

Excerpts from Life-study of James, Message 14
A LIFE NOT FULLY ACCORDING TO
AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT
ECONOMY
(2)

Bible Verses:

2 Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 Tim. 3:17 That the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

After considering all the matters in the Epistle of James that show us a life not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy, we must go on to consider a major problem—the problem of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Since we have pointed out so many shortcomings of the book of James, some may wonder if this Epistle is inspired of God, if it is God-breathed. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul says,

“All Scripture is God-breathed.” Therefore, we need to explain carefully what is our attitude toward the inspiration of the Scriptures in relation to the book of James.

First, we definitely believe that all Scripture is God-breathed, that is, inspired by God. We believe that every word of every book of the Bible has been breathed out by God.

Second, although every line and word of the Scripture is inspired by God, this does not mean that every word in this holy Book is the word of God, but we must be very careful in our understanding of this matter. In the Bible there are a great many words that are not God’s words. We may give several examples to make this matter clear.

In Genesis 3:1, 3-5 we have words spoken by the serpent. First the serpent asked the woman, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (v. 1). Then the serpent went on to say, “Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (vv. 4-5). These words spoken by the serpent are actually words uttered by the Devil, Satan.

In the book of Genesis, we also have words spoken by evil persons. For instance, in Genesis 4:23-24 Lamech boasted to his wives, “Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.” Throughout the Old Testament many other words were spoken by evildoers and by those who are enemies of God and of His people. To be sure, none of those words are God’s words.

We may cite further examples from the book of Job and from the Psalms. In the book of Job many things are spoken by Job and his friends, all of whom were godly. The young man, Elihu, also was a godly person. Eventually, God Himself came in to speak and He repudiated many of the things that had been spoken by Job and his friends. God would not recognize many of the words of those godly men as His words. Instead of being the word of God, many of the words spoken by Job and his friends were merely human. Furthermore, in the Psalms certain words are merely the utterances of men, whereas others are truly the word of God.

In the New Testament we also find words that are not the word of God. According to the gospel of Matthew, the high priest demanded that the Lord Jesus tell His investigators whether or not He was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 26:63). After the Lord gave His answer, the high priest declared, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy” (v. 65). Furthermore, the people shouted, “Crucify, crucify him!” (John 19:6). Certainly, although the Gospels were breathed by God, inspired by God, the words of the high priest and of the people are not God’s words.

As recorded in the Gospels, Peter also said certain things that are not the word of God. Receiving a revelation from the Father, in Matthew 16:16 Peter declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” However, after the Lord went on to speak about His death, Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God be merciful to You, Lord; this shall by no means happen to You!” (Matt. 16:22). To be sure, what Peter said here was not the word of God. This is proved by the fact that the Lord turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are

not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men” (v. 23). Actually, what Peter said was not even his own word; it was a word that came from Satan.

In Matthew 17:4 we have another instance of a word spoken by Peter that is not the word of God: “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You are willing, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Here Peter spoke in a nonsensical way, and his word certainly was not the word of God.

In like manner, although certain words in the Epistle of James are the words of James and not the words of God, God inspired the writing of this Epistle for a particular purpose. Part of this purpose is that we may realize that it is possible even for a godly man to be veiled concerning God’s New Testament economy. If the book of James were not part of the Scriptures, there would be a hole, a gap, in the Bible. Without Acts 21 and the book of James, probably none of us would ever think that a godly man could be so veiled and covered in relation to God’s economy. If we did not have Acts 21 and the Epistle of James, we would never imagine that a godly man could have such a lack concerning a clear

vision of the New Testament economy of God. Therefore, we should be thankful that we have the book of James to help us realize that it is not adequate simply to be godly, holy, scriptural, spiritual, and victorious. Perhaps this may have been adequate for someone to be a saint in the Old Testament, but it is not sufficient for us to be a New Testament member of Christ, a bona fide son of God regenerated by Him. This should help us understand why the Epistle of James is included as part of the Scriptures breathed by God. This Epistle was included for the purpose of showing us that it is possible for a godly man to be far off from God's New Testament economy.

I realize that by speaking frankly concerning the shortcomings of the Epistle of James with regard to God's New Testament economy, I run the risk of being unjustly accused of not believing that every word in the Bible is God-breathed, inspired by Him. However, if all these messages on the Life-study of James, especially this message, are read carefully, it will be clear that there is no ground to say such a thing. We do not have the slightest doubt about the divine inspiration of the Bible. On the contrary, we have proper understanding concerning the

inspiration of the Scriptures. We believe that the entire Bible, every word in the Scripture, is God-breathed. Nevertheless, not every word in the Bible is the word of God. As we have seen, many words recorded in the Scriptures are the words of Satan, evil men, God's opposers, and even the nonsensical talk of godly men. Furthermore, all the words of the Scriptures were breathed out by God and recorded for a particular purpose. In Genesis 3 the purpose is to expose the subtlety of the enemy. 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! We thank God for the Scriptures breathed out by Him.

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Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

[Commentary]:

Introduction

[CW]: The book of James has many wonderful expressions and utterances that many Christians love to quote. His exhortation on bridling an evil tongue, for example, and on other various Christian virtues are the stuff of many a good Sunday school lesson. In chapter four, we have another admirable example of the practical Christian perfection that James espoused. He says in verse 13, "Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit." Whereas you do not know the matter of tomorrow, what your life will be, for you are a vapor which appears for a little while and then disappears. Instead you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will both live and do this or that. Who could argue or take issue with such an expression, if the Lord wills? But by comparison, we must consider another angle, another perspective, and it's the perspective of the dominant New Testament writer, the Apostle Paul, who did not exhort the believers simply to follow God's will in an objective outward way, but rather to be those that live moment by moment under the influence and direction of the indwelling Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Ron Kangas is here. We have our last program in this life-study of the Epistle of James, and Ron, we've been, I would say, a bit hard in a way on our brother James in certain instances. Today I think we'll see that we fully affirm that his contribution is in the Scripture under the direct inspiration and breathing out of God, but yet we have had to be faithful and fair in our consideration, haven't we?

[RK]: We have had to be in order to be faithful to the Lord and faithful to the divine revelation in the New Testament as a whole with its governing principles related to God's economy. And in brief, what we have emphasized is that, number one, the book of James is part of the God-breathed Scripture. Every word in the book of James is the product of the breath of God, inspired by God, word by word. But, number two, we've emphasized that James, in contrast to Paul, did not have a thorough and clear view of God's New Testament economy. So, in his epistle, it's fair to say there is an element of mixture, not with the world, not with pagan things, not with worldly philosophy, but with the Old Testament, with the Jewish religion. And this is not something we read into the text or superimpose on the book. It's there in James' own words, addressing the twelve tribes, referring to the synagogues, emphasizing the law. And even as you read, you know, this is a very good portion. We shouldn't be presumptuous to say, today, tomorrow, we'll go here and we will do that. But we should say, if the Lord wills. We can't say that this is an error. This is a godly and pious attitude, showing that we trust in God's sovereignty. But the problem is, even such a pious expression, if unduly emphasized, can cause us to miss the central matter of the Spirit's indwelling, of the Spirit's leading, of Christ's living in us, which are central matters in the New Testament revelation. Therefore, what we need to do with James is to discern between that part of his writing, which shows one foot in the Old Testament economy, and the other part of his writing, which is really profitable to us, concerning the practical side of the Christian life and the practical Christian perfection in God's New Testament economy. If we take the extreme of discrediting the book of James and regarding it as of no value, we go way too far. This is a book in the Bible. It's inspired by God. But if we go to the other extreme of reading it without discernment, we will pay attention to many things that actually match our natural concept or our religious notions, and the effect will be distraction from God's

economy. So we need to read James in the light of the completing ministry of Paul and of the revelation of God's economy given to Paul. Then we will be able to discern what in the book of James is really, frankly, religious or of the Old Testament economy, and what is a treasure to us living in the New Testament economy. This is what we've been endeavoring to do. We can only have limited success due to time and due to just our shortages to communicate. That is why the printed ministry in the life-study format is so useful. But this is our burden to cut straight the word of God and to present James in the light of God's New Testament economy. As we do this, we have the full peace in the Lord and the rest in Him, that we are true to God, true to His word, true to His revelation. It's vital that the seekers among the Lord's people who may be inclined to immerse themselves in James without discernment, understand correctly and see clearly what we're saying so that they will be helped to have a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

[CW]: Well, Ron, let's give James his full due now as we come to this matter that's, I think, expressed so well by Paul. In 2 Timothy 3.16, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Here's Witness Lee.

Part 1

[CW]: Ron, I think we need to be clear here. On one hand, what we've just heard and what we're talking about seems very obvious. But on the other hand, there's a couple of senses in which we can understand the Bible is God's word. Every word is God's word. And in one sense, surely we affirm that. We've said many times now that every word is God's breath, God's inspiration. But that's different than saying that every word is the spoken word of God directly, isn't it?

[RK]: That's correct. And it's necessary to emphasize this distinction. Every word of the Bible is God-breathed. It's all inspired. But the words in the Bible, even though they are inspired by God, are not all the word of God's divine revelation, conveying God's thought, God's intention, God's view, that it pleased God in His infinite wisdom to have included in the Scriptures the speaking and the writings of many kinds of persons. Even the words of the serpent in Genesis 3 have a very important purpose. But that's the speaking of the serpent, not of God. That conveys the thought of the serpent, not of God. It exposes the serpent. It doesn't reveal God. And we can trace this principle all the way through the Scripture. Now we come to a crucial matter, not merely in the Old Testament. The principle obtains, it holds true. In the New Testament as well. When Peter declared, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, he was uttering a revelation that was given by the Father in the heavens. Then when he expressed his opinion in league, although not known to him, with Satan, he did not express God. He expressed himself and in so doing he expressed Satan who was in him. But that word, along with the word of revelation, both of which are in Matthew 16, is inspired by God. It's instructive to us. Where we're going with this is that we will apply this as we must to the book of James. Every word in the book of James is inspired by God. Even though James was a slave of Christ, he was an elder in Jerusalem, he was an apostle. Nevertheless, not all of the words recorded in the book of James are the word of God in the sense that they reveal the divine thought. Rather, certain of the expressions are more reminiscent of the speaking of the psalmist under certain occasions, the speaking of Job and his companions under certain occasions. And this is why we must discern between those utterances in James, which really reflect an Old Testament religious concept, and those words which clearly reveal the New Testament economy. But while we're doing this, we have to go back to our original principle. The book of James is inspired by God word by word. But not every word in the book of James conveys the thought of God. Some readers and some listeners, they may react. And we're not afraid of their reaction, but we'd like to avoid misunderstanding. We're not saying James should not be in the Bible. We're not saying James is not the word of God in the sense that it's inspired by God. We're saying there are things in James that are not God's New Testament economy. And actually, to express our feeling in full, we're saying the book of James was included in the New Testament, at least in part, to serve the purpose of showing to us how a godly man, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, a child of God, could still be in a mixed situation, as was the church in Jerusalem. And this mixed situation involved the mixture of the Old Testament economy, which God had forsaken, and the New Testament economy, which God is fulfilling. So,

there we have said it forthrightly. James serves this purpose, not only of helping us with practical Christian perfection in relation to God's New Testament economy, but also the purpose of showing the possibility, the actuality, and even the danger of mixing the two economies, not only in our thinking, but in our being.

[CW]: Well, that's exactly the topic of this next and final segment in the Life-study of the book of James. Let's join Witness Lee once again.

Part 2

[CW]: Ron, I like this. This is so clear. You know, just as this portion in Matthew we've talked about a number of times regarding Peter, is very instructive to us. In one moment, here he is uttering this grand, great revelation that is so foundational in the whole New Testament about Christ being the Son of God. And then just moments later, he's uttering words that the Lord ascribes to Satan, or at least Satan is the source of those words. It's very instructive that we see this contrast. In a similar way, the whole book of James becomes very instructive and helpful to us, doesn't it?

[RK]: It is. This is the burden, actually, in this entire life-study of James. And as I was listening to Brother Lee speaking this again, I was just freshly assured in spirit of the faithfulness, of the accuracy, and of the balance of the ministry on this point. Brother Lee mentioned Acts 21, and I would like to refer to that for a moment as we are concluding our fellowship. See, in verse 18, we read, And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And having greeted them, he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God and said to him, You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law. They did glorify God. Then right away, according to the text, you get the impression, But brother, look at all these Jews, they're zealous for the law. This is the mixture we're talking about. They have believed, but they're zealous for the law. Our brother James, as revealed in the book of James, a believer, a slave of Christ, an apostle, an elder in the church, a godly man, a scriptural man, a prayerful man, an enduring man, yet zealous for the law. This cannot be denied. The law, the law, the law, all the way through the book. Therefore, we must return to our focus. The book of James is inspired by God word by word. But not everything James says is the revelation of God in His New Testament economy. If we are clear about this, then we will realize even a most godly person may not have a clear view of God's New Testament economy. This is crucial. This should be a warning to us. If someone as godly as James was not clear, how about the rest of us who we have to admit are not as godly as James? And if we're not clear about God's New Testament economy and lapse into a mixed situation, do you know what we'll be? In practice, we will be Old Testament Christians. We will be Christians, believers in Christ, genuine children of God who live day by day under the Old Testament principle. May God have mercy on us that for the sake of His heart's desire and His New Testament economy, we would learn from James as exposed in Acts 21 and in His book that we too may end up mixed. And we would hope then that we would seek the Lord and that we would pray to receive a clear governing vision of God's New Testament economy. So that our life, like the life of the Lord Jesus, like the life of the Apostle Paul, would be a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

[CW]: Well, I just can't help but smile. We're at the conclusion of this Life-study, Ron, and it's been one that I have to confess. I approached with some measure of trepidation for fear that we might be misunderstood and thereby not do justice and service to the ministry that we labor under. But I feel in the Lord that He has been merciful to us. Even when our utterance has been short, he has been abundant and the lack has been made up.

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