

What You Should Know about Sharing the Gospel with Jehovah's Witnesses: Tactics Beyond Basics

They come to your door eager to talk about the Bible and faith and are very nice people. You have your arguments and Bible verses ready, but why do these encounters feel so frustrating at times? Jehovah's Witnesses may sound very Christian at times, but one key to successfully sharing the gospel with them is to understand the cultic language barrier that hinders communication. In this workshop we will look more closely into the Jehovah's Witness mindset to understand why, although we are using the same verses and sometimes even the same "evangelical" terminology, we are actually talking about very different things. You will learn why the Watchtower Society and its literature controls the Jehovah's Witnesses thinking and why you should be critical of their use of their own (mis)translation of the Bible called *The New World Translation*. We will look more closely at some tactics that will enable you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to break through the language barrier and the influence of the Watchtower Society's authority so that the minds and hearts of Jehovah's witnesses will be open to the true saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pasi Turunen has written a widely read exposé on the Watchtower Society titled *The Watchtower – Kingdom in the New Light* and has debated the Finnish Watchtower leadership both on the radio and on national TV.

Pasi Turunen, theologian (M.Th), author, and apologist, has been working as a Christian radio broadcaster for 25 years. He studied theology at Helsinki University. Turunen is a well-known Bible teacher and is often invited to speak to various apologetic seminars in Finland. He has written four books dealing with cult evangelism, same-sex marriage, inerrancy of the Bible, and apologetics. Currently he hosts a weekly radio program that analyzes current events and changing culture in light of the Christian worldview and the Scriptures. Turunen has also appeared on secular national television and radio programs in Finland defending Christian faith and views on contemporary issues. Turunen works for the Patmos Foundation for World Missions, which is an evangelical missions and relief organization bringing humanitarian aid and the Gospel of Christ to over 20 nations in the world. Patmos Foundation has an extensive media ministry in Finland and was the first Christian organization in Finland to start broadcasting Christian programs on commercial radio stations in 1985.

I. Introduction

- A. Founding of the Jehovah's Witness movement by Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916).
- B. Basic differences with classical Christian beliefs (see separate handout).
- C. Sociological concerns: No Christmas and birthday celebrations, military service, etc.; Disfellowshipping and shunning ex-JW's as apostates, even family members.
- D. Medical concerns: No blood transfusions → Thousands of dead JW's

II. Understanding and overcoming the cultic language barrier

- A. The problem of terminology: Using the same terms with different meaning and attaching polemic significance to common theological terms.

“The well trained cultist will carefully avoid definition of terms concerning cardinal doctrines such as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Atonement, the Bodily Resurrection of our Lord, the process of Salvation by Grace, and justification by Faith. If pressed in these areas, he will redefine the terms to fit the semantic framework of orthodoxy, unless he is forced to define his terms explicitly.” (Walter R. Martin)

1. **Solution**: Be aware of subtle redefining of terms and always seek to define the terms carefully.
2. **Solution**: Avoid using terms that are certain to evoke a theologically conditioned reflex and sever the lines of communication.
3. **Solution**: Familiarity with the “theocratic language” of JW’s is an asset.

B. Persecution complex: JW’s are convinced that Christians will always attack them on a personal as well as religious level

1. **Solution**: Communicate with love and sincerity; create and maintain trust. Especially important for JW’s who need support after leaving the organization.

III. *The New World Translation* and why you should not accept its use as a basis for discussion with JW’s

A. Examples of willful mistranslations:

1. John 1:1 – is Logos “God” or just “a god”?
2. Colossians 1:16 – is Christ the Creator of “all things” or “all *other* things”?
3. John 16:13 – is the Holy Spirit “it” or “he”?
4. Hebrews 12:23 – “spirits” or “spiritual lives” of the dead saints are near to God?

IV. The Watchtower Society as “God’s visible organization”

A. Identity of “the faithful and discreet slave” in Matthew 24:45-47

1. Vital to understand: Interpreting of “*the faithful and discreet slave*” (NWT) as representing Watchtower Society / Governing Body and linking it with the belief of Jesus’ invisible return (*parusia*) in 1914 and the

“inspection” during 1914-1919 forms the basis of Society’s absolute authority in all doctrinal and practical matters and is used to justify that salvation depends on following Society.

2. Notice: Changes in the doctrine of “this generation” of 1914.

B. From 144,000 “anointed ones” to the Governing Body alone (since 2013):

“Who, then, is the faithful and discreet slave? In keeping with Jesus’ pattern of feeding many through the hands of a few, that slave is made up of a small group of anointed brothers who are directly involved in preparing and dispensing spiritual food during Christ’s presence.” (Watchtower, July 15, 2013, p. 22.)

“That faithful slave is the channel through which Jesus is feeding his true followers in this time of the end. It is vital that we recognize the faithful slave. Our spiritual health and our relationship with God depend on this channel” (Watchtower, July 15, 2013, p. 20).

“We need to obey the faithful and discreet slave to have Jehovah’s approval.” (Watchtower 2011 Jul 15 p.24)

“Avoid independent thinking. How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by God’s visible organization.” (Watchtower, January 15, 1983)

V. Challenging the role of WT Society as “a uniquely reliable mouthpiece of Jehovah God” by pointing out inconsistencies and constant changes in WT teaching and how the “new light” proves the “old light” to be total darkness:

A. Who is the “*faithful and discreet slave*”:

1. **144,000** (1881) – **C.T. Russell** (1896-1907) – **144,000 + Jesus** (1926) – **144,000** (1995) – **Governing Body** (2013)
2. Notice: The 2013 teaching that only the Governing Body represents the Slave was described in 1981 as an apostate concept!

B. WT Society as a false prophet: When will Armageddon come?

1. The return of Jesus (visible → invisible), Armageddon, and resurrection of the saints: 1874, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1925, 1925, 1975, 1984, 1999 (and possibly 2034).

WT Society says: “*Who is this prophet? ... not one man, but body of men and*

women ... today they are known as Jehovah's Christian Witnesses" (Watchtower, April 1, 1972).

The Scripture says: "You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed" (Deut. 18:21-22).

C. "Accurate knowledge"? Will men of Sodom be resurrected:

1. **Yes** (1879), **No** (1952), **Yes** (1965), **No** (1982), **Yes & No** (1988), **No** (1990).

"... so as to walk worthily of Jehovah in order to please him fully as you go on bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in **the accurate knowledge of God**" (Colossians 1:10, NWT)

D. Life is in the blood: Changing interpretation of "avoid blood" in Acts 15:20, 29.

1. *Vaccination*: Not allowed 1931 – Allowed 1952
2. *Organ transplants*: Not allowed 1968 ("Cannibalism!") – Allowed 1980
3. *Blood transfusions*: Allowed before 1943 – Not allowed 1943 – Partly allowed 1982 (separately: red cells, white cells, plasma, platelets)

E. History at stake: Did Jesus die on a cross or on an upright pole? Case of *Justus Lipsius*.

Suggested Reading:

Ron Rhodes: *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (2009).

Erich and Jean Grieshaber: *Exposé of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Jean Books, 1982).

JWfacts.org – Facts About Jehovah's Witnesses: <https://www.jwfacts.com>

Raymond Franz: *Crisis of Conscience – The struggle between loyalty to God and loyalty to one's religion* (4th edition, 2002).

Prof. M. James Penton: *Apocalypse Delayed – Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (University of Toronto Press, 1985).

Watchtower Online Library (official Watchtower site): <http://wol.jw.org/en/wol/h/r1/lp-e>

JW.org – Jehovah's Witnesses (official Watchtower site): www.jw.org