

HOW WE ARE RECONCILED TO GOD

Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

This article is prepared to assist the Christian in presenting the good news to Jehovah's Witnesses. "How We Are Reconciled to God," was selected because it represents the foundation doctrine of the Christian faith, thoroughly developed in the Scriptures (hence best defended) and is less threatening to Jehovah's Witnesses than other topics.

Realistically, one should not expect to dramatically change a Witness' thinking on this salvation issue, but you may be able to plant a seed that may grow in his heart and mind. Apart from the possibility that we might be able to influence a Witness for good we should want to share the good news with anyone and everyone not presently enjoying that precious free gift from God.

UNDERSTANDING THE WITNESS VIEWPOINT

Talking with any Witness on any Bible topic is difficult, at best, because most people do not understand their basic doctrinal concepts. One needs to know where the Witness is coming from in order to intelligently challenge him. And, we might add, the believer with only a superficial understanding of Scripture will have a difficult time with the well-trained Witness.

On the matter of how we are reconciled with God, it is necessary to know something of their convoluted view of salvation. The Witnesses teach that there are two classes of Christians with different hopes of future life.. One class is limited to 144,000 while the second class includes millions. Currently a few Witnesses claim to be of the 144,000. In 1992 there were 8,683 who publicly identified themselves as such. In the same year nearly 4.5 million Witnesses declared themselves to be of the second group. The smaller group views itself as the remaining ones of the 144,000 and claim to be sons of God with a heavenly hope. The 4.5 million Witnesses (as of 1992) are not sons of God, have no hope of heaven, but will live forever on the earth. That is their hope. So you end up with two groups of people in one fellowship all claiming to be Christians but with different hopes of life.

The Witness who calls on you is not likely to count himself among the 8,000 or so who identify themselves with the "remnant" of the 144,000 heavenly class. He will view himself as part of the "earthly class" of Jehovah's Witnesses—the larger group.

How did they arrive at this idea of two groups of believers with different relationships with God and different hopes? This radical notion was articulated by Joseph F. Rutherford, second president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, at a convention in Washington, D.C., May 31, 1935. At that time he proclaimed that chapter 7 of Revelation identified two classes of believers: the 144,000 and "the great multitude." According to Rutherford, verses 1-8 identified a heavenly class limited to 144,000 and verses 9-17 an earthly class of believers who would come out of the "great tribulation."

His view was that from A.D. 33 to A.D. 1935 the 144,000 "elect" were selected to be part of the spiritual "Israel of God"—the Christian congregation of Jesus Christ. By 1935 that calling to a heavenly hope came to an end because the 144,000 had been already selected from among mankind. Now, in 1935, a new class of Christians was being created. Those making up this class of Christians would become part of the "great multitude" and survive the end of the world which was viewed as being immediately ahead.

The identification of the "great multitude" of Revelation 7:9 *KJV* as being distinct from the body of Christ was first proposed by Rutherford's predecessor, Charles T. Russell, the founder and first president of the WBTS. Russell, taught that the "high calling" of the 144,000 members of Christ's congregation extended from A.D. 33 to A.D. 1881. In 1881, according to Russell, the opportunity to be part of the elite 144,000 came to an end.

The "great multitude" of Revelation 7:9 was said by Russell to identify a lesser class of Christians who would have heavenly life but with lesser glory than the 144,000. The "great multitude" would receive

everlasting life in heaven but they would not reign with Christ as priests and kings and would not receive immortality (self-existing life) as would the 144,000. (1 Cor. 15:53) So, from 1881 until 1935, that was what the Witnesses believed and taught. (Note: Until 1931 they called themselves International Bible Students. In 1931 they adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses.)

Both Russell and his successor Rutherford believed they were living in the "time of the end." Russell taught that the "time of the end" mentioned in the book of Daniel (8:17) began in 1799 and would conclude with the end of the world in 1914. He taught that the last 40 years of this period (1874-1914) marked a "harvest" period of approved Christians and a judgment period against nominal believers. According to Russell, Christ Jesus returned invisibly in October, 1874 to begin these judgment proceedings. The execution of this judgment would be climaxed in 1914 when the whole world would be destroyed.

1914 did not bring the end of the world as Russell predicted. His calculations regarding the "time of the end" and Christ's invisible return in October, 1874 continued to be taught until 1928. It was then decided that Christ didn't return invisibly in 1874 but 40 years later in October, 1914. What had at one time been the *concluding date* of Russell's calculations now became the *beginning date* for a new round of prophetic speculations regarding the "time of the end."

Jehovah's Witnesses continue to teach that those who witnessed the events of 1914 will not pass away until the end comes. For many years their *Awake!* magazine declared: **"this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away."** (bottom, page 4 of each issue.) Notice that they said that this was "the Creator's promise."—not theirs!

But, as of November 8, 1995, the *Awake!* magazine removed any reference to the 1914 generation and the end of the world! Now it says: **"Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things."** By this significant change they tacitly admit that yet another one of their many predictions has also been proven false. (Deut. 18:20-22)

HOW WITNESSES ARE SAVED

As previously explained only a few thousand Witnesses declare themselves born again Christians. Only these few apply to themselves the new covenant promises as they are the only ones who are in the new covenant. This means that the millions of Witnesses not in the new covenant cannot claim any of its privileges or benefits. The new covenant promise found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and repeated in Hebrews 8:7-12 is the covenant in which the Christian Church functions. To say you are a Christian and deny that you are in the new covenant is a contradiction of terms.

Not being in the new covenant means that millions of Witnesses cannot claim Jesus Christ as their mediator between themselves and God. (1 Timothy 2:5) The Witness who calls on you cannot apply to himself any of the new covenant blessings because he is not included in it. This is a critical factor you need to understand when talking with a Witness about how we are reconciled to God because **any and all Scriptures originally written to those in the new covenant cannot be used by him to define his relationship with God for the simple reason that he declares himself excluded from it!**

Their book *Insight on the Scriptures*, says the following under the subject **New Covenant**: "The parties to the new covenant are Jehovah on one side and 'the Israel of God,' the spirit-begotten ones in union with Christ, making up his congregation or body, on the other side. . . By means of Jesus' mediatorship of the new covenant, he assists those in the covenant to become part of the real seed of Abraham (Heb 2:16; Ga 3:29) through forgiveness of their sins. Jehovah declares them righteous.—Ro 5:1,2;8:33; Heb 10:16,17" —Vol.1, 1988, page 524.

Notice that application of the scriptures cited above are limited to "the Israel of God." And the Witnesses are told that only 144,000 make up "the Israel of God," and only about 8,000 Witnesses *in the world* claim to be of this number! In other words, the Witness who calls on you cannot apply any of those scriptures to

himself. This means he cannot claim to be declared righteous, his sins have not been forgiven and he is not a child of God. Those gifts are only extended to those in the new covenant. Everything said in the New Testament about becoming a son of God, passing over from death to life, being a son of Abraham, being in union with Christ, sharing in Christ's death and resurrection, being declared righteous, being born again, being joint-heirs with Christ, partaking of the bread and wine in communion with Christ and God—none of these things can be claimed by the Witness who calls on you! (see Romans 8:14-17; John 5:24; Romans 4:16,17; 5:1; 8:1,2; John 3:3,7; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

At this point you might be thinking: "How can these things be true? How could a person deny all these things and still call himself a Christian?" The answer is found in the way salvation issues are presented to the Witnesses. **They are told that their spiritual security and acceptance with God is premised on their submitting to the spiritual authority exercised through the Watchtower Society, by those who call themselves the remnant of the 144,000.**

They teach that God has always dealt with people as a group through an organization. This isn't true, of course, but they read this conclusion into certain scriptures to prove their point. The truth is that from the time of Noah God has dealt with people by means of **covenant**. (Gen. 9:8-17) A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more parties to effect a certain outcome. God made a covenant with Abraham to produce a seed or heir through whom all families of the earth were to receive a blessing. The visible sign of that enduring covenant was circumcision performed in perpetuity on the male members of Abraham's descendants. (Gen. 17:1-14) In keeping with God's directive Abraham was circumcised when he was ninety-nine years old. (Gen.17:24) The apostle Paul explains that this "sign of the covenant" was also a sign of the righteousness Abraham had as a result of faith. (Rom. 4:11; Gen. 15:1-21)

Later, God made a law covenant with Abraham's descendants after their deliverance from Egypt. This covenant was in force until the coming of Christ. Then God established the new covenant foretold in Jeremiah 31. The new covenant would work to fulfill God's covenant with Abraham, namely, that by means of his seed all families of the earth would be blessed. In Galatians the apostle Paul explains the temporary nature of the law covenant that was taken out of the way by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the same sacrifice that also inaugurated the new covenant. (Matt. 26:27,28; Gal. 3:16-29; Col. 2:13,14).

The Scriptures make it plain that God deals with his people by means of covenant. If you are not in a covenant relationship with God then you simply have no relationship with God. We see this truth illustrated in the situation the Gentiles were in during the time the state of Israel was in a covenant relationship with God. They were without God! (Eph. 2:11,12) It is the same with the new covenant. Those excluded from the new covenant are without God. Jehovah's Witnesses, we are sorry to say, argue that they are not included in the new covenant. To say this and believe it is to take yourself outside of God's saving arrangement through Jesus Christ.

You cannot accept Christ unless you accept him on the terms he is offered in Scripture and those terms are that reconciliation with God through Christ means to become a son of God. (Gal. 3:26) To enter the kingdom of God you must experience the new birth. (John 3:1-8) "Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God." —1 John 5:1 *New World Translation*. There is but one class of Christians with one hope addressed in the New Testament. (Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 2:5,9).

The Witnesses are confused and deceived on this vital matter. The Watchtower Society teaches that the seed of Abraham is made up of Jesus, as the primary seed, and 144,000 additional ones who fill out the remainder of Abraham's seed. They further argue that through this seed (1 + 144,000) all others will be blessed. The Witness who calls on you says that while he is not a part of Abraham's seed (the 144,000), he is a part of the ones to be blessed by this seed. So he feels a sense of religious security in thinking he comes under the umbrella of the Abrahamic promise—not as part of the seed but as part of the nations to be blessed by that seed. This reasoning has been created by the Watchtower Society and read into the Scriptures to support their two classes of Christians doctrine.

The apostle Paul explains in Galatians that Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, the one through

whom all families of the earth were to receive a blessing. (Gal. 3:16) However, those who put faith in Christ are baptized into Christ and become sons of God. This also results in their becoming children (seed) of Abraham due to faith. Those who are reconciled to God by means of faith are justified or declared righteous as Abraham was by his faith. It is in this way that they are part of his seed and can call him father. The apostle explains this fatherhood of Abraham of all believers in Romans 4. He concludes by saying: “He [Abraham] is the father of us all.”

So, in Galatians the apostle consistently points out that the Gentile believers were also Abraham’s seed (but not the seed of promise—only Christ fits that role). The Gentile Christians in Paul’s day were being blessed just as God promised they would be. Notice how it reads in the Watchtower’s own translation of Paul’s words: “Surely YOU know that those who adhere to faith are the sons of Abraham. Now the Scripture, seeing in advance that God would declare people of the nations righteous due to faith, declared the good news beforehand to Abraham, namely: ‘By means of you all the nations will be blessed.’ Consequently those who adhere to faith are being blessed together with faithful Abraham.” —Galatians 3:7-9 *New World Translation*.

Note carefully in the above that ones Paul was writing to were included with the “nations to be blessed” by his seed, Jesus Christ. Paul was not speaking of a different class of believers who would not show up for nearly two thousand years as the Watchtower teaches. **The blessing to the nations was already flowing to those Gentile believers.** They were being brought into the new covenant to enjoy the full benefit of what that means.

SUMMARY

The New Testament was written for, by and to the Church of Jesus Christ in the new covenant. Enforce the consequences of this truth on the next Witness who calls. Ask him how we are reconciled to God? Listen to his answer. Does he use certain scriptures in his answer? To whom were those scriptures originally addressed? Does he consider himself part of that group? If not, they cannot be used by him to explain his relationship with God. Faith in Jesus Christ leads to sonship with God. Jesus Christ only mediates for those in the new covenant. Who is his mediator? Who mediates his prayers to God? Specifically, what **relationship** does he have with God?

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