

Monday March 19, 1979

To my dear brothers and sisters in the church in Wash, D.C.

I'm writing this letter to you all as an apology and a farewell. I've started this letter several times, but I've been stopped by the Lord, because of something Bob Little mentioned to me last Friday night in our private conference together. The substance was: there are two things to consider in the Christian communication, the things you are saying and the spirit in which they are said. Our dear Father has been very penetrating in His judgement of my spirit in this letter. So with a humility which has come in spite of myself, I still feel I need to write you all an apology and say good-bye.

Several months ago two brothers in the Lord, Max Rappaport and Sal Benoit were formally excommunicated from the church in Wash. D.C. – that is, refused the privilege of taking the Lord's table with us or of having fellowship with us outside of the meetings. At that time, and afterwards, I testified against Sal Benoit both in our meetings and in private fellowship and against Max Rappaport in private fellowship. Because the occasions of my speakings are so numerous that I cannot even remember them all, (who can tame the human tongue!) I will just have to admit, categorically, that everything I said against these brothers in the Lord was spoken in a hypocritical and party spirit. A kind of, 'I am of Christ', spirit. Quite a few things I said in spite of a protest in my conscience. Some of the things I said may even have been true, but again, the spirit in which they were spoken was the cold, judicial, pharisaical spirit of a Laodicean. Paul wrote some things against a brother in Corinth, but his letter was stained with his tears (1 Cor 5:1-11; II Cor 2:1-4; Phil 3:18) Some of the things I said were misrepresentations of the truth. And some things were just plain untruths.

I have put all these things into your ears; now all I can do is recant and apologize. I'm afraid that, in addition to defaming the character of these two brothers, I have contributed toward creating an atmosphere here in Washington which is very unhealthy for a church that hopes, one day, to become Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love. What motivated me to play the hypocritical role? Firstly, I buried all the questions I had concerning the circumstances of Sal's excommunication out of fear – fear arising from our teaching that even to question the church at once puts you under God's displeasure, since, 'the churches are golden' and 'all questions come from the devil'. These are deep in me. Secondly, in my fears and suspicions about what has happened among us, I was all alone (my wife excepted). Nobody else here knew what really happened in Boston. Most of the saints here still have a vague understanding that, 'Sal went with Max'. So, because I was alone and in fear, I buckled. The desire not be different is very strong among us. If you don't believe this remark just try to stand up as a policeman for the truth according to Bro. Lee's recommendation; you'll see how difficult it is to face your brothers while holding a different viewpoint.

In recent weeks I have tried to do just that – stand up as a policeman – and I have botched the job terribly, it seems. When I encountered what I interpreted to be the obstinance in the nine brothers in responsibility here, I became frustrated and slipped out

from the cross of the Lord Jesus. It's apparent all the brothers were ill affected when they witnessed a haughty spirit in me, so much that they refused to look into the Scriptures concerning the questions I presented, or to pray about it. The outcome of all this was two Sundays ago, March 11, when Elton covered our Lord's Table. He then gave a message which created the impression that I (and possibly some others) have already written off the church as a sect and am now just hanging around to stir up trouble. Elton then asked rhetorically, "Why wouldn't they just leave? Why stay here and bother us?"

You seven brothers who meet with Elton and Bob, and especially you, Elton and Bob, I ask you to forgive my behavior which was unseemly and not to judge me too harshly. I never intended to cause trouble or to write off the church as a sect! I only wanted to come to you and present some facts concerning Bro. Lee's ministry and our receiving believers which show how we have left Bible truth and our own teachings – not to condemn the church, but that the church might have a change, a return to the truth. Bro. Lee enjoined us all to do this. It's my church too. I haven't given virtually all my time for the last six and a half years to the church, to now dismiss it as a sect and cause trouble. Brothers, you can't believe that! I thought we could look into our situation in brotherly conference and fellowship. I wish someone more spiritual than I had come to you. I'm afraid my personality has proven again the old expression: what you are speaks so loudly that we can't hear what you're saying.

Brothers, I honestly believe that one's holding different 'concepts' or 'opinions' regarding church practices should never be cause for his being asked to leave the church. I had always thought that we are making a stand against this type of attitude – that the church insists only on the faith, refusing only such believers as are in known and willful sin. Why would you want any brother in your locality to leave you? May God have mercy on me! Since that Saturday going on a month ago I've been persona non grata among you brothers, yet I've known you and prayed with some of you for years. When Elton covered the table of our Lord and gave out the message, "Why wouldn't they just leave?" that just took the heart out of me. I went to him after the meeting and rehearsed all my questions again, but I felt finished.

It appears to me, now, that under the circumstances, I have to leave. Not only were my questions never answered, but it's considered by some to be divisive just to have them. So I'll go. I love you all, saints; I'll always remember your love and consecration to the Lord Jesus.

Your brother,

<Signed>
**** Anderson

P.S. The remaining pages are some questions, which I asked to Elton and Bob. You may read them and take them to the Lord if you please. I beg you, please do. I will send the

remaining pages only to these 7 brothers who meet with the elders. However, if you call me desiring them, I will send them to you, saints.

Dear Saints,

If we are really holding the truth we shouldn't fear an examination, since this could only result in our holding it even stronger.

- I. What do you mean when you say, "There is no church without the ministry." I never received a solid answer to this one, so you'll have to check with Elton, the author of it. While I can see there could be truth in this statement if it were carefully qualified, the context in which it was used was in reference to the ministry of Bro. Lee. Perhaps Elton can straighten this one out. But remember, regardless of how you state it doctrinally, if you believe there could be no church without Bro. Lee's ministry, you are in real error. Ask yourself, when you hear someone, "Praise the Lord for this ministry!" what does it mean to you?

- II. Elton called Bro. Lee "God's chosen vessel for today." I objected to this as a concept which glorifies a man in a way that offends God now that we are in the New Testament age. I still must object to that statement, saints, and all others like it, which refer to Witness Lee as, "God's oracle on earth," and his messages as, "the present up to date Word of God," or as, "the Word of God pre-digested for us," and like statements which are familiar to almost all of us. Bro. Lee's message pamphlets are treated as 'spirit and life' while the works of other Christian writers are just knowledge and subject to error. The Bible only is "spirit and life".

I believe the idea of a single 'chosen vessel' is Old Testament, not New. Referring to Bro. Lee, Elton said, "Oh I'm not saying he has never made a mistake. Moses made mistakes, but he was still God's anointed." The following quotation is taken from a pamphlet: Modern Mystical Teachings and the Word of God, by F.B. Hole

All the extracts we cite are taken from publications of the last 40 years, though a few have only appeared very recently. The roots of this false teaching, however, can be traced a good way further back than 40 years, to a time when many brethren adopted the idea that God always has one particular man for the moment, to whose utterances peculiar value must be attributed. This idea soon reacted badly upon the individual who was considered to be the teacher for the moment, and in course of time he was incited to put forth novel things in an unbalanced way. These unbalanced teachings were hailed as new light by his followers. And so the process developed and enlarged until the teacher for the moment became invested with almost papal authority by his admirers.

Bro. Lee has publicly complained we have made him, “a Pope,” and has privately chastised all the elders for crowning him as, “King Saul”. There has been so much talk among us about Max’s “building a hierarchy”, but why has there been no more than the briefest footnote about the hierarchy which has existed for years with Bro Lee as the head? Why haven’t we rather mourned and repented to the Lord? It is true Bro Lee’s hierarchy and papal position have been unofficial; they have prevailed in our thinking, which is worse because less apparent. My complaint to the brothers was that I haven’t seen any change in our thinking, the cause of this hierarchy. Rather, the adulatory praises of Bro. Lee and, “This ministry”, have increased in the last few months. No wonder we can’t convince the experienced Christians that we’re not following a man. One visit to any of our meetings is enough to convince them we are deceived.

- III. I believe that our emphasis on the one-man-ministry of Witness Lee has caused us, over the last few years, to retrograde from our original stand as the church in each locality, gathered into the name of the Lord, to a standing as the church in each locality of the ministry of Bro. Witness Lee. I do not state this belief casually. It has been a growing conviction in me. I know very few saints have seen this, because it has happened gradually. Today all the churches in America bear the stamp of this one brother’s ministry. It’s almost as if we are all looking at the world through Bro. Lee’s eyes. We’re identical. This exact similitude indicates one of two things: either we are now ‘perfected into one’ to such an extent that our speech, mannerisms, gestures, and way of living have been reached by this oneness, (in which case we are in the glory) or else there is some human agency involved. The only church which I ever saw or heard of as being different was Boston, but that has changed.

In the Normal Christian Church Life Bro. Nee wrote:

No worker may exercise control over a church or attach his name to it, or the name of the society he represents. The divine disapproval will always rest on the “church of Paul” or “the church of Apollos,” or “the church of Cephas.” In the history of the Church it has frequently happened that when God has given special light or experience to any individual that individual has stressed the particular truth revealed or experienced, and gathered people round him who appreciate his teaching, with the result that the leader, or the truth he emphasized, has become the ground of fellowship. Thus sects have multiplied. If God’s people could only see that the object of all ministry is the founding of local churches and not the grouping of Christians around any particular individual, or truth, or experience, or under any particular organization, then the forming of sects would be avoided. We who serve the Lord must be willing to let go our hold upon all those to whom we have ministered, and let all the fruits of our ministry pass into local churches governed entirely by local men. We must be scrupulously careful not to let the coloring of our personality

destroy the local character of the church, and we must always serve the church, never control it.

Another thing is essential for the preservation of the local character of the church – its sphere must not become wider than the sphere of a locality. The current method of linking up companies of believers and forming them into a church, has no scriptural foundation. The same applies to the custom of regarding any mission as a center linking together all those saved or helped by them to constitute a “church” of that mission. Such so-called churches are really sects, because they are confined by the of a particular creed or a particular mission, not by and within the bounds of locality. Any “church” formed with a mission as its center is bound to be other than local. Because wherever there is a center there is also a sphere, and if the center of the church is a mission then obviously its sphere is not the scriptural sphere of locality but the sphere of the mission.

Whenever a special leader, or a specific doctrine, or some experience or creed or organization, becomes a center for drawing together the believers of different places, then its center is other than Christ and its sphere other than local; and whenever the divinely-appointed sphere of locality is displaced by a sphere of human invention, there the divine approval cannot rest. The believers within such a sphere may truly love the Lord, but they have another center apart from Him, and it is only natural that the second center becomes the controlling one. Christ is the common center of all the churches, but any company of believers that have a leader, a doctrine, an experience, a creed, or an organization as their center of fellowship, will find that that center becomes the center, and it is that center by which they determine who belongs to them and who do not.

Anything that becomes a center to unite believers of different places, will create a sphere which includes all believers who attach themselves to that center and excludes all who do not. This dividing line will destroy the God-appointed boundary of locality and consequently destroy the very nature of the churches of God. There are no other churches in Scripture other than local churches!

I'm afraid our center has become Bro. Lee and our sphere his ministry. I think this is the reason some Christians have charged us with being a cult. The Living Stream Ministry Inc. is in every meeting. We have a Wednesday Ministry-training meeting as well as the Friday video Ministry meeting. We even pray over the current themes of the Ministry in our prayer meetings. Sunday morning we have a Ministry as the gospel meeting. And Sunday night is the meeting in which most of the, “Praise the Lord for this Ministry,” testimonies occur. The Ministry pamphlets and practically all that we will read Bro. Lee's Ministry also appears to be our entire source of fellowship. Outsiders have trouble entering into our very un-general fellowship, because we have a jargon all our own, sprinkled with Bro Lee's

unusual and sometimes awkward English expressions. I could continue this list, but I have a feeling the Lord alone can reveal this to any of us.

I believe that in centering around the ministry of Bro. Witness Lee we have actually infringed upon the right of the Lord Jesus to be the head of the church. He is supposed to be the Son over the House of God and the Great High Priest of our prayer meetings. What if the Lord wanted to do something different among us, something we hadn't planned for? Could we hear Him? It appears to me that we have set up everything around the Ministry, just as have the other churches. Then after we have set up, we pray to the Lord to come and bless the meeting with His presence, and we declare our absolute dependence upon Him!

Saints, I have also come to believe that, since the ministry has become our Centre, it has affected our receiving of believers. Allegiance to and homage paid to the Ministry of Witness Lee has become the condition for fellowship among us. Suppose I stated plainly that I thought Bro. Lee was, "an introspective old man who ought to retire"? (I don't believe this). Could I still be received here? I'm afraid the word to me would be, "If that's the way you feel, why wouldn't you just leave?" Bro. Lee has become our Centre.

I became aware of this when the exposing test came to Boston and then to us. According to the leading ones there and here, the case is simple: Max is a divisive person who must be excommunicated; Sal refused to do this, which constituted him as a divisive person. So he had to be excommunicated. The other brothers and sisters who wouldn't excommunicate Sla were also standing with a divisive person, so they had to be excommunicated. The scriptural grounds for doing this they found in Romans 16:17-18.

We followed the same procedure down here, forming a universal, extra local discipline. The difference here was that the saints who signed a so-called 'divisive letter', to Bro. Lee weren't to be excommunicated – only interrogated before being allowed to attend any meetings. Saints it is my opinion that if these brothers and sisters, after interrogation, had not been willing to repent of signing the, 'divisive letter', they would have been excommunicated. The brothers here were not exposed because the situation never came here. The excommunications are still going on in Boston and its vicinity. A few weeks ago Jack ***** cut off Nancy ***** , a sister he has known for years. Imagine how some of the saints up there feel when they go to the supermarket and see another brother or sister in the Lord, who loves the Lord as they do, and who is not in any kind of sin, neither is in error as regards the faith – yet they are not allowed to even talk to that person! This is what I mean when I refer to retrograde movement away from the truth of our original stand.

- IV. I asked Elton and Bob if, according to Romans 16, they consider Sal Benoit to be one who 'serves not the Lord Christ, but his own belly', and deceives the simple hearts. They both affirmed that he was such. But they wouldn't give any details. I

can't agree with them. Why, in all the years they've known Sal, didn't they realize that he was a deceiver and a belly server? Suddenly, after Bro. Lee visited Boston and Washington, this brother is pronounced to be one of the awful people mentioned by Paul in Romans 16. I fear the worst: Bro Lee has made himself and his Ministry an issue which has caused too many brothers and sisters to be cut off or to leave the churches. Not a few who left Anaheim were the strong ones from the early and middle 60's. Can we say, "They never really saw the church?"

- V. I told Elton and Bob there were two churches, Wellesley and Framingham, meeting in the Lord's name, receiving all believers, which refused to cut off Sal Benoit. Were they still to be considered churches? They said no. Elton explained a principle from Acts 8: Phillip preached the gospel in Samaria and many believed. But they didn't receive the Holy Spirit until two of the Twelve, Peter and John, laid their hands upon them. According to this Elton said that those two churches are not in the Body. Please take these verses to the Lord, saints. This amounts to cutting off two entire churches. I was taught that Christ in me makes me a member of the Body.

Bro. Nee states:

Since there is a spiritual relatedness between the various local churches, no one church must take advantage of its independence and decide things after its own good pleasure. It must rather cultivate relationship with the other churches, seeking their sympathy and working with their spiritual good in view. On the other hand, since each is totally independent of the other, the decision of a church in any locality is absolutely final. There is no higher court of appeal. The local church is the supreme court. There is no organization to whose control it must submit, nor is there any organization over which it exercises control. It has neither superiors nor subordinates. If any one is received or refused by a local church, its judgment in the matter must be regarded as absolutely decisive. The local church is the highest church authority. If other churches object to its decisions, all they can do is to resort to persuasion and exhortation.

It seems clear to me that an extra-local union or confederation of churches has been formed around the ministry of one man.

- VI. I have lost a lot of respect for Bro. Lee because of the way he has handled our finances. Elton and Bob refused to discuss the finances with me even though I reminded them we are all involved as contributors. We all pay \$50.00 at every training in Anaheim as a registration fee. We also pay \$0.25 for each message pamphlet from the Living Stream Ministry Inc. We all have paid this money in good conscience, giving as unto the Lord.

All of us held a common opinion concerning the registration fee and pamphlet price: if money was being asked for, surely there was a practical need for it. It is

now my opinion, all the following statements. But these opinions are nothing more than a recitation of the facts which I heard from Bro. Lee's mouth. I am not interpreting anything. I also saw his tax statement.

Bro. Lee is making approximately a million dollars every year from the Living Stream Ministry Inc. He also has other income not filed with the IRS. I cannot help but regard his practice as "making retail of the Word of God." II Cor 2:17. Many of the elders in the local churches have compared Bro. Lee to the apostle Paul. But was Paul a millionaire? And can you imagine Paul charging between 250 and 300 thousand dollars for his letter to the Ephesians? Paul did tell the Corinthians, "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel". But after reminding them of their responsibility to care for the apostles, he didn't then ask for a fee from them. Paul trusted the Lord to touch the saints to contribute to him. Prior to 1974 I think Bro. Lee did this.

Yet although we pay a fee to register for each training, (an amount paid for a service rendered), the money is listed as donations before the IRS. The money is then funneled into a company called Overseas Christian Steward, which is not registered in any country. O.C.S. owns the Phosphorous factory in Taiwan, which currently manufacturing tennis rackets fro retail in the U.S.A.

I believe these practices are dishonest, and they should be illegal. Presently Bro. Lee is under full investigation by the IRS. They estimate it will take them about 1 year. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps this funneling of tax exempt money into business investment is lawful. Still, if we are donating money we should be told it is a donation. I also think we have a right to know what it is we are donating to.

I hope you will consider all these things I have mentioned and have some honest, open fellowship about them

<Signed>
**** Anderson