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## Watchman Nee: The Master of Mix-Up The Parable of the Chocolate Rabbit

by G. Richard Fisher

Many of us remember getting a chocolate rabbit for Easter and discovering that it was only a shell — not solid. People experience the same kind of letdown from some religious icons. The accolades, promotions, and testimonials for these icons have been overdone. Sometimes the promotion has been a tool to sell books. Sometimes the teachers' words and presentations are shown to be aberrational or heretical. And sometimes those who biblically scrutinize these teachings are accused of attacking good men.

Immature or undiscerning Christians often focus on the shell and never deal with what is — or isn't — inside. So the "Christian" marketing machine goes on pushing illusion with little substance. Some hollow items are even touted as "Christian Classics." The shell of mock spirituality hides the lack of content or the corrupt content. We are being sold empty accounts of religious folk heroes inside a shell of religious cliches.

### WATCHMAN WHO?

Author Dana Roberts, writing on Watchman Nee, observes that Nee's



books, *"The Latent Power of the Soul and The Spiritual Man*, teach us a gnostic psychoanalysis."<sup>1</sup>

Many Christians have heard of Watchman Nee. His book, *Sit, Walk and Stand* appears to be a nice presentation of Ephesians. At one time, the prevailing view was that Watchman Nee was a martyr for the faith, something like a twentieth-century Stephen, for being killed in a Chinese prison. That fact alone makes some think he was.

In 1984, Warren Wiersbe said, "I don't doubt that Watchman Nee may have had some weaknesses in some areas. I fear that all of us have them whether we recognize them or not. I do realize, however, that Watchman Nee was one of the giants of the faith."<sup>2</sup>

However, there are weaknesses and there are *weaknesses*. Weaknesses in critical areas can cripple. The word *weakness* can be used to gloss over serious problems or rationalize the  
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Tsvika Tsuk, "Bringing Water to Sepphoris," July-August 2000, pp. 34-41; and Zeev Weiss, "The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," September-October 2000, pp. 48-61, 70.

23. See further, Sandy Brenner, "Spending Your Way Through Jewish History," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June 2003, pp. 46-51; and *Herod King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*, op. cit., pp. 203-215. Also the art museum at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California, makes available two different sets of "Museum Replicas - Coins of the Bible."

24. For more information on these cities, see Rami Arav, "Bethsaida Revealed," *Eretz* magazine, March-April 1999, pp. 54-58; also Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997, pg. 304.

25. *The Stones Cry Out*, op. cit., pp. 305-306.

26. See further, Zvi Greenhut, "Burial Cave of the Caiaphas Family," and Ronny Reich, "Caiaphas Name Inscribed on Bone Boxes," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1992, pp. 28-44, 76.

27. "History, Archaeology, and Jesus," op. cit., pg. 22.

28. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987, pg. 200.

29. Jack Finnegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 240-250.

30. Jean Gilman, "Jerusalem Burial Caves Reveal Names, Testimonies of First Christians," *Jerusalem Christian Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, pp. 1, 7.

31. Jean Gilman, "Priestly Artifact, Cross Marks Discovered in Tomb of Lazarus, Martha, Mary," *Jerusalem Christian Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 8, pp. 1, 7.

32. Said K. Aburish, *Children of Bethany*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

33. Kenneth Holum, editor, *King Herod's Dream, Caesarea on the Sea*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988, pp. 109-110.

34. *The Stones Cry Out*, op. cit., pp. 307-308.

35. See further, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, op. cit., pp. 27-32.

36. See further, Adolf Deissmann, *Light From The Ancient East*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978, pp. 270-271.

37. *The Holy Temple Revisited*, op. cit.,

pg. 16.

38. *The Stones Cry Out*, op. cit., pg. 192. See also, Linden D. Kirby, *Footprints in the Holy Land*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House Publishers, 1998, pg. 77-80.

39. See further, Shelley Wachsmann, "The Galilee Boat — 2,000-Year-Old Hull Recovered Intact;" David Adan-Bayewitz, "Dating the Pottery from the Galilee Boat Excavation;" and Israel Carmi, "How Old Is the Galilee Boat?," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1988, pp. 18-33.

40. Mendel Nun, "Cast Your Net Upon the Waters," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 1993, pp. 46-56, 70.

41. "History, Archaeology, and Jesus," op. cit., pg. 27.

42. *The Stones Cry Out*, op. cit., pp. 308-311.

43. See, "A Death in Jerusalem," *Time* magazine, January 18, 1971, pp. 64-65.

44. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, pp. 86-87.

45. Alan Millard, *Discoveries From The Time Of Jesus*. Oxford, England: Lion Book, 1990, pg. 133.

46. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965, Vol. 2, pg. 469.

## WATCHMAN NEE

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endorsement of a questionable teacher.

### NOT ALL THAT GLITTERS

Not all the reviews in 1984 were as glowing as Wiersbe's. A report came from mainland China that churches there had split and joined Nee's assembly, believing that his was the one way to please God. Many in China did not see him as "one of the giants of the faith," but as sectarian and rigid.

The report stated that Nee's early endeavors seemed like a real work of God:

"Later however, he sees pride coming in, with strong denunciation of denominational churches, and an unhealthy authoritarianism."<sup>3</sup>

Along the way, this writer began to notice that people who were really enamored with Nee's teachings were very pushy and insistent that his was

the last word on everything. Followers asked others questions simply to see how their answers stacked up against Nee's teachings. These people also seemed off-balance and tended toward a mystical and elitist position. But it was brushed aside and reckoned as a few unbalanced people who took Nee's writings too far or were off-center.

Further research into Nee's teachings brought a surprise. This led to a brief article, "Watching Out For Watchman Nee," which appeared in PFO's newsletter nearly two decades ago. Since then, the influence of Nee's teachings has grown. A deeper and broader look at this religious icon and presumed hero of the faith seemed necessary. No one wants to be overly critical of a giant with a few flaws unless the classification of giant itself is flawed.

### A CUT ABOVE

Avid Nee followers are the poorest advertisements for his teachings. Their mentality can be cultlike. Judging Nee leaves one in the position of

being judged by his followers as judgmental. Ardent Nee disciples often display one or more of the following characteristics:

1. They often assume that everything — including the Bible — is judged by Nee's writings. They appear to be unaware that they are quoting what Nee *said* the Bible says. This mind set may not characterize all Nee devotees, but it is prevalent in many. Those who disagree with Nee may be considered sub-spiritual and a dwarf challenging a giant. Whole churches have been summarily judged with Nee's teachings as the ultimate test.

2. When clear statements by Nee point toward error or even heresy, Nee's followers tell those who express doubt that they misunderstand Nee. Pressing for a clearer interpretation is futile.

3. Nee's followers say his writings had to be translated from Chinese and therefore may not be precisely rendered in English. If this is true, then no one can know for sure what he wrote.

Nee's books come to us from a number of sources, which include the books he himself wrote, his articles and editorials from his magazines, and English and Mandarin shorthand taken during his lectures. These writings reflect his chronological transition and developing views from a handful of teachers who introduced him to their extremes, which then became Nee's new emphasis. Very little of his work can be considered biblical exposition.

Because the books are sold as Nee's writings and there are no disclaimers, sidenotes, or corrective and critical apparatus, we have only these translations to go on. Errors of doctrine cannot be blamed on editors or publishers because Nee's doctrinal blemishes are repeated in different books and establish a pattern of questionable teaching.

4. There is further confusion with Nee's followers because Nee, like nearly every other mystic, confused illumination with revelation. General revelation is God showing Himself in creation. Special revelation is God communicating directly with prophets, apostles, through angels, and finally in and through Jesus Christ. It is information given directly by God that could be known in no other way. By inspiration the special revelation was recorded in the Bible for all generations.

Now as the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible, He gives believers *illumination* of the text. Because Nee called illumination "revelation," his followers are misled and misleading as they talk of their latest revelations. That confusion is taught by Nee in his book, *The Ministry of God's Word*:

"By revelation we mean that today God again breathes on His word, the Holy Spirit imparts light to me; the anointing of the Holy Spirit is upon this word so that once again I see what Paul saw in his day."<sup>4</sup>

Technically, Nee did not have or offer a systematic theology. His teachings are scattered through nearly 100 books, which makes it difficult to

arrange and systematize his views. Living Stream Ministry has collected and published *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee* in 62 volumes, which includes previously untranslated and unpublished material.

### NEE'S HISTORY

Watchman Nee was a collector of religious ideas who tried to build a consistent system out of a hodgepodge of theological extremes and distinctives. He ended up with a patchwork quilt of the prevailing ideas of the early twentieth century, based on the ideas of four diverse teachers. Nee borrowed extensively and uncritically, but gave the appearance of having unique insight into spiritual things.

Capitalizing on Luke 12:32, he called his movement the "Little Flock." It was formed in Fujian in the early 1920s.<sup>5</sup> The Little Flock Movement disrupted and divided churches in China.

Nee believed that early Church truth had been lost and needed to be recovered. He saw some of the recovery occurring through the mystics of the Middle Ages. A historical sketch, provided by one researcher, reveals:

"*The Lord's Recovery* began when the Lord raised up Martin Luther and the reformers, and continued in recovering lost biblical truths through others such as Madame Guyon, Father Fenelon, Brother Lawrence, Count Zinzendorf, the Moravian Brethren, John Darby, the Brethren, Watchman Nee, and today with Brother Witness Lee. Doctrinal conflicts arose between Lee and other leaders and members of the existing movement. Controversy brought about a split of the movement."<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Nee opened himself up to mystical and Gnostic strains. Nee mixed and merged things from the Reformed camp, mystical thought, dispensational ideas, and Roman Catholicism. Nee seemed to come up with very few original ideas while pushing these borrowed ideas with intemperate language. One of those

fringe ideas has been denounced by Dave Hunt. In an analysis of Nee's 1933 book, *The Latent Power of the Soul*, Hunt writes:

"Its basic premise (much like Benny Hinn's teaching) is that Adam was a superman with abilities at least 'a million times' greater than ours (p. 15) and 'possessed [of] a hidden ability which made it possible for him to become like God. He was already like him in outward appearance."<sup>7</sup>

These kinds of statements by Nee may seem inconsequential and even silly to some, but it is dangerous to speak of Adam as being like God outwardly and inwardly without, at the very least, careful explanation and qualifiers. Adam, in many ways, was really as unlike God as anything could be. But there is more going on with Nee than just a few ill-stated religious ideas about Adam. We must go back to his formation in his early days.

Pentecostals, Holiness groups, and even evangelicals appeal to Nee. Regrettably, someone as prestigious and orthodox as Adrian Rogers, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote his latest book, *Kingdom Authority*, claiming he first learned the principles for his new book from Nee's *Spiritual Authority*. Rogers floated the oft-reported idea that Nee "was imprisoned for his faith for 20 years."<sup>8</sup> Some have gone so far as to describe Nee's writings as "new light" for "end-time ministry."<sup>9</sup>

In 1980, Dana Roberts' book *Understanding Watchman Nee* was published by Haven Press, a division of Logos International. It was the first definitive work on Nee and his writings. However, because Haven Press was a small company that eventually ceased publishing, Roberts' book fell into obscurity. Though Roberts was not completely critical of Nee at every point, he was objective and brutally honest where he had to be.

Roberts gives the details of Nee's birth and naming by his mother:

"...Ho-P'ing promised that if the Lord gave her a boy, she would



return him back for His service. On November 4, 1903, in Swatow, a male child, Nee Shu-Tsu, was born. His name means 'he who proclaims his ancestors' merits.' Years later, after the boy's mission in life became more evident, she proposed a new name, To-Sheng, 'the sound of a gong.' The name would remind both mother and son that he would be a 'bell ringer' (or Watchman) who would raise the people of God for service."<sup>10</sup>

Nee was molded in his early days by the teachings and ideas of three influential women. He attended the Bible school of Miss Dora Yu, where he became dissatisfied with his Christian life and growth. Yu encouraged him to submit to the tutelage of Miss M.E. Barber, a Keswick higher-life teacher.<sup>11</sup> With Barber's help, Nee experienced what he called the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and followed Barber's victorious life principles.<sup>12</sup>

Through Barber's encouragement, Nee's mind was profoundly shaped and influenced by the mystical and demon-obsessed Jessie Penn-Lewis. Penn-Lewis divided soul and spirit so radically that she ended up dominated by psychic-warfare struggles that took her out of the realm of reality. She became the basis for the formulations of Nee's anthropological struggles and convoluted sanctification ideas. Penn-Lewis believed and taught that Christians could be indwelt by demons.<sup>13</sup> Nee adopted this unbiblical teaching as well.<sup>14</sup>

Barber also introduced Nee to the theory of a partial Rapture. This view, still held by many Pentecostals, assigns carnal and unsanctified believers to a kind of Protestant purgatory in which they suffer the horrors of the tribulation to be purged and made more ready for the Kingdom. This teaching came from the bookshelves of Barber through the writings of Robert Govett. Govett's *The Apocalypse Expounded* especially influenced Nee. Nee taught two levels of Christians: overcomers and "Christians living in sin according to works who must be refined through a limited period of punishment."<sup>15</sup> Nee's carnal/spiritual

division of Christians carried over into his prophetic views.

### CHURCH OR CHURCHES?

Nee's ideas on ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) came almost entirely from the collected writings of J. Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. Like the early Brethren, Nee was quick to point out "the sin of denominations."<sup>16</sup> Yet, despite his contempt, many denominations love him. Many Plymouth Brethren today do fellowship across denominational lines. Darby's strong reaction to both the Anglican denomination and Roman Catholicism caused him to use intemperate, sweeping generalizations regarding all churches.

So it is clear that Nee's formation took place in the seedbed of Brethren and Keswick teachings, though he took notice of other teachers of that day. Nee took some of the current strains of current Keswick teaching a few steps further because he often decided things by way of inner promptings and leadings and by what he determined subjectively was God's way. His well-known statement was: "God's way for us is not known by external indications but by internal registrations."<sup>17</sup> It is apparent that Nee got stuck in the theory and theology of the mid-to-late 1800s. He is in every way a product of his time and his writings are a mirror of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In 1935, Nee came under the influence and instruction of a Pentecostal named Elizabeth Fischbacher, who introduced him to speaking in tongues. Though Nee never spoke in tongues, he did not regard the practice as unbiblical. In some writings, he did warn about false tongues or tongues out of the human psyche or soul power.

### MARTYR OR MANAGER?

The question of whether Nee was a martyr for the faith has to be raised. Early in Nee's leadership over the "Little Flock," he exhibited a humble lifestyle as he and his church disassociated from business and commerce. Nee opposed a salary and any system of wealth demonstrated in so many

Catholic and Protestant denominations and missions.<sup>18</sup> Nee thought church workers could do outside work only in special circumstances, but saw trusting God as the ideal method of support and income.

However, something changed as one report points out that "Nee [became] involved in [a] pharmaceutical company and is criticized for withdrawing from full time Christian work."<sup>19</sup> Nee left full-time ministry for a number of years.

One can speculate about all the reasons that Nee decided in 1942 to accept an invitation to work in the administration of his brother George's chemical factory. The commercial trade problems of China at that time, along with diminishing finances, had to play a large part.

Eventually, as the factory was in effect turned over to the church and staffed by the members of the Little Flock, the communist authorities became angered at the commercialism. One source says, "Nee was later successful in business, but turned his successes over to his church."<sup>20</sup>

During this time, Nee changed many of his principles and earlier teachings. This led to disaffection with people vying for work-related status.<sup>21</sup>

Mao Tse-tung declared and established the People's Republic of China on Oct. 1, 1949, and Nee and his factory-owning Flock were seen as imperialists and people of wealth who had to be confronted and stopped. On April 10, 1952, Nee was arrested, jailed, and charged with corruption. So, technically, he went to jail, not for the Gospel, but for being a business owner and having some wealth. His biographers say he tried at the last minute to disassociate the assemblies from business, but it was too late.

Another brief biography confirms this scenario:

"This business venture caused him much suffering because his fellow workers misunderstood his intentions; this resulted in Nee's withdrawal from active ministry for several years. Later

it provided an excuse for his arrest by the Communists."<sup>22</sup>

Nee's biographer, Angus Kinnear, fills in the details of the arrest:

"In his fiftieth year he was arrested in Manchuria by the Department of Public Safety on 10 April 1952, and at his first inquiry, either at Harbin or in Peking, he was charged as a lawless capitalist 'tiger' who had committed all the five crimes specified in the *Wu-Fan* campaign against corrupt business practices. He was warned that the Sheng Hua Company would be required to pay a fine of 17,200 million yuan in old currency (equivalent to 1½ million U.S. dollars). He neither accepted this unfair accusation, nor did he have the funds to pay such a fine. So he remained in prison, and the Company was in due course confiscated by the State."<sup>23</sup>

It could be argued that Nee eventually would have been arrested anyway because he was a Christian leader, but no one knows for sure. Kinnear also documents that many of the Little Flock defected and joined the Three Self Movement, a pro-State Political/Religious organization.<sup>24</sup> Later suppression by the Government shrunk the numbers of the Little Flock even more. By 1967, after Nee had served 15 years, all churches were closed.

The Three Self Movement was committed to control by the State, financial dependence on the State, and propagation of the various party lines of the State.<sup>25</sup>

No one would suggest that prison life is less than austere and rigorous, but contrary to all the reports of extreme suffering, mutilation, or torture, Roberts relates that while in jail, "Nee was given a sufficient diet to serve the state as a translator of English chemical journals."<sup>26</sup> Kinnear reports that when suffering from coronary problems, he was relieved of manual labor and proper drugs were purchased from a pharmacy and given to him.<sup>27</sup> On June 1, 1972, at the age of 68, Nee died.<sup>28</sup>

## NEE'S HERESIES

With such reverence to Nee by his devotees, a charge of heresy brings a familiar hostility. Therefore, proper recognition of the use of *heresy* is in order. This article uses heresy in its normally defined and normally understood way. The Greek word *haire-sis* is defined as:

"denotes (a) choosing, choice, (from *haireomai*, to choose); then, that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects."<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that Nee in many places chose to stray from the clear teachings of Scripture and imposed his opinions and artificial interpretations on certain Bible portions, leading to an elitism and sectarianism among his followers. Nee himself warned that "History is strewn with innumerable cases of sanctified saints who propagated heresies!"<sup>30</sup>

Nee taught that spiritual growth, or sanctification, is reduced to an agonizing internal struggle between soul and spirit. Scripture is clear that our struggle is a battle on three fronts: the world, the flesh and the devil. Nee mistakenly created a sharp dichotomy between soul and spirit. This false division permeates most of his writings.

The internal struggle is against our sin nature, our baser drives and sinful desires. That in itself is difficult enough without getting tangled up in a theoretical and mystical campaign to separate the soul from the spirit. Nee's dichotomy was artificial. Biblically speaking, those two words can be interchangeable.<sup>31</sup> Nee promoted the concept that the soul is always the evil part that we must reject. However, this is likewise unbiblical. David spoke of God restoring his soul in Psalm 23:3; of his soul thirsting and hoping for God in Psalm 42:2, 5; and of God's comforts delighting his soul in Psalm 94:19. Nee's view was really more in league with metaphysics,

rather than good exegesis. Jesus spoke of loving God with "all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Nee fabricated the concept of a spirit trapped in the soul, having to break free.

## ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND

Nee did not see sanctification as practical character change in accordance with the Word and motivated by grace and the Holy Spirit as much as subjective scraping of one's insides while struggling to understand "brokenness" and "the release of the spirit." Nee states that "revival, zeal, pleading and activity are but a waste of time."<sup>32</sup> To be of help or blessing to anyone else there must be "brokenness," Nee said. Somehow the spirit must break through the soul and body in some significant way.

Brokenness is not just repentance or being broken by sin. Neither is it the expected sufferings that drive us to our knees throughout life. It is not just the hard experiences we face. How does one, to use Nee's depiction, "break our alabaster box"?<sup>33</sup> Nee proposed that it must be the destruction of "our opinions, our ways, our cleverness, our self-love, our all."<sup>34</sup> Our cleverness and self-love may be a problem for us and should be dealt with biblically, but to have no opinion and to question all our ways — even good ones — could reduce one to an introspective muddle.

Ronald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs express their objection:

"Nee's stress on not putting confidence in one's own ideas is excellent, but it seems to us he goes beyond this, in suggesting that doctrine and its exposition are not helpful even if they seem to be helpful. He is, we suggest, bound to reach such a conclusion because his view of the self is so negative and because he sees the Holy Spirit working only in the spirit, not into the whole of the believer's experience."<sup>35</sup>

Nee offered a crisis prayer of consecration for "our brokenness,"<sup>36</sup> but that is just a beginning. Later he took

that back when he wrote, "It is according to His law of accomplishing a brokenness and release in us; all our praying will not alter this law."<sup>37</sup> Nee turned clearly mystical and said that brokenness can come through direct revelation by soliciting: "May He truly reveal to us what is meant by the destroying of the outward man."<sup>38</sup> Nee went on to say that we cannot serve effectively without this brokenness. Still later, his formula seemed to be that "God wants to divide our spirit and soul. ... How rare it is these days to find a pure spirit."<sup>39</sup> This is just a small sampling of how obscure, metaphysical, and confusing Nee could be.

In the end, brokenness seems to be an experience of unmediated, undisturbed communion with God. Nee's somewhat gnostic formula is:

"THE OUTWARD MAN IS BROKEN THROUGH THE DISCIPLINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT; IT IS DIVIDED FROM THE INWARD MAN BY THE REVELATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."<sup>40</sup>

### HOUSE OF CARDS

Nee based his entire anthropological/psychological view of man on his misuse of Hebrews 4:12, which states: "For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Nee's book, *The Release of the Spirit*, is based on his misunderstanding of the Hebrews' passage as he stated:

"...that the ability to use our spirit depends upon the two fold work of God: the breaking of the outward man and the dividing of spirit and soul, i.e., the separating of our inward man from the outward. Only after God has carried out both of these processes in our lives are we able to exercise our spirit."<sup>41</sup>

Note his words, "the dividing of spirit and soul," after which he references Hebrews 4:12. Nee went on to say that "our spirit and our soul are

divided" and then has God saying that His Word "is able to divide the soul and spirit."<sup>42</sup>

Nee read the verse as if it means that God divides *two* things, *soul* from *spirit* and *joints* from *marrow*. Herein was his crucial mistake. His premise, upon examination, falls apart since there is no marrow in joints, but there is in bones. What Nee missed is the plain meaning of the word "and." Hebrews 4:12 uses *four* separate things to declare what God can divide. He can divide a soul as well as a spirit, and joints as well as marrow. The point being that God can divide what no human sword can ever divide no matter how sharp. God's Word is sharper than the sharpest sword on earth and can slice into areas of our inner being that nothing else could.

F.F. Bruce was a Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester. He said that the dividing of both soul and spirit and both joints and marrow:

"...are to be understood as a 'rhetorical accumulation of terms to express the whole mental nature of man on all its sides'; so A.B. Davidson, who further points out that since 'the idea of dividing the soul and spirit suggests the division of a body into its members, hence joints and marrow are attributed to them, expressing the subtle articulations of the spiritual being and the innermost nature and substance of it'. It would indeed be precarious to draw any conclusions from these words about our author's psychology, nor is it necessary to understand them in the sense of the Pauline distinction between soul and spirit. That the word of God probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light is what is meant; we may compare Paul's language about the coming day when the Lord 'will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts' (I Cor. 4:5). It is not surprising, accordingly, that a judicial function is

here attributed to the word of God. It is 'discriminative of the heart's thoughts and intents.'<sup>43</sup>

The focus of Hebrews 4:12 is not the psychology of man, but the power of the Word. Jerry Vines concurs:

"The Bible *explores* our lives... It penetrates to the depths of our experiences. The Word of God reaches areas no human being is able to see. It gets under our skins. The Bible divides soul and spirit. That means it *examines* our lives. ... Other people see what we do, but God's Word examines why we do what we do. It deals not only with our thoughts, but also with the intents behind the thoughts. ... The Bible also *exposes* our lives."<sup>44</sup>

Jay Adams believes that people are misled at times because of slight inaccuracies in the King James Version and he states:

"The point is not that the soul is *divided from* spirit, or joint *from* marrow. Rather, what is said is that God's Word splits the spirit and also the soul, the joints and also the marrow. Many who misunderstand have always wondered why the joints are to be divided from the marrow when they are not in close contiguity. The word *between* has been imported into our thinking about the passage... The true idea is that God's Word penetrates deeply enough into man's innermost being to cut open and lay bare his desires and thoughts."<sup>45</sup>

Dana Roberts homes in on the real issue with Nee:

"The local churches had invested him with the job of metaphysician, and, using the historic tools of the 'inspired' Scripture in conjunction with personal revelation, Nee felt confident enough in the position to propose a practical metaphysical map of the soul and the spirit."<sup>46</sup>

At the very least Nee was unclear, contradictory, and misleading. Brokenness teaching is an example of the mystical and fuzzy extremes that mark Nee's teachings throughout.



One can easily make that judgment, even at the expense of being evaluated as unspiritual by Nee's followers.

## REVELATION

Perhaps even Nee realized that his readers were mentally exhausted by his verbal gymnastics when he wrote:

"...it is extremely difficult to explain this matter of dividing the natural from the spiritual, the outward from the inward. Only as there is revelation, is the problem solved. Whenever you are enabled to discern the thoughts and intents of your heart, you can be sure your soul and spirit are being divided."<sup>47</sup>

In the end, it is something supernaturally revealed and discovered within the believer. Just as with Mormonism, it is an inner assurance. The rub is if we are not quite sure what it is, we cannot be sure that we have it.

## BECOMING LORD JESUS

Another troubling aspect of Nee's teaching is his view of Jesus. He is off the mark in so many ways with regard to the person of Christ. A defective Christology is no small matter. From the days of the early Church there were struggles because of attacks regarding who Jesus is, as well as His work on earth. One writer suggests that the question of who Jesus is happens to be hugely important:

"This is the most important question that any person will ever face. The deepest joys we will ever know in this life and our very hope of eternal life depend on the proper answer to that question. Because this is true, we may be sure that the primary activity of Satan will be to obscure as much as possible the true nature of the person of our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus."<sup>48</sup>

Heresy hardly ever begins as a quick U-turn, but rather as a slight curving away. Nee taught clearly that Jesus was not always inherently Lord. Lordship was something that Christ had to gain or earn. Nee stated it this way:

"As regards the Godhead, the Son and the Father are co-equal; but His being the Lord is rewarded Him by God. The Lord Jesus Christ was made Lord only after He emptied Himself. His deity derives from who He is, for His being God is His inherent nature. His being Lord, though, issues out of what He has done. He was exalted and rewarded by God to be Lord only after He forsook His glory and maintained the perfect role of obedience. As regards Himself, He is God; as regards reward, He is Lord. His Lordship did not exist originally in the Godhead."<sup>49</sup>

This is a shocking paragraph. Nee said Christ had to work for His Lordship. He suggested that something was added to the Godhead that was not already there. This undermines Christ's eternal Lordship, and the doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of God. Lordship comes from the Greek word *kurios* and signifies power and authority (as an adjective) and can be translated as Master, owner, and Lord (as a noun). It is the equivalent (when used of Jesus) of the Old Testament names Yahweh and Adonai. The Lord Jesus did not have to wait until after He was exalted to become Lord, but was addressed as Lord all through His earthly ministry. Though its full significance was only realized after the resurrection (Acts 2:36), He was called Lord at birth (Luke 2:11), and even in His pre-incarnate existence (Psalm 110:1). Jesus Himself affirmed that even David called the Messiah his Lord (Matthew 22:42-45). The Messiah was both son of David and Lord of David.

Nee missed the fact that we cannot ever disconnect Christ's deity from His Lordship. Jesus is eternal deity. Therefore He must be eternal Lord, as one writer affirms:

"Jesus Christ, therefore, is Lord to Christians in the same sense that Jehovah was Lord to the Hebrews. The usage referred to is altogether peculiar; no man — not Moses, nor Abraham, nor David, nor any of the prophets or Apostles, is ever thus prevail-

ingly addressed or invoked as Lord. We have but one Lord; and Jesus Christ is Lord. ... Every believer knows in what sense he calls Jesus Lord... He knows that it is from the New Testament he has been taught to worship Christ in calling him Lord."<sup>50</sup>

To say that Jesus was lacking something, or that He became something He was not already, or that the Godhead had something added to it along the way, is a total distortion. Probably not realizing it, Nee put forth a form of open theism (or finite godism). If followers of Nee want to argue for Nee's position and accept a limited and diminished Christ or even a developing Christ, that is up to them. Clinging to Nee and his teachings gives one no choice.

The exact nature of the union of Christ's deity and humanity pushes us into a study in which we must walk a fine line. Helpful biblical explanations and guidelines can be found in most systematic theologies or in books like *Thiessen's Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*.<sup>51</sup>

Though no one can give a precise psychological analysis or detailed explanation of the personality of Christ and the union of His two natures in one person, there are things in Scripture that are evident or may be inferred that keep us from the mistakes being made by Nee. Hebrews 13:8 is clear: "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever." He was fully Lord in the past, is Lord in the present, and will ever remain Lord in the future.

Nee then promoted an incredible scenario by suggesting that Jesus could have ascended to heaven devoid of His glory:

"He braved the possible peril of not being able to return with glory. Should He have become disobedient on earth as a man, He would have still been able to reclaim His place in the Godhead by asserting His original authority; but if so, He would have forever broken down the principle of obedience."<sup>52</sup>

It is hard to understand why Nee did not understand that a “disobedient” Jesus would have been a sinner. A sinner could not be a Savior.

Even worse is the use of the words “reclaim His place in the Godhead.” Here Nee argued for the possibility of a time when Jesus would be excluded from the Godhead, thereby again diminishing His deity and the very expressed nature of the Trinity. It seems that Nee had “glory” confused with “Lordship” and “Godhead” and was using “glory” as if it were the other words. “Glory,” which is *doxa* in Greek, is used of “honor,” at times of God’s nature or acts as exhibited in the person and work of Christ, and of the power of God. It is even used of the believer’s future.<sup>53</sup>

It is hard to understand how Nee was even using the word glory, let alone propose that Christ might have returned to heaven without it. John 17:4, 5, and 22 speak against Nee’s idea of Jesus Christ minus His glory. Vine informs us that “When *doxazo* is predicated of Christ..., it means that His innate glory is brought to light, is made manifest.”<sup>54</sup> Christ’s glory being innate could never be forfeited or taken away, but either manifested or not manifested.

John MacArthur emphasizes why we could not even suggest that Christ would be divested of glory:

“Believing God means we acknowledge His glory, which is the sum of all His attributes and the fullness of all His majesty.”<sup>55</sup>

### COULD JESUS HAVE SINNED?

The other issue raised is the question of whether Jesus could sin or be disobedient.

Respected theologians insist that Jesus was impeccable — that He could not have sinned:

“Christ’s deity overruled any susceptibility to sin that may have been in the human nature. Christ’s deity made it impossible for Him to sin as a person. Thus, as a person, Jesus Christ was not susceptible to sinning. ... The very fact that God’s sovereign

decrees are *certain* to be fulfilled required the impossibility of Christ’s sinning.”<sup>56</sup>

The late John F. Walvoord concluded:

“In the person of Christ, however, the human will was always subservient to the divine will and could never act independently. Inasmuch as all agree that the divine will of God could not sin, this quality then becomes the quality of the person and Christ becomes impeccable. ... The concept of peccability in the person of Christ is contradicted principally by the attributes of immutability, omnipotence and omniscience. The fact of the immutability of Christ is the first determining factor of His impeccability.”<sup>57</sup>

Professor of Systematic Theology, Bruce Demarest, summarized:

“In some mysterious way the divine nature of the God-man shielded His human nature against the possibility of sin.”<sup>58</sup>

Some may argue, “What does it matter anyway since Jesus didn’t sin and everything worked according to God’s plan and purpose in the end?” What matters is that if we take that approach to the Bible, it demonstrates a carelessness in how we handle truth. A metamorphosed biography of Jesus is a false one.

Saddam Hussein is known to have said, “Don’t tell me about the law. The law is anything I write on a scrap of paper.”<sup>59</sup> We need to be very careful about taking anything that anyone writes on paper and making it our law. The Bible is our only safe and consistent guide.

### MYSTICS AND FUSION

Nee’s view of the Holy Spirit is also troubling and it reflects a mystical move toward what is known as fusion or mingling. The medieval mystics, at times, confused God with their inner man, believing that there could be a total fusing or mingling of God with their spirit to the degree that their identity was lost in the divine pres-

ence. These have been called pantheistic mystics. Nee seems to have borrowed from the evangelical strain of mystics, as well as the pantheistic strain.<sup>60</sup>

Consider some of Nee’s statements with regard to the Holy Spirit:

“Of the whole Bible, Romans eight may well be the chapter where the word ‘spirit’ is used most frequently. Who can discern how many times the word ‘spirit’ in this chapter refers to the human spirit and how many times to God’s Spirit?”<sup>61</sup>

Here Nee clouded the issue by suggesting that no one can know whose spirit is being spoken about in Romans 8. What he said initially does not sound like a huge problem. What he went on to propose pushed far beyond this and suggested a reason why we cannot sort the “spirits” out in that chapter. Besides, many would disagree with his initial premise anyway, but we will proceed to his conclusions.

Nee built on the earlier theory:

“...we find it hard to discern which is the Holy Spirit and which is our own spirit. The Holy Spirit and our spirit have become so mingled; while each is distinctive, they are not easily distinguished.”<sup>62</sup>

The word “mingle” means “to mix” so Nee suggested that our spirits get mixed in with the Holy Spirit. We may at this point say he is wrong and even confused, but he has at least held that the two spirits are “distinctive.” However, Nee pushed his premise further:

“Since the Holy Spirit and our spirit are joined into one, they can be distinguished only in name, *not in fact*. And since the release of one means the release of both, others can touch the Holy Spirit whenever they touch our spirit. Thank God that inasmuch as you allow people to contact your spirit, *you allow them to contact God*. Your spirit has brought the Holy Spirit to man. When the Holy Spirit is working,



He needs to be carried by the human spirit."<sup>63</sup>

Here Nee taught mingling or fusion and is close to, if not fully teaching, pantheism.

Macaulay and Barrs address this flaw:

"He seems to suggest here that there is a union of being between the Holy Spirit and man's spirit so that the two become one being. This is contrary to the biblical teaching that God is never confused with man."<sup>64</sup>

### MAJOR ON MINORS

Another mark of a cultic or aberrational group, according to Dave Breese, is what he calls "segmented biblical attention," or overemphasis on one portion of Scripture at the expense of others that might bring balance and moderation. If one minor or debatable area of the Bible is overemphasized, strangeness and divisiveness can result.<sup>65</sup>

When special emphases become all-important points and defining doctrines for fellowship, heresies and divisions occur. Enslaving organizational structures often follow. Breese observes:

"Human dispositions, responding to the portions of Scripture to which they have given attention, have made of this amorphous thing called 'Christianity' a crazy quilt of groups whose resemblance is obscure indeed."<sup>66</sup>

Nee was willing to divide over the issue of localism. In his early teaching, he was against denominational names and taught that believers should gather in only one church in any given locality. The Bible nowhere commands or condemns local church names. It seems to be unimportant to God or it surely would be regulated or forbidden. Since the Bible does not make it an issue, it is not an issue.

Nee advocated his form of localism. Local can mean a town, a borough, or a large city. So, according to Nee, there was to be only one church in any locality. It was an expansion of

the Plymouth Brethren teaching and led to sectarianism. Dana Roberts writes:

"Nee castigates Roman Catholics as the church of Thyatira, Protestants as Sardis and many of the Brethren as Laodicea. Nee's arguments are based on interpreting church history as a progressive recovery of the original truths of the Ephesus and Smyrna churches. While Nee always regarded other denominations with disfavor, Nee here brings eschatological judgment upon all other churches."<sup>67</sup>

Any of the above churches that find solace in Nee surely have no idea what he taught.

Later, however, Nee received "new light," which is expressed in his book *Spiritual Authority*. He established regional centers over local churches at least partially negating the autonomy of those churches. Nee, with his localism, overemphasized one portion of Scripture while ignoring others. The Apostle Paul himself, in addressing the locality and region of Galatia greeted them with "To the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2).

### FIRST YOU SAY YOU DO, THEN YOU SAY YOU DON'T

Initially, Nee was the main teacher in the regional center, periodically training workers and elders. It is chilling to realize what Nee taught about absolute authority:

"People will perhaps argue, 'What if the authority is wrong?' The answer is, If God dares to entrust His authority to men, then we can dare to obey. Whether the one in authority is right or wrong does not concern us, since he has to be responsible directly to God. The obedient needs only to obey; the Lord will not hold us responsible for any mistaken obedience, rather will He hold the delegated authority responsible for his erroneous act. Insubordination, however, is rebellion, and for this the one under authority must answer to God."<sup>68</sup>

Nee could not have been more wrong. Saying "no" to sin or error, no matter who commands it, is never wrong, always right. It certainly is not rebellion. A leader directing a follower toward an unbiblical course has exceeded his or her biblical authority. When the Apostles were commanded toward something unscriptural, they replied: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). New Testament leadership is servant leadership. A servant leader never asks anything he will not do himself. Loyalty to the point of obeying wrong is perverted loyalty and another cultic mark that Dave Breese calls "enslaving organizational structure."<sup>69</sup> Unquestioned authority can only produce monarchs or princes. True leaders feed the sheep as they model Christ (Hebrews 13:7).

Nee said even God is restricted by delegated authority:

"Having delegated His authority to men, God Himself will not supersede delegated authority; rather is He restrained by the authority He has delegated. He confirms what delegated authority has confirmed and voids what it has also voided."<sup>70</sup>

Here Nee had God under man and "restrained." This is a frontal assault on God's omnipotence and a challenge to other attributes.

However, later in the book Nee said leaders should be humble servants — but what he offered was too little, too late. Then, in a mind-boggling reversal, Nee stated:

"Should the delegated authority issue an order clearly contradicting God's command, he will be given submission but not obedience. We should submit to the person who has received delegated authority from God, but we should disobey the order which offends God."<sup>71</sup>

Nee's confusion stems partially from his making submission something internal and subjective, but obedience external. Submission, he said, is a "heart attitude" and obedience is "related to conduct."<sup>72</sup> In other

words, we can be submissive while not obeying. That division will not hold up since submission means to be under someone and yielded to them, making obedience just an outward expression of submission. Nee promoted a false distinction because submission and obedience come from the same root word. Obedience is the fulfillment of submission. At times, they are almost interchangeable. Submit (or submission) is *hupeiko*,<sup>73</sup> and obedience is *hupakoe*.<sup>74</sup> Both convey being under someone or something and responding positively to orders. We could in no way say we were submitted to God if we did not obey Him.

Nee would have made believers unquestioning robots had the following been true:

“God puts above you the brothers and sisters in the church who are more advanced spiritually so that you may accept their judgment as your judgment. This will then enable you to possess their wealth without you yourself having to go through their painful experiences.”<sup>75</sup>

With this criteria we would have to judge the Bereans as rebellious and carnal since they questioned a spiritual authority and checked him against Scripture (Acts 17:11). So much of Nee’s parallel teaching points to unrestrained authoritarianism.

With all the above teaching on authority, Nee weakened the concept of individual responsibility. We may ask others for their opinion, which is wisdom, but we do not have to accept their judgment as final.

Nee said individual Christians cannot put on the armor of God. He saw leadership and the body (the Church) as protection and as a “covering” without which we are mincemeat for Satan.<sup>76</sup> While fellowship is good and right, Nee pushed this truth beyond proper boundaries when he suggested that only under the “covering” can we have the armor of Ephesians 6. Nee wrote:

“We should understand that spiritual warfare belongs to the

church, not to an individual. ... In view of this fact, let us not forget that this spiritual armor is given to the church and not to anyone individually. You as an individual cannot cope with Satan. It requires the church to deal with the enemy. ... Satan is not afraid of your personal prayer... Satan looks for such solitary and uncovered persons to attack.”<sup>77</sup>

No one would think for a moment that Paul was addressing anyone other than individual believers in Ephesians 6. Early in the chapter, specific commands are addressed to certain believers (children, fathers, masters) and then specific directions are given to all believers. The “we” and “you” are each of us. A parallel passage Romans 13:12 (“put on the armor of light”), and its context shows it is addressed to individuals.

Kenneth Wuest’s *Expanded Translation* shows how intensely personal Ephesians 6 is when it translates the literal Greek of “put on,” as “clothe yourselves” and “having clothed yourself.” Paul’s point in the imagery of a Roman soldier and his armor is that the soldier alone can don his armor. The Roman government could not dress him. He was responsible to dress himself so that he would be protected.

It would be silly to think that Satan only attacks in Church or when one is with other believers. In Nee’s view, it would follow that a shut-in or one cut off from fellowship and the Church would be defenseless.

Church fellowship must always be held in balance with personal responsibility, but it seems Nee goes to extremes by so emphasizing one he almost excludes the other. While individualism is wrong, covering — really smothering — can produce passive, immature, unthinking believers. Good leadership and accountability go along with personal responsibility. Growing along with while serving others gives liberty and balance in the local church.

No wonder Nee’s followers are confused and ready to defend him, because he did not always teach the

unavailability of armor to individual Christians. In another publication on Ephesians 6 where Nee annotates the phrase “stand therefore,” he says without qualifiers that, “Every Christian must learn to stand.” He then speaks of warfare “in relation to our personal Christian lives.”<sup>78</sup> One wishes the real Watchman Nee would have stood up.

## BEYOND ALL REASON

Nee denigrated reason. He believed that it was forever disqualified at the Fall, but produced no adequate scriptural basis for his theory. The Bible picture is that although human reason is tainted by the Fall, it can be enlightened, aided, instructed, and guided by the Scripture. Redeemed reason, guided by the Word of God, is part of discernment. The Lord calls us to “come reason together” (Isaiah 1:18) and Paul said our Christian service was “reasonable” (Romans 12:1). Here Nee was into his simplistic reductionism and polarization again. The Bible instructs us that reason can be used for or against God. Paul constantly “reasoned” with others regarding the faith (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25).

Nee railed against reason, spending seven pages in *Spiritual Authority* knocking it. Samples of his thoughts include:

“One who is subject to authority, however, lives under authority and not in reason.”<sup>79</sup>

“Reason cannot bear thinking.”<sup>80</sup>

“It is very true that we need to have the eyes of our reason put out in order to follow the Lord.”<sup>81</sup>

“The servants of God must be delivered from the life of reason.”<sup>82</sup>

“Hence there are two classes of Christians: those who live on the level of reason, and those who live on the level of authority.”<sup>83</sup>

“...there is no possibility of mixing up reason with obedience... it is absolutely impossible to live by both.”<sup>84</sup>

“He who knows God knows himself and therefore is delivered from reason.”<sup>85</sup>

“All who still live in their reasonings have not known Him.”<sup>86</sup>

### BY WHAT STANDARD?

When we compare them with Scripture, we can see why many of Nee’s teachings are in error. Nee often cavalierly and subjectively assigns meanings to Scripture that do not do justice to the verses or context. If Nee had any consistent hermeneutic at all, it can only be defined as quasi-devotional and, at times, almost gnostic. It can create in some a completely introspective life.

Dana Roberts is not convinced that discovering the fine details and intricacies of our psyche is all that necessary or important:

“Whether one understands the characteristics of the soul and the ‘human spirit’ is irrelevant. Once sin is made known, continuing growth is conditioned upon repentance and surrendering ourselves more to the work of the Holy Spirit. ... Indeed, sanctification preconditioned upon our comprehension of the hidden mechanics of the spiritual man may lead to a spirit of pride rather than to a humble and contrite heart.”<sup>87</sup>

No one would believe that if they had only the Bible and had never read Watchman Nee they would be spiritually impoverished. No one would suggest that Nee was not a Christian. The larger questions are whether he should have been a teacher and leader. Mixed-up teachers produce mixed-up students.

### THE RETURN OF THE RABBIT

In closing, let’s return to the chocolate rabbit and add to it the following parable:

There was a man who lived next to the Hershey’s chocolate factory and was friends with the Hershey family. The son of the owner invited the man to come to the factory at any time and enjoy free of charge anything they

made. This was an open invitation with no time limits or barriers. The man, a chocolate lover, rejoiced as he thought of all those treats, so available and there in both quality and quantity everyday. What a gracious gift.


The parallel to the Bible and the riches of Scripture should be clear. In the end, people might still want the chocolate bunny. It is really up to them. However, they need to know what they are getting and not expect anything more.

### Endnotes:

1. Dana Roberts, *Understanding Watchman Nee*. Plainfield, N.J.: Haven Books, 1980, pg. 150.
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4. Watchman Nee, *The Ministry of God’s Word*. New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1971, pg. 87.
5. “A Short History of The Little Flock,” op. cit., pg. 4.
6. Jim Moran, “A Brief History of the Local Church.” Moran published critiques of the Local Church on his web site, Light of Truth Ministries ([www.ltm.org](http://www.ltm.org)). On January 17, 2003, Moran died and in April 2003, the Local Church (The Church in Fullerton Corporation) purchased from Moran’s estate his web site including all files and postings. They have now removed these documents from the Internet and are notifying any other web sites which have these documents posted also to remove them.
7. Dave Hunt, “Q&A” section, *The Berean Call* newsletter, April 1998, pg. 3.
8. Erin Curry, “Rogers addresses Kingdom Authority, human battle with Satan in new book,” Baptist Press News, December 26, 2002. Document available at: [www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?ID=14922](http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?ID=14922).
9. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. xiii.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
13. For a further critique of Jessie Penn-Lewis, see G. Richard Fisher, “Pressing Truth to the Extreme — The Errors of Jessie Penn-Lewis,” *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2000, pp. 1, 11-20.
14. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pp. 96-97.
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17. *Ibid.*, pg. 20.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
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20. J.D. Douglas, *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1991, pg. 588.
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24. *Ibid.*, pg. 205.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 200.
26. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
27. *Against the Tide*, op. cit., pg. 226.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 237.
29. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 547.
30. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 103.
31. See, for example, John 12:27 and 13:21; Hebrews 12:23 and Revelation 6:9; Matthew 10:28 and 1 Corinthians 5:5. Also see standard works on systematic theology such as James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. Escondido, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887, pp. 194-212; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 2, pp. 44-51, (Hodge labels trichotomy as “anti-Scriptural”); and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, pp. 472-489.
32. Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit*. Indianapolis: Sure Foundation, 1965, pg. 10.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 13.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.
35. Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978, pg. 204.
36. *The Release of the Spirit*, op. cit., pg. 14.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 36.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 65.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 29, upper case in original.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 72.
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44. Jerry Vines, *The Believer’s Guide to Hebrews*. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1993, pg. 60, italics in original.
45. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*. Grand Rapids, Mich.:



- Zondervan Publishing House, 1979, pg. 112, italics in original.
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52. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 48.
53. See further, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, op. cit., pp. 483-484.
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60. See further, Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 76-81.
61. *The Release of the Spirit*, op. cit., pg. 20.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 21, emphasis added.
64. *Being Human*, op. cit., pg. 200.
65. A classic example of this trait is the Latter-day Saint (Mormon) interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 ("why are they baptized for the dead") in which they have built an elaborate theology and temple ceremony.
66. *Know the Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pg. 87.
67. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 135.
68. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 71.
69. *Know the Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pg. 95.
70. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 73.
71. *Ibid.*, pg. 109, italic in original.
72. *Ibid.*
73. See further, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, op. cit., pg. 1100.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 795-796.
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83. *Ibid.*, pg. 94.
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## EDITORIALS

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member, there is little — if any — encouragement or discipline to obey the command of 1 Peter 4:10. The demands (or lack thereof) of Riverbend and similar churches allow for a brand of Christians who are salt that has lost its flavor and lamps hidden under a basket (Matthew 5:13-16).

In the first chapter of 1 John, the apostle spells out that we have been brought into fellowship with God *and each other*. Christians are not to be isolated from one another, but rather they are to be team players. A number of years ago, *Christianity Today* ran a brief sidebar entitled, "The Team Player." The article provided some helpful observations:

- Team members *supplement* one another and they build one another's strengths.
- Team members *encourage* one another and motivate each other to develop and use their abilities.
- Team members are *accountable* to one another.

The article also reminded us, "Shared work means shared responsibility." Local churches that allow members the option of being anonymous allow them the option of dodging work and responsibility.

No doubt, Riverbend Church (and other low-impact Christianity churches) would protest and claim that they are reaching those who would never darken the doorstep

of some other church. Pastor and author Gary E. Gilley repeatedly defuses such an argument and shows its unbiblical premise in his insightful volume, *This Little Church Went to Market*. Gilley demonstrates the flaw in this logic when he writes:

"The seeker-sensitive experts would defend marketing as a tool they use to attract more unchurched Harrys to hear the gospel. 'Methods change, the message stays the same,' is the cliché. What they do not seem to understand is that the message will ultimately be shaped by the method. ... In the seeker-sensitive church, 'needs' reign supreme; God exists to meet Harry's needs. Harry comes to Christ, not to glorify Him, but to find the promised fulfillment and happiness in this life" (pp. 81-82).

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Southern Baptist Seminary president, is right on target when he states, "Americans are now fanatic devotees of the cult of self-fulfillment and personal autonomy."

Mann's desire not to expose his flock to "guilt-inducing sermons" may well impede the work of the Holy Spirit. In the hours before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that the work of the coming Spirit would be to point to Christ and to convict the world of sin:

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9).

Christians assemble under the preaching of the Word, not to *feel* better, but to *be* better. Scripture demands that