

Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

We have covered a number of the points on witnessing which are applicable to JW's. In particular, we need to show how Jesus is called God, is worshiped, and is prayed to. Then we can ask just why it is that you do what the Bible commands, the JW doesn't, yet the JW is correct. In other words, why can the JW contradict the Bible but still be a Christian?

The difficulty with JW's is that they seem to be very well prepared. In fact, in many ways, they seem to be prepared better than the typical Christian. This can be very intimidating. Then they add the NWT, which is alleged to be a more faithful translation from the original Greek and Hebrew than the other modern translations. This leaves anyone other than a Biblical languages scholar at a terrible disadvantage. If you try to argue the translations, you will lose. But in arguing, you will also lose even more profoundly, because you will be taking the discussion away from Jesus to a relatively unimportant topic. (No, the original languages are not irrelevant, but their primary benefit is to add depth to our understanding, not ordinarily to decide doctrinal issues.) What we need to do is to keep the discussion focused on Christ, and allow the Holy Spirit to work.

How can we do this when the JW is so well versed in scripture? The answer is simpler than it seems. The typical JW is not well versed in scripture. He is well versed in the scriptures which support his own ideas in the NWT. It is an unusual JW who is truly well versed generally in scripture. JW's are strongly encouraged to attend classes at the Kingdom Hall two or more times each week. They are taught from the Watchtower magazine and *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, a Bible study guide. Topics and texts which are not covered in these resources constitute large holes in the scriptural knowledge of the typical JW.

Things to do.

1. Understand the nature of the Watchtower member.

The typical JW is an ordinary person who has become associated with the Watchtower. He has all the feelings and desires that each of us has. But in particular, he has adopted a theology which supports his desire to have a God he can fully understand who does not offend him with a doctrine of punishment for the wicked. While in the JW fold, he is given as much as sixty pages of JW literature to read weekly, with only four pages of Bible. He is taught to value unity and organizational uniformity at the expense of independent thought. And he is directly discouraged from reading anything by ex-Witnesses (apostates) or by those who are critical of JW doctrine (opposers).

2. Be respectful and ask questions.

In trying to break through to a JW, it is important to control the conversation without becoming confrontational. This can be done readily easily by asking questions. It will also be somewhat disarming, since the JW is taught to expect hostility and disrespect from non-JW's. In asking questions, you will find that the answers at times reflect true Biblical insights. Agreement with such ideas that God's kingdom is the only hope for mankind or that humanity will inhabit a new earth will cement common ground with them. Asking questions will also tend to direct the flow of the conversation.

3. When answers are incorrect Biblically, direct the conversation to answers.

Many times the JW will give answers to questions that are incorrect Biblically. These answers come from their indoctrination (a proper description of the JW training). As a witness for God, it is your responsibility to know where to get the correct answers. Direct the JW gently to the texts which more clearly explain the issues at hand. Be prepared to use the NWT wherever possible. If you can take the JW's own sources and show how their position is not representative of the truth, you will be more effective than if you insisted on using other materials.

Few people are willing to be told what the truth is. It is far more effective to take the approach from Witnessing, Parts 1 and 2 and direct the conversation with questions. Walk through the specific topics you want to cover, and ask the JW what the texts mean. This will make him arrive at the necessary conclusions. At times, it is necessary to explore the context of a passage. For example,

if in John 2:19-22 the JW says that "this temple" refers to Christ's spiritual body or the church, it may be necessary to review the passage in detail, considering that Jesus specifically referred to his own physical body. Similar approaches may be necessary on other texts.

4. Explore "Why?"

Rather than tackling the translation issues of texts such as John 1:1, try a Rabbinical approach. As why John would write that passage. Who was he speaking to? What was he trying to say to them? This avoids the issue of translation. Other possible topics are Paul's rationale for writing Philippians 2 or the OT prophecies of the divinity of the Messiah (Melchizedek).

5. Do not expect an immediate conversion.

Few people will accept a belief system casually. They are personally invested in it. Thus, a JW will have a commitment to his beliefs, and will not easily discard them for another set of beliefs. It is very likely that there will need to be repeated studies. It is also possible that the JW will leave, never to return. Do not despair. God has said that His word will not come back unfulfilled. You have planted a seed.

6. Try to keep the cross in focus.

The necessity of the sacrifice of God himself for us and the incredible love shown by it will win when mere words cannot. One JW I have studied with said that he "didn't want it to be God on the cross." The unfathomable love demonstrated there was more than he could handle.

Things to avoid.

1. Do not believe that there is only one way to approach a JW.

Like all individuals, JW's are different from each other. Some will respond positively to a gentle approach, and others will require a more direct one.

2. Do not give up because it seems that the first JW turned you off.

They didn't get to know their doctrines on the first try, and neither did you. None of us are perfect witnesses for Christ, but we all get better with practice. Keep on trying.

3. Do not neglect your own studying.

Know your Bible well, and you will be a better witness. When preparing for JW's, review materials specifically tailored to them, but never stop learning for yourself.

4. Do not spend substantial amounts of time tearing down the Watchtower.

This will lead to a defensive stance by the JW. Build up Christ instead.

5. Do not try to force an admission of error.

This will be very hard to get in the first place, because the JW will have invested himself in his beliefs. Allow the Holy Spirit to work after the presentation.

6. Do not argue Greek or Hebrew grammar unless you are well prepared.

Even then, it is likely to be a losing issue, since it will be a debate, not an exploration of truth. There are no winners in a debate. It may be possible to get full photocopies of reference materials the Watchtower quotes in part. Those will show that the Watchtower has lied to its members by quoting out of context. Properly used, this can lead the JW to see the error of his beliefs.

7. Don't get in over your head.

None of us knows all the answers. It is reasonable to say that you do not know something. Good preparation is helpful, but it may be necessary to say that you need to do research on some issue.

Above all **PRAISE THE LORD!**