

Open Letter to Brother Benson Phillips from Russia

Dear Brother Benson,

At the outset allow me to explain why I chose to write you an open letter, rather than writing you privately. Originally I wanted to write you a private letter, but then I learned that you do not read correspondence which is perceived to be “negative” in content. Therefore, I felt to choose this way of communication, hoping that this way my concerns will somehow reach you.

First of all, let me thank you for all the help and care I received from you personally. I still remember my time at the FTT in Moscow as the best time in my life. My present position is not the result of personal offenses. I was always treated with love and care. My present position is a truth issue.

I would like to give you a little testimony. I came into the Lord’s recovery in December of 1992. It was a glorious experience! I was reading Brother Witness Lee’s book “The Economy of God”, praying over all the verses in this book, and I experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. My heart was overwhelmed with love to the Lord. I clearly saw how knowledge and gifts distracted me from the Wonderful Person of Christ. It was like a honeymoon with Jesus. I right away left my denomination and began to attend the meetings of the church in Rostov. This experience happened during the break after the 1st term of the FTTM. Some saints from Rostov had attended the training and came back with burning hearts. Their testimonies set me on fire, and I felt that I should go to this training. This came with a price. I had just finished high school and was a freshman in the University. My parents were unbelievers, and they were horrified at my desire to drop the University and go to Moscow. My mother cried almost every day begging me not to go. I was unmoved, and eventually she gave in. At that time I had no idea that I might not be accepted for the training. Only later I heard that you had to ask Brother Lee if I could come. I am very thankful to Brother Lee that he accepted me for his training.

Before the training Brother John Brooks came to visit us, and he gave messages on the ground of oneness. I remember how captured I was by the vision of oneness of all the believers. I saw that non-essential teachings, practices and ministers could not constitute the ground of oneness.

My time at the FTT training in Moscow was full of enjoyment. In order to make a long story short, I will not go into details here. I would like to mention only one thing here. When I was in the training, a leading brother in Rostov through whom the church life there was established grew cold to the recovery. He began to speak against the training and against Brother Lee. He did it openly in the meetings. I was very much troubled by this and had fellowship about this situation with different brothers. I remember very well what Brother Joel Kennon told me then. He said that nobody could ever forbid me to eat from the tree of life. In any situation we should be positive and eat from the tree of life. Brother Benson, at one point I had fellowship regarding this situation with you. You told

me that I should only pray. I should not confront this brother; I should only pray. I followed your advice. Throughout this entire situation I did not say anything negative about this brother. I supported him as much as I could. All I did was I prayed for this brother and for the church. At the training the saints from Rostov met every Monday to pray for this situation. As you know, eventually that brother and the majority of the saints left. We basically had to have a new beginning; but this whole situation gave me a valuable lesson of the cross.

Brother Benson, I admired your wisdom at that time. At that time you did not ask me to form a party loyal to LSM. You did not teach me to sue my brothers and sisters. At that time you did not teach me to insist on one publication. You taught me to respect that brother despite his attitude. I learned that Christ could be gained and ministered in any situation. I am only wondering why today you are not following your own advice you gave me then. I am talking about the situation in the Great Lakes area. I hear that the saints loyal to you sue their brothers for property, and speak negatively of their elders. I am wondering why won't you give them the same advice you gave me in 1993? Why won't you teach them not to confront the elders and only pray for them if they see something wrong?

Now I'd like to explain why I took this situation with Midwest so closely to my heart. When Brother Lee died, the trainings were conducted by the number of brothers, including yourself, brothers who are now known as "blended/ing brothers". I was always positive to all the ministering brothers. But some years later I was a little bit alerted by how often the name of Brother Lee was mentioned in the blended brothers' messages. I constantly heard, "Brother Lee this, Brother Lee that." I did not like it because we should always focus on Christ, not on ministers. But I got an impression that Brother Lee was mentioned more than the Lord. At that time I just neglected this whole matter. I still trusted all the brothers very much.

The second time I was alerted it was related to Brother Titus Chu. In 2000 I was in a spiritual depression. I considered my Christian life as failure. I couldn't even read the Bible. At this juncture I read a book by Brother Titus Chu. This book was a great help to me and helped me to cope with my depression. I got a feeling that this book should be translated into Russian. I wrote a letter to Cleveland, Ohio, and obtained their permission for translation. But then I heard that something was wrong with Brother Titus. I wrote a letter to Brother John Brooks and asked his help. He gave me a call, and basically told me that Brother Titus is a rich brother, but he is carrying out his own ministry. Then Brother John told me that to avoid rivalry we accept only the materials published by LSM. That is when the alarm bell rang. Previously I was taught that we should accept everything that gives life. I definitely got life from the book of Titus, and I could not understand why I should not receive his ministry. But because I trusted Brother John Brooks very much (he is like a father to me), I decided that I just did not understand something. I went on positively. And I did not consider these matters for some time. Meanwhile I was encouraged by the "96 lessons" training. After some time my wife decided to go to the FTT, and we moved to Moscow. She was in the FTT, and I worked for BBD ("Bible Book Depot", Russian branch of LSM) as a translator. That is when my doubts returned

and were intensified. I do not want to go now into details of what troubled me in Moscow. That is quite another subject. I would only mention three things:

First, when I was in Moscow the “one publication” statement was issued (June 2005). It was too much for me. My spirit just could not take it. Of course, this whole idea of one publication is a logical implication of the “one minister of the age” teaching. This teaching I cannot agree with. In this letter I will not analyze this teaching from the Scripture. Much was written already. I would only give you a historical background of this teaching. This teaching — that in one age God has only one minister of the age — was first introduced by the James Taylor’s branch of the Exclusive Brethren. They considered James Taylor, Sr., their “minister of the age.” James Taylor was a godly man, and a real minister of the Lord. But when he died, he was succeeded by his son James Taylor, Jr., who was considered the next minister of the age. However, he was a wicked man: a drunkard and fornicator. When in 1970, he was caught by some in adultery, those saints were slandered and excommunicated. I think you are well aware that this scenario was almost repeated in the recovery. This is an example of a dead teaching producing dead fruit. How can I receive the “one publication” statement that was spawned by such a deadly teaching?

Second, when you learned that I read an article of Nigel Tomes, you had fellowship with me. At that time you spoke and I listened. I was grateful that you found time to have fellowship with me, and I hoped that I could receive help from you. I listened attentively, and when I came home after the fellowship I right away took down all the main points and considered them carefully. I will not address them all here. I will only cover one point which to me is the most important. Brother Benson, you said that those who oppose one publication use the Bible, but with the Bible we can prove anything. Then you shared about life and death, that we should run away from death. And the rest of your fellowship was once again “Brother Lee this and Brother Lee that.” Dear Benson, to say that we can prove anything by the Bible and therefore should use our life/death feeling as our standard is a serious error and deception. That is something I would expect to hear from a Roman Catholic priest. One of the main achievements of Reformation was “Sola Scriptura” (Only Scripture). To make the feeling of life and death our standard apart from Scripture is very dangerous. Because it is purely subjective, it can lead to serious spiritual deception. This feeling can easily be manipulated. If you teach the saints that anything that does not come from LSM is divisive, of course, they will feel “death”, when they see other books. However, this feeling comes not from spirit, but from a deceived mind. I am sorry, but “Brother Lee said” is not enough for me. I should see if it is based on the Bible. Brother Lee is not infallible. His teachings are not canonized. He is not above the Bible; he is not even equal to it. No matter how much we respect a minister of the Lord, he should not be above scrutiny. The noble people of Berea knew this very well (Acts 17:11), and they were not even saved! The Bible commends them for this.

Third, as you know I was in Anaheim at the “Crystallization-Study of God’s Building” training (January 2006). At this training the most shocking experience to me was not the “acting God” thing; it was your message about the destroyers of God’s building. Especially, your example when you picked on a brother and asked him what he would do,

if his friend is affected by death. You said words to the effect that he should not try to rescue him. He should stay away from him and only pray. Dear Benson, your words were so cruel. Do you think it is honorable for the servant of the Lord to use scare tactics? I right away understood everything. If the saints would THINK that I am affected by death, that's it. I'm done for. Henceforth nobody will speak to me. Brother Benson, don't you see what kind of bondage your words impose upon the saints? Why should the saints be in fear lest someone would think that they are affected by death? Is this the glorious salvation bought for us by the precious blood of the Lamb? I do not think so. I rather think that it is a "different gospel."

Dear Benson, when I came to the recovery I was caught by the vision of Christ and the Church. I was attracted by the brothers' ministry concerning oneness with all the genuine believers. I was taught that non-essential teachings, names and people should not constitute our ground of oneness. However, what I see now is that you are leading the churches into the most exclusive and sectarian way I have ever seen. I do not want to be a part of it. That was the reason why I resigned from BBD. That is why I cannot continue to meet with the "LSM churches". Yes, I deliberately call them "LSM churches". Despite all the denials, that is what they are. I have not forsaken the saints. I still love them. I have no negative feelings toward them. I have no personal offenses. I appreciate and treasure all the positive things I received from the saints. However, I cannot be a part of the sectarian system promoted by you. I know that I will not be received by any of the LSM churches with my present views. Based upon your current teachings, it seems it is not enough for you that I love the Lord and want to follow Him. You want to bind me with the yoke of unscriptural teachings, like "one publication" and "one minister of the age". I am sorry, but my conscience does not allow this.

Dear Benson, I wrote some strong words. I was reluctant to do it, since you are much older than I. However, if I really love you, I should speak truth to you. I want to tell you that I love you and pray for your wellbeing.

May the Lord bless you richly,

Sergei Kuznetsov

a simple brother from Russia

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