

is to get permission from the householder to go to the table to explain the Watch Tower position. As the Society is urging the Witnesses to use the arguments presented in *Reasoning from the Scriptures* it follows that the line of reasoning presented in the matter of "False Prophets" will be followed by them. It is unfortunate that a lack of knowledge on the part of both the Witness and the general public, as a rule, to understand the truth in this regard which, in turn, permits the Society to bluff its way through such questions. And even if someone did have documented evidence it is doubtful that the Witness would even look at it.

To be sure, the Watch Tower Society is not the only religious organization guilty of predicting things that did not come to pass or are currently making certain predictions. Nor are they the only religious group to have corrupted the good news by creating another one out of their own imagination. There is no shortage of

this sort of thing in the religious world. Their published claim that they, and they alone, rightfully speak for God today simply makes them more reprehensible. No individual Christian or group of Christians has perfect (complete) knowledge and understanding. (1 Cor. 13:9-13) There are uncertain areas where a subject is not fully developed which, in turn, may allow for a number of possibilities. But such things should be taught as possibilities-not truths. Care needs to be taken in presenting these views. It is one thing to qualify a conviction by saying: "I believe this" or "I think this" and quite another thing to say:

"I have God's spirit on this and you must believe it, too, or be condemned!" Where God's Word is dogmatic we can afford to be dogmatic but where it is less certain we can afford to be charitable. We should not say a particular teaching is essential for salvation unless the Bible puts it that way. To do otherwise is to run ahead of God. □

Misapplication of John 6:53-57

(Number 22. Originally published February 28, 1986)

Those who have been Jehovah's Witnesses for any length of time are familiar with the fact that changes in interpretation of scripture are a constant feature of their religion. Such changes are expected -even welcomed-as they are viewed as evidence that the 'light of truth' is getting ever brighter. (Prov.4: 18)

The fact that the previous viewpoint was argued for and presented as 'truth' does not prevent the new 'truth' from being readily accepted. Whatever interpretation of scripture is presented in Watchtower publications is not there to be scrutinized or put to the test of critical, scholarly examination-it is set forth only to be accepted. The Watchtower Society has used the '*light getting brighter*' notion as an article of faith to explain away failed predictions, contradictions and the constant flux of their organizational structure. Few Witnesses seem to come to grips with the paradoxical nature of this concept and that is: if you insist that what you presently believe is the truth yet argue that the 'light is getting brighter,' that can only mean that you accept that some 'present truths' are not really truths at all. Yet, for the most part, Witnesses find little difficulty holding these contradictory views at one and the same time.

Another characteristic of these changes is that oftentimes they represent no real spiritual growth or insight. For example, a date may fail to produce a

predicted event. When that happens a new explanation is offered that explains-away the failure and sets forth a new speculation which, in turn, leads to some future disappointment. This has happened time and again in their 100-year history. While some changes do reflect a measure of spiritual growth, for the most part they seem locked into merely rearranging their furniture of radical thought handed down from Russell and his successors. There is an example of this to be found in *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1986 regarding their interpretation of Jesus' words found at John 6: 53-57: "Accordingly Jesus said to them: 'Most truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. He that feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life, and I shall resurrect him at the last day; for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. He that feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in union with me, and I in union with him. Just as the living Father sent me forth and I live because of the Father, he also that feeds on me, even that one will live because of me.'" -John 6:53-57 *New World Translation*.

For many years the Watchtower Society has interpreted Jesus' words in such a way as to 'prove' that he could only have been addressing those who were to become a part of the 144,000-member body of Christ in these verses. This argument was used to

convince those whom they call the "other sheep" that they were not being addressed in the above text. As recently as 1985 the Society was dogmatically teaching that Jesus' words could only apply to the "anointed remnant" which now consists of about 9,000 elderly Witnesses who profess to be the last remaining members of the 144,000 on earth. The arguments developed in this interpretation have been used for more than 50 years to prevent the so-called "other sheep" from partaking of the emblems of Jesus' body and blood at the annual observance they call the 'Memorial' or "the Lord's evening meal." (Luke 22:17-19; I Cor. 11:20,23-26) They have consistently argued that only those who are members of Christ's body (the 144,000) can be spoken of as being "in union" with Christ. They have also argued that having "life in yourselves" meant more than merely having everlasting life; rather it meant to have the privilege of *dispensing life* along with Jesus Christ during his future 1000-year kingdom reign.

In 1985 the Watchtower Society produced a book titled: *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, which is a handbook to be used by the Witnesses in their field ministry (door-to-door proselytizing). This handbook is designed to assist in using the Bible to answer questions and/or objections encountered in their public activity. Under the subject of MEMORIAL (pages 266-269) they quote John 6:53,54 and offer the interpretation of Jesus' statement about "eating his flesh and drinking his blood" by saying: "This eating and drinking would obviously have to be done symbolically, as at the Lord's Evening Meal." (page 268). Then to show that this would not apply to the "great crowd" of "other sheep" they say: "Notice that those who thus partake of the emblematic bread and wine are persons who would gain the reward of life only by means of a resurrection. That is because they must lay down their human life in order to attain to the reward of heavenly life with Christ." (page 268) Regarding the matter of these "having life in themselves" (John 6:53) they add: "Evidently it means much more than simply living forever. The expression in the Greek text is similar to what is found at John 5:26, where the power of Jesus to resurrect the dead is being discussed. John 5:26 as rendered in *NE [The New English Bible]* reads: "As the Father has *life-giving* power in himself, so has the Son, by the Father's gift." Thus those who are granted to have "life in themselves" like Christ will share with him in imparting to mankind the life-giving benefits of the ransom sacrifice." (Page 268) The clear implication is that the

144,000 will exercise life-giving power like Christ does during the millennium.

The *new* interpretation of John 6:53-57 offered by the Watchtower Society in the February 15, 1986 *Watchtower* makes the above explanation obsolete & untrue. Before considering the 'new light' presented by the Society on this text I think it would be helpful to enlarge upon their previous position more in order to further appreciate the significance of the 'new light.' As noted in the above quotations from the *Reasoning* book the matter of 'having life in yourselves' has always been interpreted in a curious way by the Society, namely, that in some way the 144,000 "*share with him in imparting to mankind the life-giving benefits of the ransom sacrifice.*" They speak of the 144,000 as 'sacrificing' their earthly prospects in order to have this 'share' with Christ and in this respect they have 'life in themselves' as Christ has this 'life in himself,' that is, '*life-giving* power in himself.' This clearly implies *sacrificial merit* in their dying and in this way they 'share in his kind of (meritorious) death.' Notice how this argument is presented in a past Watchtower:

"Now when the disciples drink the cup of Memorial wine, they are in symbol drinking blood, but drinking under divine command. So it means for them to shed their blood or to die as Jesus Christ did in the cause of his Father's universal sovereignty. They undertake death with him, that they might prove the Devil a lying rebel and prove themselves worthy of life with Jesus in his heavenly kingdom." ~*The Watchtower*, January 15, 1951, pages 54,55.

The notion that the members of Christ's congregation die a *meritorious death* as did their Lord finds its roots in the teachings of Charles T. Russell, founder of the Watchtower Society. Russell taught that not only the *head* (Jesus Christ) was a sin-offering but so also the *Body* (the congregational body of Christ) was a part of God's sin-offering. Writing in *Tabernacle Shadows* he used the installation sacrifices recorded at Leviticus 8: 14-33 to picture this teaching. Commenting on the offering of the bullock as a sin offering for Aaron and his sons he wrote: "The bullock for the sin-offering was brought, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of it, thus saying, This sacrifice represents us. From that moment, all that happened to the bullock, represented what was to be done to Jesus and his Body, the Church, as human beings ... Thus the humanity of the Christ complete, Head and Body, is made 'a sin offering,' suffering the destruction to which the world was doomed, and from

which, by this sacrifice, it will ultimately be delivered, the merit being in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, we, his 'brethren,' being privileged to fill up the measure of HIS sufferings, as 'members of his Body.'" (pages 41,42)

Of course, the Society no longer uses these scriptures as did Russell but his views are still at the root of their interpretation regarding the death of the 'anointed' as being 'sacrificial' in nature. (see WT.12/1/85,pages 10,11; TCR #19, page 72). As the 'great crowd' do not 'sacrifice' human life at death they do not 'share in a death like Christ's' and are therefore excluded from sharing in the bread and wine. This has been the Society's argument. Furthermore, they argued that the 'great crowd' did not possess 'life in themselves' as that was interpreted by the Society. This, too, was and is used as reason for their not sharing in the bread and wine at the Memorial. Until the current *Watchtower* it has been taught that being 'in union' with Christ was something exclusive with those in the new covenant (the 144,000). Commenting on the application of John 6:53 they had this to say back in 1951: "Note that Jesus here said that those drinking his blood as well as eating his flesh remain in union with him and he in union with them. This means that they are made members of his body, being baptized into Christ and thereby being baptized into his kind of death. "~*The Watchtower*, January 15,1951, page 56.

For many years (until 1956) the Society taught that the 'loaf at the Memorial represented not only Christ but also the 144,000-the 'body' of Christ. Concerning this they said: "From this inspired testimony it is evident that at the Memorial the Lord Jesus was referring to the 'congregation, which is his body.' It is, as Jesus said, 'my body,' because God 'subjected all things under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills up all things in all' ... Hence when a Christian is really devoted to God and eats of the Memorial bread, he is thereby confessing that he is 'sharing in the body of the Christ;' he is a member of it."-*The Watchtower*, January 15, 1951, page 49. In 1954 an article title: "Celebrating the Lord's Evening Meal," had this to say about what was represented by the loaf that Jesus used to symbolize his body: "To which body was Jesus referring to here? To his fleshly body? Hardly, for concerning it we read that not a bone was broken, whereas Jesus broke the loaf. (John 19:36) Rather, he was referring to his spiritual body, the Christian congregation, which in the

Scriptures is termed a body or Christ's body more than forty-five times." -*The Watchtower*, March 15, 1954, page 174.

Back then the argument advanced prohibiting the 'great crowd' from partaking of the Memorial bread was that they were not represented in the loaf that Jesus broke in pieces and distributed to his disciples on that occasion and therefore could not profess to 'share' in it. It wasn't until 1956 that the Society discovered that the loaf used by Jesus symbolized his *own body of flesh* and not his mystical body-the Church. After discussing the loaf Jesus used over which he said: "this is my body, " they comment on identifying what body was symbolized: "His body? Yes; his own body, his whole body, head and all, that he was to give for them. Jesus meant his own body, the body with which he next associates his own blood when speaking of the cup. " - *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1956, page 49. No mention was made in this article that it represented a dramatic shift in understanding.

It can be appreciated that the radical concepts advanced by Russell and perpetuated by the Watchtower Society have been responsible for a great deal of confusion surrounding the Memorial meal and those qualified to partake of it. Their seemingly profound explanations and interpretations simply obscure the plain truth regarding the significance of the Memorial and partaking thereof, namely, that the person of Christ is symbolically represented and imbibing these emblems confirms one's individual faith and communion with the Lord and fellow believers. "For I received from the lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this., whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. "-1 Corinthians 11 :23-26 *MV*

That the Watchtower Society is still evolving different interpretations of one of the most elementary of doctrines presented in the Bible stands as a witness against their lofty claims of being entrusted with 'serving food to the household of faith.' They are still trying to clarify a teaching that has been understood by Christians for nearly two thousand years. That they . continue to teach that it would be a most serious sin for millions of Jehovah's Witnesses to partake of the

emblems is very serious, indeed. The current *Watchtower* continues this tradition even though it contradicts their previously held 'truth' on this matter. It brings to mind what Paul wrote to Timothy regarding those who are "always learning and yet never able to come to an accurate knowledge of truth. " (2 Tim.3:7 NW) The current magazine now postulates an entirely different interpretation of Jesus' words found at John 6:53-55 and about which they say the following:

"Of course, Jesus is here emphasizing that anyone who is to attain to everlasting life must do so on the basis of exercising faith in the sacrifice that Jesus later made in offering up his perfect human body and pouring out his lifeblood. (Hebrews 10:5,10; 1 Peter 1:18,19;2:24) This provision is not restricted to Jesus' joint heirs. It must also include the 'great crowd,' who survive 'the great tribulation.' for these 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" -*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1986, page 18, par. 12. Forgotten in their 'new truth' is their previous argument that Jesus had to be speaking only to those who were to get heavenly life because he said he would "resurrect him at the last day." As the 'great crowd' will survive into a cleansed earth they do not need resurrection-hence Jesus could not have had them in mind. (see *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, page 268) They now acknowledge that the so-called 'great crowd' also symbolically eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood. This new view calls for a change in the meaning of 'life in yourselves.' Previously, you will recall this was given a special meaning and tied in with John 5:26 to prove that having this 'life' meant to have the power to give life. Now they say there is no connection between the 'life in yourselves' (John 6:53) and Jesus' 'life in himself (John 5:26).

The Scriptures do not suggest the confusing interpretations that the Society has offered over the years but rather find their origin in the aberrations of thought advanced by their leaders. While the new explanation broadens out the application of Jesus' words to include 'anyone' yet the leaven of sectarian teaching ferments even this truth. Jesus clearly says that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood "has (present tense) everlasting life," but the Society postpone~ the having of life more than a thousand years into the future for the so-called 'other sheep': "Thus according to the context of John 6:53, having 'life in yourselves' would here mean entering at last into the very fullness of life. The 'little flock' of Kingdom heirs experience this at their resurrection into the heavens. The 'other sheep' experience it after the

end of the thousand years, when they are tested and declared righteous for everlasting life in the Paradise earth." -*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1986, page 19, par. 13.

So the 'new light' is bent to perpetuate a tradition that they seem determined to uphold, namely, that the 'other sheep' are barred from communion with Christ in the annual observance of the Memorial. It seems strange that they can speak of these 'sheep' as feeding symbolically on Jesus' flesh and blood "by showing faith in the redeeming power of Jesus' sacrifice" and yet insist that it would be wrong for them to do this very thing in symbol at the Memorial and yet that is the contradictory position they take on the matter. On the one hand they acknowledge that the 'other sheep' meet all the criteria set out in the Scriptures but they deny the conclusion that they are Christian disciples in the same sense as the 'anointed.' They even acknowledge that these 'other sheep' are 'in union' with Christ-something they have continually denied in the past: "Jesus continues: 'He that feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in union with me, and I in union with him.' (John 6:56) This, then, is true of 'anyone' who thus exercises faith in. Jesus' sacrifice, with the prospect of having 'life in himself. ' All who manifest such faith can come to be 'in union with' Jesus. of course, the 'great crowd,' having earthly hopes, are not 'in union with Christ' in the sense of being joint heirs with him, members of his bride who receive a heavenly resurrection like his." -*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1986, page 19, par.15.

Even while acknowledging that the 'great crowd' are 'in union' they attempt to water this down by adding that this union is not "in being joint heirs with him." The Scriptures, however, do not put matters that way: "Consequently, if anyone is in union with Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed, look! new things have come into existence." -2 Cor.5: 17 NW. "However, you are in harmony, not with the flesh, but with the spirit, if God's spirit truly dwells in you. But if *anyone* does not have Christ's spirit, this one does not belong to him. But if Christ is in union with you, the body indeed is dead on account of sin, but the spirit is life on account of righteousness. "-Romans 8:9,10 NW.

According to the above texts one who is "in union" with Christ is a "new creation" and must have "Christ's spirit" -acting in harmony with it. The *New World Translation* translates the Greek preposition *en* as *in union* other translations simply use *in*. Thus the *New International Version* renders the two scriptures as

follows: "Therefore, if anyone is *in* Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" -2 Cor. 5:17 "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives *in* you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is *in* you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." -Romans 8:9,10

Regardless of which translation we prefer it is clear that having the spirit of God and Christ is essential to being *in* or *in union* with Christ. It means to have the in-dwelling spirit of God causing us to both think and to act in harmony with that spirit. Christians are regenerated by the spirit so that they no longer live according to the sinful nature. They are led by God's spirit and "all who are led by God's spirit, these are God's sons." Paul makes clear that being an heir is linked with this sonship:

"For you did not receive a spirit of slavery causing fear again, but you received a spirit of adoption as sons, by which spirit we cry out: 'Abba, Father!' The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children. If, then, we are children, we are also heirs: heirs indeed of God, but joint heirs with Christ, provided we suffer together that we may also be glorified together." -Romans 8: 15-17 *NW*. "All who are led by God's spirit" are sons of God, according to Paul. Not so, according to the Watchtower Society. It comes down to which authority we are going to listen to. All things considered it would seem the better part of wisdom to go with the Scriptures-the only valid authority.

The question might come to mind as to how God's spirit bears witness that we are adopted as sons? Albert Barnes offers some interesting thoughts in his *Notes on the New Testament* regarding Paul's words: "This pertains to the adoption; and it means that the Holy Spirit furnishes evidence to our minds that we are adopted into the family of God ... If we ask how this is done, I answer, it is not by any revelation of new truth; it is not by inspiration; it is not always by assurance; it is not by a mere persuasion that we are elected to eternal life; but *it is by producing in us the appropriate effects of his influence*. It is his to renew the heart; to sanctify the soul; to produce 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.' (Gal.5:22,23) If a man has these, he has evidence of the witnessing of the Spirit with his spirit."

-Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, Vol. 10, page 180 (Italics added).

The thoughts offered by Barnes agree with Paul's statement that those "who are led by God's spirit" are "God's sons." It indicates a receiving of God's spirit and submitting to its influence-its regenerating, transforming power. Proof of God's spirit bearing witness that we are his sons would be shown in the fruitage of that spirit. Such fruitage in our lives would testify that we are being led by that spirit. Our spirit "bears witness" in that we mentally assent to the spirit's direction and readily submit to its discretion. We form a longing for all that is right and good while deploring that which dishonors God. That doesn't mean we do not sin but it does mean that we are not in harmony with the sinful nature and do not willingly submit to it. We acknowledge to ourselves that we are a child of God.

Unfortunately, the Watchtower Society prevents Jehovah's Witnesses from realizing this blessed relationship. When we realize that 99.7% of them disclaim being sons of God and are therefore outside the family of God we begin to realize how serious this is. On March 24 this year they will assemble by the millions in their Kingdom Halls to ritualize the observance of the Lord's Supper or Evening Meal. It is a meal that 99.7 % of them have no right to eat, according to Watchtower tradition. This means that they will go away from this observance not having imbibed the emblems of Jesus' body and blood. In this they will have listened to the Society's voice and not that of Christ who commanded: "This means my body which is in your behalf. Keep doing this in remembrance of me." ... This cup means the new covenant by virtue of my blood Keep doing this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this loaf and drink this cup, you keep proclaiming the death of the lord, until he arrives. "-1 Corinthians 11 :24-26 *NW*. To merely assemble and pass the emblems while not partaking of them is not doing what Jesus commanded. If it can be said that these same people symbolically 'feed' on Jesus' body and blood by means of faith each day it seems strange, indeed, to view it as a sin to do that very thing with the emblems at the Memorial, namely, symbolically 'feed' on the Lord's body and blood. □