

**CONCERNING THE TEACHING OF
A UNIQUE WISE MASTER BUILDER OF THE AGE**

BY

Sergei Kuznetsov

(Submitted for posting on February 6, 2006)

Today in the local churches the teaching of Brother Lee being the unique wise master builder in this age is highly promoted. Brother Lee is claimed to be the unique minister for this age, possessing the plan for the building up of the church. There is also an implication that to be one with the wise master builder the saints today must be one with the group of brothers who call themselves “blended coworkers”. So to speak, the oneness with the blended brothers is considered as indispensable for the one accord in the churches. In fact, this teaching rather brings the discord and confusion into the churches. That’s why we have to examine this teaching in the light of the Word. Discord in itself is not always unhealthy. If we stand with the truth and contend for the faith, then we should not be afraid of possible discord with some saints. The truth is the truth, we should never compromise the truth. But if we hold an unbiblical teaching, and thus cause discord, then we are in trouble. Then we are real destroyers of God’s building. Then we will have to answer to the Lord.

I am very much concerned that there is much talk today that even scriptural teachings can bring death. And then we are given some unbiblical teachings that supposedly bring life. In this way the criterion is not anymore scriptural vs. unscriptural, but life vs. death. I disagree! That notion is very dangerous. It places our subjective feelings above the Word of God. Every single teaching should be examined by the Word of God. If something is not scriptural, we should never insist upon it (in fact we should even drop it), no matter how beneficial it may appear to us. Of course, we should apply the truth with and in the divine life, but that is another matter. Our first criterion is whether the teaching is scriptural or not. If the teaching is unscriptural, but we insist upon it, claiming that it brings life, then we are really on a sandy ground.

Hence, we have to turn to the Word and examine the present teaching concerning wise master builder. There is only one place in the Scriptures where Paul identifies himself this way.

According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it. (1 Cor. 3:10)

To understand Paul’s thought here we need to consider the whole context. If we read the whole chapter, we will see that Paul’s purpose here is **not to promote his ministry, but to turn Corinthians from men to God**. We see that in Corinth the believers were forming parties around some of the prominent ministers of the Word, like Paul, Peter and

Apollos. They were promoting some ministries. Suppose the situation in Corinth existed among us today, whom would we support? According to the present understanding among the churches, those who supported Paul should have been right. In their eyes, Corinthians supported “the ministry of the age”. But that was not Paul’s attitude. He did not promote his ministry as the “ministry of the age.” His thought was that all the ministers have their portion, but these ministers are nothing, but God is everything (v. 7). Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth (v. 6). Furthermore, Paul claims that to promote certain ministers is to destroy the temple of God and to build with wood, grass and stubble (v. 12-17). That is what we witness today. The promotion of Brother Lee’s ministry among us has very much destroyed the building of God. Whenever we promote a ministry, we turn the eyes of the saints away from Christ. The purpose of any genuine ministry is to bring us to Christ, to betroth us to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), but never to replace Christ. Whenever a ministry (even a genuine ministry) begins to replace Christ and becomes an issue among the saints, the headship of Christ is marred and God has to interfere. That’s what happened with the ministry of John the Baptist. His ministry was to introduce Christ. But then his ministry became an issue, and even replaced Christ. Therefore, God had to come in and terminate this ministry.

Now let’s come back to Paul as a wise master builder. What did Paul mean? Who is a wise master builder? What is his function? The verse quoted above provides the explanation. A wise master builder is the one who lays the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. To lay the foundation is to plant, that is to preach the gospel (v. 6). Apostle Paul was the one who first brought the gospel to the Corinthians. Then he gathered the believers together to be the Church in Corinth, taught them the truth and gave them a pattern. Therefore, he was a wise master builder to them. Paul laid a foundation for the local church in Corinth. Was he the only master builder in his age? Definitely not. Let’s turn to Rom. 15:19-20:

...I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, but have done so aspiring to announce the gospel not where Christ has been named, so that I would not build upon another’s foundation...

Here we see that to lay the foundation is to announce the gospel where Christ has not been named. And it is obvious from here that Paul was not the only one doing that. There were other ministers, who also laid the foundation, who planted, who preached the gospel where Christ has not been named. Other servants of the Lord laid the foundation of Christ in other places, raising up local churches in other towns and cities. Surely according to the context of 1 Cor. 3 and Romans 15, to “lay a foundation” as a wise master-builder was to raise up a local church. It is “local,” not “global.”

Hence, to teach that in every age there is only one global master builder is totally unscriptural. Therefore, such a teaching should be dropped. With all due respect to Brother Lee, he was not the only wise master builder in this age. To state otherwise and to insist upon such a teaching is to cause a gross division in the Body of Christ. Let us give heed to the words of Paul: **“So let no one boast in men”** (v. 21). Only Christ is the factor of our oneness. To say that Brother Lee’s ministry is indispensable for our oneness

is an insult to Christ. No minister of the Word can and should be the factor of our oneness. The oneness based upon any minister of the Word is exclusive. That is not the oneness of the Spirit. I am sure that those “of Apollos” were one among themselves, and so were those of Peter and those of Paul. But that kind of exclusive oneness was destroying the temple of God. Our oneness should be based on Christ alone, and this oneness should be inclusive. (Those “of Christ” in Corinth were also exclusive, they used the name of Christ to separate themselves from others, rather than receive them as “God received them”).

The context of 1 Cor. 3 and Romans 15 clearly shows that “a wise master-builder” lays the foundation of a local Church, then it follows that there are many “master builders.” If a brother is the first to take the gospel to a place, preach the gospel, get people saved and form them into a genuine local church, then he is the “wise master-builder” of the local church in that city or town. Any other servant of the Lord who comes to work there should respect the “foundation” which has been already laid in that place and “build upon it” with the divinely-approved materials (gold, silver and precious stones). If another minister rejects the foundation of Christ, already laid and forms another “local church,” he is causing confusion. Hence, brother Nee advised saints, when arriving in a new city, to investigate whether the Lord had already raised up a local church independently of them. If so, they should join in. We should not assume that the Lord carries out His recovery work “only through us.” We have no monopoly for the Lord’s work.

If the “wise master-builder” in 1 Cor. 3 is in the context of the local church, is there any place in Scripture for a “wise master-builder” in a “global” or “universal sense”? Is there a “wise master-builder of the universal Church”? Ephesians 2 tells us that the Church is built upon the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). This should be the revelation given by God to the apostles and prophets and ministered to the Church. Paul, Peter, John and the other apostles received divine revelations and ministered them to the saints. Their revelations and riches have come to us in the form of the New Testament writings, the gospels, epistles and Revelation. The canon of Scripture was completed by the New Testament writers (Rev 22:18) – the “apostles’ teaching” in the New Testament is the “foundation” of the universal Church. Since that time every Bible teacher, Scriptural expositor and minister “builds upon that foundation.” Hence, it seems to me that if there is a “global or universal master-builder” it is a “corporate” builder composed of all the New Testament writers with their revelations. Since the New Testament is complete, today no one can be the “universal wise master-builder” to lay that foundation again. If we claim to lay “another foundation,” besides the unique foundation contained in the New Testament, then we risk being like Joseph Smith (of the Mormons) who produced a “third testament” – the Book of Mormon.

One more thing should be addressed here. Some say that if Peter and Apollos had been really one with Paul, then there would have been no divisions in Corinth. In this way, a shadow is cast upon the ministries of Peter and Apollos. Does this mean that Peter and Apollos were not one with the ministry of the age? To my mind, that is preposterous. Should I think that if those saints, who speak such nonsense, had lived in Paul’s time,

they would have rebuked Peter for not being one with Paul? I am sure Paul would be the first one to severely **rebuke them**. If the responsibility for the divisions in Corinth lay with Peter and Apollos, Paul should have written the Epistle to Peter and Apollos, correcting them. Furthermore, Paul himself gave the reason for the divisiveness of Corinthians. They were fleshly, not spiritual; they were infants in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). The divisiveness is a sign of immaturity. If we promote men, that is a sign of immaturity. So let us grow in life. Let us drop childish boasting in men. Let us exalt Christ alone. Let us give Him the preeminence. Let us give Him all the glory.