

Are Christians Commanded To Preach From House To House?

WAS the method of preaching the saving gospel from house to house among people of diverse beliefs enjoined by Jesus Christ on his disciples? This is a question often asked by people. The correct answer is NO! And the method did not originate from his apostles. For anyone to teach or air the view that such a system was the example set by our Saviour or his early disciples is, to say the least, very misleading.

One of the doctrinal issues on which the God's Kingdom Society (GKS) differs from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (W.B.T.S.) for whose sake people ask the foregoing question, is the matter of preaching from house to house. The witnesses regard all other Christians who do not go from house to house or door to door preaching the Bible as either indolent or not understanding the will of God. They always make references to certain portions of the Bible to justify their manner of preaching and to show that others who do not adopt that system are not keeping to the theocratic rule.

Owing to the questions arising from this issue from time to time and in the interest of honest seekers-after-truth: it has become necessary to treat the subject in this Sermon in a really intelligible language of the Bible.

Watchtower!

In the first place, there will be need to get a clear view of the points on which the Watchtower members base their faith, and why, in giving a free scope to their imaginations, they have come to the conclusion that all those who disagree with them are wrong. Secondly, we will re-examine the very texts of the Bible on which they so much rely in order to find out whether they have not a mote in the eye as to be under an illusion.

In the book *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, published by the Watchtower Society, it is stated: "They (Jehovah witnesses) follow the example of Christ Jesus and his apostles as to the manner of speaking the Kingdom message, by going from house to house as well as in public places, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God." (pages 313-314).

Writing on "Manner of Preaching" the Watchtower Society has this to say: "The method of teaching and preaching employed by Jehovah's witnesses is primitive. That is to say, they use the original method of preaching instituted by Jehovah's Great Witness, Christ Jesus. He 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 foot- steps and must do likewise. (1 Peter 2: 21; Luke 24: 48; Acts 1: 8; 10: 39-42) Since Jehovah's witnesses take the message to the people, their preaching is distinguish- able from that of the religious clergy, who require people to come to them and sit at their feet to be preached to." *Let God Be True*, First Edition, pages 213, 214. Thus it can rightly be inferred from this quote that anyone who does not preach from house to house, according to the Watchtower Society, is not a "true Christian minister of the gospel". They claimed that it is their responsibility to make Jehovah's name and word known among men, and added: "And that work is done in the very same manner as Jesus did it, namely, from house to house, city to city, Country to Country, and publicly. (Mark 1: 38; Matthew 11: 1; Acts 20: 20,21)" - *Let God Be True*, page 116.

In their book *This Means Everlasting Life*, pages 142-143, they do not add anything new. And in repeating themselves over again, they asserted in their work *Thing.' In Which It Is Impossible For God To Lie* (page 405) that their system of preaching is the "apostolic fashion... that is to say, 'publicly and from house to house' (Acts 20: 20; 5: 40-42)".

Now, having scrutinised all the textual references made in the publications of the Watchtower Society on this topic which the witnesses have always employed as tools to defend their faith, no doubt remains in our minds that they have become victims of misconceptions. They cite texts that do not lend support to their claims or have relevance to their arguments.

In all the references they made there is not a single one showing that Jesus Christ preached from house to house in Jerusalem, and we make bold to say that nobody can cite any authority of the Scriptures to substantiate that view because it is not true. Matthew 11: 1 and Mark 1: 38, which they referred to have nothing relative to house-to-house preaching. In the interest of those who have not their Bibles by their side, here is Matthew's account: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities." And that of Mark reads: "And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for there- fore came I forth." Where in these texts is it shown that he preached from house to house?

Their third reference is Acts 20: 20,21. This, too, has no connection with the person of Jesus Christ whatsoever. It only relates to the work of St. Paul which the Watchtower members themselves do not understand as we shall show later on in this Sermon.

The Holy Bible abounds with instances of how Jesus Christ preached in the open from city to city, and in the villages. He preached in the synagogues or temple of the Jews, at sea coasts, on the top of mountains, and so on, but NEVER from house to house. (Mark 4: 1; 5: 1-19; Matthew, 9: 35; Mark 10: 1, etc.) However, there were occasions on which he lodged in private houses and did preach to those who came to him; and in any of such cases, we could see that the house belonged to one of his followers or believers, and where it was not so, then he went to do spiritual good as moved b:,' the Spirit or he was invited.

In Mark 2: 1,2, it is recorded: "And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And .straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them." We can see that in this case the house in which he put up was thronged beyond capacity by those who desired to hear him and he preached to them. HE DID NOT GO FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, RATHER, THE PEOPLE CAME TO HIM.

There is also the record of Christ's visit to the house of Martha where Mary, her sister, sat at his feet to hear God's word while Martha cumbered about material things of no spiritual profit. (Luke 10: 38-42) But the visit of Jesus Christ to the house of Simon, who was a Pharisee, was on invitation. As it is writ- ten: "And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat." (Luke 7: 36) And the circumstances surrounding his going into the house of Zacchaeus are quite clear. He was not preaching from house to house. It was when he had discerned the heart-condition of Zacchaeus that he called him out and decided to visit his house.-Luke 19: 1-10.

Jesus Christ was never inclined to private or secret interpretation of his doc- trine. He himself said that it is those whose works are evil that go into dark places or hide their activities but "he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God". (John 3: 20,21) When he was under arrest, and the high priest of the Jews wanted to know of his doctrine, Jesus gave an answer that should serve as an eye- opener to the Watchtower Society. As it is written: "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I

said nothing.”-John 18: 20.

Turning to the days of the apostles i1fter the Pentecost there is no ground to believe that they preached from house to house among unbelievers. All the texts offered by the Watchtower Society are misconstrued and wrongly interpreted -maybe because of their over-zealousness to preach. They referred to Acts 5: 40- 42 where it is reported that after the apostles had been beaten up they went out of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer indignity for Christ’s sake. “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

The Watchtower men rest their opinion on the phrase “in every house”. But the question that has always beaten them flat is whether the phrase is with reference to “every house” of the Christians ..1r “every house” of non-Christians. In actual fact, those houses where the apostles taught and preached belonged to the Christian believers. It was customary with the early Christians to be gathering in their houses, and .they engaged, apart from hearing God’s word, in eating together or “breaking bread from house to house”. (Acts 2: 46; 20: 7).

It must be realised that at that time when the Christians were Il n d e r severe persecution, it would be unwise and unsafe for them to preach “in every house” of unbelievers or go around from house to house visiting their persecutors who were even bunting for them! The persecution reached a stage that Saul, who later became Paul the apostle, entered the homes of the Christians, took them and sent them to prison. The record states: “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house and haling men and women committed them to prison.”-Acts 8: 3.

Finally, let us now consider the popular text of the witnesses at Acts 20: 20. It reads: “And how I kept back no- thing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house.”

By the way, whom was St, Paul addressing? If he was talking to non-believers the Watchtower Society will be right to cite it as a precedent for them to go into people’s houses as they are doing, But if the apostle was addressing the Converts, then the Watchtower Society is hopelessly wrong in preaching from house to house among those who are not of their faith, The truth is that St. Paul was addressing not just ordinary converts but the elders or local leaders of the Ephesians Church. This is clear if we read from verse 17 of the very chapter. It runs thus: “And from Millets he (Paul) sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I] back nothing that was profitable \ you, but have shewed you, and havoc 1aught you publicly and from house to house.”-Acts 20: 17-20.

We have now seen vividly that this text is never a command by Jesus Christ nor an order by St. Paul that Christians should preach’ from house to house or door to door among people who do not share their beliefs. And if we are to go, as we should, by the standard of St. Paul’s action, the President, Secretary, Legal adviser. elected elders, circuit servants, or pioneers of the Watchtower Society can go from house to house among Watch- tower members in any place they visit to exhort them. But it is NOT an instruction or a precedent for them to preach from house to house to others where they are not invited.

Inconveniences

It is a pity that the witnesses do not know the inconveniences and embarrassment they give people by their house-to-house informal visits. Sometimes they meet people in a state for which common sense should dictate to them to return without saying a word, but they must insist on preaching to them. A man may be very busy in his home, a Watchtower witness must want him to listen to him still. They don't care to disturb women or servants cooking in the kitchens or even halt a man going to the toilet or bath. room for a moment and say, "I bring God's word to you," If you have reason to say you are sorry in that you have not the time to listen they will persist that you must listen because God's word is more important than anything else. And if you still show unwillingness to hear them or order them out of your house for disturbing your peace, they will turn round to rain curses on you such as "Armageddon shall kill you".

Despite the fact that their headquarters in the United States had advised against their fanatical attitude, many of them are still of the same stuff. In The Watchtower magazine, issue of January 1, 1954, it is stated: "You ministers are of the New World society And when you go into a house let your peace be manifest to that house. If that house does not want your peaceful message...do not rebuke it; that is, the occupant who faces you at the door and refuse to hear. Rather take back your peace...There is no reason to scold and say, 'You're going to die at Armageddon!' and then abruptly walk away." (Page 16) But do they pay heed to this advice? Many do not. It was because of such stubborn attitude two members of the sect were each jailed for two years at the Magistrate's Court, Ikot-Ekpene, for unlawfully assaulting a teacher, Udo Udo Inyang in 1955. He had warned them not to come again to his compound to preach but they still went claiming to be on God's mission and insisting on proselytizing the teacher's wife. It was reported that the Magistrate described them as "false preachers who were out to cause an uproar in the community". (Vide The Eastern States Express. Sept. 13, 1955)

Temptations

The system of preaching from house to house is even worse with women. It exposes them to the temptations of immoral men. Some foolish men may pretend to be interested in the preaching of a female witness and even promise to join their fold while in fact his motives are otherwise. What the Bible says is that women should be "keepers at home".-1st Timothy 5: 14; Titus 2: 4, 5. Moreover, even men are not commanded to go from house to house to preach as the Watchtower people are doing. When Jesus Christ sent out his seventy disciples he charged them not to go from house to house. In The Watchtower magazine, issue of December 15, 1959, the Watchtower Society claimed that their members were "armed only for spiritual warfare", and added: "In their house-to-house work they are looking for the friends of peace with God. Jesus Christ told them to do this, saying: 'Wherever you enter into a house say first: "May this house have peace." And if a friend of peace is there. your peace will rest upon him. But if no such one is there, it will turn back to you'. (Luke 10: 5, 6; Matthew, 10: 12, 13)." In their reference to Luke chapter 10, they carefully omitted verse 7 because it is against their method of preaching. Verse 7 reads: "And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for a labourer is worthy of his hire. GO NOT FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE"!

Those who engage in the work of creeping from house to house are described in the Bible as people who are destitute of the truth. Said St Paul: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes

and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.” – 2nd Timothy 3: 1-9.:
The prophetic statement of St. Paul just quoted is fulfilling on certain people today, and it is a sign of the times, for we are now in the last days.