

FOLLOWING THE VISION OR FOLLOWING A MAN?

Some have asserted that the saints in the Lord's recovery merely follow men—Brothers Watchman Nee and Witness Lee—rather than God. This claim denigrates the saints, who are said to exalt Brother Lee above the headship of Christ, and it falsely accuses Brother Lee of seeking a personal following. However, the real objective of such an accusation is not only to demean the saints or Brother Nee and Brother Nee but to cast doubt on the ministry in the Lord's recovery and to set aside the vision of God's New Testament economy that it imparts.

Brother Lee strongly upheld the unique headship of Christ and taught the saints to honor that headship in their daily lives and their spiritual pursuit. Brother Lee adamantly rejected any thought of uplifting a man, saying, a "church that takes whatever I say just because I say it is not healthy and does not know the truth" (*Life Messages, vol. 1 (#1-41)*, 143). In the same book in which he stressed the ministry of the age, Brother Lee stated, "I hope that you are not following me as a person; I hope that by the Lord's mercy you are following the vision that I have shown you" (*The Vision of the Age*, 50). Brother Lee's concern for the saints was that they would receive the vision that he was laboring to impart to them from the Bible and enter into it, not that they would follow him personally.

Brother Lee cautioned against the practice of some Christian workers who sought to gain a personal following:

I have spoken a word of love directly to these kinds of brothers. I have warned them to not do this kind of work. Wherever you go, you may become the superior one. You may be good; there is nothing wrong with that. You do have a capacity that might be higher than others'. However, you should avoid doing a work to attract people to follow you. We all have to see this. (*A Word of Love to the Co-workers, Elders, Lovers, and Seekers of the Lord*, 57)

One such worker Brother Lee warned five times in a private setting. Brother Lee then went on to warn the saints of the dangers of following a man:

I have spoken publicly to you because there is such a danger that you may appreciate certain persons. I do not like to hear that you appreciate me, that you feel I am right and you follow me. If you appreciate the truths I have put out, I thank the Lord, but if you appreciate me, that is wrong. Be careful in following any co-worker whom you appreciate and to whom you are attracted. To be one with another co-worker in this way is wrong. Regardless of what the reason is for this oneness, you are wrong. We all are one. We do not have parties. (*A Word of Love...*, 57)

Here again, Brother Lee makes clear the distinction between following the vision and following a man's person; he encouraged the first and warned against the second.

In 1933, when Brother Lee began co-working with Brother Watchman Nee, Brother Nee took the lead in the work serving the churches with the ministry and Brother Lee became a learner serving under Brother Nee's leadership. In 1934, when the church in Shanghai was passing through a turmoil, Brother Lee told Brother Nee:

"I have followed you absolutely, and I do have the assurance that I am following the right way because you have the Lord's revelation. The revelation that you pass on is according to the

New Testament. Actually, I am not following you personally; I follow the revelation that you have released.” Then I said, “Brother Nee, even if from today you would give up the way of the Lord’s recovery, I would remain in this way.” (*The Practice of the Church Life according to the God-ordained Way*, 34)

Later, Brother Lee recalled his experience in serving with and under Brother Nee in the work, noting, “[w]e always took him as the authority because God’s word came to us through him. Thus, it was not he that took the lead but God’s speaking. The word of God is the leadership” (*The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, 16-17). In the last year of his ministry, Brother Lee said, “[w]e follow someone because he has the revelation of God, the vision of God” (*A Word of Love to the Co-workers, Elders, Lovers, and Seekers of the Lord*, 64-65). Brother Lee’s testimony exemplifies a proper following—following the ministry, the speaking, that opens up the vision of the New Testament economy of God.

To live and serve according to those who have the vision is to live and serve under the vision they minister. We cannot say that during the age of Noah no one else was serving God, but Scripture is clear that it was to Noah alone that the vision of the ark was given (Heb. 11:7). Noah received the vision, not his sons, yet his sons labored with him, serving under the vision that he had received. In this way Noah’s sons entered into the vision and were ultimately saved through the vision. Those who chose not to follow Noah and not to enter into the vision he had received fell short of God’s work in that age. Whether we will miss the mark of God’s present work in this age depends on whether we receive and enter into the vision brought to us by the Lord’s faithful ministers.

Some have accused Brother Lee of replacing the headship of Christ and, in so doing, controlling the churches through his personal ministry. This accusation is opposed to the healthy teaching and the organic order in the Body. Leadership in the Lord’s recovery is not located in a controlling person. Much rather, the leadership is in the “one controlling revelation” found in the New Testament ministry of the apostles’ teaching. “The revelation controls,” noted Brother Lee, “and it controls through those who bring in the revelation. The revelation in the Lord’s recovery controls us and restricts us” (*Leadership in the New Testament*, 20). The ministry received by the churches in the Lord’s recovery is the unique New Testament ministry, the ministry of the apostles, which has been faithfully transmitted to us through the teaching and living of persons who were under the unique vision of the New Testament themselves. In accordance with Scripture we honor (but do not idolize) those through whom the vision has been brought to us, and we unashamedly affirm our indebtedness to Brother Nee and Brother Lee (2 Tim. 3:14; 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Tim. 1:8).

The accusation that the saints in the Lord’s recovery follow men and not God, thus overthrowing the headship of Christ, grossly mischaracterizes the saints’ appreciation of the ministry. This claim is diametrically opposed to the actual teaching and practice in the Lord’s recovery, which is in accord with Scripture. For some to falsely attribute the idolatrous practice of following men to the saints in the Lord’s recovery and the ministry of Brother Lee is reprehensible. Ultimately, this accusation aims to overthrow the ministry of Brother Nee and Brother Lee, the ministry that the Lord has given to His recovery to open up the revelation in the Bible so that all the saints can serve the Lord under the heavenly vision to carry out His New Testament economy (Acts 26:19; cf. Prov. 29:18a).