

C. Witness Lee

And the Local Church

"The Local Church" teachings go astray on many major points, placing them in the class of cults or false prophets. A cult is a group claiming to have the truth, but who teach biblical error and erroneous personal revelations. Four general ways to recognize a cult are:

1. Deviation from one or more major Christian foundations such as the Trinity, divinity of Jesus, the bodily resurrection, Second Coming, authority of the Bible, salvation through Jesus alone.
2. Personal revelations from the group's leaders are considered equal to or superseding the Bible.
3. The basic cultist belief, "We are the only ones right with God and if you don't join our group you're lost."
4. Cults commonly twist Scriptures and take them out of context to support their uniqueness.

"One Church, One City"

The Local Church is founded on the teachings of Witness Lee. Quotations throughout this article are taken from Witness Lee's book, *The Practical Expression of the Church*.

The Local Church teaches "One city should only have one church, one local church," (pg. 26). They teach the Local Church is God's eternal purpose. "We are chosen, redeemed, saved and regenerated not for heaven, but for the church. The church is God's goal."

Witness Lee, their leader and founder, believes the true church has been lost since the first century and they are now the manifestations of the true and proper church for today.

God's "Church" Of The Day

Witness Lee holds they are the proper expression of the Body of Christ today. He totally disagrees with all previous established Christian ministries and churches. He believes everyone else is for division and Babylon and his group is the only rightful church. "Until there is a local church in your locality, you can never have the proper expression of the Body," (pg. 32). "Do not try to be neutral. Do not try to reconcile the denominations with the local church. You can never reconcile them" (pg. 92).

The Local Church group also believes they are the only ones who are right with God and everyone else is wrong. Witness Lee states: "We need to have our eyes opened for if we have not seen the local church, we are in darkness, and

under a blindfold" (pg. 31). "If we drop it (the revelation of the local church) we simply have no way to go on as a Christian. The only way to follow the Lord absolutely is to go the way of the local church" (pg. 94).

The Church Is Jesus?

Witness Lee has the audacity to say The Church, his Church, is Jesus. "Therefore the church must be Christ. When we say that the local church is the house of God, we must realize that this house must be Christ" (pg. 20). The Bible teaches all true Christians are the house or temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). Each believer is a temple. Jesus is not the house of God, Jesus is God!

Confusion On The Trinity

The Local Church also has warped views on the Trinity and the Second Coming of Jesus. Witness Lee stated, "Even the three persons of the Godhead are for the divine purpose of having a church to fulfill God's eternal plan" (pg. 8); "Everything is for the church and everything is because of the church" (pg. 9); "God, creation, and man are all for the church" (pg. 10). Keep in mind when Lee says "church," he means his organization, "The Local Church." This is a most illogical statement since in essence he is saying the only reason for both God's and mankind's existence is for himself and his group.

Witness Lee heavily implies that no longer is God three-in-one but four-in-one. What's added? The Local Church. "This is the oneness of the church. It is nothing but the Triune God realized in the Spirit. Thus, the oneness of the church is the unity of the Spirit. The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is now in the Body. They are now four in one: the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body" (pg. 43).

In 1 John 5:7 the Bible says, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (KJV). Nowhere is the church mentioned as being one with the Triune God. The church, as the Body, is simply all believers in Jesus Christ. The church is not some mystical missing fourth part of the Trinity.

The Second Coming Teaching

Witness Lee also teaches "The Local Church" is necessary for the Lord's return. "If the Lord were to come back today, there would be no ground on which He could stand in the earth. But if a small number of the Lord's people were to be prepared ... and built up as a local expression here and there, the Lord will have the ground He needs," (pg. 186). Again on page 186 he refers to "The Local Church" as a "small number of seeking ones or the overcomers," and "their standing will be sufficient to bring the Lord back."

Witness Lee also believes only this small, seeking group of overcomers who have raised up The Local Church will be raptured with Jesus when He comes. Nowhere in the Word can you find Scripture saying Jesus can't return until there is a local church. In fact, Jesus Himself is not in control of the day nor the hour; only the Father has this information (Mark 13:32).

In answer to Lee's doctrine on only a select few being raptured, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 makes it clear all believers dead and alive shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord. First Thessalonians 5:9 makes it clear God has not destined His children for wrath (the Great Tribulation) but whether we be awake or asleep we will go to live with Him.

Pray-Reading: The Best Way?

Another unscriptural teaching is The Local Church's pray-reading. Witness Lee says about pray-reading: "The best way to have our spirits released is to pray-read the Word. This is because pray-reading the Word exercises our spirit and does not give us time to use our mind" (pg. 144).

"Pray-reading" is quickly reading short phrases of the Bible using a different phrase each time accompanied with "amen," "hallelujah" and "O Lord Jesus." In accordance with "The Local Church" practices, Scriptures are divided into individual and double word groupings and rearranged in such a way as to render them meaningless. Pray-reading is executed as a group with all voices joining in with crescendos. Actually it is very much like Eastern chanting. The participants receive a "high" equal to that felt by Eastern religious chanters with their "oms" and "ramas." A Christian does not receive spiritual edification from a passive mind. Instead he opens himself up for attack by letting his spiritual armor down. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Jesus taught in Matthew 6:7, "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do" (RSV).

In Colossians 3:16 we are instructed to: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (RSV).

How To Deal With False Prophets

No matter how nice The Local Church people seem, nor how convincing their story is, at the center of The Local Church's foundation is a man and his organization, not Jesus. The Bible teaches: "No man can lay another foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians. 3:11, KJV).

Even though many members of The Local Church have had a born-again experience they preach another "gospel." The Bible tells us:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of God and turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. (Galations. 1:6-8, RSV)

The Word also instructs us not to fellowship with people in false doctrine and to count them as an unbeliever.

I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. (Romans 16:17, RSV)

Believers have the responsibility of judging one another to see if they be in the faith. (1 Corinthians 5:6, 7, 12)

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