

# Among the Workers

by Watchman Nee

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing the sovereignty of the Spirit in the formation of apostolic companies and the exercise of spiritual authority in the Body of Christ.*

**Scripture:** Acts 13:1-3, Acts 20:34, 1 Corinthians 12:28, 2 Corinthians 8:6, Galatians 2:7-9, Ephesians 4:11-12, Philippians 2:25, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 2 Timothy 4:9-12, Titus 1:5

**Topics:** "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Establishing Local Churches"

---

## Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the importance of local churches and the spiritual unity among workers in the body of Christ. He explains that while churches in Scripture are independent and local, workers are called to associate and collaborate under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, forming groups without official organization. Nee highlights that the work of God should focus on establishing local churches rather than creating denominational branches, as true cooperation among workers is rooted in a shared commitment to the Body of Christ. He warns against the dangers of both individualism and man-made organizations, advocating for a spiritual fellowship that reflects the unity of the Body. Ultimately, the goal is to build up local expressions of the Church, ensuring that all efforts are aligned with God's will and purpose.

---

## Transcript

The churches in Scripture are intensely local. We never find any federation of churches there; they are all independent units. The position is quite otherwise as regards the workers. Among them we find a certain amount of association; we see here a little group, and there another, linked together for the work. Paul and those with him--as for instance Luke, Silas, Timothy, Titus, and Apollos--formed one group. Peter, James, John, and those with them formed another. One group came out from Antioch, another from Jerusalem. Paul refers to those who were with him (Acts 20:34), which indicates that while there was no organization of the workers into different missions, still they had their own special associates in the work. Even in the beginning, when our Lord chose the twelve, He sent them out two by two. All were fellow workers, but each had his special fellow worker. Such grouping of workers was ordained and ordered by the Lord.

These apostolic companies were not formed along partisan or doctrinal lines; they were formed under the sovereignty of the Spirit, who so ordered the circumstances of the different workers as to link them together in the work. It was not that they were really divided from other workers, but merely that in the Spirit's ordering of their ways, they had not been led into special association with them. It was the Holy Spirit, not men, who said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul."

Everything hinged on the sovereignty of the Spirit. The apostolic companies were subject to the will and ordering of the Lord. As we have seen, the twelve were divided into pairs, but it was not left to their personal discretion to choose their associates; it was the Lord who coupled them together and sent them forth. Each had a special fellow worker, but that fellow worker was of the Lord's appointing, not of their choosing. It was not because of natural affinity that they associated specially with some, nor was it because of difference in doctrine or practice that they did not associate specially with others. The deciding factor was always the ordering of the Lord.

We recognize that the Lord is the Head of the Church, and that the apostles were the first order "placed" by the Lord in the Church (1 Cor. 12:28). Although they were formed into associations, having their special fellow workers appointed by the Lord, still they had no special name, system, or organization. They did not make a company smaller than the Body to be the basis of their work; all was on the ground of the Body. Therefore, although on account of difference of locality and the providential ordering of their ways, they formed different groups, still they had no organization outside the Body; their work was always an expression of the ministry of the Body. They were constituted into separate companies, but each company stood on the ground of the Body, expressing the ministry of the Body.

The Lord is the Head of the Body and not the Head of any organization; therefore, whenever we work for a society, a mission, or an institution, and not for the Body alone, we lose the headship of the Lord. We must see clearly that the work is the work of the Body of Christ and that, while the Lord did divide His workers into different companies (not different organizations), their work was always on the ground of the Body. And we must recognize that every individual worker and every company represents the ministry of the Body of Christ, each office held being held in the Body, and for the furtherance of the work of God. Then, and only then, can we have one ministry--the up-building of the Body of Christ. If we recognized clearly the oneness of the Body, what blessed results we should see! Wherever the principle of the oneness of the Body operates, all possibility of rivalry is ruled out. It does not matter if I decrease and you increase; there will neither be jealousy on my part, nor pride on yours. Once we see that all the work and all its fruits are for the increase of the Body of Christ, then no man will be counted yours and no man mine; it will not matter then whether you are used or I. All carnal strife among the workers of God will be at an end once the Body is clearly seen as the principle of the work.

But life and work in the Body necessitate drastic dealings with the flesh, and that in turn necessitates a deep knowledge of the cross of Christ.

The early apostles were never free lances; they worked together. In the story of Pentecost we read of "Peter, standing with the eleven" (Acts 2:14). At the Beautiful Gate we see Peter and John working together, and again they were the two who visited Samaria. When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, six other brothers accompanied him. When the apostles went out, it was always in companies, or at least by twos, never alone. Their work was not individual, but corporate. As to those with Paul at Antioch and elsewhere, it is unfortunate that so much emphasis has been placed upon Paul as an individual, with the result that his fellow workers are almost lost sight of. We see that at Troas, Luke joined their company and was of one mind with Paul in considering that the Macedonian cry should be responded to. Later on when they returned from Macedonia, they brought with them as fellow workers Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus. Later on we find Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila joining them. Still later we find Paul sending Timothy to Corinth and encouraging Apollos and Titus to go there; and some time afterwards we see Epaphroditus joining them as a fellow worker. And it is good to read at the head of Paul's Epistles words like these: "Paul...and Sosthenes the brother," "Paul...and Timothy the brother,"

"Paul...Silas and Timothy."

So we see no trace of organized missions in Scripture on the one hand, nor do we see any workers going out on individual lines on the other hand, each being a law to himself. They are formed into companies, but such companies are on a spiritual basis, not on the basis of organization. Scripture gives no warrant for an organized mission on the one hand, nor does it sanction free-lance work on the other hand; the one is as far from the thought of God as the other. Therefore, while we must guard against the snare of man-made organizations, we must also guard against the danger of being too individualistic. We must not be organized into a mission and thus become schismatic; at the same time we must have associates in the work with whom we cooperate on a spiritual basis, and thus maintain the testimony of the Body.

We need to emphasize this fact, that the apostles worked in association with others, but their companies were not organized. Their relationship one to another was only spiritual. They loved and served the same Lord, they had one call and one commission, and they were of one mind. The Lord united them; therefore, they became fellow workers. Some were together from the outset; others joined at a later date. They were one company, yet they had no organization, and there was no distribution of offices or positions. Those who joined them did not come in response to some "Help Wanted"

advertisement, nor did they come because they were equipped by a special course of training. On their journeys the Lord so ordered circumstances that they met; He drew them one to another, and being of one mind and one spirit, linked together by the Lord, they spontaneously became fellow workers. In order to join such a company there was no need of first passing an examination, or of fulfilling some special conditions, or of going through certain forms or ceremonies. The Lord was the One who determined everything. He ordered; man only concurred. In such groups none held special positions or offices; there was no director, or chairman, or superintendent. Whatever ministry the Lord had given them, that constituted their position. They received no appointments from the association. The relationship which existed between its members was purely spiritual, not official. They were constituted fellow workers, not by a human organization, but by a spiritual bond.

## SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Before considering the question of spiritual authority, let us read a few passages of Scripture bearing on the relationship between the workers, as they throw considerable light on our subject. "Timothy ... Paul wanted this one to go forth with him"

(Acts 16:1-3). "When he [Paul] had seen the vision, we immediately endeavored to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to announce the gospel to them" (Acts 16:10). "And those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as quickly as possible, they went off" (Acts 17:15). Paul "resolved to return through Macedonia. And Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him" (Acts 20:3-4). "We, going ahead onto the ship, set sail for Assos, from there intending to pick up Paul, for so he had arranged"

(Acts 20:13). "If Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear....Send him forward in peace that he may come to me.... And concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him many times to come to you" (1 Cor. 16:10-12). "We entreated Titus" (2 Cor. 8:6). "Titus...received the entreaty....And we sent together with him the brother" (2 Cor. 8:16-18). "We sent with them our brother" (2 Cor. 8:22). "Tychicus, the beloved brother...I have sent to you" (Eph. 6:21-22). "But I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus" (Phil. 2:25). "All the things concerning me, Tychicus...will make known to you"

(Col. 4:7). "Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as well as Demas" (Col. 4:14). "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry" (Col. 4:17). "We sent Timothy" (1 Thes. 3:1-2). "Be diligent to come to me quickly....Take Mark and bring him with you....But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus" (2 Tim. 4:9-12). "Trophimus I left at Miletus sick. Be diligent to come before winter" (2 Tim. 4:20-21). "For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things which I have begun that remain and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). "When I send Artemas to you or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Zenas the lawyer and Apollos send forward diligently that nothing may be lacking to them" (Titus 3:12-13).

The above Scriptures show us that among the workers of God dependence upon Him does not render us independent of one another. We saw that Paul left Titus in Crete to complete the work he himself had left unfinished, and that he afterwards sent Artemas and Tychicus to replace him when he instructed him to proceed to Nicopolis. On various occasions he appointed Timothy and Tychicus to do certain work, and we read that he persuaded Titus and Apollos to remain in Corinth. We observe that these workers not only learned to work in teams, but the less experienced learned to submit to the direction of the more spiritual. God's workers must learn to be left, to be sent, and to be persuaded.

It is important to recognize the difference between official and spiritual authority. In an organization all authority is official, not spiritual. In a good organization the one who holds office has both official and spiritual authority; in a bad organization the authority wielded is only official. But in any organization, no matter whether the office-bearer himself has spiritual authority or not, the authority he holds in the organization is actually only official. What is the meaning of official authority?

It means that because a man holds office, therefore, he exercises authority. The authority is exercised solely on account of the office he holds. As long as the office-bearer retains his position, just so long can he exert his authority; as soon as he resigns office, his authority ceases. Such authority is altogether objective; it is not inherent in the man himself. It is connected not with the person, but merely with his position. If he holds the office of superintendent, it follows as a matter of course that he superintends affairs, no matter whether he is spiritually qualified to do so or not. If he holds the office of director, then automatically he directs, even if lack of spirituality should really disqualify him from exercising control over other lives. The life of an organization is position; it is position that determines authority.

But in divinely constituted companies of workers there is no organization. Authority is exercised among them, but such authority is spiritual, not official. It is an authority based upon spirituality, an authority which is the outcome of a deep knowledge of the Lord, and intimate fellowship with Him. Spiritual life is the source of such authority. The reason Paul could direct others was not because of his superior position, but because of his greater spirituality. If he had lost his spirituality, he would have lost his authority. In an organization those who are spiritual do not necessarily hold any office, and those who hold office are not necessarily spiritual; but in Scripture it is otherwise. There it is those who know the Lord who superintend affairs. It is those who are spiritual that direct others, and if those others are spiritual, they will recognize spiritual authority and will submit to it. In an organization its workers are obliged to obey, but in a spiritual association they are not, and from an official point of view no fault can be found with them if they do not obey. In a spiritual association there is no compulsion; direction and submission alike are on the ground of spirituality.

Apart from the question of spiritual authority there is also the question of different ministries. All servants of the Lord are in the ministry, and each has his own special ministry. In an organization, positions are

allotted by man, but in spiritual work ministries are appointed by the Lord. Because of difference of ministry, we must on the one hand obey the Lord, and on the other we must obey the brethren. Such obedience is not on the ground of their superior position, but because their ministry differs from ours, and yet both are intimately related. If the head is moving the tips of my fingers, the muscles of my arms cannot take an independent attitude and refuse to move with them. The principle of being in one Body necessitates the closely related members to move with one another. In moving with the other members, we are not really obeying them; we are obeying the Head. In many things we can claim a direct guidance from the Head, but in just as many things the Head moves others and we simply move with them. Their movement is reason enough for us to fall in. It is most important to recognize this relatedness of various ministries in the Body of Christ. We have to know our ministry and to recognize the ministry of others, so that we can move as one obeying those who have a greater ministry. Since our ministry is interrelated in such a way, we dare not take an individual or independent attitude.

All positions held by God's ministers are spiritual, not official. Alas! men have only seen half the truth, so they try to organize the work and appoint a director to superintend the service of others, but their directing is based upon their position in the organization, not upon their position in the ministry. The reason Paul could direct others was that the ministry committed to him by the Lord put him in a position of authority over them; and the reason Titus, Timothy, and Tychicus could submit to being directed was that the ministry committed to them by the Lord put them in a position under his authority. Unfortunately, the directing of today is based upon neither depth of spirituality nor greatness of ministry.

Timothy was a man of God. He lived close to the Lord, obeying and serving Him faithfully; yet many a time he was sent here or there by Paul. He did not say, Do you think I am incapable of working by myself? Do you think I do not know how to preach the gospel and how to found churches? Do you think I do not know how to go about things? Although Timothy knew a lot, he was willing to obey Paul. In spiritual work there is such a thing as being directed by others; there is the position of a Paul, and there is also the position of a Timothy, but these are spiritual, not official, positions.

Today we must learn on the one hand to maintain a right relationship with our fellow workers, and on the other hand to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We must maintain both relationships and also maintain the balance between the two. In the first and second Epistles to Timothy there are many passages which illustrate how fellow workers should cooperate, and how a younger worker should submit to an older one. A young Timothy ought to obey the commands of the Holy Spirit, but he ought also to receive the instructions of an elderly Paul. Timothy was sent out by Paul, Timothy was left by Paul at Ephesus, and Timothy obeyed Paul in the Lord. Here is an example for young servants of God. It is most important in His work to learn how to be led by the Spirit and how, at the same time, to cooperate with our fellow workers. The responsibility must not be wholly upon Timothy; neither must it rest wholly upon Paul. In the work Timothy must learn to fit in with Paul, and Paul must also learn to fit in with Timothy. Not only must the younger learn to submit to the instructions of the elder, but the elder must learn how to instruct the younger. The one who is in a position to leave, send, or persuade must learn not to follow the dictates of his own nature, acting according to personal inclination or desire, for in that case he will make it difficult for those under his authority. Paul must direct Timothy in such a way that he will not find it hard to obey both the Holy Spirit and the apostle.

God's servants must work together in companies, but there is a kind of co-working which is to be avoided, that is, co-working in a man-made organization which restricts its members so that they cannot really respond to the leading of the Spirit. When workers are entirely subject to the direction of men, then their

work is not the outcome of a spiritual burden placed on them by God, but merely the doing of a piece of work in response to the dictates of those holding higher positions than they. The trouble today is that men are taking the place of the Holy Spirit, and the will of men in official position is taking the place of the will of God. Workers have no direct knowledge of the divine will, but simply do the will of those in authority over them, without bearing any personal burden from the Lord for His work.

There are others again who know the mind of God, have a call from Him, and depend entirely upon Him for the meeting of all their needs; but while they know what it is to be led of Him individually, they fancy they can just go their own way and do their own work in independence of others.

The teaching of God's Word is that, on the one hand, human organizations must not control the servants of God; on the other hand, His servants must learn to submit to a spiritual authority which is based on the difference of ministry. There is no organized cooperation, yet there is a spiritual fellowship and a spiritual oneness. Individualism and human organization alike are out of line with the will of God. We should seek to know His will, not independently, but in conjunction with the other ministering members of the Body. The call of Paul and Barnabas was on this principle. It was not a case of two prophets and teachers only, but of five, waiting upon God to know His will. Acts 13 gives us a good example of a working company, all the workers being mutually related, and the guidance of one confirmed by the others.

#### THE SPHERE OF THE WORK

The sphere of the work, unlike the sphere of the local church, is very wide. Some of the workers are sent to Ephesus, some go to Paul at Nicopolis, some stay on in Corinth, some are left in Miletus, some remain in Crete, some return to Thessalonica, and others go on to Galatia. Such is the work! We see here not the movements of the local church but of the work, for the movements of the local church are always confined to one locality. Ephesus only manages the affairs of Ephesus, and Rome the affairs of Rome. The church confines herself to matters in her own locality. There is no need for the church in Ephesus to send a man to Corinth, or for the church in Corinth to leave a man in Rome. The church here is local, the work extra-local. Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome are all the concern of the workers. The church only manages the affairs in any given locality, but the workers of God regard as their "parish" the sphere which the Lord has measured out to them.

#### NO CENTRAL CONTROL, BUT FELLOWSHIP

In Scripture the workers were formed into companies, but that does not imply that all the apostles formed themselves into one company and placed everything under one central control. Although Paul had "those with him," and Peter his associates, they comprised only a number of apostles, not all the apostles. That all the apostles should combine into one company is not shown in the Word of God. It is quite in order for scores of men, or even hundreds, who have received the same trust from God, to join together in the same work; but in the Scriptures we find no centralization of authority for the control of all the apostles. There is a company of apostles, but it is not great enough to include all the apostles. That is Romish, not scriptural.

The parties referred to in Philippians 1:15-17, 2 Corinthians 11:12-13, 22-23, and Galatians 4:17 all indicate that the work in the early days was not centralized. Had it been centralized, those groups could not have remained in existence, for they could have been dealt with effectively. The Scriptures show that in divine work there is no universal organization or central control, which accounts for the fact that the apostle had no authority to deal with those groups of people who were creating such difficulty in the

churches.

The explanation is this: God does not wish the power of organization to take the place of the power of the Holy Spirit. Even though there is no central control, provided all the workers follow the leading of the Spirit, everything will run smoothly and satisfactorily, and there will be the coordination of a body. Whenever people cease to obey the Spirit and labor in the power of the flesh, then it is best if the work is simply allowed to fall to pieces. A good organization often serves as a bad substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit, by holding a work together even after all its vitality is gone. When life has departed from the work and the scaffolding of organization still supports it, its collapse is prevented; but that is doubtful gain, for a splendid outward organization may be blinding God's servants to a deep inward need. God would rather His work be discontinued than that it go on with such a counterfeit for spiritual power. When the glory of God had departed from the temple, He himself left it to utter ruin. God desires that the outward and inward conditions should correspond, so that if death invades a work, His workers may awaken at once to their need and in humility of heart seek His face.

Central control has many evils. It makes it easy for God's servants to disregard the leading of the Spirit, and readily develops into a popish system, becoming a great worldly power. It is a scriptural fact that God's servants are formed into companies, but they are not formed into one single company.

However, that does not mean that every company could just go on independently, knowing no relatedness or fellowship with other companies. The principle of the oneness of the Body holds good here as in all other relationships between the children of God. In Scripture we not only see the principle of "the laying on of hands," but also that of giving "the right hand" (Gal. 2:9). The former speaks of identification; the latter of fellowship. In Antioch hands were laid on Paul and Barnabas; in Jerusalem there was no laying on of hands, but the right hand of fellowship given them by James, Cephas, and John. In Antioch the sphere in view was one apostolic company, and the point emphasized was identification; consequently, hands were laid on them. But in Jerusalem the sphere in view was the relationship between different apostolic companies, and the point emphasized was fellowship; consequently, the right hand was extended to them.

Many are called to work for the Lord, but their sphere of service is not the same, so it follows that their associates cannot be the same. But the various companies must all be identified with the Body, coming under the headship of the Lord, and having fellowship among themselves. There is no laying on of hands between Antioch and Jerusalem, but there is the giving of the right hand of fellowship. So the Word of God does not warrant the forming of one central company; neither does it warrant the forming of various scattered, unrelated, and isolated companies. There is no one central place for the laying on of hands, nor is there merely the laying on of hands and nothing else in any one of the various groups; but among them there is also the giving of the right hand of fellowship one to the other. Each company should recognize what God is doing with the other companies and should extend fellowship to them, acknowledging that they are also ministers in the Body. Under the ordering of God they may work in different companies, but all must work as one Body. The extending of the right hand of fellowship implies a recognition that other people are in the Body and we are in fellowship with them, working together in a related way, as becomes functioning members of the same Body. "Seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcision... and perceiving the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and to Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that we should go to the Gentiles, and they, to the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7-9). The unrelated, scattered, disrupted, and conflicting organizations in Christendom, which do not recognize the principle of the Body and do not come under the sovereignty and headship of Christ, are never according to the mind of the Lord.

## COOPERATION AMONG THE WORKERS

The question naturally arises, how should workers and working associations cooperate? To one company God gives one kind of ministry, and to another an altogether different form of ministry. How should the various groups work together?

Peter and his associates, and Paul and those with him, were appointed to different spheres, but in the event of their work overlapping, how should they act? Since there is no centralization of work, yet at the same time there are various groups of workers, how should these different groups cooperate? We must note two fundamental points in regard to the work: (1)The first responsibility of every worker--no matter what his ministry or what his special line of work--whenever he comes to a place where there is no local church, is to establish one in the locality. (What applies to the individual worker applies also to any group of workers.)

(2)Should he come to a place where a local church already exists, then all his teaching and all his experience must be contributed to that church, that it may be strengthened and edified, and no attempt should be made to attach that church to himself or to the society he represents.

If a worker goes to a place where there is no church and founds one there for the propagation of his particular doctrine, then we cannot cooperate with him because he is building up a sect, and not a church. On the other hand, should a worker go to a place where there is already a local church, and instead of contributing his teaching and experience to its upbuilding, seek to make it a branch-church of the society to which he belongs, then again it is impossible for us to cooperate, because he is building up a denomination. The basis of fellowship in the church is the common possession of life in Christ and living in the same locality. The basis of cooperation in the work is the common aim of the founding and building up of local churches. Denominational affiliations do not hinder us from reckoning anyone as belonging to the Body, but the aim of denominational extension will certainly keep us from any cooperation in the service of God. The greatest harm a worker can do is, instead of establishing and edifying the local churches, to attach to his society the believers he finds in a place, or to form those brought to the Lord through his labors into a branch of his particular denomination. Both these procedures are condemned by the Word of God.

Paul came from Antioch to Corinth and there he preached the gospel. People believed and were saved, and soon there was a group of saints in Corinth. Into what kind of church did Paul form them? Into the church in Corinth. Paul did not establish an Antiochian church in Corinth. He did not form a branch-church of Antioch in Corinth, but simply established a church in Corinth. Thereafter Peter came to Corinth and preached the gospel, with the result that another group of people believed. Did Peter say, "Paul came from Antioch, but I am come from Jerusalem, so I must set up another church: I will establish a Jerusalemic church in Corinth, or, I will form a branch-church of Jerusalem here in Corinth"? No, he contributed all those he led to the Lord to the already existing local church in Corinth. After a while Apollos came along.

Again people were saved, and again all the saved ones were added to the local church. So in Corinth there was only one church of God; there were no schismatic denominations. Had Paul established the precedent of founding a church in Corinth to enlarge the sphere of the church from which he went out, calling it the Antiochian church in Corinth, then when Peter came to Corinth he might well have argued, "It is all right for Paul to found an Antiochian church in Corinth since he came from Antioch, but I have nothing

to do with Antioch; my church is in Jerusalem, so I must establish a Jerusalemic church here." Apollos coming to Corinth would in turn follow their example and establish another church as a branch of the one from which he came out. If every worker tried to form a branch of the church he represented, then sects and denominations would be utterly inevitable. If the aim of a worker in any place is not to establish a local church there, but to enlarge the church from which he has gone out, then he is not establishing a church of God in that locality, but only building up his own society. Under such circumstances there is no possibility of cooperation.

Conditions have greatly changed since the days of the early apostles. Christianity has lost its original purity, and everything connected with it is in a false and confused state. Despite that fact, our work today is still the same as in the days of the early apostles -- to found and build up local churches, the local expressions of the Body of Christ. So if we are in a place where there is no church, we should seek the Lord's face that He may enable us to win souls for Himself and form them into a local church. If we are in a place where there are missions, or churches, standing on sectarian or denominational ground, but no church standing on the ground of the Body and the locality, then our duty is just the same, that is, to found and build a local church. Many will still persist in their old ways; hence, the persons standing on clear church ground may be far fewer than the total number of Christians in the locality. But the area of the ground on which they stand is just as wide as that on which the church ought to stand, so it is still our duty to maintain that ground. We can only cooperate with those who are building up the Body of Christ as expressed in local churches, and not with those who are building up something else. Denominational connection does not hinder us from fellowship in the Lord, but denominational extension does hinder us from cooperation in the work of God.

Here is the most important principle in the work of God -- a worker must not seek to establish a branch of the church from which he goes out, but to establish a church in the locality to which he comes. He does not make the church in the place to which he goes to be an extension of the church in the place from which he comes, but he founds a church in that locality. Wherever he goes, he establishes a church in that place. He does not extend the church of his place of origin, but establishes the church in the place of his adoption. Since in Scripture all churches are local, Jerusalem and Antioch can have no branch-churches. We cannot extend one local church to another locality; we can only form a new church in that locality. The church which the apostles established in Ephesus is the church in Ephesus; the church which they established in Philippi is the church in Philippi; the churches which they established in other places are the churches of those different places. There is no precedent in Scripture for establishing any other than local churches. It is all right to extend the Church of God, but it is all wrong to extend a local church of God. What is the place in which I intend to work?

It is the church in that place I must seek to establish.

Now there are two kinds of workers, namely, those who stand on scriptural ground, and those who stand on denominational or mission ground. But even with those who stand on denominational or mission ground, the principle of cooperation is just the same--the one aim of founding and building up the local church.

The work of evangelization is primarily for the salvation of sinners, but its spontaneous result is a church in the place where such work is done. The immediate object is the salvation of men, but the ultimate result is the formation of churches. The danger which confronts the missionary is to form those he has led to the Lord into a branch of the society he represents. Since workers represent different societies, they naturally

form different branches of their respective societies, and the consequence is great confusion in the work and churches of God. The immediate aim of the various workers is no doubt the same--what preacher does not hope that many souls will be won to the Lord?--but there is a lack of clarity and definiteness regarding the ultimate issue. Some workers, praise God, are out to establish local churches; others, alas! are out to extend their own denomination or to form mission churches.

This is a point on which my fellow workers and I cannot see eye to eye with many of God's children. From the depths of our hearts we thank God that in the past century He has sent so many of His faithful servants to China, so that those who were sitting in darkness should hear the gospel and believe in the Lord. Their self-sacrifice, their diligence, and their godliness have truly been an example to us. Many a time, as we looked at the faces of missionaries suffering for the gospel's sake, we have been moved to pray, "Lord, make us to live like them." May God bless and reward them! We acknowledge that we are utterly unworthy to have any part in the work of God, but by the grace of God we are what we are, and since God in His grace has called us to His service, we cannot but seek to be faithful. We have nothing to criticize, and much to admire, as far as the gospel work of our missionary brethren is concerned; yet we cannot but question their methods in dealing with the fruits of such work. For in the past hundred years it has not resulted in the building up of local churches but in the forming of missionary churches, or of branch churches of the various denominations which the missionaries represented. In our opinion this is contrary to the Word of God. There is no such thing in Scripture as the building up of denominations; we only find local churches there. May God forgive me if I am wrong!

#### LOCAL CHURCHES AND MISSION CHURCHES

Permit me to mention a personal incident. Some time ago I met a certain missionary in Shanghai who asked me if it would not be possible for me to cooperate with his mission. Not knowing quite what to say, I did not commit myself. Later on I came across him in another part of the country, and again he repeated his question and asked if I had anything against the mission. I answered, "I dare not criticize your mission, though I do not believe it is according to the full thought of God.

I believe it was God's will to establish it so that the servants of God in Western lands could come to China to preach the gospel. I have nothing to say regarding the mission as a body, for the Scriptures speak of companies of workers, and if you feel it should be organized, should have officers, and should bear a specific name, you must answer to God and not to man for that. Who am I that I should criticize the servants of the Lord? But while I do not criticize, I cannot copy, because God has not revealed that as His will and way for me. Regarding the mission as a mission, I have nothing to say, but I have serious questions regarding the churches formed by the mission. To illustrate, you represent the 'X' Mission. Now, do those saved by your instrumentality become the 'X' Church, or do they become the church of the particular locality in which they live? It may be all right for missionaries to belong to the 'X' Mission, but it is all wrong for them to form the fruits of the mission into the 'X' Church. The Word of God has not definitely forbidden the forming of an 'X' Mission, but it clearly does not sanction the founding of other than local churches."

Then I mentioned the apostolic examples, pointing out that they always sought to found or build up churches in the locality of their labors with the fruit of such labors. They never used such fruit to form branches of the companies in which they worked; otherwise, the Church of God would have been rent by numerous factions from its very inception.

I then took as an illustration the work at T----. "There at T----," I said, "God has used you to win many souls. If the people saved by your instrumentality are the church in T----, then if I come to T---- I shall certainly join them, no matter what their spiritual state, or what their form of organization; otherwise, I should be guilty of sectarianism. But if you build up an 'X' Church in T---- with the people saved there, then you are not building the Church of God in T----, and such a 'church' I regret to say I cannot join. I shall be obliged to work separately in T---- unless there is a church there standing on the scriptural ground of locality.

"If we are all out to establish local churches, then there is every possibility of cooperation. It is permissible to establish an 'X' Mission, but it is not scriptural to establish an 'X' Church. Suppose your 'X' Mission coming to T---- establishes an 'X' Church; thereafter, various other missions come to T----, each establishing a separate mission 'church.' That would be the same as Paul establishing an Antiochian church in Corinth, and Peter coming along shortly after and establishing a Jerusalemic church there. On such a basis cooperation is impossible, for we should be disregarding the pattern which God has clearly shown us in His Word--the establishment of local churches.

"If we come to a place to found a church, then it must be local, intensely local, without anything extraneous to rob it in the slightest of its local character. If you come to T---- with the establishing of the church in T---- as your one aim, and I come to T---- with the establishing of the church in T---- as my one aim, then cooperation will be no problem. Even if a hundred and one missionaries, representing a hundred and one missions, all come to T---- with this as their one aim, to establish the church in T----, then there will be no possibility of sectarianism, and cooperation will be a matter of course.

If the aim of the 'X' Mission is only to preach the gospel, then it is possible for us to work together; but if there is a twofold aim--the preaching of the gospel and the extension of the mission--then cooperation is not possible. If a worker seeks on the one hand to preach the gospel, and on the other hand to extend his own society, it is impossible for us to work together." Whether or not a man is out to establish local churches determines whether or not we can cooperate with him.

No matter to what mission a man may belong, if he comes to a place not seeking to establish his own "church," but a church in the locality, then we are perfectly willing to work with him. Although we are not a mission, we are quite prepared to cooperate with any mission if they have no private end in view, but only the one end which God has shown as His will regarding His work.

May God grant us grace to see that His churches are all local churches.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/watchman-nee/among-the-workers/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**