

**Evangelism and Other Religions Part 3: The Watch Tower Cult – 5/14/23**

Intro:

What does the Watchtower teach and how can this help us evangelize them?

**1. JW teaching is derived from a misleading translation of the Bible.**

- Jehovah's Witnesses ascribe to the Bible as their sacred text for faith and practice. However, only one translation, the Watchtower Society's New World Translation (NWT), is encouraged for JW use. Since its inception in 1961, the NWT has undergone a few revisions.
- JW's also rely heavily upon a few other works produced by the Watchtower Society for beliefs and doctrinal dissemination.
- The *Watchtower* is a periodical featured in over 200 languages, with 53 million copies printed monthly, started by JW founder, Charles Taze Russell, in 1879. The periodical's purpose is to show "the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies" and "it comforts people with the good news of God's Kingdom and promotes faith in Jesus Christ."
- *Awake!* is the other JW periodical, also with some 50 million printed monthly in over 100 languages. It "shows us how to cope with today's problems and builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world."
- Another heavily relied upon work is a book called *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, which lists out the Watchtower Society's answers to various Bible questions and is often used as a training manual for converts and proselytizing.
- Though the *Watchtower*, *Awake!*, and *Reasoning from the Scriptures* are not said to be canonical, they often function that way. JW's are often systematically, and rigorously (some JW's talk of going from knowing nothing of the Bible to knowing much in a few week's time), catechized from these works. Former JW's will tell you that they are discouraged from studying anything but the NWT and the Watchtower Society writings.
- One can read the NWT, *Awake!*, and the *Watchtower* in everything from English to Chinese to Malay to Zulu.
- Despite its multiple editions, the NWT contains many alarming translation errors, making it unreliable at best. Four errors are briefly considered here, comparing the English Standard Version (ESV) with the NWT:

a) John 1:1.

ESV: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

NWT: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

The NWT commits a serious error here by inserting the indefinite article, "a," to render the phrase, "a god." The rationalization is that the indefinite article is absent in the original.

However, as Daniel Wallace points out, there are 282 occurrences of the word "God" in the NT without the definite article yet only 6% of the time do they translate it indefinite (a god, etc.).

And if we follow their translation principle consistently, for example, then "the beginning" should be "a beginning," life should be "a life," and John should be "a John" in 1:6 (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 267).

Also, the Greek grammatical rule, "Colwell's Rule," applied to this verse leans in favor of the definiteness. Finally, we see that God knows what he is doing with his word in that this particular Greek construction, without the definite article, demonstrates that Christ/the Word is God, but God the Father is not Christ/the Word.

We can conclude with the late, competent exegete, Charles Feinberg, when he said, "I can assure you that the rendering which the Jehovah's Witnesses give John 1:1 is not held by any reputable Greek scholar" (Rhodes, 99).

b) Colossians 1:16-17.

ESV: "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

NWT: "because by means of him all **other** things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All **other** things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all **other** things, and by means of him all **other** things were made to exist." (bold added)

The NWT inserts the word, “other,” four times in the English, yet the Greek word does not appear once in the original. Why is this significant? Since JW teaching asserts that Christ was created, they must insert the word to maintain that he created the “other things,” as he himself is one of the created things.

c) Colossians 2:9.

ESV: “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

NWT: “Because it is in him that all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily.”

Here the NWT mistranslates the Greek word θεότητος as “divine quality.” Yet the overwhelming exegetical evidence and agreement is that the word does not speak of qualities or traits that are divine, or divine-like, but simply the very essence and nature of deity.

d) Hebrews 1:6.

ESV: “And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’”

NWT: “But when he again brings his Firstborn into the inhabited earth, he says: ‘And let all of God’s angels do obeisance to him.’”

The issue here is with the word, “obeisance,” which is much closer to “worship” in the original. Interestingly, the 1961 NWT translated the word, “worship,” though it has since changed.

In either case, this would pose a problem since God would be commanding the angels to worship Christ, a fellow angel (see below, #2).

The problem is further complicated in that the angel in Revelation 22:8-9 refused worship from John.

Also, the rhetorical question is asked in Hebrews 1:5, “For to which of the angels did he ever say, ‘You are my Son’...?” to demonstrate that Christ is not an angel, but God to whom worship is due. Finally, Hebrews 1:8 helps settle the issue: “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever...’”

Interestingly, these severe translation blunders all have one thing in common: distorting the plain sense of the original text to the detriment of the deity of Jesus Christ.

Either the NWT translators did not possess a sufficient knowledge of the biblical languages to produce a reliable translation or they are intentionally distorted the plain sense of the languages for theological reasons, or both.

Other problems exist with the NWT. There was the 1954 scandal in which it was revealed that four of the five men on the NWT translation committee had no training in Hebrew or Greek, while the fifth had a questionable knowledge of the languages.

Competent NT Greek scholars also repudiate the NWT. Bruce Metzger said it was a “frightful mistranslation,” “erroneous,” “pernicious,” and “reprehensible” (Cited in Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Jehovah’s Witnesses*, 96).

William Barclay said that the “deliberate distortion of truth by this sect is seen in their New Testament translation...It is abundantly clear that a sect which can translate the New Testament like that is intellectually dishonest” (Rhodes, 96).

The NWT is therefore, not simply an unreliable translation, but, in many ways, a misleading translation. Since the Watchtower insists on this translation for faith and practice, many of its teachings cannot be embraced as biblical truth.

## 2. JW teaching denies the deity of Christ.

Similar to Mormonism, the descriptors of Christ appear similar to those in biblical Christianity. However, the Christ of JW teaching is radically different from the Christ of the Bible.

To begin, the Watchtower denies the Trinity; that God is one God, in three persons; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. JW teaching says that the Holy Spirit is not God or a real person of the triune Godhead, but instead an impersonal energy. The Holy Spirit is supposedly “God’s power in action, his active force. (Micah 3:8; Luke 1:35) God sends out his spirit by projecting his energy to any place to accomplish his will.—Psalm 104:30; 139:7.”

The Watchtower teaches that prior to his incarnation, Jesus Christ was a spirit creature in heaven. God supposedly created Christ first among all creation. The Watchtower writes, “[T]he first human that God created, Adam, is called a ‘son of God.’ (Luke 3:38) Similarly, the Bible teaches that Jesus was created by God. So Jesus is also called a ‘Son of God.’”

Furthermore, JW teaching asserts that Jesus Christ is the archangel, Michael. The problems with this are innumerable, for example, that rhetorical question to

demonstrate the supremacy of Christ over all things: “For to which of the angels did God every say, ‘You are my Son..?’” (Heb 1:5).

But with this view of Christ, it makes sense that JW doctrine teaches that “it is unscriptural for worshipers of the living and true God to render worship to the Son of God, Jesus Christ.”

This renders a different Christ than that of Scripture; one who is less than eternal God, and, therefore, not God. JW doctrine violates the clear teaching of Scripture that, among other things, Christ is God; the uncreated, eternal, second Person of the Triune Godhead, who has eternally possessed all the attributes of God, and worthy of our worship (John 1:1-2, 8:58, 20:28, 10:30, Col 2:9, Titus 2:13).

### **3. JW teaching denies the biblical resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

JW doctrine denies the bodily resurrection of Christ, teaching instead that it was a spiritual resurrection. The Watchtower writes, “People who were resurrected earlier were given human bodies but later died again. Jesus was given a spirit body that can never be destroyed.”

What about the literal body which the risen Christ had and was seen by so many? The Watchtower teaches that he was not a glorified human but was recreated as the archangel Michael and the body which the disciples saw was not the body which was nailed to the cross.

What about the crucifixion wounds which the risen Christ showed to Thomas and the disciples? The Watchtower teaches that Christ used a body with wound holes in order to convince Thomas of his identity. Further, it is claimed that Christ’s real body was disposed of by God into its elements.

This teaching violates the plain sense of the New Testament text. Arriving at these conclusions requires an extravagantly preconceived bias and portrays God and Christ as some sort of deceivers in cahoots. It almost appears as if someone is trying hard to design a false Christ who cannot save.

Yet, the overwhelming evidence and logical reading of the text demonstrates a literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Further, a Christ who is not God and did not rise physically can in no way be the Savior of sinful humanity.

If he is not God, then he does not have the sufficient nature wherewith to live a sinless life, go to the cross, and effectually extinguish the wrath of God for sinners. No created, sort-of-god being is qualified to do this.

So, it makes sense that JW teaching would claim only a spiritual resurrection. Their Christ is not God so he cannot pull off a complete resurrection. However, if he did not rise physically, then God may not justify sinners effectually (nor may we be raised physically).

Thus, the heart of Christian doctrine, justification by faith alone in Christ alone, shipwrecks without a bodily resurrection. His sort-of-rising is not enough to accomplish our justification (cf. Rom 5).

He has to be God to pull off a sinless life such that his death atoned for our sin, proven by the complete, total-person resurrection.

He has to be resurrected, fully man; living, dying, and rising, in order to mediate for other men. Further, since this Christ is unqualified to serve as the propitiation for our sins, then God the Father may not justly justify one sinner.

He has no Savior to whom man's sin may be imputed and from whom a sufficient righteousness may be imputed. In that sense, justification is irreducibly complex. Pull away a few pieces, as the JW's do, and our faith is worthless and we are still in our sins (cf. 1 Cor 15:7).

Tragically then, because JW doctrine derives from a devious Bible translation, denies the God of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and the biblical resurrection of Christ, it denies any possibility of salvation through Christ. It is a false gospel and damnable system through which no one can be forgiven of sin, right before God, and go to heaven.

Thankfully, however, the JW Christ is a mere myth. The second Person of the Trinity, eternal God, took on human flesh, went to the cross, propitiated the wrath of God in the place of sinners, and rose with that glorified body for our justification. Through faith in this Christ alone, God justifies the unjust with the result that there is no condemnation.

We could talk more, for example, about how JW teaching denies the biblical teaching on eternal punishment or the many false, end-times prophecies made by the Watchtower Society or, with the denial of the biblical Holy Spirit, how we, therefore, cannot experience regeneration (such that we could savingly know, love, or obey God), experience sanctification, be sealed for the day of redemption, or be reborn in order to see and enter the kingdom of God, to name a few.

In the end, we must love those who embrace the JW system to gently encourage them to carefully examine the plain sense of the biblical text.

As they do, by God's grace, they will behold and bow before the true Christ of mercy, supremacy, and deity, to whom they cry out with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

*Recommended resource for evangelizing JW's: Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses, by Ron Rhodes.*

- Additional considerations:
  - The Watchtower adherents expect to be opposed
  - Only the Spirit of God can grant them regeneration (John 3:3-8)
  - We must engage them with the true gospel of faith alone in Christ alone
  - And we must pray