

The Riverside “independent group” was made up of former local church members who had learned how to care for one another in love and outside of any program or system or movement. They had been stirred by *In the Wake of the New Way* and were especially moved by quotes from Witness Lee and ordered his book, *A Word of Love*, which comprised messages he gave to elders and co-workers a year before his death. A quote:

“The Lord can testify for me that I don’t condemn anyone... We love people. We love the opposers, and we love the top rebels. I really mean it. We love them and do not hate them. Who am I? I am not qualified to condemn or hate. Am I perfect? Even the prophet Isaiah when he saw the Lord, said, “Woe is me, for I am finished / For I am a man of unclean lips, / And in the midst of an unclean people I dwell” (Isa. 6:5). Who is clean today? If we criticize people and say something bad about them, we are not clean.”

So they became open to see if they would be accepted. Max was nowhere near ready to make contact, was extremely skeptical, and was convinced the local churches had become a cult. Nevertheless, he was quite interested in my boldness with them to open a way for communication and the fellowship to elders in *A Word of Love* gave him and others hope. Had the fledging bbs had a change of heart toward the “top rebels” and dissenting ones? Ron White would find out.

Earlier that year, 2001, I had included this word in the *In the Wake of the New Way* and sent the booklet to Dan Towle by regular mail and gave him two other copies for other brothers.

Brothers who remain in the recovery,

It would be most foolish of me or of anyone reading this book on the fermentation of rebellion to simply take this word without hearing a word of defense on behalf of our accused brothers and sisters about the defamations and devastations of their own character as set forth in this book and other writings and speakings. The book depicts brothers representing the heart and mind of the dissenting ones without giving them opportunity to express for themselves what their intentions and motives were. It does not record the responses of dissenting ones to very serious allegations about them.

The book may be one hundred percent correct according to your understanding and the new way mentality. But according to God is it correct? If not, we in the churches should know for our awareness of the wrong and sin against these saints.

Did these people just all of a sudden rise up in rebellion and begin to speak contrarily to the ministry without a reason? Were they really against brother Lee and his ministry? Were they really against God’s ordained way revealed in the Bible?

Their dissenting, actually, was solely to those elements in the new way that they found to be absolutely objectionable to their Christian conscience and to their understanding of Christ and the church. To them, these elements of the new way were irreconcilable with the word, with church precedent, and with prior church ministry.

A Thoughtful Consideration Needed

We have been taught to believe the worst about all the dissenting brothers from Southern and Central California without ever hearing their defense. Their wives and other sisters might be implicated as well, as possible supporters of an alleged conspiracy, for they too no longer meet with the church or support the ministry. Thus, they might also be deemed betrayers or traitors. Are all those who left really to be condemned for not supporting brother Lee and the questionable aspects of the new way?

Should we still condemn them today? Brother Lee had former elders, co-workers, and saints in mind at the end of his life and ministry: He said, *“The Lord can testify for me that I don’t condemn anyone... We love people. We love the opposers, and we love the top rebels. I really mean it. We love them and do not hate them. Who am I? I am not qualified to condemn or hate. Am I perfect? Even the prophet Isaiah when he saw the Lord, said, “Woe is me, for I am finished / For I am a man of unclean lips, / And in the midst of an unclean people I dwell” (Isa. 6:5). Who is clean today? If we criticize people and say something bad about them, we are not clean.”*

Has there been any mercy, understanding or grace shown the former elders in Anaheim, and their wives for the convictions they stood by during a very difficult time? These brothers withstood condemnation, criticism, and slander AS ELDERS in a local church in the midst of a turmoil engendered not by them, but by what was considered by them to be intruding elements and factors coming into their local church. A careful, thoughtful consideration of what their concerns were and what they endured, and also what it was that pressed some of the saints in Anaheim into such a shameful display of “rebellion” could help give the saints in the recovery a much better understanding and a less exaggerated view of our uncelebrated brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our Basic Failure and Need

The idea that all who left the recovery should be painted black with the same broad brush is highly questionable as well as unethical and careless. It is undeservedly defaming and devastating to many of them! One former elder’s wife is quite supportive of brother Lee, for instance. Many of those who left have never had a chance to express themselves in an environment that is conducive for hearing them clearly, and considering genuinely what they have to say. Maybe we could give them this opportunity soon, brothers.

Do we really love the “opposers”, even the “top rebels” as brother Lee said we should do? Is our view of them fair? Is our view of each one right according to God? Is the Person of Christ involved in our judgment of them? I can testify that in my little bit of contact with a few former elders, their spirit of love and careful manner today in handling the saints is evident, such that I have not seen in the recovery. Their testimony in this regard is that once they left the church life, they began to seek the Lord Himself. He was their Shepherd, and they learned to shepherd and care for one another. They did not become unsaved when they left the church, and they did not become beasts of the field

wandering about like Nebuchednezzar. They have learned the way of shepherding and caring for one another's needs. These were the casualties of the new way.

We should listen to their stories and their testimonies, brothers? If "*something is wrong*" among us, maybe listening with respect and regard to our brothers and sisters will help us to understand our lack of feeling and sensitivity to the Lord's heart and mind for others, even those He bought with His own precious blood and had brought at one time into the church. Not walking "according to love", brothers, is surely our basic failure; and walking in love our greatest need.

This is another quote from *A Word of Love* that aroused some hope in this "independent group" for reconciliation.

"In speaking to the elders in 1996, Witness Lee made a statement that took them aback. He said, *As I have said before, the spirit of not shepherding and seeking others and being without love and forgiveness is spreading in the recovery everywhere. I believe that not having the Father's loving and forgiving heart and not having the Savior's shepherding and seeking spirit is the reason for our barrenness. I realize that you all work hard, but there is almost no fruit. The Lord says, 'By the fruit the tree is known' (Matt. 12:33), but we are a tree without any fruit. Everywhere among us barrenness is very prevailing.*

*Many of you are good speakers, knowing the higher truths. The truths we hold are much higher than those in Christianity. However, we do not have fruit because we are lacking in the Father's loving and forgiving heart and the Son's shepherding and seeking spirit. We condemn and regulate others rather than shepherd and seek them. We are short of love and shepherding. These are the vital factors for us to bear fruit, that is, to gain people. I am very concerned for our full-time training. Do we train the young ones to gain people or to regulate people? We have to reconsider our ways, as Haggai said (1:5). **Our way is not right; something is wrong.***

(Note: I met with three couples from this group for fellowship in Dec 2001. Max, Ron White and their wives were present. This was just after the email exchange with Kangas, and before Ron White had experienced "the display" from Ron Kangas. I also met with other former leading ones that week. And prayed with John Ingalls and Bill Mallon on the final evening after meeting with them separately the first day, 7 hours total. Chinese brothers from Toronto were in Bill's home for fellowship, but Bill and John spent time in order to review the week with me and then we had some prayer. It was a sweet time and a meaningful trip.)