

## Lesson 23

### *Thought Provoking Questions*

### Jehovah's Witnesses

#### I. History

***A. Charles Taze Russell was the founder of what is now Jehovah's Witnesses and who brought about its far-flung organization.***

- 1. The name Jehovah's Witnesses was taken at Columbus, Ohio, in 1931 to differentiate between the Watchtower and the true followers of Russell as represented by The Dawn Bible Students and the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement.**
- 2. Russell was born on February 16, 1852 and spent most of his early years in Pittsburgh and Allegheny, Pennsylvania, where at age 23 he was known to be the manager of several men's furnishing stores.**
- 3. At an early age he rejected the doctrine of eternal torment, and as a result of this entered upon a long career of denunciation aimed at "organized religions."**
- 4. At the age of 18 he organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh which elected him "Pastor," a title that he retained for the balance of his life.**

***B. In 1879 he founded The Herald of the Morning, which developed into today's The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom.***

- 1. From 6,000 initial issues the publication has grown to 17.8 million copies per month in 106 languages.**
- 2. The other Watchtower periodical, *Awake!*, has a circulation of 15.6 million per month in 34 languages.**

***C. By 1981 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society claimed branches in more than 100 countries, and missionary works and Kingdom preaching in over 250. Its literature is distributed in 110 languages, and the Society's volunteers numbered 563, 453.***

- 1. During his life Russell had absolute control over the Society and its funds, holding \$990 of the \$1,000 capital while two followers held the other \$10; thus Russell controlled the entire financial power of the Society and was not accountable to anyone.**
- 2. Russell was not above raising money with shady schemes.**
  - a) He sold “miracle wheat” for \$1,00 per pound (some \$50-60.00 per bushel).**
  - b) It was asserted that it would grow five times as much as any other brand of wheat.**
  - c) Russell sued for libel those who publicly scorned the scheme, asking for \$100,000 in damages.**
  - d) Government witnesses testified that the wheat was actually low in the government’s tests.**
  - e) Russell lost the suit.**
- 3. He also practiced fraud upon his ex-wife after their divorce.**
  - a) The divorce was not granted on the basis of adultery, although that were allegations of improper conduct between Russell and Rose Ball, a young woman who lived with the Russells.**
  - b) Although denying more, Russell did admit to embarrassing circumstances.**
  - c) The divorce was granted because of “conceit” and “domination” there were such as to make life intolerable to any sensitive woman.**
  - d) After the divorce Russell transferred his property to corporations and societies over which he had absolute control to avoid paying alimony.**
- 4. Russell also sued J.J. Ross for libel based on a pamphlet Ross published entitled” *Some facts about the Self-Styled ‘Pastor’ Charles T. Russell.*”**

- a) Ross described Russell's teaching in *Studies in the Scriptures* as "the destructive doctrines of one man who is neither a scholar nor a theologian."
- b) Ross further denounced Russell's whole system as "anti-rational, anti-scientific, anti-Biblical, anti-Christian, and a deplorable perversion of the gospel of God's Dear Son."
- c) Ross pictured Russell as a pseudo-scholar and philosopher who "never attended the higher schools of learning; knows comparatively nothing of philosophy, systematic or historical theology, and is totally ignorant of the dead languages."
- d) In the suit Russell denied Ross's allegations, thus assuming the burden of proving that he possessed all of the qualities of learning and knowledge that Ross accused him of not possessing.

*(1) The only evidence offered at trial was offered by Ross's lawyer from Russell's sworn deposition.*

*(2) Russell admitted that there was "a grain of truth in a sense" (pun probably not intended) to the charges related to the "Miracle Wheat."*

*(3) His sworn testimony was that he was familiar with the Greek alphabet, but when asked to identify them from a page he admitted "I don't know that I would be able to." He then admitted that he was not familiar with the Greek language or with Hebrew or Latin.*

*(4) He further admitted that he was never ordained by a bishop, clergyman, presbytery, council, or any body of men living.*

*(5) Russell's claimed "unswerving honesty" received a rude blow as Russell's lawyer wrung statement after statement from him that established him beyond doubt as a premeditated perjurer.*

*(6) Russell asserted that his wife did not divorce him and that the court had not granted alimony from him; he was*

*then forced to admit that the court did divorce him from his wife and did award his wife alimony.*

e) The evidence was in; the case was clear. Russell was implicitly branded a perjurer by the court's "No Bill" verdict

f) Russell was shown to be a man who had no scruples about lying under oath and whose doctrines were admittedly based on no sound educational knowledge of the subjects in question.

5. Psychologically, Russell was an egotist whose imagination knew no bounds, but who is classed by his followers as equal to the apostle Paul as an expounder of the gospel; among his claims is the assertion that one would be better off to read his writings and leave off the Bible than to read the Bible and leave off his writings.

***D. Russell continued his teaching until his death on October 31, 1916, aboard a transcontinental train in Texas.***

***E. Following Russell's death, Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford assumed the helm of leadership.***

1. Rutherford acquitted himself nobly in the eyes of the Society by attacking the doctrines of "organized religion" with unparalleled vigor.

2. He was an adversary of not only of organized religion, but also against those in the Society who questioned his decisions.

3. Rutherford approached the egotism of Russell when he claimed that God had declared in effect that he was the mouthpiece of Jehovah for this age and that God had designated His words as the expression of divine mandate.

***F. Rutherford died from cancer on January 8, 1942 at "Beth Sarim," his palatial mansion in San Diego, California.***

## **II. Russell-Rutherford Doctrine**

***A. It destroys the supernatural character of the Bible.***

**1. Russellite teaching always uses as its standard for what can be true that which is acceptable to the human mind.**

**a) For example, Rutherford said that the doctrine of eternal torment is impossible because:**

*(1) It is unreasonable.*

*(2) It is repugnant to justice.*

*(3) It is contrary to the principle of love.*

*(4) It is wholly unscriptural.*

**b) This means, of course, that his sense of justice and conception of love are determined by his reason, and that the Scriptures are made to coincide with the pre-established findings of his reason.**

**2. In the Society's official six volumes that they claim to be a better key to the scriptures than the testimony of modern theologians and the so-called early church fathers, state that they have endeavored to approach the word of God "in a manner that will appeal to and can be accepted by reason as a foundation. Then we have endeavored to build upon that foundation the teachings of Scripture in such a manner that, so far as possible, purely human judgment may try its squares and angles by the most exacting rules of justice which it can command."**

**a) One thing is clear -- the Scripture is judged by human standards and rationale and its squares and angles are to be tried by purely human judgment.**

**b) The ordinary rationalist rejects the word of God because he cannot square it with human reason and standards; here we have rationalists who seek to make the Word of God subject to human reason and standards.**

**3. One author observed that from Russell's introductory words we may learn why translations are arbitrarily changed, why words are put into our Lord's mouth that are glaringly contradictory to anything ever spoken by Him, and why Russell, after stating that the Bible is a revelation from God, says, "let**

**us examine the character of the writings claimed as inspired, to see whether their teachings correspond with the character we have reasonably imputed to God.” (emphasis added.)**

a) The same author observed: “It is quite true that a revelation from God to His intelligent and responsible creatures might be expected, and we can scarcely conceive aught else. But to suppose that such revelation would justify, by its nature and contents, and be in accord with the anticipations of human reason, is to deny the depravity of human nature; it supposes the mind of man of paramount authority with the Word of God, and renders such a revelation unnecessary. For if it were possible for man to anticipate what is revealed, the need of revelation would be much less, if needed at all. As another has said, ‘the very idea of revelation supposes that it would contain things that the human mind could not conceive without it’; but it is these very things that men object to if they do not positively reject them. Such is the rationalism of unbelief.

b) 1 Corinthians 2:9 disposes of the issue.

***B. It destroys the supernatural nature of Jesus.***

1. Like Arianism of the fourth century, Russellism states that the Son of God is a created being.

a) To Russellism he was Michael, the archangel.

b) He became a man at the birth of Jesus, thus losing his angelic nature completely.

c) Thus Russellism rejects that Jesus is deity; he may have been a secondary God, but he was not Jehovah God.

2. The Biblical basis for the Society’s teaching on Jesus are such passages as John 5:30 as John 14:28 in which Christ speaks of his human nature as subordinate to God, followed by a most arbitrary exegesis of passages like Jeremiah 23:5, 6; 1 Corinthians 2:8, etc.

3. Compare Micah 5:2 with Russell’s explanation of its meaning:

a) **Micah 5:2 (KJV):** But thou, Bethlehem, Ephratah, though thou be little among thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

b) **Russell's Paraphrase:** They can be well understood thus, "Whose goings forth have been [foretold] from of old, from everlasting [his coming and Messiahship were purposed and provided for in the divine plan]."

**4. Russellism is silent on such passages as Romans 9:5 and 1 John 5:20.**

a) **There is but one God according to the Old and New Testaments alike; if Jesus is called the true God, who could He have been but this one God, even Jehovah?**

b) **As to the claim that Jesus is not Jehovah, Isaiah saw the glory of Jehovah (6:1-3), and John states that Isaiah spoke because he saw the glory of Jesus (12:41).**

c) **Of the voice of the Lord in Isaiah 6:9, 10, Acts 28:25 says "Well spake the Holy Spirit."**

d) **Peter substitutes Christ for Jehovah (Isaiah 8:13 -- Jehovah of hosts him shall ye sanctify; 1 Peter 3:15 -- But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.**

**5. From this fundamental error concerning the Person of Christ, other errors flow.**

a) **They reject the doctrine of the Trinity.**

b) **Its impact on the doctrine of Christ as Mediator, the resurrection of Christ, the second coming of Christ, and Heaven will be discussed below.**

***C. It denies that salvation is a supernatural work of God's grace.***

**1. Many points are subsumed underneath this heading.**

- a) **If the Mediator was not a divine person it must follow that his mediatorial work is of less than infinite value.**
- b) **If God has not provided a supernatural Savior for the fallen race it must be that man was not so utterly sinful that given certain conditions, he could not be saved by a natural process (autosoterism).**
- c) **If Jesus Christ is not a divine Redeemer, and if man has not fallen beyond repair (apart from a supernatural saving work), it follows that an eternal torment could be unjust retribution for rejecting the work of Jesus and also too severe a punishment for the not deadly character of sin.**
- d) **All of this is what Russellism teaches.**

## **2. Atonement.**

a) **Russellism ignores the Greek meaning of the word “atonement”, breaks the word into three parts, and argues its meaning from that concept.**

b) **Russell wrote a volume of 500 pages titled *At-One-Ment Between God and Man*.**

*(1) According to Russell, the atonement consists of two parts, a divine and a human.*

*(2) The Scripture speaks of the atonement being entirely the work of Christ. See, e.g., Romans 5:10-11.*

*(3) Man’s part is not establishing the atonement or some part of it, but the entering into the atonement perfected by Christ through faith and obedience to God’s commands.*

c) **Not unlike the Mormons, Russell conceives of Jesus as having removed the penalty of death resulting from Adam’s sin.**

*(1) How the death of Jesus, even though voluntary and not a penalty for sin in His case, could have removed death not only from one man, Adam, but also from his posterity, neither Russell nor Rutherford make any effort to explain.*



*(2) These men merely assert it, but their error is all the more glaring because they deny that Jesus, having undone Adam's sin, became the new head of the human race.*

**d) Russell teaches that the atoning work of Jesus is not complete because it was merely the ransom, the price that set free from death.**

*(1) Atonement is also "the bringing into harmony or 'at-one-ment' with God of so many of his creatures as under full light and knowledge, shall avail themselves of the privileges and opportunities of the New Covenant."*

*(2) This work of atonement will be completed at the close of the Millennial Age.*

*(3) Russell, with his merely human Jesus destroys the character of Christ's mediatorial office to such an extent as to include the church with Jesus in the name Mediator; the "little flock" "are privileged to be reckoned as joint sacrificers, joint mediators, joint reconcilers, joint at-one-ers"; "willing to lay down their lives in God's service; who became thus copies of their Savior, shall by divine arrangement be privileged to be his joint-heirs in the Millennial Kingdom and partakers of his divine nature."*

### **3. Autosoteric (saved by natural processes) Utterances.**

**a) It is clear from the above autosoteric character of man's salvation according to the Jehovah's Witnesses is established from the denial of the divine character of the Mediator and the infinite value of his mediatorial work, thus, one or two citations should do at this point.**

**b) Romans 5:18 is quoted by the great Paraphraser" Russell: "For as through the disobedience of one man [Adam}, many were made sinners [all who were in him], so by obedience of one man [Jesus] many [all who ultimately shall avail themselves of the privileges and opportunities of the New Covenant] shall be constituted righteous."**

*(1) He speaks of "the Church which already has received the Atonement [accepted the divine arrangement] and come*

*into harmony with God, and . . . nevertheless . . . waits for her share of the completed work of the Atonement, in her complete reception to the divine favor.”*

*(2) And he states “that this offer of salvation is a great boon and should be promptly accepted and that its terms are but a reasonable service.”*

**c) In the same manner J.F. Rutherford describes the process of man’s salvation in a genuinely autosoteric manner.**

*(1) It is always man who acts first, and God Who accepts man’s efforts.*

*(2) Even such passages as John 6:44 and John 3:7 which lay emphasis upon the work of God are twisted into their autosoteric opposite.*

*(3) Thus John 6:44 -- No man can come unto me except the Father that sent me draw him -- follows the discussion of man’s giving his heart to the Lord.*

*(4) “It has pleased Jehovah, then, during the gospel age to draw to Jesus, great Redeemer and Deliverer, those who have the desire to come into harmony with him. . . .” It is the admitted Universalism of Russellism that leads to this autosoterism, as universalism ever tends to do.*

#### **4. Man and retribution.**

**a) Jehovah’s Witnesses’ denial of (1) the supernatural revelation in Scripture, (2) the supernatural Savior, and of the supernatural character of the work of salvation lead inevitably to the denial of the doctrine of divine retribution upon those who reject God’s divine plan for redemption.**

**b) This doctrine takes two elements:**

*(1) It denies that man is so constituted as to be able to suffer such punishment.*

*(2) It denies that Scripture teaches the existence of a place of torment.*

**(a) It is perhaps this doctrine that was the original rock of defense to Russell; from this denial he reasoned back to the points already discussed.**

**(b) However, that which was first in Russell's mind is of little importance; logically, inadequate views of the Scriptures, of the Savior, and of the work of salvation, must lead to erroneous views of the sinner.**

**c) In order to make man incapable of endless suffering Russellism has invented two arbitrary definitions.**

***(1) First, man is a soul, but does not have a soul.***

**(a) The scriptural proof for this doctrine is Gen. 2:7 -- and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul -- a single text quoted regardless of others.**

**(b) Other relevant texts:**

(i) Numbers 21:4 -- and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of he way.

(ii) Matthew 26:38 -- Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful and sore troubled.

(iii) Ecclesiastes 12:7 -- where body and spirit are referred to as the two distinct component parts of man.

***(2) Death means destruction, an absolute non-existence.***

**(a) "The penalty is death, not dying; and death is the absence of life, destruction."**

**(b) To prove this definition Russell made a very poor choice when he quoted, "Had it not been for the redemption, Adamic death would have been what the Second Death is to be, vis., 'everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.'"**

**(c) Russell did not realize that there is a great difference between total destruction and destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.**

**(d) Russell might have learned from several passages that destruction does not necessarily mean annihilation. Deuteronomy 28:15-20, 61-64; 30:1-4.**

(e) Matthew 22:32 is conclusive -- I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

**d) Russellites become eloquent to the breaking point when speaking of the “nightmare of eternal torture.”**

*(1) Sheol and Hades we are told should be translated “grave”; Gehenna means destruction, annihilation.*

*(2) Since the valley of Hinnom was a place where refuse was destroyed by fire, and this valley stands metaphorically for Gehenna, the fire of Gehenna is an emblem of annihilation.*

(a) There is an eternal punishment, but not eternal damnation, far less eternal torment.

(b) The punishment consists of quietly going out of existence.

(c) The dead -- those not existing -- will be raised with the same thoughts they had before their destruction, and those who have not had an opportunity to hear or to appreciate the [Russellite] gospel will live again, namely during the Millennium.

(d) If during this period they fulfill their part of the atonement, they will enter eternal life.

(e) If they again choose evil their punishment will consist of “eternal cutting off.”

(f) Where this interpretation does not fit in, for instance John 5:29, the Witnesses dogmatically assert that “judgment” is mistranslated “damnation” in the KJV and this they claim settles the matter.

*(3) While this travesty on Scripture may be conclusive for those deceived by the Russellite method of parading Greek words, the truth is that here again the Witnesses contradict themselves.*

(a) There can be no suffering in sheol, hades, or the grave, they assert, because Ecclesiastes 3:19 and 9:5, 10 declare that man in death is like the beasts, without knowledge.

(b) And yet in a far-fetched paraphrase of Luke 16:19-31 they state that the rich man in Hades represents the Jewish nation “in a condition of torment ever since the destruction

**of Jerusalem; for they have been hunted like wild animals hunted to their dens. They have been persecuted for centuries.**

**(c) They do not tell us how a state of torment could possibly be called being in Hades, when, according to Russellites, Hades denotes a condition of non-existence.**

**(d) Of Mark 9:47-48 it is said, "This text has long been a favorites with the hell-fire screechers" -- an amiable likeness of a "screecher" in the pulpit adds to the zest of what is about to be dished up and the argument proceeds as follows: "In it they think they have conclusive proof that the sinners are punished by torment in a fire which is never quenched. They argue with great warmth that the worms die not. But be it noted that the only thing mentioned as dying not are worms. Therefore, it is worms that are immortal, from their viewpoint Nothing is said about human beings as alive and conscious in that fire."**

***(4) All this is no doubt humorous to the Russellites, but this position can only be maintained by placing the judgment before the Millennium in the case of believers, or during the Millennium in the case of unbelievers, and by changing the meaning of the word judgment into trial, or "an honest chance."***

**(a) It should be self evident that this is contradictory to Matthew 13:42, 50 and to Revelation 20:11-15, and this is true regardless of whether these texts are considered to be pre-millennial or non-millennial sense.**

**(b) Then there remains the problem of how Russellism can admit that the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and assert that this means annihilation.**

**(i) The word "punishment" certainly denotes an unpleasant experience.**

**(ii) If, then, this punishment is admitted to be everlasting, what becomes of the objection to the word "torment"?**

**(iii) Moreover, if the punishment consists of annihilation, how can it be an everlasting punishment?**

**(iv) How can a non-existent, annihilated non-entity continue to be everlastingly punished?**

(v) But such minor contradictions in terms do not trouble the Russellites.

***D. It destroys the hope of Heaven for multitudes of people.***

**1. To understand Jehovah's Witnesses' interpretation of the Kingdom of Heaven, it is necessary to understand that only 144,000 faithful servants will rule with Jesus in the heavenly sphere.**

**a) This is based on a literal interpretation of Revelation 7:4 and 14:1, 3, but they fail to note that makes the 144,000 the literal tribes of Israel and are in no sense to be construed as anything else.**

**b) Thus, only 144,000 of their Jewish members will be privileged to reign with Christ.**

**2. All of the dead are in a state of unconsciousness or extinction. At the end there will be a series of resurrections and those who are saved (other than the 144,000 who reign with Christ) at that point will enter into a new earth of Edenic perfection, enjoying what Christ accomplished by his death, that is, overcoming the loss of Eden and making a perfect world possible.**

**III. Russellism and human government.**

***A. Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to pay homage in any way to the flag of any nation or even to defend their own individual nation from assault by an enemy.***

**1. Patriotism as displayed in bearing arms is not one of their beliefs since they claim to be ambassadors of Jehovah and as such deem themselves independent of allegiance to any government other than His.**

**2. This contradicts Romans 13:1-7 in which Paul outlines the case for human government and goes to great length to stress that the "higher powers" are allowed and sanctioned by God.**

***B. As supposed followers of His word, the Witnesses ought to heed both Christ and Paul and "render unto Caesar that which is***

***Caesar's," which in the context of Romans 13:1-7 clearly means subjugation to governmental rule.***