

QUOTES FROM A LETTER BY WATCHMAN NEE

The following quotes were taken from chapter six of the book, *Back to the Cross*(1). This chapter, entitled "A Reply to the Brethren Assembly in London," is a letter that was written in 1935 by Watchman Nee and his co-workers. There is a lengthy explanation at the beginning of the chapter on the background to this letter. In summary, it says that the letter was written to show what Watchman Nee and the brothers with him in the Far East believed about fellowship and why they could not join themselves with the Exclusive Brethren. They said that it was their hope in writing this letter "that Christians everywhere will not conceive our fellowship to be one comprised of those who have left the sects, but that instead they may know from this document that what we strongly maintain is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."

The Scriptures plainly show us that the basis of our receiving one another is "even as Christ also received you" (Rom. 15.7). The reason why we receive anyone is because "God hath received him" (Rom. 14.3). Hence the command of God to us is: "him that is weak in faith receive ye" (Rom. 14.1). This command is explicit, distinctive and irrevocable. It is a sin to refuse acceptance of him whom God has received, however weak or lacking in light he may be (110, paragraph 4).

Who among any of us is really worthy to undertake this work of selection--this act of determining who is fit for fellowship? From what we learn in the Bible, our responsibility is to judge only on moral corruption (I Cor. 5.10-13) or on heresy regarding the Person of Christ (2 John). Difference in interpretation of truth alone must not be the ground of division.

Thus we receive all whom God has received for the sake of Christ.

...We need to distinguish the "sin," be it moral or doctrinal, that would or would not hinder fellowship with God. We know for sure that sins such as fornication and not believing that Jesus came in the flesh would block fellowship. But sins such as "denominational connection" and apparent errors of interpretation on prophecy do not cut off fellowship with God. This fact you cannot deny: that many who have not yet departed from what you call "evil association" and who, moreover, differ with you in prophetic views have most intimate fellowship with the Lord, even more intimate than we have. This clearly indicates that the so-called "evil association" and "evil doctrine" are not the sins which hinder fellowship. This also proves that he who stands on the correct ground of the Church and truth may not himself necessarily possess a close contact with the Lord. There is one thing far more essential than external ground and mental acceptance of truth, and that is to live in the Holy Spirit and give no ground to the flesh. This is of the greatest importance.

The fellowship of God's children is in the fellowship of God's Son. It is also in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Whoever lives in the Holy Spirit has fellowship. The flesh has absolutely no place in the Holy Spirit. ...Actually the act of receiving or not does not really bring one into or exclude one from the fellowship of Christ. The fact of the matter is: if he is truly in fellowship he is in fellowship, or if he is not truly in fellowship he is therefore not in fellowship. Appearance is of little value here; reality alone counts. *The Holy Spirit alone knows who is not rebellious to His authority, does not grieve Him, and who lives in Christ through Him. And hence, the Holy Spirit alone can decide who may or may not have fellowship. We are not qualified to make such a decision* [emphasis mine] (111, paragraphs 2-4, 112, paragraph. 1).

We are doubtful about your current way of reception. We wonder if this is a practice truly handled by the Holy Spirit or is simply a method received by men? Our basic question on this is whether it is men who are conducting this matter or whether it is the Holy Spirit who is exercising His authority?

...Some may question the safety of receiving people on the basis of their being Christians alone and leaving the responsibility of the partaking of the loaf* entirely to themselves. Let us be reminded that

Christian fellowship is too spiritual a matter to rely upon the protection of human hands. Furthermore, if we are truly spiritual and not mental in our approach, we shall see the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit manifested in power and authority. But if we have only mental, and not experiential, knowledge of the Holy Spirit, confusion will be the natural consequence.

Do we not rely on the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit in meetings? We give Him boundless position in exercising His sovereignty to choose any vessel He prefers to use, without any human arrangement. Why, then, can we not also trust the Holy Spirit to keep the purity of fellowship at the Lord's Table by His constraining or restraining the saints in the breaking of the bread? If we give ground to the Holy Spirit in exercising His sovereignty, we do not need any man-invented method of exclusive reception as a substitute (113, paragraph 3--114, paragraph 2)

....No matter how we seek to know His will, we can never be His substitute. We must let the Holy Spirit do whatever He wills. Let us be clear as to whether it is the Holy Spirit who is now exercising His authority or whether we ourselves are trying to guard this fellowship.

...The reason for the lack of life in the assemblies today lies just here: the human hand has substituted itself for the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. This, however, was not so in the preceding century. Judging by what we have heard and read, the assemblies in the former days had more life and power. Nor was there present in those earlier days the way of receiving as is known today. For then the Holy Spirit was the sole guide in both works and fellowship. It was due to the failure of men (as in the case of the Bethesda Chapel in Bristol*) that human hands began to control this matter of receiving. (115, paragraphs 1, 2).

The danger of human selection lies in either extending fellowship to the undeserved or refusing fellowship to the deserved. Have not these things happened in your midst? Such difficulties will be avoided among us all if we allow the Holy Spirit to make the choice and willingly step aside ourselves by trusting wholly in Him.

...This perhaps will conflict with your concept of right and wrong. For according to your view you consider many of God's children to be "wrong," and therefore you will not receive them. Nevertheless we need to learn to respect the Holy Spirit in a meeting. If He will supply and encourage them, even use them, we should do likewise. If the Holy Spirit can forbear certain things, why can we not? In any case, the fact of the matter is that many of God's children who differ with your system and whom you judge as unfit for fellowship are walking with God and maintaining sweet fellowship with the Lord. Does not this clearly indicate to us that fellowship is based on spiritual life and cessation of all fleshly works?

Some may oppose this because of the lack of external uniformity. We should be reminded that the flesh cannot endure outward irregularity. For it delights in orderly appearance. Rigid uniformity (law) is a thing of the flesh. In the New Testament there are letter and law just as in the Old Testament. It is only when we live in spiritual reality and understand all truths in life and not in the mind that we will pay more attention to spiritual reality than to outward appearance.

....the Lord cares little about external regularity during the time of ruin (117, paragraph 2--118, paragraph 2).

....Moreover, in the earthly days of Christ, we witness a group of people who possessed external exactness; yet Christ deliberately set aside these outward matters in order to lay stress on the more important ones. We believe that in today's apostasy the Lord is leading His people to see the value of spiritual things more than the exactness of outward appearances. (119, paragraph 1).

Do you realize that you too incur the danger of losing the living waters of the initial blessing and being left with a meeting system just as has happened in the other movements? You too will become a sect if you make external exactness the basis of fellowship instead of maintaining fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

....We all need to see that the orthodoxy of fellowship is decided not by seniority, nor by "scripturalness," but by the full sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

In order to unify interpretations and practices, you tend to divide God's children. Even the most spiritual among them will be divided into separate groups (120, paragraphs 1, 2, 3).

...Beloved, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is too spiritual a matter for us to guard, because it is indeed beyond our ability. We can only keep our fellowship from wicked ones. The Holy Spirit alone is able to preserve His fellowship. The human hand is totally useless in this matter of keeping the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Unless the Holy Spirit reigns in our lives we shall not enjoy the light and smile of the glorious face of our Lord, no matter how careful we are in outward things. We readily consent to the fact that in a locality where the Holy Spirit does not rule, the moment man's hand withdraws, chaos begins (121, paragraphs 2, 3).

(1) Watchman Nee, Back to the Cross, (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1988) Chapter 6.