

"Interpretational Differences" Once Again—Who's Not Holding the Head?

An earlier piece¹ discussed differences in scriptural interpretation. It was inspired by a "blended co-worker's" statement that,² *"When Christ is the Head practically...it is impossible for there to be different interpretations of the Scriptures....Interpretational differences prove that some members have problems with the Head and are not under the Head."* This striking, dogmatic statement appeared without any qualification. Taken seriously it implies absolute concord in Scriptural interpretation among those under Christ's headship. All *"interpretational differences,"* (both major and minor) are ruled out, since these only *"prove that some...have problems ...and are not under the Head."* I pointed out examples where Brothers Nee and Lee held divergent interpretations and asked: "Who is not holding the Head?"

The LSM-brothers' Response

The LSM-brothers³ have graciously responded in a piece entitled:⁴ *"On Holding the Head and Interpretational Differences."* They make a valuable contribution by pointing out Watchman Nee's words,⁵ *"If we hold the Head, we cannot have different interpretations of Scripture. Differences arise when someone is not holding the Head, because He cannot possibly say one thing to one member and something else to another."* Hence it appears the "blended co-worker" was echoing Brother Nee on this point. Unfortunately, one looks in vain for further clarification from W. Nee. How should we regard cases of differing interpretations of Scripture, e.g., the identity of the "two witnesses" (Rev. 11) or divergent views about rapture? What scope was envisioned when W. Nee talked about *"different interpretations of Scripture"*? Did he include parables, types, prophecies and practices along with biblical truths? I don't know.

The LSM-brothers say concerning⁶ *"the difference...between Brother Nee and Brother Lee concerning the identity of the two witnesses....Brother Lee... present[ed] himself as a pattern of not teaching differently from the leadership in the Lord's ministry...Although he held a different understanding of...the two witnesses, he would never say anything publicly to contradict Brother Nee..."* What's the point here? According to the LSM-brothers, *"The point is that Brother Lee held the Head...by not making an issue over a different interpretation...Had Brother Lee contended with Brother Nee or merely spoken differently...[that]would be the strongest evidence that he was out from under the headship of Christ."* Hence, even though Witness Lee *"held a different understanding,"* the LSM-brothers assert, *"he would never say anything publicly to contradict Brother Nee..."* Is this a satisfactory response? Has the real issue been addressed?

Different Interpretations vs. Different Speaking

The LSM-brothers emphasize that while working with Watchman Nee, Brother Lee **never said "anything publicly to contradict Brother Nee..."** Only subsequently, after W. Nee's imprisonment and departure, Brother Lee presented another interpretation. This is highly commendable. Yet it doesn't answer the question: **"When there are different interpretations, who isn't holding the Head?"** The quotes from W. Nee and the "blended co-worker" do **not** relate to differences in speaking; **they refer explicitly to different interpretations,** whether spoken or not. **The issue is the existence of interpretational differences,** whether they are expressed or suppressed. The fact is W. Lee *"held a different understanding of...the two witnesses."* True, Brother Lee didn't make *"an issue over a different interpretation,"* and didn't *"say anything publicly to contradict Brother Nee..."* However, that doesn't change the fact—an underlying interpretational difference existed. Moreover, (according to the "blended co-workers") **such differences⁷ "prove that some...have problems...and are not under the Head."** Once again,⁸ *"May we ask...which one—Brother Nee or Brother Lee—had "problems with the Head and [was] not under the Head"?"*

The LSM-brothers' response shifts the focus from the underlying divergent interpretations to the question of speaking and teaching. However, diversity in speaking is **not** the issue addressed in this striking assertion about "not holding the Head." Their response diverts attention away from the core issue—divergent interpretations of Scripture. The claim is that different underlying Scriptural interpretations **"prove that some...have problems with the Head."** The LSM-brothers argue

that "**Brother Lee held the Head...by not making an issue** over a different interpretation." They assert that "*had Brother Lee...spoken differently...[that] would be the strongest evidence that he was out from under the headship of Christ.*" However, the lack of "evidence" in spoken form, doesn't negate the underlying divergent interpretations. If we take the "blended co-worker's" statement seriously, **diversity in speaking is superficial; different interpretations are fundamental.** According to them, if divergent interpretations persist, "**the real issue behind all the differences" remains—"somebody is not holding the Head."** This is the inescapable conclusion of the "blended co-worker's" teaching. In their response, the LSM-brothers seem to retreat from their teaching in order to avoid its unpalatable implications. But if they accept the principle they espouse, they should embrace its implications.

Do the LSM-brothers take this Teaching Seriously?

The "blended co-workers" are on record as saying,⁹ "*When Christ is the Head practically...it is impossible for there to be different interpretations of the Scriptures.... Interpretational differences prove that some members have problems...and are not under the Head.*" This statement was not qualified as relating only to crucial items of truth. In fact the "blended co-worker" applied this principle to such topics as¹⁰ "the Minister of the Age," "one publication," the young peoples' work and the way of gospel preaching. Neither is their statement limited to a certain era. This principle provides no basis to justify modifying interpretation when the "leadership in the Lord's ministry" changes. If Brothers Nee and Lee had divergent interpretations of Scripture then "**somebody is not holding the Head.**" This holds true whether Brother Nee was actively ministering or not. It applies both before and after Brother Lee's departure. Applying the "blended co-worker's" own logic,¹¹ the Head (Christ) didn't change when Brothers Nee or Lee cease their active ministry. Then why should the Head's interpretation of Scripture change? I'm obliged to ask: Do the LSM-brothers take this teaching seriously or not? If they do, the diversity exemplified below implies "**somebody is not holding the Head.**" Please tell us—Who is it?

1. Watchman Nee & Witness Lee differed concerning the two witnesses (Rev.11)¹²
2. Watchman Nee & Witness Lee differed concerning the "Region of the Work"¹²
3. The "blended co-workers" & Witness Lee differ concerning the prerequisites for "one accord"¹²
4. The "blended co-workers" & W. Nee differ concerning the one "Minister of the Age"¹³
5. The "blended co-workers" & W. Nee differ concerning the "one Wise Master Builder, who is the acting God"¹⁴
6. The "blended co-workers" & W. Nee differ concerning "one global company of co-workers"¹⁵
7. The "blended co-workers'" teaching "The Body Equals the Recovery" differs from W. Nee & W. Lee¹⁶

Concerning each of the above differences, we ask: who's not holding the Head?

Interpretational Differences—Concerning What?

Watchman Nee said, "*If we hold the Head, we cannot have different interpretations of Scripture...*". What was the scope of these differences? Did Brother Nee mean **all** possible differences, both major and minor? Does he include the interpretation of prophecies, parables, types, shadows and figures? I haven't found anything in W. Nee's writing addressing the question—What is the scope of scriptural subjects with only one divinely-accepted interpretation? Perhaps given the opportunity, W. Nee would have confined the scope to essential items of faith and truth. Even the statement itself assumes there's only one divinely-acceptable interpretation. Yet, is that the case, say for prophecies, parables and types? For the early Church Fathers,¹⁷ "*every passage had more than one meaning precisely because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit.*" Hence, they looked for the literal, allegorical and spiritual meanings of each Scripture. When W. Nee addressed the question of the rapture he noted,¹⁸ "*there are three different views... Among these three groups there are persons who are very good in Bible knowledge and are very spiritual.*" Brother Nee didn't vindicate one group for "holding the Head" and condemn the others for having "*problems with the Head*" and are "*not [being] under the Head*"!

The “blended co-workers” adopt an extreme position on the issue of diversity. They are on record saying:¹⁹ ***“If one brother has a different view, even if it is on a minor point, we cannot have the one accord.”*** It seems they demand absolute uniformity in biblical interpretation. This implies zero tolerance for diversity, even on minor points. Moreover, they cite examples, including practical matters¹⁰ such as publications, young peoples’ work and the method of gospel preaching. Concerning some of these matters, it’s difficult to find even one direct biblical reference. Yet it seems, uniformity is required in **all** areas of scriptural interpretation and practical application.

Interpretational Differences—Different From What?

What is the reference point, the standard to which interpretations are to be compared? At times the LSM-brothers speak in generalities. For example, they say, *“In order to maintain a proper relationship with the other members of His Body and in order to maintain the...one accord in His Body, we should not strive for different interpretations of Scripture.”* But what do the LSM-brothers mean by **“His Body”** here? Christ’s Body includes all believers in time and space. How then do we “maintain a proper relationship” and “one accord” with them all? Didn’t Brothers Nee and Lee *“strive for different interpretations of Scripture,”* differing from the majority of believers—e.g. concerning rapture, reward & punishment, the kingdom? Of course, if “the Body equals the recovery,” (as the “blended co-workers” say,¹⁶) the interpretation of believers “outside the recovery” is irrelevant! Is that what the LSM-brothers believe?

More specifically, *“Brother Lee...[was] a pattern of not teaching differently from the leadership in the Lord’s ministry,”* the LSM-brothers say. Here the reference point (according to the LSM-brothers) is *“the leadership in the Lord’s ministry.”* Therefore, Brother Lee *“would never say anything publicly to contradict Brother Nee’s ministry,”* during that era. Today, in the recovery, views differing from the “blended co-workers” are portrayed as ***“attacks against the ones taking the lead in the ministry.”*** However, Brother Lee emphasized that the leadership is **more in the Apostles’ teaching** (the entire New Testament revelation) **than in the people,** *“the ones taking the lead in the ministry”* (to use the LSM-brothers’ phrase.) The irony of the present situation is that the LSM-brothers’ reference point differs from that of Brothers Nee and Lee. W. Nee proclaimed²⁰ ***“The Bible is our only standard...if it is not the Word of the Bible, we could never agree even if everyone approved of it.”*** So here we have a final “interpretational difference”—the LSM-brothers’ standard is **“the teaching of the leadership in the Lord’s ministry”** (currently the “blended co-workers”). In contrast, Watchman Nee’s unique standard was **the Bible.** Witness Lee’s was **the Apostles’ teaching,** the entire New Testament revelation according to God’s economy. So, (once again) who’s not holding the Head?

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NOTES

1. ***“Interpretational Differences – Watchman Nee & Witness Lee vs. “the Blended Co-workers”-- Who’s not holding the Head?”*** On the internet at: <http://www.concernedbrothers.com/WorkRegions/InterpretationalDifferences.pdf>
2. ***The Ministry***, vol. 8, no. 7 July/August 2004, p. 183
3. The authors of articles on **AFaithfulWord.org** are members of LSM’s “Defense & Confirmation” project, led by Dan Towle. We assume that the opinions expressed reflect the views of the “blended co-workers.” Moreover, we assume all the items posted on this website have passed through LSM’s “discerning check” and qualify as part of LSM’s “one publication” in its internet version. For simplicity, we refer to the contributors to **AFaithfulWord.com** as “the LSM-brothers.”
4. ***“On Holding the Head and Interpretational Differences,”*** On AFaithfulWord.org July 10, 2006
5. ***“Authority in the Body”*** in ***The Collected Works of Watchman Nee***, vol. 44, pp. 812-813 ***“On***
6. ***“On Holding the Head and Interpretational Differences,”*** Unless otherwise indicated, quotes attributed to “the LSM-brothers” are from this source.
7. ***The Ministry***, vol. 8, no. 7 July/August 2004, p. 183
8. See my ***“Interpretational Differences...”***
9. ***The Ministry***, vol. 8, no. 7 July/August 2004, p. 183

10. "Interpretational differences prove that some members have problems with the Head and are not under the Head. Many brothers have spoken ardently concerning **the ministry and the minister of the age**. But recently I heard of a young brother...who declared that Brother Lee was wrong...Many are governed by Brother Lee's word...of having **one publication work**. Others may honestly have a different view. What should we do? We are not here to fight, to argue, or to debate. Let us **identify the real issue behind all the differences that arise – somebody is not holding the Head....The same thing is true with the work among the young people or with the way of preaching the gospel**" (*The Ministry*, vol. 8, no. 7 July/August 2004, p. 183)
11. In the spoken message the "blended co-worker" explained that, Christ our Head is not schizophrenic, having a dual personality. If you and I both contact Him, we will receive the same answer. Hence, we will have the same interpretation of Scripture." (Based on the author's notes from the message published in *The Ministry*, vol. 8, no. 7 July/August 2004, p. 183) The text applies this same logic over time. Christ our Head is eternal, unchanging, hence He doesn't change with the departure of His servants, W. Nee, W. Lee or others. Then why should our interpretation of Scripture change?
12. See my "**Interpretational Differences...**" (Note 1 above)
13. See my "**One, Unique 'Minister of the Age'? – What Did Watchman Nee Teach?**" On the internet at: <http://www.concernedbrothers.com/MA/Minister%20Of%20The%20Age.pdf> and my "**One, Unique 'Minister of the Age' – What do the 'Blended Co-workers' Teach?**" On the internet at: http://www.concernedbrothers.com/MA/BlendedCo_workersTeachMinisterOfTheAge.pdf
14. See my, "**Witness Lee, the 'Wise Master Builder', & the 'Acting God'**" On the internet at: http://www.concernedbrothers.com/WL/WLeeWiseMBAActingGod_2.pdf For W. Nee's exposition on the "Master Builder" see his "**Church Affairs**," Chapter 10, pp. 163-5 (in my edition)
15. During the LSM Summer 2006 Training reference was made to "one band of co-workers" conducting God's one work. On this topic see my "**ACTS: Flawed Pattern OR Highest Divine Standard?**" On the internet at: <http://www.concernedbrothers.com/Ground/ACTSFlawedPatternOrDivineStandard.pdf>
16. See my "**The Body Equals the Recovery" – Going Beyond what has been written?**" On the internet at: <http://www.concernedbrothers.com/BODY/RecoveryEqualsTheBody.pdf>
The LSM-brothers seem to make the same implicit assumption when they say, "*the dissenters...teach whatever they like...without regard for its effect on the Lord's recovery as a whole...In their disregard for the effect of their winds of teaching on the Body as a whole.*" It seems that, for them, "**the Lord's recovery as a whole**" **EQUALS** "**the Body as a whole.**" See the LSM-brothers' "**On Holding the Head and Interpretational Differences**," On AFaithfulWord.org July 10, 2006
17. D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church*, p. 104
18. W. Nee, "**The Rapture and the Tribulation**" in *Collected Works of W. Nee*, vol. 19, p. 502.
19. The context of these statements is: "**As long as we have different views on a minor point, we cannot have one accord** (Phil. 3:15). *In a particular aspect of the work, some brothers may have diametrically opposed views, and it may seem that no one can lay aside his view. We may wonder what to do in such a situation. We cannot argue and fight, nor can we refuse to speak—we are brothers. Yet in this matter there is no one accord. However, Brother Nee had a certain view in this particular matter and Brother Lee had the same view. We should simply take Brother Nee and Brother Lee's view on the matter. If one brother has a different view, even if it is on a minor point, we cannot have the one accord...*" *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 2, Feb. 2005 p. 64. The quote in the text focuses on the main point of this passage, as shown by the heading in *The Ministry* magazine: "**As long as we have different views on a minor point, our not being able to have the one accord.**"
20. Watchman Nee, *The Christian*, Issue No. 1, 1925, in *Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. #7, p. 1231. For more on this, see my "**The Bible: Our Only Standard**" On the internet at: http://www.concernedbrothers.com/Bible/Bible_is_our_only_standard_Nigel_Tomes.pdf

