

WWJD

by Holly & Sally Ondersma

Dear *Beacon Lights*,

I am writing this letter in response to an article published in the September, 1998 issue of the *Beacon Lights*. The article proposed reasons why the author felt the WWJD bracelets, popular today, are not fitting for Reformed Christians to wear.

The first sentence of the article states, ‘We believe that WWJD bracelets are not appropriate attire for the Reformed Christian to wear.’ Who are the ‘We...’ spoken of in this statement? They are not clearly defined. Hopefully, this is not intended as a blanket statement for the whole Protestant Reformed denomination. I am sure that not every member of the Protestant Reformed denomination agrees with this strong statement. A decision such as whether or not I will wear a WWJD bracelet is my choice and has nothing to do with how strong or weak my faith is.

The first reasoning the author brings is that there is too great a temptation to fall into idolatry while wearing the bracelets. I do not feel that these bracelets are meant as amulets or charms that will magically keep you from sinning. At least the people that I know who wear them do not think so. They were designed as a visual reminder that I need to constantly think in a Christ-centered way. I need reminders daily because of the old man of sin in me. Jesus faced the same temptations we do. He could overcome them perfectly. A reminder is beneficial to me, who is not perfect as He is.

The author also stated in his article that by wearing the bracelets one associates him or herself “with the Arminians and other hypocrites who promote evil doctrines while wearing these bracelets (pg. 5).” I find this statement offensive and judgmental. The bracelet is not promoting the evil doctrine of Arminianism and is not to be blamed here. Just as the scalpel is not evil because some doctors use them to perform abortions. Just as we do, Arminians also use Scripture to support their doctrines. Are we to use the same line of reasoning for this example as well? The bracelet is merely a piece of fabric with letters embroidered on it and is not evil. However, people use good things in wrong ways. We must not, therefore, do away with the object, but with the wrongful actions of the user.

The WWJD bracelets were also classified with the Jewish phylactery. The author quoted Matthew 23:5 in his article which says, “...they make broad their phylacteries...” The phylactery is also called a tefillin and consists of a small black box and black straps. The box holds scrolls on which are written Scripture and are used during the weekday morning worship services. The straps are wrapped around the arm with a box on the biceps. Another box is placed on the forehead with the straps hanging down over the shoulders. Blessings are recited while the tefillin are placed and after the service they are removed. One Jewish website gives this as the reason why they are used, “...tefillin are meant to remind us of God’s commandments.” They are literally taking the command by God to bind the Word of God to your arms and your forehead. The Pharisees in Matthew 23:5 were rebuked because they were boasting and making public displays of their worship. They were not rebuked for using the phylacteries. I feel the author segregates unfairly the external acts of worship to God and internal love for God.

At the end of the first piece of the article are listed three texts which the author states are frequently used “to show that there is nothing wrong with WWJD bracelets (pg. 6).” These texts all speak of having the Word of God on one’s hand and forehead as spoken of above. They were most likely speaking of phylacteries which the Jewish children of Israel would most likely have used. The author explains that these texts must be taken spiritually because we do not read of the Old Testament saints as following this practice and because it would be impossible to write the entire Law of God on our hands and forehead. I think the author is missing the point. It isn’t about physically writing the letters on our faces and hands. The text doesn’t even say anything about “writing” them. The text uses

the word “bind.” It also isn’t about what our forefathers did or did not do. It’s about finding the best way to continually keep our eyes on Christ and not forget Him in our everyday activities. If some people can do this without a physical object as a reminder, then that is wonderful. I personally need a visual reminder to help me.

The author also tells us that baptism is the way we witness and that by our Christian walk others see the light of Christ. I couldn’t agree more. But that is not the end of the story. There needs to be more to complete Christ’s idea of witnessing. We also need to take an active approach by going out into the communities and seeking out those who are hungry for the Word. The apostles did not just continue everyday living waiting for others to ask them questions. They broke through barriers, went to people who were considered the scum of society, and went to people even though others criticized them. One person I spoke with said she wears the bracelet to work. Several co-workers have asked her what the abbreviation stands for. She explains the significance of Christ in her life to that person and exposes them to the Word. She then gives the person the bracelet in hopes that they will pursue finding out more about Christ.

The underlying theme under every point the author of the September, 1998 article brought up is not that the bracelet is wrong, as he suggests. The theme is that we, as Christians, need to be careful that the attitudes behind why we wear the bracelets are God-glorifying. The purpose behind the bracelet is to remind us throughout the day that we must have on the armour of God and show ourselves to be true followers of Christ. This can be accomplished with or without a bracelet. Some may prefer to wear a cross pendant on a necklace. Once again, the choice is personal and not something that we judge each other by. We must show ourselves to be different from the world in the way we live our lives. People should be able to see our different attitude whether we are wearing a bracelet or not.

I felt that the article of September, 1998 poorly demonstrated the stance of the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and the stance of Christians in general who wear these bracelets. If the article was meant as a personal opinion, then I have no problem with a brother or sister in Christ holding this view. When it is published in a magazine sounding as if it is the belief of the entire Protestant Reformed Church, then I have some difficulty. We should not be using this time and space to be judging one other. As brothers and sisters in Christ we should be uniting to find better ways to spread the gospel and get each other excited in the faith. Then we will be strongly united and able to withstand whatever attempts to destroy us.

Holly and Sally Ondersma

Response:

The heart of your argument can be found in the following quote from your letter: “I personally need a visual reminder to help me.” Let us understand what God’s Word says on the matter.

1. The child of God puts God’s Word about his neck, in front of his eyes, and upon his fingers in a spiritual sense. Read Proverbs 3:3, 21, 22; 4:21; 6:21, 22; 7:3.
2. God puts His Word in the hearts of His own. Read Psalm 37:30, 31; 27:8; 40:8; 119:9-16; 119:80; 119:111.
3. Those who have His Word (law) in their hearts, meditate on that Word and constantly bring it to remembrance. Read Psalm 1:2; 77:11,12; 119:15, 16, 24, 48, 97-105, 161-168; Proverbs 6:22, 23.
4. Christ gives unto us His Spirit, Who “by His power... defends and preserves us against all enemies.” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 51). Read II Corinthians 1:22; I Peter 1:2; John 14:16, 17; Acts 5:32; Titus 3:5,6.

5. The Spirit, dwelling in us, is the THE REMINDER. We pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The Catechism’s explanation (Q&A 127) of this sixth petition reads in part: “since we are so weak in ourselves, that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory.” Read Galatians 5:15,16; Romans 8:5, 6; Psalm 51:6, 11, 12; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; I John 3:24; I John 4:4; John 14:26 which reads, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” Further, we are to “pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit.” (Q&A 115).
6. From this knowledge of God in our hearts and the testimony of the Spirit in us flows the fruit of our confession. Read Psalm 89:1; Psalm 116:10; II Corinthians 4:13; Romans 10:8-10; Psalm 119:27, 46, 172.
7. We live out the truth because we believe and say in our hearts, “I love thee God, through Christ!” To say that we must first ask “What would Jesus do?” before we act, is to reduce Jesus to nothing more than the Example in whose steps we must walk (read *In His Steps, “What Would Jesus Do?”* by Charles M. Sheldon). Rather, we live out of a “sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.” (Heidelberg, Q&A 90). Read I Peter 4:1, 2 (having the mind of Christ); Galatians 2:19,20 (having the life of Christ in us); Romans 5:11, Matthew 22: 36-38; The 150 Psalms.
8. We fight temptation with God’s Word which we know and love and which dwells in us. Read Matthew 4:4, 7, 10 (“It is written...”). We err because we do not know Scripture or the power of God (Matthew 22:29).

Let us humble ourselves before God’s Word and apply ourselves to growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18). ❖

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