

Subject: A reconsideration about my signature on the 1986 elders' letter to Brother Lee

June 29th, 2007

To whom this may concern among the brothers and sisters in the Lord:

On the Internet in recent days a discussion has arisen concerning the perceived inconsistency of the stand of the brothers from the Mid-west. That alleged "inconsistency" relates to the current stand of a number of Midwest local churches and Great Lakes brothers ("GLA Brothers") viz-a-vi LSM's "Blended Brothers" and their past position related to Brother Witness Lee. One specific point offered as "evidence" of this alleged "inconsistency" is the inclusion of signatures of brothers from the Mid-West on a February 21st, 1986 letter¹ addressed to brother Witness Lee ("Letter").

While I believe the alleged inconsistency to be based on *non sequitur* reasoning, the allegation did cause me to reread the Letter along with Brother Lee's reply. Based on that re-examination, I arrived at the conclusions elaborated below.

Before proceeding, let me emphasize that this letter expresses my own personal convictions and I do not presume to speak for other GLA Brothers, nor the brothers with whom I currently serve in Toronto. However, I do know that some of the GLA Brothers also have regrets about their signature being on the Letter.

I am presently an elder of the community of Christians meeting as the Church in Toronto whose primary meeting place is located at 671 Sheppard Avenue East. In 1986 I was one of the 419 brothers who signed the Letter addressed to Brother Lee, endorsing his leadership.

Hind sight is 20/20. We are now more than 20 years further along in our journey with the Lord. In addition, 10 years have elapsed since Brother Lee went to be with the Lord. We now have the benefit of 20 years history to evaluate the results of that 1986 Letter endorsing Brother Lee's leadership. Given what I now know and what I have subsequently learned during this 20-year-plus period of time **I wish to state that my signing of the Letter at that time, though done with the right heart, was ill-conceived. Were it possible, today, I would remove my signature. Since that is not possible, as a second-best alternative I am writing this letter of retraction.** There are many reasons for this decision but the more important ones I have listed below:

- In 1986 I had been functioning as an elder less than 1 year. As a 'novice' elder I attended the special 1986 Elders' Training in Anaheim CA. It was during that training that this Letter was composed, circulated and the attendees' signatures were solicited. Although I did read the contents of the Letter (at least once), to some extent the contextual peer pressure and imposed time constraints were factors in my decision to sign the Letter. (There were 419 signatures out of a potential 425 who attended the elders' training).
- The 1986 Elders' Training was not conducted in a vacuum; neither was the elders' Letter composed in a void. Brother Lee was concerned about certain situations in the Lord's recovery, situations of which I and many other attendees were unaware. He addressed some embryonic trends he thought he perceived. Unfortunately Brother

Lee did not address those events or persons directly and specifically in his elders' training messages. Consequently, many brothers (including myself) interpreted his sharing subjectively as applying to ourselves. In retrospect, it seems that was not what Brother Lee intended. Nevertheless these factors "coloured" our understanding and response to Brother Lee's messages, including the elders' Letter to Brother Lee.

- I am not aware that Brother Lee solicited or expected any Letter of support from the elders. I now have good reason to believe that Brother Benson Phillips (perhaps along with others) engineered the drafting of the Letter and orchestrated the ground swell of support to obtain the signatures as a way of currying favour with Brother Lee and the LSM Ministry Office. In retrospect, it seems like I (and many others) were perhaps being used as "pawns" in the efforts of others to gain influence and advance their own strategic advantage in the recovery.
- As a 'rookie' elder I was unable to see the potential pitfalls that were contained within the text of the Letter. Brother Lee with the wisdom shown in his response² was well aware of and warned of these potential pitfalls.
- Also as a 'greenhorn' elder I was unaware that certain terms used in the Letter to Brother Lee such as 'repudiate all differences among the churches' and 'the church in our place be identical with all the local churches' could be and would be later misapplied by the Blended Brothers. For example, based upon this Letter of endorsement for Brother Lee's leadership, the churches were subsequently strongly encouraged to adopt the "one publication" policy and the uniform use of HWMR. This was in spite of Brother Lee's warning to avoid misapplying terms used in the Letter.
- The Letter contains certain caveats, like 'avoiding leadership as much as possible'. However, it appears that, when it is expedient to the Blended Brothers, their recent actions are the very opposite of the thought contained in 'avoiding leadership as much as possible'. Thus we have subsequently heard teachings regarding a higher authority than the elders emanating from the Blended Brothers on the LSM podium. For example, in the July 2006 issue of the Ministry magazine on pages 212 through 213 we read the following words spoken by brother Ron Kangas: "An elder's local authority pales in comparison to the authority of the Head expressed through His representatives in the Body." In my view, this looks more like a self-serving asserting of authority, rather than practicing the commitment to 'avoiding leadership as much as possible' (contained in the 1986 Letter).
- The Letter contains the declaration that "all the preceding points are the clear and definite teaching of the Bible." In retrospect this caveat has not been applied to the Letter's contents as stringently as it should. We affirm that "The Bible is our unique standard" for both teaching and practice in our individual Christian life and the corporate church-life. Hence all the statements contained in the Letter should have been interpreted, qualified and applied in the light of Scripture. In recent years, on the contrary, the tendency fostered by the Blended Brothers has been to take selected portions of Witness Lee's teachings and make them the *de facto* standard for the local churches in the recovery. We thus hear of practices that Brother Lee endorsed such as PSRP elevated to the extent that it is alleged to be 'the only way to teach the saints.' This type of claim is made even though such a term (PSRP) or practice is not clearly shown in the Scriptures.

- The positive results we hoped would be achieved such as "leading the saints to preach the gospel in **every possible way**" have not come about. In fact, initiatives such as alternate ways of carrying a gospel burden have been strongly attacked by the presumed engineer of the Letter and by many other signatories of the Letter.
- The 1986 Letter recognized the leadership position to Brother Lee in 'the work' and 'the ministry'. This recognition was based on the realization that Brother Lee had brought the recovery to North America mainly through his rich ministering of the Word. This leadership position was subsequently appropriated by the Blended Brothers when Brother Lee departed in 1997. This appropriation, to my view, was not supported by their own rich ministry. Rather, they sought to elevate Brother Lee's status and in doing so implicitly preserve their leadership role through their association with Brother Lee. Neither I nor most of the elders who signed in 1986 could have foreseen the subsequent development of an elite group of brothers who view themselves as the only legitimate "continuation" of Brother Lee's ministry. That possibility was surely not contemplated by me or by the vast majority of signatories in 1986. Yet, that Letter opened the door for these (and other related) developments in the subsequent 20-plus years.

In Brother Lee's April 11th, 1986 response to this Letter, he evidently foresaw the potential pitfalls of the term "one with the ministry" used in the Letter. Hence in Brother Lee's response he included the following :

Its proper definition is not to follow any man, any doctrine or any movement, but is to be one with the Lord's move today according to the Lord's vision, without any intrinsic element of exalting any person or promoting any work. [*W. Lee's Reply*², middle of second paragraph]

In 1986 the term 'one with the ministry' was a new item in the vocabulary of the recovery. Since that time, and especially since Brother Lee's passing, being 'one with the ministry' has been emphasized *ad nauseum* by the Blended Brothers. This has occurred in spite of the fact that this phrase does not appear in the New Testament! Moreover, under the Blended Brothers' teaching, the importance of being 'one with the ministry' has been enhanced by other non-biblical terms like, the unique "Minister of the Age," and the "one wise master-builder who is the acting God." I have asked myself, "Over the past decade, since Brother Lee's passing, what is the fruit of the Blended Brothers' leadership?" Today, sorry to say, I believe those claiming to closely follow Brother Lee's ministry, rather than avoiding this pitfall, have fallen headlong into it, along with the saints they are leading. This realization has been my impetus for no longer considering the unquestioning acceptance of the Blended Brothers' teaching as "good for building up" and for my making this public declaration.

For my part, by the Lord's mercy, the recent turmoils have caused me (as well as others with whom I serve) to re-consider how to properly relate to the riches Brother Lee left us. One clear conclusion is that we must go directly to Brother Lee's writings rather than rely on a second-hand, selective, presentation of them by the Blended Brothers. Moreover, we should learn how to selectively receive his ministry with discernment lest we fall into the error of making it a *de facto* 'Third Testament'. Furthermore, Brother Lee's writings ought to be understood, evaluated and tempered by the Scriptures as our unique standard, rather than forcing the Scriptures to fit the mold of Brother Lee's writings. I believe the Blended Brothers' uncompromising insistence on the infallibility of every

word, phrase and statement of Brother Lee (when selected and interpreted by them) discredits and spoils the riches left to us in our brother's ministry.

I continue to pray that I can join with the many saints that, in purity and simplicity, are seeking the Lord's will and leading so that the glorious church can be produced as His bride and testimony to the whole universe.

Your brother in Christ
Steve Pritchard
Toronto, Canada

Note 1 - Letter to Brother Lee

February 21, 1986
Anaheim, California

Dear Brother Lee,

After hearing your fellowship in this elders' training, we all agree to have a new start in the Lord's recovery. For this, we all agree to be in one accord and to carry out this new move of the Lord solely through prayer, the Spirit, and the Word. We further agree to practice the recovery one in: teaching, practice, thinking, speaking, essence, appearance, and expression.

We repudiate all differences among the churches, and all indifference toward the ministry, the ministry office, and the other churches. We agree that the church in our place be identical with all the local churches throughout the earth.

We also agree to follow your leading as the one who has brought us God's New Testament economy and has led us into its practice. We agree that this leading is indispensable to our oneness and acknowledge the one trumpet in the Lord's ministry and the one wise master builder among us.

We further agree to practice the church life in our locality absolutely in a new way: to build the church in, through, and based upon home meetings; to lead every member to get used to functioning without any idea to depend on any giant speakers; to teach all the saints to know the basic truths in an educational way that they may teach others for the spreading of the truth; to build up the saints in the growth in life that they may minister life to others, shepherd each other, and take care of the backsliding ones; to lead all the saints to preach the gospel in every possible way; to avoid leadership as much as possible; and to have home gatherings for nurturing the saints in life and big meetings for educating the saints in truths.

We agree that all the preceding points are the clear and definite teaching of the Bible according to God's New Testament economy.

Finally, we agree that the success of this new move is our responsibility and will rise up to labor and endeavor with our whole being, looking to the Lord for His mercy and grace that we would be faithful to the end.

Your brothers for the Lord's recovery

Note 2 - Brother Lee's Response

April 11, 1986

The Brothers attending the February 1986
Elders' Training

Dear Brothers:

Thank you for your letter dated February 21, 1986 with the list of signatures. I feel very sorry that I could not have time to acknowledge, with appreciation, what you have expressed in your letter and through your signatures until now.

Being one with the ministry is a crucial matter, and its effects are exceedingly serious. Its proper definition is not to follow any man, any doctrine or any movement, but is to be one with the Lord's move today according to the Lord's vision, without any intrinsic element of exalting any person or promoting any work. May the Lord be merciful and gracious to us, that this action would not be misunderstood or misapplied by anyone in a way that would give the enemy Satan ground for utilization, thus frustrating the Lord's move today, but rather that this action could be properly used by the Lord to swallow up all the germs of discord which have been existing, even among us, for quite a time in the past. May the Lord remember your kind wishes for me and bless your labors in Him.

Your brother in Christ,
Witness Lee