

For all generations of believers the Lord said: "Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the door-keeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because

you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!" Mark 13:33—37 *Jerusalem Bible*. □

Must All Christians Be Ministers?

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Responding to *The Watchtower*, August 15, 1984. The study article in this magazine considers the Christian ministry and the responsibility to participate in the ministry. The first article, "Must All True Christians Be Ministers?" begins this way:

"There was no distinction (in the apostle Paul's day) between clergy and laity for there were no clergy.' That startling statement, which appeared in the *London Times*, expresses a basic truth regarding early Christianity. There was no clergy-laity division. Does that mean that the Christian congregation was without any visible leadership? And were there no ministers in any sense?" —Page 10, par. 1. "Some time after Pentecost, 33 C.E., as the number of anointed Christians grew by the thousands, it became necessary to appoint qualified men in each congregation to serve as overseers and as ministerial servants. But they did not form a clergy class." —Page 10, par. 2.

Is it true that there was no clergy-laity division in the early Christian congregation? What is meant by "clergy-laity" in this regard? *The Watchtower*, on page 11 shows a drawing of three men representing the three main branches of Christian churches. Each man is attired in distinctive religious garb. It is clear that the writer wanted to impress his readers as to what distinguishes a member of the "clergy" from Jehovah's Witnesses. As the Witnesses are not university-trained for the ministry, do not receive a salary and do not wear sacerdotal dress, according to Watchtower logic, they are not clergymen. But is that conclusion accurate? What makes one a clergyman?

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines clergy as "the body of men ordained to the service of God" and laity as "the people, as distinguished from the clergy." According to these simple definitions all that is required to have a clergy-laity division in the congregation is to have certain men ordained (appointed) to special positions of authority and privilege and those who are not so distinguished. The mode of ordination varies greatly from one church to

another. In Bible times it was customary to confer such authority by the laying on of hands. (1 Tim. 5:22) When the Watchtower Society appoints an elder by their officially-stamped appointment letter they are, in effect, laying their hands on the person. They are authorizing such a one to act in a certain official capacity. Those who are not so appointed (ordained) cannot act in that capacity. This is clearly a form of ordination. Whether one uses the terms "clergy-laity" in the process is quite irrelevant. It doesn't alter the reality that you end up with a small group of individuals having special privileges and responsibilities that the larger number in the not have. Like it or not, there is a definite clergy-laity division in the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses.

There is nothing sinister or intrinsically evil in this arrangement. It simply defines or marks off those who are empowered by their church leaders to preside at meetings, teach the congregation, reward, punish and even excommunicate members if they so decide. None of these functions is given to one not so ordained. The inherent danger is, of course, the abuse of authority. While in theory bodies of elders are supposed to be servants to the congregation, in practice it can lead to a lording it over the brothers. Jesus Christ, as head of the Christian congregation understood this and sought to curb such appetites:

"You know that the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. This, however, is not the way it shall be among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant [Gr. *diakonos*: minister] of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be your slave-like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served [Gr. *diakoneo*: ministered to] but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people."—Matthew 20:25-28 *Good News Bible*.

From Jesus' use of the word *diakonos*, it is clear that it represents a lowly position of service or ministry. It is obviously not an exalted position.

However, in the real world there is a certain honor and prestige to be realized when one is appointed an elder or ministerial servant. The apostle Peter, like Jesus, also saw the possibility of abuse of this office and he counseled his fellow elders accordingly: shepherd the flock of God in your care, not under compulsion, but willingly; neither for love of dishonest gain, but eagerly; neither as lording it over those who are God's inheritance, but becoming examples to the flock." —1 Peter 5:2,3 *New World Translation*.

To be sure the Watchtower Society has studiously avoided the outward trappings that distinguish many of the ministers of religion but they have not avoided the trap of exalting themselves and creating an elder system that dominates the religious lives of Jehovah's Witnesses. Even to question the elders on a matter can lead to serious reprimand and loss of privilege.

The ministry in which Witnesses are urged to be active is presented as the same one in which the apostle Paul was engaged. His words at Romans 10:8-10, 14,15 are quoted in this regard, (page 11, par. 5) The Watchtower comments that the world "Needs a ministry of reconciliation in order that obedient and loyal people from all nations may have a relationship through Christ with the Sovereign Lord Jehovah." (page 11, par. 4) This portion of the article is directed to *anointed* Christians. Of the few Jehovah's Witnesses who lay claim to being "anointed" —less than 10,000 out of 2,652,000—none of whom are preaching the "ministry of reconciliation" to which the apostle Paul makes mention in Romans chapter 10. Righteousness, salvation and justification, according to Paul, is attained through faith in Jesus Christ and making public confession to that effect. This is not the "good news" being preached by the aging Witnesses of Jehovah who claim to be anointed.

The relationship with God that is offered in the ministry of reconciliation is that of sonship. "For all who are led by God's spirit, these are God's sons. 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 8:14-17, *NW*

This relationship with the Father is the only one

presented in the Christian Writings and therefore is the only one to which we can aspire. For one to deny that he or she is a son of God is, in effect, to deny that he or she is a Christian in the sense that it is used in the Scriptures. "Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God, and everyone who loves the one that caused to be born loves him who has been born from that one." —1 John 5:1,2 *AW* (compare John 3:3-8)

What "relationship" can one who denies being a son of God possibly have with the Sovereign Lord Jehovah? By what right can he be addressed as "Father" in prayer if, indeed, he is not one's Father? If they really do believe that Jehovah God is their Father then Jehovah's Witnesses would have to be his sons. And yet, they preach a "good news" that denies that relationship for themselves and those to whom they preach.

The Christian Scriptures were written to, for and by sons of God in the new covenant. Only those in the new covenant share in its promises and blessings. Just as the Law Covenant addressed only those "under the Law" so, too, only those in the new covenant are (Romans 3:19) It is quite incredible that the Watchtower Society has been able to create a community of believers that are bound to the obligations, principles and practices of the new covenant but are excluded from its benefits, promises and blessings!

The Society uses Revelation 7:4-17 to partition Jehovah's Witnesses into two classes of believers. The 144,000 are viewed as heaven-bound while a much larger number called "the great crowd" are earth-bound. The Watchtower Society teaches that the great crowd are pictured as "standing *before* the throne" which indicates that they are on the earth. However in Revelation 14:1-3 the 144,000 whom they say are pictured in heaven here because they are "standing *on* Mount Zion" are also said to be singing "a new song *before* the throne." By what rule of biblical exegesis or logic can it be said that "standing before the throne" in one chapter "proves" they are on earth and the same expression in another chapter "proves" they are in heaven?

Interestingly, the *Watchtower* writer speaks of John seeing a great crowd "after having seen in vision the anointed congregation of 144,000." For the record, John did not see the 144,000. He only "*heard* the

number of those who were sealed."—Revelation 7:4 (page 12, par.9)

To promote its house-to-house method of evangelizing the next article: "How To Become Effective Ministers," uses Acts 20:20 to prove that this was how the apostle Paul carried out his ministry: "Since the Christian ministry is a matter of everlasting life or death, how can we transmit the good news to the maximum number of people? Yes, how can we be 'clean from the blood of all men'? By using every avenue of service, which includes, as the apostle Paul stated, the ministry 'frim house-to-house.' One Spanish commentary on Acts 20:20 states: "Here we have the method of preaching that Paul followed in Ephesus."—Acts 20:20-27." (page 16, par.7)

The ones whom Paul taught "publicly and from "house-to-house" *were the older men of the congregation at Ephesus.* (Acts 20:17,20) This seems to be what Paul is talking about. He not only taught them as a body in public assembly, but he also took the time to visit them in their homes as well to give them counsel. It does not appear that he is talking about visits to homes of unbelievers in this instance. And it would be a gross misrepresentation of Scripture to argue that the house-to-house method of preaching was the premier method used by the apostle in his general ministry. The Greek word *kat'oikon*, here translated "house to house" is also found in Acts 2:46 where the *New World Translation* renders it "private homes." One Bible translation seems to better capture the sense of what the apostle is talking about at Acts 20:20 when it has Paul saying: "You know that I did not hold back anything that would be of help to you as I preached and taught in public and in your homes."—Acts 20:20 *Good News Bible.*

There certainly would be no objection to going from house-to-house to preach the good news of salvation but care must be taken to avoid misrepresenting the Bible as supporting a custom when, in fact, it does not. The use by the writer in this article of one sentence extracted from a certain unnamed Spanish Commentary to support their view is curious. Ordinarily, the Watchtower Society shows considerable disdain for reference works produced in "Christendom." But if they find support in one of these they readily use it. To select a single sentence, out of context, to support your point of view is a highly questionable practice. Left to stand on its own, a sentence can even

be used to convey a conclusion that the scholar was not presenting at all.

The last article in this series of study articles considers: "Effective Miniistry Leading to More Disciples.". Under a sub-heading this question is raised: "On what must the Christian message be based? On human wisdom and philosophy? Paul's letter to Timothy gives a clear answer: 'You, however, continue in the things that you learned and were persuaded to believe, knowing . . . that from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through the faith in connection with Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching.' Clearly, the Bible, the Word of God, has to be the cornerstone of our ministry." (2 Timothy 3:14-17)—Page 22, par. 6 This seeming fidelity to the Bible as "the cornerstone of our ministry," is misleading. It suggests that the Bible is complete and needs no additional "human wisdom" or "philosophy" to expand upon it or to make it understandable. And, to be sure, that is correct. But the "good news" preached by the Witnesses is clearly not the one preached by Jesus or the apostles as presented in the inspired Christian Writings. In preaching their particular "good news" they must quickly take the student from the Bible alone and introduce Watchtower study aids that contain their time feature structures which, in turn, are the basis for their two classes of Christians teaching. Scriptures are slanted to accommodate these Watchtower creations. A rigid question and answer format present in all of their publications is designed to mentally condition the student to arrive at a predetermined conclusion. The whole idea of having a home "Bible study" with someone is to get them into one of the Society's publications as quickly as possible. While the Bible is used extensively in these publications it is used in a certain arbitrary context—one carefully constructed by the Watchtower Society. Those indoctrinated into this kind of Bible study are soon conditioned to confuse Bible truth with human ideas and speculations. Few Witnesses would be capable of conducting an in-depth study using the Bible alone. The Witnesses and their students never advance beyond this infantile system of learning. They are forever treated as catechumens by the Watchtower Society. □