

A BRIEF LETTER

■ CONCERNING
MISREPRESENTATIONS OF
THE MINISTRY OF
BROTHER WITNESS LEE ■

In recent years a small group of Burmese congregations have circulated statements opposing the teaching of Dr. Thein Htay and by extension of Witness Lee.¹ Because we have not studied Dr. Htay's teaching and because he has carried out his work among Burmese-speaking Christians apart from the fellowship of Witness Lee's co-workers, we cannot comment on what Dr. Htay may have said. Nevertheless, we are compelled to correct misrepresentations in these statements of Witness Lee's teachings and our own beliefs and to point out the shortfalls they exhibit in the signers' understanding of Scripture. More specifically:

1

We affirm our belief that, as Witness Lee wrote, "The Bible is the Word of God, written under His inspiration word by word (2 Tim. 3:16), and is the complete and only written divine revelation of God to man (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19)."² Any inference otherwise is false.

2

We repudiate as false any statements that we interpret the Bible according to "feeling and experience" and believe that the Bible is "not absolute correct truth that guides us to spiritual life." While we believe that the Christian life as portrayed in the Bible has a significant experiential component (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18), Witness Lee explicitly taught that any spiritual experience must be measured against the Bible and rejected if it does not correspond to what is recorded there.³

We believe unequivocally, contrary to what these statements say, that the unique basis of God's salvation is the eternally effective redemptive work of Christ, the incarnate Son of God, appropriated by us through faith and resulting in our justification before God (Eph. 1:7; John 1:14; Eph. 2:5, 8; Rom. 3:24, 28; Gal. 2:16). As Witness Lee wrote, "Only the blood of Jesus Christ, whom God judged on the cross (Isa. 53:8), is able to wash us from our sins (Rev. 1:5)."⁴

Although we, due to conscience, meet apart from denominational Christianity, which we view as unscriptural, we seek fellowship with all believers as brothers and fellow members of the Body of Christ. The Bible says plainly that there is one Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 2:16; 4:4), which includes all believers. Likewise, God has called all Christians into one fellowship in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16). We do not consider ourselves superior to other Christians. Rather, we simply believe that our standing for the practical oneness of the Body of Christ is correct according to the Bible. That standing is inclusive, not exclusive, making it incumbent on us to receive into fellowship all members of the Lord's Body, whether they take the same standing or not.

■ *Many of the statements' criticisms display a shortage of realization concerning significant aspects of biblical truth. For example:* ■

1

Criticism of our translating John 3:16 and other verses as “believe into” rather than “believe in” is ill-informed. Through believing, we who were once “apart from Christ” (Eph. 2:12) are now “in Christ” (v. 13). Our believing is the transaction by which we moved from “apart from” to “in.” Nor are we alone in affirming that the Greek word *eis* means “into.” A note on John 11:25 in the ESV Study Bible, a popular version among Western evangelicals, says, “The preposition translated ‘in’ (Gk. *eis*) is striking, for *eis* ordinarily means ‘into,’ giving the sense that genuine faith in Christ in a sense brings people ‘into’ Christ, so that they rest in and become united with Christ.”

2

The signers of these statements seem not to realize that through our new birth, we have been born of God to have His life and nature. In the Greek New Testament, the word used to designate the uncreated eternal life of God is *zoe*. It is the word Paul used in Ephesians 4:18 for “the life of God,” from which the Gentiles are alienated. It is also the word used in the Gospel of John when the Lord Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25) and “I am the way, the reality, and the life” (14:6). As believers, we were born of God (1:13). As this verse makes clear, we are not just adopted sons, but we are born of God Himself. As a result, we now have the eternal life (1 John 5:11-12), and because we have this life, we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

Lack of understanding concerning the believers being born of God leads to failure to apprehend the great significance of Romans 5:10: “For 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.” To be “saved” “much more” is not our word; it is the apostle Paul’s. This verse shows that God’s full salvation is of two parts. Through faith in the redemptive death of Christ we are reconciled to God. However, there is a “much more” salvation in the life of Christ. Without faith in the redemptive death of Christ, we cannot receive the life of Christ in which God desires to save us, that is, to thoroughly renew us (Rom. 12:2), transform us (2 Cor. 3:18), and conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). On the other hand, to care only for redemption and not for God’s salvation in life is to fall short of the goal of God’s salvation.

We believe that the signers of these statements are themselves victims of works of shallow Western apologists. We would refer them to the conclusions drawn following extensive studies performed by members of the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary and by leaders at the Christian Research Institute. After a two-year study, the former group wrote, “It is the conclusion of Fuller Theological Seminary that the teachings and practices of the local churches and its members represent the genuine, historical, biblical Christian faith in every essential aspect.” They noted that in the hands of critics “the teachings of Witness Lee have been grossly misrepresented and therefore most frequently misunderstood in the general Christian community” and urged all Christians to extend to the local churches “the right hand of fellowship.”⁵ The Christian Research Institute, after a six-year primary research project, reached similar conclusions.⁶

On behalf of the co-workers in the Lord's recovery:



Ray Macnee



D. Colley Joseph

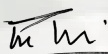
Representatives of local churches in Myanmar and the United States:



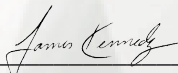
Noah Naw Aung
Myanmar



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1. We welcome fellowship and questions from all fair-minded believers. To facilitate fellowship, please first write to us at one of the following email addresses: myanmargospelbookroom@gmail.com (for Myanmar); openletterfellowship.ok@gmail.com (for the United States).
 2. Available at <http://an-open-letter.org/en/our-faith/>.
 3. Witness Lee, *The Knowledge of Life* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1973), 157.
 4. Witness Lee, *Life-study of Leviticus* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1989), 433.
 5. Available at <https://an-open-letter.org/en/fuller-theological-seminary/>.
 6. Available at <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/we-were-wrong-2/>.