

THE DANGER OF WITNESS LEE BOOKS

By Jeremiah J. Sargent

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Never before in the history of Christianity have there been so many religious writings and commentaries on the Word of God. Books have been written and are being written on every subject imaginable. Just check out Amazon.com or Christianbooks.com and you will see what I am taking about. This abundance of "Christian" literature can be a tremendous blessing to an individual who desires to increase their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, but it can also be a great detriment. Satan uses the religious writings of men to deceive, confuse, and distract people from the truth. It reminds me of the apostle Paul's warning to the church in Corinth — *"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."* Throughout history, religious writings have been used to captivate the hearts of people and cause them to walk away from the truth of God's Word. In recent years, we have seen a perfect illustration of the power that "Christian" writings can have on churches and individuals with the publishing of Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life*.

So with the endless resource of "Christian" material comes a challenge to those who want to be edified in their faith, but don't want to be lead astray by false doctrine. I am sure you have heard it said or have even said it yourself, "This is a great book, but it doesn't use the King James Version;" or "The author holds to a 'Universal church' view;" or "It has a Charismatic flavor to it." So how does one discern if a Christian book proclaims the truth of God's Word and not just the author's opinion?

When discerning whether or not a Christian book is worthwhile, the first thing I do is find out some information about the author (the internet can be a good resource, though not always accurate). I want to know what kind of church or denomination he/she is associated with; where he/she received his/her training and teaching; what his/her testimony of salvation is, and what beliefs he/she holds to on major biblical doctrines? Now of course there are many other questions we could ask, but I believe the answers to these questions are sufficient to discern the basic flavor of the book. Taking these steps is wise because it protects the reader from allowing error to corrupt their mind. God's Word exhorts us to only think upon those things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

Several weeks ago, a lady in our church gave me a book entitled *The World Situation and God's Move* by Witness Lee. She asked that I read it and then give her my option about the author and the book. She had received it from a friend and wanted to make sure it was biblically accurate before reading it herself. Not knowing the author or book, I began my research. Here are my findings:

BACKGROUND OF WITNESS LEE

In 1905, Witness Lee was born into a Southern Baptist family in Northern China. He grew up in the Province of Shandong, and was educated in both American Southern Baptist and Presbyterian schools. At age 19, he was invited to attend a Chinese Independent 'Church' and after hearing the preaching of Sister Peace Dang Wang, he made a profession of salvation and declared that from that moment on he was "Fully captured for Christ." Immediately Witness Lee consecrated the rest of his life to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here is a portion of his salvation testimony from his website.

After about two and a half months, they baptized me into their membership by sprinkling. But it was not until a short time later that I was actually saved and turned to the Lord through the preaching of Sister Peace Wang in April of the same year. At that time I was exceedingly ambitious as a young man for my education and my future. But after I was saved under Sister Peace Wang's preaching that afternoon, while I was walking home, I stopped and prayed to God, according to Sister Wang's message, somewhat as follows: "God, I don't like being usurped by Satan as Pharaoh, through the world as Egypt; I would like to serve You and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus through the villages at any cost for my whole life."

Soon after his profession, Witness Lee started attending a Brethren Assembly and studied with them for the next seven years until he read an article in the local paper entitled "The Morning Star" by Watchman Nee. Watchman Nee was a prominent preacher in China during the early 1920s who published a monthly paper called, *The Christian*. His articles inspired Witness Lee, and soon after they began corresponding.

Lee moved to Shanghai in October of 1933 and worked under the supervision of Watchman Nee. Nee became Witness's mentor and teacher, testing him in the scriptures and challenging him in his way of life. After four months of testing, Nee invited Lee to move to Shanghai permanently and join him in the work there. Nee entrusted him with the responsibility of operating their publication ministry called the "Shanghai Gospel Bookroom."

In 1940, with the politics in China moving towards Communism, Watchman Nee called an urgent meeting of all his ministry co-workers. He wanted them to pray and seek God's direction as to whether or not they should stay in China. On the last day of the prayer meeting, Nee announced that Witness Lee should leave the country. Here is Lee's account of the meeting:

"Regardless of whether he likes it or not, he must be asked to go abroad." There was prayer, and Watchman closed with these words: "Let us bring this matter to the Lord and see how the Lord will lead us." That was the decision.

Witness Lee submitted to Nee's leadership and left for Taiwan in 1949. He continued the publishing ministry under the new name of "Taiwan Gospel Bookroom" and was instrumental in starting hundreds of Recovery local 'churches' in Taiwan and the Philippines. These churches grew to over 40,000 followers in just five years. While in Taiwan, Lee also began publishing his own monthly magazine called *The Ministry of the Word*.

Then in 1962, Lee felt led to come to the United States to expand his training ministries, book publishing, and to start the Living Streams Ministry (based in Anaheim, California.) He has published over 400 titles, many of which have been translated into other languages. Two of his most well known pieces of literature are the *Recovery Bible* (a verse-by-verse commentary on the Bible) and *The Life Study of the Bible* (his interpretation of the scriptures). Witness Lee's ministry emphasized the experience of "Christ as life" and "the practical oneness of the believers as the Body of Christ." He also believed Christians should not be segregated or organized into denominations, as seen in his commentary on Matthew 16:18, "*The Lord is not building His church in Christendom, which is composed of the apostate Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations. This prophecy is being fulfilled through the Lord's recovery (meaning their movement), in which the building of the genuine church is being accomplished.*" Lee held to a "Universal Church" and a "Local Church" belief that teaches all Christians make up the body of Christ; (though they should meet together in local assemblies to declare that "we are the church," while maintaining the understanding that the "we" is inclusive not exclusive of some). He believed that belonging to a denomination such as Baptist, Methodist or Catholic was divisive and contrary to the oneness people have inherited in Christ.

Witness Lee died June 9, 1997 at his home in Southern California. His teachings are still widely published and followed around the world, primarily in the Chinese "Christian" circles.

MAJOR INFLUENCE UPON WITNESS LEE

Witness Lee's greatest influence came from the teachings of Nee Shu-Tsu, who is commonly known as Watchman Nee. Watchman Nee was a Chinese Christian author and church leader during the early 20th Century. He founded the "The Church Assembly Hall," which would later be known as the "Local churches." At the age of 17, Nee heard the gospel while listening to the preaching of an evangelist by the name of Dora Yu. He responded to the gospel and afterwards set out to reach all of China for Christ.

During Nee's college years a Miss Margaret Barber, an independent British missionary/teacher, taught him the Keswick concept of being filled with the Spirit, and in February of 1922, Nee claimed he was "baptized in the Spirit." Nee was an avid reader and student of the Bible, but much of his doctrinal influence came through the reading of authors such as Jessie Penn-Lewis, Robert Govett, D. M. Panton, and John Nelson Darby. These authors range in religious background from Methodist, Anglican, and Brethren, and are well known for their books supporting Calvinism and a selective or partial-rapture. Through his studies of these books, Nee developed a "perfectionist theology," a "partial rapture/Christian purgatory" belief, a belief that pastors are unscriptural, and several Charismatic doctrines. While imprisoned in China during the 1940s, Nee was asked this question: "*If a servant of the Lord from another Christian group gives us more or higher spiritual light, do we receive it?*" After he thought for a while, he said: "*God did not give us all the light. If somebody gives us more light, we should be very glad to receive it!*"

Like Witness Lee, Nee wrote many books, and is best known for His book entitled *The Normal Christian Life*. His writings continue to have a large influence in the "Recovery Churches."

DOCTRINAL BELIEFS OF WITNESS LEE

Some have claimed that the “Lord’s Recovery” movement is a cult; saying that more emphasis is put on Watchman Nee’s and Witness Lee’s writings than on the scriptures. In 2001, Living Stream Ministry filed a \$136 million libel lawsuit against Harvest House Publishers. Authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon wrote the *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* and listed Lee’s movement among the cults and new religions. In 2006, the Court of Appeals for the First District of Texas dismissed the lawsuit against Harvest House Publishers and many leading Evangelical groups called on the “Recovery Churches” to renounce the doctrinal teachings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. To this day, they have not.

Just because a religious group is called a cult does not necessarily mean they are one. The church I pastor has been called many different names throughout the years — some are accurate and others are just spoken out of ignorance or hatred! I would like to allow Witness Lee to speak for himself. A man’s true beliefs never come from his critics, they come from own words — “...those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart;” “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:” I have included a few statements Witness Lee made concerning his beliefs of the scriptures and I will allow you to decide for yourself concerning the reading of his books.

ON THE NATURE OF GOD

“...the entire Godhead, the Triune God, became flesh.” — God’s New Testament Economy (1986, p. 230)

“The traditional explanation of the Trinity is grossly inadequate and borders on tritheism. When the Spirit of God is joined with us, God is not left behind, nor does Christ remain on the throne. This is the impression Christianity gives. They think of the Father as one Person, sending the Son, another Person, to accomplish redemption, after which the Son sends the Spirit, yet another Person. The Spirit, in traditional thinking, comes into the believers, while the Father and Son are left on the throne. When believers pray, they are taught to bow before the Father and pray in the name of the Son. To split the Godhead into these separate Persons is not the revelation of the Bible....” — Life Messages, p. 164 (1979)

“The Son is the Father, and the Son is also the Spirit... and the Lord Jesus who is the Son is also the Eternal Father. Our Lord is the Son, and He is also the Father. Hallelujah!” — Concerning the Triune God, pp. 18-19 (1973)

ON THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

“Christ is of two natures, the human and the divine, and we are the same: we are of the human nature, but covered with the divine. He is the God-man, and we are the God-men. He is the ark made of wood covered with gold, and we are the

boards made of wood covered with gold. In number we are different, but in nature we are exactly the same.” — The All-Inclusive Christ, p.103 (1989)

“God can say to His believers, ‘I am divine and human,’ and His believers can reply, ‘Praise You, Lord. You are divine and human, and we are human and divine’.” — The Triune God to Be Life to the Tripartite Man, pp. 51-52 (1990)

“My burden is to show you clearly that God’s economy and plan is to make Himself man and to make us, His created beings, ‘God,’ so that He is ‘man-ized’ and we are ‘God-ized.’ In the end, He and we, we and He, all become God-men.”— A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing, p. 54 (1990)

“We the believers are begotten of God. What is begotten of man is man, and what is begotten of God must be God. We are born of God; hence, in this sense, we are God.” — A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing, p. 53 (1990)

“Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, we may say that the Triune God is now the ‘four-in-one’ God. These four are the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body. The Three of the Divine Trinity cannot be confused or separated, and the four-in-one also cannot be separated or confused.” — A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing, p. 203-204 (1990)

ON BEING “BORN AGAIN”

“We have seen that to reach the unbelievers, no preaching is necessary. If we help them say “O Lord” three times, they will be saved. If they open the window, the air will get in. All they have to do is to open their mouths and say, “O Lord, O Lord.” Even if they have no intention of believing, still they will be caught! Regardless of whether they have the intention or not, as long as they open the window, the air will get in. It is not a matter of teaching; it is a matter of touching the seven Spirits of God.” — Witness Lee, Stream Magazine, p.6 (1970)

To be regenerated, simply come to the Lord with an open and honest heart and say to Him: “Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I need You. Thank You for dying for me. Lord Jesus, forgive me. Cleanse me from all my sins. I believe You rose from the dead. I receive You right now as my Savior and life. Come into me! Fill me with Your life! Lord Jesus, I give myself to You for Your purpose.” After regeneration, a believer needs to be baptized (Mark16:16). Then God begins the lifelong process of gradually spreading Himself as life from the believer’s spirit into his soul (Eph. 3:17). This process, called transformation (Rom. 12:2), requires human cooperation (Phil. 2:12). The believer cooperates by allowing the Lord to spread into his soul until all his desires, thoughts, and decisions become one with those of Christ. Finally, at Christ’s return, God will fully saturate the believer’s body with His life. This is called glorification (Phil. 3:21). Thus, instead of being empty and damaged in each part, this man is filled and saturated with the life of God. This is

God's full salvation! Such a man expresses God and fulfills God's plan! — The Mystery of Human Life, Living Stream Ministry Gospel tract (1997)

ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

"We do not need the Bible study classes; we need the weeping classes to weep for the spiritual poverty and deadness. We must listen to the Spirit, not just read what is written. We must listen to the present, instant speaking of the living Spirit. Why have Christians been divided? It is simply because of the different teachings and doctrines. The more teachings there are, the more divisions there will be. All the various teachings and opinions have done much damage to the recovery of the church. I fear that some of us are still under the influence of the Babylonian doctrines. May the Lord have mercy upon us that we may forsake all of those teachings, regardless of whether they are right or wrong. Let us go back to Jerusalem with the Spirit. We all must have our "heads cut off." — The Stream

"Then the fourth thing that we must see in order to participate is life! We all must know life. Revelation is a book of life. Do not pay attention to the forms, the regulations, the teachings, the doctrines, Christianity and religion. No, we must pay our full attention to life. Today, if you were to ask me how to be victorious, I would tell you that there is no need for you to try to be victorious. Just say from deep within, "O Lord, Amen, Hallelujah! O Lord, Amen, Hallelujah! O Lord, Amen, Hallelujah!" and you will be so victorious." — The Stream

Research Resources:

- www.witnesslee.org
- www.watchmannee.org
- www.lsm.org
- The Recovery Movement by Steve Amato
- Understanding Watchman Nee by Dana Roberts
- The World Situation and God's Move by Witness Lee
- The Recovery Bible
- Concerning the Triune God by Witness Lee