

Understanding the Jehovah's Witnesses

It is sometimes shocking to find out what people believe about Christ. Most cults and false religions see him as either a very good person, or that He was a prophet, or even that He was the Son of God. None of these are necessarily wrong, however, they fall short of the true identity of our Lord. Jesus himself made the exclusive claim that salvation is only possible through him. He did so by claiming that He and the Father were one. This is to say that Jesus of Nazareth and God the Father are equal in importance. Simply stated, Christ Jesus did claim to be God.

In many ways Christians find themselves in the midst of a fierce battle, i.e. the battle for the deity of Jesus Christ. In order to prove the deity of our Lord, we will have a look at the Bible's interpretation of the person of Christ. In doing so, it should become evident that He possessed the attributes of the living God. We will also look at some of Christ's claims regarding himself. The Gospels are replete of evidence that Christ claimed to be God. Not only did He claim to be God, but He also proved that He was God through the many miraculous deeds done by him during his time on earth. The resurrection being not the least of these. It would become obvious that these findings are in direct opposition to any cult or false religion that does not believe that Jesus is God.

The Incarnation of Christ

In order to understand who Christ truly was, it is necessary to first have a look at who God truly is. The Bible makes no secret of the fact that Christ was God in the flesh and therefore we will do well if we do an analysis of God's attributes. Historically, the attributes of God have been placed in two categories. Typically, theologians speak of the communicable and the incommunicable attributes of God. The communicable attributes of God are defined as those attributes which makes us similar to God. These are the attributes that God has communicated unto us. This is to say that we understand these attributes since we possess them as human beings. The incommunicable attributes, however, are those attributes that God does not share with human beings. Examples of these would be the fact that God knows everything, or that He is present everywhere at the same time. These two examples are only a few of the incommunicable attributes of God. As an infinite being God is very different from us, but also similar to us since we were created in his likeness.

The Incommunicable Attributes of God

According to theologian, Wayne Grudem, the incommunicable attributes of God are often the most easily misunderstood attributes of God. The reason he offers for this is that these attributes represent aspects of God's character that are least familiar to our experience as human beings¹. We will only look at a selected few.

Independence

Grudem defines God's independence as follows: "God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation glorify him and bring him joy." God in this sense is seen as self-existent. This is a reference to his "aseity." This word is derived from the Latin words "a se" meaning "from himself."²

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 160.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 160.

Omnipotence

To be omnipotent means that God is all-powerful. God is described in the Bible as the “almighty.” Robert Culver reminds us about the usage of this word in the New Testament. The term “pantokrator” appears nine times in the New Testament where it is usually used in the context of the eschatological final judgment.³ The theological doctrine simply boils down to the fact that God is able to do anything as an expression of his power. These acts of power do not by any means diminish his strength in any way since it remains at a constant value. Culver explains this in the following way:

“We say that God is able to do all things that are ‘objects of power,’ inasmuch as such things as the multiplication table, the law of non-contradiction and such other abstractions are not objects amenable to or commensurate with power. Power has nothing to do with them. Legislators and kings neither originated them nor control them. God created the world in harmony with his own reasonable nature. A world where there were several contradictory multiplication tables would not be ‘heaven and earth’ but hell - not universe, but chaos. A theologian’s professional joke runs: ‘If ever you should meet an angel who tells you $3+4 = 8$, he will certainly have soot on his wings!’ Per contra, in my files is a pastor’s Christmas letter in which he asserts that the Trinity is an example of God’s ability to break mathematical laws, because he is both one and three!”⁴

Omnipresence

God is also, by nature, omnipresent. Since He is all-powerful, He can only be so if He is everywhere at the same time. Grudem says that as God is unlimited or infinite with respect to time, He is also unlimited with respect to space. This has been historically referred to as God’s omnipresence. The prefix of the word is from the Latin “omni” meaning “all.” Grudem proceeds by providing a formal definition for the term. To him, God’s omnipresence refers to the fact that “God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.”⁵ Throughout the ages theologians have always had difficulty to formulate God’s omnipresence.

However, to simplify matters, when we speak of God’s omnipresence, we speak of the simple reality that God is everywhere at the same time. God certainly is everywhere at the same time, in every part of space, looking at the internal evidence of the Word of God. The Lord himself says the following: “I am a God at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off. Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and Earth? says the Lord” (Jer. 23:24). In this instance God shows the prophets that nothing they may say or do can be hidden from his presence. He is the God who is always aware of the deeds of men.

Omniscience

The last communicable attribute of God that we will look at is his omniscience. This term refers to God’s awareness in creation. Culver says that “God has perfect, immediate, knowledge of all events and things, whether actual or conditional upon the acts of ‘free’ beings; whether the events or things are only possible or actual; and whether they are past, present or future.”⁶ According to this definition then, God knows everything that there is to know. He knows all things perfectly. Compared to human beings we only know partially, but God has full knowledge of every possible event or topic.

³ D. Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 90.

⁴ R.D. Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical*, 90.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 160.

⁶ R.D. Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical*, 90

Christ is Equal to God

Jesus shared these attributes with God. Based on his own confession, Jesus said quite emphatically that He is one with the Father (Jn. 10:30). The credibility of Christ as Saviour to the world is thus authenticated by the fact that He is equal to the Father. We will now have a look at some of the evidence for this.

It is important to know that Christ existed in the form of God before He became a man. This forms one of the key arguments that Paul offers for the impeccability of Jesus.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁷

Commenting on these verses, R.M. Bowman and J. Komoszewski reminds us of the fact that Paul makes the case for the pre-existence, or the self-existence of Christ before He became a man.⁸ As a result of his becoming man He had to “empty” himself when He was born as a man (vs. 7).

However, the incarnation of Christ, realistically speaking, remains a mystery. One cannot even start to explain how an infinite, self-existent, omniscient, omnipresent being like God can place himself within the confines of a human body.

In an interview with D.A. Carson, Lee Strobel agrees with him that the incarnation of Christ is a “mind boggling” concept. The two agree that the Bible makes no secret of the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament testifies strongly to the fact that every attribute of God is found in Jesus Christ. To this end, Strobel offers a list of Christ's attributes as laid out in the New Testament:

“Omniscience? In John 16:30 the apostle John affirms of Jesus, ‘Now we can see that you know all things.’ Omnipresence? Jesus said in Matthew 28:20, ‘Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’ and in Matthew 18:20, ‘Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.’ Omnipotence? ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,’ Jesus said in Matthew 28:18. Eternality? John 1:1 declares of Jesus, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.’ Immutability? Hebrews 13:8 says, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’”⁹

In addition, Strobel makes the point that many of the Old Testament terms for God are applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Terms such as ‘Alpha and Omega,’ ‘Lord,’ ‘Savior,’ ‘King,’ ‘Judge,’ ‘Light,’ ‘Rock,’ ‘Redeemer,’ ‘Shepherd,’ ‘Creator,’ ‘giver of life,’ ‘forgiver of sin,’ and ‘speaker with divine authority’ are some of the additional attributes Jesus shares with God. Strobel marvels at the fact that every one of these is applied to Jesus in the New Testament.

Clearly, the Bible is not undecided with regards to the deity of Jesus Christ. Book after book, verse after verse, the Bible remains consistent in its description of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, anyone who accepts the Bible as God's revealed Word to the world has to admit that Christ was indeed God, and this was the Lord's claim about himself.

⁷ Phillipians 2:5-11

⁸ R.M. Bowman, Jr., J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus In His Place* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 82.

⁹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 169.

Christ's View of Himself

The New Testament makes no secret of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is God. It can be said that although it might not call Jesus God, the way it speaks of Jesus amounts to claiming that He is God. Referring to the Gospel of John for example, we find three passages in which *Jesus claims to be God*.

The first of these is found in John 5 where Christ healed a man who had been paralysed for 38 years. In verse 8 Jesus tells this man to “get up, take up your bed, and walk.” In verse 9 we learn that this man was healed instantaneously by Jesus.

It is through Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees that we get valuable information regarding his own view concerning himself. The Jews had a twofold problem with Jesus' healing of this man: Firstly, Jesus managed to heal a man by just speaking the words. This is something that has never been seen or experienced before until the coming of Christ Jesus. Secondly, Jesus was healing on the Sabbath day. After Jesus had withdrawn because He saw that a crowd was gathering, the Jews asked the man who it was that healed him (v. 12). A few verses later we learn that the Jews wanted to persecute Jesus because He healed this man on the Sabbath day. It is however in verse 17 that Jesus tells them that He has the authority to do what He did for the man since He and the Father are equal. He said “my father is working until now, and I am working.” Through this statement Jesus was basically declaring himself to be God. Evidently the Jews understood him to be claiming this and this we can see in their response. John says that this is the reason why the Jews sought to kill him because “not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (v. 18). John Fienberg comments on Jesus words in verse 17, saying:

“This made the situation worse, for his accusers understood Jesus to be calling himself God's son and making himself equal with God (v. 18). If Jesus meant that he was God's son in the sense that angels or humans were called sons of God, that would not have merited the charge of blasphemy. But as his accusers complained, Jesus was making himself equal to God, and he never denied their charge, for that was exactly what he meant.”¹⁰

In John chapter 8 we find Jesus claiming to be God as He did in the previous example. In verse 58 Christ said, “truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” What was Christ saying through these words? The answer is self-evident. He was telling them once again that He was God and that He was equal to Father. Again, they became infuriated to the point of stoning him. The phrase that Jesus used here is not up for discussion as might be the case with verse 24 and 28. According to Carson, the Greek term “ego eimi” must be taken absolutely in this instance. In addition, he remarks:

“The strong linguistic connections with Isaiah 40 to 55 are supported by obvious conceptual links: ‘I, the Lord – with the first of them and with the last – I am he’ (Is. 41:4); ‘Yes, and from ancient days I am he’ (Is. 43:13). Cf. Ps. 90:2. That the Jews take up stones to kill him presupposes that they understand these words as some kind of blasphemous claim to deity. Nevertheless, as in 1:1, so here: neither the Word nor the Son is so identified with God that there is no remainder.”¹¹

In other words, the Jews interpreted Christ correctly when He made this statement about his eternal existence. Although a difficult concept, Jesus merely sought to define his identity, i.e. God in the flesh. Regarding this claim of our Lord, Gerald Borchert emphasises:

“That claim was a reminder of the claims for God in the Old Testament over against creation (cf. Ps. 90:2; Isa 42:3-9) and of the self-designation for the comforting God of Isaiah (41:4; 43:3, 13). The claim of Jesus, therefore, was clearly recognized from the Jews' perspective to be a blasphemous statement

¹⁰ John S. Feinberg, *No one Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 458.

¹¹ D.A Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 358.

they could not tolerate. Accordingly, they again made their judgment call, and their verdict implied this by stoning (John 8:59; cf. Lev. 24:11-16; 1 Kgs. 21:10-13).”¹²

We will look at one more example from John's Gospel. We find this in chapter 10 where Christ explains to the people that He is the Good Shepherd. Here Jesus uses a farming illustration to explain to the people that He is the one who looks after his sheep. In verse 22 Jesus makes his way to the Temple and shortly after He entered, He was asked by the Jews whether He truly was the Christ or not (v. 24). They even say that they want to know plainly from his own mouth. So, Jesus proceeds by telling them who He truly was. Christ then explains who He is by saying that He gives eternal life to people (v. 28), and that He and the Father are one (v. 30). At this point the Jews become so infuriated that they get themselves ready to stone him.

The Early Church's View of Christ

A final line of defence supporting the deity of Jesus Christ is found in the view of the people who Christ ministered to. They were the ones who saw his deeds: The blind, the lame, the deaf, and the lepers, but also those who witnessed these events. We understand that these people saw Christ as equal to God in that they offered him worship, and Jesus does not rebuke them.

If indeed He truly was God in the flesh, then He would deserve such worship. However, if He was a mere man, He would not have deserved their worship and would probably have told them to stop. Again, Fienberg reminds us of the various passages in which Christ did not refuse the worship of the people. We not only see that Christ does not hinder them from doing this, but also that He encourages such worship. This is clearly seen in passages such as Matthew 15:25-28; 28:9-10 and John 9:35-39.¹³ Fienberg continues to prove to us how Christ warned those who did not want to worship: “In fact, Jesus even said (John 5:23) that those who do not honour the Son do not honour the Father who sent him, so those who think it is appropriate to worship the Father and ignore the Son are severely mistaken.”¹⁴

The fact that Christ referred to himself in phrases that are only suitable for God should be reason enough for us to worship him as God. The fact that the people who saw Jesus offered worship to him should spur us to do the same. In this fashion I offer one more line of defence for the deity of Jesus Christ. We find this in the Christian church's view of those who had a skewed understanding regarding the identity of Christ. These views are in clear violation of the apostolic tradition.

The Post-Apostolic Church's View of Christ

We will now look at the way the Post-Apostolic Church viewed the person of Christ. Church History is certainly not the primary evidence for the deity of Christ, but it does help to know that it affirms it.

The Council of Nicaea – A.D. 325

This Council was an ecumenical gathering that addressed the situation of the Church after the persecution of the Church at large. One of the main purposes was to gain clarity concerning the Arian controversy. This Council was called by the Emperor Constantine in which bishops from the East along with a few from the West took part. S.W. Chung describes one of its outcomes in the following manner:

“The Council established regulations for the life of the Church following the cessation of persecution. It also rejected Arianism when it condemned the teaching that the Word of God or Son of God was a creature or any less divine than the Father. It declared that Christ was of one substance (homoousios)

¹² Gerald L. Borchert. *The New American Commentary: John 1-11* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 309.

¹³ John S. Feinberg, *No one Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, 458.

¹⁴ John S. Feinberg, *No one Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, 458.

with God the Father. This statement became a crucial element of the Nicene Creed and a hallmark of Nicene orthodoxy in both East and West.”¹⁵

From this the Council of Nicaea condemned the Arian misinterpretation of Jesus Christ's identity. This finding is in unison with the New Testament teaching of the person of Christ.

A word must be said regarding Arius. Although he felt like he could not believe in Christ as eternally begotten, he was compelled to accept him as a supernatural being, although he viewed Christ as being somewhat lower than the Father.¹⁶ The issue may have been settled at this point but it could not prevent any misinterpretations from occurring in the future.

The Council of Constantinople – A.D. 381

This council is somewhat repetitive in that here the findings of the Council of Nicaea were reaffirmed. The findings were in unison with the apostolic tradition which taught that Christ was of the same substance as the Father. The heresy that the Church was fighting at this stage was Apollinarianism. In the event of condemning Apollinaris' false teaching, the Church stressed the humanity and the divinity of Christ. This council gave rise to the compilation of the Nicene Creed which was later improved and expanded.¹⁷

H.O.J. Brown explains what heresy was being committed by Apollinaris. According to him the view of Apollinaris, like Arius, was naive. To Arius it was the view that the Son was begotten, but to Apollinaris it was the view that Christ is God, a view that he elaborated to the point of threatening another major element of Christian doctrine. Brown says the following regarding Apollinaris:

“Like the Arian controversy, the Christological controversy sparked by Apollinaris began and ended in the East but was decisively influenced by a clear stand taken by the Western church, particularly by Rome. Apollinaris, unlike Arius, A firmly established Christological dogma to which he could appeal, that of Nicaea; the Antiochenes, who stressed - correctly, as we believe - the full and complete humanity of Jesus Christ, had no leader of the caliber of Athanasius around whom they could rally. Although Apollinaris was defeated, the Antiochene position was not fully vindicated; its clearest exponent, Nestorius, will ultimately be rendered a heretic, and the ultimate solution, although not Apollinarian, will continue to reflect the influence of Apollinaris in a way that far exceeds any ongoing influence of Arius was in the main body of orthodoxy.”¹⁸

In effect, Apollinaris rejected the proposition that Jesus possessed a human personality. He opposed the idea that Christ was a man united with God. He rather proposed that Jesus was not a man but only God in the flesh. He took his belief a step further saying that Jesus must have been of “heavenly flesh” since it appears blasphemous to suggest that God can be synonymous with weak, passible, sinful, human flesh. Brown says that Apollinaris' view is subject to the same criticism that is made of Arianism: “Instead of a Christ who is both God and man, it confronts us with a remarkable composite figure who is neither God nor man, but a combination.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Sung Wook Chung, *Christ The One and Only* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 12

¹⁶ Brown draws a distinction between ancient heresies and modern heresies. According to him Arianism differs from most modern heresies in that “moderns who deny the deity of Christ seldom Paul's in a kind of middle position like that of Arius, but usually drop down to an adoptionist or even overview of the Savior. He says that “generalizations are dangerous, but we may say that most ancient heresies were characterized by variant belief; most modern ones, by unbelief, or at least by uncertainty about what to believe. Variant beliefs, strongly held, are common in the modern era, but they are usually held by those who stand beyond the limits of formal Christianity, such as Jehovah's witnesses.” H.O.J. Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 105

¹⁷ Sung Wook Chung, *Christ The One and Only*, 12.

¹⁸ H.O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, 105

¹⁹ H.O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, 164

The Council of Chelcedon – A.D. 451

This council attempted to settle early controversies regarding the person of Christ. It is valuable to Christian history in that it produced a “Definition of Faith.” This definition declared that there are “two natures in one person” in Christ. The view of Tertullian was echoed by this definition. By this they did not seek to define how the two natures can be united in one person, but rather rejected all explanations that caused trouble in the Church earlier on. By this definition Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism were some of the heresies that were rejected. Nestorius, though warning against making the Virgin Mary into goddess, is branded a heretic by this council. To him speaking of Mary as “bearing God” seems to imply that Jesus was not a true man. Willing as he may have been to say that Jesus is God, he was reluctant to say that “God is born.” To do so implied in his mind that Jesus was not a true man. One can only say that “God and man are born.”²⁰ Nestorius largely neglected the pre-existence of the second person of the Trinity, which is an essential doctrine of the Scriptures.

Interpreting John 1:1

Incorrect Grammar

The Jehovah's Witnesses religion as a system relies heavily on their interpretation of John 1:1. The whole system is built upon the assumption that the traditional view of the doctrine of the Trinity is faulty. According to them the Trinity is not a true doctrine taught in the Bible. They believe with much assurance that the doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere mentioned in Scripture, let alone taught. The doctrine in its essence is seen as contradictory to the prophets, the apostles, what the early Christians believed, and even that which Christ Jesus himself taught. Christians are viewed as worshiping three gods, a practice that is believed to have its origin in Satan himself.²¹ According to this view of the Trinity, Christ is seen as only a created being or as the angels of heaven. Jesus is seen as the most important angel, since he is seen to have been Michael the Archangel before becoming a man.

John 1:1 is one of the popular passages in refuting the traditional view of the Trinity. Duane Magnani explains: “At John 1:1 the Society’s New World Translation reads, ‘In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.’ ‘A god’ yes, suddenly the seemingly insignificant article ‘a’ takes on new relevance. The little addition ‘a,’ makes John to say that Jesus was ‘a god,’ a second, though inferior deity, and distinct from ‘the God.’ Such an interpretation forces the apostle to polytheism,…”²²

As Christians we should be good Bereans and make sure that we understand John's true intent in the first chapter of his gospel. It has to be understood that the true interpretation will only become evident if we view the message in the original language, it was written in to its audience. In essence the true answer lies hidden within the principles and rules of Greek grammar. Mounce offers valuable insight relating to the correct interpretation of this verse. He says the following:

“Its lack of a definite article keeps us from identifying the person of the Word (Jesus Christ) with the person of ‘God’ (the Father). That is to say, the word order tells us that Jesus Christ has all the divine attributes that the Father has; lack of the article tells us that Jesus Christ is not the Father. John’s wording here is beautifully compact! It is, in fact, one of the most elegantly terse theological statements one could ever find. As Martin Luther said, the lack of an article is against Sabellianism; the word order is against Arianism.”²³

²⁰ H.O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, 173.

²¹ H. Wayne House, *Charts of Cults, Sects, and Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 152-153

²² Duane Magnani, *The Watchtower Files* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 186.

²³ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 28

In other words, it is fallacious to interpret John 1:1 as teaching that Jesus Christ is one and the same person as the Father, or to say that that he is of lesser substance than the Father. What Mounce is saying is that the absence of the article for the noun referring to “God” keeps us from interpreting John as saying that Jesus and God the Father is the same person. The word order prevents us from interpreting John to be saying that Christ Jesus is of “lesser nature” than God the Father. Mounce explains further by saying that John employs this usage to stress the fact that the Word was indeed GOD. Another way of saying this is, “what God was, the Word was.” John is emphasizing the fact that the “Word” is equal to the divine Father.

Wrong Theology

Faulty grammar set aside, the Jehovah's Witnesses commit the grave error of allowing for other “gods.” The Bible clearly teaches that God is a jealous God (Ex. 20: 4-5) and that he will not be worshiped along with other gods. He reserves the exclusive right to be worshiped alone. This ultimately becomes the second fundamental error of the Jehovah's Witness system. A.A. Hoekema explained it in the following way:

“By way of refutation, it should be observed, first, that Jehovah’s Witnesses thus take a polytheistic position, affirming that there exists, besides Jehovah God, someone who is a lesser god. This position is, however, in direct conflict with Scripture, which affirms in Deuteronomy 4:35, ‘You have been shown, so as to know that Jehovah is the [true] God; there is no other besides him’ (NWT); and in 1 Corinthians 8:4, ‘We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one’ (NWT). How, then, can the Witnesses affirm that Jesus Christ is a god? To be sure, the New Testament does occasionally speak of gods other than Jehovah, but then only in the sense of false gods.”²⁴

Hoekema proceeds by giving more New Testament examples of the refutation of the existence of any other gods apart from God. When the New Testament speaks about ‘gods’ it is always talking about false gods who should not be worshiped (Gal 4:8). He says that “by calling Jesus Christ a god, therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses are actually making themselves guilty of idolatry and polytheism.”²⁵

How to Approach Jehovah’s Witnesses?

To have a good basic understanding of the Jehovah's Witnesses system is imperative when one has the opportunity to converse with them. However, this will only be effective if one has a solid understanding of how to approach someone caught up in this cult.

A good place to start is to challenge them on the basis of their assurance of salvation. As Jehovah’s Witnesses are quite unlikely to admit that they do not believe in Christ, they might be prone to believe that faith is not enough to be saved. Lewis tells us that we can be forthright in our approach and ask them openly: “Do you depend upon some achievements of your own to contribute to justification or is it only by God's grace through faith?”²⁶

Lewis reminds us of the fact that the New World Translation of Ephesians 2:8-10 explicitly states that salvation is not something we can work for. Only God is the one who is able to produce salvation in the person through faith. Therefore, even the bearing of fruit must be seen as the work of God in someone's life. We are seen as righteous before God not because of anything that we did, but because Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness. Jehovah’s Witnesses do not live in light of this truth. Lewis proceeds by explaining why: “In spite of the clarity and force of this truth in the Bible, Jehovah’s Witnesses live in fear of losing their justification before God on the basis of their works. At any time,

²⁴ A.A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1963), 332-333.

²⁵ A.A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*, 332-333.

²⁶ 6 Gordon R. Lewis, *Confronting the Cults* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1990), 36

they may be excommunicated from the society. They are thereby excluded from preservation through the battle of Armageddon and from the kingdom of Jehovah.”

For the rest of this section we will focus on Ron Rhodes’s approach to effective evangelizing of Jehovah’s Witnesses. In his book “Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses” Rhodes offers the following practical advice for interacting with Jehovah’s Witnesses:

1. Do identify with the Jehovah's Witness
2. Do labour persistently with the Jehovah's Witness
3. Do exhaust every effort to answer the questions of Jehovah’s Witnesses
4. Do allow the Jehovah’s Witness to save face
5. Don’t approach a Jehovah's Witness with a spiritual chip on your shoulder
6. Don’t lose your patience, regardless of how dense you may think the Jehovah's Witness is

Let us have a look at what he means by these:

1. *Do identify with the Jehovah's Witness*

What he means by this is that we should approach Jehovah's Witnesses as we should any other person, with respect. We must always remember that they are people before they are cultists says Rhodes: “They have families, they have children, they have needs, they have frustrations and fears, and they are brothers and sisters in Adam, though not in Christ.”²⁷ We should never see them as anything else, because we were also lost before Christ revealed himself to us.

2. *Do labour persistently with the Jehovah's Witness*

We need to not lose heart whenever we interact with Jehovah's Witnesses. We need to persevere until they tell us they have heard enough. We must always remember that God's Word will not return to him void (Is. 55:11). Let us also remember Hebrews 4:12 that says, “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Although it is not always easy to labour persistently with Jehovah's Witnesses, we have to be diligent in guiding them to a true understanding of the Bible.

3. *Do exhaust every effort to answer the questions of Jehovah’s Witnesses*

Sometimes we might be tempted to approach reaching Jehovah's Witnesses in a half-hearted fashion. This should however not be the case. We must strive to answer every question and do so accurately. Of course, it is sometimes difficult to answer their questions. In such cases we simply have to request from the Jehovah’s Witness if we may research the question and get back to him with an answer.

4. *Do allow the Jehovah’s Witness to save face*

When we get to the point of winning the argument with the Jehovah's Witness, we have to allow him to recover. There is no need to undermine somebody through our words. The best we can do after winning an argument is to show him that we truly care for him. We can do this by ensuring him that we know he is being sincere in his approach, and that his goal is to understand the Bible too. By doing this we are “disarming” the situation and showing him that we have the gentleness of Christ. We might even be pleasantly surprised at his response when he experiences our sincerity towards him. Even if he does not want to change there and then, one would still have an open channel of communication with him.

²⁷ Ron Rhodes, Reasoning from the Scriptures with Jehovah’s Witnesses (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 404.

5. Don't approach a Jehovah's Witness with a spiritual chip on your shoulder

In this instance it might be possible to look down upon a Jehovah's Witness instead of conversing with him. We have to make every effort to remain humble in our approach, and not come across as being superior.

6. Don't lose your patience, regardless of how dense you may think the Jehovah's Witness is

Lastly, any battle can be lost in a moment of rage. We have to focus on not getting upset whenever we converse with a Jehovah's Witness. Even if he might not see the proof which is right before his eyes, we should not react in any way that would cause us to lose our testimony. Rhodes says the following:

“If you should lose your patience and raise your voice at the Jehovah's Witness, the likelihood is that the Witness will not come to your house again. This is something you don't want to happen. After all, it may take multiple exposures to the truth before the Jehovah's Witness comes to see that the Watchtower Society led him astray. You need to maintain a witnessing environment such that the Witness will feel free to stop by your house without fearing a verbal assault.”²⁸

Conclusion

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. This belief is based on various deductions from the words of Christ, as well as one major grammatical issue found in John chapter 1. The deity of Christ is seen as polytheism. On closer observation however, the Bible does in fact teach that Jesus was God in the flesh. The advent of Christ is the witnessing of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, namely the Word. It is important to be familiar with the issues that were explained when we engage in discussion with Jehovah's Witnesses. Whenever the occasion does arise, let us remember to be loving in our approach, not attacking the person, but critiquing the system fairly and kindly.

²⁸ Ron Rhodes, Reasoning from the Scriptures with Jehovah's Witnesses, 404