

"... Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error"

The
DISCERNER

AN
INTERDENOMINATIONAL
HERESY-EXPOSING
QUARTERLY

Vol. XI No. 10

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April - June, 1985

The DISCERNER

Published Quarterly
Price \$2.00 for 4 issues.
50 cents a copy, for foreign
subscriptions add 20 cents a copy.

2708 E. Lake St., Suite 231
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406
Printed in the United States

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THE DEVIATION OF THE CULTIC GROUPS FROM THE TRUTH OF GOD

Prof. John E. Dahlin, Editor

Students of the present-day cultic groups understand clearly the ongoing deviation from the Biblical position by the spurious groups, generally known as the cults. It is not a drummed-up accusation by some over-zealous fundamentalists, but rather a regrettable development among the well-known cults of our time. It would be of much less concern to all Bible-believing groups if the deviation by the cultists covered only minor theological points and not the basic doctrines of the Scriptures. The fact of the matter is that the cults have drifted away from the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God. This situation should not be glossed over or minimized by those who understand what the Bible teaches. The Bible sets forth a number of all-important doctrines which must be accepted wholeheartedly by all who confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In order to convince the readers of THE DISCERNER that this is a vital area which separates Bible-believing groups from the off-center organizations, I have listed in this article some of the distinct deviations of the cults from the Biblical position. I have selected those which may be

most clearly detected by knowledgeable Christians.

The Following Constitute the Major Deviations

First of all, the cults reject the position of Jesus Christ in the Holy Scriptures. None of the cults, so far as my knowledge extends, believe that the Son of God is co-equal and co-eternal with God, the Father. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was the highest created being. His Deity is not accepted. Here is a clear deviation from the Biblical truth. John writes, "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is come in the flesh is not of God, and this is that spirit of an anti-christ whereof ye have heard that it should come" (I Jn. 4:3). In the last words of John in his First Letter he writes, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even His Son Jesus Christ" (v. 20).

Generally, the other cults hedge or compromise the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. The Mormons have very substantially down-graded the position of Jesus Christ. The Deity of the Son of God, as presented in the New

Testament, is recklessly passed over by the Mormon Church. The test of every religious organization is what they believe regarding Jesus Christ. Right here the cultic groups stumble and deviate from God's Word on the vital doctrine of the Deity of our Lord.

Moreover, on the subject of the atonement and the efficaciousness of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, the cultic groups retreat and fail to embrace the simplicity as well as the necessity of our redemption through the finished work of Jesus Christ. The cults fail to understand that in Christ's redemptive work, He paid the price for our sins and atoned for them by the shedding of His precious blood on the cross. Somehow, this truth is not understood by the present-day cults. In my 30 years of study of cultic publications I have never discovered a single writer among these spurious groups who puts full reliance on the completeness of Christ's work on the cross in achieving forgiveness for our sins and providing eternal life to everyone who believes in this truth. The central truth of the New Testament is given by Paul, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3). The cults have added to the atonement of Christ, in our behalf, additional requirements in making us acceptable before God. It may be the commandments, baptism, penance, or the merits of the sacraments. With the Mormons, baptism is a **must** requirement. It seems that none of the cultic groups are willing to believe the work wrought by Christ on the cross is adequate for our salvation. Luther found the right way after long struggles and prayer. He accepted

the truth that "The just shall live by faith." He carefully enunciated the phrase "by faith alone." The cults adhere to some form of works in order to be reconciled to God. Somehow, they by-pass the truth of God, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). The grace of God through Jesus Christ is not understood or taught by the cults.

Thirdly, the cults fail completely in understanding the reliability and the authority of the holy Scriptures. The verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a position held by any of the cults. The cultists lift up into prominence their own writings. The Mormons have as their central authority The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. The Christian Science group has the writings of Mary Baker Eddy to guide them. The adherents to the Seventh Day Adventist body loyally follow their founder, Ellen White. By these extra writings the Bible is often obscured and unread. The Apostle Paul gives us the supreme authority as our guide. He writes, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect and thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16). The failure of the cults in accepting the verbal inspiration, and the inerrancy of the Scriptures, leave them without a foundational authority. The weakness with regard to the inspiration of the Scriptures not only weakens the position of the cults, it also harms other groups which ignore

the fact of inspiration of the Word of God. The Mormons blast away by charging that nearly every verse of the Bible is corrupted by faulty translation. No person of knowledge will agree to such a ridiculous statement. It may be stated, however, that the cultic groups rely very little on the authority of the Scriptures in arranging their activities and religious systems.

In addition, the general position of the cults of today is to deviate from the Biblical doctrine of eternal punishment for the ungodly. They all more or less rationalize the Scriptural passages which deal with everlasting punishment of those who are lost. Even the Seventh Day Adventists, who accept some of the basic doctrines of the Scriptures, reject the Biblical doctrine of eternal punishment. Perhaps no doctrine is more clearly set forth in the New Testament than that of eternal punishment of all Christ rejecters. It is stated "They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (I Thess. 1:9). Referring to the lost, Jesus says, "And these shall go away into everlasting judgment" (Matt. 25:46). In no Scripture is eternal punishment minimized or left in uncertainty. Any group which rejects this doctrine is gambling with the revelation of God on a very solemn subject.

Some Somber Conclusions To This Study

In the light of our discussion of the subject, and the information you have received from it, we might well ask: What conclusions may be reached regarding the cultic activity

and its impact on the religious life of our country? It is obvious from our many observations, and the discussion of these matters, that most people have no real awareness of the seriousness of the situation, that is, how damaging it is to our country. It is safe to conclude that there are at least 15 million people who are identified with the scores of cults which are active these days. As we consider the great multitude of people who are misled by cultic propaganda, and the clever maneuvers of those spreading false doctrines, it is obvious that these organized groups have a great impact on a considerable segment of our national population.

It is altogether true that these misguided millions are harder to reach for Christ in their present situation than it would have been had they not been brainwashed by the false teachings. None of these systems offer a Biblical message on the subject of salvation. Doubtlessly most of these people are lost for eternity because of their acceptance of these damnable heresies. In addition, it is disheartening to realize that millions of dollars are siphoned off the naive people to fill the coffers of these religious racketeers. All this money is wasted as it is used to bind people in error which is soul-destroying for millions of our fellowmen. The Mormons (the largest cult) have built 16 massive temples in our land to impress people with their great system of religion. Indeed, this is indicative of their resourcefulness.

It may sound arbitrary to accuse these cultic systems of having no Gospel to offer lost people. In our examination of their publications, I have failed to find any Gospel in

them. Paul writes, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). This message is missing in the cultic presentation.

The heresies of these many cultic systems is a challenge to Bible-believing people to equip themselves for action in producing sound literature to all who need enlighten-

ment on the subject of truth versus error. Our organization is dedicated to helping people by means of literature, counseling, special services, and the use of the telephone in reaching those who are eager for the right information. If more funds were available, we could increase our effectiveness in reaching many more people with God's truth in this age of confusion. We need your help and continuous prayer.

SKELETONS IN THE WATCHTOWER CLOSET: BETH-SARIM AND THE RETURN OF THE PRINCES

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Those who have taken the time to investigate the history of the Watchtower Society (the Jehovah's Witnesses) are well aware of the many skeletons which are to be found in this cult's past. While the past is not completely hidden from Jehovah's Witnesses today, contemporary treatments in Society publications often obscure or hide some of it. Many examples come to mind, but only two, which are related, can be briefly dealt with here: Beth-Sarim ("House of the Princes"), the mansion which was built in San Diego, and the return of the princes (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, etc.).

The public was introduced to Beth-Sarim in an article on the front page of the *San Diego Sun*, March 15, 1930, "San Diego Mansion—With All Modern Improvements—Awaits Earthly Return of Prophets." It went on to report,

"In one of the strangest deeds ever filed in the nation, Rutherford, President of the International Bible Students Association and of

the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, has put the huge tile-roofed home in fashionable Kensington Heights in perpetual trust for the ancient kings and prophets of Palestine."

According to the article, when the home was offered to him by some prominent Watchtower associates, Rutherford "accepted it only on a single condition"—that he be permitted to write the deed. This unusual document, dated December 24, 1929, states in part:

"Both the grantor and grantee, the said Joseph F. Rutherford, who is President of the WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY and General Manager thereof makes this provision and condition as set forth in this deed.

Both the grantor and grantee, the said Joseph F. Rutherford, are fully persuaded from the Bible Testimony, which is the word of Jehovah God, and from extraneous evidence that God's Kingdom is now in course of establishment... that the

Kingdom of God will have visible representatives on the earth who will have charge of the affairs of the nations under the supervision of the invisible ruler Christ; that among those who will thus be the faithful representatives and visible governors of the world will be David, who was once King over Israel; and Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthae, and Joseph, formerly the ruler of Egypt, and Samuel the prophet and other faithful men who were named with approval in the Bible in Hebrews the eleventh chapter. The condition herein is that the said WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY shall hold said title perpetually in trust for the use of any or all of the men above named as representatives of God's Kingdom on earth and that such men shall have possession and use of said property herein above described as they may deem for the best interest for the work in which they are engaged.

... IT IS FURTHER PROVIDED that if the said JOSEPH F. RUTHERFORD while alive on the earth shall by lease, deed or contract provide that any other person or persons connected with the said WATCHTOWER AND TRACT SOCIETY shall have the right to reside on said premises until the appearing of David or some of the other men mentioned in the Eleventh Chapter of Hebrews; as above set forth every such person or persons so designated by the said Joseph F. Rutherford in such lease or other paper writing shall have the right and privilege of residing on said premises until the same be taken possession of by David or some of the other men herein named and this property and premises being

dedicated to Jehovah and the use of his kingdom, it shall be used as such forever. Any persons appearing to take possession of said premises, shall first prove and identify themselves to the proper officers of said Society as the person or persons described in Hebrews Chapter Eleven and in this deed" (Recorded in Book 1741, p. 69, County Record Office, San Diego, California).

On January 9, 1931, the *San Diego Sun* carried an article on Beth-Sarim on the front page, "David's House Waits for Owner: Bearded Tramp Only Claimant to House for King." When Rutherford was asked by the reporter how he thought the returned princes would look, he explained,

"... as perfect men. I interpret that to mean . . . that David, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, Joseph and Samuel will be sent here to wrench the world from Satan's grasp, clothed in modern garb as we are, and able, with little effort, to speak our tongue."

Rutherford pictured the arrival of the biblical delegation perhaps in frock coats, high hats, canes and spats."

The mansion had "the most modern appliances that science has devised" and in a two-car garage "stands a new, yellow 16-cylinder coupe which will be turned over to the rulers along with all the personal property on the place."

Rutherford predicted that the return of David and his companions would be the greatest news story in history. He also indicated that the testimony of Beth-Sarim had gone all over the world and that thousands had come to see the house.

When Rutherford died on January 8, 1942, it was evident that the

princes had not yet returned as predicted. What happened to Beth-Sarim after his death? The following came out in testimony given in Scotland, in 1954. F. W. Franz, vice-president of the Society was answering the questions.

“Q: Do you still maintain a property known as Beth-Sarim in San Diego, California? A: No. Q: Beth-Sarim was, was it not, a mansion in San Diego kept for the second coming of some of the Prophets? A: Kept for the resurrected Prophets. Q: Namely who? A: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, and so on . . . Daniel . . . Q: Were the whole body of Witnesses instructed to accept that the mansion was being kept for that purpose? A: Yes. Q: What has come of the mansion? A: It has been sold. Q: Why? A: Because it was there, and the Prophets had not yet come back to occupy it, to make use of it, and the Society had no use for it at the time; it was in charge of a caretaker, and it was causing expense, and our understanding of the Scriptures opened up more and more concerning the Princes, which will include those Prophets, and so the property was sold as serving no present purpose” (Walsh vs. the Minister of Labour and National Service, p. 120).

Franz’s testimony mentioned that “our understanding of the Scriptures opened up more and more concerning the Princes, which will include those prophets . . .” What had previously been taught concerning these men? In 1904, founder C. T. Russell taught that the “ancient worthies” or “princes” would be resurrected “about 1914, or shortly thereafter . . .” (*WatchTower Reprints* p. 3445). In 1920 Rutherford changed the date, “. . . We may expect 1925 to

witness the return of these faithful men of Israel . . .” (*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, p. 88). In 1928 Rutherford wrote that “it may be reasonably concluded that the ‘ancient worthies’ will be back on earth as perfect men within a comparatively short time” (*Government*, p. 276). In a cover headline, *The Consolation* of November 26, 1941 asked, “Return of the ‘Princes’: Who will meet earth’s new governors?” The article inside was written by Rutherford himself. He went on to speak of Beth-Sarim as a testimony and concluded, “You may soon meet Abraham, David, and other like faithful men, who shall be here as perfect men acting as governors of the new world” (p. 18). *The Consolation* of May 27, 1942 reported that “before his death Judge Rutherford made the simple request that his remains be buried somewhere on the hundred-acre estate . . . held in trust for the New Earth’s Princes” (p. 3). Requests for interment on the property or on an adjacent parcel were turned down by the Planning Commission.

The New World, published in 1942, claimed that “the most recent facts show that the religionists of this doomed world are gnashing their teeth because of the testimony which that ‘House of the Princes’ bears to the new world” (p. 104). In 1950, the Watchtower’s new view of the princes was presented.

“For many years it had been the view of *The Watchtower* that the faithful men of old who served God faithfully before Jesus’ time would be raised from the dead even before Armageddon to join in organizing Jehovah’s modern-day people and to share in shouldering the remnant’s responsibil-

ity of representing the Lord Jesus Christ in the capacity of overseers of the flock of God on earth" (*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, p. 252).

This same source went on to explain that outstanding Jehovah's Witnesses today could also become "princes," and subsequently it was taught that the ancient princes would experience a resurrection soon after Armageddon (*You May Survive Armageddon Into God's New World*, p. 355).

Why had Beth Sarim been sold according to Franz's testimony quoted earlier? Because of new Bible understanding and because of the failure of the princes to return as predicted. The "property was sold as serving no present purpose." It must be concluded then, that the testimony of Beth-Sarim was a testimony of false prophecy. It obviously was then, and still is, an embarrassment to the Watchtower Society. This conclusion is confirmed by an examination of material published since the end of the 1940's. For example, "Beth-Sarim" is not even listed in the Index of the Witnesses' history, *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, published in 1959. "Let Your Name Be Sanctified" (1961) mentions Beth-Sarim and states that for years Rutherford "had been hoping to see the faithful prophets"—but no connection is made between his hope for their return and Beth-Sarim (p. 336). The 1975 *Yearbook* contains a brief history of the Jehovah's Witnesses. It presents the closing days of Rutherford's life at Beth-Sarim, but it does not communicate a complete account for the purpose of the house. "In time, a direct contribution was made for the purpose of constructing a house in San Diego for Brother Rutherford's use . . . Concerning this property, the 1939 book *Salvation* stated: 'At San Diego,

California, there is a small piece of land, on which, in the year 1929, there was built a house, which is called Beth-Sarim'" (p. 194). What the *Yearbook* did not quote from the *Salvation* book is that which immediately follows in the next two sentences:

"The Hebrew words Beth Sarim mean 'House of the Princes'; and the purpose of acquiring that property and building the house was that there might be some tangible proof that there are those on earth today who fully believe God and Christ Jesus and in His kingdom, and who believe that the faithful men of old will soon be resurrected by the Lord, be back on earth, and take charge of the visible affairs of earth. The title to Beth-Sarim is vested in the *Watchtower Bible & Tract Society* in trust, to be used by the president of the Society and his assistants for the present, and thereafter to be forever at the disposal of the aforementioned princes on the earth" (p. 312).

The story of Beth-Sarim and the multiple failures of the predicted return of the princes, are just two examples of skeletons in the Watchtower closet, and confirmation that this organization is a false prophet.

"And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts [*"from their own inspiration"* NASB], Hear ye the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God: Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!" (Ezekiel 13:1-3).

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FALSE DOCTRINE

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Long before the canon of Scripture was completed, heterodoxy or false doctrine was evident. In fact, as soon as God's truth was given it was opposed by some. Wherever on earth there has been truth, there has also been error. The pages of Scripture and the record of history verify this.

The longer an error is condoned or tolerated, the easier it is to compromise the truth. Somehow a conditioning process goes on. An unhealthy toleration of false doctrine usually leads to accommodation to it. When falsehood is left unchecked, unexposed, or unopposed, it gradually seems less and less objectionable. It looks more and more like merely a weak and watered-down form of truth, though, to be sure, a less desirable option than the truth.

At the turn of the century J. Gresham Machen, a great spokesman for orthodoxy, apparently sensed this was happening to many in his day in their understanding of the nature of liberal theology. He spoke to the issue pointedly in his classic work, *Christianity and Liberalism*. The major thesis of this Presbyterian leader was that theological liberalism was not in any sense a form of orthodox theology.¹ It must not be viewed as partly Christian and partly non-Christian; rather liberal theology was to be seen as non-Christian, heterodox, and anti-Christian. The reason for this bold assertion was that classic liberal theology unashamedly rejected and ridiculed belief in the supernatural Christ of Scripture and the Scripture of Christ.

Other great defenders of the faith shared Machen's views. Arno C. Gaebelien, for instance, argued strongly that "modernistic" Christianity was "the most dangerous infidelity true Christianity had ever faced."² On the heels of the collapse of old liberal theology with its deification of man and humanization of God came neo-orthodoxy, which was built on the same foundation of the higher critical theory of the Bible. Today a new contemporary liberal theology has arisen, which also rests solidly on the higher critical theory of Scripture but speaks with more respect for Christ and the Bible. However, this is the same denial of old pre-war classic liberal theology in new costumes. The wrapping has changed but the package is basically the same.³

How should Bible-believing Christians respond to false doctrine today? How should those who embrace and seek to obey the Bible respond to such teaching and to those who deny the cardinal doctrines of the historic, orthodox Christian faith? The Word of God itself gives instruction on this issue. Five scriptural realities must be faced by those who accept the Bible as their rule of faith and practice.

Prediction of False Teachers and Doctrine

Jesus warned His disciples of those who would "come to [them] in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15). Repeatedly He alerted His own to the false teaching of the religionists of His day. He also told them that false teachers would

come in the future (Matt. 24:5).

With a pastor's heart, the Apostle Paul put the Ephesian Christians on alert concerning the "savage wolves" who would seek to join and destroy "the flock" (Acts 20:29). The apostle did the same for the believers in Corinth so they would not be "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). He knew some were preaching "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4). The saints in Galatia needed the same warning since some of them were already following after "a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6) and thereby seeking "to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). "Let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9), Paul said of all who teach a false gospel.

The young preacher Timothy was told that "in later times some will fall away from the faith" giving heed to the "doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). Like Hymenaeus and Alexander who had already "suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith," others would arise and do the same" (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

"Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings," the saints addressed in the Book of Hebrews were exhorted (Heb. 13:9), Peter (2 Pet. 2:1) and John (1 John 4:1) both reminded the people of God whom they served about the danger of "false teachers" and "false prophets."

Command to Separate

Christians at Corinth were charged with the solemn responsibility to set themselves apart from idolatry and idol worshipers (2 Cor. 6:14-16). The principle of separation from error of any kind is clear; the command was

unmistakable. "Come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean" (2 Cor. 6:17). In verses 14-16 Paul referred to several Old Testament passages where the truth of separation from false teaching was also taught. With verse 17 he drew practical implications from the truth stated in verse 16 that believers are the temple of the living God.

The older shrines were separated off from the world around them so that Christians must be spiritually and morally withdrawn from the pagan society in which they have to live. Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to make this withdrawal is given in words originally spoken by God to His people through Isaiah when He called them out of exile. They were to leave in Babylon everything that was unclean, taking only the sacred vessels of the temple so that they might continue to be a people whom God could receive, i.e., whom He could look upon with favor (see Isaiah 52:11).⁶

God, through the Apostle Paul, pronounced a curse on those who proclaimed a false gospel (Gal. 1:9). It would seem to follow then that the Christians should not be in fellowship with anyone who stands under the judgment of God. Surely those who reject such foundational doctrines as the absolute deity of Christ and the divine authority of the Bible do not stand in God's favor, but are under His disfavor and judgment.

John, the apostle of love, had some strong words of exhortation for believers in regard to false doctrine. John's chief concern was the person and work of Christ. He wrote, "Anyone who . . . does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have

God" (2 John 9). In this way he made clear the total falsity of the view described. But what is to be the believers' response to such false teachers and teaching? John said, "Do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting" (2 John 10). This referred to a formal visit by an official, not just a casual visit from a stranger. A teacher who claimed authority was in view.⁷ If a Christian disobeyed this injunction he was one who "participates in his [the false teacher's] evil deeds" (2 John 11). The word translated "participates" (*koinonei*) "implies more than participation in the definite acts. It suggests fellowship with the character of which they are the outcome."⁸

In 3 John the apostle wrote of the need for believers to receive other faithful believers who were itinerant evangelists so that they "may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 8). This is the exact opposite response the believers are to have toward false teachers. In 3 John 8 fellow believers are to be welcomed and given hospitable support; in 2 John 10, by contrast, false teachers are to be avoided. Westcott's comment on the exhortation in 3 John is helpful: "Fellowship may be either with the teachers 'that we may be fellow workers with them in support of the truth'; or (better) with the truth, the substance of their teaching; that we may help the truth which is effective through them."⁹

The biblical teaching seems clear enough. The issue of separation from apostasy is settled for those who claim allegiance to the Word of God. The believer's responsibility is now to obey.

A more difficult biblical truth for many to accept and obey is separation from Christian brethren who persist in walking in disobedience. Two passages in God's Word address the question of a believer's fellowship with other believers who embrace false doctrine.

The Corinthian Christians were told in a clear, unmistakable command to "remove the wicked man from among yourselves" in their assembly. This man, guilty of immorality and refusing to confess it (1 Cor. 5:13), was called "wicked" and was to be removed. The saints at Thessalonica were told also to "keep aloof ['withdraw,' KJV] from every brother who leads an unruly life . . . not according to the tradition which you received from us" (2 Thess. 3:6).

Paul enjoins them to *withdraw* from such. The verb *stellesthai* was used earlier in its history for such activities as furling sails. It signifies the withdrawing into oneself, holding oneself aloof from the offender in question. This is not to be done in a spirit of superiority. The appeal to brotherliness shows that it is part of a man's duty to the brotherhood that he should not condone the deeds of any who, while acclaiming the name of brother, nevertheless denies by his actions what the brotherhood stands for.¹⁰

Interestingly when Paul wrote to the same Christians in Corinth and Thessalonica concerning two specific doctrines which were being denied by some among them, he did not command the faithful to separate. Some in the church of Corinth were denying the doctrine of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). The Thessalonian Christians were being deceived by the false

teaching that the predicted "day of the Lord" was already present (2 Thess. 2:2-3). Yet in these cases separation from those who were teaching the false doctrines was not advocated. This raises two questions. First, must God tell believers to separate from brethren holding false doctrine every time He mentions false teaching? Second, over which doctrines of the faith are Christians to break fellowship with other believers? The Bible does not give specific answers to either of these questions. However, in response to the first, certainly God need not state something more than once for it to be true.

What about what has been called second-degree separation or third-, fourth-, or even fifth-degree separation? Are God's people to separate from others of God's people who do not separate? How far removed from the original offender should one carry the matter of separation? Specific answers to these questions are not given in the Bible. Each case it would seem, therefore, must be decided on its own merits. In making such a decision, a believer must be sure he does not disobey any clearly stated teachings of Scripture.

Proper Attitude in Separation

Too often separatists forget that the biblical doctrine of separation is positive and not just negative.¹¹ The proper sequence of these opposites is imperative. Unless one is first separated to God, all separation from apostasy will have little value. The scriptural commands to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) and to "retain the standard of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13) refer not to their own personal views but to the body of

truth committed to believers. This requires complete dedication to the Lord and His Word. Determination to defend an organization or one's own views often replaces the command to contend and "continue in the faith" (Col. 1:23) and to be "abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Unfortunately opposition to and separation from someone ensnared in false doctrine is often done without love, humility, and prayer. Human nature is such that it is easier to lash out at someone than it is to love. It is often easier to be harsh toward and to hate the erring one than it is to be humble in spirit. It is often easier to pronounce judgment than it is to pray for those in error.

Yet Scripture clearly reveals that Christians are to exercise love for those from whom they separate (1 Tim. 1:5-7). Prayers are to be made for "all men," which would include even those who hold false doctrine and oppose God's Word (1 Tim. 2:1). Humility is to characterize those who seek to restore one "caught in any trespass," whatever that sin may be (Gal. 6:1). What is needed in these days of increased efforts toward church union and widespread adherence to false doctrine is simple obedience to God's commands—obedience not only to separate from these but also to be completely separated to God. The biblical commands to separate are not completely followed unless love and humility characterize the believer. Paul put it bluntly when, immediately after giving an exhortation against false doctrine, he wrote, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5).

Purposes of Separation

The purpose of separating from false teachers and their doctrines is to encourage those ensnared in error to be obedient to God's Word. Other purposes include honoring God and His Word, defending the doctrinal purity of the church and its testimony, and restraining sin and Satan's work in the world. Still another purpose is to help and restore erring brethren. Those older in the faith are responsible to show new and immature Christians the seriousness of their faith. Affiliation with the enemies of the cross spells a lie to all claims to believe the truth.

Schaeffer bluntly stated the issue of believers' responsibility toward false doctrine and those who promote it.

Thus it must be said that in spite of (and even because of) one's commitment to evangelism and cooperation among Christians, I can visualize times when the only way to make plain the seriousness of what is involved in regard to a service or an activity where the Gospel is going to be preached is not to accept an official part if men, whose doctrine is known to be an enemy, are going to be invited to officially participate. In an age of relativity the practice of truth when it is costly is the only way to cause the world to take seriously our protestations concerning truth. Cooperation and unity that do not lead to purity of life and purity of

doctrine are just as faulty and incomplete as an orthodoxy which does not lead to a concern for, and a reaching out toward, those who are lost.¹²

Notes

¹ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Guardian, 1923).

² Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Conflict of the Ages* (Arno C. Gaebelein, 1933), p. 64.

³ See Robert P. Lightner, *Neo-Liberalism* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1972).

⁴ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 382.

⁵ Kenneth Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 139-40.

⁶ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 99-100.

⁷ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 230.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), p. 144.

¹¹ The following three paragraphs are adapted from the author's *Church Union* (Des Plaines, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1971), pp. 128-29.

¹² Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 169.

Reprinted from *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA*, Jan.-Mar., 1985.

RECENT TURMOIL OF THE WATCHTOWER SOCIETY IN RUSSIA

by Jerry Bergman, Ph.D.

Much has been written about the turmoil that Witnesses are now fac-

ing in the United States, Canada and the rest of the Western world. Well

over a dozen articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Time* and *Christianity Today* in recent months. The prophetic failures of the Watchtower Society, their dictatorial, unloving and often capricious disfellowshipping policy, their serious problems in doctrine, and the corruption of the organization have all been of major concern.

Little, though, has been written in this country about their situation in the Soviet Union. Recent reports show that amazing parallels exist between American and Russian Witnesses, i.e. the same problems are found, causing similar reactions. Barmenkov (1983: 122) noted that "the ideologists of the Brooklyn Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses spared no effort to penetrate inside USSR and to win over ideologically wavering Soviet people to their creed." He added (1982: 123) that:

"The creed of Jehovah's Witnesses is based on a myth of an inevitable Armageddon . . . in their attempts to make the sect more active, the ideologists of Jehovah's Witnesses placed their hopes on the preaching of the approaching Armageddon which was to break out in the autumn of 1975. But it is well known that the Brooklyn leaders have set the date of the 'holy war' more than once before: in 1914, 1925, 1927, and 1929. Every time when the believers were disappointed, many members left the sect. In the latest case, the clamorous campaign urging the believers to get prepared for the Armageddon was launched at a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in Munich in 1969. In April, 1969, *Awake!* even published a chart of mankind's history for 6,000 years with figures pointing to October 1975,

for the Armageddon . . . the believers were told again and again that the salvation of everyone in the war would depend on how active his religious and missionary work would be."

The authors concluded "just as in the past, this Brooklyn provocation of Armageddon has flopped. Faced with a blatant deception, many believers stated that they would leave the sect." Barmenkov quotes a Mr. Sharaburak, a former high level Witness leader in the USSR, who said leaving the Society "threw away a veil from my eyes [after] having broken off with this sect of darkness and gloom." He added that Witness propaganda is uncritically believed because many Witnesses in USSR are illiterate. Brooklyn is aware of this and tries to keep literate believers in the dark by openly discouraging them from reading all non-Witness literature. Another former high level leader of the Witnesses in Russia, N. I. Varga, frankly said that his desire to eradicate his fear of Armageddon was decisive in leaving the Witnesses.

Barmenkov quotes a number of Witnesses who stated that after leaving the Witnesses they began attending college, building a large house "with wide windows in place of a decayed hut where smoke once smarted the eyes." One couple stated that Vitya, their youngest son, is planning to go to college, adding that "our children will never know the fear of the Armageddon that had tormented us for so many years." The author concluded that "many believing Jehovah's Witnesses [have] become less zealous; they [have] begun to question the real nature of the religious values and the political at-

titudes propagated by the Brooklyn Centre. Serious controversy arises between the everyday consciousness of the believers and the recommendations of their religious center" (p. 124-125).

The author even claimed that "believers often protest against the blatant anti-Sovietism of... their religious [headquarters]." He also noted that several groups, although adhering to the Society's beliefs, are no longer able to adhere to the "anti-Soviet Brooklyn Centre." In conclusion, Barmenkov stresses that:

"the trend of Soviet Witnesses is in the direction of autonomy and breaking of the ties with the Brooklyn Centre (especially)... among believers of Moldavia and in the Ukranian regions of Chernovtsi Ivano-Frankovsk and Lvov. More and more Jehovah's Witnesses are now socially productive, no longer alienated and suspicious (therefore) join trade unions and subscribe to magazines and newspapers. Most of Jehovah's Witnesses have changed their attitude toward civic duty and enjoy the benefits of modern life. Thus, many of them have cars, motorcycles, refrigerators, and radio sets. During the first post-war years, Jehovah's Witnesses let their children go to school only as far as the 4th or 5th form... did not allow them to join the Young Pioneers... or to study (in school) whereas now, many children, of such families, after 8 years of school, enroll at vocational schools."

Barmenkov, (pg. 125), further claims that "a considerable number of Jehovah Witnesses [now] go to the polls during elections. It is rare, now,

when a young man from a family of Jehovah's Witnesses refuses military duty because of his religion. Many former believers break off with the sect after they have served in the Army."

It is obviously difficult to assess fully the accuracy of this report. Nonetheless, it corresponds with reports by other observers of the Witnesses in the Soviet Union (Kolarz, 1966). Even the Watchtower statistics reveal little growth in the Soviet countries during the past decade (see the *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*). As a whole, Soviet Witnesses are becoming more oriented toward school, education, and discouraged with the Watchtower's prophetic failures and their teachings which put Witnesses against society no matter in what society they live (Gebhard, 1971). As a number of researchers note, the Witnesses have made some peace with society in America. They are no longer rabble rousers but are becoming more middle class, even meeting in multi-hundred thousand-dollar Kingdom Halls instead of dilapidated "storefront churches." They are more tactful in their approach to proselytizing and have modernized in other areas as well, including fully computerized operations at Bethel. On the other hand, they have become more intolerant of dissonants, even those who disagree with very minor teachings of the Society. They are becoming more worldly and ironically, at the same time, more intolerant. These contradictory and multifaceted changes are apparently occurring not only in the Western world, but the Soviet block as well.

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PERTINENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

John E. Dahlin, Editor

QUESTION . . . Does the deviation of the cultic groups from the Truth of God involve all the present-day cults?

ANSWER . . . It is practically impossible to find the record of the teachings of more than a thousand cults in existence. In our office, with the records which we possess, it appears that the deviation from God's Word is true of all the cults with which we are familiar. There are, of course, variations as to the extent of the departure from the Scriptures among the cults. But the fact is all have rejected a number of the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God which historically have been accepted by all Bible-believing groups.

QUESTION . . . Which are the most common doctrines that are rejected or explained in a faulty manner?

ANSWER . . . All with which we are familiar reject the Deity of Jesus Christ, and none hold the Scriptural view of the atonement of our Lord on Calvary's cross. In addition, a number of the cults reject the doctrine of the Trinity. On the matter of the Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures these off-center groups have separated widely from the position by the orthodox groups. And finally, works are required in order to be accepted by God. The grace of God and full redemption through Christ's shed blood are rejected matters among the cults. All in all, the deviation from the Scriptures by the cults covers the major Biblical doctrines.