

APOLOGIA

Paul preaches in Ephesus –
the beginning of
the end of paganism

**Did early Christians
preach door-to-door?**

By David Aspinall

WATCHTOWER
Myths

APOLOGIA

"... sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [Greek, apologia] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness & reverence ..."
1 Peter 3:15 (NASB)

"... I am appointed for the defense [Greek, apologia] of the gospel ..."
Philippians 1:16 (NASB)

Editor & layout David Aspinall

Did early Christians preach door-to-door?

THE CLAIM

Each Jehovah's Witness you will talk to has a bottom line that proves him right and you wrong. No matter how good your arguments -- on the Trinity, salvation, hell or whatever subject you have chosen to dialogue -- the fact that he's at *your* door, and you're not at *his*, when all is said and done decides whether he's the Christian or you are.

That is the bottom line -- whatever subject you discuss, however much time you give him -- he and his fellow Jehovah's Witnesses (and ONLY Jehovah's Witnesses) are Christians because: 1/ they and they ONLY use the true name of God, Jehovah; 2/ they and they ONLY know the truth about the kingdom of God, which, they will assert, was the emphasis of Jesus and his apostles; and 3/ they and they ONLY not only know these truths, but preach them door-to-door, again in imitation of Jesus and his earliest followers.

Until you strip away these unique 'badges' which the Witness wears, you will probably flail away in futility trying to dislodge one brick at a time from the Watchtower's complex belief system. How much simpler to remove the foundation stones. For the Jehovah's Witnesses, the foundation of his faith is the Watchtower 'organization' -- the "faithful and discreet slave class" which he believes is predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24:45-51. But if you attack his 'mother' (for that is how the Watchtower trains him to think of the 'organization' -- as the wife of Jehovah) you run the risk of losing his ear. Far better to chip away at the second tier of the foundation, the 3 'badges' listed above which, as far as the Witness is concerned, **prove** that Jehovah's Witnesses (and 'mother') have "the truth", as Witnesses habitually refer to their religion.

We might even reduce the fundamentals of Witness belief to a simple sentence: *Jehovah's Witnesses have 'The Truth' because they are the*

DID EARLY CHRISTIANS PREACH DOOR-TO-DOOR?

only religion that goes door-to-door. No Witness, of course, will admit that this is the only 'proof' of the true religion. Nevertheless, when you survey the history of the Watchtower you quickly realize this form of evangelism is the constant -- the "mark" which separates Witnesses from other groups espousing similar beliefs. Others challenge the Trinity, others 'turn the hose on hell', many evangelicals and many cultists emphasize the Second Coming -- but no other group organizes systematic visitation of every home to spread its beliefs. A Jehovah's Witness, if asked which is the most important of all Bible teachings, will probably answer "the vindication of Jehovah's name" or the "preaching of Jehovah's name and kingdom", or something similar. But the Watchtower did not promote the name "Jehovah" widely till the 1930s (they officially became "Jehovah's Witnesses" in 1931), nor did they publically promote the earthly kingdom that is now their 'good news' until 1935. If, then, the Watchtower did not promote these peculiar beliefs which 'mark' them as "God's people" till over 5 decades into their history, why did God deign to use them at all before that?

The Witness conviction is that God saw in them, despite their imperfect understanding, a **willingness** to 'preach the good news' in the face of opposition. This is why Watchtower literature is so fixated on the years 1914-20 -- a 7 year period which, to outsiders, is one unbroken, embarrassing sequence of Watchtower false prophecies -- but which in modern Watchtower mythology has somehow been turned into the era of their greatest **triumph** and vindication. God did not cast them off for their fundamentally unsound beliefs (by modern Watchtower standards), or judge them unfaithful because of their perfect prophetic record (100% failure). Rather, according to Witness understanding of Malachi 3, the Lord (Jesus) "came to his temple" suddenly (in 1919) and pronounced the Watchtower leaders as "faithful and discreet", sealing them as his unique 'slave', the only organization he would henceforth recognize and use. What was the basis of the Lord's judgment?

Perhaps we gain a clue from the book *Revelation Its Grand Climax at Hand!* (1988). This commentary on the last book of the Bible has been

studied several times in Witness congregations in the 1990s. Obviously Watchtower leaders continue to hope that its revisionist interpretation of the place of Jehovah's Witnesses in the 20th century will convince the present generation of their divinely ordained destiny – predestined collectively, that is, *not*, individually! Like all other interpretations of Revelation published by the Watchtower Society, *Climax* details how the 1914 to 1925 activities of the Watchtower 'fulfilled' Bible prophecy. Here, the imagination of the writers seems to know no bounds. Following the interpretative method used by the Society ever since its second president's own commentary on Revelation (*Light*, 2 volumes, 1931), *Climax* repaints this period in an orgy of self-congratulation. The Watchtower's principal publication of the period, *The Finished Mystery* (1917), is described (p. 165) as "a powerful commentary on Revelation and Ezekiel". The only 'power' this book retains today is the power to remove Witnesses from the Watchtower. So embarrassing are its wild claims that the Society has not reprinted *The Finished Mystery* in 7 decades (Rutherford's work *Light* was the official replacement for it). Nevertheless, the leaders of the Society continue to insist that the publication and distribution of *The Finished Mystery* were among their greatest accomplishments before God. Why? *Climax* sees it this way:

In the United States, the irate clergy used the war hysteria as an excuse to get the book banned. In other countries the book was censored. Nevertheless, God's servants kept fighting back with fiery issues of the four-page tract entitled *Kingdom News*. As the Lord's day proceeded, other publications would make clear Christendom's spiritually defunct condition ... between 1914 and 1918, the anointed remnant boldly drew attention to the spiritual drought in Christendom and warned of fiery judgment at "the coming of the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah ... " (*Climax*, pp. 165-66, emphasis added)

Forgotten are *The Finished Mystery*'s date-setting false prophecies and worshipful treatment of "the Laodicean messenger" Charles Taze Russell. What counts to the Watchtower leaders today – and what they

obviously think counts to God too – is the Society's "fiery" pronouncements during this period, their "boldly" denouncing Christendom. In summary, what *really* counts in the Society's view is not the *content* of these publications – if it did, they would be reprinted today! – but the guts demonstrated in circulating them. The Watchtower Society, finally, is God's modern Elijah and Moses (these quotes from *Climax* occur in a section tracing the career of the 'two witnesses' of Revelation 11). And God is WITH the modern Elijah and Moses because they 'prophesy' (however inaccurately) against Christendom.

It is no coincidence that the scandal of *The Finished Mystery* was immediately forgotten by Rutherford and his headquarters cohorts. Instead of retreating into the wilderness for some soul-searching and honest self-evaluation – as the *real* Elijah did after his contest with the Baal prophets – Rutherford and his colleagues just got busier with their publishing projects. *Millions Now Living Will Never Die!* (1920) replaced *The Finished Mystery* as the calling card of the Watchtower door-to-door colporteurs. This new campaign, focussing the Bible Students on a new date (1925), was an extremely effective way of moving Russell's followers away from the prior failed dates (1914, 1915, 1918 and 1920). Rutherford's most brilliant move, though, was to mobilize ALL the Bible Students in the new campaign. By 1927, even the failure of the 1925 prediction in *Millions* hardly caused a blip in the 'Advertise Advertise Advertise' hysteria which now consumed the 'faithful'. Now, however, they were no longer carrying founder Russell's books door-to-door. The seven volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures* had been replaced by 'new light' – Rutherford's books *The Harp of God* (1921) *Comfort for the Jews* (1925) and *Deliverance* (1926) being the official substitutes. In this way, Rutherford deflected attention *away from* the failed predictions and interpretations (even his own – *The Harp of God* had undergone extensive revision by 1928), and switched attention from the *message* to the *method* of its delivery. All Bible Students were by now expected to go door-to-door. This was the 'test' by which God now evaluated who was faithful and who was not, who was Christian and who was hypocrite. Of course, historical retrospect allows us to see that in reality it was *Rutherford's* test, not

God's. By 1931, the Watchtower's second president had determined who *really* was the 'faithful and discreet slave' – and it wasn't any longer C.T. Russell! When, in that year, Rutherford renamed the Bible Students *Jehovah's witnesses* (with a small "w" – Russell had insisted that 'denominational' names were of the Devil) cynics could be heard to remark on the TRUE significance of the J in JW: *all* the books, booklets and phonograph records which 'witnesses' now carried with them house to house were creations of one man – Joseph F. Rutherford. The 'faithful' ones were definitely no longer Russellites, as the public had always called them, but were now Joe's witnesses.

The Problem: An Identity Crisis

This review of the Watchtower's 'golden age' (and that, by the way, was the new magazine which Rutherford launched in 1920, predecessor to *Awake!*) has been necessary to make vivid the central problem the Christian encounters when witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses (now with a capital 'W'!). The JW no longer 'witnesses' by playing on your doorstep Joe Rutherford's 78s, nor has he even read any of JFR's books. But he *does* carry Joe's main message. And that message is essentially this: *the fact that I'm at your door and you're NOT at mine proves I'm a Christian and you aren't*. Salvation by works, yes, wrapped up neatly in a disguise that even fools the Jehovah's Witness himself. For HE thinks he's there to preach the name of Jehovah and Jehovah's kingdom. But, as I hope is now abundantly clear, his identity among *Jehovah's Witnesses* is the only thing proven by his presence at your door.

And this unique 'badge' is graphically – and incessantly – set before the JW by the Watchtower publications. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, their most successful publication in recent decades, reinforces what is the bottom line for JW's on its last page:

You must be a part of Jehovah's organization, doing God's will, in order to receive his blessing of everlasting life. (p. 255, emphasis added)

And in case we don't know what 'doing God's will' means, here's a clarification from the Watchtower:

It is by our endurance in proclaiming "this good news of the kingdom" that we may attain to salvation. (*Watchtower*, July 15, 1979, p. 14)

If we have satisfactorily established that door-to-door evangelism is what makes one a *Jehovah's Witness*, let us proceed to a scriptural evaluation of the central question – ***Did Jesus and the apostles preach door-to-door?*** For if we would get anywhere at all with a Witness, we **MUST** take away his 'badge', that which separates him from everyone else called 'Christian'.

How the Witnesses have justified door-to-door evangelism

From the 1920s the Watchtower has claimed that the apostles and even Jesus himself engaged in house to house ministry. So often is this repeated and so unquestioned is this 'fact' among Witnesses today that you may encounter sneering arrogance should you suggest to the 'publisher' at your door that early Christians did NOT so evangelize. Among the current generation of Witnesses there has been no debate on this point. The following quote may serve as typical of the boldness of the Watchtower claim (discussing requirements for baptism):

The dedicated one must be a house-to-house witness as was Christ Jesus and the apostles ... (*Watchtower*, July 1, 1959, p. 409, emphasis added)

Since the Rutherford days this form of ministry has taken on something like the sacred aura of the sacraments among Christians, and indeed is the 'sacred service' that all Witnesses are expected to engage in. Listen to A.H. Macmillan, a colleague of both Russell and Rutherford and a key member of the Watchtower headquarters staff in the early days:

With the birth of the New World Society in 1919 a new spirit had come into us and we were eager to carry our message of Jehovah's established kingdom to the ends of the earth ... Rutherford wanted to unify the preaching work and, instead of having each individual give his own opinion ... gradually Rutherford himself began to be the main spokesman for the

organization. That was the way he thought the message could best be given without contradiction. At the same time we began to realize that each one of us had a responsibility to go from house to house and preach. We were shown it was a covenant-keeping arrangement. ...

In 1927 we were shown that the way each individual was to serve was to go from door to door. (A.H. Macmillan, *Faith on the March*, p. 152, emphasis added)

Macmillan's words indicate the seriousness and solemnity with which the Witness has come to understand his role. Since, according to Watchtower theology, only the 144,000 are in the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 (and, by the way, are the only ones who according to Rutherford's understanding can truly be called 'Jehovah's Witnesses' – the 144,000 have replaced literal Israel as the witnesses referred to in Isaiah 43) – since the 144,000 are now covenanted to serve as priests to the rest of mankind, the service the 'great crowd' of 'other sheep' (virtually all of the 5-6 million Jehovah's Witnesses today) can contribute is their loyal publicity of this 'kingdom arrangement' in which they themselves have no part. Their door-to-door ministry, therefore, becomes the means by which they prove their fealty to the 144,000, the 'slave' which is in effect the mediator of the earthly kingdom. Jesus Christ, according to classic Watchtower theology, is actually mediator only to the 144,000, 'spiritual Israel'.

When I was baptized as a Witness in 1971, it was a given that the New Testament (or, as we insisted the 27 books be called, the "Christian Greek Scriptures") supported door-to-door witnessing. An early manual for Witness use, *"Equipped for Every Good Work"* (1946), the Watchtower equivalent of a Bible handbook, devotes only 7 pages to the book of Acts, but manages to put in a plug for the house to house technique in this comment on Acts 5:42:

To threats by the religious council they make the rejoinder, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Off they go witnessing from house to house! (p. 288)

This certainty respecting the method of the apostles continues right into

the era of Witnesses explosive growth in the western world, the 1960s and 1970s:

The book of Acts shows just how the Christian activity of proclaiming God's kingdom should be carried out. Paul himself was an example, 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." Then he goes on to say: "I *thoroughly* bore witness." This theme of 'thorough witnessing' strikes our attention throughout the book ... (*All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, 1963, 1983 ed. p. 203)

This comment occurs under the heading "Acts: Why Beneficial?" It sums up effectively for us exactly what the Witness has come to regard as 'thorough' witnessing – methodical, door-to-door canvassing. Whether this is Paul's meaning when he says that he 'thoroughly bore witness' we will leave to another tract.

Watchtower admissions in the 1970s

Shortly after my baptism, the Society released the book *Organized for Kingdom-Preaching and Disciple-Making*. This book was designed to be a congregational manual for Witnesses. Chapter 6 is devoted to forms of evangelism. That chapter's title, *Your Service to God*, is indicative of the shift of emphasis during the 1970s. For the first time, albeit cautiously, the Watchtower backs off the use of standard prooftexts for house to house work, Matthew 10, Acts 5 and Acts 20. (See especially pages 112-116.)

Ex-Governing Body member Raymond Franz devotes much space to the background of these changes, governing body discussions during the 1970s. He records that Watchtower leaders *unanimously* approved the *Organization* book chapter on ministry – minus the traditional prooftexts, Acts 5:42 and Acts 20:20. These texts, Franz reports, were thoroughly discussed at governing body meetings, and finally there was no dissent at all among the 11 members of the Watchtower elite that, while the door-to-door method would continue to be promoted, it could

not be supported from these texts. Franz goes on to note that this understanding continued unchallenged during the Watchtower's years of fastest growth, 1972-1975. Then, suddenly, the Witnesses experienced an unprecedented 2 consecutive years of numerical decline. Apparently, by 1980, about a million Witnesses drifted away or deliberately defected. Franz shows how the governing body dealt with this reversal. Instead of blaming themselves for the 1975 scandal, they instead blamed the 'brothers' for expecting *too much*(!!), and decided simultaneously that the old favourite prooftexts were needed after all to shore up the Witnesses lagging interest in witnessing. By 1983 the Society found it necessary to rewrite the *Organization* book, barely a decade old, and now retitled *Organized to Accomplish Our Ministry*. This time, however, the chapter on 'field service' is entitled *Ministry of good news*, rather than *Your service to God*, and its emphasis is right back where it was before 1972:

House-to-house preaching is not a modern innovation of Jehovah's Witnesses. It was firmly established in theocratic history long ago in the days of the apostles. Outstandingly, the apostle Paul refers to his teaching in the homes of people ... (p. 84)

Once again, the Society draws attention to how "thoroughly" Paul did his work in Ephesus. Then the writer quickly moves off the text, exhorting Witnesses to imitate the apostles and support the local congregation's field service arrangements. So little space is given to the Acts texts – in fact, Acts 5:42 isn't even mentioned – that the hasty reader of the cited paragraph might miss a telling detail. After insisting Jehovah's Witnesses didn't invent house-to-house preaching, the Society's writer supports his argument by referring to Paul's work *in the homes*, not *at the doors*, of his disciples in Ephesus. Why this subtle shift? Was the writer aware of the tangled web he would weave by insisting Paul meant door-to-door evangelism rather than home visitation? Yet, despite the faltering faith of the Watchtower leaders in the usefulness of Acts 5:42, you will still find that the average Witness blithely refers to it in 'proving' early Christians went door-to-door just as he does. And indeed, a superficial reading of that text – apart from its

context – might well *seem* to support the Watchtower position.

What about Acts 5:42?

Acts 5:42 And daily in the temple and from house to house [*kat' oikon*, Gk.], they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

This sentence is one of the two outstanding prooftexts for Jehovah's Witnesses door-to-door evangelism. What manner of home visitation were those early disciples engaged in?

But before we examine the *how*, let us think about the *who*. Just *who* "kept right on teaching and preaching"? Check back in the previous verse and you quickly discern there is a problem with using this verse to justify the JW understanding that ALL Jehovah's Witnesses **must** preach door-to-door. The ones preaching, according to v.41, are the same ones who had appeared before the Sanhedrin, under arrest for preaching in the temple area (v.21). According to the previous account, those arrested for this public preaching were **the apostles only** (see verses 18-29).

If you go back further in chapter 5, you also see that, rather than evangelizing house-to-house, the apostles were doing their preaching and healing in Solomon's portico (vv.12-16), a precinct of the temple. People from the whole city and beyond were bringing their loved ones to that location to be healed. They were NOT waiting for the apostles to arrive at their doors. THIS "public witnessing", not a canvassing campaign, antagonized the religious establishment (vv.17-18).

The chapter 5 arrest followed a previous arrest in chapter 4 (the narrative actually begins in chapter 3). Here it was simply Peter and John who were under arrest for preaching, again in Solomon's colonnade (3:1,11; 4:1). Although at this point in Acts there is no record that the apostles had preached anywhere but in the temple area, the Jewish council is rightly afraid their work is "apparent to all who live in Jerusalem" (4:16). The leaders fear that their work will spread among all the people (v.17). And with justification -- there were now about 5000 disciples, and without the apostles getting beyond the

temple (4:4)! After their release, we read that “with great power **the apostles** were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”. (4:33, NASB). This “great power” was sufficient to accomplish the Lord’s work in Jerusalem. It was also the Lord’s way of answering the prayer of v.29:

And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy Holy Servant Jesus. (4:29,30, NASB)

The book of Hebrews confirms that it was the **apostles** who both performed **signs** and also **preached** the message which established the divine source of the gospel:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb.2:3,4; NIV)

This is the pattern established in Acts 1. The apostles, “those who had heard him [Jesus]”, allow none to join their rank but others who meet the same qualifications:

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. (1:21,22; NIV)

Thus the qualification of a WITNESS was that he must have SEEN the Lord, and seen Him from the beginning of His ministry to its end, the resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:8 -- “YOU will be my witnesses”; see also Luke 24:33-53). They, and they only, would qualify to witness. This was in accord with Jewish legal precedent (Deut.17:6). A witness, for his testimony to be valid and legally acceptable, must have **seen** -- experienced personally -- the event about which he testified.

Thousands had seen Jesus, but very few among those witnesses had also

witnessed the resurrection and ascension. No more than a few hundred had seen the risen Christ, and these only, according to Peter, were qualified to testify publicly:

Him God raised up the third day, and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered US to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. (Acts 10:40-42; NASB, emphasis added)

Therefore it is beyond dispute that those who preached the word in Acts 5 were the apostles. Where did they preach? “... in the temple and from house to house”. But from the reports in Acts 3 and 4 we see that there is no support for a work such as Jehovah’s Witnesses do. Rather, as F.F. Bruce understands this verse, *kat’ oikon* should in context be rendered “in their own homes” [Eng p.126]. Ernst Haenchen renders *kat’ oikon* “in home gatherings” [p.254], Richard Rackham “at home, i.e. in their own meetings” [p.75]. A.T. Robertson, in his famous *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Vol.3, p.70), acknowledges that the Greek may be rendered “from house to house”, but understands it to have the force of “at home”. I. Howard Marshall suggests why the reference to homes is coupled with another reference to the temple activity:

The Sanhedrin could probably do little to stop them evangelizing in their homes. [p.124]

William Jacobson is specific as to the verse’s intent:

In the temple. To casual listeners; *in every house*, to avowed believers. The same marginal rendering, *at home*, might have been given here, as in 2:46. [*The Bible Commentary*, ed. F.C. Cook, *John-Acts* p. 391]

Jacobson’s reference to Acts 2:46 is telling, as that is the only other place in Acts where the exact phrase *kat’ oikon* occurs.

Acts 2:46 -- Why is the Watchtower not consistent?

A.T. Robertson, as mentioned previously, concedes that *kat' oikon* may be rendered “from house to house”. But in rendering the phrase “at home”, Robertson refers us to Acts 2:46, where precisely the same Greek expression occurs. Of 2:46, *And they [all that believed, v.44], continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*, Robertson writes:

Does it refer also to the possible agapai or to the Lord's supper afterwards as they had common meals “from house to house” (*kat' oikon*)? We know there were local churches in the homes where they had “worship rooms,” the church in the house. [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.3, p.39]

Robertson, inadvertently, has given us insight as to why the Watchtower, despite its claim of consistent translation, has been forced to render 2:46 **in private homes**. In the Watchtower reference Bible (1984, p.1315] the rendering “from house to house” is consigned to the footnote, but exactly the reverse occurs in 5:42, where the Watchtower quotes Lutheran scholar Richard Lenski as follows:

Never for a moment did the apostles cease their blessed work. ‘Every day’ they continued, and this openly ‘in the Temple’ where the Sanhedrin and the Temple police could see and hear them, and, of course, also [*kat' oikon*], which is distributive, ‘from house to house,’ and not merely adverbial, ‘at home.’ [*The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 1961]

What the Watchtower thought to prove by this quote is not clear -- unless their writer hoped the Witness readers would assume that Lenski's allusion to ‘distributive’ had some reference to what Jehovah's Witnesses do door-to-door! That Lenski meant no such thing is apparent from his note on Acts 2:46:

Luke sketches the daily life of the first congregation. The three [*kata*] phrases are distributive: “day by day,” “house by

house” ... The believers both visited the Temple and broke bread house by house at home ... “Breaking bread” also refers to all the meals and not merely to such as might precede the Sacrament as an agape. “House by house” is like “day by day.” It does not mean merely “at home” but in each home. [pp.120-21, emphasis added.]

Why did the Watchtower NOT quote Lenski on 2:46? Would it not be at least fair to both Lenski himself and to the reader, who might assume Lenski's position was the same as the Watchtower's, to mention that he renders the phrase in question, *breaking bread house by house*? In other words, Lenski sees 2:46 **and** 5:42 as basically saying the same thing about the worship habits of the early disciples. Is the Watchtower's selective quotation of Lenski in the spirit of impartial, objective research?

We have already noticed that the scholars of Christendom -- Lutheran Lenski, Baptist Robertson, Anglican Rackham, Brethren Bruce, Methodist Marshall etc -- have **consistently** interpreted 2:46 and 5:42. Let us see whether their interpretation will hold up as we examine the other principal Watchtower proof-text for door-to-door evangelism, Paul's memorable summation of his own 3-year ministry in Ephesus in Acts chapter 20.

Does Acts 20 indicate Paul went door-to-door?

[20:20] ... **I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house [*kat' oikous*].** [NASB]

Was Paul here referring to a *public* work of preaching, i.e. house to house evangelism of *non-believers*, as the Watchtower encourages its devotees to believe? F.F. Bruce, in his renowned Greek commentary on Acts, renders *kat' oikous* “in your homes, privately as well as publicly.” That is, the Ephesian elders were instructed both publicly and privately. But Bruce admits that the **public** ministry of Paul was not carried out by door-to-door method:

His discourses in the synagogue and in the lecture hall of

Tyrannus constituted his public teaching.” [Greek commentary, p.378].

Richard B. Rackham, another famous commentator on Acts, understands the phrase “house to house” to refer to “private gatherings of the Christians” [p.389]. I. Howard Marshall, in his Tyndale commentary, also understands that Luke is referring to Paul’s “pastoral ministry”. [p.330] Liberal commentator Ernst Haenchen renders *kat’ oikous* “in the house churches” [p.591], which rendering helps us to understand the correspondence to the usage in chapters 2 and 5, where Peter and the other apostles are found preaching **both** publicly (in the temple, before the Sanhedrin) and in private homes (that is, they have at this point no buildings **other than private homes** wherein to worship and fellowship).

Are Haenchen, Bruce, Rackham and Marshall biased against the Watchtower understanding? Or is the Watchtower guilty of “twisting Scripture” to suit their peculiar understanding of the apostolic preaching method (2 Peter 3:16)?

Let Luke himself decide where the prejudice lies. Does Luke, who was present with Paul for the speech to the Ephesian elders, (Acts 20:15, 21:1), give **any** indication that Paul carried out a house-to-house visitation? Here are the verses in Luke’s record which bear on the **location** of Paul’s preaching work:

[19:1-7] Finding certain disciples ... [unspecified location]

[19:8] And he went **into the synagogue** and spoke boldly for the space of three months ...

[19:9] ... disputing daily **in the school of one Tyrannus**. And this continued by the space of two years ...

No mention of house-to-house ministry. According to Watchtower reasoning there is no way that a thorough witness can be given without the door-to-door method. Yet Luke records

And this [daily disputing in the school of Tyrannus] continued for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (19:10)

How can this be? ALL heard, yet apparently Paul -- for two years -- did his evangelism in a school. According to Witness logic, you cannot reach everyone except by thorough canvassing. Yet even Witnesses recognize there are many who will not be reached by that method. Here, the Watchtower tells them, we have to leave the **how** to God and his angels. Yet if we consistently apply this principle, leaving it up to God to locate those He wants, why is there ANY need to go door-to-door? About Paul’s work in Corinth (Acts 18) Luke records that the Lord said to Paul, “I have many people in this city”, whereupon Paul remained there 18 months. The Lord knew, apparently, whom He had in Corinth. We are NOT told precisely how Paul found these (future) disciples. We can be sure, however, that the Lord can -- and always **will** -- reach His elect. In Corinth, it appears the chief method was the local synagogue (18:4-6), and afterward the house of one Titius Justus (v.7). As with Ephesus, we are given no indication that Paul undertook any extensive canvassing. Rather, the work there seems to have been spurred on by the word of mouth generated when the leader of the synagogue, Crispus, was converted (v.8). As in Acts 2, where no fewer than 3000 were converted by a single sermon, the “Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (2:47, KJV). Wherever the Spirit is working, we can be sure God will have no trouble in locating (soon-to-be) saints. And without methodically mapping out every block in the Roman empire.

There is yet one more point to recognize. In all these circumstances, it is **the apostles**, more particularly Peter and Paul, who are credited with accomplishing the preaching work. In no case do we read of the local disciples -- the apostles’ converts -- doing evangelism. This is not to say that early Christians did not talk about their faith. But Paul himself, in laying down his final instructions to the Ephesian elders, does not stress even **public** evangelism, let alone door-to-door canvassing, as their responsibility. The elders, rather, are instructed:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (20:28, NASB)

This “feeding” of the flock (see KJV), Paul said, was what made him “innocent of the blood of all men” (v. 26). For he had not shrunk back from “declaring to you [the Ephesian elders] the whole purpose of God” (v.27). Among those elders, NOT the **public**, Paul says “I went about preaching the kingdom”. At least that is the work Luke -- and presumably Paul -- choose to record.

If the house-to-house work is the method by which Jehovah’s Witnesses **must** demonstrate THEY are “clean from the blood of all men”, why has God not given a command to that effect? Why has the Lord not given even a single clear, indisputable indication that the apostles set the example for ALL Christians by witnessing door-to-door?

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APPENDIX:

The Evidence of Paul’s Epistles

In Paul’s letters we have first hand evidence of the pastoral emphases of the great apostle himself. In the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians (thought to be a general letter to the Asian churches), Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, we have insight into exactly what Paul considered to be “spiritual service of worship” (Rom.12:1, NASB). In addition to these 9 congregational letters, we have 4 pastoral epistles from Paul’s hand (Timothy, Titus and Philemon), which flesh out the shepherding emphases we noted in Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

What do these 13 letters reveal as to the importance of *witnessing* in Paul’s mind? According to the Watchtower *Comprehensive Concordance* (1973), Paul used the words *witness*, *witnessed*, *witnesses* and *witnessing* a total of 32 times in his 13 epistles. The concept of “witness” is therefore of some importance to Paul. Yet, of the 32 occurrences, the “witnesses” are God (5 times), Paul (6 times), Christ (once), the Spirit (once), the conscience of Paul or others (3), the Law (1), a Cretan prophet (1), the audience for Timothy’s ordination (2). 2 references are to the general principle of the Law regarding the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses. This leaves 9 occasions where the word “witness” is found with *we*, *our* or an unspecified subject. Most of these occurrences, if not all, when examined in context, will be found to refer to the apostles. This leaves a single example where Paul undoubtedly refers to the “witness” of the members of the congregations he founded and served. In this single instance (1 Thess. 2:10), the local believers are reminded of how they are witnesses to the blamelessness of the apostles. **Not once**, amid the myriad instructions Paul gives to the disciples regarding *spiritual worship*, does Paul ever command or even recommend that those Christians witness.

It is instructive that when the Watchtower goes to Paul’s epistles for a proof-text for their public preaching, they usually are left with 2 Timothy 4:2. Here is the only place in Paul or any of the apostolic epistles where we have a **command** to preach. However, as even the title of the epistle

gives away, it is elder Timothy, Paul's deputy in Ephesus, who is receiving the imperative to preach. In verse 5 Paul makes his wish for Timothy explicit, *do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*. We NEVER hear Paul give such an instruction to the members of the congregations.

2 Timothy 4:2 is one of 31 occurrences of the word "preach", "preacher", "preaches" or "preaching" in Paul's letters (according to the NWT *Comprehensive Concordance*). Of the remaining 30, 12 refer to Paul, and 8 to *we* or *our* (as with *witness*, context almost always indicates the reference is to the apostles). The other 10 occurrences do not specify the subject, but context reveals they refer to either the apostles or Jewish or false teachers (e.g. Rom.2:21, 2 Cor.11:4). We reiterate: **Not once does Paul give a congregation instructions to preach or witness.** In fact, in his last epistle, the same 2nd letter to Timothy, Paul sums up how he considers the good news was *proclaimed in all creation under heaven* in that generation (Col.1:23). Speaking of his court case before the Roman magistrate, Paul says:

But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear ... (2 Tim. 4:17, NASB)

Paul has reached many hundreds of millions more Gentiles through his epistles written *from prison* than he ever reached by his organized preaching tours. Little could the apostle have realized how the Lord would use even the evil of Paul's imprisonment to praise Him. God, as Paul learned, is NOT dependent on human plans, means and methods to get HIS work done.

WERE THE APOSTLES REALLY 'JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES'?

As outlandish as that question may seem, Jehovah's Witnesses take pride in the claim that they -- and they only -- are imitators of the method of evangelism practised by the early church.

But did 1st century believers -- even the apostles -- go door-to-door, or does the book of Acts present a different picture of preaching work of the early church?