

BLENDING IN THE VITAL GROUPS—THE REALITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Message 3

Being Related to Others for the Blending in the Vital Groups

I. Gathering in small groups of twos and threes as the building blocks of our vital groups

Acts 2:46-47

46 And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of *their* food with exultation and simplicity of heart,

47 Praising God and having grace with all the people. And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved.

A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality composed of saints who mainly meet in small groups.

The Conclusion of the New Testament, message 192, p. 2081

- The greatest usefulness of a group meeting is to bring in relatedness.

The greatest usefulness of a group meeting is to bring in relatedness. A group meeting can keep people, uphold people, and relate people. No meeting can be as practical as a group meeting in communicating with and blending together the brothers and sisters... We all know that no member of the body can be alone or isolated. The more the members of the body fellowship and mingle together, the healthier the body will be.

Words of Training for the New Way. Volume 2, p. 70

MEETING WITH A SMALL NUMBER

Basically speaking, we should not meet in big meetings, but with a small number. The smallest number for gathering is two. The Lord refers to two or three meeting together into His name. Without two, you cannot have any gathering. To build up the local church you need to go to the bottom of the required number for meetings. Do not require twenty or two hundred for a meeting. Just require two. Let the saints meet with two or three, with a small number. By the Lord's word in Matthew 18:20 we can realize that in the Lord's intention He did not want to have big gatherings in the local church for practical help. Big gatherings can only be good for general teaching and could never be good to give some practical help... It is nearly impossible to render any practical help in a big meeting. You must have a little gathering of two or three to render such help. Sometimes if the number of saints meeting is over ten it would still be hard for you to render the practical help. We need the small number for our meetings so that we can take care of everyone's need practically. I hope that we could all be impressed with this point in the word of the Lord.

Elders' Training (Book 5)—Fellowship Concerning the Lord's Up-to-Date Move, chapter 6, p. 89

II. Being related to one another

Every church after God's own heart bears the stamp of "one another" on all its life and activity. Mutuality is its outstanding characteristic.

The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 30, chapter 3, p. 47

A. The definition

1. Relatedness is nothing less than Christ Himself

Ephesians 2:20-22

20 Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone;

21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;

22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

- a. **The relatedness among the saints is the spreading Christ, the very Christ who takes over their entire being.**

The Christ in one brother longs to be joined with the Christ in another brother, but the layers of the soul and flesh become a wall to separate their portions of Christ. Only the growth, spreading, and increase of Christ within them can overcome this separation... The relatedness between them will be the spreading Christ, the very Christ who takes over their entire being. This is the genuine building up. The building up of the saints in oneness depends absolutely on the increase of Christ within them. This relatedness is nothing less than Christ Himself.

The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ, chapter 11, p. 143

- b. **Real relatedness is Christ Himself overcoming, conquering, defeating, and taking full possession of us.**

We can never be built up in our natural life... There is no relatedness in ourselves. In ourselves there is only separation and individualism. The real relatedness, oneness, and building up is Christ Himself. When Christ overcomes, conquers, defeats, and takes full possession of us, He can join Himself to the Christ in others.

We need to say, "Lord, conquer and defeat me. Lord, never allow me to defeat You. Never allow me to win the battle." The real building up of the church depends on the Lord's defeating us. The more we have the victory over the Lord, the more we are separated, but the more He defeats us, the more He can build us together.

...He can conquer us and take possession of us. As long as He can do this, there is the genuine oneness among us. This relatedness between us is nothing less than Christ Himself who conquers us.

The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ, chapter 11, pp. 143-144

2. Relatedness is the result of our being mingled with God.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

12 For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.

13 For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.

As we take Christ as our life and life supply day by day and moment by moment, we will be in the oneness of the Body, because we will be living by the one life... When we live by Christ, there will be a longing in us to always be related with others and a real desire to be one with all the saints... If we live in such a way, taking Christ as our life supply moment by moment and applying Christ to all our situations day by day, we will have the inner registration that we can never be separated from the saints, independent of the saints, or individualistic. We will sense that we are simply members of the Body and will treasure the relatedness between us and the other saints...

These are the two most important matters in the Scriptures—being mingled with God and being one with all the saints... The mingling is a matter of our relationship with God, and the oneness is a matter of our relatedness with one another. With God we should be mingled, and among the saints we should have the oneness.

Experiencing the Mingling of God with Man for the Oneness of the Body of Christ, chapter 4, pp. 36-37

3. Relatedness is a matter in the spirit (not simply a matter of friendship).

The relatedness that I am referring to is not a matter of friendship. Friendship is not good enough. We must be related in the Spirit of Christ, in the Spirit of life. To whom are you related in the Spirit? This is something very vital.

... Over the years there have been troubles, difficulties, and hard times, but our relatedness has been kept by our learning to go along with the Spirit... You and I can never be related in the mind, emotion, and will. We can be related only in the Spirit... the only thing that is long-lasting is the Spirit. You must believe me. Our friendship must be in the Spirit so that it can last for eternity. If it is just in the emotions, then our friendship will never last. Our relatedness must also be something in the Spirit.

The Mystery of God and the Mystery of Christ, chapter 9, pp. 97-99

...Whenever we are in our mind, we are separated, not related. Relatedness can be realized only in our spirit... When we have a problem, the secret is to say, “Brothers, let us stop our talking and pray a little.” We need to stop the exercise of the mind and pray. To pray is to come back to the spirit and exercise the spirit. After everyone prays, we are restored to oneness. Whenever we come back to the spirit, we are immediately in the oneness.

The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ, chapter 12, p. 153

4. An organic relatedness in which we function as members of the Body (not a mere outward relationship)

Romans 12:5

So we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Ephesians 4:15-16

15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and *through* the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

When we speak of relatedness, we are referring to something that is more than a mere outward relationship; we are referring to an organic relatedness in which we function in the church as members of the Body of Christ. As members of the Body of Christ, we are not related to one another in a vague way; we are related in our function. Merely having an outward relationship is a substitute for the genuine relatedness and the genuine church life. We are related only when we all do our part in functioning as members of the Body. Until we are properly related in our function, we will not be able to progress beyond a shallow relatedness and enter into the practical church life.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 1, p. 557

B. Being related in a definite way to several others

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Suppose that I were to ask my hand, “What are you?” If my hand could respond, it would say, “I am a member of the body of this man.” Then I would ask my hand, “Are you in the body now?” The hand would answer, “Yes, I am in the body.” Then I would ask the third question, “To whom are you related?” The hand would then say, “Mr. Lee, it is quite clear that I am related to the arm on one end and to the fingers on the other end.” Our relatedness to the other members proves that we are in the Body.

The Mystery of God and the Mystery of Christ, chapter 9, p. 96

We need to ask ourselves whether or not we have been built up with others. A brick that has been built into a wall is related to specific bricks—bricks above it, below it, and beside it. To whom are we related? We should not say that we are related to Christians in a general way... that kind of relatedness is too general. We need to be related to other Christians in a specific way. For example, if you are a sister, you may be related to three or four other sisters in a definite way. Whenever you encounter a problem or a need, you may open yourself to them. When you are considering to do something or go somewhere, you may bring this matter to them for fellowship. This kind of relatedness is a real blessing, strengthening, and support to us.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 1, p. 325

C. Being related to others according to the Lord’s sovereignty

1 Corinthians 12:18, 24-25

18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed.

24 But our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the *member* that lacked,

25 That there would be no division in the body, but *that* the members would have the same care for one another.

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.

We must learn to be related to persons who are not of our choosing according to our taste. If we have the choice to be related according to our taste, we eventually will be related to no one but ourselves. We will take ourselves as our best choice. We must learn to sacrifice, to crucify, our taste and to submit to others. If the Lord sovereignly brings together a number of brothers, they need to submit one to another. No one should say, "I don't like to be with these brothers. I will join myself to someone else." This does not work. We need to believe the Lord is sovereign and learn to submit ourselves under His sovereignty.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 4, p. 96

Once we are related to some others, we should not separate ourselves from them. If we continually "divorce" the other members, we will not learn anything regarding coordination, and there will be no building up. In this matter we need to recognize the sovereignty of the Lord.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 1, p. 326

D. Being related to particular ones for support and protection

Acts 2:14

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth to them: Men of Judea, and all who are dwelling in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

Acts 9:23-25

23 And as a considerable number of days were being fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to do away with him;

24 But their plot was made known to Saul. And they also watched the gates closely, both day and night, so that they might do away with him.

25 But his disciples took *him* by night and let him down through the wall, lowering *him* in a basket.

If we cannot say to whom we are related, this means we are not yet built into the Body... If you ask me to whom I am related, I will tell you that I am related to many persons. If even one of these brothers says, "Brother Lee, we do not feel this matter is right," I will not do it. It seems that this is our limitation, but it is not a limitation; it is a support. The more we are related to our fellow members, the more we are supported and protected by them...

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 4, pp. 93-94

Whatever we do in our home life, private life, school life, or business life, we need to fellowship with these brothers and sisters to whom we are related. This is a safeguard, protection, strengthening, and real support. Unless the brothers and sisters are built up in this way, there is no possibility that a local church can be built up.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 4, p. 95

E. Being balanced, adjusted, and corrected by our relatedness

Acts 21:10-12

10 And while we remained *there* many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

11 And he came to us and took Paul's belt; and having bound his own feet and hands, he said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, In this way will the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man whose belt this is and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.

12 And when we heard these things, both we and those in that place entreated him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Some brothers and sisters are very clever. They are transcendent, like the birds in the air. They do not like to be related to anyone. To some extent they are "supernatural," not real and practical. They are in the church, but they are related to no one. This is because they are afraid to be balanced, adjusted, and corrected. In order to be balanced rightly and adequately, we need at least six brothers or sisters to balance us. We may say that we are related to a certain brother, but he is only one. We need a second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth one. Try this. To have six brothers or six sisters in the church to be related with means that we are fully balanced.

Whatever we are going to do, we should fellowship with these six persons. If any one of the six would not agree with us, we should forget about what we are doing. Then we will see how much we will be balanced. Many people say they are seeking the Lord's leading, but to have six brothers or six sisters to balance us is the best leading of the Lord.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 4, p. 93

F. Being related to others for overcoming

Mark 2:3-5

3 And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men.

4 And being unable to bring *him* to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof where He was. And when they had dug through, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying.

5 And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, Child, your sins are forgiven.

Why are some persons so weak? It is because they are isolated...

... When I was young, I did not know this secret. I tried to overcome many things, but I did not succeed. One day I came to know the secret that I need to be related to my fellow members, and by the mercy of the Lord, I did become related. After I became related to the members, it was very easy to overcome things. If we have a weakness, a weak point which is hard to overcome, we should not try to overcome it by ourselves. We simply should be related to some brothers and sisters and bring that weak point to them. Then we will overcome it immediately and spontaneously.

... The more we are related to others, the more strength we have, the more victory we have, and the more protection we have.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 4, p. 94

As Christians, can we point out other definite members of the Body of Christ with whom we are related in a practical way? ... Check yourself. If you are an isolated member of the Body, you are burdened with many problems. The only way to be a victorious Christian is to be a related Christian... The issue is not whether we are a living, healthy, or functioning, individual Christian; but are we vitally and practically related to the Body of Christ? It is a pity, but it is a fact that very little is heard today regarding the building of God and the real relatedness of the Body of Christ on this earth. I do hope that we all may see that it is God's intention to have a corporate man as a building, a unique expression, with so many members fitly framed together, members related and built up as one Body.

The Vision of God's Building, chapter 1, pp.16-17

III. The effect of our being related to others

A. Our self is dealt with and our outer man is broken.

Matthew 16:18, 24-25

18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

25 For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it.

1. The best way for our self to be dealt with and for our outer man to be broken is for us to be related.
2. Only when we are related to the saints in a definite way will we learn the lessons regarding the dealing with the self and the breaking of the outer man.
3. The main reason we do not want to be related to others is that we are afraid of losing our freedom. Once a brick is built into a wall, it loses its freedom because it is related and bound to other bricks.
4. If we refuse to be related, we will be free from certain limitations, but we will lose the blessing in our service.
5. Why is it so difficult for us to be built up? The difficulty is the self. It does not matter whether the self is good or bad, pleasant or ugly. As long as there is the self, there cannot be any building.

For instance, some brothers have a dominating self, and because of this dominating self they cannot go along with others in doing things for the church. No matter what the situation may be, these brothers must be the dominating ones. How, then, can they have the building? In order for them to be built up with others, the self must be broken. The problem is not their strong character; it is their dominating self. It may be right for them to be strong, but they should not dominate others. A person who is built up with others may be very strong, but he is properly related to others and constantly has fellowship with others. A marble column in a building is strong, but it is related to others. It is strong, but it does not dominate. The situation is the same with a strong brother who has been built up with others in the Body.

The Heavenly Vision, chapter 3, p. 35

B. When we are related, we will have the real building of the Body.

Ephesians 4:15-16

15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and *through* the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

If we are related to certain brothers, and each of these brothers is related to others, we will be like a chain that is interwoven and intertwined. In this way there is the real building of the Body, not as an organization but as something related in life and in the Spirit. Nothing can damage this building, and nothing can break this kind of relatedness. This is the Body... In order to have the Body, all the members must be livingly related.

...In the same way, merely to have a heap of materials is not to have the building. That is not the building; it is a heap. The materials have been heaped up but not yet built up. Are we heaped up, or are we built up?... The building is the members being rightly related. The proper phrase used by the Scriptures is *joined together* (Eph. 4:16). We need to be joined together with others in a practical way, not merely in doctrine.

The Collected Works of Witness Lee (1964), Volume 4, p. 95

C. Satan will be crushed under our feet.

Romans 16:20

Now the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

The Greek word rendered “your” in 16:20 is plural; this points to the Body. God will crush Satan under the feet of the Body. Romans 16 does not refer to the Body in a universal sense, but refers to the local and practical expression of the Body. This indicates that Satan can be crushed only under the feet of the practical expression of the Body in the local churches. It is only when we have a proper local church as the practical expression of the Body that Satan is crushed under our feet.

The Conclusion of the New Testament, Message 139, p. 1520