

PSALMS, JAMES, AND THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

Some have accused Witness Lee of teaching that parts of the book of Psalms and the Epistle of James were not divinely inspired. This is a grievous accusation that, if true, constitutes a denial of one of the basic affirmations of Christian orthodoxy: that the Bible is the Word of God, complete and inerrant. Such ones hastily seize upon Brother Lee's statements which indicate that not everything conveyed in Psalms or James' Epistle expresses the divine concept. Only when plucked out of context and twisted from their original meaning could these statements be in any way alarming. With a fair evaluation of Brother Lee's ministry on these books as well as his numerous clear affirmations of the divine inspiration of every book of the Bible, the point of these statements and the basis for making them become quite clear.

On the Divine Inspiration of the Bible

There is no ambiguity in Brother Lee's ministry regarding the divine inspiration of the Bible. In *Truth Lessons* he says "The entire Bible is God's breath. Each book of the Bible is God's revelation with every line and word coming from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture is infallible." (*Truth Lessons, Level 1, Volume 1, 11*). Speaking of the Bible as God's word and drawing upon such verses as 2 Samuel 23:2 and 2 Pet. 1:21, he taught:

Not only do we have to admit that the Bible is God's inspiration, but we must also realize that the Bible is God's Spirit bringing man into God and is from God, speaking forth God's word. It is also the Holy Spirit speaking the word of God through man's mouth. This is the Bible. What is the Bible? The Bible is the word of God spoken through man being borne by the Holy Spirit. (*On Knowing the Bible, 16*)

In the same portion he went on to conclude, "Therefore, we can draw a very clear, simple, and accurate conclusion: the Bible is the word of God spoken by His Holy Spirit through the mouth of man." Quotes such as these make clear that Brother Lee strongly held that every book, even every word, of the Bible has God as its source, being divinely inspired by Him and communicated to the writers via the Holy Spirit. In the face of such definite speaking to the contrary, it is impossible to sustain the accusation that Brother Lee did not believe in the so-called verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible.

Psalms and James Containing Mixture

In ministering on books such as Psalms and James, Brother Lee brought forth an important consideration for understanding Scripture: Even though the Bible and all the speaking contained therein is God's Word, not every speaking in the Bible can be said to be God's own speaking that expresses the divine concept. In the *Life-study of James* he said, "For the Bible to be divinely inspired does not mean that every word in the Bible is God's word." (75) The distinction should be clear. Every word contained in the Bible is was breathed out by God through His Spirit, but not every word is God's word in the sense that it conveys God's own thought. The serpent's deceptive speaking in Genesis 3:4-5, the beclouded debates of Job and his three friends (Job 2:11-32:1), and Peter's rebuke of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:22 are all clear examples of this. All of these words were recorded according to the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but they are not God's own words, God's own speaking, nor do these words, when taken in isolation, convey the divine thought and concept.

With this important distinction in mind, we can properly understand Brother Lee's teaching that the writings of the psalmists contain a mixture of the divine concept with the human concept. For example, of Psalms 1 and 2 Brother Lee says:

These two psalms are two kinds of declarations. One is made by the psalmist according to his human concept, and the other declaration is made by God according to His divine concept, concerning Christ as His centrality and universality. We have to say amen to God's divine concept in Psalm 2. In God's eyes, it is not a matter of our keeping the law. In God's eyes, it is a matter of taking refuge in Christ and kissing Him. To take refuge in Christ means to believe in Him, and to kiss Him means to love Him. This is according to the divine concept of the New Testament. We need to believe in Christ and to love Christ. By doing this, we are blessed. (*Life-study of Psalms, 7*)

What is the divine concept? In brief it is to exalt Christ as the centrality and universality of God's eternal economy. It is that God desires to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen people to produce the Body of Christ as the enlargement of Christ to be Christ's glorious expression. With this revelation as a base, it is easy to see why Brother Lee identifies some Psalms as having mixture. Some exalt the keeping of the Mosaic law, which clearly contradicts the teaching of the New Testament (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:16). In many others, the psalmist expresses desire for vengeance against his enemies or boasts of his own righteousness. This, too, is against the teaching of the New Testament, in which the Lord instructs us to love and pray for our enemies and in which Christ Himself is our righteousness and our unique boast (Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; Luke 18:9-14; Phil. 3:3). The Psalmists' exaltation of the law, their wishing ill upon their enemies, and their boasting in their own righteousness all indicate that there is indeed a mixture of the natural human concept with the divine in the Psalms. Because the divine revelation of the Bible is progressive, it is understandable that some of what the psalmists saw and expressed does not come up to the standard of what, for example, the Lord Himself taught in the Gospels, or what was revealed to the apostle Paul and conveyed in his Epistles. Nevertheless, we strongly affirm with Brother Lee that, without exception, all the Psalms were written by godly men, whose words were recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for a specific purpose. As a whole the Psalms show that in their seeking of Him, the Lord turns His lovers from the law to Christ and to the building up of God's habitation and kingdom for Christ to take possession of the earth.

In his Epistle, which is on practical Christian perfection, James uplifts the Old Testament law and charges the Jewish believers in Christ to keep it (James 1:25, footnote 25²; 2:8-12). However, a great part of the New Testament addresses the immense and ongoing struggle to bring the believers, both Jew and Gentile, thoroughly out from the old covenant, in which God dealt with His people according to the principle of the law, into the new covenant, in which He deals with His people according to the principle of grace. The writings of Paul strongly emphasize that the believers in Christ have died to the law and should have nothing further to do with it now that Christ, who is the end of the law, has come (Gal. 2:19; 5:1-4; Rom. 10:4).

Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15 show how some tried to induce the Gentile believers in Antioch to keep the law and how absolutely Paul and Barnabas fought against this Judaic influence to maintain the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:5). They even traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and the elders in order to clarify the truth for the sake of all the churches, the entire Body of Christ. During the conference in Acts 15 Peter strongly confirmed that both the Jewish and Gentile believers should not consider themselves to be under the yoke of the law (vv. 7-11). The solution given by James showed that his concept was still at least partially according to the Mosaic law and his Judaic background (vv. 20-21, see footnote 21¹). This is even more clear in his subsequent boasting of the church in Jerusalem's zeal for the law (21:20). Moreover, his influence continued to frustrate the work of bringing the believers fully out from under the law, as seen in his effect on the clear standing of the apostles Peter and Paul (Gal. 2:11-12; Acts 21:21-26).

As with Psalms, the divine inspiration of James' Epistle is unquestioned, and in both the *Life-study of James* and *Crystallization-study of James* Brother Lee emphasizes this very point. However, in light of God's economy as the central line in the Bible, Brother Lee is faithful and bold to point out that James's writings lack a clear view of God's economy, including His dispensational move from the Old Testament, in which righteousness is through the law, to the New Testament, in which righteousness is through faith in Christ. Nevertheless, the inclusion of James's Epistle in the Bible is, as with all other Scripture, quite purposeful: "In Acts 21 and in the book of James the purpose is to show us the possibility that a godly person may lack the clear, heavenly view of God's New Testament economy. Praise the Lord that everything in the Bible is God's breath, and everything has been recorded to serve a particular purpose!" (*Life-study of James*, 132). Brother Lee's appreciation of Psalms and James is evident in the hundreds of messages he released on these two books. We appreciate his great insight that these books were included in the Bible to show us that the pursuit of godliness or practical Christian perfection may cause us to misaim if we lack a clear vision regarding God's economy, which is wholly and absolutely centered on Christ dispensed into and lived out of the believers for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ to be His fullness and expression.