

CULTS AND FALSE RELIGIONS

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

REVIEW: None.

READING: John 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION: This morning will we start a new series on cults and false religions.

What is a cult? [*Ask the students*]. A cult may be defined as a religious sect based mainly upon the teachings of one individual.

What is a false religion? [*Ask the students*] A false religion may be defined as any religious system that does not conform to the key doctrines of the Biblical Christian faith. These key doctrines include:

- The inspiration of Scripture.
- Biblical authority.
- The virgin birth, sinless life and vicarious [*substitutionary*] death of Christ.
- The deity of Christ.
- Salvation by grace through faith.
- The nature of God – eternal, unchanging, unique, etc.

This morning we shall study the **Watchtower Bible and Tract Society**, otherwise known as the **Jehovah's Witnesses**, as they are one of the more active and populous groups.

I. FOUNDER: Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916).

- 1) Russell started a small Bible study group after rejecting the doctrine of eternal torment. He also started publishing a monthly magazine that spread his teachings.
- 2) He was a non-Christian sceptic when he began the WT.
- 3) Russell perjured himself in court and proved himself a fraud, claiming he knew Greek when he could not read the Greek alphabet.
- 4) His formal education ended at age 14.

II. HISTORY / ORGANISATION:

- 1) Russell who drew his ideas from Seventh Day Adventism and Christadelphianism.
- 2) The Watchtower magazine was first published in 1879.
- 3) As of 1999, there were approx. 5 to 6 million active members, plus 5 to 7 million inactive members.
- 4) From 1970, over one million JW's resigned or were disfellowshipped.
- 5) **There are three assumptions that form the JW world view:**
 - i) Divine guidance comes only through the WT Society. This leads JW's to live under a dictatorial, authoritarian organisation that suppresses independent thinking in the name of God. Disagreement with the WT is seen as satanic and disagreeing with God.
 - ii) JW's alone have the truth about God. JW's alone claim to be the people of God. They hence feel exclusive, unique and superior.
 - iii) Every other church in Christendom is false and controlled by Satan.

III. **PURPOSE:** To declare the name and coming Kingdom of Jehovah.

IV. **SOURCE OF AUTHORITY: The Watchtower Society.**

- 1) The Watchtower Society's Headquarters are in Brooklyn, New York.
- 2) It is ruled by a group of 12 men headed by a president who rules for life with absolute power.
- 3) JW's believe that God set up the Watchtower Society as His visible representative on earth; people are utterly unable to know the true meaning of Scripture without the Society and its vast literature.
- 4) JW's are expected to obey the WT as the voice of God.
- 5) "We must recognize not only Jehovah God as our Father, but his organisation as our Mother."
- 6) JW's are not to think for themselves to interpret the Bible – they are to submit their minds to the Watchtower.
- 7) If a JW disobeys WT instructions, they assume that he is 'apostate', and the punishment is 'disfellowshipping', whereby his WT friends are forbidden to talk to him. This fear of disfellowshipping is one of the WT's most effective means of keeping members obedient to its teachings.

V. **CLAIM:**

- 1) To represent the only organisation on earth through which Jehovah God operates and disseminates His will.
- 2) To supply the true interpretation of the Bible.

VI. **KEY LITERATURE:**

- 1) The corrupted *New World Translation* of the Bible – this has been translated to remove or change Scriptures that disagree with WT teachings.
- 2) Periodicals such as:
 - i) "The Watchtower"
 - ii) "Awake"

These two periodicals have a combined yearly circulation of over **600 million** in **150 languages!**

VII. **ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY:** Rejecting. JW's view Christians as a hated enemy.

VIII. **DOCTRINAL SUMMARY:**

- 1) **GOD:** His personal name is Jehovah.
- 2) **JESUS:** A created angel who has existed in three stages: the archangel Michael; Jesus on earth; an exalted state of Michael.
- 3) **HOLY SPIRIT:** The impersonal active force of Jehovah.
- 4) **TRINITY:** A pagan superstition devised by Satan to blaspheme Jehovah. It is polytheism – worship of three gods.
- 5) **MAN:** A material (not spiritual) creation of Jehovah. They believe the soul is a living physical body.
- 6) **SALVATION:** By faith and works. Spiritual rebirth is not necessary. Their salvation is never sure, so they keep selling books to earn salvation by good works.
- 7) **SECOND COMING:** Occurred invisibly in 1874.
- 8) **BIBLE:** Authoritative only when interpreted by the Watchtower Society.
- 9) **DEATH:** Death brings annihilation – temporary for those resurrected to life; permanent for the wicked.
- 10) **HEAVEN AND HELL:** Heaven is a place reserved for only the 144,000 elect; the idea of eternal damnation is a "doctrine of demons."
- 11) **WORSHIP:** JW's do not worship God.
 - i) There is no reverence or awe of God in their hearts.
 - ii) It is forbidden to worship Jesus Christ because to them He is created.

iii) In their hymn book “Songs to Jehovah’s Praise” they extol the works of the organisation and of individual JW’s; No adoring words to God or Christ, just praise to the organisation.

iv) JW’s will never kneel to pray, nor have any prayer meetings.

IX. TALKING WITH MEMBERS:

- 1) **The real problem with JW’s is the question of religious authority.** To a JW the Bible has no real authority, except as correctly interpreted by the Watchtower. JW’s are trained not to trust themselves or others to interpret the Bible, only the Watchtower.
- 2) If you silence and refute a JW by Bible arguments, which he cannot answer, he will just contact the Watchtower and they will give him their answers.
- 3) **As long as a JW trusts the WT organisation, you’ll never get anywhere with him.** Once a JW’s confidence and trust in the WT organisation is shaken, he is more readily brought to salvation.
- 4) **To destroy a JW’s blind obedience and submission to the WT, you must show them that the Watchtower is not trustworthy or reliable.** You must prove that the WT is not ‘God’s visible organisation on earth.’
- 5) **To destroy a JW’s blind allegiance to the WT, we must show from Scripture and Watchtower literature that the Watchtower is a FALSE PROPHET,** and hence is unreliable, fraudulent, untrustworthy, and not worthy of his belief, obedience or submission.
- 6) It is best to first get the JW to recognize and acknowledge that the WT is a false prophet, then to discuss doctrine and Bible passages. It can then be argued that, just as the WT has given false **prophecies**, so it has given false **doctrines**.
- 7) How can we show that the Watchtower is a false prophet? **A true prophet of God will give prophecies that will come true 100% of the time (Deut. 18:20-22; Matt. 7:15-20).** A false prophet will give prophecies that fail to come true. All WT prophecies have been shown to be false by the passage of time, even though it has tried to cover up its false prophecies by lies and deceit.
- 8) **Example:** From 1940-43, the Watchtower made 44 predictions of the immanence of **Armageddon:**
 - i) In September 1940 they said, ‘The kingdom is here, the king is enthroned. Armageddon is just ahead ...The great climax has been reached.’
 - ii) On May 1, 1942 they said, ‘Now, with Armageddon immediately before us . . .’
 - iii) On May 1, 1943 they said, ‘The final end of all things . . . is at hand’.
 - iv) On September 1, 1944 they said, ‘Armageddon is near at hand.’
 - v) In 1946, ‘The disaster of Armageddon . . . is at the door’.
 - vi) In 1953 they said, ‘Armageddon is so near at hand it will strike the generation now living’.
 - vii) In 1958 they said, ‘When will Armageddon be fought? . . . It will be very soon’.
 - viii) In Kingdom Ministry, May 1974, the world’s end was said to be ‘so very near’ that JW’s were commended who sold ‘their homes and property’ to devote themselves to full-time service in ‘the short time remaining before the wicked world’s end’.
 - ix) In 1975 they said, ‘The fulfilment . . . is immediately ahead of us.’
 - x) 1975 came and went, thus discouraging and embarrassing the WT and JW’s. Yet from 1976 to today the WT still says Armageddon and the end of the world is very near.

REVIEW / QUESTIONS: