

## JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THEIR DIFFERENT GOOD NEWS

There is but one good news or gospel taught in the New Testament. Concerning that good news the apostle Paul wrote: "if we or an angel out of heaven were to declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed. As we have said above, I also now say again, Whoever it is that is declaring to you as good news something beyond what you accepted, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8, 9 *New World Translation*.) Jehovah's Witnesses have certainly gone far beyond the good news taught by Jesus and his apostles.

Defending the biblical good news is every Christian's responsibility and privilege. To assist you in doing that in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses is the purpose of this tract. The Witnesses have corrupted God's good news in two ways: (1) they limit those declared righteous (justification by faith) by God who have put faith in Jesus Christ's ransom sacrifice to a mere 144,000 and (2) they have created a different good news that the Scriptures do not teach and prevents millions of Jehovah's Witnesses from embracing the genuine good news.

Realistically, one should not expect to dramatically change a Witnesses' thinking on this salvation issue, but a seed may be planted that could later grow in his heart and mind. Apart from that possibility, we should want to share the Bible good news with everyone not presently enjoying the precious free gift of reconciliation with God as that gift is presented in Scripture.

### UNDERSTANDING THE WITNESS VIEWPOINT

Talking with the Witnesses on a Bible topic is difficult, at best, because most people do not understand their basic doctrines. One needs to know something of the Witnesses' perspective in order to effectively engage them in a productive discussion. And, we might add, the believer with only a superficial understanding of Scripture will have a difficult time with the well-trained Jehovah's Witness.

The Witnesses are taught that there are two distinct classes of Christians in their organization. These two classes of Christians do not share a common relationship with God through Christ, nor do they share a common hope. Yet, according to their view, each group is fully Christian and fully acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. At the outset, it must be pointed out that this contradicts a basic Christian tenet, namely, that Christians are "called in the *one hope* to which you were called." (Eph. 4:4 *NW*) All Christians share a common hope of future spiritual life.—1 Cor. 15

Witnesses teach that from the days of Jesus to the end of the world there will only be 144,000 born-again Christians. These are said to have a heavenly hope and will reign with Christ as kings and priests in his kingdom. The second class is an unlimited number who are given an earthly hope of life. These millions believe that the world will soon end and they will pass alive into an earthly paradise created by Christ's reign. There are only a few thousand Witnesses who claim to be one of the 144,000. In 1994 there were 8,617 who professed this claim. Only these few are allowed to take communion. Only they can claim to be sons of God and part of Abraham's seed. Only they are said to be declared righteous. Only they are truly "born again."

The remaining 4.7 million Witnesses (as of 1995), are said to have an earthly hope of life. They cannot take communion, cannot claim to be sons of God or the seed of Abraham. They cannot claim Jesus Christ as their mediator between themselves and God because they are told they are not in the new covenant. They have not experienced the new birth and cannot claim to be holy. The Witness who calls on you will be in this latter group.

How did this strange doctrinal concept get its birth? To understand this it is necessary to briefly review their history. Their religion was born in the latter part of the 19th century as an offspring of the Adventist movement. Charles T. Russell, the founder of the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, taught that two different classes of Christians were identified in chapter seven of Revelation. The 144,000 mentioned there was the literal number of those making up the Israel of God—the body of Christ, according to Russell. These would reign with Christ as kings and priests and receive the gift of immortality in heaven. The "great multitude" mentioned in this same chapter was said to be another heavenly class of Christians who do not measure up to being one

of the elite 144,000. This latter group had a hope of heaven but would not reign with Christ as kings and priests. Nor would they have immortality as do the 144,000.

Russell's teaching on this matter was linked to his many prophetic time feature speculations. Russell taught that the "time of the end" mentioned in Daniel (8:17) began in 1799 and would conclude with the end of the world in 1914. The last 40 years of this period (1874-1914) marked what he called the "harvest period" of approved Christians and an adverse judgment period against nominal Christianity. According to him, 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. He taught that the dead in Christ were resurrected in 1878.

Russell also taught that the opportunity to become one of the elite 144,000 ended in 1881. The door of opportunity to become a part of the body of Christ was forever closed in that year, according to him. After 1881, the only hope of heavenly life available was to become part of the "great multitude" mentioned in Revelation, chapter seven. The outworking of history gave the lie to Mr. Russell's different good news and his imaginative time feature speculations. Yet, the religious corporation he founded continued to hold to his errors until 1928, when a new set of time speculations were created to replace those discredited earlier.

In 1935 Russell's successor, Joseph Rutherford, changed the Witnesses' view regarding Revelation, chapter seven. At a convention in Washington, D.C. that year, Rutherford asserted that the "great multitude" identified not a heavenly scene, but an early one. Now it began to be taught that the "great multitude" were those Christians who would pass through the great tribulation and live on the earth forever.

While Russell had closed the door to being one of the 144,000 in 1881, Rutherford opened the door until 1935, when it was again asserted that the "higher calling" was now ended. It was now time (in 1935), to begin gathering in the "great multitude" who were destined to survive the end of the world which was just ahead and continue living on earth in a paradise made possible by the reign of Jesus Christ and the 144,000.

Like Russell, Rutherford tied this new teaching to new prophetic speculations. In 1928 it was decided that the "last days" hadn't started in 1799 and Christ hadn't returned invisibly in October 1874 to begin judgment proceedings against his professed followers as Russell had taught. No, Christ returned (invisibly) in October 1914. This new time frame bought Rutherford another generation of time for the Watchtower movement regarding their different good news and their speculations about the end of the world. For nearly 40 years Russell emphatically taught that the world would end in 1914. Now that year became the starting date for a new round of speculations and false hopes. What had once been the end of the last days, now became the *beginning date* for a new round of prophetic speculations regarding the "time of the end."—an easy thing to do on paper.

For decades the Watchtower Society has taught (and Jehovah's Witnesses have preached), that the world would end within the generation of those people who were alive and witnessed the events of 1914. For many years each issue of 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 this was the "*Creator's promise*"—not theirs!

Now that the 1914 generation has passed away they are beginning to reinvent their "last days" teachings once again. Beginning with the November 8, 1995 issue of *Awake!* they no longer speak of "the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away." As of November 8, 1995 that declaration has been changed to read: **"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 removing any reference to 1914 they (editorially) cut themselves free from their long-held generation of 1914 prediction.

The sad truth is that the Watchtower Society never learns and never repents of its errors. When one false

prediction fails they simply invent a new one. While they may modify their different good news from time to time they never reject it. Out of their own mouth they are clearly identified as false prophets. (Deut. 18:20-22). The enormous harm done by false predictions that discredit God and Christ and cast the Bible in repute is compounded by their destructive gospel that denies reconciliation with God through faith. In what way do they do this?

### THE DIFFERENT GOOD NEWS

As previously explained, only about 8,000 Witnesses claim to be in the new covenant mediated by Jesus Christ. The other group, while claiming to be Christians and led by God's spirit, deny they are sons of God. This denies what Paul said under inspiration: "All who are led by God's spirit, these are God's sons."—Romans 8:14 NW. When confronted with Paul's teaching that *all* those led by God's spirit are sons of God, they will say that God leads them in a different way. However, the apostle is contrasting being led by God's spirit as opposed to being led by the sinful flesh. One either obeys the sinful flesh or one obeys the spirit of God. He wrote: "For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those in accord with the spirit on the things of the spirit. For the minding of the flesh means death, but the minding of the spirit means life and peace; because the minding of the flesh means enmity with God, for it is not under subjection to the law of God, nor, in fact, can it be. So those who are in harmony with the flesh cannot please God. However, you are in harmony not with the flesh, but with the spirit, if God's spirit truly dwells in you. But if anyone does not have Christ's spirit, this one does not belong to him." (Rom. 8:5-9 NW) It is in this context that the apostle says that those who are led by God's spirit are all his sons. In other words, we are led by the sinful flesh or we are led by God's spirit. And there is but one way to be led by God's spirit and that is to resist being led by the sinful flesh. God's spirit leads everyone in the same way—in righteous attitude and conduct.

That Jehovah's Witnesses have to come up with an explanation that sets aside a clear teaching of Scripture demonstrates how destructive such sectarian teachings can be. Further, holding to such a view raises serious questions as to the validity of their claim as Christians. Being reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ is essential for salvation. As the apostle Paul said: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and it is as a free gift that they are being *declared righteous* by his undeserved kindness through the release by ransom [paid] by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23,24 NW) Being *declared righteous* results in reconciliation with God. Sinful man, by nature, is alienated from his Creator but by means of faith in Christ Jesus' human sacrifice he has his sins forgiven and this results in reconciliation with God. "For if, when we were enemies, we became *reconciled* to God through the death of his Son, much more, now that we have become *reconciled*, we shall be saved by his life."—Romans 5:10 NW.

The context in which the apostle Paul sets forth the above is in a letter addressed to "all those who are in Rome as God's beloved ones, called to be *holy ones*." (Romans 1:7) From the Witness standpoint this means that he is speaking only to those who make up spiritual Israel—the 144,000—they are the only holy ones. The letter of Romans (along with his other letters) were all written to those making up a part of spiritual Israel—the household of faith. By what authority can anyone take these promises and apply them to another group who are told they are no part of the group Paul is addressing?

An illustration may help here. You receive a beautiful, personal letter from your father confirming his love for you and explaining in great detail what he has done and will yet do to guarantee a rich inheritance for you as his beloved child. The letter is so delightful that you share its contents with a close friend. Your friend reads this letter and shares in your joy but understands the letter is not addressed to him. All the love and good things promised are addressed only to you. Your friend will not benefit. He is not your father's son. That, in essence, is the situation with millions of Jehovah's Witnesses. On one hand they are told that they are excluded from being a part of the Israel of God—the Christian congregation—but promises addressed to the Israel of God are taken out of context and applied to them in a convoluted, manmade system of religious interpretation.

An example can be given to illustrate how they do this. The book, *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*, published by the Watchtower Society in 1995, says the following under a subheading: CHRIST'S RANSOM AND YOU, "Consider three ways in which Christ's ransom sacrifice benefits you even now. First, it brings *forgiveness of sins*. Through faith in the shed blood of Jesus, we have 'the release by ransom,' yes, 'The forgiveness of our trespasses.' (Ephesians 1:7)"—page 68. The reader is the "you" in this application of Ephesians 1:7. But the "we" to whom Paul was writing were "*the holy ones* who are [in Ephesus] and faithful ones in union with Christ Jesus," according to Ephesians 1:1. Such ones were part of the Israel of God which the WT Society says is limited to 144,000. To apply the promise of the forgiveness of sins to a group Paul is not addressing is to go beyond the biblical good news. The Watchtower Society tells the Witnesses that they are excluded from being "holy ones" because they are not part of the 144,000. Then they take a promise given to the 144,000 and say it applies to them as well at the same time they are telling them that other gifts and promises in the same letter do not apply to them!

Witnesses are told (at least 99% of them) that Jesus is not their mediator. (1 Tim. 2:5) Their Bible Dictionary: *Insight on the Scriptures* (1988), under the heading: **Those for Whom Christ is Mediator**, says: "The apostle Paul declares that there is 'one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a corresponding ransom for all'—for both Jews and Gentiles. (1 Ti 2:5,6) He mediates the new covenant between God and those taken into the new covenant, the congregation of spiritual Israel. (Heb 8:10-13; 12:24; Eph 5:25-27) Christ became Mediator in order that the ones called 'might receive the promise of the everlasting inheritance' (Heb 9:15); he assists, not the angels, but 'Abraham's seed.' (Heb 2:16) He assists those who are to be brought into the new covenant to be 'adopted' into Jehovah's household of spiritual sons; these eventually will be in heaven as Christ's brothers, becoming a part with him of the seed of Abraham. (Ro 8:15-17, 23-25; Ga 3:29) He has transmitted to them the promised holy spirit, with which spirit they are sealed and are given a token of what is to come, their heavenly inheritance. (2Co 5:5; Eph 1:13,14) The total number of those who are finally and permanently sealed is revealed in Revelation 7:4-8 as 144,000."—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, page 362.

The quotation above officially excludes millions of Jehovah's Witnesses from reconciliation with God. They are told that Jesus is their high priest, however, even though they are not in the new covenant. However, Hebrews, the only letter in the New Testament that explains Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood, limits it to those in the new covenant. "For he is really not assisting angels at all, but *he is assisting Abraham's seed*. Consequently he was obliged to become like his 'brothers' in all respects, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, in order to offer propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the people."—Heb. 2:16,17 NW.

Ask the next Witness who calls on you who mediates his prayers? If he says Jesus Christ, ask him if he is in the new covenant? If he doesn't claim to be in the new covenant what covenant relationship is he in? Does he view himself as a son of God? If he is not a son, how can he speak of Jehovah God as his Father? Is he led by God's spirit? If so, how can he deny being a sons of God when the apostle Paul said "For *all* who are led by God's spirit, these are sons of God."—Romans 8:14 NW.

published by  
**CHRISTIAN RESPONDENT, INC.**  
 Route 2, Box 932  
 Aitkin, MN 56431