

Who's That Knocking at Your Door?
Witnessing to People Who Belong to Cults and New American Religions
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Late on a Saturday morning, a knock on the front door interrupted Sue's visit with out-of-town relatives. A young, well dressed family stood at her door. The father smiled at her and said: "We're visiting our neighbors to find people who are deeply concerned about the lack of real love in the world. Do you feel that way too?" A little bit startled by the people, she replied: "I'm a little busy right now, so I can't talk." "I'm sorry that we caught you at an inconvenient moment," the mother quickly responded, "as you may know, we are Jehovah's Witnesses. We wanted to share with you an important thought from the Bible. But since you don't have time to listen right now, perhaps I could leave with you our current magazines, which discuss ways to show love to family members. You could read them when you have time. They cost 25 cents each." Sue quickly pays for the literature, sends the family away, and closes the door as soon as possible. She knew what talking to Jehovah's Witnesses was like and knew she'd just be confused and frustrated hours later. Yet she couldn't help feeling guilty about not saying something about Jesus.

George thought of himself as a good ol' boy. He loved country music so much, he'd even risk a fight with his wife to play it on the way to church on Sunday morning. He could hear her voice even now: "Are you a Christian or a Cowboy?" At least he could listen to as much as he wanted to, now that he was on his way to work. The D. J. announced a song by Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash. He reached over and cranked up the volume. He didn't want to miss a second of a tune by his favorite artists. "I was a highwayman..." the song began. It was a real toe-tapper. He really got into the song. He loved these spirit of adventure songs. At least until he heard the last verse. He pulled off the road as the words rolled out of the speakers: "I fly a starship, across the Universe Divine. And when I reach the other side, I'll find a place to rest my spirit if I can. Perhaps I may become a Highwayman again. Or I may simply be a single drop of rain. But I will remain and I'll be back again and again and again and again and again and again..."

Judy wandered around the mall, half-heartedly looking into all the store windows. Linda and Heather were in California, sunbathing for a few weeks before their jobs began in Los Angeles. Dave and Bob were also gone, off to New York and the world of advertising. Everyone she knew had left yesterday. For four years they'd laughed and cried their way through college. True, she'd soon be off to med school, but she missed them all. As she took a seat near a tree, tastefully placed in the center of the mall, she saw a few young people selling flowers. One of them came over to chat. He was warm and caring. He asked about her and really listened. He invited her to their youth center downtown to meet some more young people, have some snacks and enjoy herself. She accepted, glad to have some new friends for company as she waited for the few days to pass before her move. She soon learned that they were a religious group. They were so loving that she was interested in learning more about their leader, Sun Myung Moon.

What is your reaction to these stories? Do they sound real? If you were the people in the stories, how would you have dealt with the situation? How could a

strong Christian faith help you in such situations?

In today's America, religion is gaining strength as people struggle to find meaning for their lives in a world that often seems uncaring, cruel, confusing, and without meaning. What makes the modern search for religion different from the ones of our past is that a great many people seem to find fulfillment in non-Christian religions. On T.V., actresses preach the gospel of the New Age. The newspaper frequently brings us stories concerning satanic groups. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses send missionaries to our homes. Buddhist philosophy is taught in martial arts classes. Everywhere we turn another Gospel, another Jesus, new bibles, old gods, and religious ideas offer their brand of salvation to all who will listen. How should God's people respond to these challenges to the Christian faith? How do we witness to the truth? How do we protect ourselves and our children from buying into these new gospels offered by angels of light?

This course is designed to help us discover from God's word the answers to these and many other questions. We will first consider what the Bible says about false religion and about Jesus. We will then examine the teachings of several cults and new American religions in order to discover effective ways to witness to the hope within us.

Session One: Characteristics of Cults and New Religions

Before we begin to look for ways to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people in cults and new religions, we need to know what we're talking about. What's a cult? What's a new American religion? How do you identify them? In the first session of our course, we will take up these questions. In this way we will develop a foundation from which to study such groups.

Definitions

List below everything you think of when you hear the word "cult" and the phrase "new American religion." From these thoughts, develop a definition for each concept.

The teacher or course leader of your study group has several formal definitions to share with you. Is it possible to draw a single definition from them? If not,

how can we speak about these groups in a way which makes sense?

The terms "cult" and "new American religion" are modern english concepts which describe what, in the opinion of the Bible, are false religions, false prophets and false doctrines. Read each of the following passages and identify the characteristics of false religion they reveal.

Deuteronomy 18:1-5 _____

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 _____

Matthew 24:4-5, 10-13, 23-31 _____

John 8:42-44 _____

1 Corinthians 12:1-3 _____

Galatians 1:6-9 _____

Colossians 2:6-12 _____

Colossians 2:16-23

2 Timothy 3:1-7

2 Timothy 3:12-17

2 Timothy 4:3-5

Titus 3:9-11

2 Peter 1:20-21, 2:1-3

2 Peter 2:9-22

2 Peter 3:14-18

1 John 2:18-23

1 John 4:1-6

Summary

Review the things we discovered in the above passages. Create a "profile" for cults and new religions from the points brought out by the scriptures. Compare these to the points provided by the course leader.

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The Point of Session One: A cult is a group, movement, or philosophy which claims to be in harmony with the theology of the Bible and may even claim to be true Christianity, but in fact teaches a form of works righteousness and attempts to destroy the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Session Two: Untwisting Twisted Scripture:
Respect for the Text of Scripture

On Sunday morning, you have the T. V. set turned to a Christian channel. As you dash through the living room looking for the envelope with the offering in it, you notice a young man praying with a woman. "Sister," he proclaims, "I KNOW God doesn't want you to have this heart disease. Didn't He say in His word, "Let not your heart be troubled?"

What is your reaction to this announcement? What is wrong with this use of the Scripture?

You stand blocking the front door. Your frustrated teenage son pleads with you. "Come on! It's just a little party. I won't drink much. Anyway, Jesus thought it was O.K. to have fun. He made more wine at a wedding, didn't He? He said, "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry, Didn't He?"

Short of killing him, what might you say?

When Satan convinced Adam and Eve to seek to become gods and to decide for themselves what was good for them, sin entered the world. Each and every person born since that day has been driven to pursue pleasure and to be self-centered. Even Christians feel the pull to do things against God's will or to believe things contrary to God's word. Because we sense that God will not approve of our plans to sin or because others might get in the way, we seek to find noble reasons to justify our desires. At times like these, we are tempted to quote the Bible, not to learn from it, but to claim that God is really on our side, soothe our consciences, or silence others.

As we learned in our last session, one of the marks of false religion is the drive to twist God's word into a form that seems to agree with human opinions and actions. If we are share the love of Christ with those who follow other religions, we must be on our guard for distortions of Biblical truth. The best way to do this is to understand the basic rules for finding the correct meaning of passages in the Scripture. In this session, we will discuss these rules and the tricks which false religion use to mold God's word to their purposes. In this way we can learn how to hold up the Gospel purely and correct distortions which keep others from hearing its sweet message.

Workshop in Untwisting Twisted Scripture

The basic principles for understanding what the Scripture teaches are described below. Under each rule, passages from various sources are presented. Examine each quote. Using the rule, determine whether or not the author of the reading uses the Bible correctly. If you feel the writer is mistaken, explain why.

Rule #1: Make the Bible your highest authority

Because the Scripture is God's own word, it is a perfect guide to the truth. Human arguments, theories, logic, and opinions are limited by the fact that people are created beings and by the sin-ridden desires within every individual. When the Bible speaks on an issue, our only proper response is trust God and to obey His commands.

False religions, however, attack the authority of God's word in many ways. Some add new books to the Scripture. Others treat it as a giant puzzle which only they can solve. Still others claim that some portions of God's Word do not apply to today's Christian. Other simply condemn portions as not a part of the original Bible, as mistranslations of the original text, or simply as wrong. All this amounts making the Bible a slave to human opinions.

When the Scripture is assaulted in these ways, the proper response is faith in God's Word alone. We must reject all additions to Scripture, all subtractions, and all attempts to turn it into a coded book in need of a key to unlock its meaning. If someone wishes to convince us, let them confine their appeal to the Bible. There alone can we be certain of hearing the truth.

Quote #1

"The proofs concerning the identity of the world-ruling empires depicted by the fabled image of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2) are too numerous to mention. Most Bible commentaries include ample references to historical sources correctly identifying the kingdoms of Babylon (head of gold), Persia (the chest of silver), Graeco-Macedonia (the belly and thighs of brass), and Rome (the feet and toes of miry clay and iron)...the identity of the beast has never changed. The culmination of the ancient kingdoms was Rome... (following a quote of Rev. 17:1-5) The woman is a great, universal, false church! She "sits on" a "beast," meaning she holds sway and influence over the ten-nation union in central Europe."

_____ Correct

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Quote #2

"The inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us. Their words come to us through conferences, Church publications, and instructions to local priesthood leaders. "We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #3

"If the Holy Scriptures were really so obscure a book that the meaning of all those passages which form the basis of the Christian Creed could not be definitely ascertained, and if, as a result of this, we should have to acknowledge that without some other authority it would be impossible to decide which of two or several interpretations of Scripture passages is the only correct one, -- if these conditions, I say, were true, the Scriptures could not be the Word of God. How could a book that leaves us groping in darkness and uncertainty regarding its essential contents serve as a revelation?"

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #4

"Most people believe that the entire Bible -- from Genesis to Revelation -- is written to them. This is not true. Believing that the entire Word of God is written to everyone throughout history has caused confusion and contradiction in rightly dividing the Word. There are some passages in the Word of God that just do not fit with other sections unless we understand to whom the passage is specifically addressed...That part [of the Word of God] which is addressed to us must be applied by us. All the rest of the Scripture which does not have our name on it, which is not addressed to us, is for our learning...Those things written before the day of Pentecost are not addressed to us but are for our learning...The Epistles such as Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philipppians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians are addressed specifically to the Church as are the personal Epistles like Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Hebrews is not addressed to the Church...James is addressed to the same Old Testament-minded believers [as Hebrews]"

_____ Correct

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Rule #2: Look up proof texts yourself

A popular plaque, often displayed at truck-stop diners and down home family restaurants announces: "In God we trust, all others pay cash." The anonymous writer of the saying displays a healthy suspicion of strangers -- he will not be fooled. In the same way, we must never take a person's word that the Bible teaches something. We must always be willing to ask "Where?" and to look up the

passage. If we are lazy here, we can be convinced that anything is true.

Often people proclaiming false religion will speak without notes. Sometimes they quote a verse wrongly. Other times they claim the Bible teaches something without giving a reference to support the claim. In order to hear God's word clearly, therefore, we must look up every passage and never take a person's word for it that the Bible teaches something we've never heard before.

Quote #5

"I'll give you a sign," said God. "Not the sign of a white collared priesthood. Not the sign of wealth and power. There's nothing in this sign that you will want, or think suitable. But it is an everlasting sign. It is the greatest sign of all."

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Quote #6 -- "A thought struck me. "Why, if people have lived other lives, don't they remember anything from them?" "But they do," she said. "It's just sometimes that they don't remember that they are remembering. Jesus said, "I'll bring all things to thine remembrance," but he didn't say how."

_____ Correct

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Rule #3: Respect the original language of the text

The Bible which most people read in their study of God's word is not the actual words written down by the prophets. It is a translation of those words. The original text was recorded in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. Even when the translator is careful to express the meaning of the Bible in the new language, some distortion will occur. However, cults and new religions employ translators who frequently alter the meaning of passages to protect and defend their teachings.

The best solution to this problem is for the reader to learn the original languages. For most people, this is an impossible task. There is another solution. When Christians study God's word in-depth they can make use of three or four different translations accepted by many different churches. When the information of all the versions is considered together, much of the distortion will disappear. This author suggests the use of the following combination of translations: The New American Standard, the New International Version, God's Word to the Nations, and the Good News Bible. Many other versions are available and equally acceptable.

Quote #7

"The word Adam is from the Hebrew adamah, signifying the red color of the ground, dust, nothingness. Divide the name Adam into two syllables, and it reads

a dam, or obstruction. This suggests the thought of something fluid, of mortal mind in solution. It further suggests the thought of that "darkness...upon the face of the deep," when matter or dust was deemed the agent of Deity in creating man -- when matter, as that which is accursed, stood opposed to Spirit. Here a dam is not a mere play upon words. It stands for obstruction, error, even the supposed separation of man from God, and the obstacle which the serpent, sin, would impose between man and his creator."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #8 -- A translation of Colossians 1:15-18, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all other things and by means of him all other things were made to exist, and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that he might become the one who is first in all things."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #9 -- A translation of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water. He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths as he has promised. Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me. You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim. I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home forever."

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Rule #4: Determine the literary form

Language is a very flexible tool. Very different meanings can come from the same words, depending upon the type of literature in which it is used. For example, "Once upon a time," used in english language fiction means roughly "This is how it all began..." In a history book, the same phrase might mean: "Some time ago, I don't know exactly when..."

To understand the Scriptures, it is important to know what type of literature the author is writing. In symbolic language, a passage may mean one

thing, while in a literal account it means something completely different. Often false religions take advantage of such double meanings to "prove" their points.

Quote #10

"Based on the Book of Genesis in the Bible, Christians have traditionally held the somewhat vague belief that the Original Sin and the root of sin and evil was the first human ancestors' eating a piece of fruit -- the Fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (for brevity, often referred to hereafter as the fruit of good and evil). However, is the fruit of good and evil a literal fruit, or is it a symbol, as are many other terms in the Bible? According to The Principle, it is a symbol."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Rule #5: Trust the simplest meaning

Sometimes people from cults and new religions claim to have been shown the real meaning of passages in the scriptures supposedly written to conceal the truth from the average person, until the times were spiritually mature enough to allow a proper understanding of the hidden truth. They urge us to seek the "deeper meanings" with them since they alone hold the key to the truth. Since the beginning of the church, this technique has been used by even Christian scholars. This was used by people to put their own words into God's words.

Yet the Scriptures were not written for the learned few, but for all who believe. Thus we should look to the simplest understanding of the words recorded in a text to hear God's voice.

Quote #11 -- "Here let me give what I understand to be the spiritual sense of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father which art in heaven, Our Father-Mother God, all-harmonious, Hallowed be Thy name. Adorable One. Thy kingdom come. Thy Kingdom is come; Thou art ever-present. Thy will be done in Earth, as it is in heaven. Enable us to know, -- as in heaven, so on earth, -- God is omnipotent, supreme. Give us this day our daily bread; Give us grace for to-day; feed the famished affections; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. and Love is reflected in love; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; And God leadeth us not into temptation, but delivereth us from sin, disease, and death. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. For God is infinite, all-power, all life, Truth, Love, over all, and All."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Session Three: Untwisting Twisted Scripture:
Scripture Interprets Scripture

Rule #6: Read the surrounding text of each passage

The exasperated teenager in our earlier story made a common mistake in interpreting the Bible. He ignored the immediate context of the passage he quoted. Far from urging us to party, Jesus used the quoted reading as a part of a parable condemning a rich man who was so caught up by possessions that he ignored both the poor and his own spiritual welfare. He called the man a fool and stated that the man would die that evening.

Out of context, anyone's words can be used to support causes condemned by their author. It is important, therefore to read the verses surrounding a text quoted in order to be sure the meaning is the same as the one claimed.

Quote #12

Speaking about Psalm 46:10: "Christ said, "Be still and know that I am God." Be still and know that you are God and when you know that you are God you will begin to live Godhood, and living Godhood there is no reason to suffer."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Rule #7: Look up parallel passages

Beacause God inspired over forty different authors to write books in the Bible, some of the events recorded appear in more than one place. This is especially true of the first three Gospels, which cover the earthly life of Jesus. Often one writer will not record a detail which is written about by another. It is thus important to look at all of the passages covering the same or similar events, teachings, or miracles to fully understand what a given passage says.

Rule #8: Put the text in its place in history

The events of the Scriptures occurred at particular moments in time. In order to fully understand what is being said in a given passage, it is important to examine the world around it. For example, when St. Paul speaks in Romans 13 about obeying the government because it is God's chosen servant, he does so in the Spring of 57 AD, while Nero is Caesar.

When someone brings a new insight to a passage of Scripture which fits modern notions just a little too well, its time to go to a scholarly source or two that you trust. You should also do some research if you discover in your study actions or sayings which sound strange to the ear. Your source might be an encyclopedia, a commentary on the Bible, an encyclopedia of Biblical archaeology, something similar, or pastors and other church workers. The more you understand about the background of the Scripture, the more God's word will come alive.

Quote #13 -- "I turned to Matthew. The page fell open to Matthew 16, verse 13. Jesus is talking to his disciples. He asks them: "Whom do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?" The disciples answer, "Some say that you are John the Baptist, some say Elias, and others say Jeremias or one of the prophets." Evidently reincarnation was such an accepted belief at the time that it was a matter of simple discussion -- not "whether," but "who?""

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Rule #9: Examine all other passages on the same subject

As you have probably noticed, the Bible is a big book. God inspired over forty writers to record it in three different languages across three different continents over a period of 1600 Years. It covers a wide variety of topics and yet speaks with one voice each time it addresses an issue. For this reason, we must take care to gather together all passages on a subject before we make judgements on what God has to say on a given topic.

Often false religions will not do this. Their teachers will defend their doctrines only from the passages which support their theories. The same method is used when attacking the position of Christianity. The claim will be made that a teaching is based upon a misunderstanding of two or three passages, when in fact it may be based on dozens if not hundreds of references. We must be on our guard against such an assault.

The most useful tool in discovering all that the Bible has to say on a issue is a concordance. Concordances list all the words used in the Scriptures along with the location of each verse in which they are used. Careful study of the use of key words in a subject will reveal what God has said on a given issue.

Quote #14

"Scriptural evidence indicates that the name Michael applied to God's Son before he left heaven to become Jesus Christ and also after his return. Michael is the only one said to be the "archangel," meaning the "chief angel" or "principal angel." The term occurs in the Bible only in the singular. This seems to imply that there is but one whom God has designated chief or head of the angelic host. At 1 Thess. 4:16, the voice of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ is described as being that of an archangel, suggesting that he is, in fact, himself the archangel. This text depicts him as descending from heaven with a "commanding call." It is only logical, therefore, that the voice expressing this commanding call be described by a word that would not diminish or detract from the great authority that Christ Jesus now has as King of kings and Lord of lords. (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 17:14)..."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #15

"Let's list the Scriptures referred to by most churches to justify their actions and beliefs (on the subject of personal salvation). The most commonly used are John 3:16, 36; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 2:8-9, and 1 John 5:11-13. What does the Bible mean to believe on Him? Does mere belief make us live righteously? Surprisingly, many think it does. They even go so far as to say that so long as you simply believe that the Messiah died for your sins, you are saved. Here comes the first "contradiction" : James 2:19 says, "The devils also believe and tremble." Do the demons, then, have salvation? Something is surely misunderstood."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Rule #10: Say only what the Bible says

The main goal of most speakers, especially religious ones, is to convince an audience that they know what they're talking about. One way of doing this is quoting writings and persons held in respect. On the top of the list is God and His Word. Often a blizzard of Bible passages are quoted, most of which have little to do with the passage and thus prove nothing. Sometimes a quote is used to defend an idea not related to the content of the passage. This is such an old trick it has a latin name, non sequitur, which means, "It does not follow." Another way of using this ploy is to take passages which do not speak about the same issue and string them together in such a way that they appear to support an idea outside of God's Word. Sometimes a writer will use a general statement to support a narrow conclusion and other times use a passage addressed to a specific issue to support a broad idea. Often the passage appears just because it sounds nice.

Another method used by false teachers to explain away passages they do not like is changing the meaning of words. They supply a meaning not contained in the original languages or not laid down by the Bible to distort a passage. For instance, the word "salvation" is changed by many false religions to mean: "God forgives your past sins for the sake of Jesus and expects you never to sin again so that you might go to paradise." This popular misunderstanding muddies the clearest of grace-filled statements with works-righteousness.

False teachers have yet another way of disposing of competing theories. The method can be dubbed "intellectual terrorism." They simply state that "reasonable people" will understand a passage in a certain way. All other explanations, they claim without evidence, are foolish or misleading.

The way to discover these shell games is simple. Look up each passage and put aside anything which is not directly related to the point the author or speaker is trying to make. Also, do not be fooled into believing someone simply because they quote the Bible.

Quote #16

"Words are the most powerful thing in the universe. We read in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We must

learn to use our words more effectively."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #17

"This great doctor, who knew the Bible backward and forward, always referred such people to the second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39). "There it is," Dr. Smiley Blanton would say. "Plain as the nose on your face. Love is the answer to all human ills. But the Bible says here" -- and he would thrust the Book right into the patient's hands -- "that you can't love anyone properly as long as you despise or downgrade yourself. Look! There it is, right there. See? Right there!"

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Rule #11: Use Clear passages to understand difficult ones

One of the greatest attractions new religions offer is a brand new way of understanding difficult issues and supposedly unlocking the meanings of hard to understand portions of God's Word. Virtually all false teachers claim to have the key to the book of Revelation, whose symbolism has baffled the greatest scholars God has given to His church. However, when the new way of looking at a hard to understand portion of Scripture is proclaimed, it often runs into very clear passages which contradict it.

When this happens, the teacher ought to use the clear passage to alter his or her view of the hard passage. Often the opposite is done, resulting in a collection of distortions imposed upon the clearest of readings. If we discover such a movement from difficult to clear passages, we should ask the question "Why is this done?" Since God's Word is written to everyone, we should insist that the clear passage be left alone and seek the true meaning. Clear Scriptures should always be used to interpret difficult ones.

Rule #12: Don't confuse the law and the gospel

Our final rule has to do with understanding the difference between the two main teachings of God's word: Law and Gospel. The law contains all the things which God commands us to do for Him, the gospel contains all the things which God has done or will do for us. Because we are sinful, we cannot even remotely keep God's law. Because of this, we are condemned to eternal death -- separation from God forever in hell. The law reminds us of this, showing us our need for help from God. Because God loves us, He sent His Son Jesus to die in our place. Because Jesus paid the price of our sins, we are forgiven of them. The Gospel tells us this and gives us the power to believe it. If we turn God's gospel promises into statements of what we must do (law), we destroy our only way back to God. If we ignore the law and hear only the gospel, we will grow lazy in

doing God's will for our lives and may substitute faith in Him for trust in ourselves and in that way lose our salvation. Thus it is critical to let the law be law and the gospel be gospel.

Quote #18

"In John 3:17-18 we see that Yahweh sent His Son into the world so that those who believe in him might be saved. (He who doesn't believe in Him is condemned already.) This vers doesn't say that if you believe in Him that you are automatically saved, but that you have a chance. You must prove you believe in Him in order to begin to gain salvation."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Quote #19

"I don't think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition."

_____ Correct

_____ Incorrect

Summary

In these past two sessions, we have discussed the basic rules for understanding what the Bible has to say. These rules are listed below. Explain each principle in your own words.

Rule #1: Make the Bible your highest authority

Rule #2: Look up proof texts yourself

Rule #3: Respect the original language of the text

Rule #4: Determine the literary form

Rule #5: Trust the simplest meaning

Rule #6: Read the surrounding text of each passage

Rule #7: Look up parallel passages

Rule #8: Put the text in its place in history

Rule #9: Examine all other passages on the same subject

Rule #10: Say only what the Bible says

Rule #11: Use Clear passages to understand difficult ones

Rule #12: Don't confuse the law and the gospel

Footnotes

Quote #1 -- Europe and America in Prophecy, by Garner Ted Armstrong, (Tyler, TX: Church of God, International, 1989), pp. 153, 157.

Quote #2 -- Gospel Principles, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979), pp. 51-52.

Quote #3 -- The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, by Dr. C. F. W. Walther, Tr. W. H. T. Dau, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928, reprinted in 1980s), p. 59.

Quote #4 -- Power for Abundant Living: The Accuracy of the Bible by Victor P. Wierwille. (New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1971), pp. 207-209, 212.

Quote #5 -- An Exposition of the Seven Church Ages, by William M. Branham (N.L.:The Author, N.D.)

Quote #6 -- Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping Prophet, by Jess Stearn, (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 246.

Quote #7 -- Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, Mary Baker Eddy, (Boston: First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1971), p.338.

Quote #8 -- New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1961)

Quote #9 -- The Good News Bible, (New York: American Bible Society, 1976)

Quote #10 -- Outline of the Principle: Level 4, (New York: Unification Church, 1980), pp. 47-48

Quote #11 -- Eddy, pp. 16-17

Quote #12 -- Meditations of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, (New York: Bantam, 1968)

Quote #13 -- It's All in the Playing, by Shirley Mac Laine, (New York: Bantam, 1987)

Quote #14 -- Aid to Bible Understanding, (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1971).

Quote #15 -- "Don't Gamble Your Salvation: Know How and When You are Saved," by Pete Vacca, The Master Key, Vol. 9, No. 3 (May/June 1989), p. 4.

Quote #16 -- The Tongue: A Creative Force, by Charles Capps, (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1976), p. 7.

Quote #17 -- Dynamic Imaging, by Norman V. Peale, (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1982), p. 45.

Quote #18 -- Vacca, p. 5.

Quote #19 -- Interview of Robert Schuller in Time, March 18th, 1985, p. 70, as quoted in The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days, by Dave Hunt and T. A. Mc Mahon, (Egane, OR: Harvest House, 1985), p. 15.

Further reading:

Scripture Twisting by James Sire. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980). This book provided the inspiration for this session and pointed the way to many of the quotes. I recommend it as an excellent guide to proper interpretation of the Scriptures.

Session 4: Who is Jesus?

He is Called God

The most important question ever asked of us is: "Who is Jesus?" Our eternal life depends upon the way we answer it in our hearts. The apostle Peter puts it this way: "No one else can save us, because in all the world there is no other name given among mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Jesus Himself puts this question to the disciples. Read the account of this session in Matt. 16:13-28.

What did this public opinion poll say about Jesus? What did people mean when they said this?

What was Peter's answer? What did he mean when he said this?

Jesus complemented Peter on this answer. What did Jesus mean when He accepted this title?

What was Peter's reaction to the definition Jesus gave? What was the Lord's reply?

Now read Matthew 17:1-13. This account gives the answer of God the Father and the Holy Spirit to this question. What is it? What does it mean?

Opening Prayer

"Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus, Lord, to Thee we raise, manifested by the star to the sages from afar, branch of royal David's stem in Thy birth at Bethlehem, anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest. Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest, and King supreme, and at Cana, wedding guest, in Thy Godhead manifest. Manifest in power Divine, changing water into wine. Anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest. Amen. (The Lutheran

Hymnal, #134, vs. 1 & 2)

It is one thing to know that Jesus is "God in Man made manifest," and another thing to know where the Bible says that He is both God and man. The Scripture was written by God-inspired men who believed that Jesus was 100% God and 100% man at the same time. The people who first read their writings agreed with them. Since no one challenged this truth, the Bible does not examine the whole doctrine in great detail in any one passage. Yet the whole of the Bible is filled with the good news that God became man in Jesus Christ. The purpose of this session is to show you why we believe the Word of God teaches Jesus is God. To demonstrate this, we will examine the many ways the Scriptures speak of Jesus and God the Father. From this study, you will see for yourself that Jesus is considered God by the Bible.

Reasons to Believe Jesus is God

Reason #1: God's Word Plainly Teaches it

Read the following passages. What does each one say about Jesus?

Isaiah 9:6: _____

Matt. 1:23: _____

John 1:1-18: _____

John 10:28-30: _____

John 20:26-29: _____

Romans 9:5: _____

Philippians 2:5-11:

Colossians 2:9:

1 Tim. 3:16:

Titus 1:3-4, 2:13

Hebrews 1:8:

2 Peter 1:1:

1 John 5:20

Reason #2: The Bible calls Jesus by God's Name

When God had finished calling Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt Moses had many questions for Him. One question was, "What is Your name?" (Exodus 3:13-17) God then revealed His name, Yahweh, to Moses. The name means "I am who I am." God's name tells us not to limit Him, but to take Him for who He really is.

In the centuries which passed, the people constantly rebelled against God.

Finally God punished them by sending the Babylonians to destroy their land and carry them off into exile. The people of Israel learned their lesson (after a fashion) and vowed to keep God's law perfectly. But how could the people of Israel be sure they kept God's law? To solve this problem, the Rabbis created a legal system stricter than the Law of Moses. They called their man-made law a hedge or fence around the law. They reasoned that anyone who kept their rules would automatically keep God's Law. If the Rabbis' rules were broken, the law would warn that sinner to be careful. In the case of the commandment not to take the name of the Lord in vain, the Rabbis set up the following rule: Instead of using God's name, "Yahweh," always say "Adonai," which means, "my Lord." Since a person would then never use God's name, they believed it to be impossible to take it in vain.

During their travels, the Jewish people settled in many different lands and adopted the language of the ruling people of their new country. Soon many spoke the Greek language as a native tongue. A group of seventy scholars noticed that these people could not read God's word without taking time they did not have to learn Hebrew. Thus they translated the Old Testament into Greek. The scholars followed the rule of using "Lord" in the place of God's name in their translation. They used the term "Kurios" which means "Lord" in Greek when the Hebrew text used God's personal name. The New Testament writers, who wrote in Greek, followed this same custom. Thus the many of the uses of the word, "Lord," in the New Testament mean "Yahweh" or "God." Other times they translated "I am" into Greek, also meaning, "God."

Examine the following texts in light of the above information. What do they tell us about Jesus?

Luke 2:11:

John 8:24, 58:

Acts 2:34-36:

Romans 10:9:

1 Corinthians 12:1-3:

2 Peter 2:1:

Jude 4-5:

Session 5: Who is Jesus?
He Has the Same Titles and Qualities as the Father

The passages we examined last week are more than enough proof that Jesus is God. Yet the false teachers who oppose His deity have developed clever arguments to eliminate these clear passages. Sometimes they invent new rules of greek grammar which have no basis in reality. Other times they impose english grammar and punctuation upon the text. Still other times they provide their own twisted translations and try to pass the off as the most accurate versions of the original text.

Yet they cannot change enough of the scripture to avoid the truth that the whole of the Bible teaches that Jesus is God who became man for our sakes. In this session we will examine how God's Word treats Jesus as God the Father's equal by giving Him God's Titles and God's unique qualities.

Reason #3: The Bible Gives Jesus Titles Given to God

One of the main ways in which God's Word tells us about God's nature is to give Him titles. Each one helps us to see an unique side of God. Some passages even insist that the title belongs to God alone. Some of these very titles are applied by the Old Testament to the Messiah and by the New Testament to Jesus. Read each pair of passages below. What is the title held by the Father and Jesus in common? Does it tell us anything else about God?

1 Timothy 6:14-16 and Revelation 17:14: _____

2 Kings 19:20-22 and Acts 3:13-14: _____

2 Samuel 22:1-3 and Luke 1:69: _____

Joel 3:12 and Acts 10:42: _____

Zechariah 14:5-9 and Matthew 25:31-46: _____

Isaiah 60:19-20 and John 8:12:

Isaiah 44:8 and 1 Corinthians 10:4

Isaiah 8:13-15 and 1 Peter 2:4-8:

Malachi 2:10 and Isaiah 9:6:

Hosea 13:4 and Titus 3:3-7:

Genesis 49:22-25 and Hebrews 13:20-21:

Isaiah 40:28 and Colossians 1:13-16:

Isaiah 44:6 and Revelation 2:3

Isaiah 62:1-5 and Matthew 9:15

Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 22:13-16

Reason #4: God and Jesus Share the Same Qualities

If someone claimed to be God, you'd ask them to prove it. To keep you from calling the authorities to take them to an asylum, they would have to convince you that they could do only what God could do. When we look at the Bible to discover whether or not Jesus is God, we need to take the same approach. Does God's Word speak of Jesus in the same way it speaks about God? Does Jesus do things only God can do? Does He have qualities that only God has? If He does, then He must be God. If not, He cannot be God, because God is unique.

Read the following passages. What qualities do they claim that Jesus and God share? Is this a quality unique to God?

Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8

Jeremiah 23:24 and Matthew 28:20:

Isaiah 54:4-5 and John 13:3:

1 John 3:20 and John 16:30-31:

1 Timothy 6:15b-16 and Hebrews 7:22-25:

Acts 17:25 and John 11:25-26:

John 5:26: _____

Psalms 31:3-5 and John 14:6: _____

Mark 10:17-18 and 1 Peter 2:2-5: _____

1 Corinthians 15:28 and Colossians 3:11: _____

Psalms 95:3 and Matthew 28:18: _____

Deuteronomy 7:9 and Revelation 19:11: _____

Isaiah 42:8 and John 17:1-5, 24: _____

Deuteronomy 32:4 and 2 Corinthians 5:21: _____

Isaiah 40:8 and Matthew 24:35: _____

1 Samuel 2:6 and John 5:21:

Psalms 148:2 and Hebrews 1:6:

Exodus 20:1-6 and Revelations 5:8-14:

Psalms 148:2, 5 and Colossians 1:16

John 5:16-24:

John 8:19:

John 14:1:

John 14:8-9:

John 16:15:

Matthew 9:1-8:

Zechariah 14:9, Acts 4:10-12 and Philippians 2:9-11:

Titus 2:11-14 and Acts 15:10-11:

Summary

Many false prophets claim that Jesus is not God and the Bible does not teach this. Many of their arguments are very clever and confusing to Christians who have not examined what the Bible has to say on the subject. How can you answer an attack on the Godhood of Jesus, now that you've studied the topic?

What advance preparation could you do to ready yourself for discussing this topic with those who do not believe Jesus is God?

Session 6: Witnessing to People in Cults

Read the following statements. What is your reaction to them? Is the advice given correct? Explain your answer.

"Look, Mormons are nice people who believe in God. Stop saying such bad things about their church. We all have the same God, don't we? We're all going to heaven, aren't we?"

"Jane, your my daughter and I love you. That will never change and you are always welcome here at home. But you need to know that I'm worried about this Way group you've joined. They don't have the same Jesus as we do, honey. The real Jesus died for you and gives you heaven -- free of charge. Please look into them with our pastor before going."

"I have a notecard posted on my door. It says: No Jehovah's Witnesses welcome here. I'm a Christian.""

"I tell you, those Moonies are nuts! They're brainwashed. My neighbor has a son who's one. I told her, "They're holding him hostage with mind games. Hire one of those deprogrammers to get him out of there and talk some sense into him."

Why Should We Bother Witnessing?

Witnessing to people who actively practice a non-Christian religion is very difficult. They try just as hard to convert you as you try to present the gospel to them. They are willing to believe in their leaders no matter how much disturbing information is shown to them. They have pat answers to many of the

challenges you present. They are very sincere and highly motivated. They seem to know the Bible better than you do.

So why should we waste time on them, we think. They'll never change. Yet as hopeless as it seems, it is far from impossible. For example, 768,000 Jehovah's Witnesses left the Watchtower Society in the 1970's. This was equal to a quarter of all the members gained during the same period. (Crisis of Conscience, by Raymond Franz, Commentary Press, 1981, p. 31) Many of these people have heard the Gospel and have become Christians. Whole organizations such as Ex-Jehovah's Witnesses for Jesus and Saints Alive are made of Christians who came from such groups.

The most compelling reason for witnessing to them comes from the Scriptures. Read the following passages. What do they tell us to do when faced with someone who belongs to a cult or new religion?

Ezekiel 33:1-11

Matthew 28:16-20:

Romans 15:20-21:

James 5:19-20:

1 Peter 3:15-17:

Jude 22-23:

General Principles for Witnessing

The Word of God has much to say about the method and manner of witnessing to the love of God in Jesus. What principles do the following passages set down

or demonstrate? How can we apply them to the task of witnessing to people in cults?

Luke 24:46-49: _____

Acts 4:29-31: _____

Acts 8:26-38: _____

Acts 17:16-18, 22-25, 28-31: _____

Romans 1:16-17: _____

Romans 10:14-17: _____

1 Corinthians 9:19-23: _____

1 Corinthians 10:1-6: _____

Galatians 6:1-2: _____

1 Peter 3:15-17:

Session 7: Strategies for Witnessing to People in Other Religions...

When Preparing to Witness

Witnessing is a part of the every day life of a Christian. It is giving credit to God for what He has done for us. We witness when we ask aloud, "Isn't it a wonderful day that God has given us." We witness by living the life God has asked us to live. We witness when we explain at length to another the wonders of God's love for them.

Yet often we feel that we are poor witnesses. We are at a loss for the words to say. We are still sinful people and do things we're ashamed of. Often our fears come from lack of preparation. What steps can we take to prepare ourselves?

- 1 - _____
- 2 - _____
- 3 - _____
- 4 - _____
- 5 - _____
- 6 - _____

When Learning How to Work With a Specific Group

General preparation for witnessing is the most important step towards sharing the Word of God with others. Yet those with whom we share the gospel are not made of cardboard. Each individual has a background: where they were born, grew up, went to school; what they believe, assume, and how they live; what their struggles, hopes, and dreams are all about. When we know who they are, we are able to pick the approach which meets their needs and thus the message they will most likely respond to. This means it is always important to listen to the person and ask questions to get at this information.

A lot of time can be saved by studying groups of people you are most likely to meet. This is especially true of cults and new religions. What in the group meets the member's needs and desires? What do they believe and why do they believe it? What hopes do they have for the future and how do they hope to receive them? Whom or what do they trust for information about God and His will for them?

In order to learn about such groups, we need a plan of learning. List ways you can gain information and sympathy for people belonging to cults and new religions. Include ways to learn about the Christian's response to such groups and witnessing approaches which have proven effective.

- 1 - _____
- 2 - _____
- 3 - _____

- 4 - _____
5 - _____
6 - _____

When Time is Limited

When an opportunity to witness arises, it is often in a time and place which makes continuing contact impossible. The person may be selling flowers at an airport, sitting near you in a restaurant, or at your door while you have other things to do.

Sometimes a Christian may not be able to begin a long-term discussion with a visiting missionary from a cult or new religion. Other times the Christian is unsure of what to do in the situation. In these circumstances, we want to give a witness, although brief. What methods might we use in these circumstances?

- 1 - _____
2 - _____
3 - _____
4 - _____
5 - _____
6 - _____

A Sample Confessional Statement

"Thank you for taking the time to visit with me. But I already have peace with God. I know that my heavenly Father loves me because my God and Savior, Jesus Christ, gave up His glory and power to die in my place on the cross. Because He did this, all my sins are forgiven and salvation has been given to me as a free gift -- no strings attached. You see, I will not trade this peace for any system of working to prove my loyalty to God or earn the love He already has shown me. If you wish to receive this same peace, my pastor will be happy to talk to you. Otherwise, please leave and do not return."

When Beginning a Long-Term Dialog

Sometimes the opportunity presents itself to study with those who belong to cults or new religions. For those who have a sure grasp of what the Scripture teaches, this is a golden opportunity to tell the Good News to others. When a Christian takes the time to do this, what we have already learned applies. Study of God's Word and memorizing key passages is essential. Learning the details of what the person's religion teaches is important. Talking about the encounter with a pastor is helpful. Prayer is vital.

Yet a strategy for how to proceed can help make the presentation effective. What elements should make up such a plan? How can we keep the person coming? How can we express our love and patience without losing the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel? List your ideas below.

- 1 --
- 2 --
- 3 --
- 4 --
- 5 --
- 6 --
- 7 --
- 8 --
- 9 --
- 10 --

Sample Outline of Law/Gospel Presentation of Salvation

- I. Salvation is a free gift -- not earned or deserved.
- II. We cannot earn it because:
 - A) We are born sinful, inheriting rebellion against God from Adam and Eve.
 - B) Sin is punishable by death -- physical and spiritual.
 - C) Works not a payment for sin. Only death counts.
 - D) Even if works would earn forgiveness, ours are best efforts are tainted by evil motives.
- III. Jesus died in our place, paying the full penalty for our sin.
- IV. Now God offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who accept this sacrifice as their own.
- V. Out of thanks to God for these and other blessings, we serve God by doing whatever He wishes us to do.

When Speaking to a Friend or Relative

Our witness is most effective when the people to whom we speak are our own friends and relatives. Yet our witness must take on a different form with loved ones than the methods used with strangers. We want to preserve the relationship we have with our friends and relatives, because it has the greatest chance of reaching them of all approaches.

Thus we reverse the normal percentage of the manner of our witness. With strangers, 75% of our witness is in words, 25% in deeds. With a loved one, 75% of our witness ought to be in deeds and 25% in words. What methods may we employ to reach them?

- 1 --

- 2 --
- 3 --
- 4 --
- 5 --
- 6 --
- 7 --
- 8 --
- 9 --
- 10 --

When Speaking to Someone Newly Attracted to a Group

On occasion, a Christian may discover an acquaintance has become seriously interested in a cult or new religion, but has not committed to the group completely as yet. This person has become disenchanted with their way of life and perhaps the church, but is not yet firmly entrenched in the new movement. In most cases, the individual is still open to learning "negative" things about their new-found religion.

How should we approach such a person? Is it any different from any long-term conversation with people in cults? List possible witnessing strategies for this type of person.

- 1 --
- 2 --
- 3 --
- 4 --
- 5 --
- 6 --

When Seeking Out a Contact

Once Christians have prepared to witness to people caught in various non-Christian religions, should they wait for the encounter to happen? A lot depends upon the Christian's own gifts, talents, and love for those deceived by a given cult. Not all Christians have the spiritual gift or desire to deliberately seek out the lost. The gift of evangelism, however, is given by God to many people. If a Christian has a special feeling of compassion for those caught in a given error, then it is time to seek out the lost.

List methods which might be used to seek out a given type of person caught up in a false religion. Also, list ways that the church might support such an individual.

- 1 --
- 2 --
- 3 --
- 4 --
- 5 --
- 6 --

END OF PART ONE