

**Conflicts With Jehovah's Witnesses and the Protestant Church**

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Among the pseudo-Christian organizations present in the United States, one of the most spoken-of organizations is also the most obscure of them all. This paper seeks to shed some light on the Jehovah's Witness (JW) organization and its contradictions with the mainline, Protestant, Christian faith, and doctrine. Though some historical context will be needed to clarify this discussion, the paper is not intended as a historical piece but rather as a contemporary review of the material. The author is not a Jehovah's Witness but has some friends who claim this belief system.

### **Explanation of the Jehovah's Witness Doctrine**

Jehovah's Witness (JW), known as The Watchtower<sup>1</sup>, is a pseudo-Christian organization headquartered in Warwick, New York<sup>2</sup>. The adherents of this organization (calling them a religion would be a misnomer), at first blush, appear to be Christians. However, a closer observation of their beliefs shows something more akin to a cult thinly veiled in Christian doctrine. In some instances, the JW can be incorrectly identified as Mormons (that is, followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) as they have some similarities, such as the desire to engage in door-to-door evangelism and an often-conservative style of dress<sup>3</sup>. The fact that both Mormons and JW operate more like pseudo-Christian cults further complicates the average person's ability to differentiate the two, but their beliefs are very different.

First, the JW has its own version of the Bible called "The New World Translation," which is a heavily modified version of the Holy Bible. Second, they do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but rather that God disintegrated the body of Jesus, and he became a "spirit

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<sup>1</sup> (The Watchtower n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> (Chryssides 2019)

<sup>3</sup> (Davis 2023)

body.” Lastly, the JW does not believe that faith in Jesus offers any salvation but rather that the statements of the “Elders of the Watchtower” are the only things that can save humanity<sup>4</sup>. In this way, the adherents of the JW are cut off from God's love and the salvation he can offer believers.

### The New World Translation of the Bible

As mentioned above, the JW has created its own version of the Bible called “The New World Translation,” which is a barbarized version of the New Testament. In this version of the New Testament, the JW has removed all instances of Jesus being a deity because this is what conforms to the beliefs their elders have established<sup>5</sup>. The writers of the material are happy to confirm that Jesus was a Good Teacher, a pious man, and a scholar, yet draw the line at Jesus being God.

One might ask how it is that the JW can argue that Jesus was just a man when the Bible has been around so much longer than their religion, and it clearly states otherwise. This is because the leadership of the JW has convinced their adherents that all versions of the Bible besides theirs are false bibles that writers have corrupted. It may sound far-fetched, but many mainline Protestants believe that only the King James Version of the Bible is the correct version<sup>6</sup> even today. JW teachings are designed partly to sow distrust and doubt of the “outsiders” among their congregations. Ere go, if only the statements of the Watchtower are correct and they state that all other versions of the Bible are false, all other versions of the Bible must be false teachings produced by those outsiders seeking to destroy the JW faith.

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<sup>4</sup> (The Watchtower 1972)

<sup>5</sup> (The Watchtower 2023)

<sup>6</sup> (Gebarowski-Shafer 2013)

## Jesus' Body Was Destroyed, Not Resurrected

One of the core tenets of the Christian faith is in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ after His death on Calvary. While it is true that many denominations of Christianity exist and have varying beliefs, they all agree on the Resurrection of Christ as the basis of their faith. In fact, one of the greatest celebratory moments of Easter and the Passion is Jesus' triumphant resurrection, forever destroying death: "Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death – that is, the Devil." (Hebrews 2:14, Holman Christian Standard Bible). Yet the JW goes to great lengths to disprove Jesus as God and will instead tell others that Jesus's body was destroyed by God<sup>7</sup>. They explain that Jesus returned as a "spirit body" or "spirit organism." If a core aspect of being a true Christian is that Jesus died and was resurrected to overcome death (1 Corinthians 15:13-22, HCSB), it seems that the JW cannot be truly considered Christians.

If the death of Jesus did not occur, the bridge over sin and death would never have been made, and therefore, no one can be righteous in God's eyes. What should a concerned JW do to attain God's love without Jesus? The simple answer is that they must work through various checklists of works to be deemed right in God's eyes, hopefully<sup>8</sup>. For these reasons, the JW work so hard to do their missionary talks, required services, donations, and almost any other work that is preached as capable of saving them from death. In contrast, mainline Christianity preaches that only faith in Jesus can save. Anything else (or, as it is sometimes said, Jesus+) is not true Christianity (John 14:16).

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<sup>7</sup> (The Watchtower 1953)

<sup>8</sup> (Chryssides 2019)

### Only Obedience to the Elders Can Save

The final point of key JW beliefs is their belief that in the end times, only obeying the instructions of their Elders can save them. The Watchtower is not led by a distributed group of congregations (like most Protestant faiths), it is also not led by an elite group of priests (as in Catholicism), and it is not led by a single figurehead (as many cults are). Instead, the JW leadership comprises a select group of 8-12 (the number is not directly specified) of “Elders” who call themselves ‘the faithful and discreet slave’<sup>9</sup>. This group of men (women are not granted this right) sit on a council in the Watchtower’s corporate headquarters, oversee all actions of the JW, and manage their vast publication library. It is not uncommon for the ‘faithful and discreet slave’ to make far-reaching changes to the beliefs and even the New World Translation bible whenever they deem fit. Once the Elders have changed the statements of the JW, all previous versions of the changed statement(s) are no longer valid<sup>10</sup>.

Not only do the Elders of the JW hold complete sway over the beliefs and direction of the adherents, but in the end times, only their instructions can save people<sup>11</sup>. To the true Christian, it seems ludicrous to put faith in any man or body of men for any aspect of faith. After all, mankind are flawed people who have fallen into sin and away from God (Job 15:14) and therefore could never hope to bring salvation of any kind in the final days (Romans 3:23). The demand of the “faithful and discreet servant” no longer seems discreet and certainly does not seem faithful to the true Word of God. The Elders have, with their instructions, forever locked the JW adherents from the everlasting love of God, which can bring them salvation. It is no

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<sup>9</sup> (The Watchtower 2013)

<sup>10</sup> (Rainer 2005)

<sup>11</sup> (The Watchtower 1964)

wonder that those who believe the statements of the Watchtower would be so distrustful of outsiders; they are taught that only their leaders can tell them what is right.

### **Sharing the Good News with Jehovah's Witnesses**

After this brief review of the beliefs and principles of Jehovah's Witnesses, it can be easy to consider them unreachable, but that is not the case. Over the years, some JW have begun looking for truth on their own and have already begun finding flaws in their beliefs' fabric. Due to the insular nature of the JW community, anyone who argues against the group's tenets is dubbed 'apostate' and excommunicated from the community<sup>12</sup>. To this end, a direct, bombastic approach to shut down the beliefs of a JW adherent will most certainly end in failure. But this does not mean it is impossible to reach JW with the Good News, but the approach must be different and deliberate and will likely take a long time. Christians seeking to reach their JW neighbor will receive the best results if they follow a three-step process: befriend and develop a relationship with the JW adherent on common ground, develop rapport through trust, and then gently illustrate Jesus through non-JW scripture.

#### **Develop a Relationship**

As mentioned previously, members of the JW tend to be naturally suspicious of any outsiders due to the combination of the fear their leadership forces them into and the general disdain for their mission from non-JWs. It is certainly possible that careful discussions happening upon first meeting a JW at one's home could lead to a fruitful harvest, but the chances of success are quite low. Instead, the Christian seeking to minister to them will bolster their

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<sup>12</sup> (Pannofino and Cardano 2017)

chances of success by investing in a long-term relationship. The chances of successfully navigating spiritual discussions over time will increase greatly when the JW sees that one is generally interested in them despite their differing beliefs.

### Develop Rapport Through Trust

A word of caution: if one attempts to develop a relationship with a JW to turn them to Christ without caring for them as an individual, it does not engender trust. The relationship formation between a Christian and their JW friend must be built on trust and understanding. One must also be cautious not to intentionally invite their JW friend into a situation contrary to their beliefs, meaning it is not wise to invite them to a birthday party or other holiday celebration<sup>13</sup>. To the JW who is seeking to build a friendship, being asked to do something that conflicts with what they have been taught is more likely to cause damage to trust and reduce openness. A better solution is to focus on spending time with a JW member in a neutral, non-religious manner, such as enjoying a walk in a park together or casual conversations on a back porch or in a living room. The more times a JW sees a non-JW acting in a positive and caring manner or making decisions that do not contradict what a JW is taught, the trust relationship may eventually open the door for discussing religious matters among friends.

### Engage in Friendly Discussion

Once a Christian has developed a trusting relationship with their JW friend, the opportunity will eventually arise to engage in friendly theological discussions. JW are taught their version of scripture at a very young age and will likely be well-trained in how to handle common debate topics regarding their faith. Any sources of material beyond what a JW

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<sup>13</sup> (The Watchtower n.d.)



considers Holy Scripture (i.e., The New World Translation and materials from the JW Library) will most certainly be dismissed by a JW in a debate as “apocryphal.” However, using the scripture of their own bible will be difficult for a JW to refute.

One simple example is regarding the JW belief that Jesus was not equal with God when their own scripture states: “On this account, indeed, Jews began seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.” (John 5:18, New World Translation). In this instance, the very words from their Bible show that Jesus was, in fact, equal to God. If there is room for debate, verse 5:23 should resolve it: “In order that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He that does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” (John 5:23, NWT). If one has a good rapport with their JW friend, asking if Jesus was equal with God and then asking, “If Jesus was equal with God, would that change anything?” should prove to at least begin the friendly discussion regarding religious differences<sup>14</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The Jehovah’s Witnesses is a pseudo-Christian cult that passionately desires to convert the world to their beliefs. Despite having the appearance of being Christian, many of their key beliefs directly conflict with what Protestant Christians believe. The Watchtower, the corporate body behind the JW and its adherents, specializes in creating propaganda through magazines, books, and generalized publications to indoctrinate their people. Using fear, isolation, and misdirection, the Watchtower maintains near complete control over the thoughts of the JW.

Despite the often-suspicious nature of JWs of any ‘outsiders,’ if one can develop a

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<sup>14</sup> (Winger 2013)

relationship with them, they can eventually be reached for Christ. One must be willing to develop a true friendship with the JW and truly care about their eternal salvation to reach them, but it can be done. If the JW trusts the outsider enough, they can be reached by showing them the inconsistencies inherent in their organization's literature and potentially opening their eyes to the true love of Jesus – something their organization seeks to remove.

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