizes that the apostles should remain to train the appointed elders to bear responsibility.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1991-1992, vol. 4

"Southern California Elders' and Co-workers' Meetings"

p. 308

Some have utilized Brother Nee's book *The Normal Christian Church Life* to argue for local autonomy, but later books by Brother Nee clarify the relationship between the apostles and the churches. For instance, in *Church Affairs* he says, "You should cause the elders of the local churches to be capable of bearing responsibility. Paul did not leave Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus and tell them to return after they established elders. Rather, he told them to set up elders and to teach and train the elders how to be proper elders, helping them to an extent that they could bear responsibility before God" (ch. 1). In a chapter entitled "The Relationship between the Local Church, the Work, and the Apostles" Brother Nee says, "The apostles give the authority to the elders, and the elders administrate the local church directly. Therefore, everyone who is an elder, an overseer, must learn to listen to the apostles. Because their being elders is due to the apostles, they cannot overthrow the authority of the apostles" (ch. 9).

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 1

"Miscellaneous Fellowship with the Church in Anaheim"

p. 54

In a recent rebellion among us, a teaching regarding autonomy was promoted. Some claimed that after the apostles establish a church and appoint elders, they should keep their hands off the church, leaving the church autonomous. Such a teaching concerning autonomy is contrary to the Scriptures and produces local sects.

“Southern California Elders’ and Co-workers’ Meetings”

p. 268

In the recent rebellion among us, some who had not been delivered from their natural man promoted a teaching regarding autonomy. These dissenting ones taught that every local church is fully autonomous. However, this is contrary to the revelation in the Bible. The church in Ephesus, for instance, was not absolutely autonomous. After appointing the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; cf. 14:23), Paul visited the church in Ephesus and remained with the church for three years (ch. 19; 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:8). Later, while journeying to Jerusalem, he sent some from Miletus to call for the elders in the church in Ephesus to come to him (Acts 20:16-17). Ephesians 4:11-12 says that Christ “gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” The dissenting ones in the recent rebellion claimed that after establishing the churches, the apostles should keep their hands off the churches and the saints in those churches. However, if the apostles are not allowed to care for the churches by laboring on the saints in the churches, how can the perfecting of the saints in Ephesians 4 be carried out? It is wrong to teach that the apostles, after they have established a church and appointed elders, should keep their hands off the church, leaving it as an autonomy. The dissenters promoted the doctrine of the autonomy of the local churches in order to vindicate themselves, to make a name for themselves, and to terminate the ministry in the Lord’s recovery. We must reject the teaching concerning autonomy and must care for the inner life and the Body of Christ.

p. 317

These dissenters assert that after establishing a church and appointing elders, the apostles should keep their hands off the church and allow it to be autonomous. This teaching of autonomy is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. According to the New Testament, the apostle Paul visited and wrote Epistles to the churches that he had established (Acts 18:18-21a, 23; 19:1-7; Eph. 1:1). After appointing the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17; cf. 14:23). Paul visited the church in Ephesus and remained with the church for three years (ch. 19; 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:8). During this time he admonished the saints in Ephesus with tears night and day and taught the saints publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20, 31). Later, while journeying to Jerusalem, he sent some from Miletus to call for the elders of the church in Ephesus to come to him (vv. 16-17). This indicates that the church in Ephesus was not absolutely autonomous. If the dissenting ones saw the Body of Christ, they would not dare to teach or practice absolute autonomy of local churches.

“Caring for the Church by Practicing the Vital Groups”

p. 514

G. H. Lang, a teacher among the open Brethren, opposed John Darby’s view of the church and taught that each local church should be autonomous. This was a wrong teaching. In *The Normal Christian Church Life* Watchman Nee taught that after establishing a church in a city and appointing elders, a worker should then travel to another city, but this was only one side of his teaching. A person’s last words, not his first words, are the consummation of his speaking. After a number of years Brother Nee taught that the workers should remain in a city to help the church and teach the elders how to be one and how to care for the saints. Paul set up the church in Ephesus and appointed elders, and then he remained in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). It is wrong to teach that the local churches are autonomous and that the one who raises up a church should stay away from it. If this were true, all the apostles would eventually have no job.

On Local Administration in View of the Body of Christ

The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 22: The Assembly Life & The Prayer Ministry of the Church

p. 58

However, we also have to pay attention to another side of the truth. The administration of the assemblies is completely local. Shanghai cannot overturn or interfere with the decisions of Tsinan, and Tsinan cannot overturn or interfere with the decisions of Shanghai. However, in making decisions, both Shanghai and Tsinan have to consider how their decisions will affect the other assemblies. Therefore, we have to be careful and need to be bound for the sake of the other assemblies. The administration of one assembly cannot be affected by other assemblies. But if this assembly is seeking after God's will in a definite way, it will not act presumptuously, using the excuse that the administration of churches is local; instead, it will consult the other assemblies, hoping to walk scripturally and according to the Lord's desire. All questions relate to whether or not our flesh has been dealt with and whether or not we are spiritual. In this way, we will be able to care for the other assemblies.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1984, vol. 2

"Elders' Training, Book 4: Other Crucial Matters Concerning the Practice of the Lord's Recovery"

pp. 387-388

Examples of Items Related to the Body

Some may ask whether or not the receiving of a brother is a local administration matter or something related to the Body. We must realize that to receive a brother is very serious. Receiving the saints is quite crucial because this decides whether or not you are sectarian. If your receiving of the saints does not cover all the genuine saints, that receiving is sectarian. By this we can see that the receiving of the saints is not merely a local administration matter, because it affects the Body of Christ. If you receive every genuine believer, you are a part of the Body representing the Body and not a sect representing yourselves. However, if you receive the saints according to your taste, this is sectarian. We should not say that receiving the saints is merely a local matter.

A decision to have seven meetings a week or four meetings a week is merely, purely, and singly a local administration matter. This does not affect any other local churches and has nothing to do with the testimony or with the Body. To receive the saints on the positive side and to exclude the saints on the negative side, however, means a lot because it affects the entire Body. You should not consider this as a local matter, because this is a matter belonging to the Body. If you exclude one from your local church, you exclude one from the Body. If you are not receiving one into your local church, you are not receiving one into the Body. This aspect is above the regions and also above the churches. It is a Body matter and not just a local church matter.

Let me cite another illustration to show that something done by a local church may not merely be a local church matter but fully related to the entire Body. For a local church to receive a ministry that is different from the general ministry, which produces the churches, establishes the churches, and is still edifying the churches, affects the entire Body. Paul's ministry was a general ministry to produce the Gentile churches, to establish them, to edify them, and to help them grow. I refer to Paul's ministry as a general ministry. Then Apollos came in with another ministry. Before the church in Corinth received such a ministry, they should have considered the effect of receiving such a ministry. Undoubtedly, you have the right to receive any ministry because you are a local church. However, you must consider that your receiving of such a ministry is not merely a local matter. This is not like making a decision as to how many meetings a local church should have.

We must also realize that for a local church to print and distribute publications affects the testimony of all the churches. When a local church puts out a printed testimony, it should be done in a very careful way with much consideration as to how this would affect the Lord's testimony universally. We must always consider the effect of what we do on all the local churches.

These three illustrations are good enough and strong enough to tell us that it is not right to think that just because we have a regional work with a few churches under this regional work, we have the full jurisdiction to do everything according to our choice without caring for the Lord's universal testimony, universal Body, universal ministry, and universal move. If we think and practice in this way, we will get in trouble, and we will make trouble for others. Every local church does have its own jurisdiction, but whatever a local church does must be done in a careful consideration as to how this would affect the Lord's universal testimony, universal Body, universal move, and universal ministry.

pp. 390-392

REGARDING THE ONE BODY—TAKING CARE OF THE LORD'S TESTIMONY

Remember that you are not the only local church on this earth. The distance between the churches means nothing, especially due to the fact that we are living in an age of modern means of communication. Any church on the earth can be reached in a matter of seconds by means of a telephone call. Whatever you do in your locality is a part of the Lord's recovery. We must take care of the churches, the Body. We must ask ourselves, "Could the Body take this? Could the Body say Amen to us?"

In practice there were regions during Paul's and Peter's time. However, we must realize that it would have been wrong for the brothers in Judea to say that they were in one region and that Paul who was with the Gentile churches in another region should not bother them. It is wrong to have the attitude that the churches in another region have nothing to do with us. Whether we are in Jerusalem, Rome, Corinth, or Antioch, all the churches are one Body bearing one testimony.

Some of you may feel that through my fellowship I am now trying to carry out Catholicism and that this is the "Catholic Church." Actually, the word *catholic* is a good word, but it has been spoiled, damaged, contaminated, corrupted, and ruined by the so-called Roman Catholic Church. All the churches should be catholic. We should be under one catholic move, bearing one catholic testimony. We should be this way because this is one Body. We should not consider that just because we brothers are working in a certain region covering a few states that this is our region. Thank the Lord that you began the work there. Peter also began the work in Judea, but if he thought that was his region and not Paul's region, that would be wrong. Thank the Lord that He used you to begin the work in that state or in those two states. Thank the Lord that He used me to begin the work in California. However, if I consider that California is my region and not your region, this is wrong. We cannot do this.

I believe that Peter never thought this way, and Paul never had this concept. When Paul encountered the problem from the Judaizers, he immediately went to Jerusalem. He did not say, "Forget about Jerusalem. That is not my region, and the brothers from that region should not come here anymore. If they come, we will shut them out and exclude them. They are the Judaizers." This is not the way that Paul took. Rather, he went to Jerusalem. He did not tell Peter to come to Antioch to solve the problem since Jerusalem was the source of the trouble. It seems that he had the right to do this, but instead, he went to Jerusalem humbly. He went neither to fight nor to argue.

The record in Acts 15 shows us the sweet spirit of the apostle Paul during the conference held there. Mostly he did not say much. After Peter said something, Paul testified to the dear saints in Jerusalem, telling them what the Lord had been doing through his ministry (vv. 7-12). Then James said something to conclude the conference (vv. 13-21). Actually, I do not believe that the conclusion

was satisfactory to Paul. Paul, however, took this decision. This is a good example for us to follow because Paul regarded the fact that the Lord had only one Body. Whatever they were doing there was only under one move to carry out one ministry to produce the one Body that bears one unique testimony.

I do not care what kind of burden you pick up to do in your locality. I am not concerned with whether what you are doing is right or wrong. My concern is that your kind of doing might be divisive. You may have the right to do things, but the Body would not swallow them. Rather, the Body would either spit out or vomit what you do. Then you will suffer. This is quite serious. We must realize that we are not doing a piece of Christian work. We are burdened to carry out the Lord's recovery for His unique Body to bear His unique testimony.

Whatever you do, please consider the situation in this way. What you do might be better than all the others' doings. Even so, you must consider how this would affect the Body. Would this be taken by the Body? We are not a political party, nor are we anything earthly. We have no arms, and we do not need to fight, but the Spirit of the Lord in His Body means a lot. Do not forget the example that I related to you in this chapter. We must regard the Body, honor the Body, and take care of the Lord's unique testimony.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 2

"The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life"

pp. 99-100

Turmoil after turmoil has transpired because of our not knowing the Body. The only remedy that can cure us of this kind of illness is the seeing of the Body. When Brother Nee taught about the Body, he said that with whatever we do, we have to consider how the churches would feel about it. When we do something, we must not forget that we are members of the Body, and the Body is not only a local church. The local church is not a "local body"; if it is, it becomes a local sect. The Body is the Body of Christ, constituted by the Triune God with all the believers on this earth, with all the local churches.

On Seeing, Knowing, Caring for, and Honoring the Body

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 2

"The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life"

p. 107

As we said in the previous chapter, all the problems are due to one thing—not knowing the Body. Some in the churches are self-appointed elders. They may say that the Holy Spirit appointed them, but the Bible does not say that the elders are appointed merely by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the apostles appointed the elders and that eventually the Spirit recognized that appointment (Acts 14:23; 20:28).

I want to say again that whenever we do something, we must have a proper consideration for the Body. We need to consider how the Body would feel about what we are doing. The biggest problem, the unique problem, is not knowing the Body and not caring for the Body. If we take care of the Body and are concerned for the Body, there will be no problems.

We are here for the Body. Without the backing of the Body, without the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches. If we practice the local church life and neglect the view of the Body, our local church becomes a local sect.

The recovery is for the Body, not for any individual or merely for any individual local church. If we are going to do something, we have to consider how the Body, the recovery, will react. The

problems are all due to the lack of seeing the Body and of caring for the Body. We all need to come back to the truth, and to practice the truth is to take care of the Body. Sometimes the Body is strong, and sometimes the Body is weak, but it is still the Body. If we come back to the truth and take care of the proper order in the Body, the Body will immediately become stronger. all the problems are due to one thing: not seeing, not knowing, and not caring for the Body. We have to honor the Body.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 2

“The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ”

pp. 535-536

THE NEED TO SEE THE ONE CHURCH, THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST

Why has there been turmoil among us? I had a twenty-five-year relationship with Brother Nee. For eighteen years I was with him shoulder to shoulder. I saw what happened to him. Nearly every seven years there was a turmoil. Why? Because those involved in the turmoil did not see what the church is. All the problems of the church today are due to the ignorance concerning the Body of Christ.

Some might like to talk about the practice of foot-washing. Every time they set up the Lord’s table, they insist on the practice of foot-washing. When I was young in the Lord, I insisted on baptism by immersion. That was my favorite topic for debate, but I have no heart for things like this anymore. There are so many debates concerning baptism. Should we use fresh water or salt water? Should it be in a lake, a river, or a baptistery? Some think that you cannot follow Jesus to the uttermost unless you go to the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized. But no one knows the very spot where Jesus was baptized. Should we baptize in warm water or cold water? Do we immerse once, twice, or three times? There is no end to these kinds of arguments.

We need to forget about all these minor things and see what the church is. The church is the organism of the Triune God. The church is the organic Body of Christ, which is God’s family, God’s household, God’s folks becoming His home, His dwelling place. There is no need to argue about any doctrinal matters or practices. We just need to see and know that the church is God’s total reproduction, God’s continuation, God’s full growth, God’s increase, God’s rich surplus, and this surplus today is the organism of the Triune God, the organic Body of Christ, which is the family, the folks of God, becoming His dwelling place on this earth. Today God not only is with us, with the church, but also has made us His dwelling place.

Some like to talk about the distinction between the universal church and the local churches. Even such a thing is not worth arguing about. God’s house, the Body of Christ, is just one. Some say that the church is local and the work is regional. We need to forget about all these things. We need to see that we are one church. Some may say that the saints in Taipei cannot meet with the saints in Anaheim, so apparently in practice there are two churches—one in Anaheim and one in Taipei. Actually, today in the Lord’s recovery there are over twelve hundred churches, but all these churches are parts of the one church, the one Body of Christ. On this earth there is the element of space and the element of time. But with God there is no space element and no time element. In His eyes in the whole universe there is one church.

The final point of my burden in this chapter is that we should not consider just our church in our city. We have to consider God’s church in the universe. We may wonder how to practice this, but we should not worry about this. Now we are in a city, and we simply need to come together to meet. We can say that we are a local church, but we are not separated from the church of God. We are just a part of the church of God.

p. 538

Praise the Lord and thank the Lord that we have seen the light to this extent, and we have been brought into the Lord's recovery. But regretfully, our seeing is not that high. Our sight is not up to the standard. We are still merely for our local church in our city. This is wrong. None of us should be only for our church in our city. We are here for God's church in the universe. Every local expression, every local church, should be the same to us. If I am in Anaheim, I surely should meet, worship, serve, and work in the church in Anaheim. Next year I may go to Taipei. Then after another month I may go to another place. Every church is my church because that is God's church. There are no regional differences. To think that a certain region is my region for my work is wrong. Christ has only one Body.

We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation with the eyes of our heart being enlightened to see God's vision and to know God's economy in His wisdom. The center of God's economy is His desire to have many sons constituted through transformation into one Body, which is the church to be expressed on this earth in many localities as local expressions, local churches, and all these local churches are one church.

pp. 543-546

THE NEED TO SEE THE ONE BODY, THE ONE CHURCH OF GOD

Look at today's situation with the thousands of divisions among the Lord's people. There is a "church market" full of division and confusion. In Anaheim there is a division called the Church of Taiwan in Anaheim. In my hometown of Chefoo in mainland China, there was a division called the Church of England in China. Logically, the Church of England should be in England, and the Church of Taiwan should be in Taiwan. What confusion this is! Today there are not only divisions but also confusion. People have argued and have been divided over whether to have wine or grape juice at the Lord's table. They have also been divided over what kind of bread to use at the Lord's table.

In the recent past, there was a different teaching among us which said that the local church should be autonomous. If we receive such a teaching, this means that we have not seen that the church is the Body of Christ. Can any part of our physical body be autonomous? If the various parts of our body were autonomous, this would mean that our body was cut into pieces. How could we make our blood circulation autonomous? The circulation of our blood is throughout our entire body. In the same way, no part of the Body of Christ can be autonomous.

But some may argue by saying, "Brother Lee, didn't you say that the administration of the churches should be local and independent?" I may have said that many years ago, but if you asked me to repeat such a saying today, I would not do it. We may think that the local churches are independent, but in the Bible I cannot find the thought of independence. Who is independent from whom in the Body of Christ? Is the church in Anaheim independent from the church in Dallas? The word independence should not be brought in when we are speaking about the Body of Christ. We are not independent. Instead, we all are dependent on one another. The church in Anaheim depends on the church in Fullerton, and the church in Fullerton depends on the church in Anaheim. We are not independent. We are one Body. Are the churches in Taiwan independent from the churches in America? In the Body of Christ this cannot be.

The churches may be different in their business affairs, but even in this matter they should not claim that they are independent. What if the church in Anaheim made a decision to meet at two o'clock in the morning? The leading ones there may claim that the local church has its own jurisdiction and that no one can interfere with them. But the church in Santa Ana may ask, "Why have you brothers in Anaheim made such a decision to meet at two o'clock in the morning?" The brothers in Anaheim may say that those in Santa Ana should not interfere with them, that this is not their business, and that the church in Anaheim is independent and has its own jurisdiction. But to

meet at two o'clock in the morning is peculiar and odd to the uttermost. In this matter the church in Anaheim needs the helpful advice from the church in Santa Ana. It is not wise to make a decision to meet at two o'clock in the morning. This illustration shows that we need the advice and help from the other churches even in business affairs and practical things.

There are many times when I am adjusted in my fellowship with the co-workers. The brothers may remind me of something that would change our consideration in certain matters. In this particular conference we brothers came together before the meetings to pray and fellowship about certain things. Some of the brothers asked me whether or not we needed to meet before the Lord's table meeting, since this meeting would be a little earlier. We felt that there would be no need for us to come together before this meeting. This is the fellowship of the Body. I should not say to the brothers, "This conference is my conference. This is not your business. Don't interfere with my jurisdiction." That would be terrible. But this is actually the practice in some places—if not outwardly, at least inwardly.

If we claim to be independent, we damage ourselves. We should never forget that God has only one church. The church in Anaheim is just a small part of the church of God. We should not think that there is the church of God plus the church in Anaheim. When we speak of the church of God, we imply the local church. Through the years I have learned the following lesson. The more we honor the uniqueness of the church, the more blessings we will receive. The church in which you are meeting today may be in Spokane or in Anaheim, but we have to remember that these are just parts of the church. They are not independent. We are dependent upon one another. All the churches need the help of the other churches because we are one Body. We have to see the Body.

Because we are on this earth, we are limited by time and space, and we have many business affairs. The saints in Anaheim and the saints in San Francisco and Fresno cannot meet together often. This is impossible because of the inconvenience of distance. They need to have their own particular activities. The church in Fresno may decide to rent a small hall, whereas the church in Anaheim meets in a big hall. This is altogether according to the practical need. But this does not indicate any division, separation, or independence.

pp. 548-549

THE BODY BEING THE INTRINSIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH

We need to see the way Paul presents the Body of Christ in Ephesians 1. Paul says that God raised up Christ, seated Him in the heavens, subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church. Right away in the following phrase he says, "Which is His Body" (v. 23a). The church is the Body. This indicates that the Body is the church's intrinsic significance. The church without the Body means nothing. In Greek the word for church is *ekklesia*, the called-out ones coming together. But the significance of this gathering is the Body.

In the recovery today there are over twelve hundred churches around the globe, yet we all are one Body. If we consider ourselves as individual churches or as individual believers, we are through. We should consider ourselves as one Body. If the parts of our physical body would keep their own jurisdiction and be autonomous, our body would be finished. But thank the Lord that all the members of our physical body are submissive to one another so that our body can act and operate smoothly. Suppose that we wanted to go somewhere and that all the parts of our body agreed except our feet. If the feet could talk, they might say to the other members, "Don't you know that we are tired? You have no love. You don't sympathize with us. You want to go, but we will not go, because we do not have the strength to go." What kind of physical body would this be? In practicality, there would be no body. This is to be "disbodied." Today among the Christians concerning the Body of Christ, it is like this. They are "disbodied."

At least I can testify for myself and for my senior brother, Brother Watchman Nee. We always behaved, acted, and took action in the recovery as one Body. This is why the Lord's recovery could exist on this earth over these past approximately seventy years. We do not have any organization to keep anything, but the recovery is still here. The recovery is still existing and has been kept by the principle of the Body. While I was ministering the word, I often considered Brother Nee. I considered what he spoke; I did not like to speak anything that was contradicting with his ministry. If I had spoken in a contradicting way, where would the recovery be today? We must know the Body.

I would like to say again that the Body is the intrinsic significance of the church. If there were no Body, the church would have no meaning. The church makes no sense without the Body. But Hallelujah, there is the Body! Without the Body the church makes no sense, but with the Body there is the intrinsic significance of the church.

pp. 551-552

THE ORGANIC AND UNIQUE BODY OF CHRIST EXPRESSED IN MANY LOCAL CHURCHES

The organic Body is undivided, and it is also indivisible (1 Cor. 1:13a). It is not autonomous. This unique Body of Christ is expressed in many local churches (Rev. 1:11) in the divine oneness as it is with the Triune God (John 17:11, 21, 23) and in the divine nature, element, essence, expression, function, and testimony. There are many churches, yet they have one divine nature, one divine element, one divine essence, one divine expression, one divine function, and one divine testimony because they are one Body. This is why I say that our troubles are due to not seeing the Body. If we have seen the Body, there will be no problem. The principle and practice of the one Body are kept by the believers in the practical one accord (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25; Rom. 15:6).

KEEPING THE DIVINE ONENESS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

The divine oneness of the Body of Christ should be kept both in the local churches as the local expressions of the Body and in the universal source and substance. In every way we should keep the divine oneness of the Body of Christ.

ONE CRUCIAL POINT OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY IN THE CONSUMMATING AGE

The genuine oneness of the Body of Christ is one crucial point of the Lord's recovery in this consummating age. The Lord is going to consummate His economy, so to keep the oneness is very crucial.

THE IGNORANCE CONCERNING THE BODY OF CHRIST

All the problems of the church today are due to the ignorance concerning the Body of Christ. Among us this ignorance should be absent, and the full knowledge should be present. We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation with the enlightening of the eyes of our heart to see and apprehend the Body of Christ.

On Autonomy Independence Being a Different Teaching, a Wind of Teaching

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 3

"The Body of Christ"

p. 386

See excerpt under "The Body of Christ" on page 4.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 1

“Questions, Answers, and Fellowship Concerning the Organic Practice of the New Way”

p. 377

See the first paragraph under the subheading “The Erroneous Teaching of Autonomy” on page 5.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 3

“The Exercise and Practice of the God-ordained Way”

pp. 406-407

The Apostles’ Care for the Churches

There is a different teaching regarding “autonomy,” which originated with some of the Brethren teachers. The teaching of autonomy says that once the apostles establish a church and appoint the elders, the apostles should keep their hands off the church and not touch the saints. If this were the case, how could the apostles perfect the saints? This is altogether a strange teaching, a wind of teaching. How can saints be perfected if the perfecting ones stay away from them? By reading the New Testament you can see that the truth is that the apostles were always with the saints and contacting the churches. Paul established the church in Ephesus and appointed the elders there, but he never abandoned Ephesus. He visited Ephesus again and again; even once he stayed there for three years (Acts 20:31). Surely he did not keep his hands off the church. This teaching of autonomy was published in a book by one Brethren teacher, and we rejected it years ago.

Paul did not stay away from the churches. He not only visited the churches but also wrote many epistles to the churches. After establishing a church with the appointment of the elders, the apostles repeatedly went back to the churches they had established. When they could not go to visit for a period of time, they cared for the churches by writing letters. They never gave up their care for the churches.

In Acts 20 while Paul was going back to Jerusalem the last time, he could not forget about the church in Ephesus, having labored so much on them. He was very concerned about them. Therefore, when he came to Miletus, he sent word to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church (v. 17). He reminded them, saying, “I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house” (v. 20). He also said, “I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God” (v. 27), and “for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears” (v. 31). Surely the apostle did not take his hands off the church; rather, he continued to perfect them by teaching them, admonishing them, etc., all the time. The teaching of autonomy is a wrong teaching, and we must reject it.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 2

“The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ”

pp. 544-545

See from “But some may argue” on page 25 to “We have to see the Body” on page 26.

Life-study of 1 and 2 Samuel

pp. 64-65

Six years ago a teaching came out which said that the local churches are autonomous. Some said that after the apostles establish a church and appoint elders, they should keep their hands off the church, leaving the church as an autonomy. Such a teaching of autonomy was actually the building up of a monarchy.

On Overemphasizing Spirituality or Scriptural Teachings Being to Teach Differently

The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1989, vol. 4

“Elders’ Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-ordained Way (2)”

p. 383

SPIRITUALITY OR SCRIPTURAL TEACHING NOT TO BE USED AS A CLOAK FOR DIVISION

Any kind of spirituality or any kind of scriptural teaching should not be used as a cloak for division.

Saying “I Am of Christ” Being Condemned by the Scriptures

In 1 Corinthians 1:11-13, saying “I am of Christ” is condemned, just as saying “I am of Paul,” “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas.”

Taking the Enjoyment of Christ as an Excuse for Separation or for Division Also Being Condemned

Taking the enjoyment of Christ as an excuse for separating oneself from the saints or for division among the churches also is condemned, just as saying “I am of Christ.”

Preaching Christ Because of Envy and Strife Being Condemned by the Scriptures

In Philippians 1:15 and 17 the apostle Paul condemns those who preached Christ because of envy and strife, out of selfish ambition.

Using Teachings That Are Seemingly Scriptural as Reasons for Separation or for Division Also Being Condemned

Using teachings such as the teaching concerning the headship of Christ, the teaching concerning all the churches being responsible directly to Christ alone, and the teaching concerning not exalting man, all of which seem very scriptural, as reasons for separation from the saints or for division among the churches also is condemned. As long as anything that is spiritual or scriptural causes separation or division, it is condemned.

All of the excerpts in this document are copyrighted by Living Stream Ministry and used by permission.