

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Biblical Doctrine of Salvation, Part 3

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The Denial of Grace and Maintaining One's Righteousness Under Threat of Annihilation

We have seen that Jehovah's Witnesses hold that unregenerate men and women can exercise faith, live for Jehovah, and even perfect themselves without spiritual rebirth (regeneration). This teaching, of course, denies biblical grace—for if man can do all these, he certainly needs little or no "grace." Clearly, Jehovah's Witnesses speak of "grace"—but not in a biblical sense. The Jehovah God of the Watchtower is said to be a God of "grace" because without Jesus' death for our sins, no one would have the *opportunity* to merit salvation. It should be evident then that the word "grace" for the Watchtower Society simply means the *chance* to earn one's own redemption.

Unfortunately, the problem with a salvation dependent on personal worthiness is that it must be maintained by great effort and can so easily be lost if one fails to meet the proper standards. Thus, if the 144,000 do not continue in service, good works, and obedience to the Watchtower Society (which is believed to equal obedience to Jehovah), they will lose their "justification" and become *worthy* of eternal death. In the following citation, observe how being "justified" (biblically being *declared* righteous apart from works—Titus 3:5-7) is dependent upon continued works and faithfulness. Obviously, then, the 144,000 are *not* declared righteous by God; they are only given the opportunity to prove themselves righteous by maintaining a favored status before God. Their "present justification" may be lost at any time!

The followers of Jesus Christ...are first declared righteous by God on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24, 28)....They are therefore "counted" or "credited" as being completely righteous persons, all their sins being forgiven....To win [the battle with present sin], however, they must constantly exercise faith in Christ's ransom sacrifice and follow him, thus *maintaining their righteousness* in God's eyes....If, on the other hand, they take up the *practice* of sin, falling away from the faith, they lose their favored standing before God as righteous persons....Such ones face destruction [eternal annihilation].²¹

Obviously, this claim to being *credited* as righteous and having *all* ones sins forgiven is either not true or not believed by the Watchtower. If it were considered true, there would never be any legal or just basis for Jehovah to annihilate people. Thus, just like the claim to believe in God's grace is disproven by their emphasis on works, so their claim to believe in justification and full forgiveness of sins (at least for the 144,000) is disproven by their emphasis on the requirement to maintain salvation. Thus, the 144,000 elect are chosen on the basis of their own worthiness, and then must maintain worthiness until death to be insured a spiritual resurrection, finally giving them immortality. The other Witnesses, as we shall see, must also do good works and remain faithful in this life and then both they and the rest of resurrected mankind must later attain sinless perfection if they also are to finally inherit "eternal life" on earth.

Salvation in the Battle of Armageddon and Beyond to the Millennium

The Witness concept of salvation is also related to the ever approaching “battle of Armageddon,” the last great World War prior to the Millennial age of God’s theocratic kingdom. Only Jehovah’s Witnesses are survivors of this Great Tribulation. They will be joined on earth by the resurrected *faithful saints** (Only the 144,000 hold the title of “saints.”) and later by the resurrected unbelievers. These Witnesses will become the righteous example for the rest of resurrected mankind (the unbelievers, whether good or evil) who now have the opportunity to earn salvation during the millennium. Here we have an irony of sorts. Even the evil people in this life fare better than unfaithful Witnesses—even if the Witnesses had been faithful most their lives. Jehovah’s Witnesses can be faithful for most of their lives and still lose their salvation—which relegates them to the “unfaithful” category. All “unfaithful” Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout history were forever annihilated when they died, while the evil unbelievers now get to be resurrected and are offered a second chance for immortality on earth. Obviously, it is preferable to be even an evil person in this life than an “unfaithful” Jehovah’s Witness.

But even faithful Jehovah’s Witnesses are not off the hook. The Watchtower teaches that Jehovah’s Witnesses who survived Armageddon had previously attained righteousness on earth, although not yet perfection. Hence their righteousness only provides them a privileged *position* in the millennial age. They must still earn their eternal life. The rest of earthly mankind must do the same. Thus, while Jesus and the 144,000 rule from heaven, everyone on earth must now attempt to perfect themselves. For the Jehovah’s Witnesses who survived Armageddon: “Jesus Christ...can do priestly service for them throughout the thousand years of his reign till at last they reach human perfection, if they are willing.”²² For the remainder of mankind:

The “great crowd” of survivors of the war of [Armageddon]...will then be on their way to gaining absolute righteousness and perfection in the flesh...actual human perfection in the flesh....They will be able to stand before the God of holiness on the basis of their own righteousness.²³

But that’s not all. Even *after* attaining perfection, *no one* is yet truly justified or a possessor of eternal life. All must yet pass the test spoken of in Revelation 20:7-9, the test that countless numbers are destined to fail:

Up in heaven in association with the High Priest Jesus Christ, great will be the privilege of his 144,000 immortal joint heirs.... Having been imperfect, sin-laden humans themselves on earth, they too will be able to sympathize with men on earth in their efforts to get rid of the “law of sin and death” in their members and to attain to human perfection, innocence, sinlessness.... All mankind will then be like the perfect man Adam in the Garden of Eden.... [Nevertheless] before adopting them as his free sons through Jesus Christ, Jehovah God will subject all these perfected human creatures to a thorough test for all time....The ones to be tested then will be not the holy angels of heaven but only perfected mankind on earth....So an indefinite number of perfected, human free moral agents will let themselves be misled....These willful rebels will be summarily executed.²⁴

According to Revelation 20:7-9, the number of the perfected class who will rebel against God are like the “sand on the seashore”—innumerable people. So, one wonders how these “perfect”, “innocent”, and “sinless” people could ever rebel against God in the manner spoken of? The answer biblically is because these people of the millennium are still sinners. But the Watchtower teaches that these individuals have *sinless perfection* and

yet still rebel. Clearly, it would seem, this does not offer Witnesses much hope for their eternal future.

Thus, all the heroic efforts a Jehovah's Witness engages in in this life only secures him a better *political* position in the New World. His many good works offer him precious little in relation to his *spiritual* position before God. Along with everyone else, including the wicked, Witnesses with a lifetime of good works and maintaining righteousness must now work even harder toward literal perfection and somehow attain it. Then, they must pass the final test before they can be counted among those with eternal life.

Notes:

21. *Aid to Bible Understanding* (1971), p. 437, emphasis added.

22. *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (1969), pp. 397-399.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 391-393, cf., pp. 396, 397.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 397-399.