

## “Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

In this edition of “Misaimings” we will consider several serious theological errors made by John Ankerberg and John Weldon in *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (ECNR), limiting ourselves to matters related to what the authors call “The Local Church” (TLC) and to the publications of Living Stream Ministry (LSM) and concentrating on accusations leveled against the writings of Witness Lee. Admittedly, the issues raised are serious, even profound, and merit extensive discussion. However, our purpose here must be confined to concise statements that expose the misaimings and present the truth.

**Misaiming concerning the nature of Christ:** ECNR asserts, “The following list illustrates sayings of new religions and cults that deny Christ’s nature. In the New Testament, Jesus warned that false prophets and false Christs would arrive (Matthew 24:4-5, 24). The Apostle Paul warned that there were false Christs and false gospels (2 Corinthians 11:3-5). The Apostle Peter cautioned against false teachers who would be active within the church” (688). In the “following list” ECNR includes “The Local Church (Witness Lee)” and then quotes Witness Lee concerning the only begotten Son, the firstborn Son, and the many sons of God (689). Clearly, ECNR regards TLC, LSM, and Witness Lee as false prophets and false teachers who bring in heresies concerning false Christs.

**Truth:** The New Testament reveals that Jesus is both the only begotten Son of God and the firstborn Son of God. There is one, unique God, and this God is eternally triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Bible calls the second in the Godhead the only begotten Son of God (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). As the only begotten Son, He is of the same essence with the Father and the Spirit, and He possesses the full essence of God with all its unique attributes. This status He has eternally; that is, in the immutable Godhead He always was, He is, and He always will be the only begotten Son of God. The deity of the only begotten Son of God is eternal, absolute, and unchanging. In His incarnation He is called the Son of Man (Matt. 12:8, 40; Mark 8:31, 38; Luke 19:10; 22:69; John 3:13). In His deity as the only begotten Son of God, He is the complete God; in His humanity as the Son of Man He is the perfect man, the God-man, who

lived a perfect human life, and then, in His divine-human person, He was crucified for our redemption. After His death on the cross Christ was resurrected, and on the morning of His resurrection He declared that His disciples were now His brothers and that His Father was now their Father (20:17). Before His incarnation Christ was the only begotten Son of God, a designation that refers to His deity and to His identity in the Godhead. Eternally, He is the only begotten Son of God, and as such, having divinity only, He cannot have and does not have brothers. Nevertheless, as the firstborn Son, having humanity as well as divinity, He has many brothers among whom He stands as the Firstborn (Rom. 8:29). In His resurrection He was glorified to be the Son of God not only in His divinity but also in His humanity (1:3-4). Acts 13:33 speaks of this: “God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; this day have I begotten You.’” *This day* refers to the day of the Lord’s resurrection, at which time He was begotten by God to be the Son of God in His humanity. To be sure, in His divinity He was already the only begotten Son of God, but in and through His resurrection He became the Son of God in another sense—in His humanity. Now He is the Son of God both in His divinity and in His humanity. He remains the only begotten Son of God in His divinity, but in His humanity as the Son of Man, He is now the firstborn Son of God, possessing both divinity and humanity. This glorious fact makes it possible for the Son, in His status as the firstborn Son (not as the only begotten Son), to have many brothers who are the same as He is in life and nature. As the firstborn Son, Christ is human as well as divine, and as the many sons, the believers in Christ are divine as well as human. “Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb. 2:11). Although we are brothers of the firstborn Son of God, He alone has the Godhead, and thus He is a proper object of worship.

**Misaiming concerning the coming of Christ:** ECNR, adding error to error, goes on to attribute the following to TLC and LSM: “Christ will return visibly but as the ‘Lord Spirit,’ not necessarily as the biblical Jesus Christ” (212).

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**Truth:** The “biblical Jesus Christ” is both in the heavens, at the right hand of God, and also in the true believers. Romans 8:34 tells us that Christ is at the right hand of God, interceding for us, yet verse 10 of the same chapter says, “Christ is in you.” Also, Colossians 3:1 says that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, yet in 1:27 we read of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Christ, therefore, is both at the right hand of God and in the believers. The Bible clearly reveals that Christ will come visibly from the heavens: “Behold, He comes with the clouds, and every eye will see Him” (Rev. 1:7). When our body is transfigured and conformed to the body of the Lord’s glory, the indwelling Christ will, experientially, also come forth from within us. “Our commonwealth exists in the heavens, from which also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:20-21). He will come from the heavens in visible, glorious manifestation, and He will come forth from within the believers also in visible, glorious manifestation, for “He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed” (2 Thes. 1:10). This is the essential truth concerning Christ’s coming at the end of this age.

John 14, however, speaks of His coming in another sense, and it seems that the writers of ECNR either are ignorant of this or confuse the coming in John 14 with the coming in Revelation 1. Before His death for our redemption, the Lord Jesus said, “In My Father’s house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be” (John 14:2-3). The Lord’s going in these verses refers to His death, and His coming again refers to His coming to the disciples in resurrection as another Comforter, the Spirit of reality (vv. 16-20; 20:22). Christ now dwells in His believers, because He has come to us and even into us as the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. We praise the Lord for His coming in such a way! But this invisible coming to us as the Spirit in resurrection should not be confused with His visible coming with us in glory to bring the kingdom of God to the earth. Like all those who love the Lord’s appearing (2 Tim. 4:8), we hope for and anticipate the glorious, visible coming of “the biblical Jesus Christ.”

**Misaiming concerning redemption:** Regarding the fall of humankind, ECNR characterizes TLC and LSM as teaching that humanity, in the original state of creation, was fallen and needed redemption: “In a sense even created man was ‘fallen’ man since he still required redemption” (212).

**Truth:** The man created by God was originally very good and was not fallen in any way and thus did not require redemption. To be redeemed is to be repossessed by God through the payment of a great price, the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. Since God did not create a fallen human being, there was, in the beginning, no need of redemption. After sin came into the world and entered into humankind, redemption was necessary.

In accusing TLC and LSM of teaching that even created man was fallen and in need of redemption, the authors of ECNR seem to confuse redemption and regeneration. Regeneration is a matter of receiving another life—the eternal, uncreated life of God—in addition to the natural, created, human life. Even if man had not fallen and had no need of redemption, the unfallen, created man would nevertheless have needed regeneration; that is, he would have needed to be born of God to receive the life of God in order to become a child of God. TLC and LSM follow the divine revelation to teach from the Scriptures that (1) the life of the tree of life is the life of God; (2) that created man, having only the created life, needed to receive the life of God; and (3) that the unique way to receive the life of God, eternal life, is regeneration. Created man needed regeneration in order to have the life of God; fallen man needs both redemption and regeneration—redemption to deal with sin and to bring man back to God as His possession, and regeneration to be born of God and thereby have eternal life. If the writers of ECNR were clear concerning the difference between redemption and regeneration and clear concerning the proper understanding of regeneration, they might have avoided making the false accusation, the misaiming, cited above.

**Misaiming concerning salvation:** ECNR accuses TLC and LSM of holding unorthodox views of salvation. In addition, in referring to salvation, ECNR seems to deny that the believers in Christ have eternal life, God’s uncreated life (212).

**Truth:** We believe and teach the full scriptural revelation regarding salvation. God’s complete salvation has two main aspects—judicial redemption and organic salvation (salvation in life). Because we who now believe in Christ were formerly sinners under the righteous judgment of God, we needed to be redeemed judicially (according to the requirements of God’s law) in order to be justified, forgiven, and reconciled to God. This redemption was accomplished at a tremendous cost—the shedding of the precious blood of Jesus. Although we thank the Lord for His grace displayed in judicial redemption, we realize that such a wonderful redemption is not an end in itself; rather, redemption brings us

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back to God so that He can accomplish His original purpose by means of His life. Having a thorough knowledge of this, Paul writes, “If we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled” (Rom. 5:10). *Much more we will be saved in His life*—what amazing words! To be saved in (or by) the divine life is to experience what we call organic salvation. If we study this matter carefully in the Word, we will see that organic salvation—salvation in life—includes regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. After we, the believers, are regenerated, born of the Spirit in our spirit, we need to be sanctified through being saturated with the holy nature of God until we become holy even as God Himself is holy (a prerequisite to being part of the holy city, New Jerusalem). As we are sanctified, we are renewed with God’s attribute of newness, transformed into the image of Christ, and conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God. Eventually, at the Lord’s coming, we will be glorified and will, in Paul’s words, be manifested with Christ in glory (Col. 3:4).

In order to experience salvation in life, we must first receive eternal life—the uncreated, indestructible life of God. This we have simply by believing into the Son of God (John 3:15-16), and the apostle John testifies that this life is in the Son and that whoever has the Son has the life (1 John 5:11-12). God has promised us the eternal life (2:25), and John writes to us that we may know that we have eternal life (5:13). This life, God’s own life, has truly been given to us by being imparted, dispensed, infused, into us by the life-giving Spirit. Now our spirit is life (Rom. 8:10), and our mind, when it is set on the spirit, is life (v. 6). Moreover, this life is being dispensed into our mortal bodies (v. 11). This is the life that saves us. How can it be reasonably denied that believers today need much more of the “much more” in Romans 5:10? Yet regrettably, ECNR neglects this and may even oppose it. What a tragedy that supposedly orthodox believers, while allegedly combating error and contending for the truth, would oppose a major aspect of God’s complete salvation! What they oppose, we boldly testify: Based upon redemption through the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross, we have the life of God, and in this life we who have been regenerated are being saved—sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified.

**Misaiming concerning the church:** “Claim: To be the only true church that God is satisfied with” (211). Here ECNR accuses TLC and LSM of believing that they are the only true church and, in particular, the only church that the Lord is satisfied with.

**Truth:** Although TLC and LSM have never made such a claim, they do receive all that is revealed in the Scriptures concerning the church, a brief summary of which is included here:

According to the entire book of Ephesians, God’s eternal intention, His will according to the desire of His heart, is to produce and build up the church as the Body of Christ.

According to the book of Romans, especially chapters 12 through 16, the perfect will of God is to have the church as the organic Body of Christ expressed as and practiced in genuine local churches.

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus uttered the great prophecy, “I will build My church.” The church is of Christ and belongs to Christ; it is not the property of any worker or minister.

According to the type of Eve in Genesis 2 and its fulfillment in the New Testament, especially in Ephesians 5, the church is a pure product out from Christ. Actually, the church is Christ (Col. 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 12:12) in the sense of being constituted with Christ and thus being Christ in another form—bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, just as Eve was to Adam.

The church as the Body of Christ is uniquely one and cannot be divided. In the sight of God, divisions are intolerable and abominable.

In the Bible there is no such thing as denominations—religious entities that take names other than the name of Christ and that designate themselves by such names.

According to the revelation in Ephesians 4, the church as the Body of Christ is the mingling of the Triune God—the Spirit, the Lord, and God the Father—with redeemed humanity. This mingling produces a four-in-one entity: the Spirit, the Lord, the Father, and the Body. However, the church does not enter the Godhead or become a part of God as an object of worship. Rather, such a mingling is a matter in God’s economy, whereby God, in His Divine Trinity, is dispensed into redeemed and regenerated human beings to produce an organism—the Body of Christ.

According to God’s ordination described in the New Testament, there should be only one church, one expression of the Body of Christ, in a locality. Concerning this, the Lord Jesus spoke clearly and emphatically in Revelation 1—3. He commanded John to write what he saw in a scroll and “send it to the seven churches” (1:11), and then the Lord Himself listed seven cities, thereby identifying churches with cities.

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When He spoke to each church explicitly, the Lord put together church and city, e.g. “the church in Ephesus” (2:1).

A genuine local church as an expression of the one unique, universal Body of Christ must receive all whom God and Christ have received (Rom. 14—15). It is most serious to refuse fellowship with other true believers in Christ; nevertheless, this is what Christians are practicing, including the authors and the publisher of ECNR, with respect to thousands of real children of God, true brothers and sisters in Christ. By contrast, the local churches receive all blood-washed, Spirit-regenerated believers, and LSM is burdened to supply and feed all the people of God.

The consummation of the church as the Body of Christ will be the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). We are not going to heaven—we are becoming the New Jerusalem, the eternal abode of the redeeming God and His redeemed people.

These truths regarding the church may be different from so-called “historic orthodoxy,” but they are absolutely in keeping with the divine revelation in the Word of God.

**Misaiming concerning God’s eternal purpose:** ECNR claims that the purpose of TLC and LSM is “to build God a body” (211).

**Truth:** ECNR misrepresents and mischaracterizes TLC and LSM by coining a non-scriptural term and then ascribing it to TLC and LSM, which never use such an expression.

The New Testament reveals that God has an eternal purpose and that God’s purpose should become our purpose. In 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul reminds his young co-worker that God “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace.” A note on this verse in the Recovery Version says, “God’s purpose is His plan according to His will to put us into Christ and make us one with Him to share His life and position that we may be His testimony.” God saved us, giving grace to us in Christ Jesus, so that we would live for God’s purpose. As one who lived for the eternal purpose of God, Paul testified to Timothy, saying, “You have closely followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, endurance” (3:10). God’s purpose had become Paul’s purpose, and Timothy could participate in God’s purpose by closely following Paul’s purpose. His purpose, my purpose—what a marvelous reality this is!

If by the Lord’s mercy and grace we would make God’s purpose our own purpose and live for this purpose, we need to be governed by the revelation concerning God’s eternal purpose found in Ephesians. In 1:9 Paul says, “Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.” In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, “In whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” In 3:9-11 Paul has this to say:

To enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If we study these verses in the context of chapters 1 and 3, we will see that God’s eternal purpose is to have the church as Christ’s Body, “the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (1:23). In 3:9-11 the church is inseparably connected to God’s eternal purpose. Because God’s purpose is the Body of Christ and because His purpose has become our purpose, our purpose is the building up of the Body of Christ through the increase of Christ in us by our growth into Him in all things as the Head (4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 2:19). ECNR’s expression *to build God a body* is infelicitous, even strange. As believers who realize that we have been saved according to God’s own purpose, we should follow the apostle Paul to speak of the building up of the Body of Christ.

The purpose of the local churches (TLC) is clearly stated in the section entitled “Our Mission” in *The Beliefs and Practices of the Local Churches* (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1978), and it is deplorable that the authors of ECNR ignored it when writing of the alleged purpose of TLC and LSM. The following are the points in “Our Mission”:

To preach the gospel of grace and of the kingdom to sinners that they may be saved.

To minister the life supply to believers that they may grow in Christ.

To establish the church in each city that the believers may become a local corporate expression of Christ in practicality.

To release the living and rich word of God from the Holy Scriptures that the believers may be nourished to grow and mature.



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To build up the Body of Christ so that the Bride may be prepared for the coming back of Christ as the Bridegroom. (4-5)

**Misaiming concerning God:** Regarding the doctrines of God and of the Trinity, ECNR accuses TLC and LSM of teaching modalism, which is defined in ECNR as “God is one Person with three modes” (211) and “one God, one person, three modes or aspects” (673).

**Truth:** The basic scriptural truth concerning God is that God is one and unique. Nevertheless, the true and living God is triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19). All three are God; all three are eternal; all three exist at the same time, that is, coexist; and all three coinhere, that is, mutually dwell in one another. Although the three of the Divine Trinity are distinct, they are not separate, for where one is, there the others are also. This understanding of the Trinity is contrary to the heresy of modalism, which denies the eternal, simultaneous coexistence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead and claims, erroneously, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are merely three temporary manifestations (modes) of the one God, who supposedly exists as a kind of monad. A modalist claims that for a period of time God is the Father and later ceases to be the Father and is manifested as the Son and finally as the Spirit. A modalist cannot believe, as TLC and LSM do, that God is

eternally triune, that He always has and always will exist as the one true God, who in His intrinsic being is three-one, triune—Father, Son, and Spirit.

In contrast to many theologians who engage in abstract speculation concerning the nature of the Trinity, the Bible emphasizes the economy of the Triune God for the dispensing of Himself into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people to be their life, their life supply, and their everything so that they may become His corporate expression. In our ministry and publications we emphasize what God Himself emphasizes in His written word—His desire and intention to work Himself in Christ as the Spirit into our tripartite being for the building up of the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. Treasuring this revelation in the Bible, we pray that the Father will strengthen us with power through His Spirit into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:14-17). The Father strengthens us through His Spirit, and Christ makes His home in us: This is the Triune God not as a doctrine but as a reality in our experience for the Body of Christ (4:4-6). Therefore, we echo Paul’s words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14).

*by the Editors*

### Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the **Father** and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

**Father:** Matthew and John are the two books in which the Divine Trinity is revealed more fully than in all the other books of the Scripture, that God’s chosen people may participate in and enjoy Him...For the constituting of the kingdom, Matthew discloses the reality of the Divine Trinity by giving one name for all three. In the opening chapter of Matthew, the Holy Spirit (1:18), Christ (the Son—1:18), and God (the Father—1:23) are present for the producing of the man Jesus (1:21), who, as Jehovah the Savior and God with us, is the very embodiment of the Triune God...Eventually, in the closing chapter, after Christ as the last Adam had passed through the process of crucifixion, entered into the realm of resurrection, and become the life-giving Spirit, He came back to His disciples in the atmosphere and reality of His resurrection to charge them to make the heathen the kingdom people by baptizing them into the name, the person, the reality, of the Divine Trinity. Later, in the Acts and the Epistles it is disclosed that to baptize people into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is to baptize them into the name of Christ (Acts 8:16; 19:5), and that to baptize them into the name of Christ is to baptize them into Christ the person (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), because Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, and He, having become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), is available at any time and in any place for people to be baptized into. According to Matthew, being baptized into the reality of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is for the constituting of the kingdom of the heavens. Unlike an earthly society, the heavenly kingdom cannot be formed with human beings of flesh and blood (1 Cor. 15:50); it can be constituted only with people who have been immersed into the union with the Triune God and who have been established and built up with the Triune God, who has been wrought into them.