

Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Heresy, Idolatry & Fornication

(2)

How is Idolatry Related to Heresy and Division?

In one of a series of conference messages given in Copenhagen, Denmark in April of 1980, Brother Lee spoke concerning the matter of being “perfected into one” in John 17:23. There he inculcated upon the saints the importance of keeping the genuine oneness in dealing with the saints in spite of all the defects and shortcomings that may become exposed as a result of their coming together for a period of time. He exhorted that on one hand we ourselves need to be perfected; on the other hand we must be able to tolerate the imperfections of others. It was there that he also stressed that while the church must be tolerant in every respect, there are four things which the church must not tolerate, namely, idolatry, fornication, division, and heresy.

“There are only four things which the church will not tolerate. The first is idolatry. To worship idols is an insult to God; this the church cannot allow. The second is fornication. Because this damages the humanity God created for His purpose, the Bible strongly forbids it. The third is division. Because it damages the Body of Christ, the church cannot permit division. The last is the denial of Christ’s Person and redemptive work.” (W. Lee, *The Mending Ministry of John, Chapter 5, Section 5, LSM*)

In part one of our series of three articles on “Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Heresy, Idolatry & Fornication” entitled *What is the Real Meaning of Heresy according to the Bible*, we saw from the teaching of brothers Nee and Lee, along with those of a good number of renowned Bible expositors through the centuries, how heresy and division are so closely related. In fact, the two are of the same word in Greek, which firstly means the causing of divisions that form sects and divide the Body of Christ, and secondly it means the holding of a self-opinionated teaching that entices people and leads them away from Christ.

In this article we shall look into the meaning, significance, and application of idolatry, and how it is related to heresy and division. Brothers Nee and Lee taught on numerous occasions against both the physical and spiritual aspects of idolatry, referring and applying them to church services as well as personal love and desire for things such as mammon, education, entertainment, recreation, hair combing, shopping, and other minute details of our living. This article does not endeavor to present a comprehensive study of the entire coverage of what brothers Nee and Lee said as regards idolatry. Rather, it aims to present only its spiritual aspect in relation to heresy and division in the church. We pray that by reviewing the ministry speaking of our brothers, we will be enlightened to know the intrinsic meaning and significance of idolatry, and keep ourselves from idolatry and from those who cause the division of His Body.

The Three Abominations in the Eyes of the Lord

Inasmuch as heresy and division practically and realistically refer to the same thing, Brother Lee in most of his other messages emphasized that idol worship, fornication, and division are the three things that are abominable in the eyes of the Lord which He would never tolerate or allow in the church:

“There are three abominations in the eyes of the Lord—idol worship, fornication, and division. Idol worship is an insult to the person of God; fornication is a damage to humanity; and division is a mutilation of the Body of Christ. God cares for Himself, God cares for humanity, and God cares for the Body of Christ. God would never tolerate any idols, any fornication, or any division.” (W. Lee, *Christ versus Religion, Chapter 12, Section 5, LSM*)

Division Being Related to Heresy

According to the Scriptures, the Greek word for “heresy” is *hairesis*, which is the same word for “division.” In its most prominent sense, heresy of erroneous teaching insults the person and headship of Christ, whereas the heresy of division dismembers and damages His Body. Both heresies are intolerable in God’s eyes and should be utterly rejected by the church:

“Denying the person of Christ and division are the only two items that can be considered as heretical because they are damaging to the uttermost. Denying the person of Christ insults Christ as the Head and denies Him as the Head. Division dismembers the Body of Christ. One heresy damages the Head, and the other heresy damages the Body. These heresies are intolerable in the eyes of God and should be utterly rejected by us.” (*W. Lee, Messages to the Trainees in Fall 1990, Chapter 17, Section 6, LSM*)

“The meaning of the word sect [heresy] is very clear in Greek. It is translated as ‘divisions’ in 1 Corinthians 11:18 and as ‘sects’ in Galatians 5:20.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 50, Chapter 12, Section 7, LSM*)

“Galatians 5:19-20 says, ‘The works of the flesh are manifest, which are such things as...outbursts of anger, factions, divisions, sects [*hairesis*].’ One item of the works of the flesh is sects. The Chinese Bible translates it ‘heresy.’ In Greek this word is the same word as ‘division’ or ‘sect.’” (*W. Nee, Messages for Building Up New Believers, Vol. 3, Chapter 12, Section 7, LSM*)

“The word division or sect is *hairesis* in Greek. It is used nine times in the Bible.” (*W. Nee, Messages for Building Up New Believers, Vol. 3, Chapter 12, Section 7, LSM*)

“Considering all the nine occurrences of this word in the New Testament, we may say that heresy firstly means the causing of divisions that form sects in the Body of Christ, and secondly it means the holding of a teaching that seduces people and leads them away from the Lord, the Savior. Therefore, to set up a division that issues in a sect and to seduce people away from the Lord are both heresy.” (*W. Lee, Young People’s Training, Chapter 8, Section 4, LSM*)

“‘Heresy’ is an anglicized Greek word, *hairesis*, which means choices of opinion of doctrine different from that usually accepted, ‘self-chosen doctrines alien from the truth’ (Alford), thus causing division and producing sects.”

“Heresy involves three matters: opinion, the causing of divisions, and the producing of sects. Therefore, opinion, divisions, and sects are the three constituents of heresy. Heresy, of course, is not constructive. Instead of building up the church, heresy destroys the church. For this reason, Peter speaks of destructive heresies, or heresies of destruction.” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of 2 Peter, Chapter 9, Section 1, LSM*)

“In the Greek the word rendered ‘heresies’ in Galatians 5:20 [KJV] does not necessarily convey the thought of error, but rather of division on the ground of doctrine.” (*W. Nee, The Normal Christian Church Life, Chapter 5, Section 9, LSM*)

“Paul uses the word *hairesis* strongly in Galatians 5:20, ranking heresy with works of the flesh, such as adultery, fornication, and witchcraft.... In this verse, Darby translates *hairesis* as ‘schools of opinion.’ To have a school of opinion means to hold an opinion that causes you to be separated and divided from others and to form into a sect.” (*W. Lee, Young People’s Training, Chapter 8, Section 4, LSM*)

The Meaning of Idolatry

An idol does not necessarily pertain to an image outside of us; it is anything that substitutes God inside of us. Anything that we love, including ourselves and our preferences more than the Lord and His desire, is an idol:

“In the same principle, by the word idolatry Paul does not merely mean graven images, but something much broader and more inclusive. As we shall see, idolatry here implies a great deal.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 Corinthians, Chapter 49, Section 1, LSM*)

“How could such a wonderful people who were God's elect, God's vine, God's Bride, God's flock, and God's treasure become the rebels, the thorns, the scorpions, the whore, and the dross? The first reason for the degradation was their idolatry. Do not consider that idols are always physical images—idols are any substitutes we have for God. Whatever we love more than the Lord is an idol.” (W. Lee, *The Visions of Ezekiel, Chapter 10, Section 2, LSM*)

“The first reason for their degradation was their idolatry. Ezekiel speaks again and again about the idols among the people of Israel. We should not consider that an idol is always an outward image. Idols are substitutes for God. Ezekiel 14:3 says, ‘Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart.’ Those who set up idols in their hearts are estranged from the Lord through their idols (v. 5).” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Ezekiel, Chapter 13, Section 4, LSM*)

“The principle of an idol is that it is something besides God that occupies people.” (W. Lee, *The Testimony of Jesus, Chapter 8, Section 3, LSM*)

“Even in holding a thought preferring this or that thing, our preference can become an idol. You may say that you are still with the Lord, but you may be with the Lord in a general way, but particularly, in a certain thing, you may not be with the Lord.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Judges, Message 7, Section 1, LSM*)

The Presence of Idols in the Church

The church should not have any physical idol. Moreover, if we are possessed with the love for our work for God, even Bible teaching, gospel preaching or any other practice more than our love for the Lord, they constitute other kinds of idols that become substitutes of God. We must be separated from these kinds of idols as they would provoke God and are under His judgment:

“The local churches should not have any kind of idols. An idol is simply a substitute of God. Anything that replaces God and possesses man is an idol. Nothing should ever be allowed to replace God in the local churches. We should never have anything that possesses us. Our only Possessor must be God Himself. Our relationship must only be with God; otherwise, we will bring in fornication and idolatry. The local churches must be so pure and separated from the world and idols.” (W. Lee, *The Seven Spirits for the Local Churches, Chapter 7, Section 3, LSM*)

“In some of the churches, you will not see physical idols, but you will see other kinds of idols. With some their work for God is an idol. With others Bible teaching or evangelism is an idol. In every corner of Christianity, there is an idol. If you love your work, your activity, or your practice more than the Lord, that is an idol... This is why I say that the situation in Christianity is provoking to God and under His judgment. God's glory cannot tolerate the idols.” (W. Lee, *The Visions of Ezekiel, Chapter 11, Section 1, LSM*)

The Presence of Idols in the Work

All our works and services for the Lord must be for the Lord's testimony and not for ourselves. For this reason, we need to deal with our motive in working for the Lord. Otherwise, our works such as gospel preaching, counting of the number of members, young people's work, and Bible-studies will be a building up of idols for ourselves, and in reality worshipping the idols made by us:

“What is an idol? It is the setting up of something that man has made and worshipping it as god. Those who consider man's work as God are in reality worshipping idols.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set, Vol. 4, Chapter 5, Section 5, LSM*)

“The people of Israel worshipped idols as a substitute for God. Today most Christians have lost their first love. They love their mission work, their membership, their young people's work, their Bible studies, or their gospel work more than the Lord Himself.” (W. Lee, *The Visions of Ezekiel, Chapter 10, Section 2, LSM*)

“The people of Israel worshipped idols as substitutes for God. The situation is the same with a great many Christians today. Most Christians have lost their first love. Some love their missionary work much more than they love the Lord Himself. Others love their study of the Bible or their evangelistic outreach more than the Lord. Many care for their work, but they do not care for the Lord. Dr. A. W. Tozer of the Christian and Missionary Alliance once said that if the Lord Jesus came into a conference of Christian leaders, they would not recognize Him. Although they might be discussing their work for the Lord, if He were to come into their meeting, they would not know Him. Tozer’s observation indicates that it is common for Christians to love many things other than the Lord Himself.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Ezekiel, Chapter 13, Section 4, LSM*)

“There is a proper technique to learn, but first we need to be purified in our motive. If our inner motive for working in a certain place is to build up something for our own desire or purpose, it is not pure. This motive must perish. It is wrong. It is even an idol; we are building up an idol for ourselves. We need to be dealt with in our motive. We must be able to say, ‘We are working here not for ourselves but for the Lord’s testimony, His Body.’” (W. Lee, *The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ, Chapter 7, Section 4, LSM*)

The Principle of the Golden Calf

In relation to division, the principle of making the golden calf is a matter of abusing God’s gifts for self-beautification and the uplifting of our own name and glory rather than those of the Father:

“The principle of the golden-calf idol is that wealth and treasures—gifts from God, both material and spiritual—are not properly used for God’s purpose. We need to be careful regarding both material things and spiritual gifts received from God, for we may not use these gifts properly for God’s purpose.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 2, LSM*)

“In principle the making of the golden calf was a matter of abusing God’s gifts. The children of Israel used the gold miraculously given them by God to make the calf. Because God miraculously subdued the Egyptians, they gave gold to the children of Israel. God’s intention was that the gold given to the children of Israel would be used for the building up of His tabernacle. But before the tabernacle was built, the people abused the gold by using it for self-beautification. Then the gold that was used to beautify themselves was turned into a golden calf. Here we see the principle that idolatry involves abusing what God has given us and not using His gifts for His purpose.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM*)

“The worship of the golden calf was different from the pagan worship of idols. The golden calf was worshipped by a redeemed people in the name of the Lord their Redeemer. After the golden calf was made, the people declared that it was the Lord who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. This indicates that they worshipped an idol in the name of Jehovah their God.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 2, LSM*)

Idolatry Being Related to Division – by Taking Division as an Idol

As the father of all lies, Satan is instigating rebellion and division in the church and deceiving the division makers and their followers even into thinking that what they have been doing is right. Brother Lee pointed out seriously that their embracing of division indicates that they are taking division as an idol:

“I have published a book called *The Fermentation of the Present Rebellion*, presenting the whole story, fully documented. That book concludes by saying that we need to ‘reject any kind of

division (1 Cor. 1:10), to stand against any wind of teaching and any spreading of spiritual death (Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:16-17), and to separate ourselves from the contagious ones — exercising to quarantine' (Titus 3:10; Rom. 16:17). Some, however, have not agreed to quarantine these ones and have embraced division. They have been deceived to such an extent that they take the matter of division as an idol." (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Judges, Message 7, Section 1, LSM*)

Idolatry Being Related to Division – by Having Human Choice

Every division is caused by human choice, and every human choice that is different from God's choice is related to idolatry. The Israelites set up idols and worshipped them in different high places according to their own choice. Thus, the people were divided by worshiping the idols based on their own choice of idol and venue of worship. This is a type of the divisions in Christianity and possibly in the church:

"In Deuteronomy Moses charged them strongly, lovingly, and definitely that when they entered into the good land, they should not worship idols but should worship only God and should do so only in the unique place chosen by God (ch. 12). If the children of Israel had kept Moses' exhortations, they would have avoided idol worship and division. However, the children of Israel instead chose to worship idols (Judg. 2:11-13; 10:6). These idols were set up in different high places according to the people's choice. Thus, the people were divided by worshiping the idols. This is a type of the divisions in Christianity. Every division is caused by human choice, and every human choice that is different from God's choice is related to idolatry. In Judges we see idol worship that produced division. Nearly every case of failure in Judges is the same in principle. Because the children of Israel did not walk in a way pleasing to God, God allowed their enemies to defeat them." (W. Lee, *The Divine Trinity as Revealed in the Holy Word, Chapter 9, Section 1, LSM*)

Idolatry Being Related to Division – by Starting Another Meeting

To form a separate group and start another meeting is prevalent among Christianity in division today due to the believers' preference of personality they choose to follow. This is a manifestation of division which involves idolatry:

"The divisions among Christians may be related to idols built in the name of the Lord. Suppose a group of Christians meet together to worship the Lord. But after a period of time some brothers, unhappy with the situation in that group, decide to start another meeting in the same locality. That is a division which involves idolatry." (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM*)

Idolatry Being Related to Division – by Making a Golden Calf

It is a pity that Aaron, who was one of the leaders among the Israelites, was the one who took the lead in making the golden calf, which is the main source of division and fornication among the Israelites:

"The main source of division and fornication is idolatry. Aaron made a golden calf, and that caused a division. The division among the children of Israel was due to the worship of the golden calf." (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM*)

God's Dealing with Idolaters and Calling for Overcomers

Just as it is easy for gifted ones to misuse the gifts that God had given to them and turn them into idols, it is also easy for people to be followers of an idol. We must not make anyone our idol so that we could discourage the division-maker from making idols of themselves and creating division. Rather, we must be today's overcomers who answer the Lord's call to stand against idol-worshipping and division:

“We should not blame the gifted persons. We need to blame ourselves, the congregation. It is too easy for people to be the followers of an idol. To say, ‘I am of Paul; I appreciate him’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Peter’ is fleshly (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4). We must not say that we are for someone. We should say, ‘I am for the church in my locality.’ If the saints are clear about this, no one will be able to create a division. If anyone tries to create a division, he will be by himself. No one will follow him. Rather, we will all go along with the local church. We may be kind to that brother and say, ‘Brother, we do appreciate your ministry. Praise the Lord! However, we are not for your ministry. We are for the local church. Moreover, we believe that you also know that your ministry is for the church.’” (W. Lee, *The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, Chapter 6, Section 4, LSM)

“In 32:21-24 [of Exodus] Moses dealt with the idol-maker, Aaron. Then in verses 25-29 he dealt with the idol worshippers. Seeing that the people were broken loose ‘Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Whoever is for Jehovah, come to me! And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves to him’ (vv. 25-26). Here Moses sounded a call for the overcomers. The worship of the golden calf caused division. Moses’ call did not cause a division; it produced a purification.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus*, Chapter 175, Section 2, LSM)

The Need to Guard Ourselves from Idols

We might think that just because we have no idols in the form of graven images in our meeting halls, it means that we do not have idols. Our idols may be ourselves, our scheming, our domineering or our desire to win others over so they would agree with us. Even our reading of the Word, praying, worshipping, serving, and breaking of bread outside of our regenerated spirit can be idols:

“Finally, there is a warning: ‘Little children, guard yourselves from idols’ (1 John 5:21).... Our reading of the Bible may be an idol, our prayer may be an idol, and even our bread-breaking may be an idol, because we may be reading the Word, praying, worshipping, serving, and even breaking bread outside of our regenerated spirit!”

“First John 5:21 says, ‘Little children, guard yourselves from idols.’ You may say that there are no idols in your meeting hall. However, you may not realize that your idols are yourselves, your scheming, and your domineering. You may not realize that your desire to win others over so that they will agree with you is an idol. You may not realize that your idol is your insistence on teaching others the spiritual experience you had three years ago. You may love your Bible and insist that others read it the same way you do. This is also an idol. Whatever is not in the spirit is an idol. Whatever is not of the spirit is an idol.” (W. Lee, *Living in the Spirit*, Chapter 5, Section 6, LSM)

The Need to Flee from Idolatry

In the Bible, idolatry is utterly abominable and hateful to our God who is a jealous God. We must be watchful to resolutely, seriously, and speedily flee from all idols, including our flesh, our ideas, our views, our dissenting thoughts, and our old experiences:

“The Lord is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5). Idolatry is utterly abominable and hateful to Him... Hence, we must flee from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14).” (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 2, Section 4, LSM)

“Hebrews 6 says that we are all fleeing (v. 18). From what are we fleeing? We are fleeing from our idols, our flesh, our ideas, our views, our dissenting thoughts, and our old experiences. In the Greek text the word for fled is used only twice in the New Testament. It is used once in Acts 14:6, where the apostle Paul fled from Iconium to Lystra and Derbe, and it is also used in Hebrews 6:18. The Greek word translated fled implies ‘to flee intensively, seriously, and speedily,’ just as Lot and his wife fled from Sodom.” (W. Lee, *Living in the Spirit*, Chapter 5, Section 6, LSM)

Summary and Conclusion

We are so blessed that in the recovery we are in the church enjoying the proper church life and standing on the genuine ground of oneness. Brother Lee taught that we are not trying to be one in doctrine or in practices, for oneness in these areas is not genuine. Our oneness is in the Triune God, not in our beliefs or ways and practices. As those who believe in the Lord Jesus and are the regenerated children of God, we are all members of the Body of Christ. Regardless of the differences we may have in doctrine or in practice, we have no other way but to remain in the church in the genuine oneness. For this reason, we must be tolerant in many things. However, we can give no room to idolatry, fornication, division or heresy. We must turn away from any person, teaching or practice that in one way or another has something to do with these intolerable sins in the sight of God.

The seriousness of these sins notwithstanding, they are not often taught or talked about in the church. We might consider fornication a personal offense by individuals and relegate it to private dealings from the elders. We might tag idol-worship as non-existent simply because we do not see physical idols hanging in the meeting halls or at the believers' homes. We might also write-off heresy simply because we do not hear anyone teaching erroneously against the person of Christ. But far worse and more subtle than the outward, visible appearance, are the spiritual aspect of these sins which may very well be present among us but has escaped our attention. The excerpts from the ministry in this article fully demonstrate the existence of heresy and idolatry among us especially in times of turmoil instigated by Satan through division-makers in the church. The correlation of these items can be summarized as follows:

Concerning heresy and division, it is generally perceived that a heretical person is one who *merely* teaches erroneous doctrine against the person of Christ. But from the ministry we learned that heresy pertains to self-opinionated teaching, erroneous or not, that leads people away from Christ or forms sects which divide the Body of Christ as a result of an insistence of that teaching. In short, heresy is division due to different doctrine or teaching. The heresy of erroneous teaching insults the person and headship of Christ, whereas the heresy of division damages His Body. Both heresies are intolerable in God's eyes and should be utterly rejected by the church.

For instance, in Titus 3:10 the apostle Paul exhorted the believers to refuse the factious or heretical person after a first and second admonition. This verse comes after verse 9 which refers to a certain individual who made contentious issues out of foolish questionings and genealogies and insisted on the teaching related to the very law God gave to His people in the Old Testament, but in so doing became divisive. His divisiveness is based on differing teachings, though not necessarily erroneous ones. Yet it is because of this one's sect-making that the apostle Paul urged Titus to refuse him, for that is *the* serious concern here. Apparently, the apostle Paul's main concern is the resultant division brought about by the obstinate propounding of dissonant teaching or practice, rather than the correctness of the teaching or practice itself. This goes to show that today, even a practice of the early church days found in the Bible, if propounded and imposed upon the saints at the expense of the oneness of the church, can be heretical and intolerable, and thus, needs to be refused. As division is typified by leprosy that is contagious and required quarantine in the Old Testament, heresy is likened to gangrene in the New Testament by the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:16-18. We need to run away from the spreading of such germs.

Concerning idolatry and idol-worship, we cannot be so complacent to think that just because there is no physical idol in the meeting halls, we do not have idols among us. In 1 Cor. 10:17 the apostle Paul did not confine his description of idolaters among the Israelites to merely those who bowed down to worship the graven images, but those who "sat down to eat and drink and stood up to play," implying their love and enjoyment of things other than God. Hence, in the Bible, the meaning of idol-worship and idolatry extends beyond just the physical aspect of idols. Idols could be things that men set up in their hearts (Ezek. 14:3). From the ministry, we have come to realize that an idol is any substitute we have for God. Anything that replaces God and possesses man is an idol. Even our work for God, our reading and teaching of the Bible, our gospel preaching, and our care for numbers can be an idol. Thus, any special preference for a practice or insisting upon it can also become our idol. In this regard, Brother Lee dug

deeper to touch the inner motive, desire, and purpose of our work for the Lord. If we are not careful, we are making these things our idols, or building up an idol of ourselves.

Brother Lee's speaking also brought us to a closer look at the principle of the golden calf. The principle surrounding the making of the golden calf is a matter of man's abusive use of God's gifts. These gifts are the wealth and treasures — both material and spiritual — graciously given to man by God originally for His purpose. After God subdued the Egyptians, they gave gold to the children of Israel. God's intention was that the gold given to the children of Israel would be used for the building up of His tabernacle. But before the tabernacle was built, the people abused the use of the gold by making ornaments out of it for self-beautification. This very gold that was used to beautify themselves was later used for making a golden calf. Here we see the principle that idolatry involves abusing what God has given us and not using His gifts for His purpose. We need to be careful in using both the material gifts and the spiritual gifts we received from God. If we do not use these gifts properly for God's purpose but instead misuse these for our own, we might be building idols or even fashioning ourselves into an idol. Brother Lee cited an example:

“Suppose you have the ability to teach the Bible, and you use this ability to establish a work. Your ability to teach the Bible is a gift from God. But do you use that gift properly for God's purpose, or do you use it to build up something other than God's purpose? If you are doing the latter, you are making a golden calf. This is not an extreme statement. I believe that one day, either in this age or in the next, we all shall realize that, in principle, this is the making of a golden calf and is condemned by God. Many golden calves have been made by today's Aarons.

“Those with the gift of gospel preaching may also use this ability to make a golden calf. A certain brother may be an evangelist. God has truly given him the gift of preaching the gospel. But this brother needs to ask himself what is his purpose in exercising this gift. Is his purpose pure? Is it genuine? These questions deserve serious consideration.

“We need to examine ourselves and ask what we are doing and what is our purpose for doing it. With Christian workers who are gifted, no temptation is greater than the work itself. The work we are doing is itself the biggest temptation. If you study the history of the church and the biographies of different preachers and evangelists, you will see that many have built idols. Some even fashioned themselves into an idol; that is, they themselves became an idol, a golden calf. This is according to the principle of the golden-calf idol, the principle of not properly using for God's purpose the gifts received from God.” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 2, LSM*)

Furthermore, the worship of the golden calf by the Israelites was different from the pagan worship of idols. The golden calf was worshipped by the redeemed people *in the name of Jehovah their Redeemer!* After the golden calf was made, the people declared that *it was the Jehovah who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.* This indicates that they worshipped an idol in the name of Jehovah their God. It is possible that a gifted person may work for the Lord “in the name of the Lord” yet in fact be working according to his own purpose and taking credit for the success of his work, which in reality is the gift from God and blessing by God. He may even ostensibly attribute the work as the Lord's but the motive for so doing is to prove himself or his way while disproving the ones who do not subscribe to his teaching or practice. Such a one may even bask in past experiences while parading new “fruits of his labor” to make known his “exploits” and “successes” in work to draw a following after himself, even doing so in the name of the Lord. All these are telltale signs of one who promotes his own name while hiding behind the name of the Lord. Brother Lee warned us against publicizing our works or uplifting our work while depreciating others' work, for this is to advertise ourselves in the way of the world. Such a desire for name and fame and craving for recognition is not only the worship of idols but also the making of idols out of oneself:

“We should not advertise ourselves in a worldly way.... It is not only to have idol worship but to become an idol.” (*W. Lee, A General Sketch of the New Testament in the Light of Christ and the Church, Part 4, Chapter 2, Section 2, LSM*)

“If you do have something, you do not need to advertise or promote yourself; you do not need to prove that you have something... You do not need to promote, advertise, or declare. Simply be what you are in the Lord. Have a gentle and meek attitude and a lowly appearance all the time.” (W. Lee, *The Scriptural Way to Meet and to Serve for the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, Chapter 28, Section 3, LSM)

“The Lord Jesus never advertised Himself. We read in the four Gospels how He always tried to hide Himself and, if possible, to keep Himself hidden (Matt. 8:4; 9:30; 12:15-19). Our beauty and comeliness must be the experience of Christ in our spirit. That is the real beauty before God (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-4).” (W. Lee, *The Economy of God*, Chapter 22, Section 2, LSM)

“This is why we do not advertise. We are willing to serve the Lord for our whole lives without being recognized by others. We are not willing to do anything in the name, organization, or realm of Christianity. The desire for even a little fame is a Nicolaitan thought.” (W. Lee, *Three Aspects of the Church*, Book 2, Chapter 7, Section 3, LSM)

“This shows that we should try to hide ourselves, not advertise ourselves.” (W. Lee, *Christ as the Content of the Church and the Church as the Expression of Christ*, Chapter 6, Section 3, LSM)

“It is terrible to advertise the name of the Lord Jesus yet sell our flesh.” (W. Lee, *Living in the Spirit*, Chapter 5, Section 6, LSM)

Concerning the relation between idolatry and division, Brother Lee said that the main source of division is idolatry. Idolatry comes in many different forms and it is related to division in a number of ways. First, an idol is anything that substitutes God and possesses man. Any work, teaching or practice, including Bible reading, gospel preaching or church meeting or practice that is uplifted to replace the rightful position and honor of our God can be an idol, more so if these activities create factions among the saints and cause division rather than the building up of the church. Second, the principle of the golden calf is the misuse of God’s gift. A gifted evangelist with his prevailing preaching may spontaneously form a division by molding himself into an idol. Likewise, a great teacher may live and work only for his teaching and not for the Body and outside of the fellowship of the Body, which eventually causes a division out of his teaching. A worker may propound his divergent practice different from that of the general leading of the ministry among the churches and by insisting on his particular ideology, produce factions and division in the church. Instead of being for the building up of the Body, these gifted ministers often create divisions. Third, the golden calf idol is an idol that is named after the name of the Lord. It is quite possible for a worker to superficially give credit to the Lord and lavish praise and honor to His name yet, by an inordinate promotion of his work, be in fact advertising and uplifting his own name. This drives a wedge and creates a division between those who follow him and those who do not. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were divided by their worshipping of the idols. More idols means more division. Brother Lee emphasized:

“As soon as there was the golden calf among the children of Israel, there was a division. Suppose there had been more than one idol made by God’s redeemed people in Exodus 32. Immediately there would have been another division. If there had been ten idols, there would have been ten divisions.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus*, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM)

In the book of Judges we see how idol worshipping produced division. Every division is caused by human choice, and every human choice that is different from God’s choice is related to idolatry. The Israelites set up idols and worshipped them in different places according to their own choice. Thus, the people were divided by worshipping the idols based on each one’s choice of idol and venue of worship, much like the Corinthian believers each claiming, “I am of Paul,” “I am of Cephas,” and even “I am of Christ.” This is a type of the divisions in Christianity and possibly in the church. The division-makers may form a separate, factious group based on their dissonant teaching and start another meeting based on their preference of that teaching and practice. Other saints may choose to follow the division-makers and set up separate Lord’s table meetings that are not in fellowship with the church. These meetings may be held in the name of the Lord but they are in reality meetings in division and in the principle of idolatry.

In 1 Corinthians 11 the apostle Paul warned the Corinthian believers to discern the Body as we partake of the Lord's table.

It is noteworthy that after stressing the matter concerning keeping the Lord's table from idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, the apostle Paul immediately proceeded to deal with the matter of head covering in 11:2-16 followed by the proving of ourselves in partaking of the bread and the cup (v. 28) and the discernment of the Body (v. 29). The mentioning of idolatry, Lord's table, head covering, and discerning of the Body in that sequence is not without significance. We need to have a Lord's table that has nothing to do with idolatry, for the Lord's table symbolizes the oneness of the Body (10:17), whereas idolatry causes the division of the Body. The Lord's table signifies the believers' joint participation in the enjoyment of the Body, whereas idolatry and division separate the members of the Body and frustrate them from that common and universal enjoyment.

Moreover, an idol is anything that takes the place of God; it is a symbol of headship above all. It is therefore a grave offense for anyone to not remain under the headship of God but try to make for himself an idol to take God's position. It is all the more serious for a woman to try to assume the headship. Footnotes in the Recovery Version of the Bible clearly reveal that in the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man just as Christ is under the headship of God. In dealing with the problem of head covering, the apostle took the headship of God, the headship of Christ, and the headship of man as a strong ground for his instruction. His instruction concerning head covering was based on the headship in God's governmental administration. Such a strong base leaves no ground for argument over the matter of head covering for the sisters as a sign of their submission to the headship and not to make an idol out of themselves for others to follow, as this will result to division. The apostle Paul stressed that neither the apostles nor the churches should tolerate any contention or disputation concerning not subjecting oneself to the headship, because this causes division in the church (11:16). Oneness is the essence in the Lord's table meeting. Without being in the oneness of the Body, the meeting is held without its intrinsic significance. It is of utmost importance that when we come before the Lord's table, we must discern the Body to determine whether the bread on the table represents the Body of Christ in oneness or any human division. We should check whether we are having the Lord's table meeting in oneness with the Body or in division from the Body. This matter regarding the seriousness of discerning the Body will be taken up in detail in the third installment of this series entitled *How is Spiritual Fornication Related to Heresy and Division?*

In practice, there should be no idol in the Lord's table meeting. Some might think that removing the physical idol from the house, turning the idols around, or even loosely covering the graven images with a piece of cloth, or putting them in a place where the saints could not see them would suffice to proceed with the Lord's table meeting. This is simply a bribing of their conscience. The idols have to be thoroughly dealt with. As the Scriptures call for the saints to refuse the factious ones who form parties in the church (Titus 2:10) and turn away from those who make divisions in the Body (Rom. 16:17), the apostle John warned us to "guard ourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21) while the apostle Paul charged us to "flee from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), as idolatry goes hand-in-hand with division. We must realize that the first and foremost idol we need to guard against and deal with is ourselves, our scheming, our domineering, and our desire to win others over so that they would agree with us. Even our reading of the Word, praying, worshipping, serving, and breaking of bread outside of our regenerated spirit can be idols in the guise of godliness. We need to deal with the idols within us such as our flesh, our ideas, our views, our dissenting thoughts and our experiences which we brag about. As Brother Lee taught, we need to flee from these idols resolutely, seriously, and speedily just like Lot and his family fled from Sodom with much intensity and desperation to escape from the judgment of that place. As Moses sounded a call for overcomers in Exodus 25:25-26 among God's people who would stand in the gate of the camp with him, separating themselves from any idol and on the lookout for any idol lest any would creep in among God's people, may we be those who purify ourselves from any involvement with idols and be the overcomers of the age in guarding against any form of idolatry in our homes and in the church.

(Sept. 5, 2011)