

gods of Olympus had difficulty in relating with humans, so these God-men necessarily are crippled in their human associations.

A Bits and Pieces Program of Spiritual Growth

Perhaps that is why Lee and the Local Church don't want you to get the idea that the mingling of God and man occurs all at once when a person truly becomes a Christian. It's a bits and pieces affair. That is, this assimilation of Christ, this mingling with Him, is a progressive matter.

Day by day he [the Christian] eats and drinks Christ. Christ is gradually digested by him and mingled with him so that he and Christ become one.²⁴

Regular "eating and drinking" of Christ is therefore necessary. But where and how? It turns out that a properly functioning local church is the *only* place where this progressive assimilation can occur. And guess who are the ones with the properly functioning local churches? That's right—the Local Church. Of course, they would agree that any church could become a properly functioning local church if it would only do and believe exactly what the Local Church does and believes. But then, naturally, they would join in with the Local Church and Witness Lee.

The Exercised Spirit

Lee teaches that this assimilation process takes place only as the mind goes out of gear and the human spirit supposedly goes in gear. There is an oft-repeated emphasis: The spirit must be exercised. What this means is that a person must refuse to try to understand anything with his mind. Whether it be the Scriptures, a song, the teaching of Lee (or whoever is teaching), or whatever, the mind must put forth no effort to grasp what is being said. If the mind is exercised, knowledge or doctrine will be taken in. That is said to be "death." But if the spirit is exercised, only Christ will be taken in. Man is to receive and understand God in his spirit, not in his mind. The mind is considered incapable of receiving and understanding God because it is part of the soul.

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According to Lee and the Local Church, pray-reading and repeating "O Lord Jesus!" are two of the very best methods of exercising one's spirit.

We really enjoy pray-reading the Word together in the meetings. It is much better than preaching or teaching, because it includes breathing. When we pray-read the Word, we just breathe the Lord Jesus into us. . . . We come together not to receive some teaching, but to be breathed upon by the Lord Jesus—to take in the Lord Jesus by breathing.²⁵

The conscious effort to not use the mind doesn't shut the mind off. It simply causes it to work without heed to its critical process. Operating under such conditions, a person accepts what he is told without question. That is the advantage to Lee. In this case the person is persuaded that it is Christ alone that he is receiving, because that is what he is told is happening. Since he is not supposed to use his mind, he usually does not question.

A Fly in the Ointment

This progressive mingling with Jesus Christ, the one-time God, now become God-man, is made to sound good. But progress in the mingling is very hard to come by. There's a tough road ahead of anyone who plans to really advance in that mingling.

You see, according to this cult, when a person becomes a Christian, only his spirit is affected. That means there's a fly in the ointment: the body and the soul. They are not affected at all, and they don't buy the new program of the spirit one single bit. Now, if that were really true, the Christian would be in a bad way. The way Lee teaches it, there is indeed a first-class bad situation within the Christian. A great warfare is produced within, a three-way war at that. The devil is in the body, plain old human life is in the soul, and Jesus Christ is now in some measure mingled with the spirit. Lee writes:

We are quite complicated. The man, Adam, is in us; the devil, Satan, is in us; and the Lord of life, God Himself, is in us. . . . We have become a little garden of Eden.²⁶

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The result is an all-out struggle on the part of the body and the soul, who generally cooperate, in opposing the spirit. The devil gets to the soul through the body. He tells lies that trick a man into doing his bidding, "and thus causes him to become a devilish man and lead the life of a mixture of man and devil."²⁷ Thus, this theological system has the body and soul resisting the spirit and trying to prevent it from operating properly.

The Foundation Doctrines of the Local Church

The whole foundation for this teaching of Lee and the Local Church about the mingling of man and God rests totally on their teaching that God and man are completely mingled in Jesus Christ. If that foundation collapses, any doctrine built upon it collapses with it. I will show clearly that this fundamental teaching of Lee and the Local Church is far from the truth as believed by the historic orthodox Church.

The God Who Changed His Nature

It is imperative to understand Lee's doctrine on this issue. So let's review and clarify. Agreeing but for a moment with the orthodox Church, Lee teaches that Jesus Christ had two natures. One was human and the other divine. But at this point, Lee's agreement with the historic Church comes to a screeching halt. He insists that those two natures, the divine and the human, were mingled in such a union in Christ that both natures ceased to have their own unique identity. There was no longer a divine nature that was only divine. And the human nature of Christ was no longer just human. Lee's exact words are . . .

so the human nature was added to the divine nature and the once separated natures have become one.²⁸

In plain and simple English, what that means is there is no longer a God who is just God. The very basic nature and essence of God's being has been altered eternally. He hasn't become a man, but He has mingled human nature with His divine nature. He is neither God nor man, but God-man.

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Tea Water

An illustration from Lee will make his teaching on this matter clear.

Take a cup of plain water and mix it with tea. Now the water is something more than just water. Originally, it was water, but now it is water mingled with tea. Before God was incarnated [i.e., come in the flesh], He was God and God alone. But after His incarnation, He is God mingled with man. In Him there is not only the divine nature, but also the human nature, the human essence, the human element. He is the Father, He is the Son, He is the Spirit, and He is man.²⁹

The God of the Local Church is a being who once was God but has now altered His divine nature. He has added human nature to the divine content. The God of the Local Church is not the true God of historic Christianity.

The Belief of the Historic Church

God Himself has said, "For I, the Lord, do not change . . ." (Mal. 3:6). The creeds of the Church have constantly confessed that God is unchangeable. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* speaks of a God who is . . .

infinite, eternal, and *unchangeable* [italics mine], in His being, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth (Question 4).³⁰

The Belgic Confession begins by stating:

We all confess with the mouth that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, *unchangeable* [italics mine], infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good (Article I).³¹

Witness Lee, on the other hand, calmly says God has changed at the very heart of His being. His divine nature has now changed; it is utterly mingled with human nature. Whatever kind of creature that may be, it is not the God of the Christian Church.

The Fifth Century Revisited

There have been others besides Lee and his Local Church who have claimed that the divine and human natures mingled in Jesus Christ. In the heat of the battle of one such challenge, the leaders of the whole mid-fifth century Church met at the city of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. for an ecumenical council. Here in the Chalcedonian Creed is their answer to those teaching a mingling of nature:

. . . This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son [of God] must be confessed in two natures, unmingled, unchanged, indivisible, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being in one person.³²

It was at the reading of this creed that the bishops gathered at Chalcedon cried out with one voice, "This is the faith of the fathers . . . this is the faith of the Apostles; by this we all stand: thus we all believe."³³

Ever since that time, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and virtually every branch of Protestant Christendom have embraced that creed as representing the essence of what the Bible truly teaches about the joining of the human and divine natures in Jesus Christ. Witness Lee stands almost alone against all the centuries of Christendom as he arrogantly claims to be right while the whole historic Church is wrong. The truth of the matter is that it is Lee who is dead wrong.

Surely, Jesus Christ did (and does) have two natures, one divine and the other human. *But those two natures did not, do not, and never will mingle.* In the great mystery of the Incarnation, those two natures came together, not in one new nature, but in the one person, the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He remains wholly and truly God and wholly and truly man, but without any mingling. The divine nature is still purely divine, and the human nature is still purely human. God is God, and man is still man.

The noble leaders of the Church gathered at Chalcedon had a further word for those who teach that Christ's two natures

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mingled. Witness Lee should pay great heed. Speaking of those who might teach contrary to the faith which they had affirmed, they decreed:

But such as dare to put together another faith, or to bring forward or teach or to deliver a different creed . . . let them be anathematized [accursed].³⁴

Lee and his followers have dared, and the verdict against them has already been rendered.

The Foundation in Ruins—And The Superstructure Too.

There is no way the teachings of the Scriptures as interpreted by the historic orthodox Church will allow Lee's doctrine of the mingling of the divine and human in Christ to stand. Measured against historic orthodoxy, his foundation collapses in ruins.

But that is not all that falls. The whole idea of a "super-race" of Christians now possessing deity by a mingling with Christ collapses with it. The Christian is not partly divine. We remain human throughout all eternity.

Double-Talk, Sloppy Illustrations, and the Local Church Trinity

We have not, however, come to the end of the Local Church's ideas regarding the nature of God. This time look at the Local Church's view of the Trinity.

First, understand that for the almost twenty centuries of its existence, the Church has believed the Scriptures teach God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It has firmly held that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *three distinct persons with one nature*. Not three Gods, but one God in three persons.

The doctrine of the Trinity is of far more than academic interest. It is perhaps the most crucial doctrine of Christianity. Amongst other vital concerns, it is through the persons of the Trinity that God can be known and experienced by us. The Father is a person; the Son is a person; and the Holy Spirit is a person. They are *one God in one nature*. Yet each can be experienced as a person. If we deny the full personness of one or all, the persons of the Godhead will drop out of our practical

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experience. That is precisely what Lee and the Local Church have done.

Confessedly, the doctrine of the Trinity is a great mystery. However, Lee and the Local Church feel they have unraveled much of that mystery. Over and over they profess to believe in three persons in the Godhead, but their words to that effect are meaningless because they redefine the word "person."

Accusing historic Christianity of believing in three Gods, the Local Church ends up with what amounts to a *one-person Godhead* who expressed Himself in three stages or functions. This one person they name Jesus Christ. He is all-inclusive, they say. Lee writes:

The Lord Jesus is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and He is the very God. He is also the Lord. He is the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the almighty God and the Lord.³⁵

As they would have it, Jesus Christ is the very Father Himself, and He is also the Son and the Spirit. They insist they believe that the Father, Son, and Spirit are real persons. That claim, however, turns out to be double-talk because they redefine the word "person." Lee's own illustration of the so-called persons of the Trinity goes like this:

Some men have little purpose; therefore, their appearance is continually the same. But a man full of purpose may have several appearances. If you could visit him at his home in the early hours of the day, you would see that he is a father or a husband. After breakfast, he may go to a university to be a professor. Then at the hospital in the afternoon, you may see him in a white uniform as a doctor. At home he is a father, in the university he is a professor, and in the hospital he is a doctor. Why is he these three kinds of persons? Because he is a man of great purpose.

Do not think that because there are three Persons in the Godhead, there are three separate Gods. No, they are absolutely one. Matthew 28:19 says that we are to baptize people in *the name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit. There are three persons, but only *one name*. It is not in the *names* of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, but in the *name*. The father in the home, the professor in the university, and the doctor in the hospital are also three persons with one name."³⁶

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This father, professor, and doctor is not three persons; he is one person only. Father, professor, and doctor are merely three functions of one person, but in no way are they distinct persons. So it is with the Local Church "Trinity." They can call the Father, Son, and Spirit persons, but it is meaningless when they redefine the term.

The Also-Rans—Father, Son, and Spirit

It would be serious enough if this were the end of the Local Church false teaching about the Trinity. But it gets worse. Not only are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit only functions rather than distinct and unique persons in the Local Church teaching, but their functions aren't even unique. In Lee's Godhead, Jesus Christ not only functions as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but also as "other items." Lee makes this very clear,

As God, He is the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the Lord, the Christ, *and other items* . . . He is the light, the life, the air, the water, the food, the clothing, and the lodging. He is all of this and more to us.³⁷ (italics mine)

That makes the Father, Son, and Spirit nothing more than also-rans (important also-rans, but nonetheless also-rans) along with those "other items." Being functions of God, rather than persons, they cannot be experienced as persons even though the Local Church claims such experience. The Local Church multiplies words about their experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, who they say is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and other items. But their understanding of Him is pantheistic rather than orthodox.

The Local Church Judged by the Historic Church

Before we leave the subject, we must take a special look at the teaching that Jesus Christ is the same as the Father. In the fifth century this same doctrine was taught.

Cyril of Alexandria, fifth-century Christian and theologian, wrote in reply to that teaching, "But we do not call the Word of God (Christ) the Father . . . and fall under the charge of blasphemy."³⁸ These words were officially approved at the third and fourth ecumenical councils of the Church in 431 A.D. and 451 A.D., respectively. As long ago as those years,

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there were heretics claiming that Christ was Himself the Father—in much the same way the Local Church does today. They gave up the identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as unique persons. The Church condemned them as blasphemers. That has continued to be the position held by the Church, as the Augsburg Confession, among many others, demonstrates:

We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea, that there is one Divine Essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that there are three Persons in this one Divine Essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All three are one Divine Essence, eternal, without division, without end, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, One Creator and Preserver of all things visible and invisible. The word "Person" is to be understood as the Fathers employed the term in this connection, not as a part or a property of another but as that which exists of itself.

Therefore all the heresies which are contrary to this article are rejected. Among these are the heresy of the Manichaeans, who assert that there are two gods, one good and one evil; also that of the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and others like them: also that of the Samosatenes, old and new, who hold that there is only one Person and sophistically assert that the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, are not necessarily distinct Persons but that the Word signifies a physical word or voice and that the Holy Spirit is a movement induced in creatures (Article I).³⁹

The sides are all too clear. One must side with Lee and the other false teachers of these heresies or with the historic Church. They may profess their orthodoxy in the loudest of voices, but they are far from orthodox.

The Idolatry of the Local Church

Not only is there a strong emphasis in the doctrinal system of the Local Church on the mingling of the individual with God, but the mingling is given a corporate sense in an alleged mingling of the God-man with the Local Church. In fact, they say it is fundamentally with the church that God mingles His nature. The individual participates in that mingling as he participates in the Local Church.

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God planned to have a corporate body, a corporate vessel, with which He could mingle Himself and all that He is. This is called the church.⁴⁰

Lee explains that “the essence or substance of the church must be Christ Himself assimilated into our being.” A single individual is not seen to equal Christ. But the Local Church, the sum total of all individuals in a given locality who are in this assimilation process, is an expression of Christ. It is actually Christ Himself.

Only Christ Himself could be this house [the local church]. Therefore the church must be Christ. When we say that the local church is the house of God, we must realize that this house must be Christ. This house must not be a group of people, but Christ alone.⁴¹

You must understand they do not simply mean that the Local Church is a place *where God dwells*. The Local Church must also be *what God is*. There is an identity of essence. Cut it any way you want to, in a very real sense that makes the church deity itself. So thoroughly does Lee hold this view that he unbelievably adds a fourth “person” to his Godhead. *The church joins the Godhead*.

They are now four in one. The Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body.⁴²

Now “get into your mind” and follow the thought here. God and man now have the same nature, they say. The fullness of this mingling is in the Local Church. They also insist that the church is Christ. The Godhead is to be worshiped and the church is a part of the Godhead. Okay, the logical conclusion is unavoidable. In the worship of their God, they must worship their own corporate self—the Local Church. They’d scream in protest about such a conclusion, but it is a fact. And that is how they treat the Local Church.

A Root of Arrogance

It is perhaps right here at this point that we find the taproot of the arrogance of the Local Church. Claiming to be mingled with deity, they see only those who do and believe as they do