

PROVING OURSELVES WORTHY OF THE CHRIST

“He that has greater affection for father or mother than for me is not worthy of me; and he that has greater affection for son or daughter than for me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not accept his torture stake and follow after me is not worthy of me. He that finds his soul will lose it, and he that loses his soul for my sake will find it.” – *Matthew 10:37-39*

Strong counsel from the Christ! Notice it was not directed to spiritual babes – those just hearing the message and just getting their spiritual footing. It was directed to his apostles, those who agreed to follow him. But as spiritual babes grow in their faith, they, too, will be called upon to openly acknowledge their union with Christ if they are to survive the flesh.

“Everyone, then, that confesses union with me before men, I will also confess union with him before my Father who is in the heavens; but whoever disowns me before men, I will also disown him before my Father who is in the heavens.” – *Matthew 10:32-33*

Jesus is not saying that we should not deeply love and honor our families, our brothers, our neighbors or ourselves. He condemned the Pharisees and scribes who circumvented the command to honor our parents by their man-made rules. (*Matthew 15:3-9*) One of the only two commandments Jesus gave was to “love our neighbors as ourselves.” (*Mark 12:31*) And he himself was the epitome of brotherly love. (*John 15:12-13*) Instead, Jesus was telling us that, **as regards matters of the spirit**, our loyalty – our spiritual loyalty – is to no one but the Christ. We should each ponder Jesus’ words, whether we are just beginning to taste the waters of life or whether we have been following the Christ for many years. For if we are more spiritually attached to others, we are not worthy of the Christ.

Some might resist the statement that our spiritual loyalty is to the Christ. They may feel that our spiritual loyalty should be to God, the Father. Those who hold such an opinion do not clearly understand the Christ and his role. Even his apostles did not initially understand this. On one occasion, Jesus was explaining that he was going away to the Father, but that they would soon follow him because now they know the way. Thomas objected:

“Thomas said to him: ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How do we know the way?’ Jesus said to him: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you men had known me, you would have known my Father also; from this moment on you know him and have seen him.” – *John 14:5-7*

Still they did not understand:

“Philip said to him: ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him: ‘Have I been with you men so long a time, and yet, Philip, you have not come to know me? He that has seen me has seen the Father [also]. How is it you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in union with the Father and the Father is in union with me? The things I say to you men I do not speak of my own originality; but the Father who remains in union with me is doing his works.” – **John 14:8-10**

Jesus was explaining that, for us, knowing Jesus is the same thing as knowing the Father. Jesus is the best comprehension of the Father’s nature that we can achieve at this point in our development. The Father is on the same trajectory as the Christ, but substantially higher. For now, our goal is simply to follow the Christ and we will unflinchingly reach the Father.

In the same way, loyalty to the Christ is the same as loyalty to the Father. There is no conflict between the two, no challenge, no competition, no rivalry. “The Father and I are one.” (**John 10:30**) The Christ is the Father’s means of revealing **Himself** to man. This is why Jesus could request loyalty to himself. So we ask: To whom are you spiritually loyal?

Spiritual Loyalty

This subject matter comes up because of the unfavorable position Jehovah’s Witnesses find themselves in when faced with the kingdom message of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. And those of other religions can take the lesson to heart.

The leadership among Jehovah’s Witnesses are strong proponents of what we call “the two-hope doctrine” – that only 144,000 have the hope of going to heaven while the remainder of mankind have only the hope of living forever on earth.

This teaching was developed in the early 1900's in response to what appeared to be an honest interest in who the “great crowd” of **Revelation 7** represents. The scripture reads:

“After these things I saw, and, look! a great crowd, which no man was able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes; and there were palm branches in their hands. And they keep on crying with a loud voice, saying: “Salvation [we owe] to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.” –
Revelation 7:9-10

This “great crowd” is distinct from the 144,000 identified in **Revelation 7:4-8** whom they firmly believed represents the faithful Christian congregation that would be taken to heaven.

But who could these others be? The Society's publication "Revelation, It's Grand Climax At Hand!" specifically Chapter 20, discusses the development of the doctrine that this great crowd represents faithful Christians who would live on earth, rather than in heaven. And the Society strongly believes that God had given them this new understanding.

In the late 1800's, Christianity as a whole began to focus on eschatology – the study of end times. The predecessors of Jehovah's Witnesses were no different. Starting around 1918, the Society began publishing articles suggesting that many then living would never die. The interpretation was that if they are to never die, then they must live forever **on earth**. For the next 20 years, the doctrine was refined as the earthly hope was cultivated among the association. As a result, many of our brothers began to focus on earthly things and eventually abandoned the hope of life in heaven. Simultaneously, the heavenly hope was mentioned less and less.

By 1935, the doctrine had reached its completion and was announced at that year's District Convention. In a stirring talk entitled "The Great Multitude," delivered to about 20,000 conventioners, the then-president of the Watch Tower Society unfolded the doctrine. At first there was silence. Then "thunderous cheering." All those brothers who had focused on the earthly hope instead of the heavenly hope readily accepted that the "great crowd" must picture them. Thus, the "earthly hope" doctrine was birthed.

Another factor that was taken into consideration as they developed this new doctrine was the belief that the number of persons associating with the Watch Tower Society might exceed 144,000, and if so, the number in **Revelation 7:4-8** could not be a literal number. Rather than accept the possibility that they did not, and could not, understand every detail in the prophetic book of Revelation, they chose to come up with "another sort of good news" (**Galatians 1:6**) that would fit their expectations. We believe the doctrinal change was made in good faith, but having gone beyond what is written (**1 Corinthians 4:6**), it is not surprising that they fell into error.

So many Christians today are skating on the same thin ice. In their determination to 'make a vision come true' (**Daniel 11:14**) and demonstrate divine favor, they offer interpretations of the book of Revelation and teach these **possibilities** as fact, and as divine revelation. Instead of the reconciliatory message of the Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:18**), they resort to condemning, maligning and judging fellow humans, and various governments and institutions.

We think it wiser to base our faith on what are the plain and open teachings of the Christ rather than the hidden messages of prophecy, over which we have no control. We believe it is much wiser to leave to the angels and "the four living creatures" the task of serving up the 'bowls of divine anger.' (**Revelation 15:7**)

To that end, and consistent with our purpose of uplifting the spiritual conversation worldwide, we have repeatedly, consistently, thoroughly and accurately shown that the plain and open teaching of the Christ is that ALL mankind has the hope of going to heaven, and that the hope of living on earth forever is a dead hope. (See **The Cherished Earthly Hope** for a detailed discussion of this hope.)

Unfortunately, many of our brothers tell us that, although they see the scriptures promote only the heavenly hope, they will not change their position – i.e., they will not accept the sonship held out to them – unless our leadership – the Governing Body – publishes in the Watchtower magazine this change in their teachings. Very sad.

But we knew many of our brothers would indeed take this position. So from the beginning, we sought to reach the leadership to motivate them to publish the correct kingdom message. We believed that if the Governing Body made the change, our association would be put on the right track. **Now we realize that is not enough.** And it is important that all of our brothers and sisters, especially Jehovah’s Witnesses, realize this very important point:

When we choose to wait on the Governing Body before we accept the offer of sonship, we are following men. **But if we accept the offer of sonship only because the Governing Body makes the change, we are still following men** – not the Christ. Brothers, “top down” change will not save us. We must change from the “bottom up” – starting with the brothers and sisters on the local congregational level.

Let’s ponder this matter further.

Making Sure of All Things

If it is the Father’s will that we are to wait on the understanding of men in leadership positions before we accept what **His Son** taught us, we would not have received the following counsel:

“Keep testing whether you are in the faith, keep proving **what you yourselves are**. Or do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in union with **you**? Unless you are disapproved.”—*2 Corinthians 13:5*

“Make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine.”—*1 Thessalonians 5:21*

“Beloved ones, **do not** believe every inspired expression, but **test the inspired expressions** to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.”—*1 John 4:1*

If we had the luxury of simply being spoon-fed the truth, **why** would Jesus tell us:

“**Keep on** asking, and it will be given you; **keep on** seeking, and you will find; **keep on** knocking, and it will be opened to you.”—*Matthew 7:7*

And why would Jesus, Paul and John tell us that we will **individually** be led by the spirit:

“I have many things yet to say to you, but you are not able to bear them at present. However, when that one arrives, the spirit of the truth, **he will guide you into all the truth**, for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things coming.” – *John 16:12-13*

“For **all who are led by God’s spirit, these are God’s sons**. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery causing fear again, but you received a spirit of adoption as sons, by which spirit we cry out: “Abba, Father!” The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are God’s children.” – *Romans 8:14-16*

“These things I write you about those who are trying to mislead you. And as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, **and you do not need anyone to be teaching you**; but, as **the anointing from him is teaching you about all things**, and is true and is no lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in union with him.” – *1 John 2:26-27*

Instead of relying solely on **commentaries** of the scriptures, such as the Society’s literature, we should be like the Bereans who were commended for looking beyond the spoken words of even the apostles:

“Now the latter were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, **carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so.**” – *Acts 17:11*

Though well-intentioned, our leaders are not ‘the masters over our faith, but are fellow workers for our joy.’ (*2 Corinthians 1:24*) They were not ‘impaled for us’ nor were we baptized into their names. (*1 Corinthians 1:12*) As Paul reminded the Corinthians:

“What, then, is Apollos? Yes, what is Paul? **Ministers through whom you became believers**, even as the Lord granted each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God kept making [it] grow; so that **neither is he that plants anything nor is he that waters**, but God who makes [it] grow. Now he that plants and he that waters are one, but each [person] will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **For we are God’s fellow workers**. You people are **God’s field under cultivation, God’s building.**” – *1 Corinthians 3:5-9*

This counsel is important because even our leaders can be blinded on certain subjects:

“Then the disciples came up and said to him: ‘Do you know that the **Pharisees** stumbled at hearing what you said?’ In reply he said: ‘Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted. Let them be. Blind guides is what they are. **If, then, a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.**” – *Matthew 15:12-14*

“I marvel that you are being so quickly removed from the One who called you with Christ’s undeserved kindness **over to another sort of good news**. But it is not another; only there are certain ones who are causing you trouble and wanting to pervert the good news about the Christ. However, even if we or an angel out of heaven were to declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed. As we have said above, I also now say again, **Whoever it is that is declaring to you as good news something beyond what you accepted, let him be accursed.**” – *Galatians 1:6-9*

We find it very telling that even our leadership does not refer to the teaching of two hopes as “the truth,” but rather as merely “the current understanding.” Shall we rest our eternal future on merely a “current understanding” that could, and we hope **will**, change?

Standing with the Christ

The Christians writers make it clear that those worthy of the Christ should not be seeking to please men:

“Is it, in fact, men I am now trying to persuade or God? Or am I seeking to please men? **If I were yet pleasing men, I would not be Christ’s slave**. For I put you on notice, brothers, that the good news which was declared by me as good news is not something human; for neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught [it], except through revelation by Jesus Christ.” – *Galatians 1:10-12*

If we choose to follow men instead of following the Christ, we will find ourselves in this scenario:

“Not everyone saying to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and expel demons in your

name, and perform many powerful works in your name?’ And yet then I will confess to them: **I never knew you!** Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness.” – *Matthew 7:21-23*

Jesus ‘never knew them’ because they were not following him – they were following men. Notice how the apostles responded to adverse counsel from men:

“With that they called them and charged them, nowhere to make any utterance or to teach upon the basis of the name of Jesus. But in reply Peter and John said to them: ‘**Whether it is righteous in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge for yourselves.** But as for us, we cannot stop speaking about the things we have seen and heard.’” – *Acts 4:18-20*

These are strong messages, and we mean no disrespect to anyone, including the Governing Body. Instead, we are entreating everyone, including the Governing Body, to place their loyalty with the Christ and not with men. Otherwise, they will not be found worthy of the Christ.

Of course, taking a stand with the Christ may result in persecution, such as our leaders ‘expelling us from the synagogues.’ (*John 9:22*) Jesus told us this would occur:

“I have spoken these things to you that you may not be stumbled. Men will expel you from the synagogue. In fact, the hour is coming when everyone that kills you will imagine he has rendered a sacred service to God.” – *John 16:1-2*

We may also experience persecution from our brothers – fellow Witnesses within the congregations. Notice this experience:

“The next sabbath nearly all the city gathered together to hear the word of Jehovah. When the Jews got sight of the crowds, they were **filled with jealousy and began blasphemously contradicting the things being spoken by Paul.** And so, talking with boldness, Paul and Barnabas said: ‘It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken first to you. Since you are thrusting it away from you and **do not judge yourselves worthy of everlasting life,** look! we turn to the nations.’” – *Acts 13:44-46*

Some among our association reject sonship. They ‘do not judge themselves worthy of everlasting life’ in the heavens. If they reject sonship, the Father will receive sons from ‘the nations’ who love and accept the kingdom message. (*Matthew 21:43*)

But it is even more serious than that. Notice Paul's words to the Hebrew congregation:

“Any man that has disregarded the law of Moses dies without compassion, upon the testimony of two or three. Of how much more severe a punishment, do you think, will the man be counted worthy **who has trampled upon the Son of God and who has esteemed as of ordinary value the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has outraged the spirit of undeserved kindness with contempt?**” – *Hebrews 10:28-29*

Paul here speaks of three reprehensible acts worthy of severe punishment: (1) trampling upon the Son of God; (2) esteeming as of ordinary value the blood of the covenant; and (3) outraging the spirit of undeserved kindness with contempt. How are we to understand these acts?

- Trampling Upon the Son of God - rejecting Jesus, living your life as if he never came; holding onto the Jewish way of worshiping; holding onto the Jewish hope for an earthly kingdom; ignoring the important role the Christ plays in the Father's purpose for salvation.

- Esteeming as of Ordinary Value the Blood of the Covenant - looking upon the covenant for a kingdom as nothing special to you; ignoring the baptism into Christ's death (which is the eating and drinking of the Christ).

- Outraging the Spirit of Undeserved Kindness with Contempt - rejecting the offer of sonship; looking at heavenly life as contemptible, even undesirable; refusing the offer to be with the Father; refusing the offer to be grafted into the Father's heavenly family; condemning as unworthy those who seek the heavenly hope.

Truly, there is no greater way for a “Christian” to offend the Father – and seal their own destruction – than to reject His purpose for salvation!

Prove Yourself Worthy

So we are faced with a choice – do we follow the Christ or do we follow men? Do we openly confess ourselves in union with the Christ and spread the message of sonship with the Father, or do we obey men as ruler? The apostles were faced with a similar choice. They had been openly preaching about the Christ and the kingdom of the heavens, and were warned to stop preaching. Yet they continued:

“So they brought them and stood them in the Sanhedrin hall. And the high priest questioned them and said: ‘We positively ordered you not to keep teaching upon the basis of this name, and yet, look! You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring the blood of this man upon us.’ In answer

Peter and the [other] apostles said: **‘We must obey God as ruler rather than men.** The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew, hanging him upon a stake. God exalted this one as Chief Agent and Savior to his right hand, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these matters, and **so is the holy spirit, which God has given to those obeying him as ruler.**” – *Acts 5:27-32*

These men took the courageous route and stood firm in their preaching and teaching in the face of opposition from their religious leaders. And they acknowledged that those who obey God receive the holy spirit – the witness that they are sons of God. (*Romans 8:16*)

We can likewise prove worthy of the Christ by accepting the Father’s offer to be sons of God and heirs to the Christ. (*Romans 8:17*) But this decision must come from us individually and spread through our association from person to person, brother to brother – from the bottom up. **Top down change will not save us!**

But before we take a stand, let us sit down and count the cost of being worthy of the Christ. At some point, we will not be able to passively follow the teachings of Jesus – merely listening and observing the faith of those who accept their sonship. Many of us may very well face bitter persecutions for standing firm for the kingdom message, as well as crushing disappointment in our families, our brothers, or our leadership. But if we are unwilling to renounce all that we are and to dedicate all that we have, then, as Jesus said, ‘we are not worthy of him.’ (*Matthew 10:39*)

If we are to follow the Christ, we must be willing to pay the price of wholehearted dedication to the doing of my Father's will. If we are to be Christ’s disciples, we must be willing to forsake father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters – anyone who stands between us and the Christ. We must be willing to give up even our lives just as the Son of Man gave up his life for the completion of the mission of doing the Father's will on earth, in the flesh.

If we are convinced within our own hearts and choose union with Christ and sonship with the Father, we need have no fear of men.

“What, then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who will be against us?” – *Romans 8:31*

“So that we may be of good courage and say: ‘Jehovah is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’ *Hebrew 13:6*

Wonderful blessings are in store for those who loyally align themselves with the Christ.

“We are obligated to give God thanks always for you, brothers, as it is fitting, because your faith is growing exceedingly and the love

of each and all of you is increasing one toward the other. As a result **we ourselves take pride in you among the congregations of God** because of your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the tribulations that you are bearing. This is a proof of the righteous judgment of God, **leading to your being counted worthy of the kingdom of God**, for which you are indeed suffering.” – *2 Thessalonians 1:3-5*

“To that very end indeed we always pray for you, **that our God may count you worthy of [his] calling** and perform completely all he pleases of goodness and the work of faith with power; in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you **in union with him**, in accord with the undeserved kindness of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” – *2 Thessalonians 1:11-12*

We welcome your comments.

“Elaia Luchnia”