

## Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Heresy, Idolatry & Fornication ( 3 )

### **How is Fornication Related to Idolatry, Heresy, and Division?**

In the first 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 that a heretical person is not merely one who teaches erroneous doctrine against the person of Christ as generally perceived. Heresy and division are closely related to each other. In fact, the two are of the same word in Greek, *hairesis*, 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 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. Thus, we need to be so alert and prudent in refusing the factious ones who form parties in the church (Titus 2:10) and turning away from those who make divisions in the Body (Rom. 16:17).

In the second article *How is Idolatry Related to Heresy and Division*, we realized that the idolatry and idol worshipping does not merely pertain to the outward images that men bow down to worship at home or see hanging in the meeting halls, but the idols that men set in their hearts (Ezek. 14:3). An idol is any substitute man has 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, our Lord’s table meeting, and our care for numbers can be an idol. Any special preference for a practice or insisting upon it can also become our idol. Furthermore, the principle in the making of the golden calf is a matter of man’s abusive use of God’s gifts. We need to be careful in using the gifts, signified by gold—both physical and spiritual—that God has given us for His purpose and not turn it into self-beautification and make an idol of ourselves out of it even in the name of the Lord. Hence, we want to be today’s overcomers who flee from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14) and guard ourselves from all idols (1 John 5:21) so that there would be no idol existing in the church, as idolatry, in more ways than one, is the main source of division.

In this article, we come to the matter of fornication, which is the third and last sin which Brother Lee pointed out as the three abominable sins in the eyes of God that are definitely condemned and renounced by Him and should never be allowed in the church. The seriousness of the sin of fornication notwithstanding, it is not often taught or talked about in the church because of its delicate nature. For unlike heresy and idolatry even in its physical aspect, the sin of fornication is a personal offense and is not one that is committed in the open, it is mostly relegated to personal dealings individually or in private dealings with the elders. Nevertheless, it is a grave offense that should not be taken lightly but should be dealt with thoroughly. Just as idolatry damages the relationship of a believer with God, fornication destroys the relationship of a believer with the other members of the Body.

Along with idolatry, fornication is one of the most committed sins even by the children of God mentioned in the Bible. The repeated mentioning of this sin, especially in the Old Testament, exudes God’s hatred for fornication. But the sin of fornication by the Israelites, though physical in nature, has its spiritual meaning in application to our Christian life and church life today. As Brother Lee said:

“When you apply anything in the Old Testament, you must find out the principle of applying it in a spiritual way, not in a physical way.” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of Psalms, Chapter 8, Section 8, LSM*)

Dictionaries define fornication in its physical aspect as a “malicious, voluntary, and consensual sexual relation between two persons not married to each other”. From the ministry speaking of brothers Nee and Lee, we shall see the meaning and significance of the spiritual aspect of fornication. Spiritual fornication is not spatially remote but is in fact real and practical in the believers’ living and service. May the Lord enlighten us to see how idol-worship, division-makers, and the receiving of heresy are related to fornication and are in actuality spiritual fornication itself that we are warned not to have any part in.

## EXCERPTS FROM THE MINISTRY

### **The Three Things Condemned and Renounced by the Lord**

Idolatry, fornication, and division are the three things that are definitely condemned and renounced by the Lord. These are major issues which the church must stand firm to deal with:

“Actually, according to the strict teaching of the New Testament, only a few things are definitely condemned and renounced by the Lord. First is idolatry, the worship of idols (1 John 5:21). This has been absolutely condemned by God, and we also have to condemn it. We should have no idols and no worship of anything other than God. In this matter there is no excuse at all, especially in the New Testament. Second, there is also no excuse for immorality and fornication which spoils the humanity God created for Himself (1 Cor. 6:18). These two matters we all have to condemn. Concerning the worship of idols and concerning fornication we should not say we have no opinion. A third item that all of us must condemn is division (1 Cor. 1:10).

“Idolatry insults God Himself. Because God is jealous He can never tolerate the worship of idols. Fornication damages humanity; therefore, God does not allow it. Division destroys the Body of Christ. The New Testament never allows division.” (W. Lee, *Perfecting Training, Chapter 5, Section 1, LSM*)

“We should be firm only about major issues, such as idolatry, fornication, sectarianism, and division; we should not care too much about other matters.” (W. Lee, *Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 2, Chapter 16, Section 2, LSM*)

### **The Physical and Spiritual Aspects of Fornication**

As explained by Brother Lee, the “fornication” in the New Testament does not refer only to the fornication of the flesh, that is, the physical aspect of fornication, but also to the spiritual aspect of fornication, which is spiritual fornication:

“If you know the principles in the New Testament, you will realize that three matters are related to one another: division, idolatry, and fornication. Division goes with idolatry, and idolatry, with fornication, both spiritual and physical. Actually division is spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM*)

“In the Bible the word fornication includes two aspects: one aspect is fornication of the flesh, and the other aspect is spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *Ten Lines in the Bible, Chapter 10, Section 11, LSM*)

### **The Meaning of Spiritual Fornication**

To commit spiritual fornication is to receive something other than God and in place of God, even if that thing is good or even scriptural. It is tantamount to turning away from God to something apart from God Himself; that something could be the seeking of our own glory rather than His:

“To receive something from someone other than your husband is fornication... To receive something other than Christ, even if that thing is good or even scriptural, is to commit spiritual fornication. We should receive only Christ and allow only Him to make us pregnant.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 35, Section 2, LSM*)

“To go after something else in place of God is fornication. Because we all have left God to pursue other things, in His sight we all are females who have committed spiritual fornication. This means that in the case of fornication in chapter eight of the Gospel of John is a sign of

spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John*, Chapter 23, Section 2, LSM)

“To commit spiritual fornication is to turn away from God to something apart from Him. Today the entire human race is turning away from God to other things. This means that, no matter what they are doing, in principle they are committing fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John*, Chapter 24, Section 1, LSM)

“If we do not honor the Father but instead seek our own glory, in principle we commit spiritual fornication. We need to be set free from this. This means that to be set free from sin in John 8 includes to be set free from honoring ourselves and from seeking glory for ourselves. If we seek glory for ourselves, in principle we are committing fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John*, Chapter 24, Section 3, LSM)

“To deviate from the Lord’s word is apostasy, and to denominate the church with any name other than the Lord’s is spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 18, Section 1, LSM)

“Spiritual fornication is not using yourself for God. You use yourself for things other than God.” (W. Lee, *God’s New Testament Economy*, Chapter 16, Section 2, LSM)

### **Fornication Being Related to Idolatry – in Practice**

The Bible reveals that the evil practices of fornication and idol worship are closely related to each other and, most often, linked together both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. They are both hated by the Lord, both in the flesh and in spiritual things:

“Here we must pay special attention to two things—fornication and idol worship. It is very strange that these two are put together. In 1 Corinthians these two matters are also mentioned together. In the flesh these are the two things which God hates, and in spiritual things these are also the two things which God hates.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Set 3, Vol. 47, Chapter 7, Section 2, LSM)

“Fornication accompanies idolatry (Num. 25:1-2). Hence, these two things are referred to together, as also in Acts 15:20, 29. Undoubtedly, the implication here [in 1 Cor. 10:8] is that these two evils also existed among the Corinthian believers. Hence, these are the main things dealt with in chapters five through ten.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1 Corinthians*, Chapter 47, Section 4, LSM)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Idolatry - in Essence**

Instead of pleasing God by living according to His word through Moses, the Israelites failed and sinned against God by their committing of fleshly fornication at their high places—the very place they worshipped idols, which is why in its very essence, idolatry is spiritual fornication. Both are abominable in the sight of God. Brother Lee called idolatry and fornication two evil sisters that go in pair:

“After God’s people received their respective portions of the good land to enjoy, in Judges we see that they did not keep Moses’ exhortation to live according to God’s law and ordinances so that they might please God. Instead, they became a total failure. They failed by worshipping idols, which is spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Divine Trinity as Revealed in the Holy Word*, Chapter 9, Section 1, LSM)

“In the Bible fornication is related to idolatry. Idolatry is spiritual fornication. In the Old Testament the children of Israel committed fornication before God in their high places, in the

places where they worshipped idols. Their worship of idols was fornication, and that was abominable in the sight of God.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Jeremiah*, Chapter 7, Section 1, LSM)

“We have seen that division is related to idolatry. When a person commits idolatry, he may go on to commit fornication. Fornication means confusion. If anyone is confused with respect to God, how can he avoid being confused with respect to man? In the letter to Thyatira in Revelation 2 we see both idolatry and fornication. Idolatry and fornication, two evil sisters, always go in a pair. If the one is present, the other will be present also.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus*, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Idolatry – in Love**

Our God is a jealous God. As far as He is concerned, He considered the idols which the Israelites worshipped their lovers, and worse, their illegal husbands. Today, the presence of any idol inwardly or outwardly makes us who have been espoused to Christ guilty of committing spiritual fornication:

“Spiritual fornication is fully related to idol worship. We should love God, our unique Husband. But if we worship idols, we make these idols husbands to us. Hence, in principle, worshipping idols is the same as fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 16, Section 3, LSM)

“The northern kingdom of Israel became the apostate and committed spiritual fornication (adultery) with idols (vv. 6, 9). The idols were Israel’s evil lovers. Israel should have had only one husband, but instead she had many lovers, many idols.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Chapter 7, Section 1, LSM)

“Every idol is an illegal husband. The Lord is our unique God and our only husband. Apart from Him, we must not have any other. Rather, we should be a chaste virgin espoused to our one husband (2 Cor. 11:2). To love something in place of the Lord is to practice idolatry.” (W. Lee, *The Kernel of the Bible*, Chapter 10, Section 2, LSM)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Idolatry – in the Church’s Degradation**

The evil mixture of the two gross sins of idolatry and spiritual fornication marks the highlight of the history of degradation in the church that accepted the teaching of Balaam and the self-proclaimed prophetess Jezebel, which resulted in idolatry and fornication:

“The church in Thyatira committed the two greatest sins, idolatry and fornication. Man’s greatest sin before God is idolatry, and the greatest sin among men is fornication. These two gross sins both existed in the degraded church.” (W. Lee, *Three Aspects of the Church: Book 2*, Chapter 4, Section 3, LSM)

“In the degradation of the church, the church and government with its politics were improperly mixed. This was according to the teaching of Balaam (2:14). By this teaching the church was united with the world. This was spiritual fornication, and along with this there was also idol worship. We can trace this progress in the history of the church.” (W. Lee, *A General Sketch of the New Testament in the Light of Christ and the Church*, Part 4, Chapter 3, Section 1, LSM)

“The words concerning Jezebel here are very simple. It only mentions her as the one ‘who calls herself a prophetess.’ The result of such calling is to entice people to fornication and idolatry.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Set 1, Vol. 5, Chapter 1, Section 7, LSM)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Idolatry – in the Overcomers’ Rule**

The Lord is calling overcomers in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In stark contrast to degraded Christianity, the overcomers overcome the abomination of idol worship and fornication and all kinds of leaven in this age and will rule over the nations during the millennium:

“We all must overcome the abominations—the idols, the spiritual fornication, and all kinds of leaven. We must hold to what the Lord has shown us. Eventually, the overcomers will rule over the nations during the millennium.” (W. Lee, *The Kingdom, Chapter 46, Section 4, LSM*)

“In 2:17 [of Revelation] we have the Lord’s promise to the overcomers of this stage. To overcome here means specifically to overcome the church’s union with the world, the teaching of idolatry and fornication, and the teaching of the hierarchy.” (W. Lee, *Lesson Book, Level 5, Chapter 11, Section 4, LSM*)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Division – by Having Self-Interest**

God has His governing principle and ordination in His creation and in His church for the expression of the oneness of His Body. Division is caused by those who do not care for God’s governing principle and ordination but instead care only for their self-interest and self-exaltation under the principle of idol worship. Hence, division in its practical sense is spiritual fornication:

“Actually division is spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus, Chapter 174, Section 3, LSM*)

“Every division is a violation of God’s governing principle. To cause a division among Christians is to commit fornication. Anyone who does this does not care for the governing principle. Those who are divisive do not care for the one Body, the one church.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 51, Section 2, LSM*)

“Wherever there is division, there is spiritual fornication, idolatry, self-glorification, and self-exaltation. Without self-exaltation, there could be no division. Living the life of a God-man saves us from all these negative things. To live such a life is to live Christ (Phil. 1:21), the very model of the God-man life.” (W. Lee, *Living a Life According to the High Peak of God’s Revelation, Chapter 5, Section 3, LSM*)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Division – by Taking Another Name**

As the chaste virgin espoused to Christ, we should not have any name other than the Lord’s, who is our husband. To uplift a name or to take another person’s name besides that of Christ is abominable in the eyes of God because it is spiritual fornication:

“The recovered church belongs to the Lord absolutely, having nothing to do with any denominations (any names). To deviate from the Lord’s Word is apostasy, and to denominate the church with any name other than the Lord’s is spiritual fornication. The church as the chaste virgin espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2) should not have any name other than her husband’s.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Chapter 15, Section 3, LSM*)

“In the recovery the Lord’s name, Jesus Christ, is unique, without any replacement. The church in the Lord’s recovery does not take a name. We are simply the church.... The church should not be designated. If we designate the church, it becomes a denomination, a division. Denominations cut the Body of Christ into pieces. Any name of any denomination is a divisive and evil thing. We need to overcome the tide of denying the Lord’s name. To take another name besides that of Christ is abominable in the eyes of God because it is spiritual fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Overcomers, Chapter 5, Section 4, LSM*)

### **Spiritual Fornication Being Related to Heresy – by Receiving Heresy**

Heresy is related to division. The Bible reveals that the receiving of heresy in the church is a kind of spiritual fornication in itself:

*“In the matter of fornication, is the church behind the Israelites? The Bible clearly considers the receiving of heresy as a kind of spiritual fornication.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 1, Vol. 04, Chapter 5, Section 5, LSM*)*

### **The Need to Quarantine the Ones Who Commit the Intolerable Sins**

In one of his messages during an Elders Training, Brother Lee selected fifty-one cases in the New Testament, from Acts to Revelation, in which the genuine oneness of the Body and the one accord in the churches was tested for everyone to see the actual situation of the churches at the time of the apostles and to learn how to solve the problems as well as how to take care of them. One of them is the matter regarding quarantine. In his fellowship, division, heresies, and fornication are intolerable in the church and call for quarantining by the church and by the saints according to the apostles' teaching:

*“Among all the tests of the oneness of the Body and of the one accord of the church listed above, only three—divisions, heresies, and fornication—are intolerable and need a quarantine by the churches and the saints according to the apostles' teaching.” (W. Lee, *Elders' Training, Book 10, Chapter 5, Section 20, LSM*)*

### **ANALYSIS**

Man's greatest sin before God is idolatry, and his greatest sin among men is fornication. At the outset, idolatry and fornication are two different sins. However, there are many instances in the Bible where we see that fornication is linked to idolatry. In Numbers 25, when the Moabites induced the children of Israel to commit fornication, the Israelites fell into idolatry also. In 1 Kings 11:4, when Solomon committed fornication by taking hundreds of wives and concubines, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. Furthermore, in Revelation 2:20, the church in Thyatira was involved with both fornication and idolatry (Rev. 2:20). This is why Brother Lee called idolatry and fornication the two evil sisters that always go in a pair, for the two are so similar in nature and are fully related to each other. In various portions of the ministry, Brother Lee states that idolatry is spiritual fornication.

The word of the ministry has enunciated the meaning and significance of fornication as one that extends beyond the illicit physical relationship between two or more persons to its spiritual aspect, applying it not merely to one's relation with fellow men but with God as well. Fornication is a sin not just against man's physical body but also against Christ's mystical Body which is the church. Just as fornication in its physical realm primarily has its source from the lust in man's heart, spiritual fornication likewise finds its very root in the heart.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2 the apostle Paul said that we have been betrothed as pure virgins to Christ, to be the bride for the Bridegroom (John 3:29) and the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7). Our responsibility is to love Him and love only Him from our whole heart, from our whole soul, from our whole mind, and from our whole strength (Mark 12:30), taking Him as the unique center of our whole being. As lover of Christ, we should love and desire only Him, pursue after only Him, receive only Him, and allow only Him to impregnate us. We must not love any other person or thing, go after anything and receive anything from someone other than our Husband. If we turn away from Him to desire other things, leave Him to go after anything or anyone else, we are committing spiritual fornication. Our whole being must be for Him. Spiritual fornication is not using ourselves for Him but for things other than the Lord Himself.

We must underscore the fact that an idol is any substitute which man has for God. Anything that replaces God and possesses man is an idol. As chaste virgins espoused to our unique Husband, we should love God faithfully and single-heartedly. But if we worship idols, we make these idols our lovers, even husbands. Every idol is an illegal husband. We must not let anyone or anything be an idol to replace

God in our heart. To love something and allow it to take the place of our dear Husband is to commit fornication and to practice idolatry. Brother Lee emphasizes this matter with this succinct statement:

“Fornication actually denotes confusion. According to God’s holy ordination, a woman should have only one husband. To have more than one husband is to commit fornication, and this brings in confusion. Spiritual fornication is fully related to idol worship. We should love God, our unique Husband. But if we worship idols, we make these idols husbands to us. Hence, in principle, worshipping idols is the same as fornication.” (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 16, Section 3, LSM)

Moreover, for a woman to refuse to take her husband’s name but instead use her own name is similar to the idol-makers who hanker after exalting their own name rather than the Lord’s. Such is the case of denominating the church with any name other than the Lord’s. In the eyes of the Lord, this is spiritual fornication. This alludes in a way to the denominational system in Christianity. But the principle of denominating the church with names other than the Lord’s applies also to the uplifting of a division-maker’s name in the recovery, especially so if these ones repeatedly advertise and promote their works in order to gain a following to themselves. Brother Lee says that to do so is to commit spiritual fornication and idolatry:

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

Furthermore, Brother Lee propounded that if we seek our own glory, in principle we are committing spiritual fornication. For a sister to refuse to have her head covered is not only indicative of her insubordination to the authority of the Head which is Christ, but also of her desire to expose her head for her glory and fame. This is idolatry, which is an offense to the Head as well as division, which is an offense to the Body. This is the reason why the apostle Paul warned the Corinthian believers who had division among them to prove themselves and to discern the Body as they come together to break the bread (1 Cor. 11:28-29). Head covering is related to the Head (v. 3) and the breaking of bread is related to the Body (v. 29). One should not emphasize merely the practice of bread-breaking meeting while neglecting the principle of head-covering. Brother Lee elaborates on this matter:

“It is really marvelous that the apostle connects the matters of head covering and the breaking of bread. In the first half of 1 Corinthians 11 he teaches head covering, and in the second half he teaches the breaking of bread. When he teaches about head covering, he emphasizes the Head (Christ), and when he teaches about the breaking of bread, he emphasized the Body (the church). Thus, head covering and the breaking of bread are connected; they are the complete story of the Head and the Body. If we only emphasize the breaking of bread but neglect head covering, we emphasize the Body and neglect the Head. This is abnormal.... We cannot live in the Body without submitting to the Head, and we cannot receive the life of the Body without submitting to the authority of the Head. This is the reason that the apostle emphasizes both matters. Moreover, he speaks of head covering before discussing the breaking of bread, because the Head comes before the Body.” (W. Lee, *Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures*, Vol. 2, Chapter 3, Section 5, LSM)

Fornication is also a sin against the body. Fornication of the flesh is a sin against one’s own body, which is a member of Christ, but spiritual fornication is a sin against the Body of Christ itself. Physical fornication damages man’s physical body, whereas spiritual fornication destroys and divides the Body of Christ. Immediately after speaking concerning the believers’ coming together to the bread-breaking meeting, the apostle Paul cautioned about the need to discern the Body (1 Cor. 11:29) while partaking of the bread that signifies the Body of Christ in oneness. Concurring with the apostle Paul, Brother Lee stresses:

“With the degradation of the church, the matter of bread breaking became confused; therefore, the Holy Spirit in the Bible teaches us to have discernment concerning the breaking of bread.” (*W. Lee, Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, Vol. 2, Chapter 4, Section 7, LSM*)

We must be in submission under the authority to walk according to the order in the Body. Brother Watchman Nee likewise had the same teaching with Brother Lee with regard to discerning the Body. He stressed that we cannot be careless in the Body to make proposals lightly or overstep presumptuously:

“God has made definite arrangements and instituted order in the Body of Christ. We must be careful to discern the Body, as 1 Corinthians 11:29 charges us to do. We cannot be careless in the Body and make proposals lightly or overstep presumptuously. Every member must be in proper order and walk in an orderly way. Authority is ordained by the Lord; no one can be an authority in himself, and no one can elect others to be an authority. Authority comes from the Lord's arrangement and is for the Body life. We should be clear about our position in the Body and maintain our position. In the Body life, we all must walk according to the order in the Body.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Set 2, Vol. 44, Chapter 19, Section 2, LSM*)

Many “proposals” are made as a cloak to hide self-opinions and self-preferred teachings or practices, even as regards the bread-breaking meeting. They may include the way a Lord's table should be established, the manner to conduct the Lord's table meeting or even the place of the Lord's table meeting itself:

“In principle, we must do the same thing when we come to the church life. The choice of the place of worship is altogether the Lord's; it is not a matter of our preference. If we act according to our preference, we indulge our lust, for we satisfy our own desire regarding the place of worship. To behave in this way is to be like a woman who becomes involved with a man other than her husband. This is fornication. Just as a woman is limited to one man in marriage, so we are limited to the one place of God's choice as far as the corporate worship of God is concerned. We all must learn to fear the Lord our God. With respect to Christian meetings, we must fear God and do only what is according to His choice. God commands us to destroy all other worship centers and to go only to the place chosen by Him.” (*W. Lee, The Genuine Ground of Oneness, Chapter 4, Section 3, LSM*)

Indeed, to have our own preference for place of worship or bread-breaking meeting other than that which is arranged by the church under God's sovereignty is like a woman who becomes involved with a man other than her husband. Apparently, Brother Lee was referring to the Christians in the denominations not meeting in God-ordained unique ground of oneness; but the same principle applies to division-makers in the church who do not care for the oneness in the church. Brother Lee's word in another message confirms this:

“If we partake of such a divisive table without discernment, we participate in a division, which is condemned by the apostle (1 Cor. 11:29-30). Some who have recently left us to form divisions are taking the Lord's table. They have told people that they are simply a group meeting that is having the Lord's table. Should these group meetings be considered as proper and genuine meetings of the local churches? If a proper, genuine group meeting has the Lord's table, that table will be the table of a local church, with the bread as a symbol of the entire Body of Christ. That is a practice that keeps the oneness of the Body. Suppose, however, that we have a group of believers who originally were meeting with the church, but because of certain reasons, they left the church and keep themselves separate from the church, without having any fellowship with the church. Suppose, further, that these believers have what they call the Lord's table. Such a table immediately becomes a symbol of division, a symbol of a sect. Hence, 1 Corinthians 11:29 charges us to discern. When we partake of any bread on a table that is called the Lord's table, we must discern carefully whether that bread signifies the universal Body of Christ, without division, or not. If it does not, we should not partake of it. If we do not discern, and partake of such a

thing, this is condemned by the apostle, that is, by the Lord.” (*W. Lee, Elders' Training, Book 10, Chapter 7, Section 14, LSM*)

We come to the Lord's table for better and not for the worse (1 Cor. 11:17-18). Hence, each time we come to the bread-breaking meeting, we must discern the Body. We must see to it that the meeting is not a meeting on a divisive ground but on the ground of oneness of the church. Otherwise, it will not match the essential oneness of the Body which the bread on the table symbolizes. Brother Lee reiterates:

“According to verse 20, the coming together spoken of in verses 17 and 18 is the bread-breaking meeting. Some bread-breaking meetings were not for the better but for the worse because divisions existed among those attending the meeting. *First of all* refers to the main reason. When the believers meet together to break bread, they testify of the oneness of Christ's Body, the church. If those who meet together to break bread have divisions among themselves, or if a bread-breaking meeting is on a sectarian ground instead of the ground of the oneness of the church, the meeting will not match the essential oneness of the church, and it will damage the oneness of the church. Consequently, the attendants of such a meeting will come together for the worse and will suffer loss. Every time we attend a meeting to break bread, we must discern its ground to determine whether it is a meeting in division or in oneness. Is it a sect, or is it the church? We must discern whether the meeting has a divisive element or a sectarian factor lest we come together for the worse and suffer a loss.” (*W. Lee, Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, Vol. 2, Chapter 4, Section 7, LSM*)

At this point, it would be good to read what the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, “Let a man prove himself, and in this way let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body” (1 Cor. 11:28-29). Brother Lee continued by elaborating what “proving of ourselves” means and how it is important with respect to discerning the Body:

“Because there is the possibility of breaking bread in an unworthy manner and thus being guilty of the Lord's body and blood, we must take the responsibility to prove ourselves and to discern whenever we break bread. To prove is to examine the bread to see whether it is a bread of division, of a sectarian nature, or with a divisive element. Does the bread-breaking meeting treat the Lord's supper as a common thing? Does it respect the honorable significance of bread breaking? To prove is to examine the ground, nature, and element of the bread-breaking meeting; it is also to prove our own individual motive and condition in a self-examination. Are we personally divisive in the church? Do we have a sectarian element? Are we one with the brothers and sisters? .... To discern is to test the bread to see whether it refers both to the Lord's body given for us and to His mystical Body. Does it represent the Body of Christ—the church? Does it testify to the oneness of the church? Does it prove that ‘we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread’ (10:17)? Does it represent some sect or denomination, or does it represent the unique church? After we discern that the bread represents the Body of Christ and decide to break the bread, we must also prove ourselves to see whether we have any disagreement, dispute, or problem with any saint who is a member with us. Are we jealous; do we dislike or despise certain brothers and sisters? We must prove and discern. We must know that the bread is not a bread of division, that the meeting is not treating the Lord's supper as something common, that we ourselves are not divisive, that we are not in disagreement with the brothers and sisters, and that we are not taking the Lord's supper lightly and eating it loosely. We also must know that the bread represents the Body of Christ and testifies to the oneness of the church. Furthermore, we must see whether we have any problems or disaccord with any saint who is a member together with us. There cannot be any separation between members. Everything must be so clear before we eat the bread and drink the cup. If we are not in such a clear condition, we are guilty of the body of the Lord and of His blood, and we eat and drink judgment to ourselves.” (*W. Lee, Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, Vol. 2, Chapter 4, Section 7, LSM*)

In proving ourselves and in discerning the Body, Brother Lee points out that other than taking care of the place of worship, we need to take care of the spirit. We must check whether or not we are

partaking of the Lord's table with a divisive spirit, which is what the apostle Paul means by being "guilty of the Body" and partaking in an "unworthy manner," because partaking of the bread with a divisive spirit is not different from partaking of it on a divisive ground. There is no excuse or justification for a divisive spirit. Brother Lee gave this warning in numerous occasions. To cite a few:

"In discerning the Body of Christ, we should not partake of the bread in any division or with any divisive spirit." (W. Lee, *A Timely Word*, Chapter 1, Section 4, LSM)

"Paul's thought in using the expression 'the body' [1 Cor. 11:27] may include also the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4) in addition to the physical body of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24). Therefore, when we participate in the Lord's table, we must discern whether the bread on the table signifies the one Body of Christ or any division of man, any denomination. In discerning the Body of Christ we should not partake of the bread in any division or with a divisive spirit. Our participation in the Lord's table must be the unique fellowship of His unique Body without any division either in practice or in spirit." (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 2, Section 4, LSM)

"When we participate in the Lord's table, we must discern whether the bread on the table signifies the one Body of Christ or any division of man (any denomination). In discerning the Body of Christ, we should not partake of the bread in any division or with any divisive spirit." (W. Lee, *The Intrinsic View of the Body of Christ*, Chapter 6, Section 10, LSM)

"According to the human concept, it may seem insignificant to come to the Lord's table without discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29). Actually, it is extremely serious to come to the Lord's table with a divisive spirit and thereby fail to discern the body." (W. Lee, *Life-Study of 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude*, Chapter 38, Section 3, LSM)

Perhaps there may be some divisive ones who are opposed to the church arrangement regarding the Lord's table meeting for more saints to come together just like what we see in 1 Corinthians 11:20, but have insisted on meeting at home under a guise and subtle excuse for a divisive spirit. This divisive spirit is a source of spiritual fornication and division which Brother Lee exposes:

"[T]hey may say, 'We don't have the freedom to release ourselves in your meeting. We want to have a meeting in our home where we can be released.' This is merely a subtle excuse for a divisive spirit. This divisive spirit is a source of fornication, division. There must not be any divisions among Christians because we are the wife of one Husband, the one church in a locality, maintaining God's governing principle." (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation*, Chapter 51, Section 2, LSM)

It is important for us to realize that the Lord's table meeting is held not just for a group of individuals' remembrance of the Lord's laying down of His physical body to die for us, but a display of Christ's mystical Body, which is the very church as the expression of the Triune God. Brother Nee expounds:

"If we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, we eat and drink judgment to ourselves. When we partake of the Lord's table, we must discern the body. We have to consider what is being exhibited on the table. The bread on the table signifies not only the physical body of the Lord but also His mystical Body, the very unique Body of Christ as the expression of the Triune God. To partake of this bread is serious. We must discern the bread that we are going to break. It must be a figure of Christ's body broken on the cross for us, and it must be a figure of Christ's mystical Body, which is the very church as the expression of the Triune God." (W. Nee, *The Assembly Life*, Chapter 1, Section 10, LSM)

Inasmuch as the Lord's table meeting represents the oneness in expression of the Body, the church, the elders who are God's deputy authority and responsible ones in the church must be involved as regards the meeting itself. In the same section of the word concerning discerning the Body, Brother

Nee gave a serious warning about proceeding with the bread-breaking meeting in insubordination to the elders. This in actuality would result to the formation of denominations within the church; hence, a division which is a sin against the Body:

“They should first have responsible ones and then the bread-breaking meeting. They should first have elders and then deacons. This is the teaching in Acts. Antioch is one example. There should at least be one brother who can take responsibility before the bread-breaking meeting is initiated. Otherwise, the bread-breaking meeting will not be proper. Moreover, from the beginning there should be the teaching of submission to the elders and the teaching of submission one to another when the meeting starts. Otherwise, in a meeting of five people, the five will become five big denominations. When this happens, these five may still remember the Lord at the bread-breaking meeting, but they will not be able to discern the Body; they will not consider themselves the Body of Christ. They will care only for themselves and take only themselves as the head. Therefore, we should learn to submit to the elders and also learn to submit to one another.” (*W. Nee, The Assembly Life, Chapter 1, Section 10, LSM*)

It is possible that a person might come to the bread-breaking meeting to “remember the Lord” with a divisive spirit and have an “idol” in his heart. After speaking concerning discerning the Body, Brother Lee proceeds to talk about the misuse of God’s gift to man. The gift was originally given by God to man for the expression of Christ and for the building up of His Body. We should recall that the very principle of the golden-calf idol is man’s misuse of God’s gift for his own purpose of beautification and glory instead of God’s. No matter how good the gift is, if and when misused, it becomes a damaging and separating element, and a dividing factor in the church. Brother Lee’s clear speaking illustrates this:

“Verses 17-34 [of 1 Cor. 11] speak of the Lord’s supper. Why do we come together around the Lord’s table week after week? Is it simply to remember that the Lord died for us? That is too low and shallow. In verse 29 we are told that we need to discern the Body and that we eat and drink judgment to ourselves if we do not discern the Body. We who are many are one bread, one Body (10:17). When we participate in the Lord’s table, we must discern whether the bread on the table signifies the one Body of Christ. Thus, in the first part of 1 Corinthians 11 there is the Head, and in the last part there is the Body. All the gifts must be for the expression of Christ and the building up of the Body. Otherwise, the gifts become something that distracts the Lord’s people from the central line. No matter how good something is, we have to realize that as long as it is separated from Christ and the Body, it is something wrong and misused. Today even many divine things are misused through human handling so that what should be a help to the building up of the church becomes a damage, a separating element, and a dividing factor.” (*W. Lee, The Central Thought of God, Chapter 9, Section 2, LSM*)

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, the apostle Paul covered the matters of head-covering, bread-breaking meeting, and division all in one chapter. He gave importance to the matter of discerning the Body. We must build up the Body and not divide or damage it because the church is the very bridge which connects the age of grace to the coming kingdom. Brother Lee explains:

“It is a fact of history that the Body has been divided and paralyzed. Even at the time Paul wrote this Epistle, the expression of the Body in Corinth had been divided. This is the reason in chapter eleven he speaks of divisions and parties (vv. 18-19).... They had failed to discern the Body. They did not take care of the Body adequately. From this we must learn the need to take care of the Body, the church. Furthermore, the church bridges the gap between the Lord’s first coming and His second coming. This bridge is also a highway from Christ’s death to God’s kingdom. Without this bridge with the highway, there would be no way to go from one side of the gap, Christ’s death, to the other side, God’s kingdom. The unique connection is the church as the bridge. Therefore, we must discern the body. This means that we should never damage the bridge.” (*W. Lee, Life-Study of 1 Corinthians, Chapter 56, Section 4, LSM*)

Division causes damage to this bridge. Hence, for us to discern the Body in this way is to recognize that it is utterly distinct from anything divisive. We discern the Body in such a way for the

carrying out of God's administration in His eternal economy. We should never consider division an insignificant thing. Rather, we must take the Lord's table in a reverent way and in fear, lest we touch the Lord's Body in His administration without any discernment. Whenever we come before the Lord's table, we must prove ourselves by examining ourselves to ascertain that we are not divisive in order to have the peace and clear conscience to touch the Lord's Body. Brother Lee's words to us are very clear:

"Whenever we come to the Lord's table, we must discern the Body. In 1 Corinthians 11:29 the Body does not denote the Lord's physical body that was crucified on the cross, but His mystical Body. At the Lord's table the body has two aspects. One aspect denotes the Lord's physical body, and the other denotes the mystical Body of Christ. We all need to discern Christ's mystical Body. Whenever we touch the loaf at the Lord's table, we must realize that the loaf denotes this unique Body. Because the loaf denotes the mystical Body, there should be no divisions among us. If we are still involved in division, yet we partake of the loaf, it will not be a profit to us, but a loss. Every time we come to the Lord's table we must examine ourselves and ask, 'Am I divisive? If I am, I should refrain from partaking of the Lord's table. If I partake of the Lord's table when I am involved in something divisive, it will not be a profit to me. I will not come to the table for the better [profit], but for the worse [loss].' This is an extremely serious matter.

"Never consider division an insignificant thing. We must take the Lord's table in a reverent way and in fear, lest we touch the Lord's Body without discernment. We need to discern that what we are about to partake of is the unique Body of Christ. In this unique Body there must not be any division. If I am not involved in division, then I shall have the peace and a clear conscience to touch the Lord's Body. May this matter be made clear to all the churches."(W. Lee, *The Spirit and the Body, Chapter 20, Section 6, LSM*)

## CONCLUSION

This brings to a close our three-part study on "Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Heresy, Idolatry & Fornication." All these three sins are abominable in God's eyes; they are absolutely condemned and denounced by the Lord, and should not be tolerated by the church in any way. All these three have both the physical aspect as well as spiritual aspect that we should be careful of in dealing with them.

On heresy, we must be wary of the heresy of erroneous teaching and the heresy of division typified by the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans, respectively. The teaching of Balaam distracts the believers from the person of Christ to idolatry and from the enjoyment of Christ to spiritual fornication, whereas the teaching of the Nicolaitans destroys the function of believers as members of the Body of Christ, thus annulling the Lord's Body in expressing Him. The former teaching disregards the Head, and the latter destroys the Body. The Bible exhorts us that we must refuse and turn away from those heretical persons who are making divisions in the church (Titus 2:10, Rom. 16:17).

On idolatry and idol worship, we must shun any and all idols outside of us and inside our heart. Whoever and whatever matters or things—worldly or spiritual—that attract our heart, possess our heart, and replace God in our heart are idols. Our gifts and abilities as well as our works and activities may all become idols if they are exalted and extolled to substitute God's name and God's glory. Any special preference for a teaching or practice or insistence of these can also become our idol. We need to be careful with ourselves, especially of our successes, lest we make ourselves idols to draw followings after ourselves and create division in the church. The Bible warns us to guard ourselves from all idols and flee from idolatry (1 John 5:21, 1 Cor. 10:14) so that there may be no idols within us or in the church which would subsequently lead to division.

On fornication, we need to be extra cautious in our manner of life as fornication is not limited to its physical aspect of immorality. The sin of spiritual fornication particularly pertains to us who are espoused to Christ having desired, loved, and pursued any person, matter or thing aside from our unique Husband. Not submitting to the headship of our unique Husband and creating division in His Body is spiritual fornication, a most serious offense against the Head by damaging His Body. Taking a name

other than our Husband's name is yet another manifestation of spiritual fornication. All these are manifestations of self-interest, self-exaltation, and self-glorification, which are the essential factors in both idolatry and spiritual fornication; they are portentous of division in the church. The sin of spiritual fornication looms large not only in the denominations but also among the division-makers in the Lord's recovery. We must be careful not to commit spiritual fornication and sin against the Body by creating division in the Body and damaging it. Thus, it is predicated upon us that whenever we come before the Lord's table, we must firstly prove ourselves by examining whether or not we have a divisive spirit against the authority and other members of the Body. We must also discern the Body to determine whether the table represents the oneness of the Body or if it is a table of division. As the apostle Paul entreated us to flee from idolatry, he likewise exhorted us to flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18), which is a sin against the body both in the physical and spiritual realms. May the Lord grant us to be the real overcomers against all temptations of fornication in order that we would be preserved to have the chastity, peace and clear conscience each time we come to break bread until His return.

It is most fitting to conclude this series of articles with the word from the ministry concerning the spiritual aspect of heresy, division, idolatry, and fornication, which is applicable not only to Christianity in general but also to the church today:

“Look at today's situation in Christianity. There is division, confusion, fornication, and idolatry. The daughters of the great prostitute are those involved with these things. Those who are still in division and confusion and who commit fornication are part of the daughters of the prostitute. Our age is very dark. Under the light we see things clearly, but in the darkness nothing at all can be seen. Most Christians today are in darkness. Because they are in darkness, they can be involved with division, confusion, and fornication without having any consciousness of it. Their senses have been drugged. They commit fornication without any awareness of what they are actually doing. How desperately they need to be enlightened. Today the Lord is speaking. Through His speaking, He shines upon us. In these days we all are under His enlightening. After reading this message, you will not be able to say that you are not clear about division, confusion, fornication, and idolatry.” (W. Lee, *The Kernel of the Bible, Chapter 10, Section 2, LSM*)

*(Sept. 11, 2011)*