

# **Jehovah's Witnesses and the Biblical Doctrine of Salvation: Watchtower Denials—Part Two**

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It should be obvious that the “corresponding ransom” theory of the Watchtower is not at all equivalent to the substitutionary, propitiatory atonement of Jesus Christ. The first pays only for the sins of one man, and is of limited value (which again is then somehow applied to others), while the second *actually* pays for the sins of all the redeemed, and is of infinite value. Further, as Gruss points out, the Greek word *antilutron* does not carry the meaning of “exact correspondence” which the Witnesses have attributed to it:

**The “corresponding ransom” doctrine should be rejected on the following grounds: First, the Greek word *antilutron* occurs only once in the Bible (I Tim. 2:6) and the meaning need not be much different than *lutron* (“ransom”). After an examination of the words in the *lutron* group in the New Testament, Morris concludes that in meaning *antilutron* “does not seem to differ greatly from the simple *lutron*, but the preposition emphasizes the thought of substitution; it is a ‘substitute-ransom’ that is signified. Such a term well suits the context, for we read of Christ ‘who gave himself on behalf of all’ (I Tim. 2:6). The thought clearly resembles that of Mk. X:45, i.e. that Jesus had died in the stead of those who deserved death. If the thought of substitution is there, we find it here to an even greater degree in view of the addition of the preposition which emphasizes substitution.”**

**It should be obvious to the reader that what the Watchtower writers convey with the words “corresponding ransom” and what is conveyed by the words “substitute ransom” as explained by Morris and the rest of the Scriptures are not remotely the same.<sup>48</sup>**

Watchtower writings speak highly of “the atonement.” But, in fact, as to its importance, they relegate it to a secondary status behind human good works. In an ultimate sense, what is it that determines whether or not the salvation benefits of Christ’s death are applied? It is not faith in *Christ* that applies the merits of Christ, but the good works and perseverance of the individual and his faith in the Watchtower Society. For without these, the merits of Christ are worthless. *The atonement is therefore of secondary importance to man’s own works of righteousness.* Apparently then, for the Watchtower Society, what the Bible describes as “filthy rags” (our works of righteousness) has *more value for salvation* than the sacrificial and sanctified death of Jesus Christ Himself!

The Witnesses’ doctrine of the ransom largely ignores the biblical teaching on the subject, by claiming to accept the “ransom sacrifice” which was provided in the death of Christ not as a finished work, but only as a foundation from which man works to provide his own salvation.<sup>49</sup>

A former Witness of 16 years points out that, despite their claims to believe in the atonement, they deny this through their demand for works:

**As I laid aside *The Watchtower* and other study guides of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and read the New Testament with an open mind, I became aware of two things. First, salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works (Eph. 2:8-10).... I found out that they said one thing but believed another. They will often speak highly of Jesus’ sacrifice and yet deny its efficacy by saying that to be saved one**

**must do all the things the organization directs.<sup>50</sup>**

There is an additional sense in which the death of Christ is secondary. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the primary goal of Jesus was to vindicate the name of Jehovah in response to a challenge of Satan's; it was only Jesus' *secondary* purpose to die for Adam's sin. In other words Jesus' principal goal was **not** to die for our sins.<sup>51</sup> Dr. James Bjornstad comments:

**His primary purpose was to vindicate (provide a defense for Jehovah's name) and establish Jehovah's kingdom.... After Adam disobeyed God, Satan challenged God to put a creature on earth who could experience all the temptations Satan could give and still remain faithful to God until death.... The burden fell upon His first created being, His son, Michael the archangel. God's son came to earth as Jesus and met all the temptations of Satan, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Moreover, he remained true to God until death. In so doing he was able to establish God's kingdom. Thus Jesus was Jehovah's chief witness. Jehovah's Witnesses claim Jesus also had a secondary purpose in being here. He came to sacrifice his human body as a ransom to God for Adam's sin.<sup>52</sup>**

Finally, Jehovah's Witnesses not only deny a *completed* atonement by declaring its practical application dependent on works, but also deny it by declaring its future application occurs only at the end of the millennium. It is at "the end of Christ's thousand-year reign as King when he finishes applying the merit of his human sacrifice."<sup>53</sup> Thus, Dr. Martin correctly observes:

**Jehovah's Witnesses argue that the atonement is not wholly of God, despite 2 Corinthians 5:21, but rather half of God and half of man. Jesus, according to their argument, removed the effects of Adam's sin by His sacrifice on Calvary, but the work will not be fully completed until the survivors of Armageddon return to God through free will and become subject to the theocratic rule of Jehovah.<sup>54</sup>**

In conclusion, the Jehovah's Witnesses view of salvation and the atonement of Christ must be considered deficient and powerless to save. It does not accept God's teaching about salvation, and therefore cannot have God's blessing. To the contrary— "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:9)

## FOOTNOTES

Note: All Jehovah's Witnesses texts are published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS, 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11021).

48. Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, p. 144.

49. Ibid., p. 145.

50. Gruss, *We Left Jehovah's Witnesses*, pp. 37-38.

51. Bjornstad. p. 85, cites *New Heavens and a New Earth* (1953), pp. 147-148; *What Has Religion Done for Mankind* (1951), pp. 240-245.

52. Bjornstad, *Counterfeits at Your Door*, p. 85.

53. *You May Survive*, p. 357.

54. Martin, *Jehovah of the Watchtower*, pp. 71-72.