

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

1.Two Visions and Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches

In 1948, Bro. W. Nee shared on two different ways among the workers and the churches. These two ways were the way of Jerusalem and the way of Antioch. His speaking was no less than a redirection in the ministry work and in the way of establishing the local churches in China. This was his most significant redirection in his ministry since his initial release in 1937, in which he first shared on his vision and seeing of “the ground of the local church”, as published in the Normal Christian Churchlife. As this profound redirection was released near the end of his public ministry, its influence greatly impacted the subsequent years in the ministry work throughout Asia. Notably Bro. Nee stated his earnest hope for the future was that some local churches would practice in the way of Antioch. This article considers Bro. Nee's ministry concerning the two ways among the workers and the churches, and highlights key principles of the mature way of Antioch.

1.1. Two Church Principles and Starting Points

Initially in China in 1937, W. Nee had first started the churchlife and the ministry work in the way of Antioch starting from Acts 13, which emphasized the differences between the “work” and the “church”. However by 1948 many problems had arose, which caused him to speak and encourage a restart in the ministry work and in the churchlife in China in the way of Jerusalem, starting from Acts 1.

“Today we need to consider afresh the principle of Jerusalem. God's work began from Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 8). The word of the Lord was that the gospel should spread from Jerusalem. In the Bible Jerusalem represents God's work. God set up Jerusalem as the center of the work. In God's eyes all the apostles were to remain in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4; 8:1, 14, 25). We will not take back a single word of what we have said in Hankow before[i.e. the Normal Christian Church Life, 1937]. No doubt the church is local. But in God's eyes there are centers in His work. What we spoke of in Hankow was the condition of the local churches when they are matured. The failure of our work in these years is that we pass on the authority to the local churches before they are matured. According to God's order, there is first Jerusalem, and then the local churches. Our failure today lies in the fact that we have the local churches first without having a Jerusalem. The order of the Lord's way is first Jerusalem, then Samaria, and then the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8) ” ref.[1].

“We covered the way among us in 1937. At that time we spoke of the difference between the local churches and the work. Our line then began from Acts 13. But during the past few years, we found our problems. We found that we have to begin from chapter one. The Acts of the Apostles begins with chapter one. It is wrong for us to pay attention to the difference between the church and the work before the church is ever built up. We should start from the basis of the church and the work being one. Our mistake lies in the order and the sequence; it is not a mistake in the truth itself. We were not wrong in the truth, but we were wrong in the timing. Our work must first return to the principle of Jerusalem. The starting point of the church is the work” ref.[2].

“Today we should first come back to take the way of Jerusalem. Later, we hope that some local churches can practice the principle of Antioch” ref.[2].

Bro. Nee never denied any of the truth shared on the way of Antioch (i.e. Normal Christian Church Life spoken in 1937, from Hankow and Shanghai China), but realized that it required more mature local churches first before it could be practiced. Since this redirection occurred near the end of his public ministry, the way of Jerusalem was a leading in the ministry work to be carried forward by his coworkers.

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

2. The Way of the Church in Jerusalem, The Initial Stage

The way of Jerusalem and its principles was the initial way and move of the Spirit among the workers and the churches in Acts. Bro. Nee realized before the churches progress in a more mature way that they firstly needed to be built-up. Two main principles Bro. Nee emphasized in the way of Jerusalem were “the ministry work produces the church” and “the work and the church are one” (Acts 2:42-45).

“Antioch is the case of the church producing the work, whereas Jerusalem is the case of the work producing the church” ref.[2].

“The Acts of the Apostles begins with chapter one. It is wrong for us to pay attention to the difference between the church and the work before the church is ever built up. We should start from the basis of the church and the work being one” ref.[2].

In Jerusalem there was one ministry center in the work. From the one center there was the fellowship of the apostles for the coordination and dispatching of the ministry workers to raise up and establish the churches. From the one center the ministry work and the church life were one in fellowship, coordination, and labour (Acts 2:42-45).

“Today the co-workers should come together and work in one place, whereas the brothers and sisters should be sent out. The believers in Jerusalem should go out everywhere for the gospel” ref.[2].

In the way of Jerusalem the dispatch of ministry workers is like the example of Barnabas, where an established one was sent out from the ministry center to build-up a distant local church by serving with a continual supply of workers out from the common ministry center (Acts 11:22, 27). In this way a distant local church could be established and built-up from the one fellowship of the apostles with one coordinated ministry oversight in the work. We may consider these as the “branch churches” supplied by the one flow and move in the ministry.

In 1948 Brother Nee restarted the ministry work in China in the way of Jerusalem with Shanghai as the ministry center and with one coordinating fellowship in the ministry work to recover, establish, and produce the local churches. After this “the church and the work were one”, in one move, through one ministry fellowship and supply.

3. The Way of the Church in Antioch, A Later and More Mature Stage

In 1937, in Hankow & Shanghai China, Bro. Nee first shared on the principles of Antioch, as published in the Normal Christian Church Life. Initially Bro. Nee began the Lord's recovery in China in the way of Antioch, after ten years serious problems arose. By 1948 he realized it was wrong to have started the Lord's recovery in the principles of the way of Antioch since the local churches were not adequately built-up. He realized the way of Antioch was a more mature way which should be started later on after some local churches were properly established and more mature.

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Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

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“We will not take back a single word of what we have said in Hankow before. No doubt the church is local. But in God’s eyes there are centers in His work. What we spoke of in Hankow was the condition of the local churches when they are matured. The failure of our work in these years is that we pass on the authority to the local churches before they are matured.” ref.[1].

“Today we should first come back to take the way of Jerusalem. Later, we hope that some local churches can practice the principle of Antioch” ref.[2].

For the church to operate in the way of Antioch maturity was needed to properly exercise “spiritual authority”. It was the lack of maturity among the local churches that caused problems and prevented the Lord's recovery from being able to practice the church life and correspondingly the ministry work in the way of Antioch. In order for a local church to operate properly independent of the ministry's direct fellowship and oversight it needs maturity before authority should be exercised. It is not always bad for a local church to be under the fellowship and oversight of a ministry center however it is the Lord's goal in the ministry work is to produce mature members who can take the lead (Eph 4:13, 1 Tim 5:17). When mature ones are recognized by the apostle elders can be appointed to oversee the local church (Titus 1:7-9, 1 Pet 5:2-3). When a local church is mature and established the Lord can advance in the more mature principles in the way of Antioch.

The next portion expounds on seven key principles in the way of Antioch, based upon Bro. Nee's ministry and the Word, to clarify and establish Bro. Nee's mature hope for the future..

3.1. Antioch A New Beginning Initiated by the Spirit

Acts 13:1-2

1 Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Bro Nee considered Antioch in Acts 13, as a new beginning initiated by the Spirit. In this new beginning Antioch serves as the model church for the New Testament age. Antioch's prophets, teachers, and apostles were all likewise patterns. The testimony as a Christian begins in Antioch.

“The beginning in Antioch was initiated by the Holy Spirit. Please take note that the beginning in Jerusalem was initiated by the Holy Spirit and that the beginning in Antioch was also initiated by the Holy Spirit. It was not that Antioch thought up a method for going out to work but rather that the Holy Spirit initiated another beginning there” ref.[3].

“It is of no little significance that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). It was there that the peculiar characteristics of the Christian and the Christian Church were first clearly manifested, for which reason it may be regarded as the pattern church for this dispensation. Its prophets and teachers were model prophets and teachers, and the apostles it sent forth were model

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

“apostles. Not only are the men sent forth an example to us, but the manner of their sending forth is our example too” ref.[4].

3.2. The Spirit Establishing and Directing the Multiple Companies in the Work of the Ministry

Bro. Nee considered the way of Antioch in Acts 13 as a crucial foundational truth of Christianity. This foundational truth was that the Spirit desired not one company of coworkers in one ministry center but desired multiple companies in multiple centers for the work of the ministry. Initially in the way of Jerusalem the ministry work was lead or limited by “twelve” apostles (Acts 1:26, 2:14, 6:2), yet in the way of Antioch the ministry work is lead by companies of “sent ones” or apostles, which are not numbered or limited (Eph 4: 11). In principle the setting apart among the ministry workers yields an unlimited number in the ministry work.

“Please take note that the beginning at Antioch was very crucial. ... Jerusalem became a center because the Holy Spirit initiated a beginning there. If the Holy Spirit had not initiated a beginning at Antioch, we would have to say that God had only one center on the earth.”

“... If you do not have the work on your heart, you will not feel that Acts 13 regarding Antioch is a great matter. But if you have the work on your heart, you will see that this was a very great step. This was a strategic step by the Holy Spirit” ref.[3].

“Brothers and sisters, this is most crucial. Acts 13 is the foundation of Christianity. Without Acts 13 we cannot say how many problems would have occurred. Without Acts 13 the concept of the pope would be entirely correct. The concept of Rome, the concept that there is a capital of Christianity, would be completely correct. But now we know that before God there was not only one center but two centers, not only one region but two regions. Therefore, when it pleases the Holy Spirit, He can establish a third region, a tenth region, a hundredth region, a thousandth region, or a ten-thousandth region on the earth. This is according to the intention of the Holy Spirit regarding His work on the earth; it is not according to man's intention” ref.[3b].

It was the Spirit who ordered and associated the workers into another company, this was not to create a division or doctrinal aligned groups, but was the Spirit's mature way and move in the ministry work.

“These apostolic companies were not formed along partisan or doctrinal lines; they were formed under the sovereignty of the Spirit, who so ordered the circumstances of the different workers as to link them together in the work. It was not that they were really divided from other workers, but merely that in the Spirit's ordering of their ways, they had not been led into special association with them. It was the Holy Spirit, not men, who said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul." Everything hinged on the sovereignty of the Spirit. The apostolic companies were subject to the will and ordering of the Lord. ... It was not because of natural affinity that they associated specially with some, nor was it because of difference in doctrine or practice that they did not associate specially with others. The deciding factor was always the ordering of the Lord” ref.[5].

In Acts 13:1-4, there are five ministry workers praying and yet it was the Lord who set apart Barnabus and Paul with a special commission. The “set apart ones” were sent out as the commissioned apostles under the leading and guiding of the Spirit as their Director. The prophets and teachers remaining assumed no control or responsibility over their movements in the ministry, ministry work, or

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

supply of their needs.

"After the apostles were called by the Spirit and were separated for the work by the representative members of the Body, what did they do? ... they had no authority to control the apostles. Those prophets and teachers at the base assumed no official responsibility in regard to their movements, their methods of work, or the supply of their financial needs. In Scripture we nowhere find that apostles are under the control of any individual or any organized company. They had no regulations to adhere to and no superiors to obey. The Holy Spirit called them, and they followed His leading and guidance; He alone was their Director" ref.[6].

3.3. Organic Branching in the Ministry Work for the Multiplication and Intensified Move of the Spirit to Reach the Whole Earth

In Gen. 2:10, there is one flow from the garden of Eden branching out into four flows to reach the remainder of the earth. Also in Revelation 5:6, there the Spirit is seven-fold in its move over all the earth. The "principle of branching" enables a multiplication in the flow. Branching of the flow allows an increased coverage of over the earth. The body of Christ is organic like a vine and composed of members who are the individual branches (John 15:5). Yet the growth of the branches in the Body requires the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-16). The Spirit's branching or setting apart in the ministry work is for the perfecting of the many branches to be built-up as the Body. Today we should all praise the Lord for the organic branching in the Body and in the ministry work led by the seven-fold or seven-branched Spirit flowing among the churches and across the whole earth. How can the full gospel reach the whole earth? For this there is the seven-branched Spirit moving in the many branched flows possibly even 10,000 set apart companies and regions in the ministry work!. In the way of Antioch we see a crucial pattern for the New Testament age, with the Spirit establishing and directing the many, possibly even 10,000 companies of workers, as the branches in the work of the one New Testament ministry to reach the whole earth and to build-up the Body for Christ's return (Matt.24:14). If we before the Lord, clearly see the significance perhaps we like Bro. Nee might consider the way of Antioch as a "crucial foundational truth for the present age in the ministry work and the church-life".

"Brothers and sisters, this is most crucial. Acts 13 is the foundation of Christianity. Without Acts 13 we cannot say how many problems would have occurred.... But now we know that before God there was not only one center but two centers, not only one region but two regions. Therefore, when it pleases the Holy Spirit, He can establish a third region, a tenth region, a hundredth region, a thousandth region, or a ten-thousandth region on the earth. This is according to the intention of the Holy Spirit regarding His work on the earth;" ref.[3b].

3.4. Recognizing Each Company Standing on the Ground of the Body in the One Ministry of the Body

"We recognize that the Lord is the Head of the Church, and that the apostles were the first order "placed" by the Lord in the Church (1 Cor. 12:28). Although they were formed into associations, having their special fellow workers appointed by the Lord, still they had no special name, system, or organization. They did not make a company smaller than the Body to be the basis of their work; all was on the ground of the Body. Therefore, although on account of difference of locality and the providential ordering of their ways, they formed different groups, still they had no organization outside the Body; their work was always an expression of the ministry of the Body. They were constituted into separate companies, but each company stood on the ground of the Body, expressing the ministry of the Body." ref.[5].

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

In the way of Jerusalem, the New Testament ministry was centrally located in the ministry of the twelve apostles (Acts 1:17) and recognized by all (Acts 6:2-5). Yet in the way of Antioch when companies of workers are physically set apart, the one New Testament ministry requires a recognition of all the ministry workers in the principle of the Body (Eph 4:11-12). We should not consider those set apart as in a different ministry but rather we need to recognize every individual worker associated with every company as New Testament ministers and fellow workers of God for the building-up of the Body of Christ.

"We must recognize that every individual worker and every company represents the ministry of the Body of Christ, each office held being held in the Body and for the furtherance of the work of God. Then, and only then, can we have one ministry - the up-building of the Body of Christ"
ref.[5].

3.5. The Work Among the Companies Done in the Principle of the Body

In the way of Jerusalem the oneness of the ministry work and teaching was through the coordinating fellowship of the twelve apostles from one ministry center (2:42-45, Acts 11:22,27). Yet in the way of Antioch each ministry company is set apart for a work called and directed by the Spirit (Acts 13:2; 2 Cor. 10:8-16). Bro. Nee's view was that each ministry center with a company of apostles could have its own supply, special speaking, and ministry in the word. In the way of Antioch there is an enlarged move and supply through the many ministers in the Word from the many ministry centers.

"The local church in this locality is still the same as the local churches elsewhere. If there is a difference, the difference is that there are apostles living in the regional center. Perhaps at the same time these apostles are also elders. Once you have clearly seen this point, you can realize that there may be a slight difference between the general local church and the local church at the center of the work in the matter of the message meeting. Because the apostles are there, they may be willing to give a special supply, special messages, or special ministry of the word. There can be such a thing because the apostles are there. This is something that a general local church does not have. This is the difference between a local church at the center of the work and a general local church" ref.[3c].

In the way of Antioch all work is done by the companies is done on the ground of the Body, and the fruit is blessed regardless of which company does the work of the Body. In Antioch the ministry is organically one but not organizationally or institutionally one.

"If we recognized clearly the oneness of the Body, what blessed results we should see! Wherever the principle of the oneness of the Body operates, all possibility of rivalry is ruled out. It does not matter if I decrease and you increase; there will neither be jealousy on my part, nor pride on yours. Once we see that all the work and all its fruits are for the increase of the Body of Christ, then no man will be counted yours and no man mine; it will not matter then whether you are used or I. All carnal strife among the workers of God will be at an end once the Body is clearly seen as the principle of the work" ref.[5].

When all the workers recognize all ministry works in the principle of the oneness of the Body then there no claims of rivalry can exist. There should be no care or preference for which worker or company of workers did the work or whether they are from the Great Lakes area, California USA, Brazil, Taipei Taiwan, China, Russia or where ever!. If we hold the principle of the oneness of Body in the work then all ministry work is recognized as God's.

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

1 Cor. 3:7-8

7 So then neither is he who plants anything nor he who waters, but God who causes the growth.
8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour.
9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's cultivated land, God's building.

3.6. Multiple Companies Working in A Related Way by Extending the Right Hand of Fellowship

Bro. Nee shared once the Spirit has set apart ministry workers into companies the coworkers need to recognize what God is doing with the other companies, and acknowledge these ones as ministers in the Body, this is to work in a related way as functioning members of the same body by extending the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:7-9).

“Each company should recognize what God is doing with the other companies and should extend fellowship to them, acknowledging that they are also ministers in the Body. Under the ordering of God they may work in different companies, but all must work as one Body. The extending of the right hand of fellowship implies a recognition that other people are in the Body and we are in fellowship with them, working together in a related way, as becomes functioning members of the same Body” ref.[7].

In Acts 15, when the teachings from one ministry center began to create problems in another region there arose a practical extension of fellowship among the multiple companies to meet and resolve the contentious teachings. To handle church disputes requires the workers to “work in a related way” by extending their right hand in fellowship.

3.7. Being Bounded and Limited in Authority Yet Not Over Extending Control

If we discern the Word in Acts we will note that the Lord never permitted the way of Jerusalem to become a global fellowship exercising global authority over all the churches. In the way of Antioch each company had its own commission in the ministry work (Gal 2:7). If we study Acts 13:4, the Greek word translated as “set apart” is “aphorizō” which means “to mark off from others by boundaries, to limit, to separate”. This shows that the set apart companies of apostles are bounded and limited in their work in the ministry. God apportions and measures authority and the region of labour, which does not extend over other areas apportioned to others (2 Cor. 10:8,13-16, Rom 15:20).

An opposite way in the ministry work is to form one global company of workers with a global central authority. Bro. Nee warned that central authority in the ministry work contained many evils, he cautioned that it lead to a Popish system, with great worldly power, making it easier for workers to not follow the Spirit. He considered that one global company exercising centralized authority in the ministry work was in the unscriptural way of Roman Catholicism.

“In Scripture the workers were formed into companies, but that does not imply that all the apostles formed themselves into one company and placed everything under one central control. Although Paul had “those with him,” and Peter his associates, they comprised only a number of apostles, not all the apostles. That all the apostles should combine into one company is not shown in the Word of God. It is quite in order for scores of men, or even hundreds, who have received the same trust from God, to join together in the same work; but in the Scriptures we find no centralization of authority for the

Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

control of all the apostles. There is a company of apostles, but it is not great enough to include all the apostles. That is Romish, not scriptural” ref.[7].

“Central control has many evils. It makes it easy for God’s servants to disregard the leading of the Spirit, and readily develops into a popish system, becoming a great worldly power. It is a scriptural fact that God’s servants are formed into companies, but they are not formed into one single company” ref.[7].

3.8. The Impact of The New Beginning At Antioch on the Body

The New Beginning at Antioch, impacted not just those who were sent out but also all those who remained. The principles in Section 3.5 to 3.7, affected those who remained at Antioch and in Jerusalem. Previously all the church work was through the one fellowship of the Apostles, yet after the new beginning at Antioch there were two companies with two unique commissions, and leadings in the ministry work. Now the oneness of the New Testament ministry was expressed in the recognition of all the companies and the workers on the “ground of the Body” and no longer just through recognizing the one fellowship of the apostles. The work of the ministry now was done in the principle of the Body regardless of which company did the work. Now to resolve regional conflicts the companies had to work in a related way by extending their right hand in fellowship to distant companies. Authority in the ministry work was no longer exercised by just one fellowship of the apostles but it was apportioned, measured, and bounded to each worker and company.

If we see all the Lord accomplished through instituting the way of Antioch among the workers and the churches, we would bow our heads and worship the Lord every time we read Acts 13. Praise the Lord for His branched move in the many companies operating in the many centers across the whole earth ! May we all be touched by this crucial new beginning and way.

“Brothers and sisters, this is most crucial. Acts 13 is the foundation of Christianity” ref.[3b].

“If you know God, you must bow your head and worship Him every time you read Acts 13 and 14 because here is a very important matter. I will always sincerely thank God for Acts 13” ref.[3].

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Two Ways Among the Workers and the Churches – Part I

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