

Jehovah's Witnesses to read of such facts presented to them by others. All such material is labeled: "demonized-do not touch. " It has proven to be a very effective weapon to prevent Witnesses from knowing the full record.

A concluding article in the current magazine considers: "Subjecting ourselves to Jehovah by Dedication. " In this article a significant change is set forth in the vows made by baptismal candidates. Previously, the following two questions were put to such ones: (1) "Have you repented of your sins and turned around, recognizing yourself before Jehovah God as a condemned sinner who needs salvation and have you acknowledged to him that this salvation proceeds from him, the Father, through his son Jesus Christ? " (2) "On the basis of this faith in God and in his provision for salvation, have you dedicated yourself unreservedly to God to do his will henceforth as he reveals it to you through Jesus Christ and through the

Bible under the enlightening power of the holy spirit?" -*The Watchtower*, May 1, 1973, Page 280.

The new questions are: (1) "On the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, have you repented of your sins and dedicated yourself to Jehovah to do his will?" (2) "Do you understand that your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in association with God's spirit-directed organization?" - *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1985, Page 30.

While neither set of questions finds a precedent in the Bible the former set was less organizationally distinct. The latter set appears as just another of the endless tightening of doctrinal cords used by the Society to bind people to the organization. If anyone has wondered which direction the Society would take in organizational control it seems clear that the answer is now in. □

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## **Challenging Other Religions: A Double Standard**

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Under the direction of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, Jehovah's Witnesses are constantly urging others to challenge their privately held religious convictions and those of their church and religious instructors. As presented in Watch Tower publications this scrutiny of one's beliefs is presented as a necessary, even a noble, exercise. An example of this urging can be found in a book published by the Watch Tower Society designed to be used by Jehovah's Witnesses in their proselytizing activity. The book's title is *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, published in 1968. In the chapter "Why It Is Wise to Examine Your Religion, it says the following: "It is not any man, but God, who is the judge of what pleases him. To get God's viewpoint, we need to go to the Bible. There he plainly tells us the course to follow if we want to gain eternal life." -Page 11. "We need to examine, not only what we personally believe, but also what is taught by *any religious organization* with which we may be associated. Are its teachings *in full harmony* with God's Word, or are they based on the traditions of men?" - Page 13. (Italics added) "Follow the course of those ancient Bereans whom God's Word approves because they "received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so." -Acts 17: 11." -Pages 15,16. "As you examine God's Word, you will learn that your love for God will be put to the test. There may be individuals, perhaps even close friends or relatives,

who will not approve of your examining the Scriptures. (Peter 4: 4; Matthew 10: 36, 37) They may try to discourage you. They may do this in all sincerity, because they do not know the marvelous truths found in the Bible. Perhaps you can help them. In other cases the opposition may come from persons who have no love for God. If this should occur, remember, *having God's approval is far more important than having the approval of men.*" -Page 16. (Italics added)

We note in the above quotations that the Bible is given first place in the matter of determining religious truth. The important thing is to have God's approval-not man's! Human religious ideas and traditions should not be placed on an equality with the Scriptures wherein God "plainly tells us the course to follow if we want to gain eternal life." Armed with these noble thoughts the Witnesses work their way through communities and if given an opportunity will attempt to get the people to read Watch Tower literature. Even though a person may profess to be a Christian and express contentment with their religious situation the Witnesses feel an obligation to intrude themselves and Watch Tower publications into the person's life. Such material often contains views extremely critical and condemnatory of all other churches and their leaders. Those who refuse such literature or decline discussion with the Witnesses are not admired by them. Such refusal to examine another religious view or test one's

beliefs in a critical manner is viewed by Jehovah's Witnesses as a weakness rather than a strength. Those unwilling to meet the challenge of testing their religious position are considered narrow-minded, stubborn, even goatish. (Matthew 25: 31-33)

The importance of always maintaining an open mind, even in matters of religious faith, was recently considered in another Watch Tower publication *Awake!* dated November 22, 1984. In three short articles the matter of having and keeping an open mind was discussed. The first article, "An Open or a Closed Mind-Which Do You Have?," contrasted the closed and open mind and pointed up the advantages of having the latter: "Having an open mind, on the other hand, means being willing to examine and to evaluate information without a biased attitude. By retaining what is worthwhile and rejecting what is worthless, we can reach definite conclusions on a solid basis and still leave our minds open to further revision should additional information become available at a future time. He who feels he has learned it all can be sure that this attitude will prevent him from ever learning more." -Page 4.

The third, and final, article in this series was entitled "An Open Mind Wins God's Approval." Among other things it had the following to say: "The importance of having an open mind so as to win God's approval is shown in the words recorded at Ephesians 5: 10,17. There we read: '*Keep on making sure* of what is acceptable to the Lord. On this account cease becoming unreasonable, but *go on perceiving* what the will of Jehovah is.'" -Page 8. (Italics in original) "Even some religious people have closed minds. They are interested only in 'their' religion, showing no willingness to as much as listen to the views of others. And even though they may not have chosen their religion but simply have inherited it from their parents, still they feel that their religion must be right." -Page 8.

It is clear from what is written above taken from the *Awake!* magazine and the book, *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, that Jehovah's Witnesses know how important the having of an open mind is and also the superiority of the Bible over the thoughts and traditions of men. It is acknowledged in the *Awake!* magazine that *even genuine Christians must continue to maintain an open mind and feel free to examine their religious value system* because Paul's words were addressed, *not to outsiders*, but rather "the holy ones who are in Ephesus and faithful ones in union with Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 1: 1) So the need to be open

-minded and willing to challenge one's religious views is *not just for some but for all!* Genuine believers are not afraid to put their faith to the test for they realize that there is no lasting profit in self-delusion. Error can arise from any quarter-from within the Christian community as well as from without. For this reason the Christian must always remain spiritually alert. It is not a matter of being suspicious. It is a matter of being aware .that men can mistake the spirit of error for truth. ( 1 John 4: 1; Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Timothy 3: 16, 17) From what the Watch Tower Society so boldly says about using the Bible as the standard for measuring all religious beliefs and the need to maintain an open mind one might logically conclude that this is the policy and standard among Jehovah's Witnesses. Surely, a religious organization would not urge others to do what it prohibited its own followers to do, would it? By way of answer consider what *The Watchtower*, May I, 1984 had to say on page 31 in its regular feature article *Questions From Readers* as to "'Why do Jehovah's Witnesses decline to exchange their Bible study aids for the religious literature of people they meet?" The answer given: "' Jehovah's Witnesses carry on their public ministry in obedience to divine instructions. Jesus said that during this 'conclusion of the system of things,' the 'good news of the kingdom (must) be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come.' ( Matthew 24:3,14 ) So Witnesses do not go to people's doors searching for truth and enlightenment. Rather, they already have devoted countless hours learning the truth from God's Word and, having taken in the 'good news,' they are obediently going forth to share it. Many people who believe that 'there is good in all religions' might consider it narrow-minded to think otherwise. (Contrast Jesus' view expressed at Matthew 7: 13, 14,21-23 ) The Greek philosophers in ancient Athens encouraged such an 'open-minded' attitude and enjoyed 'telling something or listening to something new.' (Acts 17: 18-21) But when the apostle Paul appeared before them, it was not to swap philosophies or ideas. He used the occasion to present what he knew to be the truth, whether he was considered narrow-minded or not. While some of those Athenians mocked him, a number responded and became believers. -Acts 17:32-34; 2 Corinthians 6: 14-18

Paul obviously was aware of some Greek teachings, and he used such knowledge to give a most effective witness. (Acts 17:28) Similarly, Jehovah's Witnesses are not ignorant of others' beliefs. They have gained considerable basic knowledge of the doctrinal beliefs of

religions common in their area. Consideration to such teachings has been given in the book *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* as well as numerous articles in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* Such information on various religions is presented in the context of its contrast with accurate Biblical teachings.

God's Word warns Christians that 'Satan himself keeps transforming himself into an angel of light. It is therefore nothing great if his ministers also keep transforming themselves into ministers of righteousness. But their end shall be according to their works.' (2 Corinthians 11: 14, 15) Satan so successfully appeared as 'an angel of light' that he was able to deceive even a perfect human, Eve. (1 Timothy 2: 14) So it would be foolhardy, as well as a waste of valuable time, for Jehovah's Witnesses to accept and expose themselves to false religious literature that is designed to deceive. They have no intention of falling into the sad course of the Jews, whom Paul said 'exchanged the truth of God for the lie.' -Romans 1:25,NW; Revised Standard Version.

Furthermore, some of the religious literature that people may urge Jehovah's Witnesses to read is written by, or contains the thoughts of, individuals who have apostatized. True Christians are commanded to shun such apostates. (2 John 9-11; Titus 3: 10, 11) Appropriately, then *The Watchtower* of June 15,1983, counseled:

'In the first century, Hymenaeus and Philetus

turned apostate and tried to subvert the faith of others. God's standard was: 'Shun such empty speeches that violate what is holy.' (2 Timothy 2: 16-19) Christians holding to that standard would not have been interested in listening to apostates, nor in obtaining any poisonous writings that these might distribute 'for the sake of dishonest gain.' Why finance their wickedness by buying their literature? (Titus 1: 11) As loyal Christians let us hold to God's standards, feeding our minds on what is true and righteous, and holding appreciatively and loyally to the channel from which we first learned Bible truth.-Compare 1 Timothy 4: 16.' -Page 15 (yVT 6/15/83)

Hence, it is out of wisdom and respect for God's counsel that Jehovah's Witnesses do not make a practice of exchanging valuable Bible study aids containing Scriptural truth for religious literature that disseminates error or apostate views." -*The*

*Watchtower*, May 1,1984, Page 31

The above clearly presents a double standard position. On the one hand the Watch Tower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses urge others to read literature that openly condemns- their beliefs as well as their church organization but, when the matter is turned around, they say they cannot read other materials as this ""would be foolhardy, as well as a waste of valuable time." Why the double standard? If, as the Watch Tower Society insists, they have the truth, what are they afraid of? Could it be that they realize that many of *their* teachings cannot withstand critical, objective examination? Why flee from an open give-and-take Bible discussion? In the *Awake!* quoted earlier they said that to have an open mind meant to be "willing to examine and to evaluate information without a biased attitude. By retaining what is worthwhile and rejecting what is worthless, we can reach definite conclusions on a solid basis and still leave our minds open to further revision should additional information become available at a future time. "

It is clear that they are unwilling to do what they urge others to do, namely, challenge their beliefs and their religious instructors. Thus they appear to be like those whom they speak of disparagingly by saying "even some religious people have closed minds. They are interested only in 'their' religion, showing no willingness to as much as listen to the views of others. And even though they may not have chosen their religion but simply have inherited it from their parents, still they feel that their religion must be right." Are not many Jehovah's Witnesses second, third, fourth and even fifth generation Witnesses that would fall into the category of those who did not chose their religion *but simply inherited it from their parents?* It certainly would.

The Society feels it is fair that their publications alone be trusted in the study of the religious views of others but they *condemn-categorically-any* and all polemics written by others that take issue with *any* of their teachings. They do not hesitate to judge the motives of others by saying that all such is "false religious literature that is *designed to deceive.*" They revile former Jehovah's Witnesses who have subsequently produced material in refutation of certain practices, policies and teachings of the Society by branding all of it as "poisonous writings" distributed "for the sake of dishonest gain." It is surprising that more Jehovah's Witnesses do not realize that the

Society has assumed total control of their thinking. It matters not what reality is. By distorting the facts the Society creates, in the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses, a perception of evil that prevents most of them from really giving objective thought to anything critical of the Society. The end result is that while they urge others to be open-minded they teach their own people to be closed-minded. The Watch Tower Society thus resembles the Pharisees who preached one thing and practiced another. Such were not to be looked to for conduct worthy of imitation. (Matthew 23:3)

The stance of the Watch Tower Society in this matter of dictating what people are to think in religious issues and how they should view those who do not agree with them is not unique. Historically there have been many shameful examples of this kind of religious tyranny just as there are contemporary ones. It is typical of a movement, in its infancy, to champion freedom of speech and investigation and to urge open challenges of all established religious authority as they have nothing to lose. But once they become larger and institutionalized they revert to the same practice of "lording" it over others—a practice they once condemned! To justify such abuse of authority they label all others as wicked or apostate. In their beginning when others condemned them in similar fashion they called it persecution. When the founder of the Watch Tower Society, Charles T. Russell, began his group a hundred years ago he wrote critically of those religious groups that attempted to control the thinking of their flocks. About this he wrote the following in Volume 3 of *Studies in the Scriptures*:

"There are various degrees of bondage among the various sects of Babylon- 'Christendom.' Some who would indignantly resent the utter and absolute slavery of individual conscience and judgment, required by Romanism, are quite willing to be bound themselves, and anxious to get others bound, by the creeds and dogmas of one or another of the Protestant sects. True, their chains are lighter and longer than those of Rome and the dark ages. So far as it goes, this is surely good, -reformation truly, -a step in the right direction,- toward full liberty,-toward the condition of the church in the apostolic times. But, why wear human shackles at all? Why bind and limit our conscience at all? Why not stand fast in the full liberty wherein Christ hath made us free? Why not reject all the efforts of fallible fellow men to fetter conscience and hinder investigation?-not only the efforts of the remote past, of the dark ages, but the efforts of the various

reformers of the more recent past? Why not conclude to be as the apostolic church was?-free to grow in knowledge as well as in grace and love, as the Lord's 'due time' shall reveal his gracious plan more and more fully?

Surely all know that whenever they join any of these human organizations, accepting its Confession of Faith as theirs, they bind themselves to believe neither more or less than that creed expresses on the subject. If, in spite of bondage thus voluntarily yielded to, they should think for themselves, and receive light from other sources, in advance of the light enjoyed by the sect they have joined, they must either prove untrue to the sect and to their covenant with it, to believe nothing contrary to its Confession, or else they must honestly cast aside and repudiate the Confession which they have outgrown, and come out of such a sect. To do this requires grace and costs some effort, disrupting, as it often does, pleasant associations, and exposing the honest truth-seeker to the silly charges of being a 'traitor' to his sect, a 'turncoat,' one 'not established,'" etc. When one joins a sect, his mind is supposed to be given up entirely to that sect, and henceforth not his own. The sect undertakes to decide for him what is truth and what is error. and he, to be a true, staunch, faithful member, must accept the decisions of his sect, future as well as past, on all religious matters, ignoring his own individual thought, and avoiding personal investigation lest he grow in knowledge, and be lost as a member of such sect. This slavery of conscience to a sect and creed is often stated in so many words, when such a one declares that he "belongs" to such a sect. "

"These shackles of sectarianism, so far from being esteemed rightly as shackles and bonds, are esteemed and worn as ornaments, as badges of respect and marks of character. So far has the delusion gone, that many of God's children would be ashamed to be known to be without some such chains-light or heavy in weight, long or short in the personal liberty granted. They are ashamed to say that they are not in bondage to any sect or creed, but 'belong' to Christ only." - *Studies in the Scriptures*, Volume HI, 1890, pages 184,184, 1917 ed.

The reader can judge for himself what further progress the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society has made in the nearly 100 years since the above was first penned? How much personal liberty and freedom of

. individual thought and conscience do the Jehovah's Witnesses now have? Is it more or less than those "sects" he condemned? Are their chains heavier or lighter than those worn by others? Russell's argument had merit because it was Bible-based. We are to stand fast in Christian freedom: "For such freedom Christ set us free. Therefore stand fast, and do not let yourselves be confined again in a yoke of slavery." - Galatians 5: 1, *NW*.

Russell spoke disparagingly of those "sects" of "Babylon- Christendom, " whose only difference was the degree of slavery imposed on its followers. Of the Roman Catholic Church he decried the "absolute slavery of individual conscience and judgment" required. The Protestants merely had lighter chains of various lengths. All fell far short of "full liberty-toward the condition of the church in the apostolic times." Russell's complaint was not without merit. There were different degrees of bondage to men imposed by men and willingly submitted to by many. A bondage voluntarily surrendered to is still bondage! Jehovah's Witnesses have surrendered-willingly-their God-given right to explore and test the spirits to see if they are of God. Individual Christian responsibility cannot be shifted to others. Each of us must carry our own load. (Galatians 6:5) When we stand before the judgment seat of God and Christ we can be sure that favor with an organization will avail nothing. Then, as now, we have but one advocate with the Father and that one is Jesus Christ. He is our owner-our master -and to him, alone, can we safely entrust our full and complete trust. (Hebrews 7:25; 1 Timothy 2:5; Jude 4)

Many, if not all, of the readers of *The Christian Respondent* have experienced the extreme difficulty of either withdrawing from fellowship with Jehovah's Witnesses or have been expelled for expressing conscientious misgivings regarding certain teachings or practices of the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society. In nearly every case this results in an extremely traumatic upheaval in the person's life. Family and friends may be lost through the practice of shunning insisted upon by the Watch Tower leaders. One's own sense of identity may become confused as he or she begins to restructure their life and religious value system. Depression is a common result of this kind of crisis. Because this is so and because *The Christian Respondent* is written to help support those undergoing this spiritual transition I am including with this month's issue a verbatim *Open Letter to the Inactive or Ex-Jehovah's Witness*, written by former Jehovah's

Witness Dr. Carl Thornton. I found it to be a helpful piece of practical advice reflecting a loving concern for the well-being of fellow Christians. I thank Carl for having his permission to reproduce it for your consideration.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE INACTIVE OR INACTIVE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS by Dr. Cad Thornton, Ph.d.

Dear Brother or Sister,

If your experience was anything like mine, or like other accounts that I have read, you are going through a severely stressful, emotional period. Some of the feelings and symptoms may be: (1) A sense of loss, alienation, and confusion. Sometimes severe depression may set in when you are cut off from so many good friends and close family members. (2) A sense of righteous anger, even outrage for being accused of committing the vilest of crimes, when all you search for is "the truth." (3) Aloneness and isolation with no place to turn for relief. Your social support and sense of community is gone. (4) A cynicism and basic distrust of others. If such injustice can occur in what you thought was God's organization, how can you trust anyone or anything again? (5) A loss of spirit and sense of purpose. (6) Physical and/or mental exhaustion.

Fortunately, the body and mind heal with time, and, I think, there are steps you can take to hasten your recovery: (1) *Become part of a social support group*. We all need what psychologists call "consensual validation," that is, we need to compare and share our experience with others. We need to know that we are not alone. Others have gone through this and came out of it better people for having such an experience. Alone, we may feel like we are going insane; together we gain strength and understanding of our common plight. Only those who have been through what we have can truly understand. Find those others, through newsletters, pen-pals, and personal phone calls. You need to reach out to others.

Twenty years ago, when I left the organization at the age of twenty-five, there was no one to talk to. Since 1980, there has been an outpouring of help. Even at this late date for me, I am grateful. (2) *Don't expect to find "devils" when you enter "the world."* It's a curious, but sad state of affairs to find the zealous J.

W. who, at the end of his/her intellectual rope, hurl the accusation of "demon possessed" at a rational individual who wins the debate. The planet is not populated with evil Satanic people. Most people are trying to pay the bills, raise a family and do the best they know how. Certainly, there is a small minority of the population who make up the criminal element, but at the other end of the continuum, are some fine, noble individuals. In between, are the rest of us, making mistakes, trying and sometimes failing, but wanting to be respected and thought well of. (By the way, I wonder if J.W.'s would consider people of noble character to be "angel possessed" -seems as logical to me as the demon possessed hypothesis).

Enter "the world" with an open mind and expect to find many who will become as close to you as the former "brothers and sisters" you lost. (3) *Don't throw out the baby with the bath water.* Try to separate the wheat from the chaff. There were many fine ideas you learned like: the fruits of the spirit, brotherly love, seeking knowledge and understanding. Many of the scriptures you know by heart can be sources of comfort. Try not to overreact and become cynical and empty spiritually. (4) *Pray to the God of your understanding.* Just as the chemically dependent person has to begin a total program to recover, so too, the organizationally dependent must begin such a program. You may have withdrawal symptoms just as severe as the chronic alcoholic. For the alcoholic, *Alcoholics Anonymous* insists on a spiritual program along with physical and emotional recovery. They stress that we must seek "though prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him, praying only for a knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." (Step #11 of the Twelve Steps of AA). Such a program brings together people of all backgrounds and walks of life to "clear up the wreckage of the past." A lot can be

learned from such a simple, honest, direct and non-dogmatic approach for making a new beginning. (5) *Rebuild your life "one day at a time."* You did not become a Jehovah's Witness overnight, nor did you prepare to disengage yourself from "the organization" in one day. Therefore, your recovery and readjustment to a new life will be a process, not one dramatic event. Enjoy today, thank God today, help a friend today. The past is gone forever, only a memory remains. Use those memories to help yourself grow.

(6) *A promise to you:* As a psychologist, I have witnessed some miraculous cases of personal recovery-true testimonies to the healing power God has built into the human physiology. Again, I would like to borrow from AA literature and quote from their Eleven Premises. "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door to it. Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace ... Are these extravagant promises? We think not, they are being fulfilled among us; sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them." (AA -*The Big Book*, pp.83-84)

Please ... help yourself, help others. I believe these promises will come true for you. May this letter bring the hope, encouragement and support that you need.

With love and understanding, Your Brother,

**Carl Thornton**

**P.S.** Carl Thornton was a third generation J. W. Carl's thirst for knowledge led him to college where he obtained a PhD in Psychology. □