

DOES THE MINISTRY REPLACE THE BIBLE?

Some falsely claim that the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee has replaced the Bible in the local churches. In making this claim, they set the ministry against the Bible, the Word of God, as if these two things are in rivalry with each another. They have created a false dichotomy. The ministry is the ministry of the Word. Rather than replacing the Bible, the ministry issues from the Bible and opens the Bible so that we can be constituted with the riches of God's Word. Without the Bible, there can be no ministry, and without the ministry, our understanding and appreciation of the Word of God would be far less accurate and rich than it is today.

The Ministry's Attitude toward the Bible

Those who make this claim ignore what the ministry itself says about the Bible and how much the Bible is uplifted and recommended by the ministry. Of the Bible as God's breath, Witness Lee said:

The Bible itself says, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is the breath of God. It is not merely the word or the thought of God, but the very breath of God. Whatever we breathe out is our breath, and this breath proceeds out of our being. So the Bible as the breath of God is something breathed out of the being of God. The Bible contains the very element of God. Whatever God is, is contained in this divine book. God is light, life, love, power, wisdom, and many other items. All these items of what God is have been breathed out into the Bible. Whenever we come to this book with an open heart and an open spirit, we can immediately touch something divine: not just thoughts, concepts, knowledge, words, or sentences, but something deeper than all these things. We touch God Himself. (*Life-study of Genesis*, 2)

Here we can see that Brother Lee uplifts the Bible to the uttermost, considering it not only a record of God's speaking but also God's very breath, which contains the very element of God. Similarly, Brother Nee said:

Every Christian should read the Bible because it is "God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). It shows us many things that God has done for us and the way He has led men in the past. If we want to know the riches and vastness of God's provision for us, we must read the Bible. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers (1)*, 131)

The ministry is replete with such portions, and by them it ministers a deep appreciation for the Bible as the Word of God into us. The ministry also opens the Bible. Many can testify that without the ministry of Brother Nee and Brother Lee, their appreciation and apprehension of matters such as the tree of life, the fall of man, the law, the tabernacle, the offerings, the priesthood, the kingship, the many types of Christ and prophecies concerning Christ, and innumerable other matters in the Old Testament, would be minimal at best. Under the light of the ministry we can see and apply Christ in all these matters. In the New Testament we can see all the matters related to the person and work of Christ, the Body of Christ as the enlargement of Christ, and the New Jerusalem as the consummation of all of God's work with all its details and applications for us today. Under the light of the ministry we are continually helped to focus on the central line of God's economy to fulfill His eternal purpose.

Third, the ministry exhorts us to read the Bible even in a daily and disciplined way. Brother Nee taught that "every Christian should have a definite plan of studying the Bible" for at least half an hour daily (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers (1)*, 142). Brother Lee echoed this recommendation and even encouraged us to "spend hours to study a single word" (*Life-study of Exodus*, 679). He also went further to encourage the saints to not receive his ministry blindly but to check everything against the Bible, as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11:

On the other hand, a church that takes whatever I say just because I say it is not healthy and does not know the truth. If you follow what I tell you, it must be because you have checked that it is according to the truth. It must not be a matter of following a man but of keeping the divine truth. If what is spoken is checked out by every saint and by the church to see that it is according to the truth, we will be kept from falsehood. (*Life Messages, Volume 1 (#1-41)*, 143)

The appreciation of and the need for disciplined reading and study of the Bible are consistently portrayed throughout the ministry of Brother Nee and Brother Lee. Anyone who follows the ministry's exhortation spends much time to study the Bible.

Our Practice According to the Ministry's Exhortation

In the churches in the Lord's recovery, the Bible is central to our personal and corporate pursuit. The ministry of Brother Lee led the recovery into a number of treasured practices related to enjoying the Bible. As early as 1958 he began to teach the practice of reading and praying over the Word simultaneously, or "pray-reading," saying, "When we pray-read the Word by exercising our spirit, the word in black and white immediately becomes the Spirit. In this way the Spirit and the word are one. When we read, it is a word. When we pray with the exercise of our spirit, the word becomes Spirit and life" (*Life-Study of Proverbs*, 28). He continued to recommend pray-reading throughout his ministry as a way to receive the spiritual nourishment and the divine enlightenment contained in the Word of God. Many can testify that mingling their reading of the Bible with prayer has yielded untold benefit. This is also true of the practices of musing on the Word, singing the Word, using the utterance of the Word in our prayer, standing on the Word, and declaring the Word of God to the enemy, Satan. The ministry of our brother strongly promotes all these practices.

Our practice of all saints prophesying for the building up of the church, besides being itself a biblical exhortation (1 Cor. 14:4, 24, 31), is also very much related to the reading and study of the Bible and was presented to us as such by Brother Lee. In his training of the saints concerning how to prophesy, he said, "The first basic constituent of a prophecy is the personal knowledge of the Scriptures. To gain such a knowledge, we need to get acquainted with the Word of God literally. We should even memorize many crucial verses in the Bible" (*The Practice of Prophesying*, 29). In the same portion he continues, "To have the personal knowledge of the Scriptures, we must know not merely the text of the Scriptures in letters but the deep denotations and spiritual significances of the Word of God." These statements clearly indicate that prophesying in the meetings of the church, the necessity of which was greatly stressed by Brother Lee in his later ministry, requires much more than a cursory engagement with the Bible.

Endeavoring to receive the ministry's exhortation has resulted in numerous other initiatives among us intended to promote the reading of the Word. The ministry has expended much labor over many years to produce accurate and readable translations of the Bible in many languages. Bibles for America distributes the New Testament for free and even includes a topical guide to promote both the personal and corporate study of the Word. Every copy of the *Holy Word for Morning Revival* contains a two-year Bible reading schedule to facilitate reading in a daily and consistent way, and there are also various websites that exist for this purpose. The Full-Time Training strongly recommends a complete reading of the Bible before a trainee attends, and a complete reading during the training is required for graduation. Furthermore, "Bible reading challenges" and verse memorization contests are a common feature of college campus clubs and the work with the young people among us to help the young generation lay a foundation for their Christian life. These and numerous other examples demonstrate an effort to practically work out the ministry's exhortation to read and study the Bible diligently. In light of all these matters, to claim that the ministry has replaced the Bible in the Lord's recovery is ungrounded and inaccurate.