

existing doctrine (like Rom. 13 : 1-7), created new ones only to withdraw them (like the dates 1799, 1874, 1881), admitted of necessity that they are not inspired, should simultaneously demand 100% conformity, on pain of disfel-lowshipping. Nor can they say that the early Christian congregation also demonstrated fallibility because Peter made the mistake about circumcision and eating only with the Jews. This was, not only a position NOT held by the other apostles nor decreed by them, but he was publicly reprovved for acting in this manner.

(Editor's note: Many additional arguments, examples and scriptures were discussed in this well written, well docu-mented letter but space has not allowed to include it all. The following moving conclusion brought this obviously diffi-cult document to an appropriate close:)

Ultimately, we must all accept the responsibility for our own actions. We are all 'like an island unto ourselves' in the most literal sense. We all stand alone. We, all of us, are different. Not just indiscriminate cogs in the wheel, bricks in the vast organizational wall ... As far back as I can remember, I found my greatest happiness away from people, sorry to say. In nature, I still feel like Jehovah is a happy God, that I am still loved by him. Away from the frowns and sighs, wringing hands and prying eyes of man I feel my spirits lift. I don't feel judged anymore ... As Luther said 465 years ago when he stood on trial before the Catholic Council in Germany for apostasy:

'Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Scriptures or by evident reason (for I believe neither pope nor councils alone, since it is manifest they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is held captive by the Word of God; and as it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience, I cannot and will not retract anything. Here I stand; I cannot otherwise; God help me. Amen.'

Sincerely,

(Editor's Note: The names of this couple have been withheld due to family considerations.) □

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## ***Bible Truth Is God's Truth-Not Organizational***

( Number 36. Originally published June, 1987 )

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It is not uncommon for people leaving a highly structured religious system to experience doctrinal disorientation-even a total loss of faith. Their identity as a Christian and their beliefs may have been so entwined with their particular community-authority that the loss of that community-authority also resulted in the loss of their Christian identity. Cut away from their religious moorings they may find themselves adrift in a sea of uncertainty and doubt. This is not hard to understand. Once a person surrenders to a religious hierarchy his ability to think independently and responsibly is greatly impaired. In this setting distinguishing between personal convictions and organizational doctrines becomes blurred. It becomes almost impossible to recognize where the one begins and the other leaves off. They may even have been taught that to think independently was a serious sin and must be avoided. This is certainly the case with Jehovah's Witnesses. Any viewpoint that questioned or doubted a Watchtower position was uncomfortably entertained, if at all, and never openly discussed as this would lead to serious consequences. Such a mindset hinders spiritual, emotional and intellectual maturation. Rather than viewing questioning and doubting as a normal and healthy exercise essential to

growth it is viewed as abnormal, sickly and disloyal.

To be critical is not wrong even though some would have us believe so. Even in modern usage such words as *critical* and *discriminating* often take on a negative connotation. An examination of their etymological roots, however, convince us differently. The words *critic* and *critical* derive from the Greek words KRITES' and KRITIKOS which, in turn, are drawn from KRINO meaning "to judge." We find, for example, the adjective KRITIKOS in the Bible at Hebrews 4: 12 where it speaks of the word of God as "the judger" [NW INT.] "of thoughts and of mental inclinations of heart" [lit. 'critical of etc. ' ] i.e. 'discriminating and passing judgment on the thoughts and feelings.' [see *Vine 's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*] To be discriminating and critical in spiritual matters is essential if we are to do as God and Christ would have us do. Throughout the pages of the Bible they tell us to use good judgment and to judiciously evaluate matters dealing with faith. To do that one must be both critical and discriminating. Consider the following in that light:

"Keep testing whether you are in the faith, keep

proving what you yourselves are." -2 Corinthians 13:5a  
NW

"However, the spiritual man examines [Gk. ANAKRINO: 'to scrutinize, Le. (by impl.) investigate, interrogate, determine, ask, question, discern, examine, judge, search.' *Strong's Concordance*] indeed all things, but he himself is not examined by any man."  
-1 Corinthians 2: 15 NW

. ""Make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine." -1 Thess. 5:21

"But solid food belongs to mature people, to those who through use have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish [Gk. DIAKRISIS, from DIAKRINO: meaning to separate, discriminate] both right and wrong." Hebrews 5:13,14 NW

"Beloved ones, do not believe every inspired expression but *test* [be. you proving-NW-Int.] the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world." -1 John 4: 1 NW

How could one accede to and obey this apostolic counsel without using their thinking ability to analyze matters so as to make a critical/discriminating judgment? Something else to keep in mind is that this counsel was given, not to catechumens, but to spirit-born Christian believers. It is evident that we must individually shoulder responsibility for what we believe and teach. This cannot be left to others. We can listen to others as they may possess greater spiritual insight than we ourselves but even then we must test what they say to see if it is consistent with the framework of truth.

The Watch Tower Society uses editorial intimidation to prevent Jehovah's Witnesses from critically examining what they are being taught. Even though they instruct the Witnesses to urge others to question their beliefs and their religious instructors they deny that right to their own. They go so far as to say that independent thinking is dangerous, prideful and displays a lack of appreciation. Under the heading:

"Fight Against Independent Thinking, " *The Watchtower* said the following:

"As we study the Bible we learn that Jehovah has always guided his servants in an organized way. And just as in the first century there was only one true

Christian organization, so today Jehovah is using only one organization. (Ephesians 4:4,5; Matthew 24:45-47) Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments [admit mistakes] before, and so they argue: 'this shows that we have to make up our own mind on what we believe.' This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous? Such thinking is an evidence of pride. And the Bible says: 'Pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.' (Proverbs 16: 18 If we get to thinking that we know better than the organization, we should ask ourselves: 'Where did we learn Bible truth in the first place? Would we know the way of the truth if it had not been for guidance from the organization? Really, can we get along without the direction of God's organization?' No, we cannot. "-*The Watchtower*, January 15, 1983, page 27. (bracketed words added to original)

The above quotation is loaded with intimidating remarks to instill a sense of fear in any Witness who dares critique anything the Society says. It clearly contradicts the apostolic counsel presented in the Bible itself. Unfortunately, this abuse of authority works very well. If one's conscience forces him to see that there are inconsistencies and contradictions in certain Watch Tower teachings or practices he (or she) may, because of mental conditioning, also experience a sense of guilt. It represents a form of the self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome. If one's conscience has been trained to believe that something is sinful and they then do that thing their conscience will convict them of sin even if the act isn't really sinful. We must bear in mind that God *wants* us to prove things to ourselves. He is not offended when we make a heartfelt effort to do so. By condemning such investigation the Watch Tower Society performs an extreme disservice towards those who look to them for spiritual guidance.

Another fear that one may have is that if they leave the organization they will have to surrender cherished Bible truths. They may wonder what other religious organization teaches these truths so that they can go from the one religious system to another. This, too, represents faulty reasoning. If something is biblically true it does not need validation by some religious hierarchy or organization. We can hold to specific truths regardless of what others may think. There are many good things taught by the Watch Tower Society that are worth retaining. Principles regarding moral integrity, family life and Christian ethics would be among those things. But those truths do not validate their many errors which includes their

different gospel and time-feature speculations. Much of what they teach is not worth holding on to. But whatever good information we received or any worthwhile habits we may have formed while we were Witnesses are worth holding on to.

It is important to remember that Bible truth is God's truth. Bible truth is not franchised through some religious organization. Once the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles were publicized they became available for all. No individual church or group can lay exclusive claim to those truths. A religious system may dispense helpful biblical teaching but those teachings do not begin and end with them. Bible principles, when applied, work. If a Baptist applies Bible principles in his or her life he or she will get good results. This would be true of a Catholic, Pentecostal, Adventist, Mormon or Jehovah's Witness. We do not owe our soul to the individual or organization that may bring certain Bible truths to our attention. We owe them our love and our gratitude but not our unqualified allegiance. We owe that to God and Christ.

Bible truth is not like ordering a "Big Mac" at McDonald's. If you hunger for a "Big Mac" you have to go to McDonald's because they hold the franchise to market the "Big Mac." You can't order a "Big Mac" at Hardies or Burger King~they don't have the franchise. Some religions would have you think that Bible truth is franchised through them and if you want truth then you must come to them. If you leave the organization then you must leave all of your truth behind. You can't take it with you. There is no Bible truth "to go." As ridiculous as that may sound there are those who think and talk as though it were so.

What a former Witness needs to do is take an inventory of what he or she believes and separate the human from the divine. During our experience as Witnesses we were taught a blend of truth and error served up together. We were not at liberty to make a personal distinction between the two. One (the human) was placed on an equality with the other (the divine), and blended together as a composite whole and labeled "TRUTH." While in principle the Bible was always championed as the true authority, very often, in practice, it was human reasoning and religious tradition that took precedence. In this way some truth became a vehicle for much error.

One of the scriptures quoted earlier states that we should "make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine." (1 Thess.5:21) If you learned something as a

Witness that you believe survives the test of critical examination then, by all means, "hold fast" to it! If, on the other hand, there are things that do not merit holding on to then let go of those things. We must learn how to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. We do not have to let go of God's truth. God's truth has been preserved for mankind in the Bible for thousands of years. It is God's gift to us. No individual, group or organization can take credit for the revelations of truth therein. (2 Peter 1:20,21 )

In contrast, how valuable are Watch Tower publications after 10, 20 or 30 years? The need to be continually writing and publishing new books with *adjusted* information demonstrates the weakness of human interpretations that go beyond what is written. The Bible may present a certain truth that we can put faith in but some men are not content with the degree of revelation provided by God in relation to that truth. God's promises often raise questions as to how certain features of his promises will be fulfilled. In an attempt to answer these questions some are bold enough to add many of their own imaginations as to how certain things will be fulfilled and label these imaginations as 'new light.' Some, like the Watch Tower Society, even go so far as to predict specific times for these things to occur. An example of this is to be found in God's promise regarding a new heavens and a new earth:

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion, awaiting and keeping close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah, through which the heavens being on fire will be dissolved the elements being intensely hot will melt. But there are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." -2 Peter 3 13 *NW*.

This promise is not *new light* but it is *present truth*.

We do not need a 'progressive revelation' to inform us of it. What can be known about this new heavens and new earth is confined between the covers of the Bible itself. It is the Bible that gives us all the revelation that it has pleased God to share with us. It is sufficient for us to put faith in. Some, like the Society, add many details as to who will inherit these things, when they will inherit them and all the many details as to how the new heavens and earth will be administered. This excites many and creates added expectations. But is it well founded? Has not history demonstrated over and over again that they simply do

not know as much about these things as they thought they did? Their many changes or "adjustments" are presented as advancing light but it must be kept in mind that these "adjustments," as they call them, have been necessitated by failed expectations. New 'light' that is needed to correct previous 'light' is nothing more than replacing one faulty human interpretation with another one. Each new view, in turn, is presented as the final word on the matter.

Do such human imaginations that fall to the ground unfulfilled in any way discredit the Bible Promise? Not at all. The Bible promise continues to shine forth today as it did nearly two millenniums ago when it was first uttered by the apostle Peter. Between then and now countless generations of Christians have put their faith in this promise and have lived in hope of its realization. Not knowing all the details as to when and how this would become a reality did not prevent them from putting faith in it. Nor should lack of all the answers prevent us from doing so. False alarms and erroneous teachings surrounding this promise do not change matters. One of the first scriptures I learned as a youthful Jehovah's Witness was the one found in Romans: "For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man aliar; it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings and mightest overcome when thou art judged." - Romans 3:3,4 *IKV*.

This scripture was the theme text in the Watch Tower book *Let God Be True* first published in 1946. A second edition was printed in 1952. The opening chapter of this book (1952 edition) made a vigorous appeal to "let God be found true." It drew a sharp contrast between what religious men say and do and what God says and does. It openly condemned, and rightly so, the opinions of men and their religious traditions as these were often at odds with the Bible itself:

"To arrive at truth we must dismiss religious prejudices from heart and mind. We must let God speak for himself. Any other course would lead only to further confusion. What if men, religious and nonreligious, have discredited and belittled the Bible and have placed men's opinions and traditions above it? What if religious leaders have rejected the Bible's straight testimony? What if the highly esteemed clergy of Christendom have been found false and misleading? Do these shocking and disappointing facts change the Bible itself or its message of truth? Sound thinking

assures us that the true and living God must have given searching mankind some inspired written revelation about himself. That being so, then let our stand be that of one of the Bible writers who said: 'What, then, is the case? If some did not express faith, will their lack of faith perhaps make the faithfulness of God without effect? Never may that happen! BUT LET GOD BE FOUND TRUE, though every man be found a liar, even as it is written: 'That you might be vindicated in your words and might win when you are being judged.'" -*Let God Be True*, pages 8,9 (Emphasis in original).

That scripture and those arguments burned deeply into my young, impressionable mind and heart. I believed it then and I believe it just as strongly today. As a young man I did not realize that there would come a time when I would have to acknowledge that the Society, too, was guilty of placing "men's opinions and traditions" above the word of God. When that realization arrived did it shake my faith in the promises of God. No! I was convinced then and I am convinced now that God will do all that he has promised to do. Do I presently understand all of the details surrounding the promise of a new heavens and new earth? Can I set forth some additional dogma concerning which generation will see these things and just how all of it will unfold? I confess that I do not understand all those things but this lack of knowledge is no hindrance to faith. Partial knowledge is accurate knowledge.

"For our knowledge is fragmentary [incomplete and imperfect] and our prophecy [our teaching] is fragmentary [incomplete and imperfect]. But when the complete and perfect [total] comes, the incomplete and imperfect will vanish away -become antiquated, void and superseded .... For now we are looking in a mirror that gives only a dim [blurred] reflection [of reality as in a riddle or enigma], but then [when perfection comes] we shall see in reality and face to face! I know in part [imperfectly]; but then I shall know and understand fully and clearly, even in the same manner as I have been fully and clearly known and understood [by god]. "-1 Corinthians 13:9,10,12 *The Amplified New Testament*

There is an obvious need for God to act in connection with his promises and the welfare of mankind. This is not new. There has been such a need from the beginning. It becomes more urgent to you and me, today, because we are now alive and experiencing the results of sin and human rule. The promise of a new heaven and a new earth has a strong

appeal and it ought to. Who would not want to believe that God will act in our lifetime? Who would not want to see an end to human suffering and a ruining of this beautiful planet? Who would not want to believe that they will live to see it-never grow old \_\_ pass alive into a paradise earth? Are not all these things appealing to us as humans? It is little wonder that many have convinced themselves and others that it was near at hand and have read the signs of the times to support their convictions. It is little wonder that many respond in faith and put their trust in them. Note the appeal in just two samples of such:

"God's kingdom will be characterized by peace and equity, and by universal spirituality and knowledge of the Lord. Even the animals and reptiles will lose their ferocity and no longer be carnivorous. All men will have plenty and be secure ... The great society which human rulers have promised, but never produced, will at last be realized under Christ's rule. The meek and not the arrogant will inherit the earth (Isaiah 11)."

"No one can picture the wonders of the eternal kingdom. Real people will live in a real world without sin or selfishness. The kingdom ... will be fully restored. The whole world will be man's Eden home. With access to the tree of life, he can once again live without fear of death, and the dominion he lost by yielding to Satan will again be restored. 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' Isaiah 11: 6-9. "

Sound familiar? The first quotation is from *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey (page 177) and the second one is from *Thy Kingdom Come* by Seventh Day Adventist, Leonard C. Lee. Mr. Lindsey's book uses Bible prophecies to pinpoint this generation as the one that will see the fulfillment of end-time events. Mr. Lee also believes we are living in the last days. These men do not agree with each other as to how these things will be fulfilled but each one is convinced he understands what God will do. Why quote these men? Because the Witnesses are led to believe that they are the only ones who see a future for the earth when they

are not. Others, apart from Jehovah's Witnesses believe firmly in God's promise of a new heavens and new earth. The Evangelicals have their view; the Adventists have their view; the Worldwide Church of God has its view; Jehovah's Witnesses . have their view. There are, no doubt, elements of truth and error in all of them. But none of these religious entities can *take possession of the promise* and tell God what he must do and when he must do it. God interprets his own prophecy and will act according to his will in due time-a time known only to him! (GenAO:8; Acts 1 :7)

In the pre-messianic period the Israelite nation had the Scriptures that bore witness concerning the Christ. There developed certain preconceived ideas of just how the Messiah would be identified and what he would do. The reality proved quite different from these expectations. Even the disciples of the Lord were often confused-even bewildered-by the outworking of events. It wasn't until the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ was over that they began to get some insight into fulfilled prophecy. It was following the resurrection that the Lord explained many of the scriptures that foretold his activity as the suffering messiah to the Jewish nation. (John 5:39-40; Luke 24: 13-32) It is, I believe, much the same today in relation to the second advent of Christ Jesus. We know that certain things will take place but that's about all we know. Efforts to clarify everything before the events actually take place is really beyond our ability to do with any degree of certainty. We have a right to think on these things and even draw certain conclusions but humility and common sense should dictate that we view these ideas with modesty. The Old Testament bore witness concerning the coming of Christ but it took the outworking of history to demonstrate how those prophetic utterances were fulfilled. It is, I believe, much the same today. Do we know the full scope of our inheritance? We might ask ourselves: "What part of the world to come will Christ inherit? Will he inherit the "New Heavens" or will he inherit the "New Earth?" Will he not inherit all things? Are not his Christian brothers co-inheritors of these things? We are promised a share in the kingdom of heavens. There is but one kingdom to be inherited. We know that the kingdom will fulfill all of God's promises regarding the "New heavens and new earth." The book of Revelation draws to a close with a preview of the end result of God's kingdom by Christ:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea is no more. I saw also the holy city, New

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God and prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. With that I heard a loud voice from the throne say: 'look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away ... *Anyone conquering will inherit these things*, and I shall be his God and he will be my son.'" ~Revelation 21: 1-4,7 NW.

Can we not be content to know that if we are faithful we will "inherit these things?" We do not need to partition the kingdom of God and try to decide who will be where and how many there will be in each partition. Nor need we agonize over the fate of those who have never heard of the gospel or of the true God. We can rest our confidence in the knowledge that our heavenly Father's concern for the world of mankind far exceeds our own. When the patriarch Abraham interceded in behalf of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah he asked: "Is the judge of all the earth not going to do what is right?" (Genesis 18:25) It does not appear that God was offended by this question. He reassured Abraham that he would, indeed, do justly. We can find a measure of comfort in that knowledge. The one who did not spare his only Son has demonstrated the degree of love and active concern he has for all mankind. If our study of the Scriptures leaves certain questions unresolved we need not be overly distressed. We can understand enough to insure our salvation into the kingdom of God. The hope of life everlasting is offered to us by God through Jesus Christ. Organizations of men that try to insert themselves into God's promises can add nothing nor can they take anything away. There are no authorities in heaven or on earth that can either redeem us or condemn us from God's standpoint. (Romans 8:31-39) Until the promises are fulfilled and as long as we live we need to focus on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. What we are as people is more important than our doctrines. Paul concluded his comments on partial knowledge with mature insight when he wrote: "And so faith, hope, love abide; [faith, conviction and belief respecting man's relation to God and divine things; hope, joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation; love, true affection for God and man, growing out of God's love for and in us], these three, but the greatest of these is love."-I Corinthians 13: 13 *The Amplified New Testament*

gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble-

each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."-I Corinthians 3: 10-15 *Revised Standard Version.*

The apostle Paul had good reason to write as he did to the Corinthian assembly of Christians. Paul had spent a full eighteen months in this city earlier preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Acts 18:9-11) God blessed his ministry and many "believed and were baptized. " Sometime after Paul established this community of believers there began to appear parties or divisions of thought and practice among the brothers. (1 Cor. 1: 11 ,12) While continuing to fellowship with one another they were quarreling. One would say: "I belong to Paul," another would say: "I belong to Apollos, " yet another: "I belong to Cephas, " and another: "I belong to Christ." Understandably, the apostle was greatly disturbed by this news and wrote to address it as well as a number of other difficulties facing this youthful congregation. (1 Cor. 1 : 12) Paul reminds these people that none of these men mentioned were crucified for them nor were they baptized in the name of these men. (1 Cor. 1: 13) The one who had been crucified for them was the same one in whose name they had been baptized-Jesus Christ. Those who brought the gospel to them were not the source of that gospel nor was there to be an admiring of them as individuals or leaders: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 1 planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth ... we are fellow workers for God; you are God's field, God's building. "-1 Corinthians 3:5-7,9 RSV.

We do not know how this counsel was received by the brothers but it clearly set forth the danger of parties within the Christian community. It was the beginning of the sectarian spirit-a spirit that was destined to fragment the body of believers into many quarreling factions. Paul placed a special warning before those who followed him as teachers to be careful about what they built up in the way of doctrines on the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. His words make it clear that there would be a "Day" of reckoning and those things that were fireproof would survive but those things that were combustible would be

consumed.

If we think of God as the Great Architect we can appreciate that the finished building was already completed in his mind before the foundation was laid. (Eph. 1:3-5) Through the apostles it has pleased God to reveal something of the design and purpose of his building "to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph. 1: 10) The blueprint of this design and purpose-that portion revealed-is set forth in the Bible. We have no authority to make alterations or changes in that blueprint; nor should we want to. We cannot dream up a new design to restructure that which has been given us by God. We cannot use God's foundation (Jesus Christ) to erect a different building. When laborers are given a set of blueprints to follow it is not for them to modify or make changes in those blueprints. The final responsibility for the edifice rests with the architect, not the builders. That is why the Bible can never be rightly used to preach a different gospel. Yet, it often is. An example of this is to be found in *The Watchtower*, April 15, 1987 in an article titled:

"Gaining Peace With God Through Dedication and Baptism." More than a score of scriptures drawn from the New Testament are assembled and discussed in this piece which argues for baptism as a means of gaining peace with God and avoiding his wrath. Among other things, the matter of inherited sin and God's provision for removing it is discussed:

"Jehovah took the initiative to help. 'He loved us and sent forth his Son as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins.' (1 John 4: 10) Jesus' sacrificial death propitiates, that is appeases or satisfies Jehovah's justice. This provides a legal basis for the forgiveness of sins, and *eventually*, for the complete removal of the enmity between God and man. Yes, it is possible to become 'reconciled to God through the death of his Son,' as the apostle Paul wrote.-Romans 5:8-10." page 11 (italics added)

By the use of the word "eventually" the "complete removal" of "enmity between God and man" is placed in the future-not a present reality. This subtle difference injects a thought not contained in Paul's gospel. Paul speaks of having peace with God as a *present reality*. (Rom. 5: 1) There is no residue of enmity between God and man that will be removed "eventually." The reconciliation is presently complete. (Rom.5: 10, 11) It is "our hope of sharing the glory of God" that is yet future. (Rom.5:2) In other words, the

Watch Tower Society is using Paul's words but applying them in such a way as to misappropriate them. In fact, the Society teaches that Paul's gospel as contained in Romans does not even apply to those they call the "other sheep" or "great crowd," -those persons to whom this material is addressed! It represents a serious change in God's blueprint as given by Paul. Similarly, the significance of water baptism is radically changed in the Watch Tower gospel. Paul speaks of being "baptized into Christ Jesus" and "into his death" in order to be raised up to "walk in newness of life. "

(Rom.6:3,4) The focus is an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. But the Watch Tower Society uses baptism to focus on a relationship with an organization. Notice how they present matters in what they say on page 12 of this *Watchtower*: "Recently the two questions addressed to baptismal candidates were simplified [?] so that candidates could answer with full comprehension of what is involved in coming into intimate relationship with God *and his earthly organization*." (emphasis added)

This seemingly benign explanation is more than a little misleading. Prior to June 1, 1985 baptismal candidates were asked if they recognized that they were dedicating themselves to do the will of God "as he reveals it to you through Jesus Christ and through the Bible under the enlightening power of the holy spirit." (see *VVT.*, May 1,1973 p.280) In place of this the new vow asks: "Do you understand that your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in association with God's spirit directed organization?" To speak of the change as merely "simplified" makes no sense at all. There is a world of difference between the two. It represents yet another modification in Gog's blueprint. While ostensibly presenting a strong scriptural argument the article is really slanted to conform to a sectarian blueprint. Because the Bible is copiously used and biblical terms employed the uninformed reader might well conclude that this is a sound scriptural presentation-which it is not. To the contrary, it undermines the very meaning of the verses it calls on for support. For example, they speak of the need for one to be "seeking a personal relationship with God." (page 13) This is desirable, but what are they talking about? Are they setting forth the relationship advanced by the very scriptures they are using? Paul wrote that those "led by the Spirit of God are sons of God;" and as God's children "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." (Rom. 8: 14, 17) Is that the precious relationship the writers of the *Watchtower*

magazine are addressing? No! Those familiar with Watch Tower doctrine know that they believe only 144,000 are joint heirs with Christ. Of these, all but about 9000 are yet living according to their calculation. Those among Jehovah's Witnesses contemplating baptism are taught that they are not entering into a Father-son relationship with God nor are they fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. Even their hope is different than the one Paul discusses in relation to baptism in Romans. Their tradition has it that since 1935 a new relationship is offered to those not in the new covenant-one that *denies sonship with the Father and brotherhood with Christ*. They are told that Christ does not act in the capacity of mediator between them and God. This doctrine hits at the very foundation upon which we are told to build.

In the scripture quoted at the start of this issue (1 Cor. 3: 10-15) attention was drawn to the fact that "no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Paul cautioned his brothers in Christ to be careful how they built on that foundation. He said that there would come a "Day" in which the value of what was built on this foundation would be tested (revealed) "by fire." Those who built with burnable materials were due to "suffer loss." Historically, there have been many teachings built upon the foundation of Christ that were nothing more than human philosophy masquerading as Bible truth. Differing factions have often broken off from parent bodies to form new fellowships. Sometimes those newly formed religions later spawned their own dissidents who, in turn, left to form yet another sect. Especially since the Reformation has there been a proliferation of Christian sects and cults. Oftentimes these groups are mutually exclusive and even hostile towards other sects. The Watch Tower Society grew out of the American Adventist movement of the 19th century and retains a number of its characteristics. It is not unique in claiming that there is no salvation outside of their organization; it is unique only within its own sectarian paradigm in which this assertion is made.

How the Lord will deal with this confusing and conflicting mass of religious belief and practice is shown in 1 Corinthians 3. But we note that he is speaking about those things built on the foundation-Jesus Christ. What about those who tamper with the foundation itself? Can it be said that a body of believers who deny that Jesus is their mediator and that baptism does not symbolize their baptism into Christ as members of his body are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ? It would appear that any

doctrine that did violence to the relationship of the believer to God or Christ would be much more damaging and dangerous than any aberrant teaching built on that foundation.

In the same *Watchtower* there is a paragraph headed: "The Need to Hate Wickedness." (pages 16,17) This paragraph quotes from Proverbs 6:16-19 which reads: "There are six things that Jehovah does hate; yes, seven things detestable to his soul: lofty eyes, a false tongue, and hands that are shedding innocent blood, a heart fabricating hurtful schemes, feet that are in a hurry to run to badness, a false witness that launches forth lies, and anyone sending forth contentions among brothers." In making a practical application of this text they say: "For instance, shun 'lofty eyes' and any show of pride. After baptism some have felt that they were no longer in need of regular assistance of those who taught them ... avoid gossiping, which can easily cause 'contentions among brothers.' By spreading unkind hearsay, unjustifiable criticism, or lies, we may not be 'shedding innocent blood,' but we can destroy another person's good reputation. We cannot be at peace with God if we are not at peace with our brothers." ~ *The Watchtower*, April 15, 1987 pages 16,17

Think of how powerfully the spirit of sectarianism contributes to those things which God hates. The vilification of all Christians outside the Watch Tower community and the character assassination of those who choose to leave the organization all contribute to the attitudes and practices that Jehovah hates. In fairness, the Watch Tower Society does not stand alone in this matter. There are hundreds of groups dominated by the sectarian spirit and in various ways pass judgment on others. God is no respecter of persons and we can be assured that all manifestations of the party spirit will be dealt with accordingly. It appears that a number of those who have left the Watch Tower system have simply walked away from one sectarian group into another. We must seek Christian fellowship free of the sectarian spirit if we are to avoid the things that God hates. It is not differences in viewpoint that creates this spirit. It is fighting over these differences and forming factions or parties (sects) in the process. Only those teachings clearly taught in Scripture ought to be advocated by any Christian fellowship. And even these need to be kindly and lovingly taught rather than as clubs used to beat people into agreement. On a host of other matters less clearly defined in the Bible we need to avoid dogmatism and legalism. There must be latitude



allowed for various views, none of which may, in themselves, be God-dishonoring. We must learn to accept one another even when we may not always approve or agree on certain issues. (Rom. 14)

One of the fears that many ex-Witnesses have in seeking out suitable Christian fellowship is spiritual contamination. Due to their background they may have a very difficult time associating with those who believe doctrines they cannot accept personally. They may fear incurring a measure of 'community guilt' (the opposite of 'community merit'). What each one does in this regard is their responsibility but it may be helpful to remember that we are judged individually-not as a community. Regarding this Paul wrote: "For no one of us lives for himself and no one dies for himself; for if we live we live for the Lord and if we die we die for the Lord. So, live or die, we belong to the Lord. For it was for this that Christ died and came to life, that he might be lord over both the dead and living. But why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you scorn your brother? For we shall all be brought up before God's bench. For it is written 'As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee shall bend and every tongue shall make acknowledgment to God;' each of us, then will give an account for himself." -Romans 14: 7-12 *The Bible in Living English*, Byington.

Paul's remarks in Romans chapter 14 are limited to matters of diet and the observing of days in regard to their holiness. Each one was to be convinced in his own mind on these things. (vs.5) There are sects that make an issue over these very things and use scripture to 'prove' their correctness. Unfortunately, they often use such things as religious tests and welcome into their fellowship only those who embrace their point of view. Even those who lay claim to being nondenominational are often sectarian in spirit. There are other areas that are often debated with considerable fervor; the nature of God, the nature of man, punishment of the wicked, eschatology and the world to come. Our goal should always be to understand what the Bible teaches on these matters and be willing to go wherever the truth leads us. But we must pursue truth in the spirit of love; love of God-love of brother. It is not enough to have the words of truth. We must also have the spirit of truth which is the spirit of Christ. And, in the end, we will individually stand before "God's bench."

In seeking appropriate Christian fellowship it may be helpful to reflect on the fact that the first congregations were not free of heretical thought and practice. Nearly all of the letters by Paul, Peter and

John address some form of aberrant teaching. In the Corinthian assembly there were some who didn't believe in the resurrection. (1 Cor. 15 : 12) In Ephesus there were those who taught that the resurrection had already occurred. (2 Tim.2: 18) Peter talks about false teachers in the congregations. (2 Pet.2: 1) Paul says he was endangered by false brothers. (2 Cor. 11 :26) He also speaks of those within the Christian community who were preaching Christ out of a spirit of envy and rivalry and seeking to do him personal injury. (Phil 1:15) Already, during the lives of the apostles there were dangerous elements within the churches that posed threats to their spirituality. (see Jude & Revelation, chapters 1-3) In addition to all these things there was the much broader issue of the Mosaic Law in relation to salvation. Certain Jewish believers continued to press for its observance. The meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15) did not settle that matter to everyone's satisfaction. There was a serious cultural and religious difference between Jews and Gentiles. Working together as brothers created many difficulties on both sides.

Those who suggest that all was peace and harmony in the early church display an ignorance of the facts. The apostles of Jesus Christ spoke out against these many errors but they were not able to eradicate them. The point of all this is that even if we had lived back there during the life of the apostles we probably would riot have found the ideal fellowship. There never has been a spiritual paradise condition existing in the church. There has always been some weeds And poisonous fruit. It is no different today. Early believers protected themselves from such things by following the apostolic counsel to avoid such elements *within* the fellowship that threatened their spirituality:

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."-2 Timothy 2:20,21 *New International Version*

Taken within its context, Paul's words address God's household and those within it. Some serve a less than noble purpose within it. Even these, however, appear to serve a constructive end. (1 Cor. 11 : 18,19) While everyone would be treated with godly respect and brotherly affection it would also be appropriate to use discrimination in one's choice of intimates-those most likely to influence our thoughts and actions. The

matter of avoiding some within the fellowship who advanced unhealthy teachings is repeated by Paul in I Corinthians 15. In this chapter Paul refutes those who say there is no resurrection and follows this up by saying that "Bad associations spoil useful habits." (vs. 33) When we consider the context in which we find these words it seems apparent he is talking about those *within* the congregation that represented "bad associations" [Greek: *kakos honilia*, meaning evil (intrinsically so) companionship] Faithful Christians are not condemned for the sins of other Christians. We do not incur community guilt. Contamination takes place only if we adopt these views and ungodly practices. In the Revelation the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in the midst of seven congregations in Asia Minor. With the exception of Smyrna, each of these contained people advocating bad things or otherwise falling short in some manner. In these same congregations there were individuals who were serving loyally and who had the Lord's approval. He encouraged these to remain faithful to the end and promised them spiritual rewards. These

faithful ones were not condemned along with the others . We can take courage from that as well. (Rev. 2,3)

What can we conclude other than that the early congregations were spiritually flawed. Contamination set in at an early date. The apostles of the Lord helped to hold back that corrupting element to a large extent but not entirely. Some were denying the healthy teaching and substituting Hellenistic thought. Even within the Christian congregations there was a need to be discriminating. This must have been a trial-some experience for many faithful ones. We, today, may experience similar trials within our local fellowship. Such trials test our loyalty and devotion to God and Christ. However, we have need of fellowship and should take advantage of it when available. We are not charged with the sins of others and, moreover, we can use whatever degree of influence we have to uphold Christian conduct and sound doctrine. □