

Principles Concerning the Lord's Table in View of the Oneness of the Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is one and cannot be divided, and it is our great joy and privilege to testify of this oneness in the local churches. The testimony that we bear is unique, for it is a testimony that can be borne only on the genuine ground of oneness that we in the local churches share as our blessed inheritance. If we lose our oneness, we lose our testimony as the Lord's unique recovery on earth, for it is this oneness that the Lord is recovering today for His full expression in His corporate Body, which is His increase and enlargement in humanity.

In His wisdom, the Lord did not leave us without a practical symbol of this oneness. The symbol of the oneness that we enjoy is seen in the bread at the Lord's table, which signifies not only the physical body of Jesus given in His death for our redemption but also the mystical Body of Christ produced through His resurrection for His unique expression. When we partake of the bread at the Lord's table, we identify ourselves with the crucified and resurrected Lord and with His universal Body, and we declare to the entire universe that we stand as one, apart from all division. To partake of the bread, therefore, is to touch the Lord's heart, for the bread and our joint participation in it touch the Lord's Body, for which He gave His life.

Sadly, not all of those among us treasure the oneness of the Body of Christ, and some have even risen up to oppose it by establishing "tables" apart from and in reckless disregard of the feeling of the Body. In recent years, Brother Dong Yu Lan and his co-workers have exhibited such a disregard for the Lord's proper testimony and the oneness that the vast majority in the Lord's recovery are endeavoring to maintain. They have set up many independent "table" meetings, often in localities where proper local churches already exist. Many saints have suffered significantly under this influence and have abstained from partaking of the bread and the cup in their localities because they have had the realization that the bread there could no longer symbolize the unique Body of Christ but had become sectarian bread. The potential may now exist for those who have come out from the divisive influence of Dong Yu Lan's work to establish their own "tables" in haste, apart from the fellowship of the Body and thus with the risk of causing greater harm to the Lord's testimony. May the Lord use this article, which presents excerpts from the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, to impress His loving seekers that the establishing of the Lord's table is a weighty matter that involves not just one locality or group of believers but the universal Body of Christ.

The Lord's Table Being a Matter of Utmost Seriousness Because It Involves the Body of Christ

The establishing of the Lord's table in a locality is a matter that must be taken with the utmost seriousness because it involves the Body of Christ, the Lord's heart's desire. To establish a "table" in a city where a proper local church already exists is particularly offensive to the Lord:

Setting up churches according to our own wishes is the greatest sin. We must fear founding a church more than anything else. Brothers, do we see the seriousness of this matter? Nothing is worse than setting up a church at will. We can found anything, but we

must never establish a church in this manner because this involves the problem of the Body of Christ. We must be clear about this matter before God. Wherever we go, we first must find *whether or not a church exists* in that locality. It is not a matter of whether or not the church there is strong. That is another matter. It does not matter whether or not the church there is spiritual....If there is a local church in a locality, we must not set up another. We must fear setting up another table for the breaking of bread. This is a terrible thing. (Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 56, pp. 379-380)

Because the bread at the Lord's table signifies the one Body of Christ, we must examine ourselves as to whether or not we are involved in any division. If we partake of the bread in a divisive way and fail to discern the Body, we will damage the Lord's testimony and incur His judgment for partaking of the bread and the cup in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

We all need to discern Christ's mystical Body. Whenever we touch the loaf at the Lord's table, we must realize that the loaf denotes this unique Body. Because the loaf denotes the mystical Body, there should be no divisions among us. If we are still involved in division, yet we partake of the loaf, it will not be a profit to us, but a loss. (Witness Lee, *The Spirit and the Body*, p. 215)

When we partake of any bread on a table that is called the Lord's table, we must discern carefully whether that bread signifies the universal Body of Christ, without division, or not. If it does not, we should not partake of it. (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, p. 55)

Never consider division an insignificant thing. We must take the Lord's table in a reverent way and in fear, lest we touch the Lord's Body without discernment. We need to discern that what we are about to partake of is the unique Body of Christ. In this unique Body there must not be any division. If I am not involved in division, then I shall have the peace and a clear conscience to touch the Lord's Body. (Witness Lee, *The Spirit and the Body*, p. 215)

Because the Lord's table is an exceedingly serious matter, we should never establish the table in haste, without the proper fellowship in the Body both locally and universally, and without the proper appreciation of the oneness of the church as the universal Body of Christ.

The Proper Ground of the Church

In order to be safeguarded from division so that we may partake of the Lord's table in the unique fellowship of the universal Body of Christ, there is the need for a local church to maintain its standing on the proper ground, the ground of oneness. The New Testament reveals that the church ground is constituted of three crucial elements: the unique oneness of the universal Body of Christ, the unique ground of locality, and the reality of the Spirit of oneness.

The first element of the constitution of the church ground is the unique oneness of the universal Body of Christ, which is called "the oneness of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). This is the oneness that the Lord prayed for in John 17. It is a oneness of the mingling of the processed Triune God with all the believers in Christ. This oneness is in the name of the

Father (John 17:6, 11), denoting the Father's person, in which is the Father's life. This oneness is even in the Triune God through sanctification by His holy word as the truth (John 17:14-21). This oneness is ultimately in the divine glory for the expression of the Triune God (John 17:22-24). Such a oneness was imparted into the spirit of all the believers in Christ, in their regeneration by the Spirit of life with Christ as the divine life; this oneness has become the basic element of the church ground.

The second element of the church ground is the unique ground of the locality in which a local church is established and exists. The New Testament presents us a clear picture that all the local churches, as the expression of the universal church—the universal Body of Christ—are located in their respective cities. Hence, we see the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1), the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), and the seven churches in Asia in seven respective cities (Rev. 1:4, 11). Every city as the boundary in which a church exists is the local ground of that church. Such a unique ground of locality preserves the church from being divided by many different matters as different grounds in the way that divisive denominations such as the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Methodists, and the Episcopalians are divided.

The third element of the church ground is the reality of the Spirit of oneness, expressing the unique oneness of the universal Body of Christ on the unique ground of locality of a local church. Briefly, the third element of the church ground is the reality of the Spirit, who is the living reality of the divine Trinity (1 John 5:6; John 16:13). It is by this Spirit that the oneness of the Body of Christ becomes real and living. It is also through this Spirit that the ground of locality is applied in life and not in legality. And it is by this Spirit that the genuine ground of the church is linked with the Triune God (Eph. 4:3-6). (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 28-29)

In order to avoid a situation of division and confusion, it is imperative that we take proper care of these three crucial elements to keep, in practicality, the genuine oneness of the church without any division (Eph. 4:3). Based on the three elements of the church ground, it is clear that the ground of the church, which is the ground of oneness, is not only local but also universal. Of the three elements of the church ground, both the first and the third are universal, not local. In order to stand properly as a genuine local church, we must fully respect both the local and the universal aspects of the church ground.

The ground of the church should not be merely local; it should also be universal. Locally, the ground of the church is the ground of locality; universally, the ground of the church is the genuine oneness. Christ has only one Body. The oneness of Christ's Body is the universal ground of the church.

Suppose all the local churches in Korea are one with each other, but are not one with the churches in other continents. If this were the case, the churches in Korea may have the local ground, the ground of locality, but they would not have the universal ground, the ground of the oneness of the Body. In the entire universe Christ has only one Body. All the local churches in the six continents—in North America, in South America, in Europe, in Africa, in Australia, and in Asia—are one Body. This is the universal ground of the genuine oneness.

The church is one locally based upon its locality, the city, and it is one universally based upon the one Body of Christ. This local and universal oneness is the genuine ground of the church. (Witness Lee, *Vital Factors for the Recovery of the Church Life*, pp. 52-53)

Finally, we need to see that the genuine ground of oneness is in our regenerated human spirit. If we attempt to stand on the ground of oneness in a mental way without being in the spirit, we will make the ground of oneness a factor of division.

By reading some of the books we have published, some dear ones today have picked up the teaching of the ground of locality. To them, however, the ground of locality may be something in the mentality. In this way, even the ground of oneness becomes a divisive factor. The ground of oneness is for oneness, not for division, but if we take the ground of oneness in our mind and make it a mental matter, right away it becomes a divisive factor. Instead, we need to return to the spirit...The recovery is possible only in our spirit. (Witness Lee, *Enjoying the Riches of Christ for the Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, p. 188)

A Matter of the Ground, Not of Condition

The condition of a local church may change, but our recognition of a genuine local church is not based on its condition but on its maintaining the proper ground.

A local church is preserved from being divided by its ground, not by its condition....The condition of a certain church may be good, but that does not assure that the ground of that church is right. A local church may be low in its condition, yet it is still a genuine local church as long as it keeps the genuine ground of the oneness of the Body. On the other hand, a local church may be high in its condition, but it is a division, a local sect, as long as it does not care for the genuine ground of the oneness of the Body of Christ expressed in its locality. (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, p. 51)

The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 differed in their conditions. In fact, five of those churches were in conditions of significant degradation. The Lord, however, recognized them as genuine local churches based not on their condition but on their standing on the proper ground.

Tests of a Genuine Local Church

There are specific tests to determine whether or not a church is a genuine local church. A group of believers must pass all six tests before it can be recognized as a proper church in its locality. (See Witness Lee, *Young People's Training*, pp. 185-198; *The Spirit and the Body*, pp. 210-214; *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 52-54.)

No Special Name

A local church must not take any name other than the name of the Lord Jesus, who is our Husband (1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 11:2). To take any other name is to commit spiritual fornication and to become a denomination.

No Special Teaching or Practice

A local church must not have any special teaching or practice. The denominations have their particular teachings and practices, such as foot-washing, speaking in tongues, or a particular mode of baptism. They receive the believers based on a particular teaching or practice, not based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we insist on anything other than the common Christian faith as the ground for our receiving of the believers (Titus 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:1; Rom. 14:1; 15:7), we are sectarian.

No Special Fellowship

As Christians we have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:9). The denominations have a special fellowship that is narrower than the fellowship of the Son of God. Those in the denominations limit themselves to fellowship with those who hold to their particular, exclusive practices or doctrines. A special fellowship is sectarian, and we must reject it.

No Separate Administration

A local church has only one eldership with one administration (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). A certain Christian group may not have a special name, a special teaching or practice, or a special fellowship, but if it has its own administration, separate from the unique administration of the church in its locality, that group is a sect and must be recognized as such.

Willing to Have Fellowship with All the Local Churches in the Universal Body of Christ

A genuine local church must remain in the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ, which is the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). To remain in this fellowship, a local church must be willing to open itself to have fellowship with all the local churches on the earth. If a local church isolates itself from other local churches, it becomes a local sect.

No Hidden Connections with Other Organizations

A group may pass all of the foregoing tests and appear to be a genuine local church. However, if that group has hidden connections with other organizations, it too is sectarian.

Before establishing the Lord's table in our locality, we must carefully consider whether there is any other group of believers in our locality who pass the above six tests. If there is such a group, we have no choice but to recognize them as the genuine local church in our locality. In this case, we have no freedom to establish another "table" in our city. If there is no such group, and if we ourselves pass every one of the six tests of a genuine local church, we have the freedom to stand as the church on the ground of oneness and start the Lord's table. However, we should not do this in a hasty or isolated way; we should do it by having fellowship with the nearby churches and with the co-workers in the Lord's recovery, both of whom represent the Body of Christ. Before we establish the Lord's table, we should be sure that what we are doing is in the fellowship of the universal Body of Christ.

The Fellowship of the Body of Christ

The fellowship of the Body of Christ is the circulation of the Spirit in and among the members of the Body, similar to the circulation of blood in the human body. It is not a special fellowship of a

particular doctrine or practice but the flow of the divine life in and among the members of the Body. If we would have the proper practice of the local churches, we must have an adequate knowledge of the fellowship of the Body of Christ.

The Fellowship of the Apostles

The fellowship of the Body of Christ is the fellowship of the apostles, which is based on and issues from the apostles' teaching.

The fellowship of the Body of Christ is the fellowship of the apostles—the divine fellowship between all the believers and the Triune God. The term *the fellowship of the apostles* is used in Acts 2:42: "And they were continuing steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles." Then, 1 John 1:3 tells us that the fellowship of the apostles is not merely with us, the believers, but also with the Father and the Son. Here John did not mention the Spirit directly, because he was speaking in the Spirit. The Spirit was there already. The fellowship of the apostles is the fellowship of the Body of Christ, the divine fellowship between all the believers and the Triune God.

The fellowship of the apostles is based upon the apostles' teaching. Fellowship always comes after teaching. If there is no teaching, there is no element or realm of the fellowship. Actually, the teaching is the element and the realm of the fellowship. By the Lord's mercy, today in the Lord's recovery we are under the apostles' teaching and in the apostles' fellowship. The fellowship of the recovery which we are in is the recovered fellowship of the apostles. This fellowship was lost, but it has been recovered. Today we are in the fellowship of the apostles, which is the fellowship of the Lord's recovery. (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 38-39)

Any teaching that is different from the unique teaching of the apostles concerning God's New Testament economy (1 Tim. 1:3-4) produces a sectarian fellowship that will ultimately lead to division.

The Fellowship for the Lord's Unique Recovery

The fellowship of the apostles that we enjoy is the fellowship for the Lord's unique recovery, in which there is only one work to carry out the one New Testament ministry for the building up of the one Body of Christ.

We always need to remember that we are in the Lord's recovery and that His recovery is unique. There is not another recovery, just as there is not another Body of Christ or another New Testament. The fellowship of the apostles is the fellowship for this unique recovery of the Lord. When we see something going on in the recovery which is not so good, we need to have this kind of fellowship and a proper attitude....When we see something wrong in the recovery or in any of the local churches, we should try the best to help the situation by fellowshiping so that it can be improved and corrected. If there is anything wrong, we can and should fellowship and pray together and seek the Lord's leading to improve the situation for the benefit of all the saints. This will be a real help to the Lord's recovery.

We should not have the thought that we can do a particular work according to our way in the recovery. We may be very gifted and have a large capacity to work out something. But what we work out may be the same as worldly people carrying out a certain enterprise. We have to realize that in the Lord's recovery there is only one work. (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 39-40)

The Need for the Fellowship among the Churches to Keep the Universal Oneness of the Body of Christ

In order to keep the universal oneness of the Body of Christ, it is imperative that the churches enjoy fellowship with one another, which is to enjoy the circulation of the divine life among the churches. When we have the proper circulation, the germs of division are swallowed up, and we are kept in a healthy condition. If we isolate our locality from others or have separate territories in the work, we will cause division in the Body and lose our testimony of oneness.

Some brothers may be afraid for others to come and visit them. But what we need today among the churches is more divine circulation, more fellowship. There are about fifty churches in California, but there is not much fellowship among them. This is where our shortcoming is, and this is why we are weak. The circulation helps us and helps others. It helps everyone in the Body. We need the fellowship. This fellowship is the fellowship of the apostles, which is today the fellowship of the recovery. The fellowship today among us is the recovered apostles' fellowship.

All the churches around the globe are part of the one recovery of the Lord. There should not be any boundaries of separation among the churches. Some co-workers in the past did have the feeling that a certain area was their territory. But we need to see that it is not healthy or profitable in the Lord's recovery for anyone to have a boundary for his work. The only boundary is the boundary of the recovery. We should not say, "That's my church. That's the work in my territory." We have only one work. That work is the work of the recovery based upon the teaching of the apostles. The remedy to the problem of so-called boundaries and territories among the churches is the fellowship. We should not have the thought that others coming to our place may disturb our work. We do not need to defend our work. Our work is the Lord's work, which is the recovery's work. We need the adequate fellowship among all the churches in all the nations, and we need a clear vision concerning the apostles' teaching and the apostles' fellowship.

This fellowship is to keep the universal oneness of the Body of Christ (John 17:11b, 20-23; Eph. 4:3-6). Ephesians 4:3 charges us to endeavor to keep the oneness of the Spirit. We can keep this oneness because it is our possession already. We have this oneness; thus, we only need to keep it. Regardless of how weak we may be, we still have this oneness. This is because we still have the circulation of the "blood," the circulation of the Spirit. If we did not have this circulation, we would be spiritually dead. As long as we have life, regardless of how weak we may be, we have this oneness. It is the possession of every believer. What we need, then, is just to keep this oneness. When we keep this oneness, we are in the unique fellowship of the Lord's recovery. (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 42-43)

The Fellowship of the Local Churches

The local churches are the many local expressions of the universal Body of Christ. Although they are kept away from one another by geography, they cannot be divided. In order to keep the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ, there is the need for the local churches to fellowship with all the genuine local churches throughout the entire earth.

The local churches should fellowship with all the genuine local churches on the whole earth to keep the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ. Any local church that does not keep this universal fellowship of the Body of Christ is divisive and becomes a local sect. Some so-called local churches are not genuine and have become divisions; we do not need to fellowship with such "churches." But we should have fellowship with all the genuine local churches on the whole earth to keep the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ. If not, we are no longer a church but a sect. A church is one that remains in the Body; a sect is a group of believers who divide themselves from the Body. When my arm remains in the body, it is a part of my living body. If it is cut off and separated from the body, it becomes a dead thing. (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, p. 44)

How to Deal with the Divisions

It is a tragic fact that some churches have separated themselves from the fellowship of all the local churches and have become divisive sects. In considering how to deal with the divisions, we must first consider the isolated churches as divisive sects based not on their condition but on the improper ground that they have taken. Further, we must exercise discernment concerning how to deal with those who have come into contact with the divisions or have been infected by the germs of division.

We should not recommend any believer in the local churches to have any share in the meetings and activities of the divisions. Nevertheless, there may be some who attend the Lord's table meeting in a local church and, after taking the table, they leave to go to a meeting of the divisive ones to listen to a message. If any believer in the local churches would attend the meetings and share the activities of those divisions, the local churches should not put him away from the fellowship of the church, as long as he is not infected by and does not promote anything that is divisive. Our dealing with such a person depends on whether or not he has been infected by the "germs" of division, and whether or not he is passing on those germs to others. If he does pass on those germs, we must advise him not to do this. We cannot tolerate any germs of division.

If any believer who is meeting with any of these sectarian divisions would attend the meetings of the local churches, or contact the believers meeting in the local churches, he should not be rejected, as long as he does not promote anything divisive.

However, anyone who is aggressive for and promotes the sectarian divisions should be considered divisive and should be rejected after a first and second admonition (Titus 3:10). I believe that this is the fair and scriptural way to deal with the divisions that have separated themselves from the genuine local churches and have broken the unique fellowship of the Body of Christ. Anyhow, according to the apostles' teaching in the New Testament, anyone who makes the division, who is divisive and bears the "germs" of

division, that is, who is factious, sectarian, we should refuse them (Titus 3:10) and turn away from them (Rom. 16:17). (Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, pp. 48-49)

Discerning the Body

If we are to partake of the Lord's table, we must discern the Body and examine ourselves to see if we are involved in any division. Our testimony depends on our discerning the Body.

The Lord's recovery is neither a movement nor a division. Those of every age must be together in harmony. We are not a division, and there are no divisions among us. Rather, we are the testimony of the one Body and the one Spirit. Whenever we come to the Lord's table, we declare to the whole universe that we are one, that we have come out of division and that there are no divisions among us. When we touch the one loaf, which signifies the unique Body of Christ in the universe, we must have the witness in our conscience that we are not involved in division. If we do not have a clear conscience regarding division when we touch the Lord's table, we shall suffer, for we shall eat and drink without discerning the Body. This will not be profitable to us. May the Lord have mercy upon us that whenever we come to the Lord's table, we shall exercise our conscience to determine whether or not we are involved in something divisive.

Because today is a day of confusion and division, we must discern what group of Christians is the genuine testimony of the one Body. Then we ourselves must be certain not to have any seed of division or source of division among us. If there is no division among us, our conscience will be clear, and we shall bear a strong testimony of the Lord's Body to the universe. Then the Lord's blessing will be upon us. (Witness Lee, *The Spirit and the Body*, pp. 215-216)

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