

when this material is studied by Jehovah's Witnesses. To do so would be viewed as having a bad attitude. The last article in this series is titled: "Declared Righteous as a Friend of God." It is designed to show that millions of Jehovah's Witnesses along with

Abraham of old do not possess the "righteousness" enjoyed by the 144,000. The next issue of the *Christian Respondent* will discuss this article as part two of the matter of justification as taught by the Watchtower Society. □

On Being Declared Righteous: Part 2

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The previous issue of *The Christian Respondent* considered the position taken by the Watchtower Society that only 144,000 persons have, or will have, been 'declared righteous for life' during the more than 19 centuries that the Christian gospel or good news has been preached. (Romans 5: 18) This means that the 2.7 million Jehovah's Witnesses now actively associated with the Society are *excluded* from this select number and do not enjoy reconciliation with God as that process is explained in Paul's letter to the Romans. Still, the Watchtower Society argues that these millions do have a righteous standing with God although not the same as that of the 9,000 or so in their midst who claim that they are part of the elite 144,000. These "anointed ones" (a term used to distinguish this group by the Society) are the only ones presently 'declared righteous for life.' This *righteousness* is viewed as far different than the *righteousness* enjoyed by Abraham and other pre-Christian servants of God as well as that of the 2.7 million Jehovah's Witnesses of today.

In its December 1, 1985 issue of *The Watchtower* several articles develop this premise. The concluding article in this series titled: "'Declared Righteous as a Friend of God,'" is taken from the text found at James 2:23 which says: "' Abraham put faith in Jehovah, and it was counted to him as righteousness,' and he came to be called 'Jehovah's friend.'" -*New World Translation*. The thrust of the entire series of articles presented in this magazine is to show that there are two classes of Christians and each class has a *righteousness* that is different from the other. The scripture at Romans 5: 18 that speaks of being declared righteous for life, is viewed as only applying to the 144,000 and James 2:23 is interpreted to define the righteousness of the rest of Jehovah's Witnesses as well as pre-Christian servants of God. According to Watchtower teaching the 144,000 are born-again Christians and destined for life in heaven while those becoming Jehovah's Witnesses, especially since 1935, are viewed as having the prospect or hope of everlasting life on earth.

However, the words of James 2:23 are interpreted by the Watchtower Society to say something they do not say. James does not say that Abraham was counted as righteousness *as a friend of God*. He says that because of Abraham's faith "'it was counted to him as righteousness." He then adds: "'and he came to be called Jehovah's friend." James incorporates two widely separated scriptures in this text. The first is drawn from Genesis 15:6 and the latter remark from Isaiah 41:8 where God speaks of Abraham as his friend. In his letter to all Christians James is arguing for an active faith like the one that Abraham possessed. Abraham was put right with God and came to be called Jehovah's friend. Being acquitted of his sin there was no longer any barrier between Abraham and Jehovah. This made intimacy possible. Now that Abraham was reconciled to God by faith he could rightly enjoy friendship (intimacy) with God. *The New World Translation* of James 2:23 clearly shows that this is how the scripture is to be understood and is consistent with everything else the Bible has to say about Abraham's righteousness.

Abraham's righteousness due to faith is presented by the apostle Paul as the foundation example of the very same righteousness enjoyed by Christians due to faith in Jesus Christ. "' Although beyond hope, yet based on hope he had faith, that he might become the father of many nations in accord with what had been said: 'So your seed will be.' And, although he did not grow weak in faith, he considered his own body, now already deadened, as he was about one hundred years old, also the deadness of the womb of Sarah. But because of the promise of God he did not waver in a lack of faith, but become powerful by his faith, giving God glory and being fully convinced that what he had promised he was able to do. Hence 'it was counted to him as righteousness.' That 'it was counted to him' was written, however, *not for his sake only, but also for the sake of us to whom it is destined to be counted*, because we believe on him who raised Jesus our Lord up from the dead. He was delivered up for the sake of our trespasses and was raised up for the sake of declaring us righteous. Therefore, now that we have

been declared righteous as a result of faith, let us enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." - Romans 4:18-5:1. *NW*.

We note in the above quotation that Paul equates being declared righteous with being at peace with God. In this he echoes James' observation that because of being declared righteous Abraham became Jehovah's friend. That Abraham's righteousness is the same as that enjoyed by all believers is clearly shown in verses 23 and 24 of Romans chapter 4. To interpolate James' words to mean that Abraham was "declared righteous as a friend of God," is to do violence to what he is really saying and to corrupt the entire theme of justification by faith as that subject is presented in Scripture. However, as ill-founded as it is, the groundwork is thus laid by the Society to present an entirely different kind of "righteousness" for those millions they call the "other sheep." (John 10: 16) Having been pre-conditioned to believe that they are not justified for righteousness and life they must turn to the Watchtower Society to have their hope and righteousness defined for them.

According to the Watchtower timetable this newly defined hope and righteousness has only been available for the last 50 years of the twentieth century. Concerning this the current magazine under consideration has this to say: "In addition, for some 50 years now, Jehovah has been making peace with 'things upon the earth, ' those humans who will become part of the righteous 'new earth.'" -Page 13, par.2. The weight of proof or evidence that the above contention is true rests entirely on pronouncements found in the publications of the Watchtower Society. It was at a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses held in Washington D.C., in 1935 that the president of the Society, Joseph F. Rutherford, first proclaimed that the "great multitude" identified at Revelation 7:9 was an earthly class of Christians, some of whom were already appearing in the ranks of Jehovah's Witnesses at that time. (see *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, 1957, page 140) It is fair to ask, however, why one should accept this declaration which was nothing more than a viewpoint decided upon by the Society's president? This organization had already, by 1935, made a significant number of incorrect miscalculations, predictions and proclamations.

The Watchtower spokesperson, through whom this prophesy was being proclaimed was the same person who had previously preached that the "time of the end" began in 1799. He was the same person who taught

that 1874 marked the beginning of Christ's invisible presence. He is the same man who predicted the end of Christendom as taking place in 1918 and the violent end of all worldly kingdoms in 1920. (see *The Finished Mystery*, 1917 edition) This is the same individual who put his name to a booklet titled:

"Millions Now Living Will Never Die," (published in 1920), wherein it was predicted that the ancient servants of God would be resurrected in 1925 and begin to rule as princes in all the earth. This is the same man who later died in a home in San Diego, California called *Beth-Sarim*, (house of the princes) constructed under his direction in 1930 to house those ancient "worthies" following their resurrection. Rutherford died January 8, 1942 without any of his prognostications being fulfilled.

These things are said to illustrate that this man and the organization he represented did not have their facts straight on Scriptural matters and were making dogmatic declarations that went far beyond what the Bible taught. It would seem extremely ill-advised to set aside the historical good news clearly taught in Scripture in favor of their interpretations. Paul underscores the deadly effects of substituting a manmade gospel or good news for the real thing. (Galatians 1 :6-10)

Of course, Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to view what is printed by the Society as 'truth' and the Bible is interpreted from the standpoint that the *Watchtower* is the truth. In fact the end of every argument is; "what has the Society had to say about this?" Once that answer is found it is the end of discussion. Sometimes the Society will use other authorities in order to add weight to their position. Those authorities are not always used honestly. An example of this can be found in the present magazine under consideration as shown in the following quotation taken from page 15, paragraph 10: "James also mentions Abraham as an example to prove that faith must be backed up by godly works. After stating that Abraham was declared righteous, quoting Genesis 15:6, James adds a comment that helps us to see the scope of Abraham's justification. He writes: 'The scripture was fulfilled which says: "Abraham put faith in Jehovah, and it was counted to him as righteousness," and he came to be called 'Jehovah's friend.'" (James 2:23) Yes, due to his faith, Abraham was declared righteous *as a friend of Jehovah, not as a son with the right to perfect human life* or to kingship with Christ. Interestingly, in his *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, Robert Girdlestone

wrote concerning Abraham's righteousness; 'This righteousness was not absolute, I.e. such as would commend Abraham to God as a rightful claimant of the inheritance of sonship.'" -*The Watchtower*, Dec. 1, 1985 (Italics added).

As pointed out earlier, James is not saying that Abraham was declared righteous as a friend of Jehovah. That is the interpretation presented by the *Watchtower*-not the Bible. James is not limiting or qualifying Abraham's righteousness. To the contrary, he is actually showing us how *complete* it was! In the above quotation from the *Watchtower* it appears that Girdlestone's remarks are in connection with the "righteousness" being discussed at Genesis 15:6 as this is the text that James quotes in the first part of his statement. This is not the case. Girdlestone's remarks quoted are not addressed to Genesis 15:6 but rather Genesis 18: 19. Additionally, his commentary is arbitrarily cut off in mid-sentence. Had the sentence been completed it would have contradicted the way it was being used by the *Watchtower* writer. For the benefit of the readers of *The Christian Respondent* the paragraph from which this quotation is taken is reproduced. The underlined portion is that part used in *The Watchtower*. You will note that Girdlestone is discussing Genesis 18: 19.

"The second passage in which the substantive occurs is Gen. 18:19, where God says of Abraham, 'I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.' Here justice (i. e. righteousness) seems to mark a course of action in conformity with the grand principle of right, the loving God with all one's heart, and one's neighbor as oneself. This righteousness was not absolute, . i. e. such as would commend Abraham to God as a rightful claimant of the inheritance of sonship, because, in that case, he would not have been said to have been justified by faith; it was therefore *relative*, and was the result of his faith in God (see Rom 4:2-4, and compare 2 Sam. 22:21)." -*Synonyms of the Old Testament*, page 164.

The scripture about which Girdlestone is offering comment is discussing Abraham's *personal characteristic of righteousness*-not the righteousness bestowed on him by Jehovah God which acquitted Abraham of the liability of sin! Naturally, his native or natural tendency toward righteousness was not sufficient, in itself, to discharge him from sin. Otherwise, as Girdlestone observes, "he would not have been said to have been justified by faith." It was

this *personal quality* of righteousness that was not absolute so as to recommend him for the inheritance of sonship. Girdlestone does not argue against Abraham's claim to sonship, per se, but merely points out the relative quality of his *own* righteousness.

A couple of pages earlier in this work the writer does offer comment on what is said about Abraham at Genesis 15:6. Here he clearly shows that the inheritance to which he is speaking about was conferred upon him due to being declared righteous due to faith; Note this in the following quotation:

"The nature of righteousness, or conformity to the Divine law of love, has been pointed out in Chap. ix., but we must here notice its relationship with justification. We read in Gen 15:6, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him (for) righteousness.' In this passage three words enter on the sacred pages for the first time--belief, righteousness, and reckoning or imputation-words that were destined to play a conspicuous part in Christian terminology. That element of Abraham's feeling and conduct toward God that we usually call belief, faith, or faithfulness was regarded by God as a reason why he should be accepted as righteous or justified. Not only does all right action spring from belief in the Word of God, but also our heavenly Father justifies or acquits those persons who exercise it. Abraham's faith, according to the Hebrew text, 'was reckoned unto him righteousness;' but the LXX, followed by St. Paul, interprets this phrase as meaning 'for' not 'as righteousness.' It would follow that the passage does not teach us that Abraham's faith was regarded or estimated by God *as if it were* righteousness-the one quality being taken for the other-but that owing to the although declared righteous, still have to fight their sinful tendencies. (Romans 7: 15-20) They need Christ's blood to cleanse them from their daily sins of imperfection." -Page 12, par.17.

What they are saying is that the "anointed ones" - the 144,000-are in no better position or condition than anyone else. The arguments developed in this series of articles are not built on sound statements of Scripture but are built upon certain preconceived notions that have evolved through *Watchtower* teachings. When the Bible is approached in this manner it is impossible to view it objectively. Rather, the Bible is manipulated as one searches for 'proof texts' for one's position. To be sure, the *Watchtower* Society is not the only religious group guilty of this kind of Bible study but, still, that does not excuse them. Especially, is this so when one

considers how they boast of their scholarship and objectivity. The facts argue otherwise.

Coming back to the "hope" that the Society offers the "great crowd;" they are being told that they will never die as humans but will live through the "great tribulation" just ahead and continue to live forever on the earth. This is the constant theme that fires the imagination and the zeal of the Witnesses. It matters little to them that such a promise was offered to other 'millions' 65 year ago with the publication of the booklet, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die." (1920) Its opening paragraph read: "The emphatic announcement that millions now living on earth will never die must seem presumptuous to many people; but when the evidence is carefully considered I believe that almost every fair mind will concede that the conclusion is a reasonable one." -Page 5. Regardless of what those of "fair mind" concluded from reading this booklet the facts are that it was in complete error.

The resurrection of ancient 'worthies' in 1925 did not materialize nor did 'the restitution' that was supposed to begin that year occur.

Still, many of the devotees of the Watchtower Society did believe it and zealously spread the message by word of mouth and printed page. As a result of this zeal there were sizable increases in numbers in those years preceding 1925. It is much the same today.

Millions of Jehovah's Witnesses are being told that the generation of 1914, or at least a part of it, must see the end of the world. This puts the "great tribulation" at the door with deliverance into a cleansed earth just beyond. It is this 'hope' founded on Watchtower calculations and speculations that fires Jehovah's Witnesses. The longer it is delayed the greater the anticipation and the more feverish the activity. Present numerical increases reflect this phenomenon. In the end it will matter little, to the Watchtower Society, if this prediction also falls to the ground unfulfilled. It will have served, in their eyes, a noble purpose. It will have kept Jehovah's Witnesses busy and loyal to the organization. It is unfortunate that the hope of life is bound up with the promises of men who have no control over such matters.

Jesus reminded his disciples that the timing of the execution of God's promises was not something they could know. They could only live in expectation of and hope for these things. (Acts 1:7) It was sufficient for faith and incentive to live a godly life while awaiting the full realizations of God's purposes. (Mark 13:35-37) The uninspired utterances of men may promise much but the end is always disappointment. It is an even greater tragedy when those misled have also been denied being declared righteous for life by their religious mentors. This lack of spiritual security makes ultimate disappointments even more bitter. □