

A Letter from a Jehovah's Witness

A study on the Deity of Jesus Christ

Introduction

While living in Palmer, Alaska, the Lord allowed my wife and I to visit with a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Lord used it as an opportunity for me to really dig in and learn the doctrine about the Deity of Jesus Christ. Shortly after moving to Anchorage, we received a letter from a Jehovah's Witness that we conversed with. In this letter they dealt with the critical issue about Jesus' identity. I felt that perhaps the best way to affirm the teaching that Jesus Christ is God is to take some of the strongest arguments of the adversary and demonstrate that they do not hold up to close scrutiny. When we see these arguments tumble, it will certainly leave us with the conclusion that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh!

Why is this Doctrine a Critical Issue?

Acts 4:12 teaches that Jesus Christ is the only name under heaven that was given by which man can be saved. John 14:6 also says that Jesus is the way, the truth, and life and that no one comes to the Father but by Him. Concerning salvation, why does it matter if Jesus is God or not?

Beyond salvation, how does this issue affect our worship of God and / or Jesus?

The Question of Translations

The excerpts from the letter are broken into sections and are represented in italics.

"Hi Mary & James: ... The last discussion we had it was regarding the first chapter of John. If we examine the content of the chapter we can arrive at the truth. Also a fine example to follow is that of the apostle Paul – where in Acts 17:2 it tells us that he reasoned with others out of the Scriptures.

The "King James" Bible says at John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the "New World Translation" it reads, "In the beginning the Word was and the Word was with God and the Word was a god." In the "Moffatt" bible (1934) it reads, "the Logos was divine." In "The Bible – An American translation" (1935) it reads, "the Word was divine." In "The New Testament in an Improved Version" (1808) it reads, "the word was a god."

We need to be cautious about comparisons between various versions of the Bible on specific passages. It isn't bad to compare translations, but we need to know what versions are being quoted, what their purpose was, and who their translator(s) were. There are hundreds of English translations of the Bible. Several of them were translated with the purpose of furthering or pushing their translator's beliefs. Let's look at each Bible version that was quoted in this letter:

King James Bible (KJV) – 1st edition released in 1611. This is a literal translation text and the passage quoted from the KJV equates Jesus (the Word) with God. It has been a standard English translation since its publication and is generally regarded by all to be a reliable translation of the Word of God.

New World Translation (NWT) – Published in 1961 by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York (the leadership of the Jehovah's Witness cult). Bible-Researcher.com states: "The New Testament adheres to the text of Westcott & Hort. It is a fairly literal translation, for the most part, but it does have some peculiar non-literal renderings. These are the result of the committee's efforts to conform the version to the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses. "Jehovah" is given as a translation for *kurios* (Lord) in the New Testament whenever the Father is meant, but not when it refers to Christ, the Son. "Torture stake" is put instead of "cross" because the

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Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the cross is an idolatrous symbol introduced by the Roman Catholic Church. And because this sect teaches that Jesus Christ was merely an angel, the version reflects a Unitarian¹ bias in several places.”

The Moffatt Bible – Published in 1926 by James Moffatt, a liberal theologian. Bible Researcher.com states: “But Moffatt's version was controversial in several respects. His preface put forth skeptical views concerning the truthfulness of the Bible. In the Old Testament he... frequently rearranged passages according to his idea of how they might have originally stood. In the New Testament alone he adopts some thirty conjectures which have no support at all in the manuscripts. The translation throughout was highly readable, but often embodied interpretations that were objectionable to some.” The JW's use Moffatt as a reliable source, but Moffatt apparently didn't even believe the Bible to be truthful. He shouldn't be considered to be reliable!

The Bible – An American Translation – Published in 1931 by J.M. Powis Smith (Old Testament) and Edgar Goodspeed (New Testament). Both of these men were liberal scholars. Their attitude toward the virgin birth is evidenced by the way they translated Isaiah 7:14 - "A young woman is with child ..." They render Matthew 1:23 as, "A maiden will become pregnant ..." - again denying the virgin birth. Smith regards the miracles of the Bible, such as Jesus' virgin birth, His raising of the dead, and others as mere myth or legend. It isn't surprising that they translate John 1:1 in a way that doesn't support Jesus' Deity.

The New Testament in an Improved Version – Published in 1808 by Thomas Belsham. Bible-Researcher.com states: “As minister at Essex Street he (Thomas Belsham) was looked to as practically the leader and mouthpiece of the Unitarians. It (Belsham's translation) ... drew the fire of the orthodox by omitting as late interpolations several passages traditionally cited as pillars of trinitarian doctrine. It was widely circulated in Unitarian quarters; but in spite of its presenting a much more correct text, many strictures upon it were passed even by Unitarians, while to the orthodox its notes gave much offence, and by them it was generally scorned as a sectarian work, 'The Unitarian New Testament,' though it was never officially adopted even by the Unitarians.” Thus, again we see the JW's quote a source that was developed by those with their same viewpoint and they even wouldn't agree with the whole text.

It appears that a variety of sources were quoted in order to give the appearance that their interpretation of John 1:1 is valid. However, a closer look at their sources reveals their instability and bias towards a Unitarian viewpoint. Ultimately, there are many more translations of the Bible that translate John 1:1 as, “...the Word was God” than those that do not. **Even if you feel that this argument is above you and you can't sort it out, have no fear!** John 1:1 is a strong passage that supports the deity of Christ, but there are many, many others upon which this doctrine hangs.

Jesus: God in the Flesh

This next section deals with some of the basic concepts of the trinity. Read John 1:1-18 and then read the excerpt below.

“But what does the context of chapter 1 reveal? Verse 14 says, “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” So when Jesus was in the earth people saw him. But in verse 18 it clearly states, “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. Also verses 1 & 2 say that, “in the beginning he was with God.” Reasoning on this we recognize that one can't be with someone and at the same time be that person.”

There are two arguments to deal with in this passage. First, how do verses 14 and 18 harmonize if Jesus is God? Second, how can Jesus be God and yet interact with God the Father?

¹ Unitarians do not believe in the trinity and therefore do not believe that Jesus is God or that the Holy Spirit is a separate being.

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Harmonizing John 1:14 and 1:18

The answer to understanding the harmony between these verses lies in understanding the intent of verse 18 and also recognizing Jesus' dual Divinity and humanity.

John 1:14 – “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

John 1:18 – “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him].”

Seen –

What do we learn about God revealing Himself to man from Moses' encounter with God? (See Exodus 33:20-23, 34:5-8, 28-35)

Using what you just learned from the definition of “seen”, Moses' experience, the texts from John 1:14 and 18, and the following passages, discuss as a group how Christ could be God yet no man has seen God at any time? (Hint: Remember part of the verse, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing?”)

Matthew 1:23 – “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

1 Timothy 3:16 – “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

The Trinity: Three Persons in One Being

In the letter, the JW points out that there is a distinct separation between Jesus the Son and God the Father. They are attacking the doctrine of the trinity. While the doctrine of the trinity is hard to understand, it is an essential and important doctrine that is tied into almost everything else we believe as Christians. Let's begin by defining the term, “Trinity”.

Trinity –

The Three Members of the Godhead are:

What Divine nature do they share? They are each...

- a.)
- b.)
- c.)
- d.)
- e.)
- f.)
- g.)

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What Divine attributes do they share? They are each...

- a.)
- b.)
- c.)
- d.)
- e.)
- f.)

What does it mean to be separate in person?

How are the members of the Godhead subordinate in duty? Each one has a separate role that they play in the governing of the universe, the plan of salvation and in interaction with man. Let's define their roles in brief.

God the Father –

Jesus the Son –

The Holy Spirit –

Before responding to the JW's assertion that God cannot be Trinity, let's look at how both the Old Testament and New Testament supports the Trinity.

The Old Testament Points to the Trinity

1. The Names of God imply Trinity. See Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 11:7; Isaiah 6:8, 54:5
Elohim –
2. The worship of God by use of a Trinitarian formula. See Isaiah 6:3
3. All three Persons are distinguished as God. See Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 9:6, Genesis 1:2, 6:3
4. A clear statement points to the Trinity. See Isaiah 48:16 – God the Son is speaking here.

The Direct Teaching of the New Testament

1. The Trinity is revealed at the baptism of Jesus. See Matthew 3:16-17.
2. Jesus taught the truth of the Trinity. See Matthew 28:19, John 14:16-17, 15:26
3. The New Testament Church recognized the Trinity. See 2 Corinthians 13:14
4. The distinct work of each Person of the Trinity points to the Trinity. See Hebrews 9:14.

The JW stated, "Also [John 1:1-2] say that, "in the beginning he was with God." Reasoning on this we recognize that one can't be with someone and at the same time be that person." Based on all we have just discussed, how would we respond to this statement?

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Jesus: The Eternal God

The following section deals with whether Jesus was a created being or whether He has always existed. If Jesus was created, He cannot be God because God is without beginning or ending.

“Jesus had a pre-human existence in heaven but not as part of an almighty Godhead. For the Bible plainly states that in his pre-human existence, Jesus was a created spirit being. Colossians 1:15 says he, “is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature.” So Jesus was created by God as the beginning of his creation. Revelation 3:14 says, “... the Amen, the faithful witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”

In our discussion there was also a question regarding Jesus being the only begotten son of God – and that somehow this did not mean he was created by God?? The Greek word for only begotten is also used in the Bible at Hebrews 11:17 to describe the relationship of Isaac to Abraham. There is no question that Abraham fathered Isaac and Isaac was not equal in time or position to his father.

So Jesus was created by his father, Jehovah God, as the firstborn of all his creation. Jehovah God, as the “Source of Life”, used his first born or only begotten son to create all other things. Colossians 1:16 says, “by him all things were created.” So in Genesis 1:26 where it states, “And God said, let us make man in our image” he was speaking to his only begotten son through whom all other things were created.”

If Jesus is God, then He has always existed and we should be able to explain these passages that they misuse to defend their position.

Christ the Firstborn

The passages addressed below are commonly misinterpreted by those who oppose the Deity of Christ. We will look at each one individually and explain the issues that are encountered.

Colossians 1:15-16 – “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:”

The problem comes in interpreting the words, “firstborn” and “image”. Actually, when this passage is properly interpreted it is a strong defense of Christ's Deity.

Image –

Firstborn –

Note: This word is also used in this way in Rom. 8:29, Col. 1:18, Ex. 4:22

Putting these definitions into context, rewrite the meaning of this passage.

The passage in Revelation 3:14 has a similar meaning when correctly interpreted.

Revelation 3:14 – “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;”

Again, the problem comes in word definitions. Let's look at the word, “beginning”

Beginning –

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We must pick the definition that most correctly fits the context of the passage and the harmony of Scriptures. Looking elsewhere in Revelation, compare the following passages and determine how they help us to interpret Revelation 3:14

Revelation 1:8 –

Revelation 1:11-13 –

Revelation 21:5-6 –

Revelation 22:12-13 –

Christ the Only Begotten

Another aspect of Christ we need to examine is His title of “the only begotten son of God”. What does this mean? Look at Hebrews 11:17, speaking of Abraham’s only begotten son, and compare it to John 3:16, speaking of God’s only begotten son. Answer the following questions.

Hebrews 11:17 – “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,”

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

What is the comparison being made between Abraham and God here?

What is the limit of the comparison?

How is Christ the only begotten son of God?

Who is Jesus Christ?

In this last section of the letter, the JW brings it down to the bottom line. Who is Jesus?

The Bible is clear about the distinction between Jehovah God and his son Jesus Christ. 1 John 4:9, “... God sent forth his only begotten Son into the world that we might gain life through him.”

Is it important to know that Jesus is God’s son and not God? Well, 1 John 4:15 says, “Whoever makes the confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God remains in union with such one and he in union with God.” And Isaiah 42:8 says, “I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory.”

There are a couple of interesting points that can be made from this statement. Read John 17:5 and harmonize it with Isaiah 42:8, shown above. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Look up what the name Jehovah means (see Exodus 3:14) and compare it to what Jesus called Himself on a few occasions (John 8:58 and John 18:4-6). Who was Jesus?