

"The main thing in the Scriptures is obedience."

(Watchman Nee, Shanghai, December 4, 1932)

"The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Watchman Nee was saved by the Lord in the **spring of 1920** and became a member on the roll of the Methodist Church, where he had previously been baptized by sprinkling, thus having his name recorded in the so-called "Methodist book of life."

In **March 1921**, he received from the Lord the truth concerning **BAPTISM** and realized that the Methodist practice, as well as that of many other denominations, of sprinkling baptism was not biblical. Then, on the morning of March 28, 1921, he and his mother decided to go to Mawei, two hours from Fuchow by steamboat, where Sister Margareth Barber was, in order to be baptized by immersion. After obeying this truth and practicing the light given by the Lord, Brother Nee and his family faced strong disapproval from the leaders of the Methodist denomination, even though baptism by immersion is biblical. From the reaction of the Methodist leaders, Brother Nee realized two important things: the first was that he should set aside human authority and carefully study the Bible, and the second was the meaning of obeying the Lord and the cost involved in doing so. Here lies the beginning of the Lord's Recovery.

In **that same year, 1921**, the Lord planted in Brother Nee's heart the following question concerning the practice of the **CHURCH** and the denominational system: "There are so many nominal Christians in the church today, yet the Bible says that only the saved are in the church. There are so many denominations now, but in the Bible there is no Methodist, Presbyterian, or any other denominational church. So why am I a member of the Methodist church? Since the Word of God does not say such a thing, why do I do it?"

In the **first half of the following year, 1922**, Brother Nee was deeply troubled concerning the matter of **BREAKING OF BREAD**. That year the Lord revealed to him the errors and deviations present in the denominations regarding this practice, which is "a matter of utmost preciousness to God." One Sunday night, Brother Nee, together with Brother Leland Wang and his wife, gathered to restore this practice. That night they were deeply moved to tears, and Brother Nee felt that heaven had drawn near to the earth. From then on, the truth regarding breaking the bread in the Lord's

remembrance was restored, and according to Acts 20:7, the brothers decided to break bread every Sunday.

In the second half of 1922, Brother Nee uncovered the issue of denominations in the Bible. From 1 Corinthians 1, he realized that denominations were divisions, which certainly are not biblical. One day, pondering whether he could simply leave the denominations, he came to the following reflection: "Whenever several people enter into a partnership in a business, whether or not they are personally involved, once the business goes bankrupt, no one can escape the consequences; all share responsibility for the failure." Then he understood that being in a denomination was like being in a kind of partnership, and if he wanted to follow the Lord, he should not only avoid being a member but also have his name removed from the Methodist church. After this consideration, he sought to open this truth to his family, who at first, constrained and limited by natural affection, feared to take any stand. But after Brother Nee's insistence, he and his family made this decision and wrote a letter to the Methodist leaders requesting that their names be removed from the Methodist denomination's "book of life." The content of the letter was: "We have seen that divisions are not biblical and that denominationalism is sinful. Therefore, from this day forward, please remove our names from your book of life. We do this not out of any personal animosity but simply because we desire to obey the teaching of the Bible. Our decision is final and it will not be necessary to revisit the matter. We still consider ourselves your friends. There is no other reason for our attitude than our desire to obey the Bible."

From the above accounts, we can observe that from Brother Nee's salvation in the spring of 1920 until the end of 1922, three items of utmost importance were brought back to light and restored by the Lord: 1) Baptism, 2) Breaking of Bread, and 3) The Normal Practice of the Church. Especially from the restoration of the latter, the Lord's blessing once again rested upon His Church; the heavens were opened, the Bible was opened as never before, and then all the other biblical matters that had been abandoned, corrupted, distorted, and ignored throughout the centuries following the Early Church were restored. Items such as the assurance of salvation, the distinction between Grace and Law, the difference between Salvation and Victory, the difference between Salvation and Reward, the difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and Eternal Life, the truths concerning the Kingdom, the Rapture, the Church, the Ekklesia, the Body of Christ, the two aspects of the Church, the Clerical system and hierarchy, the Universal Priesthood, proper Presbytery, the difference between Function and Gift, the use of the Veil and the laying on of hands, living by faith in God, divine healing, the

death and resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, the coming of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the teaching of the Anointing, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the tripartite man, sanctification by faith, Christ as Life, the law of the Spirit of life, the law of sin and death, a better covenant, the victorious life of Christ, the calling of the overcomers, the spiritual warfare, the boundaries of the church, the centrality and universality of Christ, the ground of the church, migration, the practical meaning of the church life, the reality of the church, the oneness of the church, the Body, the authority of the Holy Spirit in the Body, the reality of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the church, the building up of the church, the coordination in the church life, the Body and spiritual warfare, the discipline of the Holy Spirit, the breaking of the outer man and the releasing of the Spirit, the use of the Spirit, the sphere of the work, and so forth... were divinely brought back to light. Our brother's faithfulness in obeying the Lord's Word, especially concerning the church practice, ushered in an unprecedented era of full recovery and complete blessing upon the Church.

Especially between the years 1933 and 1937, the Lord revealed and restored through our brother Nee the truth concerning the Boundaries of the Church and the Ground of the Church. Here is probably the most critical point regarding the normal practice of the Christian church life and the reality of the Body of Christ. The Lord does not seek in this age merely great spiritual individuals. All individual spirituality must be destined for the Body, it is for the Body, and it is expressed in the Body in sublime coordination with all the members. Such a Body of Christ is universal. The Church of God is universally one and unique throughout the whole earth; yet, because of physical and geographical limitations, this Body of Christ is expressed locally as the many local churches throughout the earth.

In light of this revelation, in Brother Nee's own words, "to be baptized by immersion and to leave the denominations are not great things; they are but two items among thousands that require our obedience. ***The main thing in the Scriptures is obedience***", therefore, according to Brother Witness Lee's words, "regarding the heading of Christ, who represents God and is represented by man, we must keep the divine order established by God. Concerning the Body of Christ, we must be properly regulated by the apostle's instruction without any confusion or division." Being thus, according to the light received by Brother Nee regarding the **divine order established by God**, "the Bible clearly shows us two things that must exist for a church to be established: 1º) the authority of the Holy Spirit; 2º) the boundary of the locality. (...) The Bible clearly shows us this: the church belongs entirely to a locality. In the Bible, the ground of the church is the locality where the church is.

Churches take the locality as their boundary. Here is an important point; please pay attention. If the brothers in Sabará wish to stand on the ground of the church, they can only do so on the ground of the Holy Spirit and Sabará. Once the locality is changed, you immediately lose the ground of the church. (...) In the Bible, only the smallest administrative unit has a church; only a locality or a city has a church. **The church of one locality cannot be united with the church of another locality to become one church.** Each city can only be adjusted to one church, just as one husband can only be combined with one wife. The determination of God for the church is: the authority of the Holy Spirit on the spiritual side and the boundary of the locality in its outward appearance. When the church in Corinth tended to divide into four factions, Paul immediately reprimanded them for being factional and carnal. (...) Each city, each locality can only be combined with one church. Whenever more than one appears, that is division, a sect, which is rejected by God.”

Still according to Watchman Nee, “the clearer the ground of the church is, the richer are the spiritual blessings. (...) The church is an organism with such capacity that it can contain the blessing of God.” Upon receiving the vision from God concerning the ground of the church, Brother Nee also saw and experienced that God’s blessing rests abundantly when God’s principle regarding the ground is honored. If such governmental principle of God is neglected, the blessing immediately withdraws, and problems and difficulties of all kinds subtly enter in to undermine the church life and the living of the saints. According to Brother Witness Lee, “This is the discipline, the temporary judgment of the Lord, upon those who partake of His Body in an unworthy manner.”

Dear brothers, “the two greatest errors committed by man are:

1. *To desire to have a church greater than a city or a locality; to seek to unite many churches in different localities and make them into one large church—greater than the locality. (...) All the children of God must understand that in the Scriptures there is no united church that is greater than the locality. (...) Therefore, the boundary—the jurisdiction—of the church on the earth is limited to a locality. Even if you combine two churches that are in two different localities, they still cannot be one church; they remain two churches. (...) **MAY GOD OPEN YOUR EYES SO THAT YOU DO NOT BRING CONFUSION TO GOD’S TESTIMONY.***

2. *On the other hand, people desire to have a church smaller than the city or locality. They want to divide a locality into many “churches,” many “assemblies,” many “congregations,” or “house churches”...*

*God has decided the way in which, on this earth, one church and another single church cannot become one church, but rather two churches. This is the principle of the “locality,” according to what the Bible reveals. (Watchman Nee, *Further Talks on the Church Life*, ch. 2)*

Upon receiving such a revelation from the Lord, Brother Nee immediately sought to be faithful, and the fruits of that faithfulness have reached—and continue to reach—saints throughout the whole earth and over all these years. Today, we are among the many who have benefited from such faithfulness. According to Brother Nee himself, the primary factor that allowed the blessing to be poured out was the honoring and respecting of the authority of the Holy Spirit and the ground of the church. When we disregard one or the other, we open the door to ourselves for every kind of curse and God’s discipline. Disobedience attracts a curse. Not discerning the Body brings judgment upon ourselves. Spiritual and physical weakness is only the beginning; this is followed by sickness, and even death to some.

May the Lord open our eyes, that we may perceive the deviations in our current practice, and realize that the more we persist in the error of trying to merge various localities into one, thus forming a single federated church, the more division has taken place among us, and the more rebellions have been manifested.

The evil among us today must be dealt with directly at its root. However, for many years, we have been fighting against one another like that Midianite army which, when fighting against Gideon and the three hundred, was struck with blindness and ended up stabbing one another with their own swords.

Today, by merging two, five, or even seven localities into one, thus forming a federation of churches, the great federated church, we are rebelling directly against God’s governmental principle.

The fact, according to the book *Fellowship Concerning the Lord’s Recovery*, that “neighboring churches should group and move together whenever possible,” refers to the mingling of the churches so that the saints may enter into the reality of the Body of Christ. Such mingled churches should not “abolish the local administrations regarding administrative matters.” Below is a passage from the book, pp. 79–80:

“Neighboring churches should group and move together whenever possible, without abolishing the local administrations regarding administrative matters. Our mingling should not be merely theoretical; we must act. The local administration still exists, yet on the spiritual element, all the churches must mingle as one. (...) We must still maintain local administration in administrative matters, but we need to learn to be mingled with other churches. There may be only fifteen saints in a certain locality, and they may have a group meeting in that locality. They even have the freedom to declare that they are the church in that locality, but they must also learn to be mingled with the neighboring churches. When we are mingled as one church, we will have the impact.”

This passage in no way teaches us that several neighboring churches should unite, abolishing the local administrations, to become one large church with a single administration that produces great impact. Such a practice, as happens today among some churches in our midst, is a type of unbiblical unity that seriously violates the governmental principle established by God. This evil practice has opened the door to division, confusion, conflicts, spiritual weaknesses, etc... Please remember that following this are sickness and death. The more we try to validate this evil practice with our incredibly creative and ingenious minds, the more division occurs among us and the more problems arise.

Whenever spiritual weakness and coldness settle among the saints, as symptoms of a sickness that has afflicted the system, the first reaction of many who consider themselves more spiritual than others is to condemn the individuals. At such times, it is very common to hear phrases like: “You have not enjoyed,” “You have not cared for your daily living during the week,” “You have not prayed,” “You have not had fellowship with the Lord in the morning.” Yes, indeed, it is more convenient to judge the individual, because it is much easier to deal with a branch than to deal with the trunk, and much easier to deal with the trunk than with the root. But is spiritual weakness, the coldness spreading in our meetings really the fault of individuals who have not enjoyed? Or has it been caused by a system of error? Would not unfaithfulness to the pattern God established bring these problems upon us? Is the real problem not at the root of the tree?

We feel that we are at the limit of this situation. The Lord can no longer bear it, and we can no longer bear it. This situation cannot continue for even one more minute. We have been unfaithful to the Lord; we have been unfaithful to the apostles’ teaching,

and in this regard, we blush with shame and earnestly pray that the Lord will have mercy on us. A deviation now, even if small, later causes great harm. There is still time for us to awaken.

Julio Cesar Zanelato, April 12, 2019.