

"The Bible: Our Only Standard"

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Before a modern skyscraper in downtown Taipei, Taiwan, stands a large granite boulder. Engraved upon that rock in large Chinese characters is a bold declaration: "The Bible is our only standard. We are not afraid to preach the pure Word of the Bible, even if men oppose; but if it is not the Word of the Bible, we could never agree even if everyone approved of it."

These words appeared in the first issue of Watchman Nee's publication, *The Christian*, in 1925. They encapsulate his unflinching faithfulness to God's Word. Today they mark the entrance to the exhibit: *A Presentation of the Lord's Recovery*, housed in Taipei. This principle characterizes the Lord's recovery. In Witness Lee's words, "The very great, particular characteristic in the Lord's recovery is to do everything according to the Bible" (*Elders' Training, Book 7*, p. 107). The Bible is our only standard and the unique measure in evaluating any teaching or practice.

The issue of "one publication" has been raised most recently in a booklet entitled, "Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery" (LSM, June 2005). This document decrees that "All the saints and all the churches everywhere should ... be restricted to one publication in the Lord's recovery" (p. 8). "One publication" means materials produced by Living Stream Ministry and the Taiwan Gospel Book Room. It further states that other publications produced among us should not be given "any more credence among the churches than anything else that can be published today, secular or religious" (p. 8).

Concerning "one publication," it has been publicly admitted by one of its proponents that "it is not a matter of right or wrong, biblical or non-biblical. It is a matter of whether there is one sound or more than one sound." (*Ministry Magazine*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, p. 186). To this a response must be made that it does indeed matter whether such a policy is biblical or non-biblical! Watchman Nee charges, "Whatever the Bible does not have, the church must by all means reject. Otherwise, all those who follow the Lord faithfully will leave when they see the church having what the Bible has not" (*Further Talks*, p. 64). Let us ask then the question, is this matter of "one publication" scriptural?

First of all, the Bible does not explicitly teach such a thing. Nowhere in the New Testament are the believers restricted to literature from one publishing center nor the writings of one New Testament minister. We are charged to keep the seven "ones" of Ephesians 4. However, these seven "ones" do not include "one publication"!

Neither does the Bible teach "one publication" implicitly. The verse, "if... the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle." (1 Cor.14:8) refers to speaking in tongues without interpretation. Paul's trumpet analogy has been applied to publications. However, this illustration has been borrowed and applied to a foreign context. That was not Paul's point! Using a biblical illustration does not impart biblical authority to a non-scriptural teaching.

Furthermore, the New Testament gives no example of such a restriction - which apostle restricted the believers under his care to receive only his writings? Which minister prohibited the churches from receiving the writings of other New Testament ministers? Instead, rather than prohibition, we see inclusion. Peter's epistles were sent to Galatia and Asia (1 Pet. 1:1), which were located in Paul's area of labor. Moreover, Peter's First Epistle was sent the same year Paul wrote to Ephesus and Colossae (AD 64). That year the church in Ephesus received letters from both Paul and Peter, possibly even during the same month or week, yet Paul did not prohibit the churches under his ministry from receiving "other publications" such as Peter's. Indeed, rather than restriction, we see recommendation (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Witness Lee notes, "Peter commends Paul, and says that both of them teach the same things...although their style, terminology, utterance, aspects of their views, and presentations of their teachings differed one from another, [they] participated in the same unique ministry, the ministry of the New Testament" (2 Peter 3:16, fn 2). It is also notable that, although the apostle John was aware of heretical teachings, he did not restrict the saints solely to his own writings. John instead commended the saints to the Anointing (1 John 2:22-27)!

How We Got The Bible

Consider how the New Testament came to being. Did the New Testament authors submit their writings to a "Central Review Committee"? Did the "blended brothers" (the first apostles) review Mark and Luke's writings before their acceptance in the 'one publication' (the New Testament)? Luke simply remarks "it seemed good to me also" to write (Luke 1:3).

The New Testament authors wrote under the Spirit's inspiration. Others also wrote, as evidenced by early books such as "The Gospel of Thomas," "The Epistle of Barnabus" and "The Shepherd of Hermas" etc. Scholars tell us, however, "There is no evidence of a central and official clearinghouse for inspired writings" (Geisler & Nix, p. 101). No policy of "one publication" existed, but the saints and churches had their inner "taste" for life and the Spirit. The saints rejected some writings (the Gnostic gospels, etc.) as unhelpful and even damaging. The writings that were accepted were accepted due to their spiritual merit. They were recognized, copied, circulated, and eventually gathered together to become the New Testament. The councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) ratified the 27 New Testament books (Geisler & Nix, p. 111), yet this "official recognition" occurred 300 years after

the New Testament was written! As professor Lightfoot says, "It is necessary to emphasize that no Church through its councils made the canon of Scripture" (Lightfoot, p. 112). Rather, the councils ratified the divine writings already acknowledged by the saints and churches. No teaching or policy of "one publication" existed, yet, under God's sovereignty, the New Testament was produced. Shouldn't this guide us today?

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