

## **Letter from Don Rutledge**

Dear brothers in Christ,

The brothers and churches in the Mid-West area have been in my heart for over 35 years. During the late 1980s due to slander and false issues raised by parties associated with LSM, we were not able to continue our fellowship. During the late summer of 1988 Titus spent three days with me in my home here in NC. We spoke of many concerns regarding the work and the churches. It seemed we were very similar in our concerns but neither of us had the wisdom or clear way to address our concerns. It was a time of great consternation.

I had and still do have a great appreciation for the Lord's testimony in the churches in the Mid-West and for the gift Titus is to the Body of Christ. He is certainly an apostle, a prophet and a teacher given to the whole body of Christ.

I was at the conference in Chicago with Max Rappaport in 1977. I had been summoned to come because the brothers from So. California had some important fellowship to convey to the brothers in the Mid-West. I was never told what the content or intention was. I saw them blast the saints and the Lord's work in the meetings. I sat at the back in a quandary. Later in an elders meeting, they blasted Titus and wanted him to move to Anaheim and submit to their coordination. There were about 30 brothers in the room and there were 5-6 scattered about who supported Max. The impression was that all the out-of-the-area brothers were all in agreement. I and others from Texas were just "stage props." We had no idea what was happening. Finally, I could not restrain myself. So many belittling words about the churches, saints in the Mid-West and Titus were too much. So I spoke. I protested the thought that such a gift as Titus would be taken out of function. I suggested if he felt to relocate, He would be a great blessing to the church in Dallas and he would be invaluable to build up the Lord's work in Texas. (Max had already led a "raid" on the churches in Texas and about 150 of the young people had been relocated to Orange County. What a disaster that was!) The few words I spoke seemed to end all discussion. I was shocked that a simple positive word about Titus and the churches in the Mid-West would end the gathering. They called for a break. Titus and I spent about an hour in private conversation on a walk. He later told me that my word and the private time saved him.

I later begin to realize that these men would have these purging or promoting meetings and have a handful of "plants" and a large group of "stage props." I was a "stage prop" more than once. The appearance would be that everyone was in agreement with what was being presented.

I am now reading David Canfield's article on "Concerning the Present Turmoil." On page 8 there is a footnote: 3 *"One of the key differences between the turmoil among the churches in the late 1980s and today's turmoil is that at that time a number of leading brothers, to the author's understanding, disavowed brother Lee as a servant of the Lord. In contrast, many of those who are resisting the negative trend among the churches today feel that they are fighting to preserve and protect our brother's ministry from some who, whether they mean to or not, are usurping it for their own ends."*

What a terrible repeating of slander. The very ones, whom he is writing about, those who have attempted to discredit and slander you brothers, are the ones who slandered brothers who attempted to express concerns in the late 80s. I never heard a responsible brother say Brother Lee was no longer a servant of the Lord. They, as I, were very concerned for the saints, the churches and the ministry of life and truth that had been among us. Compared to you brothers, our protest was a barely audible whisper. I would encourage Brother Canfield to read Brother John Ingalls' book, "Speaking the Truth in Love."

I myself was labeled and excluded from the fellowship of the churches, not for what I had said or done but because I would not promote the LSM, Philip Lee, the "New Way" and those who were carrying out all the decrees of "the Office." Nor would I join in to denounce brothers who had expressed concerns. It was not enough to be quiet and take the cross. Promote, join the program denounce or you are *persona non grata*. You brothers are right to speak boldly and not give any ground. You will preserve the saints and yourselves.

During my time of association with Brother Lee etc., I saw many fleshly rebellious people defame him and the churches. This kind of activity is to be condemned. During the 80s there were some who sought opportunity to defame and slander. They are easy to discern. They always speak of personal offenses and never express regards for the Truth, the Lord or the Lord's work. But brothers like John Ingalls and Bill Mallon etc. only expressed concern for the saints, the churches, and the truth and for Brother Lee himself and his ministry. They sought out Brother Lee over and over again to express their concerns. But the very ones who are now attacking you brothers had successfully insulated Brother Lee physically and mentally. My experience was when you were able to speak with Brother Lee, he had already been poisoned by the LSM cadre. Yes, even our dear brother could be influenced by rumor and innuendo, but we all are human and he was no less a servant of the Lord because he may have been so.

I understand the LSM cadre likes to relate anecdotes of private talks with Brother Lee. I will also relate one experience. I would say that Brother Lee and I were not only brothers but had a very sweet relationship. I considered him to be my older friend as well as spiritual Father and I believe he considered me as a young friend. In 1976, in Dallas, shortly after the failure of the Day Star business, he was speaking to me of his relationship with Brother Nee. He said that he would have been severely rebuked by Brother Nee because Brother Nee had repeatedly warned them not to mix the church in a business. We were standing by one another. Then he put his arm around my shoulder. (I never before or after saw him embrace someone) He told me in the most sober voice, "Brother Don, I told Brother Nee that 'if he left the vision he had given me that I would no longer follow him. Rather, I am following the vision he gave.' Brother Don, if I leave the vision please do not follow me." I assured him that I was following the vision.

In 1989 a paper was published and sent out by Living Stream that was an attempt to refute a message given by John Ingalls to the church in Anaheim. There were five serious violations of the truth and the vision I had been following. The

headship of Christ, the Bible as the final authority of truth, hierarchy, the local standing of the church and the anointing of the spirit in every believer were all torn down. I was heart broken. Not bitter or negative. I did call Don Looper and Titus and tell them of my great consternation. Neither could agree with the paper but felt to ride out the storm.

I then met with some brothers, who had moved to Carolina from California, with whom I had been attempting to meet. They informed me that they were "turning me in" to the LSM and to Brother Lee for the failure to support the "new way" and that they had six phrases I had uttered over a two-year period that showed I was not one with the ministry. (They could not even come up with a complete sentence.) They also informed me that the oneness of the Body was the oneness with "the Apostle," and that they expected everyone here to come into that standard of oneness. In addition, even though I did not say anything dissenting, my presence and my wife's presence in the meetings ruined the meetings.

Since my vision of the Oneness of the Body of Christ was not based on saying "I am of Paul" or "I am of Witness Lee," and since they considered my presence such a problem that we should not try to go on together. I further added that there was no problem with Paul or Brother Lee, but the problem was with those who wanted to be sectarian and that their practice was sectarian. I also told them that I was very much acquainted with Brother Lee and all this promoting of the "up-to-date" fellowship from LSM and Taiwan had nothing to do with being one with Brother Lee and his vision.

When I informed Don Looper about the encounter, he was very grieved. He urged me to move away and not to just leave these brothers, whom he had never met because of the damage to me among the brothers in the recovery. Because of his view of "Deputy Authority" he did not contact me again. Before he died I was in Texas on business twice and went by to see him. He was my closest brother in the Lord since we were 18.

Titus desired to preserve Brother Lee's function and ministry in spite of what this cadre of brothers was doing. I was no longer full time and attempting to start a job in order to support my family. I had no strength to endure the LSMers. I never heard from Titus or any of the Mid-West brothers again until John Myer contacted me in December of 2004. I am very grateful for his initiative.

When I began this letter, I intended to only address Brother Canfield's footnote, but it seems the Anointing had something else in mind. I am not sure what that may be. My prayer has been very much for you brothers and the preservation of the churches in the Mid-West from this current attack. May the Lord strengthen you all.

In Christ Jesus,

Don Rutledge