

**Speaking the Truth  
in Love to  
Jehovah's Witnesses**

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*Dedicated to  
my longtime friend at  
Northwestern Publishing House  
Mark Sikorski*

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# Introduction



Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:14,15)

It was a special day. The patriarch of a large family was celebrating his 90th birthday. Children, grandchildren, and other relatives had come from all over the state, and beyond. Tents had been set up on the spacious lawn, and caterers were serving a delicious chicken dinner. On the patio behind the house, musicians played songs from decades past, while people sang along. A warm midsummer sun heightened the festal feeling. Everything was just right, except . . .

The large cake especially ordered for the occasion had no words on its frosting. Among the many songs people sang, one was conspicuous by its absence. Unspoken, unwritten, and unsung were the words “Happy Birthday!”

The reason for this unusual celebration? Among the dozens of relatives—including this writer as a shirttail relation—were two people who do not believe in celebrating birthdays. In order not to offend them, the family had decided not to say the obvious—that this gathering was more than a family reunion. The persons being appeased are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Just who are these Witnesses? Often known as much for what they oppose—such as birthday and Christmas celebrations, saluting the flag, and giving blood—Jehovah's Witnesses remain a people outside mainstream society as well as outside mainstream religion. Our examination of the Jehovah's Witness faith will examine its history, what Witnesses believe, and how to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

Much has been written and continues to come off the presses about the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is not the intent of this book to create experts who know everything about the movement. As shall be noted, Witness history is complex, and when it comes to the church's doctrine, its teaching, there has been a great deal of development and change.

More important than becoming specialists in everything Jehovah's Witnesses believe, we need to be firmly grounded in the Bible, which is the Word of God. We live in an age of religious indifference. Many churchgoing people are ill informed about their own faith, much less that of others. As we are more and more firmly established in our own faith, we will want to share it. Along with presenting Jehovah's Witness doctrine, we will present the counterpart in true scriptural teaching.

The Christian faith is unique. No other religion has the Savior, Jesus Christ. All other religions—and, as we shall see, that includes the Jehovah's Witnesses—teach some form of salvation through works. Although Jehovah's Witnesses have much to say about Jesus, they do not know him as the eternal Son of God and Savior. Many well-meaning Witnesses are

devoting their lives to try to work their way into heaven. In biblical terms, they are trying to save themselves by their own righteousness, as they attempt to keep God's law.

Thousands upon thousands of Witnesses are giving their hearts and lives to their organization, which they believe is the one true church on earth. Yet Paul's words about his fellow Israelites also apply to the Jehovah's Witnesses: "I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:2-4).

It is not the intent of this book merely to show that Jehovah's Witnesses are misguided. Rather, it is our hope and prayer that this small work will help many priceless souls come to faith in Jesus, who is the world's Savior. What a joy it is for Jehovah's Witnesses when they discover that Jesus Christ has done it all. He has lived for us, died for us, risen again, and promises us forgiveness and everlasting life. He is our righteousness and our salvation.

### **Research Notes**

I have quoted rather extensively from Jehovah's Witness documents, believing readers should be able to examine and grapple with a sizeable sampling of the material for themselves, as well as through the filters of the author. Quoting from Jehovah's Witness sources can be difficult. For one thing, many of the older sources are difficult to find. Moreover, the organization has had a way of changing what it says from one edition of a book to the next, and it can be difficult to find the exact edition with the sought-after quotation.

Former Jehovah's Witness Duane Magnani has done researchers a priceless service; in his book *The Watchtower Files*, he not merely quotes from Witness sources, but he has

reproduced entire pages photographically, so the reader can see the original document and the quotation in its context. When referring to this source, I reference the Jehovah's Witness source followed with the page in Magnani's work. The works of a number of other writers, in particular ex-Witness David A. Reed, contain yet more reproduced material from the Watchtower.

I am also greatly indebted to the many articles from the *Christian Research Journal* and to the Web site of Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry for the well-organized, concise, and complete information they offer on Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as other non-Christian religions and worldviews. The bibliography at the end of this book is extensive and includes many Jehovah's Witness sources, as well as numerous works by former Witnesses, who bring insiders' understanding to their critiques.

Above all, special thanks are due former Jehovah's Witnesses Don Luke and Amy Mueller, who share the Lutheran Christian faith with this writer. Amy and Don were kind enough to review the entire manuscript chapter by chapter as it was being written. In addition to offering personal insights and valuable suggestions, they added life and feeling to the material. They epitomize the Christian attitude the apostle Paul refers to as "speaking the truth in love."

**Part 1.**  
**The Nature of the Watchtower**

**1. Foundations  
of a Cult**



North American society has become a spiritual supermarket, offering something for everyone—the careful shopper as well as the impulse buyer. That has not always been the case. At one point in our history, our religious tendencies were fairly

homogeneous. That is, despite our denominational differences, we could all identify with a common religious core, something we referred to as our "Judeo-Christian tradition." Even folks who did not often attend church knew something about the religious consensus that constituted the "moral fabric" of our society. We were a Christian nation.

The religious scene is now very different . . .  
(Ronald Enroth, *New Religious Movements* 9)

Among the many movements offering their wares in today's religious supermarket is the Watchtower Society, better known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. In a number of areas, Jehovah's Witnesses hold traditional Christian values, and many people look at them as simply another Christian denomination. They believe in the Bible as God's inspired Word, although, as we shall see, they have their own adjusted version of the Bible. Witnesses stand for traditional family and sexual values, honoring marriage and the family unit, while rejecting abortion and homosexuality.

Nevertheless, like the Mormon church and other groups that deviate from biblical Christianity, Jehovah's Witnesses diverge widely from basic Christian beliefs. Although they make the claim that they represent the restoration of true Christianity and mark a return to the faith of our fathers, they are a non-Christian cult.

### **Common Characteristics of Cults**

Relatively small groups, compared with major world religions

Follow a radical leader

Rigidly control members

Espouse extremist beliefs and practices

Reject historic Christianity, and place another authority above the Bible

Deny the Trinity

Deny the deity of Jesus

Emphasize salvation by work-righteousness

Tend to soften the teachings of sin and hell

Prey on the ignorance of nominal Christians and others

Feel a notch above orthodox Christians

### **The Nature of Cults**

Within the Christian religion there are numerous denominations. Differences that divide the various church bodies are not to be taken lightly and can be highly charged. Baptists, for instance, reject infant Baptism, even though the rite is in keeping with the scriptural injunction to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . .” without any distinction as to age (Matthew 28:19). While practicing infant Baptism, Roman Catholics, on the other hand, have added to the Bible the traditions and dogmas of their church, including that of the infallibility of the pope.

As serious as divisions between church bodies can be, the various groups are still considered Christian and are referred to by one another as denominations within Christianity. At times, newer and smaller splinter groups within Christendom are referred to as sects.

A cult, however, is something quite different. Cults differ not only in their dropping some teachings from the Bible or adding something to it, but they reject even the most central truths at the very heart of Christian faith. The two key doctrines that all Christians share are the Trinity and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both are mysteries, and both separate Christianity from all other worldviews and religions. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that while there is only one true God, that God consists of three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The incarnation is the truth that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh and blood (from the Latin, *in + carnis*, in the flesh).

Both doctrines are central to the truth that the second person of the triune God became a man, our brother, that he might live a perfect life on behalf of fallen, sinful humankind, and then offer that life as a sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world. Cults deny even these foundational doctrines.

It is ironic that the two major cults to come out of America—the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses—both claim to be Christian and to represent true Christianity. Their desire not to be referred to as cults comes in part from the fact that the term *cult* generally carries negative connotations. A recent book on the religions of the world offers this definition of *cult* in its glossary:

A term used by sociologists to denote a nontraditional minority religion characteristically centered on a charismatic leader. Recently the term has been used negatively by the news media and others to designate a group perceived as making high demands on its members and controlling their lives in ways potentially dangerous to themselves and to society. (Ellwood and McGraw 514)

As far back as 1938, in *The Chaos of the Cult*, Jan Karel Van Baalen referred to cults as “the unpaid bills of the church” (12).

When churches do not do their God-given work, there is a price to pay in the form of new anti-Christian groups that challenge the most cherished and vital tenets of Christian faith.

Liberal Christian churches have failed in that they have caved in to the pressures of the times—whether in accepting scientific theories such as evolution over the biblical teaching of creation or in going along with social trends such as the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle over against biblical morality. Other churches that hold more closely to the teachings of Scripture often turn people away by coming across as self-righteous, better-than-thou, and loveless. In either case, people turn to cults that offer something to believe in and a place where they can find a sense of personal worth and belonging.

The price people pay as members of cults is high. That price can come with financial demands made by their group, although for Jehovah's Witnesses, this is not the case. More significant, under the directives of a powerful leader or organization, people's thoughts and lives are strictly controlled. Instead of the gospel of full forgiveness and grace through Jesus Christ, cult members carry the heavy—and at times unbearable—burden of having to earn their salvation by following the demands of their organization. While they tend to look down on more traditional Christians as ignorant and unenlightened, cultists must close their minds to all but the dictates of their leadership.

In subsequent chapters we will examine the history, teachings, practices, and behaviors of Jehovah's Witnesses. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the place of the organization in the lives of Witnesses.

### **The Jehovah's Witness Organization**

A key feature of the Jehovah's Witnesses is the strength of their organization. Witnesses know they are different and are proud of it. "There is a certain feeling one gets from being thought of as different," writes former Jehovah's Witness Ted

Dencher. “That feeling Jehovah’s Witnesses have. They believe that God is restoring true worship to the earth and theirs is this worship” (24). Moreover, that heady sense of uniqueness—call it superiority—is heightened by a sense of being the only ones who will enjoy salvation. According to their official magazine, the *Watchtower*, only their church members will be saved (February 15, 1979, 30).

Dencher goes on to say how this sense of uniqueness impressed him when he was thinking of becoming a Jehovah’s Witness. The conviction of Jehovah’s Witnesses that they possess the truth and are members of the true church on earth is impressive—and heightened by their obvious devotion to their cause. Such dedication is especially impressive in our day, when many people believe there is no absolute truth and everything is relative. Whatever a person believes sincerely is thought to be true for that individual. In this respect, Witnesses come across as strongly committed to their truth.

### *Jehovah’s Witness Terminology*

In order to understand Jehovah’s Witnesses, it helps to become familiar with a few key terms. The official name of the Jehovah’s Witness organization is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS). Headquartered in Brooklyn, New York, the Watchtower Society prepares publications for the organization and oversees its operation.

Often the Watchtower is simply referred to by the all-encompassing designation “the organization.” The organization of the Watchtower Society includes all the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses, its leaders, its headquarters and branch offices, and its printing facilities. The organization lays claim to being God’s sole organization and the only true religion on earth.

Along with its designation as “the organization,” at times the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is shortened to “the Society.” As will become clear in our study, Witnesses must submit completely to the Society’s authority.

Within the organization or Society, there are several special groups of people. One is the “anointed class.” This is a group of 144,000 Witnesses chosen by God to rule in heaven with Jesus after they have died on earth. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that only this limited number of people will live in a spiritual heaven with King Jesus. All other faithful Jehovah’s Witness believers will live in a paradise on earth.

The Governing Body is a central group within the organization. Its membership varies from approximately 11 to 17 anointed Witness men residing at the Watchtower headquarters in New York and claiming to be enlightened by Jehovah. For Witnesses, this group is the sole interpreter of the Bible, as well as the only channel of communication between God and all humankind. The Governing Body makes the rules all Witnesses are required to believe and obey.

The “great crowd” or “other sheep” consist of the multitude of people who are faithful to Jehovah but who have not been selected for heavenly life. They will live in the paradise established on earth after the great conflict of Armageddon, the battle that will bring the present order of things to an end.

The term *overseer* was formerly used in reference to an exemplary brother chosen by the Society to lead, supervise, and shepherd a congregation, in some ways similar to a pastor in a church. This arrangement was later replaced by a body of elders, yet the term is still used to describe the position of leadership over assemblies, conventions, circuits, districts, and branches.

For other Witness terminology, see the extensive vocabulary at the end of the book.

### *Set Apart*

The Watchtower organization considers itself special and set apart from Christian churches, which in its eyes are not really Christian at all. Witnesses believe that for many centuries Christianity has been a corrupt, false religion—the great harlot,

Babylon the Great, of the book of Revelation. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, no sooner had the first generation of Christians—that of the apostles—died than a vast falling away from the true faith took place: “The death of the apostles removed a restraining influence, allowing a widespread apostasy to develop. (2 Thessalonians 2:7,8) An organization grew up that unworthily professed to be God's congregation. It falsely claimed to be the holy nation anointed with God's spirit to rule with Jesus” (*Watchtower*, June 15, 1992, 19).

From that early point on, until the coming of the Watchtower Society some 18 centuries later, Christendom lived in darkness. If this seems farfetched, that's because it is farfetched. As Christian writer Robert U. Finnerty comments:

Perhaps the most compelling argument against a universal early apostasy may be found in the commissioning and empowering of the apostles themselves. If a universal apostasy occurred immediately after the death of the apostles, we would have to judge the apostles as incompetent or negligent evangelists who utterly failed to accomplish Jesus' commission to make disciples. Such an apostasy would reflect poorly on Jehovah God as well, whose “holy spirit” was unable to preserve His followers for even a single generation. (18, 3:32)

Yet this is what Jehovah's Witnesses are asking people to believe. Witnesses consider historic, mainline Christian churches corrupt, decadent, and of the devil. Consequently, Witnesses do not view historic denominations—such as Lutherans—as fellow believers or even as misguided Christians. Former Jehovah's Witness David Reed explains:

To a Jehovah's Witness, a church is just as foreign as a Hindu temple. In his mind a church is a demon-infested building surmounted by a pagan

symbol (the cross) . . . filled with immoral people who worship a three-headed false god (the Trinity) and salute an idol made of cloth (the national flag). (quoted in Kern 9)

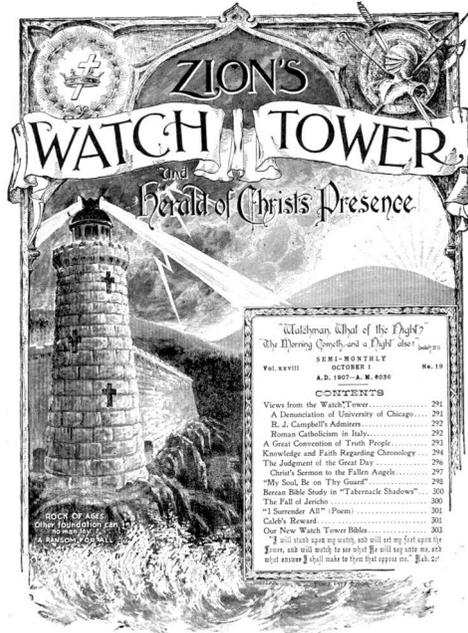
Given their conviction of having the only true church on earth, Jehovah's Witnesses look down upon others, as ex-Witness Joe Hewitt notes, "Ridicule of non-witnesses is an integral part of the Watchtower society" (142).

That their organization is God's voice on earth is seen especially in two titles by which they refer to it—Prophet and Faithful and Discreet Slave.

### *The Organization as Prophet of God*

The Society not only claims to be a voice for God, but *the only* channel of God's truth (*Watchtower*, February 15, 1981, 19). The organization considers itself God's chosen prophet on earth, as the *Watchtower* magazine states: "This 'prophet' [referred to in Deuteronomy 18:14-22] was not one man, but was a body of men and women. It was the small group of footstep followers of Jesus Christ, known at that time as International Bible Students. Today they are known as Jehovah's Christian witnesses" (April 1, 1972, 197). Another *Watchtower* article says, "Whom has God actually used as his prophet? . . . Jehovah's Witnesses are deeply grateful today that the plain facts show that God has been pleased to use them" (January 15, 1959, 40-1).

The *Watchtower* magazine, which makes such pronouncements, is looked upon as God's communication with the world. Back in 1939, the *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* asserted, "It should be expected that the Lord would have a means of communication to his people on the earth, and he has clearly shown that the magazine called *Watchtower* is used for that purpose" (85, reprinted in Magnani 15). Elsewhere, a Watchtower official asserted that Jehovah God himself had always been "the editor of the paper" (Magnani 16).



Cover of *Zion's Watch Tower*, Oct. 1, 1907

As God's prophet, the Watchtower organization considers itself theocratic—that is, ruled directly by God. The administrative system the Jehovah's Witnesses have developed supposedly rests upon that of the first Christians:

The appointive powers rested in the hands of a governing body composed of the apostles and other mature associates such as Timothy and Titus. Similarly today the power of appointment of all servants rightfully rests with the governing body of the "faithful and discreet slave" class, which is under the direct supervision of Christ Jesus at the temple. (*Qualified to Be Ministers* 320)

The reference to "faithful and discreet slave" leads to the second key term by which Witnesses identify their organization.

*The Organization as Faithful and Discreet Slave*

In speaking of the end times, Jesus made reference to “the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household” (Matthew 24:45). According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christ was referring to their organization. At first, many felt that the organization’s founder, Charles Taze Russell, was that faithful and wise servant (Magnani 25), a designation that Russell himself accepted.

Thousands of the readers of Pastor Russell’s writings believe that he filled the office of “that faithful and wise servant,” and that his great work was giving to the Household of Faith meat in due season. His modesty and humility precluded him from openly claiming this title, but he admitted as much in private conversation. (*Watchtower* December 1, 1919, 357)

Today, the faithful and wise servant (or “discreet slave” in the Jehovah’s Witness translation of the Bible) is generally seen as referring to the Society’s leadership:

Jesus foretold that among his people there would be a “faithful and discreet slave” class who would be providing the spiritual food to God’s family . . . overseeing the carrying out of the Kingdom interests world wide. (Matt. 24:45-47). These anointed overseers serve as though being guided in their activities by the right hand of Christ. (*Watchtower*, January 15, 1969, 51)

Not only is the Watchtower organization perceived by its members as God’s chosen prophet, but it is also his appointed overseer in the end times of the world.

Witnesses, then, see their organization as special, as chosen by God in these last times. That sense of uniqueness, sadly, is not based on Scripture. As will be evident in the course of our study, Jehovah’s Witnesses have departed from even the most fundamental of biblical truths. They belong not to God’s anointed organization, but to a non-Christian cult.

In closing this initial chapter, it is well to recognize the responsibility that Bible believing Christians have toward people caught up in cults. As Anthony Hoekema points out in *The Four Major Cults*:

Cults have sometimes arisen because the established churches have failed to emphasize certain important aspects of religious life, or have neglected certain techniques. Though one may assign many reasons for the rapid growth of the cults, one reason we may be sure of: people often find in the cults emphases and practices which they miss in the established churches. (1)

This is not to say that individual Christians need bear a personal sense of guilt for the rise of the cults. Rather, it means we need to recognize that the churches have much to offer and should look for ways to improve in serving folks. We will want to give people everything we can for their spiritual well-being in response to the love of God in Jesus Christ.