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Independent Thinking

The Watchtower, February 15, 1979, p. 20

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The Watchtower, January 15, 1983, p. 22

"Avoid Independent Thinking ... How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by God's visible organization."

The Watchtower, January 15, 1983, p. 27

“Fight Against Independent Thinking ... Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments before, and so they argue: ‘This shows that we have to make up our own mind on what to believe.’ This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous? Such thinking is an evidence of pride.”

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The Watchtower, February 1, 1987, p. 19

“First of all, there is the matter of being obedient and ready to respond to encouragement. When direction and encouragement come from the proper source, it is only right that we should respond readily. Thus, rather than viewing these qualities as mere national traits, we keep in mind Jesus’ words: ‘My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.’ (John 10:27) We also remember that one feature of ‘the wisdom from above’ is being ‘ready to obey.’ (James 3:17) These are qualities that all Christians are encouraged to put on. Due to background and upbringing, some may be more given to independent thinking and self-will than others. Perhaps this is an area where we need to discipline ourselves and ‘make our mind over’ so that we can perceive more clearly what the ‘will of God’ is.—Romans 12:2.”

The Watchtower, September 15, 1989, p. 23

“In the world, there is a tendency to reject leadership. As one lecturer said: ;’The rising education level has improved the talent pool such that followers have become so critical that they are almost impossible to lead.’ But a spirit of independent thinking does not prevail in God’s organization, and we have sound reasons for confidence in the men taking the lead among us.”

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¹⁵ The traveling overseers' high regard for Jesus' command to preach the "good news" and make disciples moves them to stress this twofold commission as a sacred trust, a divine requirement. (Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20) They recall what happened following the day of Pentecost in 33 C.E., and also later, after the conversion of Cornelius and his household, namely, that believers increased rapidly and were fully instructed, so that they could live according to the "good news" and declare it effectively to others. (Acts 2:46, 47; 5:14; 6:7; 10:44-48; 20:20) Today, for the multiplying of further believers, traveling overseers invite as many as possible to share with them in witnessing. They give help to those who lack experience. The zeal and fine lead of visiting elders contribute toward expansion of the witness work. They say, with Paul: "Woe is me if I did not declare the good news!"—1 Cor. 9:16.

¹⁶ Moreover, there is much work to be done in aiding those associated with the congregations to make advancement in Christian living. (2 Pet. 1:5-10) Some who are not yet free of worldliness may try to bring in practices that would relax the high standards of conduct established in God's Word. To guard against infiltration of worldliness, traveling overseers need to show discernment in observing subtle trends. They will want to encourage God's people to adhere closely to Scriptural principles with regard to their living habits, morality and dealings with others, whether in personal or social matters. (1 Cor. 10:31-33; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; Heb. 13:18) They may need to remind elders to act decisively in maintaining moral, doctrinal and spiritual cleanness in the congregations.

15. (a) How do traveling overseers regard Jesus' commands at Matthew 24:14 and 28:19, 20? (b) In line with what happened after Pentecost of 33 C.E., what aid and example do they provide congregations today?
16, 17. (a) In guarding against the infiltration of worldliness, what encouragement may traveling overseers give? (b) In what ways may they aid the brothers in combating the subtle influence of materialism?

¹⁷ In line with the advice Timothy received, traveling overseers are urged to warn Christians against the encroaching influences of materialism. (1 Tim. 6:9, 10, 17-19) By their own example in putting spiritual things first they encourage others to 'seek first God's kingdom.'—Matt. 6:33.

¹⁸ In a world where people are tossed about by confusing winds of religious doctrine, Jehovah's people need to be stable, full-grown Christians. (Eph. 4:13, 14) Their position must be steadfast, not shifting quickly because of independent thinking or emotional pressures. (Col. 1:23; 2:6, 7) Rightly, then, traveling overseers should emphasize the need for all Christians to grow constantly in accurate knowledge of God. (Phil. 1:9, 10; Col. 1:9-11) They encourage personal, family and congregational study so that Christians will feed, not just on 'the milk of the word,' but on "solid food," in order to appreciate fully "the word of righteousness," and to "have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong." (Heb. 5:12-14) When they inspect a congregation's spiritual condition, traveling overseers will counsel Scripturally on such points.

¹⁹ These older men may make visits on the sick, aged and others, as opportunity affords. (Prov. 16:31; Matt. 18:12-14; contrast Ezekiel 34:4.) When approached by individuals at variance with one another on personal matters, they may lovingly but firmly admonish them from the Scriptures, with a view to restoring peace. (1 Thess. 5:14, 15) In ways often unnoticed, they may impart spiritual upbuilding to those who have doubts regarding Christian conduct or who otherwise need to be 'snatched out of the fire.'—Jude 22, 23.

²⁰ As in the first century, these traveling

18. Why is the attainment of spiritual stability and maturity so essential, and how can this be encouraged?
19. How do traveling overseers aid various ones according to their individual need? (Jas. 5:19, 20)
20. How have traveling overseers and their wives been self-sacrificing?

today. More people are disfellowshipped for sexual immorality than for all other reasons combined.

¹⁹ But since Jehovah's servants know that fornication and adultery are against God's laws, why do so many of them become involved in such activity? Well, why did Eve disobey God's law? Because Satan made doing so appear extremely attractive; it was an opportunity she thought that she could not pass up. Similarly today, through his propaganda channels—television, movies, the press, and so forth—fornication and adultery are made to appear not only exciting and pleasurable but also acceptable. So if you bite at the lure offered through the Devil's propaganda channels, what will happen? You, too, may be "hooked"!

Avoid Independent Thinking

²⁰ From the very outset of his rebellion Satan called into question God's way of doing things. He promoted independent thinking. 'You can decide for yourself what is good and bad,' Satan told Eve. 'You don't have to listen to God. He is not really telling you the truth.' (Genesis 3:1-5) To this day, it has been Satan's subtle design to infect God's people with this type of thinking.—2 Timothy 3:1, 13.

²¹ How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by God's visible organization. For example, God's organization has from time to time given warnings about listening to certain types of immoral and suggestive music, and about frequenting discos and other types of worldly dance halls where such

19. (a) Why do so many of Jehovah's servants become involved in sexual immorality when they know it displeases God? (b) What will help you to avoid becoming involved in sexual immorality?

20. (a) What is another subtle design of the Devil? (b) How has Satan been using this design for some 6,000 years?

21. What are examples of independent thinking in modern times, and what have been the results?

music is played and people are known to engage in immoral conduct. (1 Corinthians 15:33) Yet certain ones have professed to know better. They have rebelled against such counsel and have done what is right in their own eyes. With what result? Very often they have become involved in sexual immorality and have suffered severe spiritual harm. But even if they have not been so affected, are they not reprehensible if others follow their example and suffer bad consequences?—Matthew 18:6.

²² This fact cannot be overemphasized: We are in a war with superhuman foes, and we constantly need to be aware of this. Satan and his demons are real; they are not mere figments of the imagination. They are "the world rulers of this darkness," and we have a spiritual fight against them. (Ephesians 6:12) It is absolutely vital that we recognize their subtle designs and not allow ourselves to be overreached by them. Very appropriately, then, we will next consider how we can arm ourselves to fight against these wicked spirits.

22. (a) Of what must we be constantly aware? (b) What appropriately will be considered in our next study?

Can You Answer These Questions?

- What is the Devil's purpose in subtly approaching Jehovah's people?
- Why does the Devil use subtle designs?
- What are various subtle designs Satan uses?
- What will help us to avoid being overreached by these subtle designs?

He wrote: "I [beat] my body and lead it as a slave, that, after I have preached to others, I myself should not become disapproved somehow." (1 Corinthians 9:27; Titus 3:3) Paul 'got tough' with himself. He would force himself to do what was right, even when his body desired to do wrong. You must do the same if you are to wage a successful fight.

¹⁸ In order to be fully armed you also need regularly to pray to God for help. (Ephesians 6:18) Yet you cannot pray for help and then read immoral literature, go to immoral movies or daydream about or flirt with one of the opposite sex. You must work for what you request in prayer!

Fight Against Independent Thinking

¹⁹ As we study the Bible we learn that Jehovah has always guided his servants in an organized way. And just as in the first century there was only one true Christian organization, so today Jehovah is using only one organization. (Ephesians 4:4, 5; Matthew 24:45-47) Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments before, and so they argue: "This shows that we have to make up our own mind on what to believe." This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous?

²⁰ Such thinking is an evidence of pride. And the Bible says: "Pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." (Proverbs 16:18) If we get to thinking that we know better than the organization, we should ask ourselves: "Where did we learn Bible truth in the first place? Would we know the way of the truth if it had not been for guidance

19. (a) How has Jehovah always guided his people? (b) How is independent thinking manifested by some persons?

20. (a) Of what is independent thinking an evidence? (b) What will help us to avoid placing our own views ahead of the organization's? (c) What first-century example is it well for us to follow?

from the organization? Really, can we get along without the direction of God's organization?" No, we cannot!—Compare Acts 15:2, 28, 29; 16:4, 5.

²¹ When we consider the mighty spirit forces who are fighting against us, we must acknowledge that on our own we could not possibly win. Yet with God's backing, and with the help and support of his organization—our worldwide association of brothers—we cannot lose. (Psalm 118:6-12; 1 Peter 5:9) However, we must never forget that we are in a spiritual war, and that wartime is no time to be relaxing, enjoying only leisure and the pleasures of life. Rather, it is the time for vigorous training, alertness and self-sacrifice. The enemy has been able to get some from among us to relax their guard, and these have become battle casualties. May this never happen to us! It will not if we keep on "the complete suit of armor from God" and "stand firm against the [crafty acts] of the Devil."—Ephesians 6:11, 12.

21. (a) How only can we win in our fight? (b) What must we never forget, and so what kind of life do we now need to lead?

Can You Answer These Questions?

- When material things become especially prominent in a Christian's life, what problems can result for that person and for others in the congregation?
- What will help us to combat materialistic inclinations?
- What will help us to avoid succumbing to sexual immorality?
- What is an evidence of independent thinking, and what can help us to avoid it?

the pioneers in Japan. Consider these answers:

"I don't think it means that the faith, or the love, of the Japanese Witnesses is greater than that of their brothers in other countries," said a Bethel worker who has been in full-time service for some 30 years. "But I believe that the Japanese personality probably has something to do with it. As a whole, the Japanese people are obedient; they respond readily to encouragement."

"Because there are so many pioneers in almost every congregation," an elder commented, "the general idea is that anyone can do it." The Japanese people do like to do things in groups. They have an excellent team spirit.

These are surely thought-provoking remarks, and if we are serious about improving our service to Jehovah, there are a number of salient points worthy of our careful consideration.

¹³ First of all, there is the matter of being obedient and ready to respond to encouragement. When direction and encouragement come from the proper source, it is only right that we should respond readily. Thus, rather than viewing these qualities as mere national traits, we keep in mind Jesus' words: "My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27) We also remember that one feature of "the wisdom from above" is being "ready to obey." (James 3:17) These are qualities that all Christians are encouraged to put on. Due to background and upbringing, some may be more given to independent thinking and self-will than others. Perhaps this is an area where we need to discipline ourselves and 'make our mind over' so that we can perceive more clearly what the "will of God" is.—Romans 12:2.

13. How can we benefit from the matter of being obedient and ready to respond to encouragement?

¹⁴ As dedicated Christians, we have accepted Jesus' invitation: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and continually follow me." (Matthew 16:24) To "disown" oneself means literally 'to deny oneself utterly' and thereafter willingly to accept being owned by Jehovah God and Jesus Christ, letting them control our lives and tell us what we should and should not do. What better way is there to demonstrate that we have disowned ourselves than to follow Jesus' steps in the full-time ministry?

¹⁵ Then there is the matter of being content with less materially. This clearly runs contrary to the general trend of the world, which promotes "the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life." (1 John 2:16) But Jesus said emphatically: "You may be sure, none of you that does not say good-bye to all his belongings can be my disciple." (Luke 14:33) Why is this so? Because to be Jesus' disciple means more than just being a believer. When Jesus called Andrew, Peter, James, John, and the others to be his disciples in the second year of his ministry, he did not stop at asking them to believe in him as the Messiah. He later invited them to follow him and to do the work he was doing, that is, the full-time preaching work. What was their response? "At once they abandoned their nets and followed him." James and John even "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and went off after him." (Mark 1:16-20) They left behind their business and former associates and took up preaching full-time.

14. What invitation have all dedicated Christians accepted, and what is involved?

15. (a) How is being content with less materially connected with following Jesus? (b) How did the early disciples respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him?

¹² We will be helped to obey and honor those taking the lead if we remember that God himself has provided the elders. (Ephesians 4:7-13) Since these men are spirit appointed and God's organization occupies a vital place in the lives of Jehovah's Witnesses, surely we want to demonstrate our gratitude and respect for theocratic arrangements. Moreover, we can assist new ones to develop this attitude if we set a fine example of obedience and submission to those taking the lead among us.



Why Appreciate Their Service?

¹³ In the world, there is a tendency to reject leadership. As one lecturer said: "The rising education level has improved the talent pool such that followers have become so critical that they are almost impossible to lead." But a spirit of independent thinking does not prevail in God's organization, and we have sound reasons for confidence in the men taking the lead among us. For instance, only those meeting Scriptural requirements are appointed as elders. (1 Timothy 3:1-7) They are trained to be kind, loving, and helpful, yet firm in upholding Jehovah's righteous standards. The elders adhere to Scriptural truth, 'holding firmly to the faithful word, that they may be able to exhort by healthful teaching.' (Titus 1:5-9) Of course, we should not magnify their human imperfections, for all of us are imperfect. (1 Kings

Paul was delighted to preach the good news and to serve fellow believers. As an elder, are you grateful for your God-given privileges of service?

8:46; Romans 5:12) Instead of feeling frustrated by their limitations and treating their counsel lightly, let us appreciate and accept the Bible-based direction of the elders as coming from God.

¹⁴ Paul, an appreciative man, said: "I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who imparted power to me, because he considered me faithful by assigning me to a ministry." (1 Timothy 1:12) That ministry, or service, included the preaching work and the serving of fellow believers. Although an overseer has an assignment by holy spirit to serve as a shepherd, this should not make him feel superior to others, for he himself is part of God's flock of sheeplike ones. (1 Peter 5:4) Instead, he should be grateful that the Head of the congregation, Jesus Christ, counted him worthy to minister to members of the flock and that God qualified him by granting him a measure of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

12. By keeping what in mind will we be helped to obey those taking the lead among us?

13. (a) What contrasting views of leadership exist in the world and in God's organization? (b) We have what sound reasons for confidence in the men taking the lead among us? (c) Instead of magnifying the imperfections of hardworking elders, what should we do?

14. In view of 1 Timothy 1:12, how should an elder look upon the ministry assigned to him?