

Conflicting Visions

My vision of the church life comes from over 36 years in the local churches sitting under the teaching of brother Witness Lee and from the practical, personal labor of Brother Titus Chu. Brother Lee always brought me to Christ and the Bible. He gave me a taste for God's *zoe*-life, and an understanding of God's economy. These two guideposts would not let me stray far off course. Because I participated in the church life in the US Midwest, I also benefited from Brother Titus Chu. He taught me the value of practical labor on people, and watched that my daily life and labor were true to the vision. If I wandered into the realm of religion, Brother Titus was faithful to redirect me back to the real thing.

I have always felt, and still feel today, that God's sovereignty led me to the church life. I could have been occupied with many things and gone in many directions, but God brought me into this marvelous environment where I learned not only the great truths of the Christian faith, but also how to live a subjective Christian life in touch with my resurrected, indwelling Savior. I learned to experience the "much more" salvation of Romans 5-8, and the corporate salvation of Romans 12-16. No matter what the future holds, I will always be grateful that God allowed me to find Him in this way.

Today the church life is undergoing turmoil. To my dismay, I see the possibility of division. This causes great grief to me. I have spent many hours praying and seeking the Lord as to the cause. While I am just a little brother in God's hand, I feel that the root cause is a significant difference in our visions concerning practical oneness. What is currently taught about oneness and what I initially experienced entering the church life are not the same.

PRACTICAL ONENESS

There is no need to list all the verses that tell us how the Lord desires his people to be one. This is well documented, and we all agree with its importance. The oneness of Christ's Body displays the oneness of the Triune God, and is essential to bring the Lord back. The differences of vision today are not over the need for oneness. The divergence concerns the practical outworking of that oneness. What does it look like? How shall it be produced?

My Vision

The vision I received in the church life is that all Christians are already one spiritually. We are one because we each received the same divine life on the day of our regeneration. Unfortunately many believers are scattered into various denominations. Yet I, as a believer, must keep the oneness and receive all my brothers and sisters in Christ (Eph. 4:3). There will no doubt be differences in some of our beliefs, but never on the basics of the common faith. There are also differences in practice, but these things must not ever hinder fellowship. The simple test is this: If God has received someone, I must receive him also (Rom. 14:3). Perhaps others not so clear about receiving fellow believers will

not be able to accept me, but that is beyond my control. As for me, I must be broad and receiving.

This kind of oneness may look messy. We will not all look, speak, or practice the same. Some may look at us and say that there is no oneness at all. But this oneness is one of love and acceptance that requires the divine life to make it real. It is broad and inclusive. It will cause the world to believe.

This vision of oneness has allowed me to experience marvelous fellowship with Christians who are in many ways different from me. Many of these claim membership in various denominations that I out of conscience could never claim. Nevertheless the fellowship was sweet. All that mattered to us was the flow of life.

The Blended Brothers' Vision

The “Blended Brothers” promote a different vision of oneness. They feel that practical oneness can only be achieved by everyone attending the same conferences (theirs), by reading the same material (also theirs), and by using the same spiritual vocabulary (once again, theirs). This kind of oneness does not look messy. It looks very uniform. If all meetings are alike and all differences are suppressed, everyone will see that we are one!

Where did the “Blended Brothers” convey this concept? Here are two examples:

- *“Every believer should be in one accord with one mind, one will, one intention. Do not say that you are standing against uniformity and that you cannot agree with such a thing. Forget about uniformity; we do not have uniformity. We are talking about something very organic.”* (Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, v. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 37)
- *“As long as we have different views on a minor point, we cannot have one accord (Phil. 3:15) ...If one brother has a different view, even if it is on a minor point, we cannot have the one accord.”* (Ron Kangas, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 2, Feb. 2005 p. 64)

This is a narrow, exclusive oneness. Any who cannot conform to this arbitrary standard are marked as divisive. Such “oneness” immediately excludes all true believers outside the bounds of the local churches. It even excludes many within those bounds. The underlying concept seems to be—if we narrow the scope of our fellowship to a small enough circle, visible oneness will at last be achieved!

This kind of oneness was achieved once before. James Taylor Jr. led a group of exclusive brethren in the middle of the 20th century that became more and more narrow in its fellowship. Eventually they became constricted to the extent that members were not allowed to eat at the same table with anyone outside this church circle. This included their own children or elderly parents if they did not obey church rules. Children beyond age 12, who would not conform, had to be served meals separately, while the rest of the family, who adhered to the rules of the church, dined together. Those caught dining with “outsiders” were publicly reprimanded and excommunicated from the fellowship. This

destruction of families eventually became known to the outside world. The popular press ridiculed them and the name of the Lord was put to shame. (For details on this history, see *Searching for the True Church* by Roger Shuff, Paternoster Publishers, 2005)

ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING

The Blended Brothers' Vision

This narrow view of oneness is bolstered by such verses as 1 Cor. 1:10: "*Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all **speak the same thing** and that there be no divisions among you, but that you **be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.***" It seems that, according to the "Blended Brothers" view, for all to speak the same thing is to all use the same specialized spiritual vocabulary. For all to be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion is for everyone to properly quote Brother Lee as interpreted by the "Blended Brothers."

This of course can best be achieved if everyone immerses himself or herself exclusively in the speaking and writings of the "Blended Brothers." Thus everyone is expected to attend the "seven annual feasts" and no other conferences, be restricted to LSM publications and no others, and daily read the current issue of LSM's *Holy Word for Morning Revival*. Anyone who attempts to speak without the same specialized vocabulary and without properly quoting the "Blended Brothers" or their selected Witness Lee quotes is marked as having a "different flavor" or "different taste."

My Vision

My view is quite different. The Apostle Paul's admonition to "speak the same thing" is to speak Christ and the things of Christ. To "be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion" is to pursue only Christ. Christ is our unique goal, and all our speaking and opinions must further that goal. Thus any speaking that brings me to Christ is speaking "the same thing." A different teaching is one that brings me to a man, a ministry, a teaching, or a practice other than Christ.

This is confirmed by Galatians 1:6 which says, "*I marvel that you are so quickly **removing from Him** who has called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel.*" Here Paul describes a "different gospel" as one that removes us from the person of Christ. Verse 16 continues, "*To reveal His Son in me that I might announce **Him as the gospel among the Gentiles.***" Once again, the positive speaking is to speak Christ as the gospel.

What then is the speaking that has a "different flavor" or a "different taste?" It is that speaking which brings us to something other than Christ or introduces us to something more than Christ. Galatians 1:8-9 say, "*But if even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, now also I say again, If anyone announces to you a gospel beyond that which you have received, let him be accursed.*"

No specialized vocabulary is needed. No particular literature need be sanctioned. No additional test is required. Fellowship is broad because the Christ we pursue is both “theirs and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2). As long as a ministry brings me to Christ, it is healthy and should be welcomed.

COMPETITION

The Blended Brothers’ Vision

The “Blended Brothers” have trainings. They have stated clearly that if any others also hold trainings, those trainings are automatically in competition with their training, and thus destroy the oneness of the body. They even reprimanded one brother for holding an English-speaking training in a local church in the US at the same time that they were holding a Chinese-speaking training half way around the world in Taiwan. In their view, nothing else can go on except what they themselves do. Only when they move does the Body move. Only when they speak does the Body speak. No one else can act or speak except in concert with them, or the oneness of the Body is broken.

My Vision

When I read the Bible, I find competition between workers to be completely foreign to the Divine thought. Oneness does not depend on exclusive work. When John saw someone casting out demons in the Lord’s name, he wanted to forbid him. But Jesus responded, *“Do not forbid him, for there is no one who will do a work of power in My name and be able soon to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us”* (Mark 9:39-40).

Even though Apollos caused confusion in Corinth, the Apostle Paul still commended his work when he told the Corinthians, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth”* (1 Cor 3:6). He continued to speak positively of Apollos in 3:22 and 4:6, and finally says in 16:12, *“Concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him many times to come to you with the brothers; yet it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.”* Obviously he did not consider Apollos a competitor.

In the same spirit, the Apostle Paul dared not even care about the motive of other workers. He simply rejoiced whenever Christ was announced. He wrote, *“Some preach Christ even because of envy and strife, and some also because of good will, These out of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. But the others announce Christ out of selfish ambition, not purely, thinking to raise up affliction in my bonds. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truthfulness, Christ is announced; and in this I rejoice; yes, and I will rejoice”* (Phil 1:15-18).

The thought that others may be competitors comes from the desire to monopolize and control. It comes from the “Blended Brothers” misguided, unscriptural vision of practical oneness and from the pride that makes them think God can use only them. Ephesians 4:11 says, *“And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as*

evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers.” The gifted ones are plural in each case. They do not compete. God uses this plurality to build His Church.

By The Fruit The Tree Is Known (Matt 12:33)

I recently had an enlightening experience with a dear brother whom I have known and loved in the Lord for over 30 years. Knowing he was sympathetic to the “Blended Brothers” and their views, I visited him for fellowship, hoping to understand his point of view. He told me that he had spent much time immersing himself in the “High Peak of the Divine Revelation,” and felt he had received much help from them. I did not question this and was very happy for him. He then expressed concern that he did not hear the things of the “High Peak” coming from me or from the other saints in our locality.

Based on his concern and my desire to understand his perspective, I suggested that we meet weekly to read the “High Peak” and fellowship over it. We decided to go over the *Ministry Magazine*, which contains all the latest speaking from the “Blended Brothers.” The first week went fine. The second week, however, he informed me that he could no longer meet with me. I offered to repent if I had offended him in any way. He assured me I had not. When pressed, he said he could no longer fellowship with me because (1) my speaking did not reflect the current speaking of the “High Peak,” and because (2) I did not “trust” the “Blended Brothers” as he did. I pleaded guilty to both counts. My last word to him was that I had Christ in me and he had Christ in him. That should be enough for us to fellowship over the Bible. If he broke our fellowship, the responsibility was his, for I was more than willing to continue.

This brother was once as broad as I am. What happened to him? Why must he now restrict his fellowship to brothers who pass some kind of litmus test? His changed attitude is the result of the material he has immersed himself in over the last months and years. Unfortunately, this story of broken fellowship is not unique. It has happened again and again among the brothers and sisters in the churches in recent days. Such narrowness of fellowship is the fruit of the vision proclaimed by the “Blended Brothers” and their followers. While I am both willing and able to fellowship with them, they are not willing to do the same with me. My vision keeps me broad. Theirs will continue to make them more and more exclusive.

QUARANTINE

I believe that these two views are at the root of the recent “Blended Brothers” letter of “quarantine” against Brother Titus Chu and his co-workers. If you hold the view that visible oneness will come only when everyone uses identical spiritual vocabulary and quotes the “Blended Brothers” and the quotes from Brother Lee that they select, then brother Titus is certainly an obstacle. He does not conform to this edict, and in this sense his speaking may sound “different.” Based on this view, he must be removed to obtain the desired humanly manufactured oneness.

But what will be the result of this action? How many families will be divided? How many relationships will be severed? Isn't it ironic that in the name of “preserving the oneness,”

parents will be divided from children, and perhaps even marriages will be fractured? Moreover, brothers and sisters who have co-existed in harmony within their local churches will become estranged and embittered towards one another. These are not theoretical possibilities. This is already happening in numerous churches. Who is responsible? Who has “drawn a line in the sand”? Who has said, “neutrality out of a good heart doesn’t build the Body?” The “Blended Brothers,” by their divisive actions, culminating in quarantine, are dividing churches, saints, families, and marriages! We are today repeating the shameful, divisive history of the Plymouth Brethren.

On the other hand, you may feel (as I do) that Brother Titus (and other such faithful workers sent by the Lord) bring you to Christ, and that you are obligated to be broad in your receiving of all those who are so sent. In that case, Brother Titus is not different at all. Rather, he is faithful to his portion of the New Testament ministry. Then your faithfulness must continue to receive him.

Some say the exclusive stand of the “Blended Brothers” has made us into another denomination. I fear this may already be the case for some. But there are many like me who will keep our original stand, broad and open. We stand here for all the believers. We cannot tell our brothers and sisters outside the church life, “Because you don’t talk like us, don’t attend our ‘feasts,’ and don’t read exclusively what we write, we refuse to fellowship with you, but we stand for you.” That is the utmost hypocrisy. Our oneness must be based on openness and a broad receiving of all whom God receives.

Some will reject this writing out of hand because (1) I did not use any specialized “High Peak” vocabulary; (2) I mainly quoted the Bible and not the “Blended Brothers”; (3) I confessed that my view is different from the “Blended Brothers”; and (4) I will continue to be open to brother Titus Chu and others as long as they continue to bring me to Christ. Rejection for any of these reasons only proves my point.

Romans 14:10 says, “*But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*” When that day of judgment comes, we must each be able to say that we were faithful to the Word and to the vision we were given (Acts 26:19).

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