

REASONING
*from
the* SCRIPTURES
with the
Jehovah's
Witnesses

Ron Rhodes



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A Friendly Note to Potential Jehovah's Witness Readers

If you are a Jehovah's Witness, I want to personally assure you that I, Ron Rhodes, have *never* been a Jehovah's Witness. I say this because of the Watchtower position that a Jehovah's Witness reading literature written by former Jehovah's Witnesses is as bad as reading pornography and is therefore prohibited. You may freely peruse the pages of this book with the full conviction that its author is someone who cares for you, and is concerned only about accurately communicating the truth of God's holy Word. I am praying for you.

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Introduction

*Seek the truth—Listen to the truth—
Teach the truth—Love the truth—Abide by
the truth—And defend the truth—Unto death.*

—JOHN HUSS (A.D. 1370-1415)¹

In 1985 the Watchtower Society published a 445-page book entitled *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (first edition: two million copies). This book, like most other Watchtower books, was designed to equip Jehovah's Witnesses to argue their peculiar doctrines from Scripture. The book set out to demonstrate how to disprove the full deity of Christ, prove that He is a created being, that the Holy Spirit is neither a person nor God but is rather God's "active force," that the doctrine of the Trinity is unbiblical and is rooted in paganism, and much more.

When one realizes that Jehovah's Witnesses are presently devoting over 1.4 billion man-hours each year spreading these doctrines around the world,² it is obvious that the Christian must become equipped to answer these cultists on the doorstep. Indeed, Christians must learn to *reason from the Scriptures* with Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are growing at a geometric pace in the

United States. In 1940, there were 58,009 “peak” (active, baptized) Jehovah’s Witnesses in the United States. This figure jumped to 108,144 by 1950; 205,900 by 1960; 416,789 by 1970; 565,309 by 1980; 850,120 by 1990; and is now well over a million. The statistics for the growth of this cult around the world are even more alarming. At present there are about seven million active, baptized Jehovah’s Witnesses in the world. (By comparison, in 1940 there were less than 96,000.)³ As well, Watchtower Bible studies seem more popular than ever, with over 6.3 million conducted *each month*.⁴

Distribution of the Watchtower’s New World Translation also continues to expand on a worldwide basis. At present, this Bible translation is available in whole or part in 72 languages with 143 million copies in several editions having been printed.⁵ In view of the above facts, it is clear that the Jehovah’s Witnesses are growing geometrically throughout the world.

Witnessing Encounters

Typically, in their door-to-door witnessing, the Jehovah’s Witnesses point to isolated passages in the New Testament that “prove beyond any doubt” that Jesus is lesser than the Father and hence is not Almighty God. For example, they point to John 14:28, where Jesus says, “The Father is greater than I.” They cite Jesus’ words to Mary in John 20:17: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” They quote 1 Corinthians 11:3, which says that “the head of Christ is God.” They point to 1 Corinthians 15:28, where the apostle Paul says that Jesus “will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” They cite John 3:16, where Jesus is called God’s “only begotten Son” (KJV). They quote Colossians 1:15, which says that Jesus is “the firstborn of all creation.” They point to Revelation 3:14, which says that Jesus is the *beginning* of God’s creation.

The average Christian finds great difficulty in answering Jehovah’s Witnesses who cite such verses. I think the late Dr. Walter Martin

was right when he said that the average Jehovah's Witness can make a "doctrinal pretzel" out of the average Christian in about 30 seconds.

All this reminds me of the testimony of Don Nelson. For years Don was a committed Jehovah's Witness. But he eventually came to know the true Christ of Scripture.⁶

During his early months as a Jehovah's Witness, Don recounts how the Watchtower Society trained him to defend the peculiar doctrines of the cult. "Everything the Jehovah's Witnesses told me could be 'verified' in the Word of God, they said. They spouted endless lists of 'proof texts' on every conceivable subject. Of course, when the Witnesses taught me, they were 'writing on a blank slate,' so to speak. I knew nothing of the Scriptures before I met them, and suddenly in a few short weeks, I knew everything about the Bible (so I thought)."⁷

What is of special concern is that many evangelical Christians were unable to answer the arguments Don presented on the doorstep—even though he had only been trained for a *few short weeks* by the Jehovah's Witnesses. "The first day I went witnessing door to door, I 'defeated' two Baptists, a Lutheran, and three Presbyterians in dialectic combat! I was genuinely shocked by the biblical illiteracy of most Christians."⁸

Fortunately, however, over time Don began to see the overwhelming weaknesses of the Jehovah's Witnesses' version of the Bible—the New World Translation. First and foremost, he discovered that none of the translators of this version knew Greek or Hebrew (the original languages of the Bible)! "These 'scholars' of the Watchtower knew no more Greek than I did. This made me a bit uneasy."⁹

Though the New World Translation purported to be the finest, truest, most scholarly translation ever made, Don found that it was in reality crude, wooden, and unreadable. "The beautiful 23rd Psalm was rendered in part: 'You arrange before me a table in front of those showing hostility to me. With oil you have greased my head.' Now, while I knew nothing of the Bible before I met the Witnesses, I did know some English and I cringed at the mangling of this Hebrew poetry."¹⁰

Don accordingly began reading standard versions of the Bible instead

of the New World Translation and the Lord “turned on the light” in his life. “What I found, or rather, what I was shown by the Holy Spirit, was that the New Testament is a Jesus book. I was flabbergasted. Everywhere I looked I saw Jesus.”¹¹ Such exaltation of Jesus is nowhere to be found in the New World Translation.

One purpose of this book is to equip you to help the Jehovah’s Witness on your doorstep see that the New Testament is indeed “a Jesus book.” To do this, however, we must examine the Bible verses that make up the primary arsenal of Watchtower theology. The verses contained in this book are the ones that come up most frequently in witnessing encounters with Jehovah’s Witnesses. By learning the contents of this book, you not only will *not* be made a “doctrinal pretzel,” but instead you will be equipped to lead a lost Jehovah’s Witness to the true Christ of Scripture.

Of course, this presumes that you *want* to share the gospel with the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The very fact that you are reading this book shows that you have this desire. It is truly unfortunate, however, that many Christians not only *do not* share the gospel with Jehovah’s Witnesses but instead show a hostile, uncaring attitude toward them.

This attitude is illustrated in the testimony of Chuck Love. For years, Chuck was a dedicated Jehovah’s Witness who disseminated Watchtower teachings door to door with his wife, but eventually found liberation in the true gospel of Christ. Chuck recalls what it was like during his years of witnessing activity:

My wife and I have probably called on thousands of homes between the two of us. Not once did we encounter anyone who shared their testimony or their faith in Christ with us. Lots of people would say something like, “Oh, you’re that group that doesn’t believe in hell” or, “You don’t believe in the Trinity.” Most people spoke to us in negative terms, telling us our beliefs were wrong but never bothering to tell us what was right. Nobody ever said anything about the love of Jesus Christ. No one ever tried to witness to us at the door.¹²

It is *imperative* that Christians not have a hostile attitude when Jehovah's Witnesses show up on the doorstep. After all, we are called to share the good news of the gospel with them so that they might be saved from sure destruction (Jude 3; 1 Peter 3:15-16; Matthew 28:19-20).

Look at it this way: If you came to find out that some pills in a local store had been laced with cyanide, you would do everything you could to warn individuals about the danger so they wouldn't be poisoned and killed. That would be the most loving thing you could do. What we must realize is that there is also *spiritual* cyanide being disseminated on a massive level by the Watchtower Society. Hence, the most loving thing we can do when Jehovah's Witnesses show up on our doorstep is to warn them of this poison and share the truth with them. To be hostile and turn them away is to withhold the only possible hope they have of coming to the truth and being saved.

Getting to Know Jehovah's Witnesses

Though the specific doctrinal beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses will be discussed in each chapter of this book, it might be helpful at the outset to focus on a few foundational characteristics of Jehovah's Witnesses. To begin, it is critical to recognize that each member is thoroughly indoctrinated with Watchtower theology. It is sad but true that the Jehovah's Witnesses equip their members for witnessing much more thoroughly than many evangelical churches do. The average Jehovah's Witness is able to explain *and* defend what he believes, *and back it up by citing specific proof texts*.

Trained to Answer Common Objections

During their time of training, Jehovah's Witnesses are taught how to anticipate common questions and objections to what they say. Not only are they taught how to respond to *doctrinal* issues with Bible proof texts, they are also trained how to respond to common comebacks. For example, in the Watchtower book *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, Jehovah's Witnesses are taught how to respond to people if they say,

“I’m not interested,” “I’m not interested in Jehovah’s Witnesses,” “I have my own religion,” “We are already Christians here,” “I’m busy,” “Why do you people call so often?,” “I am already well acquainted with your work,” or, “We have no money.”¹³

Hence, when someone raises a doctrinal objection or offers a common comeback, this automatically triggers a Watchtower response in the mind of the Jehovah’s Witness.¹⁴ Keeping this fact in mind will help you to remain patient with the Jehovah’s Witness when it seems you are not getting anywhere with him or her.

You must also keep in mind that when you point out a particular verse to a Jehovah’s Witness, he automatically “reads” it through the “lens” of the Watchtower Society.¹⁵ His conditioned, preprogrammed mind replaces what the verse actually *says* with what the Watchtower Society says it *means*.¹⁶ Granted, it can be immensely frustrating to try to get through to a Jehovah’s Witness, but remember—persistence and patience really do pay off. I am personally acquainted with devout Christians who were formerly committed Jehovah’s Witnesses.

One helpful technique for dealing with the triggered responses of the Jehovah’s Witness is to request that he or she read a particular verse aloud, and then ask: “What is being said here?”¹⁷ If he spouts off the typical Watchtower interpretation, ask him to read it aloud again, slowly and carefully—and follow it with another question. If you are persistent, you will help the Jehovah’s Witness see for himself that there are contradictions and problems with his view. (More on the importance of asking strategic questions shortly.)

Warned About Influence from Friends and Relatives

The Watchtower Society warns new followers that friends and relatives may very well be used by Satan to try to dissuade them from remaining with the Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹⁸ Hence, as former Jehovah’s Witness David Reed notes, when a friend or relative *actually does* try to dissuade a new member in this way, it makes the Watchtower Society appear to be a true prophet.¹⁹ This, in turn, encourages the new convert to be *even more* loyal to the Watchtower Society. As well, the

friend or relative is so identified with Satan that the new convert will scarcely listen to anything he or she says. The Watchtower's warning hence serves as an effective way of keeping new converts so they can be thoroughly indoctrinated into the cult.²⁰

Warned Against Reading "Apostate" Literature

Sometimes Christians who have read books by former Jehovah's Witnesses are tempted to pull those books out when Jehovah's Witnesses show up on the doorstep. In their zeal, they want to show how one individual was delivered from the cult. However, Jehovah's Witnesses are warned to stay away from literature written by such "apostates."

In fact, Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that reading apostate literature is as bad as reading pornographic literature.²¹ If the Jehovah's Witness even suspects that you are using such material, he or she may assume that you are under bondage to the devil, just as the apostates are.²² They will then avoid you.

Related to this, don't believe it if a Jehovah's Witness tells you that I (Ron Rhodes) was formerly a Jehovah's Witness. I have *never* been a Jehovah's Witness. This dishonest claim has been widely spread in the Jehovah's Witness community, apparently with a view to preventing interested Jehovah's Witnesses from perusing the book you are holding in your hands.

The Fear of "Disfellowshipping"

Jehovah's Witnesses are instructed that unquestioned obedience to Watchtower doctrines is expected of them. If someone questions or rejects a particular Watchtower doctrine, he can be "disfellowshipped"—or kicked out of the organization.

The reason unquestioned obedience is expected is that the Watchtower Society is considered God's prophet and voice of truth for today. To question the authority of the Watchtower Society essentially amounts to questioning God's authority. Hence, challenging the Watchtower is considered an intolerable offense.

The Fear of Shunning

Jehovah's Witnesses are also warned that if they leave the Watchtower organization or are disfellowshipped, they will be shunned by family members and friends who remain in the organization.²³ Fear of such shunning makes it very difficult for anyone to leave the cult, for the sacrifice is a heavy one.

Earlier I mentioned the testimony of Chuck Love and his wife, who found liberation in the true gospel. After they turned from the Watchtower organization and became Christians, Chuck recalls that there were definite negative repercussions. "My family disowned me. My wife—who also became a Christian—received similar treatment from her family. Her parents won't even talk to her. Our brothers and sisters cut us off. And all of my close friends—those whom I thought were close friends—shut us out of their lives. When we trusted in Christ, it wasn't just a matter of changing *churches*; it was a matter of changing *lives*."²⁴

Don Nelson, also mentioned earlier, had a similar experience when he became a Christian. "It is true that my wife and I have lost family and those we thought were our friends. But we say with the beloved apostle Paul: 'Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' (Philippians 3:7)."²⁵

When witnessing to a Jehovah's Witness, one must ever keep in mind that he or she is strongly motivated to *remain* a Jehovah's Witness because of the possibility of shunning should he or she decide to leave. This points to the need for fervent and continuous prayer for those to whom you witness (see Acts 16:14).

The Witnessing Encounter

Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses can be a trying experience. But your chances of success in reaching one for Christ can be greatly

enhanced by *deciding in advance* how you will handle your witnessing encounters. Below are some tips I have picked up over the years.

Encourage an Examination of Beliefs

When a Jehovah's Witness shows up on your doorstep, one of the first things you should do is to encourage him or her to thoroughly examine his or her beliefs. After all, Watchtower literature itself says that one should examine one's religious beliefs to make sure those beliefs are correct.

A 1950 issue of *The Watchtower* magazine "invites careful and critical examination of its contents in the light of the Scriptures."²⁶ In keeping with this, a 1973 issue of *Awake!* magazine (another Watchtower publication) says that people should examine *all* the evidence, and that one arrives at the truth by examining *both sides* of a matter.²⁷ Second Corinthians 13:5 in the New World Translation says, "Keep testing whether you are in the faith, keep proving what you yourselves are."

After pointing out the above to the Jehovah's Witness, tell him or her that you would like to examine the Scriptures and test both of your religious beliefs by those Scriptures. This will lay a foundation for all that follows.

Find Common Ground

Scripture tells us that the apostle Paul was quite angry when he entered Athens and discovered that the city was full of idols (Acts 17:16). If he had acted upon his emotions, he probably would have vented his anger by dealing with the Athenians in a hostile way. But he did not do this. Instead, Paul sought a *common ground* from which he could communicate the good news of the gospel.²⁸

Paul began his message, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, To the unknown god. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22-23).

Applying what we learn from Paul's encounter with the Athenians to present-day encounters with Jehovah's Witnesses, the *wrong* approach would be to vent our anger by dealing with them in a hostile way. The *right* approach is to speak kindly and respectfully (like Paul did to the Athenians), and begin on the common ground of their zealous commitment to God (though, obviously, their view of God is heretical).²⁹ Starting off in this way, you can then discuss the specifics of Watchtower theology.

Take Your Time

When Jehovah's Witnesses show up on the doorstep, the tendency of many Christians is to lambaste them about all the heresies in their belief system. This is what I call the flamethrower approach to cult evangelism. The problem is, this approach rarely yields positive results in terms of leading a cultist to Christ.

A much better approach is to take your time and not force the Jehovah's Witness to digest more than he or she can take during one sitting. Many cult experts have noted that it is better to focus on *one or two issues* during each meeting and deal with them thoroughly rather than to "get it all out on the table" in a single sitting. (Remember, even Jesus told the disciples: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" [John 16:12]. Jesus was sensitive to how much His listeners could digest in a single sitting.³⁰)

If you engage in a thoughtful discussion of just one or two issues during your initial encounter with a Jehovah's Witness—and you remain *kind and respectful* in the process—he or she will not only be impressed with your manner but will likely make another appointment to come back to discuss other issues. *This is what you want to happen!**

Now, here's a warning: Jehovah's Witnesses will often try to set forth what seems to be an endless chain of proof texts in support of their theology. *Slow them down!* Suggest to them, "Instead of jumping

* Of course, if your initial meeting *does* end up going long, and the Holy Spirit seems to be blessing your time, then don't cut off the meeting prematurely. You may find yourself in a situation in which the Jehovah's Witness is truly ripe for conversion.

around from verse to verse, let's make sure that we thoroughly discuss each passage before we go on to the next one."³¹

Ask Leading Questions

While talking to a Jehovah's Witness, you will not be able to force your opinion of what a verse means. But if you can help him to discover problems in Watchtower theology *for himself*, then you've really accomplished a good thing.

One great way to help a Jehovah's Witness discover problems in Watchtower theology is to ask strategic questions based on key verses, all the while remaining tactful and kind. Remember, Jesus often asked questions to make a point. David Reed notes that "rather than shower his listeners with information, [Jesus] used questions to draw answers out of them. A person can close his ears to facts he doesn't want to hear, but if a pointed question causes him to form the answer in his own mind, he cannot escape the conclusion—because it's a conclusion that he reached himself."³² We must use this same type of methodology with Jehovah's Witnesses.

The right question asked in a nondefensive, nonchallenging, unemotional way might cause the Jehovah's Witness to find himself face-to-face with a doctrine (such as the absolute deity of Christ) that is completely contrary to what the Watchtower Society teaches. By considering such a question, the Jehovah's Witness is forced to come to a conclusion *in his own mind*.

So, for example, you might begin by asking the Jehovah's Witness how many true Gods there are, according to John 17:3. Allow him to open his New World Translation and ask him to read it aloud: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, *the only true God*, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ" (NWT, emphasis added). Based on this verse, the Jehovah's Witness will say that Jehovah (the Father) is the one true God.

Next, point out that according to John 1:1 in the New World Translation, Jesus is "a god." Ask the Jehovah's Witness if he or she agrees that Jesus is "a god." The answer will be yes. Then ask whether Jesus is

a true God or a false God. This will cause a dilemma for the Jehovah's Witness. If he or she says Jesus is a *false* god, he is contradicting the New World Translation of Scripture (since John 1:1 in this version says Jesus *is a god*). If he says Jesus is a true God, he is also contradicting the Watchtower understanding of Scripture (John 17:3 says there is only *one true God*—Jehovah).³³

I will examine this verse—and potential Jehovah's Witness “come-backs”—in greater detail later in the book. But I think you can see what I mean when I say that a well-placed question can be a lot more effective than assaulting a Jehovah's Witness with your proof of the deity of Christ (or any other doctrine). If you and the Jehovah's Witness mutually agree to meet *every week or two* to discuss different issues, you can rest assured that the cumulative effect of such questions on a weekly basis will slowly but surely erode his belief system so that he is more open to the true gospel. (In each chapter in this book, I will suggest sample questions you might ask the Jehovah's Witness.)

Undermine the Watchtower Society's Authority

As noted earlier, Jehovah's Witnesses “read” the Scriptures and interpret doctrines through the “lens” of the Watchtower Society. Therefore, in every encounter you have with a Jehovah's Witness, you will want to undermine the authority of the Watchtower Society by demonstrating that it is a false prophet. By so doing, you help to remove this distorted “pair of glasses” so the Jehovah's Witness can see more clearly.³⁴

If you can lovingly demonstrate that the Watchtower Society has been wrong *time and time again* in terms of its many predictions—as well as changed its position on key doctrines back and forth over the years—this will serve to call into question everything else the Society teaches. As you continue to chip away at the Witness's confidence in the Watchtower Society, you will find it easier to make doctrinal points with him or her (via the leading questions I mentioned earlier).

Throughout this book many of the Watchtower's false prophecies will be exposed. You will also find prophetic issues dealt with in detail in chapter 13. You will want to thoroughly familiarize yourself with

some of the major false prophecies so they will be at your fingertips during the witnessing encounter.

One more thing: Don't forget to pray consistently. Only God in His mighty power can lift the veil of cultic darkness from the human heart (John 8:32; Acts 16:14; 2 Corinthians 3:16-17; 4:4). Pray fervently for those you witness to and *pray often* (Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 18:1-8; James 5:16).

How to Use This Book

As you peruse the table of contents of this book, you will notice that each of the chapters deals with a specific doctrinal issue. You will also notice that there are more chapters on Jesus Christ than any other subject. This is because many of the Bible passages cited by Jehovah's Witnesses deal in some way with Christ.

Each chapter in this book begins with a short summary of what the Jehovah's Witnesses believe about a particular subject. Following this you will find individual discussions of the major passages the Jehovah's Witnesses cite in supporting their interpretation. Quotations from Watchtower books and magazines will be liberally sprinkled throughout. You will also find suggested "leading questions" that you can use in your witnessing encounters. *For your convenience, these questions are highlighted.* This makes it easy for you to quickly find the questions you need to make your point.

The book may be read straight through, in which case you will have a good grasp of Watchtower theology and how to refute it. Or, you may consult individual chapters as needed—each one is self-contained. And since each chapter deals with a distinct doctrinal teaching along with the major passages cited by the Jehovah's Witnesses, you will find that this is an easy-to-use reference tool that you can use to "bone up" in a matter of minutes on how to refute Watchtower doctrine.

A subject index and Scripture index are provided at the end of the book for your convenience.

The Watchtower Society: God's Organization or Cultic Tyrant?

*Truth consists of having the same idea
about something that God has.*

—JOSEPH JOUBERT (1754-1824)¹

Truth exists; only falsehood has to be invented.

—GEORGES BRAQUE (1882-1963)²

The Jehovah's Witnesses are described in Watchtower literature as the "worldwide Christian society of people who actively bear witness regarding Jehovah God and his purposes affecting mankind."³ No other group of people may lay claim to being the witnesses of Jehovah, we are told.

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God personally set up the Watchtower Society as His *visible* representative on earth. According to them it is through this organization and no other that God teaches the Bible to humankind today. Without the Society and its vast literature, people are said to be utterly unable to ascertain the true meaning of Scripture. Jehovah's Witnesses are reminded of this over and over

again in Watchtower publications. For example, in various past issues of *The Watchtower* magazine, we read the following:

- “The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society is the greatest corporation in the world, because from the time of its organization until now the Lord has used it as His channel through which to make known the glad tidings.”⁴
- “Is not the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society the one and only channel which the Lord has used in dispensing his truth continually since the beginning of the harvest period?”⁵
- “Jehovah’s organization has a visible part on earth which represents the Lord and is under his direct supervision.”⁶
- “We must not lose sight of the fact that God is directing his organization.”⁷
- “Jehovah’s organization alone, in all the earth, is directed by God’s holy spirit or active force.”⁸

Of course, if the above statements are true, then this means all other Christian organizations are *not* directed by God and hence are deceptive and are of the devil. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are extremely exclusive. They view the Watchtower Society as the sole possessor and propagator of God’s truth.

The Authority of the Watchtower Society

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Watchtower Society—as God’s visible representative on earth—exercises authority over all true believers. And Jehovah’s Witnesses are expected to obey the Society as the voice of God.⁹

If there is a conflict between what the Society says and what the government says, Jehovah’s Witnesses are instructed to unquestioningly obey the former. So, for example, if the United States were to reinstitute the military draft,* and if a young Jehovah’s Witness man

* The military draft involves obligatory service in the armed forces, based on a random selection of birthdates of male citizens of the United States.

was drafted for military service, he must obey the Watchtower Society and refuse to serve in the military.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe the teachings of the Watchtower Society are all-encompassing and should affect every area of life. One issue of *The Watchtower* magazine refers to the Society as "an organization to direct the minds of God's people."¹⁰ Another issue says that "Jehovah's organization...should influence our every decision."¹¹ In fact, *The Watchtower* goes so far as to say that "we must recognize not only Jehovah God as our Father but his organization as our Mother."¹²

Even reading the Bible is considered insufficient in and of itself in learning the things of God. *The Watchtower* tells us, "Unless we are in touch with this channel of communication [The Watchtower Society] that God is using, we will not progress along the road to life, no matter how much Bible reading we do."¹³ As we shall soon see, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that specific Bible verses point to the need for the Watchtower Society for understanding the things of God.

God's "Faithful and Discreet Slave"

Jehovah's Witnesses argue that Christ's "anointed" followers—viewed *as a group* or an *organization*—are the fulfillment of Jesus' words about the "faithful and discreet slave" in Matthew 24:45-47. In the New World Translation, this passage reads: "Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on arriving finds him doing so. Truly I say to you, He will appoint him over all his belongings."

I shall discuss the correct meaning of this verse later in this chapter. First, let's take a brief look at Watchtower history.

Charles Taze Russell

A survey of Watchtower history reveals that Pastor Charles Taze Russell—the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses—was once considered the "faithful and discreet slave." Jehovah's Witnesses today deny this,

but Watchtower literature *proves* it.¹⁴ The Watchtower book *The Harp of God*, published in the early 1920s, states: “Without a doubt Pastor Russell filled the office...and was therefore that wise and faithful servant, ministering to the household of faith meat in due season.”¹⁵

The Watchtower magazine (1920) likewise affirmed, “No one in present truth for a moment doubts that brother Russell filled the office of the ‘Faithful and Wise Servant.’”¹⁶ Indeed, “the Society by overwhelming majority vote expressed its will in substance thus: Brother Russell filled the office of ‘that Servant.’”¹⁷

The Watchtower Society Changes Its Story

By 1927, slightly over a decade after Russell’s death, *The Watchtower* magazine was singing to a different tune. No longer was Pastor Russell considered the faithful and discreet slave. Following his death in 1916, there was a split in the organization that involved the new president, Joseph F. Rutherford. Rutherford took control of the Watchtower Society while members loyal to Russell broke away. Those who broke away—the “Russellites”—have continued to the present day to view Russell as God’s special servant.¹⁸ But the Watchtower organization under Rutherford alleged that Russell never made this claim for himself. Rather, Rutherford said, Christ’s anointed followers in the Society—viewed *as a group* or an *organization*—are God’s collective chosen instrument.¹⁹

Along these lines, the February 15, 1927, issue of *The Watchtower* magazine proclaimed that the phrase “faithful and discreet slave” does not apply to a single individual and certainly not to Pastor Russell. Indeed, the article notes, Russell never claimed to be the faithful and discreet slave.²⁰

Today, one will find multiple affirmations in Watchtower literature that Christ’s anointed followers viewed *as a group* are God’s collective “faithful and discreet slave.” For example, the book *Let God Be True* says that Matthew 24:45–46 “clearly shows that the Master would use one *organization*, and not a multitude of diverse and conflicting sects, to distribute his message. The ‘faithful and discreet slave’ is a *company*

following the example of their Leader.”²¹ This “company” of anointed believers is led by the governing body of the Watchtower Society in Brooklyn, New York, which may be considered the administrative head of the “faithful and discreet slave.”²²

In keeping with all this, a 1969 issue of *The Watchtower* magazine informs us that God’s faithful and discreet slave is God’s sole “channel of communication” to His people.²³ We are told that “we all need help to understand the Bible, and we cannot find the Scriptural guidance we need outside the ‘faithful and discreet slave’ organization.”²⁴

In view of the Watchtower’s change of position as to the identity of the “faithful and discreet slave”...

Ask...

- Did you know that the Watchtower Society originally claimed that Charles Taze Russell was God’s “faithful and discreet slave”?
 - How do you explain the Watchtower Society’s change of position on this very important and foundational issue?
-

Submission to the Faithful and Discreet Slave

Jehovah’s Witnesses tell us that “it is through the columns of *The Watchtower* that Jehovah provides direction and constant Scriptural counsel to his people.”²⁵ As well, “Through the columns of *The Watchtower* comes increased light on God’s Word as Jehovah makes it known.”²⁶

Submission to this faithful and discreet slave—including all Watchtower publications—is expected of every Jehovah’s Witness. This is because the anointed believers in the Watchtower Society represent God’s “sole visible channel, through whom alone spiritual instruction [is] to come.”²⁷ Hence, Jehovah’s Witnesses are to “recognize and accept this appointment of the ‘faithful and discreet slave’ and be submissive to it.”²⁸

One issue of *The Watchtower* magazine asks, “What is your attitude toward directives from ‘the faithful and discreet slave’? Loyalty should move you to be ‘ready to obey.’”²⁹

No “Private Interpretations”

Watchtower literature is replete with admonitions to “dependent” Bible interpretation—that is, *dependent on the Watchtower Society*. Jehovah’s Witnesses are not to think for themselves in terms of interpreting the Bible. They are to submit their minds to the Watchtower Society. For example, we read:

- “God has not arranged for [His] Word to speak independently or to shine forth life-giving truths by itself. It is through his organization God provides this light.”³⁰
- “Avoid independent thinking. . .questioning the counsel that is provided by God’s visible organization.”³¹
- “Fight against independent thinking.”³²
- “Rather we should seek for dependent Bible study, rather than for independent Bible study.”³³
- “The Bible cannot be properly understood without Jehovah’s visible organization in mind.”³⁴
- “If we have love for Jehovah and for the organization of his people we shall not be suspicious, but shall, as the Bible says, ‘believe all things,’ all the things that *The Watchtower* brings out.”³⁵
- “He does not impart his holy spirit and an understanding and appreciation of his Word apart from his visible organization.”³⁶

Clearly, the Watchtower Society expects unquestioning obedience of all Jehovah’s Witnesses. As we shall see shortly, the Society feebly attempts to find biblical support for such dependency from passages like Acts 8:30-31 and 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Threat of Disfellowshipping

If a Jehovah's Witness disobeys the instructions of the Watchtower Society—even on a relatively minor matter—the assumption is that this individual is “apostate,” and the punishment is “disfellowshipping.” Those who are in good standing with the Watchtower Society are forbidden to interact or talk with one who has been disfellowshipped. The only exception is if the disfellowshipped person is in one's immediate family—such as a husband or wife, in which case it is permissible to conduct “necessary business” with him or her.³⁷ This fear of disfellowshipping is one of the Watchtower's most effective means of keeping members obedient to its teachings.

Let us now examine the passages that the Witnesses cite most often in support of their exalted view of the Watchtower Society.

REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 43:10—“*Witnesses*” of Jehovah?

The Watchtower Teaching. The New World Translation renders Isaiah 43:10, “‘You are my witnesses,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘even my servant whom I have chosen.’” Appropriating this verse for themselves, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that out of all the religious groups on planet earth, *they alone* are chosen by God and have been deemed His “witnesses.”³⁸

The Biblical Teaching. In context, Isaiah 43:10 is referring *strictly to Israel* as a collective witness to God's majesty, authority, faithfulness, and truth. This is in marked contrast to pagans who cannot witness to such attributes in their false gods. Israel as a witness was to testify that Yahweh is the only true God.

Here is the point to emphasize: It is a wild, wild leap to take a verse referring to Israel as God's witness to the pagan nations in Old

Testament times (over seven centuries *before* the time of Christ) and claim its fulfillment in a modern-day religious group some nineteen centuries *after* the time of Christ. This is a classic example of what James W. Sire calls “Scripture twisting.”³⁹

To help a Jehovah's Witness understand the folly of the Watchtower interpretation of Isaiah 43:10:

Ask...

If the Jehovah's Witnesses are the only true witnesses for God, and if the Jehovah's Witnesses as an organization came into being in the late nineteenth century (which is a historical fact), does this mean God was without a witness for over eighteen centuries of church history?

Help the Jehovah's Witness to understand the implications of that question. If there was not a witness for God for over eighteen centuries, this implies that God *did not care* for people to come to know Him during those many centuries.⁴⁰

After driving this point home, switch gears and direct the Witness to the New Testament, where the clear focus is not on being witnesses of *Jehovah* but on being witnesses of *Jesus Christ*.⁴¹ Indeed, before ascending into heaven, Jesus told the disciples, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, emphasis added).*

As we examine the rest of the New Testament, it becomes clear that the disciples did indeed become *Christ's* (not *Jehovah's*) witnesses. And the consistent central feature of their witness was Christ's *bodily*,

* Some recent Jehovah's Witnesses have feebly suggested that Jehovah's Witnesses *are* witnesses of Jesus Christ, especially in regard to the good news of His kingdom. However, even a brief perusal of Watchtower literature reveals Jehovah to be the pervasively predominant figure, with Jesus relegated to the status of a creature (the Archangel Michael) who was a “lesser god.” Watchtower literature is abundantly clear that Jehovah's Witnesses are *Jehovah's* Witnesses.

physical resurrection from the dead. This doctrine is the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) and is made a matter of salvation by the apostle Paul (Romans 10:9-10). Yet the Jehovah's Witnesses deny this doctrine, believing instead in a "spiritual" resurrection.

Point out the following verses to the Jehovah's Witness, showing that the disciples were witnesses of Christ and His physical resurrection, not of Jehovah:

- "This Jesus God raised up, and of that *we all are witnesses*" (Acts 2:32, emphasis added).
- Jesus was the one "whom God raised from the dead. *To this we are witnesses*" (Acts 3:15, emphasis added).
- "And with great power the apostles were *giving their testimony [or witness]* to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33, emphasis added, insert added based on the original Greek).
- "But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, *who are now his witnesses* to the people" (Acts 13:30-31, emphasis added).

You might want to request the Jehovah's Witness to read aloud from the above passages and then:

Ask...

According to these passages, were the early Christians witnesses of Jehovah or of Jesus Christ?

Matthew 24:45-47—God's "Faithful and Discreet Slave"

The Watchtower Teaching. As noted previously, the Jehovah's Witnesses argue that Christ's words about the "faithful and discreet slave"

do not refer to the Christian in general but to Christ's anointed followers viewed as a group or as an organization (made up of 144,000 individuals), headed by the governing body of the Watchtower Society in Brooklyn, New York. This organization *alone* has been appointed by God to watch over His affairs on earth. It is alleged that no one can understand the Bible apart from the insights of the people in this organization as set forth in various Watchtower publications.

In contrast to the “faithful and discreet slave” (Matthew 24:45-47), the “evil slave” mentioned in verses 48-51 is said to refer to apostate Christendom—that is, all Christian denominations apart from the Jehovah's Witnesses. But is this what the Scriptures really teach?

The Biblical Teaching. In answering the Jehovah's Witness on this passage, you will want to ask the same essential questions that are listed in the discussion of Isaiah 43:10:

Ask...

- Since the anointed believers *as an organization* are claimed to be God's collective “faithful and discreet slave” that *alone* guides people in their understanding of Scripture, *and* since this organization did not come into existence until the late-nineteenth century, does this mean God had *no true representatives* on earth for many, many centuries?
 - What does this imply about God? Does it mean He did not care for people to understand the Bible for all those centuries?
-

After asking these questions, emphasize that the idea of God having no true representatives on earth for so many centuries clearly goes against what we learn elsewhere in Scripture regarding the continued survival, growth, and health of the church throughout history. For example, in Matthew 28:20 Jesus said to His followers: “Behold, I am *with you always*, to the end of the age” (emphasis added). This implies that there would

always be followers of Jesus on the earth. (How else could Jesus be “with” them “always” if they were not there?) There is no hint in this passage that there would be an eighteen-century period during which Christ would have no true representatives on earth (see Ephesians 4:11-16).

Having made this point, we must address the question: What does the parable in Matthew 24:45-47 actually mean? In this parable, Jesus likens a follower or disciple to a servant who has been put in charge of his master's household. In the parable, Jesus contrasts two possible ways that each professed disciple could carry out the task—*faithfully* or *unfaithfully*. Each respective servant has the potential to be faithful or unfaithful in regard to his duties.

The servant who chooses to be faithful conscientiously fulfills his responsibilities and obligations while his master is away. He honors the stewardship entrusted to him. He pays careful attention to the details of his assigned task, and seeks to avoid living carelessly and becoming lax in service. He so governs his life that he will be prepared whenever his master returns.

By contrast, the servant who chooses to be unfaithful calculates that his master will be away for a long time and hence decides to mistreat his fellow servants and “live it up” himself. He lives carelessly, callously, and self-indulgently, and does not fulfill his responsibilities to his master. It is clear that this servant is a servant *in name only*—a hypocrite. He is not a *true* servant.

Hence, this parable indicates that those who profess to serve Christ must make a pivotal choice: be faithful servants, doing the Lord's will at all times, or be unfaithful servants, neglecting God's will and living self-indulgently. Those who are faithful will be rewarded at the Lord's return, entering His kingdom; those who are unfaithful will be punished at the Lord's return, being excluded from His kingdom.

To sum up, then, this passage is not referring to an organization (the Watchtower Society) that is permanently distinct from a separate group (apostate Christendom). Rather it is referring generally to all who profess to follow Christ and is exhorting them to be faithful as opposed to unfaithful servants of Christ.

Acts 8:30-31—*The Need for the Watchtower Society*

The Watchtower Teaching. According to Acts 8:30-31, Philip encountered a man reading the book of Isaiah and asked him: “Do you actually know what you are reading?” (NWT). The man said: “Really, how could I ever do so, unless someone guided me?” Philip then sat down with the man to instruct him.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses cite this verse to support their view that the Watchtower Society is God’s Bible-interpreting organization on earth. They say that humankind *needs* the Watchtower Society in order to understand Scripture, just as the man reading Isaiah needed Philip. Indeed, the Watchtower book *Your Will Be Done on Earth* says that “in order to understand God’s Word and discern his will we . . . need the help of his dedicated, organized people [anointed believers in the Watchtower Society]. The Ethiopian Bible reader acknowledged that fact.”⁴²

The Biblical Teaching. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are reading something into this passage that simply is not there. Yes, this passage does indicate that guidance is sometimes needed to help people understand Scripture. The meaning of certain Scripture passages is not always self-evident, even to those who are earnest seekers. (Peter even acknowledged that some of the apostle Paul’s writings were hard to understand—2 Peter 3:16.) This is one reason God gives teachers to the church (Ephesians 4:11). As well, this is the reason for the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

But *no*—there is no evidence in this passage of an organization whose infallible views must be accepted by all true followers of God. In our text, *one man* (Philip) taught an Ethiopian man *directly from Scripture* (not from literature designed by an organization), after which time the Ethiopian confessed his faith in Christ and became baptized (Acts 8:34-38).⁴³

Significantly, the Bible tells us that “when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and *the eunuch did not see him again*, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39, emphasis added). The eunuch did not have to join and submit to

an organization or to anyone.⁴⁴ Indeed, the eunuch never saw Philip again! As well, he had no sense of loss when his teacher left, but rather went on his way rejoicing in the Savior.

To drive these points home to a Jehovah's Witness:

Ask...

- Where in the biblical text do you see any support for the idea that people must join an organization and submit to the interpretations of such an organization? (Only one man—Philip—is mentioned in the text. And after this single encounter, the eunuch never saw him again.)
 - Did Philip use *Scripture alone* in talking to the eunuch, or did he have to use additional literature?
 - If *Scripture alone* was sufficient for Philip and the eunuch, is not Scripture alone sufficient for us as well?
-

2 Timothy 3:16-17—*Is the Bible Sufficient?*

The Watchtower Teaching. The New World Translation renders 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.”

Though the Jehovah's Witnesses give lip service to believing this verse,⁴⁵ in their actions they deny it. A person cannot become equipped by reading the Bible alone, they say, but must read Watchtower literature. Without this literature, it is alleged that a person cannot truly understand the Bible. One former Jehovah's Witness said that to gain eternal life, he was told that certain things were necessary: “[I was told] I should study the Bible diligently, and only through Watchtower publications.”⁴⁶

We see this same mentality illustrated in the Watchtower publication *Studies in the Scriptures*:

Not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the *Scripture Studies* aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years—if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the *Scripture Studies* with their references, and had not read a page of the Bible, as such, he would be in the light at the end of the two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures.⁴⁷

The Biblical Teaching. There are two key questions that must be asked of the Jehovah's Witness in regard to this issue. (These questions are similar to some of the ones asked earlier, but they are critically important.)

Ask...

- How did people understand the Bible for the eighteen centuries prior to the existence of the Watchtower Society? (If one cannot understand the Bible without Watchtower literature, as claimed, then apparently people could not understand the Bible for eighteen centuries.)
 - What kind of a God would give His people a Bible with no means of understanding it?
-

After helping the Jehovah's Witness to understand the implications of these questions, you can then turn your attention to 2 Timothy 3:16-17. To lay the groundwork for these two verses, first point the

Jehovah's Witness to verse 15, where Paul tells Timothy that "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, *which are able to make you wise for salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus" (emphasis added).

In Timothy's era, Jewish boys formally began studying the Old Testament Scriptures when they were five years of age. Timothy had been taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother beginning from childhood. Clearly, verse 15 indicates that the *Scriptures alone* were sufficient to provide Timothy with the necessary wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ. And for us today, the *Scriptures alone* are still the sole source of spiritual knowledge.

Ask...

- According to 2 Timothy 3:15, were the *Scriptures alone* sufficient to provide Timothy what he needed to know to be saved?
 - If the Scriptures alone were sufficient for Timothy, then aren't the Scriptures alone sufficient for us?
-

Then, verses 16 and 17 tell us that all Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." This verse does not say that Scripture as seen through the lens of the Watchtower Society is "profitable for teaching, for reproof," and so forth. It is Scripture alone that does these things. And the reason Scripture can do these things is that "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (verse 16). Scripture is sufficient because it finds its source in God. Watchtower literature, by contrast, finds its source in sinful humanity.

It is noteworthy that the word competent (in the phrase "that the man of God may be competent") means "complete, capable, fully

furnished, proficient in the sense of being able to meet all demands.”⁴⁸ Scripture alone makes a person complete, capable, and proficient. Scripture furnishes all that one must know to be saved and to grow in grace.

2 Peter 1:20-21—No “*Private Interpretations*”

The Watchtower Teaching. Second Peter 1:20 says, “For you know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture springs from any private interpretation” (NWT). The Jehovah’s Witnesses sometimes cite this verse to support their contention that people are not to come up with their own private interpretations of Scripture but rather are to give heed to what is set forth by the Watchtower Society.⁴⁹ But is that the true meaning of this passage?

The Biblical Teaching. The word “interpretation” in 2 Peter 1:20 literally means “unloosing” in the original Greek.⁵⁰ The verse could be paraphrased: “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own *unloosing*.” In other words, the prophecies did not stem merely from the prophets themselves or by human imaginings, but ultimately came *from God* (as verse 21 goes on to emphatically state). Put another way, no prophecy of Scripture comes from (or originates from) a human being’s personal interpretation—that is, his personal understanding of events around him—but rather comes from God. Hence, this passage is not dealing with how to interpret Scripture but rather how Scripture *came to be written*.⁵¹

With this in mind, let us consider verses 20 and 21 together: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own [unloosing], for no prophecy was ever made by *an act of human will*, but men *moved by the Holy Spirit* spoke from God” (NASB, emphasis added). The word “for” at the beginning of verse 21 carries an *explanatory* function—indicating that verse 21 explains verse 20 by restating its contents and then pointing to God as the author of Scripture. Hence, the context of verse 21 indicates that the collective focus of verses 20 and 21 is Scripture’s *origin*, not its *interpretation*.

In keeping with this, we must emphasize that the word *moved* (in the phrase “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”) literally means “borne along” or “carried along.” Luke uses this same word in the book of Acts to refer to a ship being borne along or carried along by the wind (Acts 27:15,17). The experienced sailors on the ship could not navigate it because the wind was so strong. The ship was being driven, directed, and carried about by the wind.

This is similar to the Spirit’s driving, directing, and carrying the human authors of the Bible as they wrote (2 Peter 1:20-21). The word “moved” is a strong one, indicating the Spirit’s complete superintendence of the human authors. Of course, just as sailors are individually active and consciously involved while on a ship, in the same way, the authors of God’s Word were individually active and consciously involved in writing Scripture. But it was the Spirit who ultimately directed them or carried them along.

In view of the above facts, 2 Peter 1:20-21 cannot be used to support the Watchtower Society’s view that people are not to come up with their own private interpretations of what Scripture means. As we have seen, the passage has to do with Scripture’s *origin*, not its *interpretation*.

Besides, contrary to the Watchtower position, the apostle Paul said that Christians are to test everything, whether the teaching of an individual or an organization (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Berean Christians were commended for testing Paul’s teachings to make sure that what he said was in accord with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). We are called upon by God to test our beliefs! Instead of unquestioningly swallowing the interpretations of an organization like the Watchtower Society, we are to measure such interpretations against what all of Scripture teaches.

In support of that, you will want to point the Jehovah’s Witness to 2 Corinthians 13:5 in the New World Translation: “Keep testing whether you are in the faith, keep proving what you yourselves are.” Along these same lines, *The Watchtower* magazine “invites careful and critical examination of its contents in the light of the Scriptures.”⁵²

After making the above points:

Ask...

- Were the Bereans right to test the apostle Paul's teachings by Scripture (Acts 17:11)? (He will have to say yes.)
 - Do you believe followers of God should obey the instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to test all things? (He will have to say yes.)
 - Do you believe followers of God should obey 2 Corinthians 13:5 and test whether they are "in the faith"? (He will have to say yes.)
 - Since God commands us to test all things by Scripture—and since *The Watchtower* magazine itself invites a critical examination of its contents in the light of Scripture—are you willing to examine the teachings of the Watchtower Society in the light of Scripture alone?
 - If you find that certain teachings of the Watchtower Society go against what Scripture says, what will you do?
-

These questions can help you point out that the focus of your discussion should be the Scriptures alone, and not what the Watchtower Society says those Scriptures mean.

1 Corinthians 1:10—*Absolute Unity of Thought?*

The Watchtower Teaching. The New World Translation renders 1 Corinthians 1:10: "Now I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you should all speak in agreement, and that there should not be divisions among you, but that you may be fitly united in the same mind and in the same line of thought."

The Watchtower Society sees two applications for 1 Corinthians 1:10.

First, the verse is used to impose conformity on the doctrinal beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses.⁵³ The Watchtower book *Reasoning from the Scriptures* tells us that "such unity would never be achieved if the individuals did not meet together, benefit from the same spiritual feeding program, and respect the agency [the Watchtower Society] through which such instruction was provided."⁵⁴ We also read that God "wants his earthly servants united, and so he has made understanding the Bible today dependent upon associating with his organization [the Watchtower Society]."⁵⁵

Second, the Watchtower Society says this verse proves that the Jehovah's Witnesses are the only true Christians because they are in "complete agreement" with the Watchtower Society and are "united in the same mind and in the same line of thought." The Society boasts that Witnesses all over the world are of "one heart and soul."⁵⁶ Such unity, it is said, does not exist among the denominations of Christendom.⁵⁷

The Biblical Teaching. In your discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses, you must dispel the myth that absolute unity in a group is a proof that they are the only true Christians and that those who do not have unity are false believers. Point out that the very reason the apostle Paul wrote this verse to the Corinthians was because *they were already lacking in unity* (see 1 Corinthians 6:13; 8:10; 10:25; 11:2-16; 14-15). Some of them were saying, "I follow Paul" and, "I follow Apollos" and, "I follow Cephas" and, "I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12).

Ask...

Does the divisiveness of the Corinthians mean that they were not Christians? (Paul clearly believed they were Christians—1 Corinthians 1:2.)

After making this simple point, you must then gently but firmly explain that 1 Corinthians 1:10 does not teach that we are to attain unity by submitting to an organization or agency through which doctrinal

teaching is disseminated. The apostle Paul never (here or elsewhere) even remotely suggests that Christians are to render unquestioning obedience to any such group. Indeed, as noted previously, Paul said that we are to test everything and not unquestioningly accept what a particular teacher says (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Berean Christians were commended for testing all that Paul said to make sure that what he said was in accord with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). We are to do likewise. To emphasize your point:

Ask...

- Where in 1 Corinthians 1:10 is there *any* reference or allusion to an organization?
- Where in 1 Corinthians 1:10 does it say unity is to be achieved by *submission* to such an organization?

Another point you will want to make here is that in arguing *from the Bible* for the need for the Watchtower Society (from verses like 1 Corinthians 1:10), the Jehovah's Witnesses are guilty of committing a logical fallacy known as arguing in a circle. How so, you ask? Well, consider the "circularity" of the following logic: *The Watchtower Society says* people need to understand Scripture because *Scripture itself says* that people need to understand Scripture—and we know that *Scripture says* that people need to understand Scripture because the *Watchtower Society says* that *Scripture says* this.⁵⁸ Such circular reasoning obviously does not lend genuine support to the Watchtower position.

The Watchtower Society is also self-contradictory. As apologist Robert Bowman notes, the appeal, "Read these verses in the Bible and you will see that you need God's organization to understand the Bible," implies *both*, "You *can* understand the Bible" and, "You *cannot* understand the Bible."⁵⁹ Both of these statements cannot be true at the same time. They are contradictory.

After pointing out the above facts, you will want to return to 1 Corinthians 1:10 and focus fully on the historical situation with which Paul was dealing in Corinth. Begin by explaining to the Jehovah's Witness that the church in Corinth was divided into four basic factions, each having its own leader and particular emphasis—Paul (the Corinthians' father in Christ), Apollos (who had great rhetorical skills as a preacher), Cephas (who personally walked with Christ and was leader of the twelve), and Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 1:12). Apparently, each respective faction was acting in an antagonistic way toward the other three.

Seeking to do away with such divisiveness, the apostle Paul emphasized that we are all one in Christ. He taught that pivotal idea by asking, "Is Christ divided?" (or, more literally, "Is Christ *parceled out* among you?" [1 Corinthians 1:13]).

Paul's desire for the Corinthian Christians was that they "all...agree" (1 Corinthians 1:10). In New Testament Greek, this phrase carries the idea of "speak the same thing." It is an expression adapted from Greek political life that might be paraphrased, "Drop party cries."⁶⁰

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be "united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). The word "united" comes from a Greek word that refers to the setting of bones by a physician and the mending of broken nets by a fisherman.⁶¹ The idea is that Paul wanted the church to be without hurtful divisions and strife—the kind of strife that causes individual believers to separate from one another.

It is important to note that Paul was not asking the Christians in Corinth to do away with all diversity and individuality. This is clear in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, where diversity in doing the work of ministry is not opposed. Perhaps the best example of acceptable diversity among Christian brethren is found in the book of Romans,⁶² where Paul writes:

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:2-5).

You might want to request the Jehovah's Witness to read aloud from Romans 14:2-5 and then:

Ask...

Doesn't this passage indicate that it is acceptable for Christians to differ on certain religious issues?

To sum up, then, in 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul was not asking the Christians to do away with all diversity but rather to get rid of their unbrotherly, divisive attitude. Paul desired a unity of the parts—like a quilt made up of patches of many colors and designs.

John 17:3—*"Taking in Knowledge"*

The Watchtower Teaching. The New World Translation renders John 17:3 as follows: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ."

This verse allegedly points to the need for the Watchtower Society's Bible study—something they say helps people "take in" knowledge of God.⁶³ And since this taking in of knowledge leads to eternal life, the Watchtower Bible study is exceedingly important. One issue of *The Watchtower* magazine boldly invites people: "Come to Jehovah's organization for salvation."⁶⁴

The Biblical Teaching. You must first point out to the Jehovah's Witness that the New World Translation mistranslates this verse. Indeed, the verse is more literally translated from the Greek text, "Now this is eternal life: that *they may know you*" (emphasis added). Jesus is thus talking about *personal* knowledge of God, not *general* knowledge of the Bible.⁶⁵ The Greek word for "know" in this context is one that specifically indicates great intimacy with *another person*.⁶⁶

This is in harmony with what we learn elsewhere in Scripture. For example, Jesus indicates that general knowledge of the Bible is insufficient in itself to save someone. Jesus told a group of Jews: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). These lost Jews "knew" the *shell* of the Bible but they neglected the *kernel* within it—Jesus Christ. Such knowledge did them no good at all.

After reading aloud from John 5:39-40:

Ask...

- According to John 5:39-40, is knowledge of Scripture sufficient for salvation? (The answer will be no.)
 - What is required for salvation, according to this passage?
-

In keeping with the above, the apostle Paul referred to those who were "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). As former Jehovah's Witness David Reed says, "The 'facts' that keep filling Witnesses' heads never make up for the lack of actually *knowing* Jesus, the living truth."⁶⁷

Scripture consistently emphasizes that salvation is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—and Him alone. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Peter said of Jesus: "There is salvation

in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Scripture is clear that Christ’s divine mission was to be a Savior to the world (John 3:16; 4:42; 6:33; 1 John 4:14; 5:20).

Salvation, then, is found in knowing Christ personally. It is not found in taking in knowledge of God from Watchtower literature.

Acts 20:20—*House-to-House Witnessing*

The Watchtower Teaching. In Acts 20:20, the apostle Paul is quoted as saying: “I did not hold back from telling you any of the things that were profitable nor from teaching you publicly and from house to house” (NWT). The Jehovah’s Witnesses use this verse as a proof text for witnessing house to house.

The Watchtower book *Let God Be True* affirms that Jesus and His apostles “preached publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20). Every true Christian minister of the gospel is commanded to follow in their footsteps and must do as they did (1 Peter 2:21; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; 10:39-40). Since Jehovah’s Witnesses take the message to the people, their preaching is distinguishable from that of the religious clergy, who require people to come to them and sit at their feet to be preached to.”⁶⁸ In other words, because other so-called Christian groups *do not* go preaching door to door, the Jehovah’s Witnesses are clearly the only *true* people of God.

The Biblical Teaching. First, we must point out that there is good reason to believe that the phrase, “house to house,” in Acts 20:20 most likely refers to house-churches.⁶⁹ In the early days of Christianity, there was no centralized church building where believers could congregate. Rather, there were many small house-churches scattered throughout the city.

As we examine the New Testament, the early Christians are seen “breaking bread from house to house” (Acts 2:46; see also 5:42) and gathering to pray in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark (Acts 12:12). In his book *The Church in God’s Program*, theologian Robert L. Saucy notes that “the practice of meeting in homes evidently became

the established pattern, for we hear of the church in a house (Col. 4:15; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phil. 2). The use of specific church buildings did not appear before the end of the second century.”⁷⁰

In light of the above, it seems likely that the apostle Paul’s ministry was actually from house-church to house-church. This interpretation seems especially likely in view of the fact that when Paul said, “I did not shrink from declaring *to you* anything that was profitable, and teaching *you* in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20, emphasis added), he was speaking not to people in general but to “elders of the church” (see verse 17). If this interpretation is correct, then Acts 20:20 does not support the Watchtower contention that the Jehovah’s Witnesses are the only true believers because they are the only followers of Jehovah who go house to house.

Even if a house and not a house-church is meant in Acts 20:20, it still would not support the Watchtower interpretation. That something took place in the first century of church history is not grounds for saying that the same thing should be done throughout every century in church history.

For example, in terms of individual members of the early church, “no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32).

Ask...

Does the fact that a redistribution of wealth happened historically in the early church mean that you must give up all your personal property so it can be equally distributed among the poorer Jehovah’s Witnesses at the Kingdom Hall?

Drive this point home to the Jehovah’s Witness! Then, restate your main point: That something took place in the first century of church

history is not grounds for saying that the same thing should be done throughout every century in church history.

A Consistent Pattern

We have seen in this chapter that the Watchtower Society is *not* God's visible representative on earth today; it is *not* God's channel of truth for believers today; it is *not* the sole authoritative interpreter of the Bible; it is *not* God's "faithful and discreet slave"; and it *cannot* justify its existence from the pages of Scripture (like it claims to be able to).

Instead, we have seen that the Watchtower Society consistently twists the true meaning of Scripture to suit its own ends. We shall see this pattern repeated in every chapter of this book as we deal with specific doctrinal issues.