

“The Body Equals the Recovery”-- Going Beyond what has been Written?

For Christians, the Bible is the “canon” [Greek: *Kanon*: measuring rod or rule] – the unique standard of truth for our faith and walk. If we go “beyond what has been written”¹ in the Scriptures, we risk deviating from the apostles’ teaching and the divine revelation. Here we pose the question: **Has recent teaching concerning “the Body” gone “beyond what has been written”?** Has there been a divergence from the Scriptural truth concerning the Body, brought to us by Brothers Nee and Lee? The “Blended Co-workers” are on record equating the Body of Christ with those believers within the Lord’s recovery. One “Blended Brother” has said, “*I would say that practically speaking, for us the Body today is just the Lord’s recovery. ...In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the recovery. We know that the mystical Body of Christ includes all the believers, all of the redeemed ones in time and in space, but practically for us today, the recovery is the Body.*” (*The Ministry* magazine²)

“The Body equals the recovery”

This statement acknowledges the Scriptural definition of the universal Body, which includes all believers. Yet, it drastically re-defines “the Body” with the words, “***the Body equals the recovery***” and “***the recovery is the Body.***” Among us the term “recovery” refers to those Christians who are endeavouring to return to God’s original intention. The statement, “*we in the Lord’s recovery today,*”³ is typically understood to mean those believers meeting practically in the local churches. It follows that “the recovery” refers to a minority of believers, a small sub-set of the Body of Christ. **The recovery and the Body are not equal.** Yet this assertion, “***the Body equals the recovery***” and similar statements, such as “***practically for us today, the recovery is the Body***” have been spoken and published,⁴ after passing through LSM’s “discerning check.” It is surely a matter of great importance to diminish Christ’s universal, mystical Body, composed of millions of genuine believers, down to the 300,000 believers currently in the Lord’s recovery around the globe. This reduces something as “innumerable as the stars of heaven” (Gen. 22:17; Gal. 3:29) to a finite number equal to the population of a small-sized city or town.

We know of no precedent either in the Bible, or in the ministries of Brothers Nee and Lee, for such an **exclusive definition of the Body as entailed in the statement---** “***the Body equals the recovery.***” Brother Lee clearly taught that “*The church is ... an organic Body constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God’s life ...*”⁵ Moreover, he says, “*... through the centuries, all God’s chosen people were, are, and will be brought into not only the reality but also the practicality of the Body of Christ...*”⁶ These statements recognize the universality of the Body in both time and space.

Going Beyond what has been Written?

Brother Lee’s teachings concerning the Body and the recovery are crystal-clear. How then could a “Blended Co-worker” conclude that “***In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the recovery***”? This statement is based upon Brother Lee’s speaking⁷ “*Without the backing of the Body, without the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches.*” It appears that the brother implicitly **assumes** that the two phrases -- “*Without the backing of the Body*” and, “*without the backing of the recovery,*” -- **are in apposition**, so that “*the backing of the Body equals the backing of the recovery,*” **Based upon this implicit assumption**, he concludes that, “***In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the***

recovery.” However, this extrapolation of Brother Lee’s word “goes beyond what is written” both in the New Testament, the teaching of Brothers Nee and Brother Lee’s own teaching.

Let us revisit Brother Lee’s statement. In our view, it is equally reasonable to assume the two phrases are **not in apposition**. In that case, Brother Lee’s sentence consists of two distinct phrases: “*Without [1] the backing of the Body,[and] without [2] the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches.*” With this understanding, Brother Lee’s speaking **does not imply that the Body equals the recovery**. More importantly (we would argue) both the Scriptures and Brother Nee and Brother Lee’s teaching concerning the Body and the recovery, **require this latter interpretation**. Surely we should understand one sentence of Brother Lee’s writing in the light of all his teaching on that subject, rather than re-interpreting his entire teaching based upon one sentence! Moreover, if “*the Bible is our unique standard*,” all our teaching should be measured by the rule of the Scriptures. We do not have the liberty to extrapolate from Brother Lee’s words to a teaching “beyond what has been written” in the Bible.

An Exclusive Definition of The Body

The statement, “*the Body equals the recovery*” is elitist, excluding from Christ’s Body believers outside the Lord’s recovery. If this view is adopted, all the believers not practically meeting in the local churches are not recognized as belonging to Christ’s Body. According to this assertion, millions of genuine believers in denominations are not members of Christ’s Body. Doesn’t this teaching provide support for denominational critics who charge⁸ that “*the Local Church ... treats fellow members as if they were not [legitimate member(s) of the body of Christ]”*?

From the start of the Lord’s recovery in North America, this statement -- “*the Body equals the recovery*” -- was neither our stand nor our teaching. As early as 1968, Brother Lee acknowledged that, together with “*all the dear saved ones outside the local churches*,” we “*are all of one Body*.” To quote the wider context⁹, he said, “*This is our attitude toward all the dear saved ones outside the local churches. Although they may be in a denomination or sect, we all have the saving faith, we all have been redeemed by the Lord's precious blood, and we all have the divine life.*” He continued, “*We may be quite different from other Christians in background and in many other things. ...But regardless ... as long as we believe in Jesus Christ..., we are all redeemed, justified, regenerated, and saved. And we all have the divine life within us. Therefore, we are all of one Body.*” This accords with the Bible, which says the Body is inclusive. The apostle Paul wrote, “For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free...” (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ’s Body includes all genuine believers, both inside and outside “the recovery;” inside and outside the denominations. We reject the exclusivism embodied in the statement: “*the Body equals the recovery*,” as sectarian.

The local church includes all believers in that place

On occasion, Brother Lee talked of the Body as the aggregate of all the local churches. Concerning the local and universal aspects of the Church, he said¹⁰, “*All the local churches are part of the universal church, not something in addition to it or apart from it. All the local churches added together equal the universal church.*” Yet, in this context, Brother Lee surely intended we would regard the “local church” as inclusive of all the believers in that place. Hence elsewhere, he wrote¹¹, “*The church in the locality is not narrow. It includes all the believers in that locality.*” *The Beliefs and Practices* clearly states this inclusive stand: “*we recognize all the*

blood-redeemed and Spirit-regenerated believers in Christ as members of the one church in each city.”¹² The genuine local church, as the practical expression of the universal Church, is not exclusive. The local church includes all believers in that place. Hence it is possible to say: “all the local churches added together equal the universal church, the Body.” In this context, both the local church and the Body are inclusive.

“Seven times a year... for the speaking to the entire Body”

Over the past decade “the Body” has been emphasized repeatedly in messages given by the “Blended Co-workers.” Yet, what exactly do they mean by “the Body”? We feel the statement, “*the Body equals the recovery*,” reveals the actual concept underlying much of their speaking about the universal Body. If this assertion was merely an isolated incident, it could be dismissed as an unfortunate miss-speaking. That, however, is not the case. This teaching has appeared in *The Ministry* magazine after passing through LSM’s “discerning check.” Moreover, the same concept appears to underlie another “Blended Co-worker’s” speaking concerning “*the Lord’s leading in the Body universally*” when he says¹³ “*The seven times a year that we come together are for the universal Body, for the speaking to the entire Body and for the Lord’s leading to the whole Body.*”

Today, Speaking to the Universal Body is Impossible

If the universal Body includes all the believers throughout the age of grace, “*speaking to the entire Body*” (as claimed by this “Blended Co-worker”) **is impossible for any minister today**. Hence Brother Nee says¹⁴, “*the church here [in Matt 18] is local, not universal, for no one could speak at one time to all the children of God throughout the universe. It is only possible to speak at one time to the believers living in one place.*” Yet this “Blended Co-worker” claims to do what Brother Nee says is impossible – to speak to the entire universal Body of Christ! Simple logic shows the impossibility. The universal Body includes all the believers since Pentecost. Perhaps the apostle Paul, through the legacy of his epistles, could “speak” to all the following generations of believers. However, today no one can speak *retroactively* to the saints in Paul’s time or Luther’s era. Even speaking to all the believers currently living around the globe is impossible. How then can we “*come together ... for the universal Body, for the speaking to the entire Body*”?

It seems this contradiction arises from differing concepts of the Body. In our view, Brother Nee holds the Scriptural concept of the universal Body. However, it seems for the “Blended Co-workers,” “*the Body equals the recovery.*” In the latter case, to address the “entire Body” merely requires gathering all the local church believers to Anaheim or to the web-cast and video, where (according to this “Blended Co-worker”¹⁵) “*we come together... for the universal Body, for the speaking to the entire Body and for the Lord’s leading to the whole Body.*”

Yet, as we understand it, the Bible never teaches that “*the Body equals the recovery*,” nor that “*the recovery is the Body.*” Neither have we found this concept in Brother Lee’s writings. It seems to us that this is “going beyond what has been written.” Furthermore such a divergence from the Scriptural truth concerning the Body, as it has been brought to us by Brothers Nee and Lee, may have serious consequences. If we adopt this narrow and exclusive definition of “the Body,” (differing from the Bible and Brothers Nee and Lee), we risk producing something other than the goal of God’s economy. We fear this exclusive definition of Christ’s Body will produce a “virtual body,” an entity which is in fact nothing more than a global organization.

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NOTES:

1. This phrase occurs in 1 Cor. 4:6 where Paul warns the Corinthian believers not to go beyond what he has written concerning himself, Apollos and other servants of the Lord. Concerning this phrase, Brother Lee writes, “*Paul said that they did not do anything that was beyond what was written in the Bible (1 Cor. 4:6).... Anything that goes beyond the teachings of the New Testament would damage and jeopardize a person’s leading. The apostle’s leading must always be according and limited to the Word of God.*” W. Lee, *One Accord for the Lord’s Move*, p. 72
2. Quote from: *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 196 (emphasis added). To give the wider context of this quotation: “*We need to consider all the time how the Body would feel about what we are doing. I would say that, practically speaking, for us the Body today is just the Lord’s recovery. We need to ask ourselves how what we do would affect the Lord’s recovery as a whole. This is practical. Brother Lee continues,*
‘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.’ [W. Lee, *The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, pp. 34-5]
In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the recovery. We know that the mystical Body of Christ includes all the believers, all of the redeemed ones in time and space, but practically for us today, the recovery is the Body. We have no way to practice the local churches without the backing of the recovery. ‘If we practice the local church life and neglect the view of the Body, our local church becomes a local sect.’” [*The Ministry*, v. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, pp. 196-7, emphasis added.] Throughout this article, references appear in the footnotes.
3. Eg. *The Beliefs and Practices of the local churches*, (1978) p. 6. As a further example, “*We in the local churches are for God’s recovery.*” (p. 5)
4. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 196 (emphasis added). The need for a “discerning check” was strongly emphasized by the “blended co-workers” in *Publication Work in the Lord’s Recovery* (LSM, June 30, 2005)
5. Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of New Testament*, p. 2245
6. Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of New Testament*, p. 2106
7. Witness Lee, *The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, p. 35
8. This statement in its larger context appeared in *Christianity Today’s* editorial: “**the Local Church** implicitly sabotages its argument—that it is a legitimate member of the body of Christ—when it **treats fellow members as if they were not**, by taking them to court.” *Christianity Today*, March 2006, Vol. 50, No. 3, Page 27 (emphasis added)
9. Witness Lee, *Practical Expression of the Church*, Anaheim, CA, The Stream publishers, (1970) pp. 102-3. As quoted in “The Truth Concerning Exclusivism” on the internet at www.ContendingfortheFaith.com.
10. Witness Lee, *Life-study of Ephesians*, p. 238 (emphasis added)
11. Witness Lee, *Practical Expression of the Church*, The Stream publishers, (1970) p. 84
12. “The Co-workers in the Lord’s recovery” *The Beliefs and Practices of the local churches*, (1978) p. 4 (emphasis added)
13. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 9, (2003) p. 169 (emphasis added)
14. Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, pp. 51-2.
15. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 9, (2003) p. 169