

Dealing with Doubt in Our Christian Faith

Dr. Michael Gleghorn points out that it is not having doubts about our Christian faith that is an issue, but rather how we respond to that doubt. Attacking this issue from a biblical worldview perspective, Michael helps us understand our doubts and respond to them as an informed Christian.

Help! My Doubts Scare Me!

Have you ever doubted your faith? We all have doubts from time to time. We may doubt that our boss *really* hit a hole-in-one at the golf course last weekend, or that our best friend *really* caught a fish as big as the one he claimed to catch, or that the strange looking guy on that late night TV show was *really* abducted by alien beings from a distant galaxy! Sometimes the things we doubt aren't really that important, but other times they are. And the more important something is to us, the more personally invested we are in it, the scarier it can be to start having doubts about it. So when Christians begin to have doubts about something as significant as the truth of their Christian faith, it's quite understandable that this might worry or even frighten them.



Reflecting on this issue in *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel wrote:

For many Christians, merely having doubts of any kind can be scary. They wonder whether their questions disqualify them being a follower of Christ. They feel insecure because they're not sure whether it's permissible to express uncertainty about God, Jesus, or the Bible. So they keep their questions to themselves—and inside, unanswered, they

grow and fester . . . until they eventually succeed in choking out their faith.{1}

So what can we do if we find ourselves struggling with doubts about the truth of Christianity? Why do such doubts arise? And how can we rid ourselves of these taunting Goliaths?

First, we must always remember that sooner or later we'll probably *all* have to wrestle with doubts about our faith. As Christian philosopher William Lane Craig observes, "Any Christian who is intellectually engaged and reflecting about his faith will inevitably face the problem of doubt." {2} Doubts can arise for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they're largely intellectual. We might doubt that the Bible is *really* inspired by God or that Jesus was *really* born of a virgin. But doubts can take other forms as well. If a person has experienced great sorrow or disappointment, such as personal wounds from family or friends, the loss of a job, a painful divorce, the death of a loved one, or the loss of health, they may be seriously tempted to doubt the goodness, love, and care of their heavenly Father. {3}

Whenever they come and whatever form they take, we must each deal honestly with our doubts. To ignore them is to court spiritual disaster. But facing them can lead ultimately to a deeper faith. As Christian minister Lynn Anderson has said, "A faith that's challenged by adversity or tough questions . . . is often a stronger faith in the end." {4}

It's Not All in Your Head!

Sometimes people have sincere doubts about the truth of Christianity, intellectual obstacles that hinder them from placing their trust in Christ. In such cases, Christians have an obligation to respond to the person's doubts and make a humble and thoughtful defense for the truth of Christianity. Nevertheless, as Craig observes, it's important to realize

that “doubt is never a purely intellectual problem.” Like it or not, there’s always a “spiritual dimension to the problem that must be recognized.”[\[5\]](#) Because of this, sometimes a person’s objections to Christianity are really just a smokescreen, an attempt to cover up the *real* reason for their rejection of Christ, which is often an underlying moral or spiritual issue.

I once heard a story about a Christian apologist who spoke at a university about the evidence for Christianity. Afterward, a student approached him and said, “I honestly didn’t expect this to happen, but you satisfactorily answered all my objections to Christianity.” The apologist was a bit startled by such a frank admission, but he quickly recovered himself and said, “Well that’s great! Why not give your life to Christ right now, then?” But the student said, “No. I’m not willing to do that. I would have to change the way I’m living, and I’m just not ready to do that right now.”

In this case all the student’s reasons for doubting the Christian faith had, by his own admission, been satisfactorily answered. What was really holding him back were not his doubts about the truth of Christianity, but a desire to live life on his own terms. To put it bluntly, he didn’t want God meddling in his affairs. He didn’t want to be morally accountable to some ultimate authority. The truth is that a person’s intellectual objections to Christianity are *rarely* the whole story. As Christian scholar Ravi Zacharias observed, “A man rejects God neither because of intellectual demands nor because of the scarcity of evidence. A man rejects God because of a moral resistance that refuses to admit his need for God.”[\[6\]](#)

Unfortunately, Christians aren’t immune to doubting their faith for similar reasons. I know of a young man who had converted to Christianity, but who’s now raising various objections to it. But when one looks beneath the surface, one sees that he’s currently involved in an immoral lifestyle. In

order to continue living as he wants, without being unduly plagued by a guilty conscience, he must call into question the truth of Christianity. For the Bible tells him plainly that he's disobeying God. Of course, ultimately no one is immune to doubts about Christianity, so we'll now consider some ways to guard our hearts and minds.

I Believe, Help My Unbelief!

As He came down the mountain, Jesus was met by a large crowd of people. A father had brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' disciples, but they were not able to cast the demon out. In desperation the father appealed to Jesus, "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Jesus answered, "If You can! All things are possible to him who believes." The father responded, "I do believe; help my unbelief."[\[7\]](#)

Can you identify with the father in this story? I know I can. Oftentimes as Christians we find that our faith is in precisely the same state as this father's. We genuinely believe, but we need help with our unbelief. It's always been an encouragement to me that after the father's admission of a faith mixed with doubt, Jesus nonetheless cast out the demon and healed the man's son.[\[8\]](#) But of course no Christian should be content to remain in this state. If we want to grow in our faith and rid ourselves of doubts, what are some positive steps we can take to accomplish this?

Well, in the first place, it's helpful to be familiar with the "principle of displacement." As Sue "Archimedes" Bohlin, one of my colleagues, has written:

The Bible teaches the principle of "displacement." That is, rather than trying to make thoughts shoo away, we are told to replace them with what is good, true, and perfect (Phil. 4:8). As the truth comes in the lies are displaced—much like when we fill a bathtub too full of water, and when we get

in, our bodies displace the water, which flows out over the top of the tub.{9}

Once we grasp this principle, a number of steps for dealing with doubt quickly become evident. For one thing, we can memorize and meditate upon Scripture. We can also listen attentively to good Christian music. Paul speaks to the importance of both of these in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

In addition, we can read good Christian books that provide intelligent answers to some of the questions we might be asking. Great Christian scholars have addressed almost every conceivable objection to the truth of Christianity. If you have nagging doubts about some aspect of your faith, there’s almost certainly a work of Christian scholarship that speaks to it in detail. Finally, we must never forget that this is a spiritual battle. So let’s remember to put on the full armor of God so we can stand firm in the midst of it!{10}

Faith and Reason

How can we [know if Christianity is really true?](#) Is it by reason, or evidence, or mystical experience? Dr. Craig has an answer to this question that you might find a bit surprising.{11} He distinguishes between *knowing* Christianity is true and *showing* that it’s true. Ideally, one attempts to *show* that Christianity is true with good arguments and evidence. But Craig doesn’t think that this is how we *know* our faith is true. Rather, he believes that we can *know* our faith is true because “God’s Spirit makes it evident to us that our faith is true.”{12}

Consider Paul’s statement in Romans 8:16, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Since

every believer is indwelt by God's Spirit, every believer also receives the Spirit's testimony that he is one of God's children. This is sometimes called the "assurance of salvation." Dr. Craig comments on the significance of this:

Salvation entails that God exists, that Christ atoned for our sins . . . and so forth, so that if you are assured of your salvation, then you must be assured of . . . these other truths as well. Hence, the witness of the Holy Spirit gives the believer an immediate assurance that his faith is true.{13}

Now this is remarkable. For it means we can *know* that Christianity is true, wholly apart from arguments, simply by attending to the witness of the Holy Spirit. And this is so not only for believers but for unbelievers, too. For the Spirit convicts the unbelieving world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, particularly the sin of unbelief.{14} So when we're confronted with objections to Christianity that we can't answer, we needn't worry. First, answers are usually available if one knows where to look. But second, the witness of the Spirit trumps any objections we might encounter.

Consider an illustration from the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga. Suppose I'm accused of stealing a document out of a colleague's office. Suppose I have a motive, an opportunity, and a history of doing such things. Suppose further that someone thought they saw me lurking around my colleague's office just before the document went missing. There's much evidence against me. But in fact, I didn't steal the document. I was on a walk at the time. Now should I doubt my innocence since the evidence is against me? Of course not! For I *know* I'm not guilty!{15}

Similarly, writes Dr. Craig, "I needn't be shaken when objections come along that I can't answer."{16} For my faith isn't ultimately based on arguments, but on the witness of God's Spirit.

Stepping into the Light

We've seen that both Christians and non-Christians can have doubts about the truth of Christianity. We've also seen that such doubts are never *just* an intellectual issue; there's *always* a spiritual dynamic that's involved as well. But since we'll probably never be able to fully resolve every single doubt we might experience, I would like to conclude by suggesting one final way to make our doubts flee before us, much as roaches flee to their hidden lairs when one turns on the light!

In John 7:17 Jesus says, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." Here, Jesus frankly encourages us to put His teachings to the test and see for ourselves whether He really speaks for God or not. As biblical scholar Merrill Tenney comments, "Spiritual understanding is not produced solely by learning facts or procedures, but rather it depends on obedience to known truth. Obedience to God's known will develops discernment between falsehood and truth."[\[17\]](#) Are we *really* serious about dealing with our lingering doubts? If so, Jesus says that if we resolutely choose to do God's will, we can know if His teaching is really from God!

Sadly, however, many of us will *never* take Jesus up on His challenge. No matter how loudly we might *claim* to want to rid ourselves of doubt, the truth is that many of us just aren't *willing* to do God's will. But if you are, then Jesus says that "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."[\[18\]](#) In other words, we can know by *experience* that Jesus is from God, that His teachings are true, and that He really is who He claimed to be!

As Christian philosopher Dallas Willard observes, the issue ultimately comes down to what we *really* want:

The Bible says that if you seek God with all your heart,

then you will surely find him. Surely find him. It's the person who wants to know God that God reveals himself to. And if a person doesn't want to know God—well, God has created the world and the human mind in such a way that he doesn't have to.{19}

The psalmist encourages us to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”{20} If we do, we can know not only that God is good, but also that He exists. And even if we still have some lingering doubts and unanswered questions in the back of our minds, as we surely will, they'll gradually fade into utter insignificance as we become more intimately acquainted with Him who loves us and who reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son!{21}

Notes

1. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 316.
2. William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 31.
3. Lynn Anderson, interviewed in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 322.
4. Ibid., 326.
5. Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 33.
6. Ravi Zacharias, quoted in Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 343. See also John 3:19-21.
7. Mark 9:14-24.
8. See Mark 9:25-29.
9. Sue Bohlin, “I’m Having a Terrible Battle in My Mind,” Probe Ministries, probe.org/im-having-a-terrible-battle-in-my-mind/.
10. See Ephesians 6:10-20.
11. This section is largely just a summary of the discussion of faith and reason in Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 35-39.
12. Ibid., 35.
13. Ibid., 36.

14. See John 16:7-11.

15. Alvin Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 310; cited in Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 38-39.

16. Ibid., 39.

17. Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 84.

18. John 8:32.

19. Dallas Willard, quoted in Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 352.

20. Psalm 34:8.

21. See 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

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Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses – Understanding and Responding to False Doctrine

Dr. Zukeran provides us with a concise summary of the key doctrinal issues in the beliefs taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. Understanding these problems held by their followers in areas such as the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and false prophecies, prepares us to be more effective witnesses for Christ to members of their faith.

History of the Watch Tower

One of the most aggressive and fastest growing cults is the

Jehovah's Witnesses. Today they have a worldwide organization that numbers about 3.5 million members operating in 205 countries. Several factors account for this rapid growth. The first is their zealous door-to-door evangelism. Second, we Christians have failed to make a solid defense of our faith against their attacks when they have come to our door. The result is the Witnesses continue unchallenged in the propagation of their organization and deceive many. Third, the rise of the cults are a fulfillment of the prophetic warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles.

In this essay I want to look at the beliefs of the Witnesses and then give the reader practical witnessing strategies. The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses begins with the founder of the organization Charles Taze Russell. He was a member of the Congregational Church who came to reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment. In 1870, with no formal education, he began a Bible society which eventually named him pastor. In 1884, he founded Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is now the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. Since then they have mushroomed into an organization which produces more literature in one year than the Christian and Catholic churches combined. And, of all the cults, their missionary forces are the most well trained in evangelism.

Witnesses deviate from biblical Christianity in several areas. I will discuss some of their major doctrinal errors. First, like all the cults, they deny the Trinity. They believe there is one God, Jehovah. Jesus, is actually Michael the Archangel, the first of God's creation, who became flesh at the incarnation. After the resurrection, He returned to heaven as Michael the Archangel.(1) The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire.(2)

Second, Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, but instead believe He was raised as a spirit and manifested Himself several times in different materialized bodies.(3)

Third, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment, but believe in total annihilation after death. Only the elite ruling class, the 144,000, are allowed to go to heaven. The faithful Jehovah's Witnesses remain unconscious after death till they are resurrected in the Millennium. Those who are not in the organization are annihilated after death.(4)

Fourth, Witnesses have a works-oriented salvation. Salvation is not based upon a relationship with Christ, but found in the organization. One must serve the society, and depending on one's faithfulness and absolute obedience, one **may** be saved.(5)

Fifth, they believe that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and established His throne in heaven. At Armageddon, God will destroy all evil, and abolish all the world's governments, and establish a new Paradise on earth. Then the living and resurrected Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit Paradise earth. The 144,000 mentioned earlier will rule with Jesus. At this time all unbelievers who have died will be raised (with some exceptions) and will study under the Witnesses during the Millennium, a period of a thousand years. Studying with them will be the unbelievers who have survived Armageddon. After the thousand years, their faith will be tested because God will release Satan from the abyss. At that point all unbelievers will have to choose between Satan or Jehovah. Those who reject Jehovah will be annihilated.(6)

Clearly the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses deviate in critical ways from sound biblical principles. Next, I want to discuss approaches to evangelizing Jehovah's Witnesses.

False Prophecies of the Watch Tower

One of the most effective ways to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses is to destroy their faith in the Society. Remember, salvation is found only in this organization. The Watch Tower Society is seen as the spokesman for God. If you can show

Witnesses the serious errors of the organization, they will begin to have doubts and questions. This can sometimes lead them to leave the Society.

Attacking the Society's record of false prophecy can cause JW's to question the organization. This approach is effective because they claim to have the true understanding of the end times. If we can show them that the organization has been constantly wrong in the area of prophecy, this will certainly make an impact. When the Jehovah's Witnesses show up at your door again, begin first by asking them, "Are you prophets of God?" Some will say, "Yes." Others may say, "We are prophets in a sense." You must make it clear there is no such thing as "a prophet in a sense." There are only true prophets and false prophets. Some may deny being prophets. If so, show them a copy of the April 1, 1972, *Watch Tower* article on page 197, which states clearly that they are prophets.

Second, define clearly what makes a true prophet and a false prophet using Deuteronomy 18:20-22. A true prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which come to pass. A false prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which do not come to pass. Make sure they understand this, for this is the most critical step.

Third, ask them, "Is there an organization that fits the character of a false prophet?" That's when you say, "Let's take a look at the Watch Tower Organization." Have handy copies of the articles mentioned here. The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true.

Then the *Watch Tower* predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925

will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in Hebrews 11 to the condition of human perfection." This proved to be another false prophecy.

The *Watch Tower* made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?*, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library.

Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Here they state, "Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it." Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the *Watch Tower* will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the *Watch Tower's* false prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to JWs.

(A free PDF file of copies of these false prophecies, as well as helpful information on the invention of the word "Jehovah," is available here: [JW-False_Prophecies](#))

The Name of God

Another effective avenue of witnessing to the Witnesses is in the name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses state that God's true name is "Jehovah." They say the term "God," is merely a title, and that the real name for God is "Jehovah." In fact they go so far as to say that unless one calls on the true name of God, "Jehovah," one cannot be saved.(7)

Let's take a real close look at the name "Jehovah" and see if it is in fact the true name of God. The term "Jehovah" is

actually a false reading of the Hebrew pronunciation of God, or YAHWEH. Allow me to explain where the word “Jehovah” comes from. The words in the Hebrew Old Testament contained no vowels. The words were constructed of consonant letters only. The Scribes knew what vowels to use in the pronunciation of the words by the construction of the consonants, the context, and memory. It was written this way until the fifth century when the Masoretes added the vowels under the consonants in their version of the Old Testament known as the Masoretic Text.

The name of God in the Old Testament spelled YHWH, was considered holy, and was not to be read aloud. Instead, when the Hebrews came upon YHWH, they would say ADONAY, which means “Lord.” In order to indicate this substitution, the Massoretes placed the vowels of ADONAY or the English equivalent of e, o, and a underneath the consonants of YHWH. Later some Christian translators mistakenly combined the vowels of ADONAY with the consonants of YHWH producing the word “Jehovah.” Now the term is recognized to be a late hybrid form never used by the Jews. That’s the origin of the word “Jehovah.” Let’s now look at what other scholars say about the name “Jehovah.”

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary: “Jehovah” – False reading of the Hebrew YAHWEH.(8)

Encyclopedia Americana: “Jehovah” – erroneous form of the name of the God of Israel.(9)

Encyclopedia Britannica: The Masoretes who from the 6th to the 10th century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of Adonai or Elohim. Thus the artificial name Jehovah came into being.(10)

The Jewish Encyclopedia: “Jehovah” – a mispronunciation of the Hebrew YHWH the name of God. This pronunciation is grammatically impossible.(11)

The New Jewish Encyclopedia: It is clear that the word Jehovah is an artificial composite.(12)

According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 680, vol. 7, “the true pronunciation of the tetragrammaton YHWH was never lost. The name was pronounced Yahweh. It was regularly pronounced this way at least until 586 B.C., as is clear from the Lachish Letters written shortly before this date.”

Therefore, for Jehovah’s Witnesses to insist Jehovah is the true name of God and that one is saved only if he calls on that name, is an error. When Witnesses appear at your door explain to them the name “Jehovah” and read what the scholars say about Jehovah. Also remember, God uses many names for Himself such as, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega, and others. When JW’s realize what the authoritative sources have to say, especially the encyclopedia references, they will begin to realize the need to take a serious look at this error in the organization.

The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

A third subject area for effective witnessing to Witnesses is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Witnesses believe that Christ’s crucified body was disintegrated by Jehovah never to exist again. Accordingly, Jesus was raised as a spirit who then materialized and appeared in several different fleshly bodies as the angels had done. Indeed, it was in this form that He appeared to His disciples; i.e., He wasn’t in a human body; He just appeared to be human. He ascended into heaven as a spirit and once again became Michael the Archangel.(13) This doctrine can be easily disproved.

First, in Luke 24:36-43, Jesus clearly states in verse 39 that He is not a spirit but a man of flesh and bone. He even ate food to prove that He was not a spirit but had a physical body. In John 20:24-27, Jesus shows Thomas His wounds. Jesus is clearly demonstrating to His disciples that the body

previously on the cross had been resurrected. If Jesus had a different body than the one on the cross, He would have been deliberately deceiving the disciples. Ask the Witness, "Would Jesus deliberately deceive His disciples into believing something that was not true?"

Next, turn to some passages where Jesus predicts the resurrection of His body. In John 2:19-21 Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." See Acts 2:26-27, another prophecy of the Messiah's bodily resurrection. Clearly the prophecies and Jesus' appearances prove a bodily resurrection.

Witnesses cite 1 Peter 3:18 and 1 Cor. 15:44-50 to back up their belief. In 1 Peter 3:18 we read, "Christ died once and for all... he being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit." This verse does not prove Jesus is a spirit. This verse says that Jesus was raised in the Spirit and by the Spirit of God who gives life. Romans 8:11 states that the Holy Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was not raised *as* a spirit but *by* the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to 1 Cor. 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Since Jesus is in heaven, Witnesses say He must be a spirit.⁽¹⁴⁾ They are correct in saying that the earthly body cannot enter heaven. However, when Jesus rose, He had a glorified body (Luke 24:39). Therefore, He can dwell in heaven because of His glorified state. According to 1 Cor 15:39, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another... There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies." Christ's glorified body allows Him to travel in the earthly and heavenly dimensions. Some verses indicate that Christ exists in heaven in bodily form. "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" Colossians 2:9. The verb "dwells" in the Greek is *katoikei*, and is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus has a glorified body in heaven, the one that was resurrected. Note also 1 Timothy 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator, the

man Christ Jesus.” The verb “is,” is a present tense verb also. How can Jesus be a man if He is Michael the Archangel? Seeing these errors may prompt them to seek the truth.

The Holy Spirit

A fourth avenue of effective evangelism with Jehovah’s Witnesses is the subject of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person because they see the Holy Spirit as a force—much like electricity or fire. Here is what Jehovah’s Witnesses say about the Holy Spirit.

In their book *You Can Live Forever In Paradise on Earth*, they state, “As for the ‘Holy Spirit,’ the so-called third person of the Trinity, we have already seen that this is not a person but God’s active force.”(15)

In their magazine *Why Should You Believe in the Trinity?* they state, “To a certain extent it (Holy Spirit) can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations.”(16)

Here are some verses that are effective in proving the deity of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about the amount they sold their land for and the amount they gave to the church. Peter confronts them on this issue and states in 5:3, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?” Peter later states in the next verse, “You have not lied to men but to God.” Here the Holy Spirit is called “God” with a capital G both in our Bibles and in the Witnesses’ Bible. Another interesting question to ask Witnesses is, “Can you lie to a force like fire or electricity?” The answer is “No.” You can only lie to an intelligence, a person.

In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit speaks, “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set

apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Ask the Witness, "When was the last time electricity or fire spoke to you?" It is obvious only an intelligent person can communicate in language.

Ephesians 4:30 states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Any logical person should realize you can only grieve a living being. Ask a Jehovah's Witness, "How can you grieve or bring sorrow to an impersonal force like electricity?"

When you put all these facts together, the fact that the Holy Spirit is called God, He can be lied to, He speaks, and He can be grieved, the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. When presented clearly, I have not met any Jehovah's Witness who have been able to refute these verses.

God bless and good Witnessing!

Notes

1. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), p. 39.
2. Ibid., p. 40.
3. *Reasoning From the Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), pp.333-36.
4. Ibid., pp. 76-80.
5. *Live Forever*, pp. 350-55.
6. Ibid., pp. 170-84.
7. Ibid., pp. 41-44.
8. "Jehovah," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1973 ed.
9. *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 16., 1972 ed.
10. "Yahweh," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 12, 1993 ed.
11. "Jehovah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 1904 ed.
12. "Jehovah," *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1962 ed.
13. *Live Forever*, pp. 143-45.
14. Ibid., pp. 143-46.

15. Ibid., p. 40.

16. *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), p. 20.

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A Golf Lesson for Non-Golfers

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Recently my husband and I, along with two friends, took a golfing excursion in Jamaica while on a cruise. Two of them golfed while the other two of us rode in a cart taking pictures of the golfers and the breathtaking beauty of the mountainous course that provided ocean views from almost every hole.

This course required a caddy (a golfing-savvy helper) to accompany every golfer, and it was the first time our friend Pam had ever golfed with a caddy. She kept marveling at the Christian life lessons she was learning from the specialized help she received throughout the game. At dinner on the last night of the cruise, the eight people at our table each shared the highlight of our week; Pam's was definitely "golfing with a caddy."



Pam realized that her experience on the golf course was a picture of how the Holy Spirit would love to bless us, as a kind of "internal caddy," if we would just allow Him to:

Giving instruction: the caddy would suggest ways to shift her

stance, her grip on the club, or the way to swing. When she followed through on what he said, it helped her game—and it helped her have more fun.

The Holy Spirit knows the best way to approach and execute every detail of our lives, and will gently prompt and nudge us if we will just listen expectantly to His suggestions.

Giving direction: out of his knowledge of the challenging terrain of the course, the caddy would suggest which club to use. Sometimes Pam would disregard the suggestion and “lean on her own understanding” (Prov. 3:5) and it never worked out as well as when she followed his advice. He never shamed her when she chose a different club, just allowing the consequences of her choice to speak far more eloquently.

The Holy Spirit knows the terrain of every step of our journey through life, and He knows how to direct our paths (Prov. 3:6). As we learn to listen to His voice, He whispers, “This is the way; walk ye in it” (Is. 30:21). When we quench Him instead (1 Thess. 5:19), He never shames us; He allows us to learn from the more painful teacher of consequences.

Encouragement: when Pam made a bad swing, she defaulted to what many women do, saying, “I’m sorry.” Apologizing for not being perfect, right? How many times do we do that? Then she would hear the powerful words of encouragement, “Look, you hit the ball! Good for you!”

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate encourager, comforter and counselor. He reminds us of truth from God’s word and will often whisper (sometimes even thunder!) to us exactly what we need to hear: things like, “I will take care of you,” “You are not alone, I am here,” and “I love you.”

Trust: several times, Pam’s caddy would look at her and say, “Trust me.” He had the confidence of years of experience, but she had to choose to place herself in his hands by following his advice. He never steered her wrong.

The Holy Spirit is constantly engineering circumstances that invite us to trust Him. As I come up on 40 years of walking with Jesus, it seems to me that every life quiz or test from God has the same answer: "Trust Me."

In the space of a five-hours golf game, Pam made some amazing discoveries about the Christian life that will last for a long, long time. Instead of a white jumpsuited-clad caddy helping her golf, her big takeaway was that the indwelling Holy Spirit wants to be even more involved in every aspect of her day, her life, her choices, her sorrows, her joys.

Fore!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/a_golf_lesson_for_non-golfers

"Can the Truly Saved Commit Such Sins as Adultery and Murder?"

I wanted to ask if a truly saved person can fall into the sin of fornication, adultery or murder.... Wouldn't the Holy Spirit deal with a truly saved person if he/she is tempted? Please explain in detail. Thanks and God bless you!

Yes, a truly saved person can indeed fall prey to such sins. A good example is King David. He was truly saved and yet committed the grievous sins of adultery (2 Samuel 11:2-5) and murder (2 Samuel 11:6-17). Because of his sins, God sent

Nathan the prophet to rebuke David and he repented (2 Samuel 12:1-13). Nathan told David that the Lord had taken away his sin, but that there would still be negative consequences for it (2 Samuel 12:13-14).

It's important to realize that, like believers today, David was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We know this because, in Psalm 51 (David's psalm of repentance), He prays that the Lord will not take His Holy Spirit away from him (see v. 11). Of course, today believers are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17), but this was not so in David's day. Hence, David's request in Psalm 51:11.

Of course, the Holy Spirit will certainly convict us when we sin and it is God's desire that we so depend on the Holy Spirit that we do not sin (Galatians 5:16-26). Furthermore, God always provides a way of escape when we are tempted (1 Cor. 10:13). Thus, if we avail ourselves of God's provision, and rely on the Holy Spirit, we can resist our fleshly desires. We need not fall into such sins as fornication, adultery or murder. And we need to be ever mindful, and appropriately fearful, of future judgment (2 Cor. 5:11). But if we do sin, we have an advocate who pleads the blood of Christ on our behalf (1 John 2:1).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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“What Does It Mean to be

Filled With the Spirit?"

I need some clarification! What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I believe that it happens at the point of salvation, but many times in scripture it talks about people who are "full of the Spirit." Is this filling a one time deal or something that can happen many times. I know that in Old Testament times the Spirit came and went upon certain people. But in our times (and since Pentecost), how would you explain this. Thanks so much for your time, wisdom, and ministry.

The best explanation I have seen (and which has worked for me experientially for many years) is that being filled with the Spirit means yielding to Him (the Holy Spirit) in full dependence so that we are out of the way and He can do His thing through us and in us. The verb tense in Ephesians 5:18 means "be continually being filled," so it's not a one-time event. It's an ongoing discipline of submission.

I love the analogy of taking a hard, dried-up sponge and plunging it into a sink full of water. The sponge softens and soaks up the water until it is super-saturated. It is "filled with" water, right? But of course, a sponge can't choose to jump into the sink like we can choose to open ourselves to the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. And this choice is a matter of will, not of emotion; the difference between operating in the flesh (our own power apart from God) and being filled with the Spirit is a simple choice to ask, "Holy Spirit, please fill me" with a submissive, humble heart. It doesn't LOOK any different to someone else and it usually doesn't FEEL any different to us, but it's a real event. It can happen many times throughout the day. (I have shared this concept with my MOPS [Mothers of Preschoolers] group, and suggested they draw a line in the carpet with their shoe or draw an imaginary line across the kitchen floor, and step across the line to signify that they are moving from self-dependence to Christ-dependence and filling. One girl told me,

“Sue, you should see my house! There are lines all OVER the place!”)

The problem is that we default to the flesh; we keep gravitating toward doing things on our own and either rebelling against God or passively ignoring Him. We wake up “reset” to the flesh every morning. ☐ So we need to be filled again and again and again. Sort of like eating. We need to do it again and again and again! ☐

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

The Council of Nicea and the Doctrine of the Trinity

Don Closson argues that Constantine did not impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church, demonstrating the actual role of church leaders and Constantine.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#). 

The doctrine of the Trinity is central to the uniqueness of Christianity. It holds that the Bible teaches that “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”^{1} So central is this belief that it is woven into the words Jesus gave the church in His Great Commission, telling believers to “ . . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .” (Matthew 28:19).

It is not surprising, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most denigrated and attacked beliefs by those outside the Christian faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses reject this central tenet and expend considerable energy teaching against it. Much of the instruction of the Jehovah's Witness movement tries to convince others that Jesus Christ is a created being, not having existed in eternity past with the Father, and not fully God. Mormons have no problem with Jesus being God; in fact, they make godhood available to all who follow the teachings of the Church of Latter-day Saints. One Mormon scholar argues that there are *three* separate Gods—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are one in purpose and in some way still one God.[\[2\]](#) Another writes, "The concept that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God is totally incomprehensible."[\[3\]](#)

Among the world religions, Islam specifically teaches against the Trinity. Chapter four of the Koran argues, "Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to Him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son" (4:171). Although Muhammad seems to have wrongly believed that Christians taught that the Trinity consisted of God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son, they reject as sinful anything being made equivalent with Allah, especially Jesus.

A common criticism by those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity is that the doctrine was not part of the early church, nor a conscious teaching of Jesus Himself, but was imposed on the church by the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century at the Council of Nicea. Mormons argue that components of Constantine's pagan thought and Greek philosophy were forced on the bishops who assembled in Nicea (located in present day Turkey). Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Emperor weighed in against their view, which was the position argued by Arius at the council, and, again, forced the church to follow.

In the remaining portions of this article, we will discuss the impact the three key individuals—Arius, Constantine, and Athanasius—had on the Council of Nicea. We will also respond to the charge that the doctrine of the Trinity was the result of political pressure rather than of thoughtful deliberation on Scripture by a group of committed Christian leaders.

Arius

Let's look first at the instigator of the conflict that resulted in the council, a man named Arius.

Arius was a popular preacher and presbyter from Libya who was given pastoral duties at Baucalis, in Alexandria, Egypt. The controversy began as a disagreement between Arius and his bishop, Alexander, in 318 A.D. Their differences centered on how to express the Christian understanding of God using current philosophical language. This issue had become important because of various heretical views of Jesus that had crept into the church in the late second and early third centuries. The use of philosophical language to describe theological realities has been common throughout the church age in an attempt to precisely describe what had been revealed in Scripture.

Alexander argued that Scripture presented God the Father and Jesus as having an equally eternal nature. Arius felt that Alexander's comments supported a heretical view of God called Sabellianism which taught that the Son was merely a different mode of the Father rather than a different person. Jehovah's Witnesses argue today that the position held by Arius was superior to that of Alexander's.

Although some historians believe that the true nature of the original argument has been clouded by time and bias, the dispute became so divisive that it caught the attention of Emperor Constantine. Constantine brought the leaders of the

church together for the first ecumenical council in an attempt to end the controversy.

It should be said that both sides of this debate held to a high view of Jesus and both used the Bible as their authority on the issue. Some have even argued that the controversy would never have caused such dissension were it not inflamed by political infighting within the church and different understandings of terms used in the debate.

Arius was charged with holding the view that Jesus was not just subordinate to the Father in function, but that He was of an inferior substance in a metaphysical sense as well. This went too far for Athanasius and others who were fearful that any language that degraded the full deity of Christ might place in question His role as savior and Lord.

Some believe that the position of Arius was less radical than is often perceived today. Stuart Hall writes, "Arius felt that the only way to secure the deity of Christ was to set him on the step immediately below the Father, who remained beyond all comprehension."^{4} He adds that whatever the differences were between the two sides, "Both parties understood the face of God as graciously revealed in Jesus Christ."^{5}

Emperor Constantine

Many who oppose the doctrine of the Trinity insist that the emperor, Constantine, imposed it on the early church in 325 A.D. Because of his important role in assembling church leaders at Nicea, it might be helpful to take a closer look at Constantine and his relationship with the church.

Constantine rose to supreme power in the Roman Empire in 306 A.D. through alliance-making and assassination when necessary. It was under Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. that persecution of the church ended and confiscated church properties were returned.

However, the nature of Constantine's relationship to the Christian faith is a complex one. He believed that God should be appeased with correct worship, and he encouraged the idea among Christians that he "served their God."[\[6\]](#) It seems that Constantine's involvement with the church centered on his hope that it could become a source of unity for the troubled empire. He was not so much interested in the finer details of doctrine as in ending the strife that was caused by religious disagreements. He wrote in a letter, "My design then was, first, to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; and, second to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world . . ."[\[7\]](#) This resulted in him supporting various sides of theological issues depending on which side might help peace to prevail. Constantine was eventually baptized shortly before his death, but his commitment to the Christian faith is a matter of debate.

Constantine participated in and enhanced a recently established tradition of Roman emperors meddling in church affairs. In the early church, persecution was the general policy. In 272, Aurelian removed Paul of Samosata from his church in Antioch because of a theological controversy. Before the conflict over Arius, Constantine had called a small church synod to resolve the conflict caused by the Donatists who argued for the removal of priests who gave up sacred writings during times of persecution. The Donatists were rebuked by the church synod. Constantine spent five years trying to suppress their movement by force, but eventually gave up in frustration.

Then, the Arian controversy over the nature of Jesus was brought to his attention. It would be a complex debate because both sides held Jesus in high regard and both sides appealed to Scripture to defend their position. To settle the issue, Constantine called the council at Nicea in 325 A.D. with church leaders mainly from the East participating. Consistent

with his desire for unity, in years to come Constantine would vacillate from supporting one theological side to the other if he thought it might end the debate.

What is clear is that Constantine's active role in attempting to resolve church disputes would be the beginning of a new relationship between the empire and the church.

Athanasius

The Council of Nicea convened on May 20, 325 A.D. The 230 church leaders were there to consider a question vital to the church: Was Jesus Christ equal to God the Father or was he something else? Athanasius, only in his twenties, came to the council to fight for the idea that, "If Christ were not truly God, then he could not bestow life upon the repentant and free them from sin and death."[\[8\]](#) He led those who opposed the teachings of Arius who argued that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father.

The Nicene Creed, in its entirety, affirmed belief ". . . in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost."[\[9\]](#)

The council acknowledged that Christ was God of very God. Although the Father and Son differed in role, they, and the Holy Spirit are truly God. More specifically, Christ is of one substance with the Father. The Greek word *homoousios* was used to describe this sameness. The term was controversial because it is not used in the Bible. Some preferred a different word

that conveyed *similarity* rather than *sameness*. But Athanasius and the near unanimous majority of bishops felt that this might eventually result in a lowering of Christ's oneness with the Father. They also argued that Christ was begotten, not made. He is not a created thing in the same class as the rest of the cosmos. They concluded by positing that Christ became human for mankind and its salvation. The council was unanimous in its condemnation of Arius and his teachings. It also removed two Libyan bishops who refused to accept the creed formulated by the Council.

The growing entanglement of the Roman emperors with the church during the fourth century was often less than beneficial. But rather than Athanasius and his supporters seeking the backing of imperial power, it was the Arians who actually were in favor of the Emperor having the last word.

Summary

Did Constantine impose the doctrine of the Trinity on the church? Let's respond to a few of the arguments used in support of that belief.

First, the doctrine of the Trinity was a widely held belief prior to the Council of Nicea. Since baptism is a universal act of obedience for new believers, it is significant that Jesus uses Trinitarian language in Matthew 28:19 when He gives the Great Commission to make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The *Didache*, an early manual of church life, also included the Trinitarian language for baptism. It was written in either the late first or early second century after Christ. We find Trinitarian language again being used by Hippolytus around 200 A.D. in a formula used to question those about to be baptized. New believers were to asked to affirm belief in God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.

Second, the Roman government didn't consistently support Trinitarian theology or its ardent apologist, Athanasius. Constantine flip-flopped in his support for Athanasius because he was more concerned about keeping the peace than in theology itself. He exiled Athanasius in 335 and was about to reinstate Arius just prior to his death. During the forty-five years that Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, he was banished into exile five times by various Roman Emperors.

In fact, later emperors forced an Arian view on the church in a much more direct way than Constantine supported the Trinitarian view. Emperors Constantius II and Julian banished Athanasius and imposed Arianism on the empire. The emperor Constantius is reported to have said, "Let whatsoever I will, be that esteemed a canon," equating his words with the authority of the church councils.[{10}](#) Arians in general "tended to favor direct imperial control of the church."[{11}](#)

Finally, the bishops who attended the Council of Nicea were far too independent and toughened by persecution and martyrdom to give in so easily to a doctrine they didn't agree with. As we have already mentioned, many of these bishops were banished by emperors supporting the Arian view and yet held on to their convictions. Also, the Council at Constantinople in 381 reaffirmed the Trinitarian position after Constantine died. If the church had temporarily succumbed to Constantine's influence, it could have rejected the doctrine at this later council.

Possessing the freedom to call an ecumenical council after the Edict of Milan in 313, significant numbers of bishops and church leaders met to consider the different views about the person of Christ and the nature of God. The result was the doctrine of the Trinity that Christians have held and taught for over sixteen centuries.

Notes

1. Grudem, Wayne, *Bible Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 104.
2. Blomberg, Craig L., & Robinson, Stephen E., *How Wide the Divide*, (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 128.
3. Bruce McConkie in *Mormonism 101* by Bill McKeever & Eric Johnson (Baker Books, 2000), p. 52.
4. Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 135.
5. Ibid.
6. Hall, Stuart G., *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, p. 118.
7. Noll, Mark, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 51.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 57.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 60.

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“I Don’t Believe the Holy Spirit is a Person”

Dear Mr. Zukeran,

I do not believe the holy spirit is a person, mainly because it does not have a name. The names you give all have the word “the” preceding it. This indicates that the following word is a title, not a name. (For example “the President”, obviously “President” is not a name.) Also, the words “holy spirit” are at times in lower case. Of course you know names are never in lower case.

Thank you for your question. The Holy Spirit gives a command

(Acts 13:2), He can be lied to (Acts 5), and He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). This shows the Holy Spirit is an intelligent thinking person. One cannot lie to an inanimate force like electricity or fire. You cannot even lie to a cat or dog—it must be an intelligent cognitive thinking person. Also why does Jesus use personal pronoun “He” and “Him” in addressing the Holy Spirit (John 16)?

Regarding a name. Respectfully, that really is not much of an argument. The previous verses show the Holy Spirit has the qualities of a person; this makes Him a person. You stated because He does not have a personal name you think he is not a person. Allow me to use an illustration. If I say, “the King of Jordan is coming” what do I mean? Do I mean an impersonal, non-living entity is coming, or do I mean a person who rules over Jordan is coming? Obviously I mean a person is coming. Even if I do not know his personal name, we all know I am talking about a person. Just because I do not know if his name is George, Fred, or John but know him as “The King of Jordan” does that mean he is not a person?

The Holy Spirit has all the attributes of a person. He speaks, He thinks, He can be grieved, He can be lied to, etc. . . . Just because we do not address him as Fred or George but by His title “the Holy Spirit” does not mean He is not a person. I may never know the personal name of the King of Jordan, but whenever I speak of the King of Jordan, I am referring to a person.

Thanks for writing.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

Check out some articles and answers on the concept of the Trinity below.