

Introduction to Jehovah's Witnesses

As we first look at the Jehovah's Witnesses, a simple question pops up: "Why?" After all, they seem to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus, which is central to all Christianity. Yes, they make it a bit odd by saying that it was on a torture stake, and Jesus was just a perfect man, not God incarnate, but why should we concern ourselves with them. After all, did not Paul tell the Philippian jailer that if he believed in Jesus he would be saved? (Acts 16:31)

At first glance the JW approach appears eminently logical. Certainly the concept of the Trinity is hard to grasp at first. How can one God be only one when He is made up of three persons? And how can God die? As we look at other conclusions the JW's reach, the picture gets more and more difficult to accept. So we must go to scripture to find our answers. Also, since the JW's have translated the Bible in a way designed to show their doctrine, rather than what God wanted to say, in this session we must stay with recognized translations. In later sessions we will be careful to use texts which even the New World Translation has been unable to mangle.

Our first step is to determine just how God wishes us to deal with His word. In several places (Q1) He tells us to "study", "search the scriptures", and to "examine everything carefully". These actions clearly call for application of critical mental faculties. They presuppose that God's word will prove to be consistent, and understandable by use of our logical abilities. But we must be careful to avoid overstepping our bounds. God's thoughts (Q2) are of a level far higher than ours. He is infinite, while we are finite, perfect while we are imperfect. Thus, we must be careful not to impose our preconceived ideas on the word of God. We must let the Bible be the final authority, not our ideas.

The JW's describe Jesus as a created spirit being. He was a "mighty one", but not as mighty as God, but could properly be known as "a god" (Note the lower case "g"). He had a special status such that God allowed him to carry out the act of creation. He gave up his spirit existence to become a man. As a man, he lived a sinless life, and died on a torture stake. However, his resurrection was not as a man, but as a spirit. They quote scripture out of context to support this contention. We should be careful to note that the motivation for this is the purely human logical circle of thought originating from the "unreasonableness" of punishment of the wicked by fire. They then go on to tell us that the reason for Jesus' coming was to be "King". His sacrifice is relegated to second place.

We should contrast this with the Biblical record. As soon as man fell, God provided the guarantee (Q5) of a savior. At His birth, he was announced as the Savior, and he Himself tells us that His purpose was "to seek and to save that which was lost". True, he is our king, but that was not His purpose in coming to the earth. He could have remained a king in heaven. But He could not be our Savior without coming to die in our place.

As we mentioned earlier, the issue of Jesus' divine nature would seem to man to be a point of interest, but not of crucial belief. After all, if we believe he died after a sinless life, becoming the perfect sacrifice, isn't that enough? Jesus tells us (Q6) that it is not. Since He is the only way to get to know the Father (John 14:6), and knowledge of the Father is eternal life (John 17:3), if we do not know the true Jesus, we are believing in a mirage with no power. His language is powerful. "For unless you believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins." (John 8:24). Jesus uses the powerful language of Exodus 3:14, where God says "I AM WHO I AM". God declares Himself to be the "I AM", or the ultimate eternally existing one, before whom there was nothing, and who will exist forever. Jesus takes this language to make an unmistakable claim that He is God. JW's have carefully edited their Bible so that this claim disappears.

The power of this imperative shows up best in 2 John 9 in the KJV and RSV. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the DOCTRINE of Christ, hath not God." The Greek word "*didache*" is used here, referring to the teaching of the nature of Jesus, not the doctrines of various things taught by Jesus. Thus, the issue of the identity of Christ, and His divine nature, are essential doctrines brought front and center by the apostles. John here makes it the centerpiece of his definition of "antichrist". Paul makes it clear that anyone who holds such incorrect beliefs should be exhorted to conform to the truth, and if they will not do so, they should be rebuked severely.

The nature of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross becomes the central issue where we must deal with JW doctrine. As a consequence of their excessive rationalism, they face a simple problem. They have made Jesus into a mere man. Since the principle of "like for like" applies to sacrifices, the death of one man can only atone for the sin of one man. This means that somehow the cross must be made into a

compensation for only Adam's sin (Q7). Yet all the Bible writers make it clear that sin is an issue for all men, not just Adam (Q8). While Adam brought sin to mankind (Rom 5:12), that does not excuse the rest of us. We all need redemption.

JW's continue to press the idea of "one for one" by stating that Jesus presented to the Father the "value of his perfect human life" (LGBT p.117). Yet Jesus made a sacrifice (Q9) which put away ALL sin. Using the JW's own principle, it is impossible for a single man to atone for the sins of more than one man. Therefore, when Jesus ascended, he presented the completed sacrifice of God Himself on the cross. No other sacrifice could remove the stain of sin from the rest of us. This contrasts with the JW doctrine that only original sin (Q10) required atonement. In their view, all other sin was consequent to Adam's original sin, and because man has no choice in it, man is not responsible for it. This kind of predestination can be seen to have its roots in Russell's Calvinist upbringing, but is totally contrary to the Biblical teaching of individual responsibility for sin. If we have any individual responsibility, the JW Jesus cannot save us.

The logical consequence of this ultimate responsibility for Adam is that JW's teach that because of his deliberate rebellious act in sinning, Adam will not be saved. Of course, his punishment is simply not being resurrected, since JW's deny the existence of a place of punishment. Adam's act was so heinous that God left no provision for his salvation (Q11). Contrast this with the God of the Bible (Q11). Anyone who confesses his sin will be forgiven. God is not willing to allow anyone to be lost, so when Adam confessed his sin, he was forgiven. Adam was no more or less guilty than we are (Q12), since anyone who breaks any portion of the law is guilty of breaking all of it.

When we examine Adam's punishment (Q13), we find no hint of eternal damnation, but rather the change of state from Eden where all food was simply harvested, to the sinful earth where food had to be grown by toil among the thorns. It is curious to note that JW's emphasize Adam's sin, while ignoring the fact that Eve (Q14) actually sinned first. They make no comment about her being damned. Yet her sin, if anything, should be greater than Adam's since it was first. Biblically, Eve's punishment is similar to Adam's. She is to bear children in pain and be subject to her husband.

Our focus should be drawn to one text in the middle of the passage. God tells Adam and Eve that they will have a hope of redemption, since the savior will come from their offspring (Gen 3:15). God does not condemn man. He always leaves a way of escape.

Our final thought for this installment is to consider the (il)logic of the JW position. If a sacrifice atoning for Adam's sin alone is sufficient for cleansing the human race, then our individual sins must be of no importance. That is, we sinned because we had no choice. Therefore, we should not be responsible for them. If this is true, then why is there sin today, after the cross? Has not our disability been revoked? And why should there be a judgment. If we are not responsible, how can any judge find against anyone?

The presence of sin today shows the fallacy of the JW position. We are guilty of sin, just as Adam and Eve were. And we must be cleansed by the blood of Christ just as Adam and Eve were. The JW savior is unable to cleanse us from sin, and the presence of sin shows his impotence. We must have our faith in a God who can truly cleanse not only us, but all creation from sin.