

VERITAS EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

SHARING THE TRIUNITY OF GOD WITH THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS AT YOUR DOOR

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METHODS

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The family was still sleeping while I busied myself with breakfast. It is our family tradition to eat “hot” breakfast together every Saturday morning, something my mom started when my brothers and I were kids and something I have continued with my family. The bacon was roasting nicely in the oven (try it, it’s much less messy than pan frying and the bacon cooks more evenly), the Fuji apples were sliced and sprinkled with cinnamon, a pot of French Roast coffee was brewing and I had just begun mixing the ebelskiver¹ batter when the door bell rang.

“Who in the world would be ringing my doorbell at this time on a Saturday morning” I thought, not to happily as I turned off the mixer and made my way to the door. I opened the door to find two neatly dressed women and was suddenly a bit self-conscious as I was still in my Grinch pajamas and a tee shirt! I recognized them immediately by the “Awake” magazine in their hands as Jehovah’s Witnesses, members of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society².

The interrupters of my breakfast preparations wished me a “good morning” and then launched into their rehearsed pitch; “Easter is only a week away and many of your neighbors are wondering what it’s all about” offered one of the smiling ladies. “We would like to give you a magazine that helps people to understand why Christians celebrate Easter” said the second. They seemed so sincere, yet as I knew from my studies of the Jehovah’s Witness doctrine they were sincerely wrong about not just Easter but more importantly the identity of the Resurrected Christ.

¹ “ Ebelskivers are a Danish pancake that cook up in a special pan to form a delightfully fluffy ball of breakfast love that can be stuffed with any variety of things (bits of sweetened cream cheese, fruit, nutella or other chocolatey decadence) or just cooked up and drizzled with syrup, dusted with powdered sugar or served with fresh fruit and whipped cream.” Quoted from Mel’s Kitchen Café, accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.melskitchencafe.com/ebelskivers-puffy-danish-pancakes-a-how-to-and-a-giveaway/>.

² Walter Martin properly classifies the Jehovah’s Witnesses as a “cult” rather than a Christian denomination as The Watchtower reject many of the orthodox doctrines of the historic Christian faith. See Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers), 79.

My mind raced back to the kitchen where the roasting bacon was nearing perfection yet would soon burn if I spent too much time on the porch with these lost ladies. However, I also felt a sense of responsibility to say something to them lest I miss this divine appointment to speak truth into their lives concerning the true nature of Christ. So, I quickly excused myself to rescue the breakfast meat from the oven and to grab my copy of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures. The New World Translation (NWT) is the product of the Watchtower organization and the only version of the Bible deemed authoritative by the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, the majority of biblical scholars and textual critics do not agree with that opinion. Rather, scholarly consensus is that the NWT is not so much a translation as it is a tool for advancing the peculiar doctrines of the Watchtower organization. Of the NTW Ron Rhodes writes that it was developed: "To lend support to its deviant teachings, the Watchtower Society has published a theologically biased translation of the Bible known as the New World Translation."³

That is, it is not a true translation of the original text rather it is a deliberate attempt by the anonymous members of the Watchtower translation committee to subvert the true meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts to support their heretical doctrines. According Raymond Franz a former governing member of the Watchtower, there's good reason for the anonymity of the translation committee members, as most have no academic training in Biblical languages!

The New World Translation bears no translator's name and is presented as the anonymous work of the "New World Translation Committee." Other members of that committee were Nathan Knorr, Albert Schroeder and George Gangas. Fred Franz, however, *was the only one with sufficient knowledge of the Bible languages to attempt translation* of this kind. He had studied Greek for two years at the University of Cincinnati but was only self-taught in Hebrew.⁴ (Italics added).

³ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with The Jehovah's Witnesses*, (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 74.

⁴ Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience: The Struggle Between Loyalty to God and Loyalty to one's Religion*, 4th ed., (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 2004), 56.

Armed with that fact, the apologist in me wanted desperately to begin our conversation with a bold frontal attack on the credibility of the New World Translation. However, I had learned from previous encounters with the Jehovah's Witnesses that that strategy is not fruitful. The point is that while it would be easy to win an academic and theological argument with the smiling ladies waiting on my porch it is doubtful that I would save them from the deception they held as sacred truth.

So, taking a cue from Ron Rhodes, I thought it best to begin our conversation with a leading question. The purpose of that strategy was to get the Jehovah's Witness to "discover problems in the Watchtower theology *for himself*."⁵ (Italics his).

Ron writes:

One great way to help a Jehovah's Witness discover problems in the Watchtower theology is to ask strategic questions based on key verses, all the while remaining tactful and kind. Remember, Jesus often asked questions to make a point. David Reed notes that "rather than shower his listeners with information, [Jesus] used questions to draw answers out of them. A person can close their ears to the facts he doesn't want to hear, but if a pointed question causes him to form the answer in his own mind, he cannot escape the conclusion-because it's a conclusion that he reached for himself." We must use this same type of methodology with Jehovah's Witnesses.⁶

The leading question that I planned to use was designed to get my visitors to start thinking about the true identity of Christ, specifically His divine nature. To do that I had put together a simple series of questions based on the reading of the New World Translation that would present my guests with a conundrum, a contradiction that their theology could not accommodate.

Back at the door with my copy of the J.W. Bible in my hands I turned to the New Testament and found the place in John's Gospel from which I planned to ask my first question. The ladies seemed delighted that I had a copy of their Bible and that I had a question for them!

⁵ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, 19.

⁶ Ibid.

Turning the Bible toward the gal nearest me I pointed to John 6:46 and asked her if she would read it aloud. Adjusting her glasses she began to carefully read Jesus' words: "Not that any man has seen the Father, except the one who is from God; this one has seen the Father."⁷ "So" I asked, "who is the Father that Jesus speaks of in this verse?" "Well, God of course" responded the reader. "By 'God' do you mean 'Jehovah?'" I suggested innocently, "Yes God's name is Jehovah" was her enthusiastic reply. The conversation was moving in the direction that I had hoped for as my leading question was designed to first establish the fact that Watchtower doctrine believes that God the Father alone is known by the name Jehovah. The official Jehovah's Witness website states:

Humans all have personal names. Wouldn't it be reasonable for God to have a name? Having and using personal names is a vital part of human friendships. Should it be different when it comes to our friendship with God? In the Bible, God says: "'I am *Jehovah*. That is my name.'" (Isaiah 42:8)⁸ (Emphasis added).

This is an important point to help distinguish between the historical Christian faith and the doctrine of the Watchtower organization. For while the historic creeds of the Christian faith affirm that the Biblical revelation presents God as one essence manifest in three Persons⁹, the Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Triunity of God. Specifically the Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ and His essential equality with the Father writing, "He was god, but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah."¹⁰

⁷ John 6:46 (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures).

⁸ The Jehovah's Witnesses home page, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/gods-name/>.

⁹ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 302.

¹⁰ Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 46.

Taking the Bible back in my hand, I followed up my first question by asking “so here in John’s Gospel where Jesus said here that no ‘man has seen the Father’ does He mean that no human being has ever seen Jehovah?” The smiles and affirmative head nodding communicated that these sweet ladies considered me a quick study and a good candidate for conversion.

Having established from their own version of the Bible and now confirmed by their affirmations that this interpretation of Jesus’ words in John 6:46 was accurate according to the Watchtower I moved to my next question. “Well then perhaps you could help me understand Jesus’ testimony in light of Genesis 18?” I asked. I opened my copy of the NWT Bible to the story of Abraham’s meeting with God and once again asked the ladies to read it aloud. Taking the Bible from my hand the first lady began reading with a clear and confident voice but quickly stopped when she realized the difficulty of her position. Note the text below from the NTW:

Afterward, *Jehovah* appeared to him among the big trees of Mam’re while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing some distance from him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and he bowed down to the ground. Then he said: “*Jehovah*, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass by your servant. Please, let a little water be brought and have your feet washed; then recline under the tree. Seeing that you have come here to your servant, let me bring a piece of bread so that you may refresh yourselves. Then you may go on your way.” At this they said: “All right. You may do as you have spoken.”¹¹ (Emphasis added).

The text is quite clear that Abraham not only *saw* Jehovah, but that he also walked, talked, and ate with Him! I encouraged my guest to keep reading but it was obvious that with every vocalization of “Jehovah” that her level of discomfort was increasing so I temporarily rescued her by asking another question.

“So, back in John 6:46 Jesus said that no one has ever seen Jehovah, but it seems clear here in Genesis 18 that Abraham saw Jehovah with his own eyes.” There was no response and the smiles that had beamed so brightly just moments before had been replaced with frowns.

¹¹ Genesis 18:1-5 (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures).

Breaking the awkward silence I offered a thought for consideration, “I’m wondering then would you say that Jesus was wrong about no one having seen Jehovah?”

“No, of course not” said the second woman who until this point had been content to let the young recruit do the talking.

“Did Jesus lie then?” I asked.

“No!” came her answer with a hint of self-righteous indignation.

“Well then, if Jesus said that no one has ever seen Jehovah, and He wasn’t lying and He wasn’t wrong, then how is it that Abraham *saw* Jehovah, walked with Jehovah, prepared a meal for Jehovah, and even tried to negotiate with Him over the fate of Sodom?”

I wish that I could report that these two precious lost souls confessed their ignorance, repented of their false doctrine and gave their hearts to Jesus there on my doorstep but such is not the case. Instead the second lady who was obviously the more seasoned Witness tried to steer the conversation in another direction so as to avoid this clear contradiction of their doctrine. I continued to point them back to Jesus’ statement and Abraham’s experience asking them to reconcile what appeared to be a massive inconsistency in their Bible. Finally the elder Witness blurted out, “I don’t know!!” in response to my questions, perhaps her most honest response thus far. She then asked, “What do you think it means?”

I used that opening to share the Biblical revelation of the Triune nature of God pointing out that the example before us was just one of many in the Scriptures that demonstrate that the Father (Jehovah), Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit are one essence manifest as three Persons, “one What” and “three Who’s” as Dr. Geisler likes to put it.¹² I also suggested that the doctrine of the

¹² Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

Trinity allows one to reconcile Jesus' statement in John 6:46 with Abraham's experience in Genesis 18. That is, anytime God reveals Himself in human form it is the Son of God. Thus, Jesus could correctly state that no person has seen the Father because Jesus is the Jehovah of Genesis 18.

By now my family had made their way to the breakfast table and were wondering why I wasn't serving up crispy bacon and ebelskivers while the no-longer smiling ladies were saying something about needing to get to another appointment. As they prepared to turn away from the door I left them with one last scripture from their Bible. I pointed them back to their own Bible and asked them to look at John 8:24, which reads: "That is why I said to you: You will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am [he], you will die in your sins."¹³ With sincere charity I asked them why the "he" was bracketed in the text. No longer interested in the conversation they just looked at me so I told them what they already knew from their weekly doctrinal meetings, that is that the "he" is not in the original text. Rather, Jesus simply said, "...if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." I reminded them that their own Greek Interlinear text reveals that in this verse Jesus took the personal name of God for Himself by using the Greek phrase "*ego eimi*", the same Name by which Jehovah revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush.¹⁴

As they walked away, I encouraged them to pray about our conversation and to bear in mind Jesus' admonition that if they refused to believe that Jesus is Jehovah (God the Son) that they would die in their sins and that neither Jesus nor I would want that! I prayed that the problem that they had just discovered with their theology would continue to echo in their minds until they were ready to acknowledge Jesus as Jehovah.

¹³ John 8:24 (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures).

¹⁴ Exodus 3:14.

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