

An Open Letter to a Jehovah's Witness

Recently, I received a letter from a person I had never heard of before. The person's initials were M.S., and the envelope contained a booklet from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society entitled "You Can Be God's Friend!" Written across the top were the words "Hope you read this!" Well, I've read it, and now it's time for a few comments. If M.S. would like to respond, I would be glad to respond to the response.

The booklet opens with the words, "God wants you to be his friend." Now this is definitely the kind of thing most people really want to hear. It's kind of nice to imagine God running after you, offering you all sorts of benefits if only you will consent to be his friend, isn't it? Well, I don't call it "nice." I call it arrogant. I call it the fulfillment of Satan's original lie, "*you shall be as God*" (*Genesis 3:5*). In particular, I notice that you have not provided a single Scripture reference to back up this claim that God wants to be the reader's friend. On the other hand, Scripture clearly testifies that there are plenty of people whom God does *not* want as friends: Romans 9:13 says that God hated Esau; Psalm 5:5 says that God hates all *workers* of iniquity (not merely the *works*); Exodus 9:12 & 16 tell us that God raised Pharaoh to power and hardened his heart in order to destroy him. And in Matthew 23, Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites (several times), a brood of vipers, children of the devil, and whitewashed tombs (clean and beautiful to outward appearance, but inwardly full of death). Apparently, Jesus didn't want the Pharisees to be his friends.

For this reason, I have to take issue with another very popular statement on page 16: "You can recognize true religion by watching the people who practice it." [1] Had you been watching the Pharisees, however, you would have seen some people who appeared to be exceedingly good people. They went to church every single Sabbath day. They strictly observed the laws regarding tithing, diet, sacrifices and offerings, circumcision, fasting, and prayer. They strictly refrained from drunkenness, idolatry, and fornication. They were hardworking, zealous, and devout. (Presumably, they even refrained from smoking.) By every observable standard, they were decent, moral, God-fearing folks. Yet, as we have seen, God did not desire to have most of them as his friends.

It is true that there are certain people whom God desires as friends. But, contrary to what the booklet says on page 5, we do not become God's friend merely by learning about him, nor even by addressing him by his first name. Isaiah 65:1 says, "*I have been sought, not by those who asked. I have been found, not by those who sought Me. To a nation not calling on My name, I said, Behold Me! Behold Me!*" By nature, no one wants to be the friend of God (Romans 3:9-22); by nature, all people are enemies of God (Ephesians 2:1-3). Those whom God desires as friends, he draws to himself, not by pleading and begging, but by his own sovereign power (Psalm 110:3, Proverbs 21:1, John 6:40 & 44). Salvation is not for the convenience of man; it is for the glory of God. Salvation is "*not of the [one] willing, nor of the [one] running, but of the [One] showing mercy, of God*" (*Romans 9:16*). It is God and God alone who causes a person to become his friend by causing that person to believe the Gospel.

The Gospel is *Good News*. It is God's promise of forgiveness of sin, fellowship with himself, and

eternal glory in heaven, based exclusively on the blood that Jesus Christ poured out and the righteousness that he established. It is Good News because it means that God has provided for the forgiveness of the sins of his people. It is Good News because it means that God doesn't merely ignore the sins of his people; he causes them to be *paid for*. It is Good News because, even while paying for the sins of his people, God himself remains just, holy, and righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says: "*For He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin for us, that we might become [the] righteousness of God in Him.*" This verse makes it clear that in dying on the cross, the sins of the people of God were charged to the account of Jesus Christ, and he paid the full penalty which they deserved. Conversely, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is charged to the account of every Christian, everyone who believes God's promise, making him as holy and blameless as Jesus Christ himself. In this way, God remains just while being the Justifier of him who has faith in Jesus (Isaiah 45:21, Romans 3: 26).

God is an infinite God and an infinitely *righteous* God. Therefore, all sin is an infinite offense to him (Exodus 20:5, Habakkuk 1:13). Therefore, any sacrifice that is intended to atone for sin must be an *infinite* sacrifice. Anything less would be insufficient to turn away God's wrath against the sins of his people. It is *only* as Jesus Christ partakes of the two natures, human and divine, that he is able to become the Mediator between God and Man (Job 9:33; Hebrews 2:17), able to "lay his hand" upon both at once. Therefore, the Gospel absolutely requires that Jesus Christ not only be a real human being but also be *God incarnate*, God in the flesh.

On page 15, this booklet teaches that "Before he lived as a man on earth, Jesus lived in heaven as a mighty spirit creature. (John 17:5)" The idea that Jesus was merely a "creature" and did not fully partake of the divine nature utterly destroys the Gospel. [2] It means that Jesus could not have fully atoned for the sins of his people, because he, as a finite creature, would not have had enough merit to pay for the infinite demerit of sin.

The fact that Jesus is more than a mere "creature" is inferred from the following facts:

1. Several titles applied to Jesus Christ. Jesus is called "Lord", by Thomas and Stephen (John 20: 28, Acts 7:59-60), and Christians must confess Jesus as "Lord" (Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12: 3). The Greek word here translated "Lord" is *kurios*, which is the word used to translate "Jehovah" in the Greek version of the Old Testament.

Similarly, Jesus is called "Immanuel" (Matthew 1:23), which means "God with us." And in Revelation 22:13, Jesus is called "the first and the last," a title that is given to Jehovah God in Isaiah 44:6. None of these titles could be given to a mere creature.

2. *Several attributes of Jesus Christ.* Jesus is described as all-knowing (John 1:48; 2:25; 6:64; 16:30; 21:17), all-powerful (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1:3), eternal (Micah 5:2), and unchanging (Hebrews 13:8). And Colossians 2:9 states that in Jesus Christ “all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily.” (NWT). None of these things can be said of a mere creature.

3. *Several works of Jesus Christ.* Jesus has the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7; Luke 5:24; Ephesians 1:7), control nature (Matthew 8:26), give eternal life (John 10:28; 17:2), and judge the world (John 5:22 & 27). None of these things can be done by a mere creature.

4. *Jesus Christ received worship.* Jesus received worship from men (Matthew 14:33; John 9:38) and angels (Hebrews 1:6, Revelation 5:11-13). Yet worship is due to God alone (Exodus 34:14; Acts 14:11-18; Romans 1:24-25; Revelation 19:10). Jesus himself even taught this (Matthew 4:10; John 4:23). No mere creature can legitimately receive worship.

5. *The Patriarchs and Prophets expected a Messiah who would also be Jehovah.* The Messiah was expected to be not only David's son, but his Lord as well (Psalm 110:1). Job said “*For I know my Redeemer [is] living, and He shall rise on the earth at the last; and after my skin has been struck off from my flesh, yet this, I shall see God*” (Job 19:25-26). John wrote of Jesus in John 12:37-41 that Isaiah “*saw His glory, and spoke about Him.*” (cf. Isaiah 6:1-5). The Patriarchs and Prophets did not expect that the Messiah would be a mere creature.

Finally, there is Revelation 1: 11-18. In this section, John sees a vision of a person who clearly identifies himself as Jehovah God (vss. 11,14,17). He also has the appearance of a “Son of Man” (v. 13). But this person goes on to say, in v. 18, “I became dead.” So how could Jehovah God die? The only possible explanation is that Jehovah God died on a Roman cross, just outside Jerusalem.

The last problem with this booklet is found on page 19. Under the heading “False religion teaches that the wicked will suffer in hellfire,” we read the following: “Would a loving God torment people forever? Of course not!” This sentiment is extremely popular because it betrays a *fatal* ignorance of the infinite heinousness of sin. Anyone who makes such a statement obviously has no knowledge of the infinite glory of God or the infinite punishment that any sin against him deserves.

God is indeed a God of love (1 John 4:7-8). And first and foremost, God loves his own righteousness and his own glory (Numbers 14:15-21; 2 Samuel 7: 23; Isaiah 42:8; John 12:27-28; Romans 9:22-23; Ephesians 2:12). Therefore, it is absolutely essential that God display his infinite love for his own glory by punishing those who violate his glory with a punishment equal to the crime they have committed. If God were to treat such rebels against his glory with any punishment that was less than infinite, he would effectively be saying that he did not love his glory or his righteousness or that his glory was less than infinite. Any of these options is blasphemy. The teaching that souls do not suffer eternally in hell dismisses the seriousness of sin and dismisses the righteousness of God.

I hope you can see why I oppose the doctrines taught in this booklet. They blaspheme God, spit in the face of his only begotten Son, and make a mockery of his holiness, righteousness and justice. Anyone who believes these doctrines is obviously lost. I exhort you to repent of this blasphemy and believe the Gospel – the Gospel that glorifies God, the God who is, above all, a Just God and a Savior (Isaiah 45:21).

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Endnotes

[1] If the pictures in this booklet are to be believed, you can also distinguish true religion by the clothes that are worn. Men have pressed and pleated suits with ties and neat haircuts. Women have pretty dresses and nicely set hair. The wicked, on the other hand, have rumpled clothes and messed-up hair. (One wonders how Paul and Silas must have looked after several days in jail - Acts 17:24.) The “wicked” men have a heavy five o’clock shadow, most of them smoke, and several of them even wear (gasp!) glasses. And they *never* smile. This kind of malarkey is so obviously unscriptural that it is hard to examine it with a straight face. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Jesus had no beauty that we should desire him (Isaiah 53:2), but Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

[2] In Appendix A (below), I have dealt with some verses from the *New World Translation* that oppose the teaching of the deity of Jesus Christ.

Appendix A: Some Verses to Which the Watchtower Society Refers in Opposition to the Deity of Jesus Christ

Isaiah 9:6

This verse tells us that the coming Messiah would be “the mighty God.” That fact would seem to imply that Jesus is fully God. The standard reply, however, is that Jesus is called “the mighty God” but never “the almighty God.” Yet, while it is true that Jesus is never called “the almighty,” it is also true that in Jeremiah 32:18, Jehovah is referred to as “the mighty God.” Now if Jesus is “the mighty God” and Jehovah is “the mighty God,” does it not follow that they both possess full deity?

John 1:1

So much has been written about the translation of this verse that it will be impossible to go into all of it here. The *New World Translation* gives it as: “the Word was a god.” That translation

rests principally on the fact that the Greek word for god (*theos*) does not have a definite article. Therefore, it has been given an indefinite article in English. But there are several problems with this translation.

First, the verse itself: The word *theos* comes first in the sentence and receives the emphasis. Therefore, another way to translate this verse is “the Word was fully God.”

Second, a basic rule of translation: any controversial translation must allow for the author to have expressed the opposing meaning. In other words, you cannot insist on a translation that inherently prevents the author from expressing the opposite meaning. The question in this case is, how could John have said that Jesus was fully God? That is, if John 1:1 is rendered “the Word was a god,” how could John have written “the Word was God”? If John had written “the Word was the God” he would not have been teaching the deity of Christ but Modalism. [1] Using the definite article in this verse would not have strengthened the teaching that Jesus Christ is fully God; it would have been teaching that he was a mere manifestation of the Father.

Third, the context: The first clause of the verse tells us that the Word was “in the beginning” and that he was “with God.” The next verse repeats these facts, and the third verse adds that all things without exception were made by him. What is the point of emphasizing these facts if not to establish the full deity of the Word?

Fourth, the principle of Monotheism: In Deuteronomy 32:39, God says that “there is no god with me,” and in Isaiah 43:10, he says that there is no god before him and no god after him. How can Jesus be merely “a god” when Jehovah himself says that there are no other gods?

John 10:30

In this verse, Jesus claims to be “one” with the Father. The standard answer to this is that Jesus is one with the Father *in purpose* but not *in essence*. But compare this with verse 31; the Jews tried to kill Jesus, not because he claimed to be one with the Father in purpose, but because he claimed to be one with the Father *in essence* (v. 33)! See also John 5:18 and 19:7.

Philippians 2:6

“Although he was existing in God’s form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God” (NWT). As translated, this verse implies that Jesus, in his pre-incarnate existence, was something less than God the Father and had no intention of becoming anything more. But the Greek word for “form” (*morphe*) means “nature” or “essential attributes.” Jesus did not have any desire to “seize” equality with God because he already had it! This is borne out from the context of the verse (vss. 5-8), which is a discussion of Jesus’ condescension in coming to the earth and relinquishing his rights as God.

Colossians 1:15-17

This section states that Jesus was the “first-born” of all creation. It is sometimes asserted that the word “first-born” implies that Jesus was the “first-created” of God’s creation. But in the Greek, “first-born” (*prototokos*) and “first-created” (*protoktistos*) are two different words. The word used here is “first-born” (*prototokos*). [2]

Revelation 3:14

The *New World Translation* here refers to Jesus as “the beginning of the creation of God.” But the Greek word, here translated “beginning,” is *arche*, which is better translated “source” or “origin.” This is consistent with John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, that all things have their source, or origin, in Christ.

Endnotes to Appendix A

[1] Modalism is the view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all the same person, acting in different modes or manifestations. Also called Sabellianism, after the 3rd century teacher who first taught it.

[2] That *prototokos* has to do with “birth” and not “creation” can be seen from its derivative word, *prototokia*, which means “(right of) primogeniture.”

Appendix B: The Watchtower Society Answers a Few Questions

(For these quotes I am indebted to the following site: quotes.jehovahswitnesses.com, June 5, 2001. This interesting site is filled with simple quotations from Watchtower Society Publications, sans commentary. In these quotes, non-original emphases are underlined.)

Q. Does the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society claim to be a true prophet of God?

A. “The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society is the greatest corporation in the world, because from the time of its organization until now the Lord has used it as his channel through which to make known the glad tidings.” (*Watchtower* January 15, 1917, p. 22)

Q. But how can a person distinguish true prophets of God from false prophets?

A. “The best method of proof is to put a prophecy to the test of time and circumstances. The Bible invites such a test.” (*Watchtower* March 1, 1965, p. 151, “Basis for Reliance on Prophecy”)

Q. Should the prophecies of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society be publicly examined?

A1. "The Watchtower ... invites careful and critical examination of its contents in the light of the Scriptures." (*Watchtower* August 15, 1950, p. 263, "Name and Purpose of The Watchtower")

A2. "Over the years, representatives of different churches have published many books and brochures for the purpose of 'exposing' Jehovah's Witnesses as heretics... Naturally, we are not afraid of this kind of publicity ..." (*Watchtower* August 1, 1978, p. 12, "A Growing Paradise in Sweden")

Q. *What prophecies has the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society made?*

A1. "True, it is expecting great things to claim, as we do, that within the coming twenty-six years all present governments will be overthrown and dissolved ... In view of this strong bible evidence concerning the Times of the Gentiles, we consider it an established truth that the final end of the kingdoms of this world, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God, will be accomplished at the end of A.D. 1914 ..." (*The Time is at Hand [Studies in the Scriptures, vol. II]*, 1908 reprint [1889 orig.], pp. 98,99)

A2. "The date of the close of that 'battle' is definitely marked in Scripture as October, 1914. It is already in progress, its beginning dating from October, 1874." (*The Watchtower Reprints*, January 15, 1892, p. 1355)

A3. "We see no reason for changing the figures - nor could we change them if we would. They are, we believe, God's dates, not ours. But bear in mind that the end of 1914 is not the date for the beginning, but for the end of the time of trouble." (*The Watchtower Reprints*, July 15, 1894, p. 1672)

A4. "The culmination of the trouble in October, 1914, is clearly marked in the Scriptures; and we are bound therefore to expect a beginning of that severe trouble not later than 1910; - with severe spasms between now and then." (*The Watchtower Reprints*, September 15, 1901, p. 2876)

A5. "The people who are the strength of Christendom shall be cut off in the brief but terribly eventful period beginning in 1918 A.D. A third part are 'burned with fire in the midst of the city.' Fire symbolizes destruction. One large part of the adherents of ecclesiasticism will die from pestilence and famine. (Deut. 32:24.) ... After 1918 the people supporting churchianity will cease to be its supporters, be destroyed as adherents, by the spiritual pestilence of errors abroad, and by the famine of the Word of God among them. The Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), which is the Word of God, will be wielded in the hands of 'Present Truth' believers in such a manner as to cause conscientious supporters of ecclesiasticism to cease to be supporters." (*The Finished Mystery [Studies in the Scriptures vol. VII]*, 1917 ed., pp. 398-399)

A6. "They are to be resurrected as perfect men and constitute the princes or rulers in the earth ... Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets of old ... 1925 shall mark the resurrection of the faithful worthies of old

and the beginning of reconstruction ... based upon the promises set forth in the divine Word ...”
(*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, 1920, pp. 89,90,97)

A7. “Are we to assume from this study that the battle of Armageddon will be all over by the autumn of 1975, and the long-looked-for thousand-year reign of Christ will begin by then? Possibly, but we wait to see how closely the seventh thousand-year period of man's existence coincides with the sabbathlike thousand-year reign of Christ. If these two periods run parallel with each other as to the calendar year, it will not be by mere chance or accident but will be according to Jehovah's loving and timely purposes. Our chronology, however, which is reasonably accurate (but admittedly not infallible), at the best only points to the autumn of 1975 as the end of 6,000 years of man's existence on earth. It does not necessarily mean that 1975 marks the end of the first 6,000 years of Jehovah's seventh creative ‘day.’ Why not? Because after his creation Adam lived some time during the ‘sixth day,’ which unknown amount of time would need to be subtracted from Adam's 930 years, to determine when the sixth seven-thousand-year period or ‘day’ ended, and how long Adam lived into the ‘seventh day.’ And yet the end of that sixth creative ‘day’ could end within the same Gregorian calendar year of Adam's creation. It may involve only a difference of weeks or months, not years.” (*Watchtower*, August 15, 1968, p. 499, “Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?”)

A8. “The apostle Paul was spearheading the Christian missionary activity. He was also laying a foundation for a work that would be completed in our 20th century.” (*Watchtower*, January 1, 1989, p. 12, “The Hand of Jehovah Was With Them” [as originally published in *Watchtower* magazine])

Q. *Have any of the Watchtower's prophecies actually failed?*

A. “Ever since 'The Watchtower' began to be published in July of 1879 it has looked ahead into the future ... No, 'The Watchtower' is no inspired prophet, but it follows and explains a Book of prophecy the predictions in which have proved to be unerring and unfailing till now. 'The Watchtower' is therefore under safe guidance. It may be read with confidence, for its statements may be checked against that prophetic Book.” (*Watchtower*, January 1, 1969, p. 2)

Q. *If any of the Watchtower's prophecies had failed, what would be the result?*

A. Deuteronomy 18:20-22: "However, the prophet who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die. 21 And in case you should say in your heart: "How shall we know the word that Jehovah has not spoken?" 22 when the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the word does not occur or come true, that is the word that Jehovah did not speak. With presumptuousness the prophet spoke it. You must not get frightened at him.' [New World Translation]

Q. *Suppose someone decided that some prophecies of the Watchtower had failed; what would be the Watchtower's response?*

A. “Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments before, and so they argue: ‘This shows that we have to make up our own mind on what to believe.’ This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous? Such thinking is an evidence of pride.” (*Watchtower*, January 15, 1983, “Armed for the Fight Against Wicked Spirits”)

Q. If the Watchtower Society had made any failed prophecies, would they try to conceal such prophecies from the public?

A. “God's Word commands: ‘Speak truth each of you with his neighbor.’ (Eph. 4:25) This command, however, does not mean that we should tell everyone who asks us all he wants to know. We must tell the truth to one who is entitled to know, but if one is not so entitled we may be evasive ... As a soldier of Christ he is in theocratic warfare and he must exercise added caution when dealing with God's foes. Thus the Scriptures show that for the purpose of protecting the interests of God's cause, it is proper to hide the truth from God's enemies.” (*Watchtower*, June 1, 1960, p. 351, “Questions from Readers”)

Q. If the Watchtower Society was dishonest with me, what should be my response?

A. “God, who is himself ‘the God of truth’ and who hates lies, will not look with favor on persons who cling to organizations that teach falsehood. (Psalm 31:5; Proverbs 6:16-19; Revelation 21:8) And, really, would you want to be even associated with a religion that had not been honest with you?” (*Is This Life All There Is?* 1974, p. 46, “What Is This Thing Called ‘Soul’?”)