

Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Obedience and Submission

Obsequious and Blind Obedience or Perfect and Unconditional Obedience and Submission according to the Bible?

God's greatest and highest demand in the Bible is the demand for submission to authority. A person may try to please God by his offering of sacrifices. He may try to work for the Lord and in the name of the Lord to honor Him; yet it is only in obedience and submission that there can be an absolute honoring of God and an exaltation of His name, His will and His purpose. But just as submission to authority is the greatest demand of God, it is the greatest problem and failure of God's creatures. Disobedience to authority is the reason for the rebellion of Satan; it is also the cause of the fall of man. Disobedience and rebellion have always been the story of the fallen man throughout the history, so is it the situation on this earth until today.

For many years now, a few division-makers in the church have been challenging the Word of God regarding the need for the saints to submit themselves to the elders who are God's delegated authority in the church. The continuous attacks against the presbytery were unconscionably made and promoted in the open both in speaking and in writing. By deluding and attracting a small number of followers to themselves and causing a division of the church, they have offended the Body in their sin of spiritual fornication that is abominable in the eyes of God. In order to inoculate the faithful and unsuspecting saints against the poison of rebellion and division, three articles containing the word of God as expounded by the ministry of brothers Nee and Lee were put out in the past: *"Who are God's Delegated Authorities in the Body?"* *"Is There Really No Word for Us to Obey the Elders?"* and *"Remember, Obey, and Greet the Ones Leading You."* These articles touch the matter of God's direct and deputy authorities in the church and submission to authority in the proper perspective.

Of late, more impertinent statements surfaced in different writings by the division-makers who directly or indirectly and implicitly or explicitly claim that the saints' obedience and submission to the elders are "blind" and "obsequious." These spates of slanderous accusations not only cast aspersion on the elders but also on the faithful saints who are proper in their attitude and practice of obedience and submission according to the Scriptures. This article aims to present the word from the ministry of brothers Nee and Lee to see that the obedience and submission expected of the church toward God's direct and deputy authority is full, absolute, pure, perfect, and unconditional, contrary to the claim of the division-makers. Through the clear speaking of our brothers, we should be enlightened to discern whether the saints' obedience and submission to the elders is "blind and obsequious" or if the divisive ones' disobedience and insubordination is "blinded and rebellious."

EXCERPTS FROM THE MINISTRY

God's Greatest and Highest Demand in the Bible being to Submit to Authority

"The greatest and highest demand in the entire Bible is the demand for **submission to authority**. Man regards such things as offerings, consecration, and sacrifices as the greatest things, considering them to be the most that a Christian can offer. When many people meet young Christians, their natural inclination is to exhort the latter to give themselves to these things, but please remember that the greatest demand in the Bible is the demand to submit to authority.... We should obey whether or not things go our way. We should submit whether or not we are willing. We have to see that the bearing of the cross is not our highest obligation to God's will; **submission to authority is**." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 13, Section 2, LSM*)

"The greatest demand God has on man is not bearing the cross, offerings, consecration, or self-sacrifice. **God's greatest demand on man is submission**. God commanded Saul to smite the Amalekites and utterly destroy all that they had (1 Sam. 15:1-3). But after Saul overcame the

Amalekites, he spared Agag the king of Amalek. He also appreciated the best sheep, the best oxen, and all that was good and refused to destroy them, hoping instead to offer them as sacrifices to God (vv. 7-9, 14-15). But Samuel said to him, "To obey is better than sacrifice, / And to heed, than the fat of rams" (v. 22). The sacrifice spoken of here is the burnt offering; it has nothing to do with sin. It is for God's acceptance and satisfaction. However, Samuel said that to heed and to obey are better than sacrifice. This is because even in this kind of sacrifice there was the possibility of a mixture with the self-will. Only in heeding and obeying is there an absolute honoring of God and an exaltation of His will." (*W. Nee, Authority and Submission, Chapter 1, Section 2, LSM*)

Absolute Obedience and Submission of Christ the First God-Man

"Christ was the first God-man, and we are the many God-men. We have to learn of Him in His absolute submission to God and His uttermost satisfaction with God. Christ was so submissive to and satisfied with the Father and His will." (*W. Lee, The God-man Living, Chapter 13, Section 3, LSM*)

"In the Gospel of Mark we find a person who lives a life in absolute obedience to God to serve God's will and His purpose." (*W. Lee, A General Sketch of the New Testament in the Light of Christ and the Church, Part 1, Chapter 2, Section 3, LSM*)

His Accomplishing Redemption through Absolute Submission

"The Lord Jesus came to the earth to accomplish the work of redemption. His life on earth was absolutely submissive to God's authority. Jesus the Nazarene lived and moved on earth fully under God's authority. His every word and action were under God's rule, and He fully recognized God's authority. He was a man with more than perfect behavior; He was a person completely under God's rule. (*W. Lee, The Church as the Body of Christ, Chapter 14, Section 1, LSM*)

His Obtaining Authority to Reign through Absolute Submission

"[T]he Lord Jesus came as the Word become flesh that there was in this rebellious universe a man who **submitted absolutely** to God's authority. In the life of the Lord Jesus, every word and action, every move and cessation, were in accordance with God's will and in subjection to God's authority. Philippians 2 says, 'He humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.' Therefore, God also highly exalted Him, that every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth should bow to Him and every tongue should call Him Lord—all in submission to His authority (vv. 8-11). Because the Lord Jesus submitted to the authority of God the Father and kept the position of order, He obtained authority and was able to reign for God." (*W. Lee, The Experience of Life, Chapter 17, Section 3, LSM*)

His Receiving a Name through Absolute Submission

"His death on the cross epitomizes His submission. Through this submission He received all the authority.... Therefore, the Lord's crucifixion is the highest expression of His submission. After He expressed submission through the cross, God raised Him up to the highest point, even to the throne. On earth the Lord was a representative of submission. On the throne He is a representative of authority. This is the reason He was able to say to the disciples after His resurrection, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations' (Matt. 28:18-19). He is now on the throne. On the cross He was the epitome of humility. On the throne He is the exemplar of supreme exaltation. He has received all authority on the throne, and this authority is now carried by His name. The Lord received this name because He had perfected absolute submission." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 20, Section 2, LSM*)

His Being Entrusted with Authority through Absolute Submission

“Through the Lord’s **absolute obedience**, God entrusted such authority to Him.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 21, Section 4, LSM*)

His Being Exalted and Ushered Back as Lord in the Godhead through Perfect, Pure, and Absolute Submission

“He set His heart to subject Himself to the way of submission even unto death. Since He emptied Himself, He could no longer refill Himself. He did not vacillate in His mind. Since He emptied Himself of all divine glory and authority and stepped forth as a slave, He did not want to go back by any other way than the way of submission. Before He returned, He completed His course of being obedient unto death in the position of a man. He was able to return because He accomplished a **perfect and pure submission**. Suffering upon suffering was piled on Him, but He remained **absolutely submissive**. There was not the slightest reaction or rebellion. Therefore, God exalted Him and ushered Him back as Lord in the Godhead.” (W. Nee, *Authority and Submission, Chapter 5, Section 2, LSM*)

His Establishing of God’s Throne through Absolute Submission

In the Gospels we see His **absolute submission** to God’s authority. Submitting to God’s restriction and rule, He passed through death and resurrection to save a group of people who became the church. On the day of Pentecost He caused these ones to submit to God’s authority, just as He had. This established God’s throne among them. God’s presence was fully in their midst as they acknowledged His throne.” (W. Lee, *The Church as the Body of Christ, Chapter 14, Section 1, LSM*)

Absolute and Perfect Submission of the Church as His Kingdom

“God’s purpose is not only for us to become the church, but also for the church to become the kingdom of God. She is to be the sphere of God’s kingdom, the place where God executes His authority. Hence, God’s desire is not only to gain ground in a few, but to have the whole church free from rebellion. There must be an **absolute submission** and an absolute position for God so that His authority can be perfectly carried out.”

“In this way authority is established among God’s creatures. Not only does God want man to submit to His direct authority, He wants man to submit to all of His appointed, deputy authorities as well. God does not ask for a **little submission**; He demands a **perfect submission**.” (W. Nee, *Authority and Submission, Chapter 6, Section 2, LSM*)

Absolute and Perfect Submission of the Church as His Body

“Only Christ and the church have the highest expression of authority and submission. God has not established the church to make it an organization, but to make it the Body of Christ.... The church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the church.... Christ and the church can never be separated one from the other. With Christ and the church there is an **absolute submission** and an absolute authority which are far above all other authorities and submissions....”

“God has to establish a perfect authority and a **perfect submission**, which is Christ and the church, the Head and the Body.... Look at the submission of the body to the head; it is also perfect. As long as the head has any desire, the finger will move. There is no need for words; there is no need of force. Everything is so harmonious. God’s will is that we **submit perfectly**. We must be brought by God to a condition that is like the body submitting to the head. Only then will God be satisfied..... God desires that our submission be like that of the body submitting to

the head. It is not a submission by coercion, such as that which is seen in the nations. Rather, it is a submission of the body to the head. As soon as the head has a little intention, there is a harmonious submission.” (W. Nee, *Authority and Submission*, Chapter 8, Section 1, LSM)

“The life which God has put in us is the same life that is in Christ. We can be one with Christ because we bear Christ's nature. The Head and the Body are **absolutely in union**; the submission found here is absolute.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 18, Section 2, LSM)

“The underlying principle of the church should be the principle of submission.... This body has one characteristic—submission. While we live on earth today, we take submission as our very nature and as the principle of our very living.” (W. Nee, *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, Vol. 3, Chapter 16, Section 4, LSM)

Our Absolute Submission to the Absolute Authority of the Head

“The Body's only duty toward the Head is obedience and submission without any opinion, idea, or proposal. In the Body of Christ, no individual's idea or proposal counts; all these have to be cast down. We should only submit to the authority of the Head. We should just listen to His command and do as He says.” (W. Lee, *The Mystery of Christ*, Chapter 6, Section 1, LSM)

“As long as we obey the life of the Body, which flows as the Body maintains its position under the **absolute authority** of the Head, there will be continuous and perfectly proportioned growth.... As soon as we truly see the Body, we will also see the need of obedience and mutual relatedness. Submission is one outstanding characteristic of those who are familiar with the life of the Body.” (W. Lee, *The Mystery of Christ*, Chapter 8, Section 3, LSM)

Our Rendering of a Testimony of Absolute Submission

“As long as there is one church that is **absolute, that obeys absolutely**, and that renders a testimony of submission to God, Satan will be defeated, even if this church is small in number. However, if we operate according to Satan's principle, we will be a laughingstock to him even if we are zealous in our own way.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 23, Section 3, LSM)

Our Serving God by Way of Full Submission

“In order to serve God, we have to take a different way—the way of full submission. God has to be in control of everything. We cannot propose anything. Our human opinions have to be thoroughly destroyed.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 23, Section 3, LSM)

Our Usefulness in the Lord's Hand Depending on Our Absolute Submission

“Our usefulness in the Lord's hand depends upon how much we cooperate with Him; how far He can go in us depends entirely upon how absolute our Amen is to Him. We are sinful and corrupt, we tend to lose our temper, and we always blame others. From our experience in following the Lord, we know that these are hindrances to the Lord. However, our unwillingness to submit to the Lord absolutely is the greatest hindrance.” (W. Lee, *Knowing Life and the Church*, Chapter 15, Section 3, LSM)

Our Submitting to Deputy Authority Unconditionally

“We can find no clearer picture of man's requirement to submit to deputy authority in the Bible than in Numbers 30. There we see God asking man to submit to deputy authority unconditionally.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 47, Chapter 33, Section 2, LSM*)

Our Having an Attitude of Absolute Submission

“In our attitude we should be absolute in submission to those in authority.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 60, Chapter 27, Section 4, LSM*)

Our Absolute Submission versus Stubbornness or Rebellion

“The submission of a person in heart, attitude, and words must be absolute. There must not be any stubbornness or rebellion.” (W. Nee, *Authority and Submission, Chapter 11, Section 1, LSM*)

“God is recovering His authority through us today. Are we someone that God can trust? God's way hinges on us today. We have to be absolute in our obedience. We have to obey to the end. Otherwise, God will not have a recovery. Today rebellion still exists in the church, and unless we deal with this problem, there is no way for the church to be recovered.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 21, Section 4, LSM*)

Our Absolute Submission Not Reckoned as Sin

“Those who submit to authority need only to **submit absolutely.** Even if they make a mistake through submission, the Lord will not reckon that as sin. The Lord will hold the deputy authority responsible for that sin.” (W. Nee, *Authority and Submission, Chapter 7, Section 3, LSM*)

The Example of David's Absolute Submission in the Old Testament

Let us consider David. In his entire life, David submitted not only to God's authority, but also, in an absolute way, to the authority of order. He recognized that Saul was God's anointed one, that Saul was in the position of king, and that Saul was arranged by God to be his authority. He realized that he was only a subject of Saul. Therefore, no matter how Saul persecuted and hated him as an enemy, he never dared to rebel against him. In this way, he always kept the position of order and was a man who submitted to authority. Consequently, the day came when God also anointed him king, that he might reign for God in the nation of Israel.” (W. Lee, *The Recovery of God's House and God's City, Chapter 7, Section 3, LSM*)

The Example of Paul's Willing Submission in the New Testament

“Once when Paul was judged and stood before the court, he willingly submitted to the authority there. When the high priest's accusations became too much, Paul said, ‘God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall’ (Acts 23:3). When the others rebuked him for reviling God's high priest, Paul became quiet and allowed them to accuse him. According to the Bible, nothing is greater and more important than the matter of authority.” (W. Nee, *The Assembly Life, Chapter 1, Section 1, LSM*)

Absolute Submission of Nazarites and Serving Ones

“To be a Nazarite we must take care of two things. First, we must have nothing to do with earthly pleasure. Second, we must be absolutely under authority, absolutely under the headship.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Numbers, Chapter 8, Section 3, LSM*)

“If a man is to serve God, he must submit to authority. **Submission is higher than our work.**” (W. Nee, *Authority and Submission*, Chapter 4, Section 1, LSM)

Summary and Conclusion

Authority and submission are two of the most crucial topics in the Bible as they are two most important matters in the universe. It pays to know that God’s works in the entire universe issue from His throne; His throne is established upon authority. God created the universe with His authority, and He maintains the universe also with His authority. We see God’s sovereign authority in all His creation. Everything in God’s creation is an expression of His sovereign authority, even as all the laws on earth are being held together through authority. The Bible says that God upholds all things by the word, which is of His authority (Heb. 1:3b). It does not say that God upholds all things by His power, for God’s power only represents God’s works, but God’s authority represents God Himself. In the whole universe only God is authority. Nothing is greater than authority in the universe. Nothing can surpass it; nothing can overturn it. Hence, any sin against God’s power can easily be forgiven, but it is not that easy to be forgiven of sin against God’s authority, because sinning against God’s authority is sinning against God Himself.

The other side of authority is submission. The Bible gives much emphasis to the matter of submission. Authority and submission are related to each other. If a man submits to God, he comes under God’s authority. Otherwise, he overturns God’s authority and sins against God’s authority. Satan became Satan because he challenged God’s authority and overstepped God’s authority. He competed with God and stood in opposition to God. Such was the rebellion that had caused the fall of Satan. Man’s fall is likewise due to disobedience to God’s authority. Adam overturned God’s authority as he disobeyed God and did not recognize His authority but instead submitted to the authority of the lawless one and sinned.

As the center of dispute in the universe relates to who has the authority, man has to contend with Satan by asserting that authority is with God through his obedience to God’s authority. It is expected of the man whom God has created and redeemed to set himself to submit to God’s authority and to uphold God’s authority. Hence, God’s greatest and highest demand in the entire Bible is the demand for submission to authority. As God could not find such obedience and submission in the old creation, He found it in the new creation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the first God-man, is an example of one who is fully obedient and submissive to God’s authority. He epitomizes absolute obedience to God to accomplish redemption for man through His emptying of Himself in His incarnation to become a man in the form of a slave. During His life on earth, He was living fully under God’s direct authority and His deputy authority. In His youth, He was under the authority of His parents, and He kept all the ordinances. He was the Creator yet restricted by man’s limitations. There was one time He told His mother, “Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father?” (Luke 2:49) but nevertheless He went back with them. When He began to work and serve God in His ministry, His every word and action was under God’s rule; He fully recognized God’s authority. During His trial, He was still under the authority of the government; He did not revile the ones in authority. No one has ever subjected Himself to authority as our Lord.

He exudes His highest obedience to the Father by His death, even the death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). Because of His ultimate submission, God exalted Him to the highest in His resurrection and ascension, giving Him a name that is above every name. He was entrusted and given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18) to reign for God that every knee should bow and every tongue must confess that He is the Lord. On the day of Pentecost, He caused all the disciples to submit to God’s authority, just as He had. This established God’s throne among them. God’s presence was completely in the midst of the newly produced church that fully acknowledged His throne.

This fulfilled God’s purpose and goal to have a man under His authority to represent Him in His authority. In Genesis 1, an individual man has been commissioned with God’s authority. In Acts 2, we see a corporate man, the church, acknowledging His throne and representing His authority. The individual man sinned and cannot be entrusted with God’s authority; the church that is built upon Christ was entrusted with God’s authority. Today, the church is entrusted with God’s dominion; it is also where

God's authority is linked to heaven and exercised on the earth. Without the church, God's authority cannot be realized on earth. God's authority is realized in the church in two aspects: as the kingdom of God and as the Body of Christ.

The church is not merely a gathering of called out ones. These called out ones are called out from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God and become His kingdom. It is in this sphere of His kingdom where He establishes His authority. As the entire earth today is in chaos and in rebellion, being under the kingdom of Satan, God has obtained the church as His kingdom where He may execute His authority through and among a group of heavenly, kingdom people in the spirit who are submissive to Him and are free from rebellion against His authority.

In Christ as the Head of the church and the church as the Body of Christ we find the highest expression of authority and submission. God desires that our submission be like that of the body submitting to the head. It is not a submission by coercion like the one among the nations. In the submission of the body to the head, the body responds positively, harmoniously, and spontaneously as soon as the head expresses an intention and will. The Body's only duty toward the Head is obedience and submission without any opinion, idea, or proposal. The Body has only one outstanding characteristic—submission.

The underlying principle of the church as the kingdom of God and as the Body of Christ is the principle of submission. This submission is not one that is superficial, blind or obsequious; rather, both the kingdom of God and the Body of Christ enunciate a full, absolute, pure, perfect, and unconditional obedience and submission as seen in the various excerpts cited. This submission is genuine because it entails an absolute submission deep down in the heart, in attitude, and in words.

As this fallen, sinful, and corrupted world is a representation of disobedience and rebellion instigated by Satan, the redeemed, blood-washed, and life-regenerated church is a testimony of the full and absolute submission to God that He is looking for. The way of the world is the way of total rebellion, but the way of the church is the way of full submission. Today, for us to serve Him in the church, how useful we are in the Lord's hand and how far we can go in following Him and serving Him in the central lane of His economy depends upon how much we cooperate with Him and how absolute our Amen is to Him. For this reason, if we want to serve God, we must know God's authority and subject ourselves absolutely under His authority.

Moreover, God requires that we not only subject ourselves absolutely under His direct authority, He also demands that we subject ourselves fully under His deputy authority on earth. God has appointed authorities on this earth whom we must subject ourselves to. In the family He has ordained our parents as His authority and to them we are required to absolutely submit. In the church God has delegated His authority to the elders. Brothers Nee and Lee confirmed what the Bible teaches:

“In order to manifest His authority in the church, God appoints elders in each of the local churches to represent His authority. Another name for elders is overseers, which bears the connotation of authority. The Bible tells us to submit to these ones because they represent authority. All authorities are there to represent God. Therefore, the authority of the elders is for representing and expressing God's authority. It does not matter if an elder is a good representation or a bad one. One should submit to the elders as long as the authority is from God. Whoever does not submit to the authority of the church has lost his standing as a brother.” (*W. Nee, The Assembly Life, Chapter 1, Section 2, LSM*)

“All the brothers and sisters in the church have to learn to submit to the authority of the elders. We obey the elders because they are the Lord's deputy authority in the church.... God wants all the believers to practice submission in the church.... In the church the elders act as God's deputy authority. God wants us to learn submission. If a man truly knows authority, he will learn to submit.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set, Vol. 61, Chapter 20, Section 3, LSM*)

“We obey the elders because we submit to the authority of the Head. We are not submitting to the authority of man but to Christ, the Head of the church, recognizing His authority in the church.” (W. Lee, *The Organization of the Church*, p. 40, LSM)

“The elders in a local church are God’s deputy authority. Dealing with them is a solemn thing before God. Hence, the apostle solemnly charged Timothy before God, Christ, and the angels to do it in such a way that the chosen angels, the good angels with God’s authority, may see that His authority is established and maintained among His redeemed people on earth.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Chapter 10, Section 2, LSM)

God desires that man submit to authority because the authorities are not only appointed by God, but they also represent God. This is why the Bible says that there is no authority except God (Rom. 13:1). To obey the elders whom God has appointed as His deputy authority in the church is to obey God Himself. Although the elders should not lord it over us, we should submit to the God-appointed authority as our part. On the part of the elders, they have to be responsible before God concerning how they lead and shepherd. On the part of the flock, they need to submit to God’s delegated authorities whom God has placed in the church.

In the previous three articles, a list of qualifications and responsibilities of the elders were catalogued. The elders do not only bear the responsibility for the spiritual services of the entire church before God but must also bear the responsibility for the practical affairs. For this reason, the elders must be able to excel in proper arrangements of all the practical affairs. Arrangements of practical affairs increase the elders’ capacity for God’s grace. Among the many responsibilities on practical matters under the scope of the elders’ management of the church which the division-makers are challenging today are matters related to church meetings, gospel preaching, material offerings, and the leading and shepherding of the sisters. Brothers Nee and Lee have particular fellowship about these matters. Concerning the meetings and preaching:

“The elders should manage the matters related to the church meetings and preaching.... We must wait until the responsible brothers announce in the meeting that certain people will have meetings in their homes before we can all go. Otherwise, these kinds of meetings in the homes should not be held. It does not mean that we have no personal liberty. But we should submit to God’s authority and control and enjoy the liberty of the limitations of the meetings.... Therefore, the brothers have to pay attention to this matter, learn to submit to authority, and not do things that the elders have not endorsed.

“The elders make decisions concerning the Lord’s Day meeting and write letters of recommendation. Whether the Lord’s Day meeting should be held in the morning or in the afternoon is a matter to be decided by the elders.” (W. Nee, *The Assembly Life*, Chapter 1, Section 3, LSM)

Brother Nee clearly taught that it is the responsibility of the elders to manage and decide on matters related to the church meetings and gospel preaching. Time and venue of all the meetings, including the Lord’s table meeting during the Lord’s Day are based on the discretion and decision of the elders according to the leading of the Spirit. Even the gospel preaching must be carried out in accordance to the direction of the church and in synergy with the Body. This gives the elders the opportunity to keenly follow the Lord’s leading as regards the meeting and preaching. This also serves as a good opportunity for the saints to set aside their self and opinion to submit to the leading of the elders. As the Lord fully trusts His delegated authority and has entrusted the elders with the responsibility and decision-making of church affairs, we should likewise honor the elders and submit to them as to the Lord. In the same direction, Brother Lee likewise mentioned concerning the matter of material offering:

“Acts 7 mentions that the offerings of material goods in the church were committed to the elders. This is proof that the elders are the deputy authorities in the church.... Therefore, the elders are without a doubt the deputy authorities that God has established in the church.” (W. Lee, *The Vision of the Building of the Church*, Chapter 10, Section 5, LSM)

The succinct statement of Brother Lee clearly indicates that the matter related to offering of material goods is handled by the elders. The elders must be keen in following the leading of the Spirit on details with regard to the offerings. Sometimes the Spirit has specific leading in different places at different times. For example, the advance pledging of offering by installment cannot be literally found in the seminal church life in Acts 2 but is currently being widely practiced today by the churches after the fellowship of the elders and co-workers according to the leading of the Lord in spirit. On the contrary, the believers' selling of all of their possessions and offering all the proceeds for common use that we see in Acts 2 was practiced only for a short period of time at the initiation of God's New Testament economy. It did not continue for the long run as a practice of legality in the church life; it had already stopped by the time of the apostle Paul. In fact, like the descriptive practice of breaking of bread from house to house which appeared briefly in Acts 2, this practice of selling all and offering everything for common use was discontinued and not seen in other places in Acts or in any of the epistles after the early saints in Jerusalem practiced it in Acts 2, as shown in 2 Corinthians 9. Although the Bible does not explicitly give elaborated instructions as regards the elders' managing of material offering in the church, the following three fellowship of brothers Nee and Lee shed light to three principles involving the handling of material offering :

“Furthermore, whatever is of resurrection is hidden. Even if it is done in public, it is still hidden. No one living in resurrection likes to show off. Only fleshly ones like to **show off**. In the church there cannot be any who are natural; rather, everyone must experience **death and resurrection**. In our service we should not see only ability but also cypress and cedar, that is, **death and resurrection**. Today the situation of many Christians is pitiful. In the matter of **material offering**, there are donation records, showing who has donated the most. This kind of donation is for self-boasting. This is not cypress and cedar. It is altogether natural and has not passed through death and resurrection.” (W. Lee, *Three Aspects of the Church: Book 1, Chapter 15, Section 3, LSM*)

“Now let us consider the way to **dispense the offerings**. Part of the money received in the meetings should be set aside for the local workers and the workers in other localities. This is a sign of fellowship. Paul praised the Philippians for their grace in this matter (Phil. 4). They continued to fellowship with the apostle in the matter of money. The condition of the Corinthians was just the opposite; they developed a problem in their fellowship with Paul. As a result, Paul was willing to allow other churches to suffer, rather than ask for any money from the Corinthians. He did not use the Corinthians' money because there was a problem with the fellowship. Only when there is fellowship can there be a material offering.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 1, Vol. 11, Chapter 16, Section 4, LSM*)

“We should understand every matter that comes to us, and we should grasp the opportunity to edify and teach those who are involved. This will build up the church. If the saints can receive the help from us in the matter of material offering, they will be genuinely edified. They will also be built into the church.” (W. Lee, *The Administration of the Church and the Ministry of the Word, Chapter 8, Section 4, LSM*)

In these excerpts from the ministry speaking of brothers Nee and Lee, we see three important principles with respect to the elders' governance of material offering in the church: in death and resurrection, for fellowship and grace, and unto edification and building up.

First, the offerings should be done in the principle of death and resurrection. In the building of the temple, the cypress and cedar are strong and important building materials, yet they are hidden; none of which is for self-boasting or showing off. Brother Lee applies this to material offering. This indicates that there should be no element of self-boasting or showing off both on the part of the one who offers or on the part of the receiver, whether it is personal or an item of offering. Moreover, as taken up in the previous article *How is Idolatry Related to Heresy and Division*, anyone or anything that is uplifted even ostensibly in the name of the Lord is idol-worship. As far as offerings are concerned, the church certainly does not want to involve in any sort of idolatry or have anything to do with anyone or any work that is known to be name-uplifting and self-boasting, especially one that is used as a means to vilify the church or her elders, as it is against the principle of offering.

Second, the offering should be done for fellowship and for receiving of grace. Brother Nee clearly points out that *only when there is fellowship can there be a material offering*. Material offering is a fellowship which brings mutual grace to both the giver and the receiver. However, if there is no fellowship, there can only be gift but no grace. If either the giver or the receiver has problems with the church or if the fellowship is suspended due to divisiveness either on the part of the giver or the receiver, the elders with the authority entrusted to them in their managing of material offering have the full discretion and decision to receive or to reject the offering made. This is practiced in keeping with the principle of fellowship with respect to material offering.

Third, the offering should be done unto edification of the individual as well as for the building up of the church. An offering is made to help edify the receiver, not to spoil him. Similarly, it is made to help build up the church, not to destroy it. God's desire is to build up the church, the Body of Christ. However, the recent division-makers in the church have rejected God's authority in the church. Not only have they denigrated the elders, they also uplifted their own names and paraded their own works by way of self-boasting. They have refused fellowship with the elders. They went ahead to meet on their own even as they cut off fellowship with the elders. By breaking bread in this divisive way, they cut off fellowship with the Body. This has caused a division in the church. The work that is supposed to be for the building up of the church is being used as propaganda against the church and has caused much damage to the church. The church should not take part in such divisive work in any way. Hence, the elders do well in exercising prudence and discretion by not getting involved in offerings with respect to such work that is not beneficial, and even damaging, to the building up of His Body.

Aside from managing the church meetings and offerings, Brother Nee especially mentioned that the elders manage the matters and meetings related to the sisters:

“The elders manage the matters and meetings related to the sisters. In the Bible, we see only brothers as elders; we do not see sisters as elders. The place God has assigned for the sisters is to be under someone's ruling; they do not have a place in ruling over others. God does not allow women to manage the church. In the Bible, there are deacons and deaconesses, but there are no female elders. This shows that in managing the affairs of the church, God wants the man to be the head of the woman. Therefore, the sisters should learn to submit by the grace of God. If there are some among the sisters who can serve others, they can do the work of this service. But if anything needs to be decided, the decisions should be made by those who are responsible as the elders. For example, if some among the sisters want to be baptized or be received for the bread breaking meeting, the sisters can testify for them, but the final decision rests with the elders. Some sisters may have the gifts and may be respected by other brothers and sisters, but the question of position and authority is more important in the Bible than the question of gift, and the question of God's truth is more important than the question of ability. Suppose the sisters would like to have a sisters' meeting at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday. The sisters can express their opinion and check with the responsible brothers. If the brothers think that this is proper, they will not stop it and will allow the sisters to meet accordingly. If the sisters do this, they are not acting independently but properly and in oneness. This shows that their meetings are not private meetings but meetings of the church.

“Why do the sisters have to follow this procedure? The reason is that the sisters tend to be emotional and are easily deceived. The elders are there to protect the sisters. If everything concerning the church is decided by the brothers, the sisters will be protected and preserved in their covered position, and they will avoid many problems.

“Every problem that arises is corporate in nature and is not the problem of an individual. The elders have a responsibility to properly oversee the matters related to the sisters. While the sisters are standing on the ground of submission through submission to Christ's authority, the elders should not shun their responsibility through fear of offending the sisters or of arousing suspicion. Of course, there are limits to the authority of the elders. But we must not forget that Barak was before Deborah and became the head covering to Deborah (see Judg. 4:4-7).” (W. Nee, *The Assembly Life, Chapter 1, Section 3, LSM*)

The clear speaking of Brother Nee regarding the elders' management of matters and meetings needs no further explanation. The sisters, who have their heads covered as a sign of submission, must have the inner reality of absolute submission in their spirit, in their attitude, and in their words. This will give glory to the Lord as their head and bring shame to the devil who tempted the first woman into rejecting God's authority, thereby causing the fall of man.

Lastly, it is of utmost importance to point out that the matter of authority and submission has much to do with what makes a church a Philadelphia or a Laodicea. Our previous article entitled "*What Makes Philadelphia a Laodicea?*" has clearly illustrated the difference between Philadelphia and Laodicea based on the Scriptures. Here we would like to reiterate the word of brothers Nee and Lee on the subject in relation to authority and submission:

"Finally, we have seen that the elders in the Lord, those who take the lead among us, also represent the Body of Christ. All of these constitute God's authority. **They are the deputy authority of God among us, and we must submit to them and honor them.** We must inquire of them and listen to them. **If we practice this, the Lord's name and His word will be magnified in our midst, and we will be Philadelphia indeed.**" (W. Nee, *Messages for Building Up New Believers, Vol. 3, Chapter 16, Section 10, LSM*)

"The word 'people' is the most common word in modern politics. Yet we have to realize that 'the people' here refers to the people in the church. From its name, we see that **Laodicea is a church of people's ruling. Here we see the believers rising up for independence and self-rule. They oppose the authority of their spiritual leaders.**" (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 1, Vol. 05, Chapter 4, Section 2, LSM*)

In reference to the Lord's word in Revelation "I am coming quickly" in order to obtain the kingdom and make the kingdom of the world become the kingdom of our God, the difference between Philadelphia and Laodicea lies in the former's submitting to God's authority in the church and honoring them and the latter's rising up to oppose the authority, based on revelation we see in the excerpts of brothers Nee and Lee. While the Lord said "I know your works" to both churches, the Lord is not referring to the *results* of their work but to the *source* of their works. In fact, the church in Philadelphia has little power but has nonetheless kept His word and not denied His name (Rev. 3:9). Keeping His word is to be obedient, and not denying His name is to have no other name and to uplift no other name other than His. On the contrary, the Greek word *Laodicea* is *Laodikeia* which means the opinion, customs, rights, and judgments of the people, or simply, "*the opinions of the people.*" The special characteristic of Laodicea is the prevalence of the opinions of the people over the obedience to the word of God. The obeying of God's word brings the believers to obeying of God's authority, whereas the propounding and insisting of self-opinions bring them to opposition against God's authority. Moreover, the church in Philadelphia fully trusts in God and submits to His authority due to its little power, thereby exalting only the Lord's name. Conversely, the church in Laodicea has full confidence and is self-satisfied with its work (Rev. 3:17). This often results in the worker's name being exalted. Because of the opinions of the people led by the self-exalting ones, the Lord's authority in the church is played down and the Lord Himself is kept outside the door (v. 20). This is why the Lord's promise to the overcomers in Laodicea who do not uplift their own names and do not set up their own throne in disobedience to God is that they will be given to sit with Him on the throne, even as the Lord also overcame and sat with the Father on His throne (v. 21).

May we all be today's overcomers who are fully and absolutely submissive to God's authority even if we have only a little power. Let us keep His word faithfully and not deny His name. In conclusion, we close by saying:

"We should never consider how we can be an authority. Rather, we should learn submission and turn away from rebellion. We need to learn to drain out every drop of our rebellious blood. I hope that we will spend more time praying alone or in small groups. I hope that we will deal with this matter thoroughly. May we clearly see the principle of authority and submission as it is displayed in Christ. It is wonderful that we can learn authority and submission here! I pray that

we will rise above the clouds and see everything clearly. May the Lord be gracious to us.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 3, Vol. 59, Chapter 24, Section 5, LSM*)

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