

Christianity vs Jehovah Witness

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Every Jehovah's Witness will tell you that they are Christians. But are they? In this article I will explore the very significant differences between historical Christianity and the Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs. By the end, I think you will see that gulf is indeed wide between true, biblical Christianity, and the theology taught by the Watch Tower.

History of Christianity

Although its roots reach back to the beginning of human history, Christianity as we know it today began with Christ, the Apostles and the New Testament. At Pentecost (Acts 2), the Apostles received the Holy Spirit, and many theologians point to that event as the time the Christian church was born. Others would look back a bit further to the resurrection of Christ (Luke 24) or to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). No matter how you slice it, though, Christianity as we know it today began in the first century A.D. Acts 11 notes that followers of Jesus Christ were first called Christians at Antioch.

History of Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses began with Charles Russell in the late 1800's. In 1879, Russell began publishing his magazine, Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence. And a few years later the Zion Watch Tower Tract Society was organized.

Many of the early milestones of the Jehovah's Witnesses centered around end-time predictions that were both made and that failed to come to pass. For example, in 1920 the Watch Tower Tract Society predicted the earthly resurrection of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would occur in 1925. 1925 came and went without said resurrection. The followers of the Watch Tower Society adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.

The Deity of Christ

Christians

Christians affirm the deity of Christ, the teaching that in the incarnation, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14). The Son of God became truly man, while continuing always to be truly God.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand, explicitly deny the deity of Christ. They believe that Jesus can be called a deity or a god, but only in the sense that an angel can be thus called. They affirm the deity of God the Father, and specifically deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe and teach that Jesus Christ is the incarnate name of Michael the archangel. They believe that Michael was the first angel created by God the Father, and is second in command in God's organization.

The Holy Spirit

Christians

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is fully God, and a person of the triune God. We can see many references in the Scriptures to the personality of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks (Acts 13:2), hears and guides (John 16:13) and can be grieved (Isaiah 63:10), etc.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses deny that the Holy Spirit is a person, and often refer to Him with the inanimate pronoun 'it'. They believe the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force that God uses to accomplish His will.

The Trinity

Christians

Christians believe that God is triune; that is, that He is one being expressed in three persons.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses see this as a gross error. They believe that the Trinity is a three-headed false god that was invented by the devil to deceive Christians. As noted above, they deny the full deity of Jesus Christ along with the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation

Christians

Evangelical Christians believe that salvation is by grace, through faith, and based entirely on the work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). They deny that salvation can be achieved by works (Galatians 2:16). They believe that a person is justified (declared righteous) on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness (Phil 3:9 & Romans 5:1).

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand, believe in a very complex, work-oriented, two-class system of salvation. Most Jehovah's Witnesses strive to earn their way into the "New Order" or "the reward of eternal life", and most fear that they will fall short. In their view, only a very limited number of people – 144,000 – will enter the higher levels of paradise.

The Atonement

Christians

Christians believe that salvation is only possible through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. That is, that Jesus stood in the place of His people and died as a substitute for them, and he fully satisfied the just penalty for sin on their behalf. See 1 John 2:1-2, Isaiah 53:5 (et.al.).

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses do emphasize the atonement of Jesus Christ, and on the surface many of the statements Jehovah's Witnesses have made about the atonement sound very similar to what a Christian would say.

The main difference is connected with the lower view of Jesus Christ espoused by the Jehovah's Witnesses. They insist on a parity between the "first Adam" and his sin, and the "second Adam" and his sacrifice. Since it was a man who plunged the human condition into ruin, it is also a man who would ransom mankind from that ruin.

The punishment must fit the crime, they insist, and therefore, it is a man's sacrifice that is required in the place of man. If Jesus Christ were truly God, there would not be a parity in the atonement. These arguments (and more concerning the atonement) have no grounds in the Scriptures.

The Resurrection

Christians

Christians affirm the biblical description and apologetic for the Resurrection – that Jesus Christ was truly and physically raised from the dead by God on the third day following His crucifixion. Indeed, the Apostle Paul saw this as a core and irreducible doctrine of the Christian faith (see 1 Corinthians 15).

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses, however, see things very differently in this regard. The Watch Tower insists that "God disposed of Jesus' body, not allowing it to see corruption and thus preventing its becoming a stumbling block to faith." (The Watchtower, November 15, 1991, page 31).

They explicitly deny that Jesus Christ was physically raised in the flesh and believe that all statements to that effect are unscriptural (see Studies in the Scriptures, vol.7, page 57). The Watch Tower teaches that Jesus passed out of existence at death, that God disposed of his body and that on the third day God created him once again as the archangel Michael.

The Church

Christians

Christians believe that all those in every place who call upon the name of Lord Jesus Christ make up the true universal church. And groups of believers who voluntarily covenant together to meet and worship together are local churches.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Watch Tower insists that it, exclusively, is the one true church, and that all other churches are imposters created by Satan. As proof, the Jehovah Witnesses point to the many different denominations in Christendom.

Hell

Christians

Biblical Christianity affirms the existence of hell, as a place of eternal punishment for all sinners who die outside of God's grace in Christ. It is the just punishment for sin. (See Luke 12:4-5).

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses reject the idea of hell, insisting that a soul passes out of existence upon death. This is a particular form of the error often referred to as annihilationism.

The Soul

Christians

Christians hold that a person is both body and soul.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses insist that there is no actual difference between body and soul in the Scriptures. And that, further, there is no immaterial part of man that survives physical death.

Bible Differences

Christians

There are many Bible translations in the English language, and Christians prefer different translations for a variety of reasons including readability, accuracy, the beauty and flow of language, and the translation process and philosophy behind a particular translation. Among the more common accepted English translations that Christians read are: the New American Standard Bible, the King James Bible, the New International Version, the New King James Version, the English Standard Version, and so on.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses insist that there is one translation that is faithful to the Word of God: The New World Translation, first published in 1950, and now translated into over 150 different languages.

The translation is full of alternate readings that do not have textual warrant in either the Greek or the Hebrew. Nearly all of these alternate readings are intended to support the particular views of Jehovah's Witnesses.

So, for example, in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God becomes God's active force. This supports their view that the Holy Spirit is an inanimate force (see above). Notoriously, the Word was God in John 1:1 becomes the Word was a god. This supports their denial of Christ's deity. Needless to say, this translation is crucial for Jehovah's Witnesses to "biblically" support their unorthodox views.

Are Jehovah's Witnesses Christians?

The Jehovah's Witnesses explicitly deny the gospel by grace alone through faith alone apart from works. They deny that a person is justified by faith. They deny the nature of Christ and the atonement; they deny the resurrection and the just wrath of God upon sin. Therefore, it is impossible to affirm that a consistent Jehovah's Witness (who believes as the Watch Tower instructs) is also a genuine Christian.

What is a Christian?

A Christian is a person who, by God's grace, has been born again through the work of the Spirit (John 3). He has believed in Jesus Christ alone for salvation (Romans 3:23-24). God has justified all those who trust in Christ (Romans 5:1). A true Christian has been sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) and indwelt by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16).