
The Literal and the Symbolic Heart

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Responding to The Watchtower, Sept. 1, 1984 regarding the use of the word heart in the Bible and two study articles that consider the illustration of the olive tree discussed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

The article: "The Heart in God's Word," represents an example of how the Society can deviate from a previously held view without acknowledging to its readers that it is doing so. The current journal takes the position that the word heart is sometimes used in the Bible in a literal way but that most often it is used in a figurative sense. They say: "There are times, comparatively few, when the literal heart is referred to, for example at Exodus 28:30 and Psalm 45:5. However in nearly a thousand other references to 'heart' in the Bible, 'heart' is obviously used in a figurative sense. This is not to say that there is no connection between the physical and the figurative heart. There is. For example, emotional stress can have a damaging effect on the literal heart, causing illness and death. But obviously, a distinction must be drawn between the heart organ and the figurative heart. As W.E.Vine states, 'The heart is used figuratively for the hidden springs of the personal life.'"—*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. II, pages 206-7. (page 7, par. 3)

Although it is not likely that most Jehovah's Witnesses will even notice, this is exactly opposite from their published position just a few years ago. They now say the Bible "obviously" teaches that man has a figurative heart clearly separate and distinct from his physical heart organ. With this in mind consider their previous statements on this matter as it appeared in a study article of *The Watchtower*, March 1, 1971:

"Where and what is your heart? You may say, what heart are you talking about? You know you have a heart in your chest, one that is pumping blood throughout your entire body, serving every single cell with that stream of life. But do you have another 'heart' in your head, a 'figurative heart'? Is it part of your brain that we call the 'mind'? No! The brain in which the mind resides is one thing *and the heart in our thorax, with its power of motivation*, is another thing." (page 134, par. 5 (italics added).

"With but few exceptions, the use of the word 'heart' in the Bible is limited to the operations of the

heart of man as the powerhouse of one's desires, emotions and affections, the place that comes to include the capacities for motivation. The Bible does not speak of a symbolic or spiritual heart in contradistinction to the fleshly or literal heart." (page 134, par. 6)

You will note that they clearly argued in the magazine of March 1, 1971 that man did not have a "figurative heart" separate and distinct from his literal heart. This "truth" was presented with considerable "proof" on pages 133-139. A drawing appears on page 134 which shows "affections," "motivations," "emotions" and "desires", all emanating from the *literal heart organ*. Now, thirteen years later they completely reverse themselves by agreeing with W.E. Vine who had it right all along. By not calling attention to the fact that this is a reversal of their previous position, they demonstrate that they are not as open and candid about their mistakes as they would have Jehovah's Witnesses believe. Incidentally, the current position lays the groundwork for allowing heart transplants whereas, in the past, they argued that by taking another person's heart you would become a victim of that person's motivations and experience character aberrations.

They interpreted the experiences of heart transplant recipients as indicating that the patient took on the characteristics, to some extent, of the person who supplied the donor heart. They warned their readers of the potential danger of losing their accumulated good character in receiving a donor heart: "These patients have donor-supplied pumps for the blood, but do they now have all the factors needed to say they have a 'heart'? *One thing is sure, in losing their own hearts. they have had taken away from them the capacities of 'heart' built up in them over the years and which contributed to making them who they were as to personality.*"—Page 135, par. 10. (italics added).

The "one thing" that was "sure" in 1971 was no longer sure in 1984. In 1968 the Awake! magazine featured articles on the matter of transplantation and presented their Scriptural position on the subject: "There are those, such as the Christian witnesses of Jehovah, who consider all transplants between humans as cannibalism; and is not the utilizing of the flesh of another human for one's own life cannibalistic?" —Awake!, June 8, 1968, page 21. (italics in original).

NOTE: By labeling all transplants as a form of cannibalism (first presented as such in 1967) many Jehovah's Witnesses were denied medical options that should have been a matter of individual conscience. It wasn't until 1980 that the Society decided that this was a matter of individual conscientious. *The Watchtower* (3/15/80) said: "Regarding the transplantation of human tissue or bone from one human to another, this is a matter for conscientious decision by each one of Jehovah's Witnesses."—page 31.

The Olive Tree of Romans Chapter 11

The study article: "Who Has Come To Know Jehovah's Mind?" interprets the meaning of Paul's illustration of the olive tree (Romans 11) as representing the Christian congregation consisting of just 144,000 "branches": "The members of the Christian congregation are the spiritual branches that spring from this theocratic olive tree and according to Revelation 7:1-8 and 14:1-3, they are to number, finally, 144,000 members,"—page 10, par. 10. "The natural Jews of Jesus' day, by being his natural brothers were by natural descent from the patriarch Abraham first in line to become 'branches' in that spiritual olive tree ... So the first ones to become 'branches' in that spiritual olive tree, the root of which is Jehovah God, were natural Jews, the 12 faithful apostles of Jesus Christ and thousands of other natural Jews."—page 10, par. 10

This interpretation does not square with Paul's explanation of the olive tree. He doesn't say that believing Jews *became* branches in this tree. He says that unbelieving Jews were *broken off* the tree. Furthermore, Jehovah God is not presented as the "root" of this tree but rather Abraham is. The ones who become branches are the non-Jewish Gentile believers who are likened to branches of a wild olive grafted into the cultivated tree. The Jewish branches were broken off for failure to recognize Jesus Christ as the promised messiah and not putting faith in his redemptive sacrifice and resurrection. (Romans 11: 17- 21) If, however, those unbelieving Jews later developed faith in the Father's means of salvation, those broken off branches could be grafted back into the olive tree. (Romans 11: 23,24) *The Watchtower* notion that this tree has only 144,000 branches is not supported by Scripture.

If it is argued, as the Society argues, that Jewish branches had to be broken off in order to make room for Gentile believers, then why is it that those same broken off branches could be grafted back in again?

God's bringing into the Christian congregation Gentile Christians did not depend on the failure of the Jews as it was his intention from the beginning to do so: "Now the Scripture, seeing in advance that God would declare people of the nations righteous due to faith, declared the good news beforehand to Abraham, namely: 'By means of you all the nations will be blessed.'" Galatians 3:8 *NW*

The Watchtower Society has long argued that the entire Christian congregation of 144,000 members could have been made up exclusively of Jews had there been that many responding in faith at the outset of the preaching of the good news. The opportunity to become members of this congregation was extended to non-Jews, they say, because natural Israelites failed to fill up the number: "If the opportunity to become part of spiritual Israel had not been extended to mankind generally, 'all Israel' could not have been saved. Why not? This is because due to the unresponsiveness of natural Israelites, the membership of spiritual Israelites would not have been completed within God's fixed time." —*The Watchtower*, Feb. 15, 1974, page 127.

Where, in the Bible, do we read that "God's fixed time" for natural Jews to make up the 144,000 ran out? The time for natural Jews to be a part of the Christian congregation never ran out. Nor can it be correctly argued that the 3,000 who responded to Peter's preaching on Pentecost were all natural Jews. The Bible states that the mass of people in Jerusalem for the festival was made up of "both Jews and proselytes." (Acts 2:10) There is simply no way of determining that everyone who responded in faith to Peter's witness was a natural Jew. There could easily be converts among the proselytes as well. It appears that the opportunity to become members of Christ's congregation included non-Jewish persons as well as natural Jews from the beginning.

It seems quite incredible that it would take God more than 19 centuries to find a mere 144,000 faithful believers. When one reflects on the fact that the good news has been preached worldwide under the direction of Jesus Christ all these many centuries and has borne much fruit it seems even less credible. History records Christians by the tens of millions—many of whom sealed their faith with their death. Such large numbers would agree with the promise given to Abraham: "I shall surely bless you and I shall surely multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the grains of sand that are on the seashore; and your seed will take

possession of the gate of his enemies. And by means of your seed, all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves due to the fact that you listened to my voice." Genesis 22:17,18 *NW*

The emphasis on the number making up the "seed of Abraham" is not a hidden or concealed number but, rather, on the *magnitude* of the number. Paul explains in Romans that God had in mind the reconciling a world of mankind to himself. The basis for this reconciliation is having faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith that makes one a spiritual Jew. (Romans 2:29) Abraham had been declared righteous due to his faith in God's promises. (Romans 4:3) What makes one a descendant of Abraham in a spiritual sense therefore, is having received righteousness through faith as did Abraham: "And so Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe in God and are accepted as righteous by him, even though they are not circumcised." —Romans 4:11 *Good News Bible*. "For Abraham is the spiritual father of us all; as the scripture says, 'I have made you father of many nations'" —Romans 4:16,17 *Good News Bible*. "But the scripture says that the whole world is under the power of sin; and so the gift which is promised on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ is given to those who believe . . . It is through faith that all of you are God's sons in union with Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised." —Galatians 3:22,26,29 *Good News Bible*. So being a part of this redeemed community is not based on a quota but faith.

Christians Without a Mediator

The next article: "Lining Up With 'Jehovah's Mind' As Now Revealed," presents the Watchtower Society's different gospel for the more than 2,500,000 Jehovah's Witnesses they refer to as the "other sheep" of John 10:16. In paragraph two of this article such ones are reminded that they do not have a mediator between themselves and God: "So ever since he presented the value of his perfect lifeblood in heaven in 33 C.E., he has served as the Mediator for those disciples whom Jehovah God brings into the new covenant." 1 Timothy 2:5,6—page 14, par. 2.

It is at this point that the magazine gets into the matter of "Jehovah's Mind As Now Revealed." The term "*revealed*" is often used by The Watchtower writers in presenting their different gospel which is actually based

on their time feature calculations. C.T. Russell used such calculations to declare that the opportunity to be one of the 144,000 ended in 1881. His view was that the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 was a secondary heavenly class of Christians who did not qualify to be of the 144,000 "high calling." —*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, page 235 and Vol. 1, page 214.

Russell's failed prophecies necessitated an updating of the time features and so it was later decided that the "high calling" was extended to 1931. Under the presidency of Joseph Rutherford the "great multitude" of Revelation 7 became, not a heavenly group, but an earthly one. This "new truth" was presented to Jehovah's Witnesses in 1935 during their Washington, D.C. convention. Commenting on this the current magazine declares: "Another feature of Jehovah's 'Mind' has been disclosed since the Washington, D.C. convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in the year 1935. What was on Jehovah's 'mind' respecting the 'great crowd' foretold in Revelation 7:9-17? This foretold multitude of praisers of Jehovah God and of his Lamb, Jesus Christ, serving at his figurative temple, has appeared on the scene since 1935."—pages 14,15, par. 6. Jesus Christ with his 144,000 co-rulers."—page 17, par. 14 (*Italics added*).

These prophetic speculations are never presented in a qualified manner. They are always uttered as unquestionable truth from God himself: "How grateful we can and should be that the Most High God in heaven has disclosed to us what came first to his 'mind' and which did not originate with any man of flesh and bones!"—page 18, par. 15.

This clear, emphatic declaration that what Watchtower readers are being told represents Jehovah's mind and not man's is a claim of inspiration. While they prefer to use the word "revealed" instead of "inspired" the end result is the same, namely, that God is speaking through them and that the thoughts are his. This represents an extreme example of human presumptuousness by those whose prophecies have been repeatedly repudiated by the outworking of history. □