

C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE - BASIC APOLOGETICS COURSE

Small Group Participant Guide

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“This is a journey of faith and reason — learning to know why we believe, defend truth, and share Christ with grace.”

SET 4 - Session 4 – Dealing With Cults

Introduction (from CSLI)

As we deal with cults we need to develop a biblical discernment that will allow us to sift out the wheat from the chaff. Various biblical passages warn us of the deceptive quality of evil. Evil is most dangerous when it comes in the guise of the good. Satan can appear as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). False teachers can disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. It is important for us to recognize those who would subvert the church from the outside or inside of the flock. However, wolves can be difficult to discern from sheep when they have on their sheep costumes. Thus, it is important that we learn the key doctrines of Scripture so that we can know when teaching or practice is off base. We also need to encourage others to ask discerning questions when they meet people from groups they don’t know. This lecture helps you to engage cult members intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

Lecture Synopsis

How Can You Respond to Cults?

This lecture teaches how Christians should respond to cults, which are groups that teach things that are not true about God or the Bible. It explains that not everything that looks good is actually good. Sometimes people who teach false ideas can seem kind, smart, and even loving, but they may still be wrong. The Bible warns that even evil can disguise itself as something good, like an “angel of light.”

The speaker explains that people are often drawn into these groups because they feel loved, accepted, or are going through a hard time. These groups may use strong emotions, friendships, or exciting experiences to pull people in. That's why it's important not to believe something just because it feels good, but to ask, “Is it really true?”

The lecture also teaches that we should test what people say by using the Bible. We should look at both their teaching and how they live. A good teacher will show good “fruit,” meaning their life and message match God's truth.

Another important idea is that church leaders should teach the “whole truth” of the Bible so people are not easily fooled. If people don't know the truth well, they may believe something false.

When talking to someone in a cult, Christians should be kind, patient, and respectful. The goal is not to win an argument, but to help the person. It's important to listen carefully and understand what they believe before responding.

Finally, the lecture says the best way to avoid being tricked is to know the truth deeply. Just like people who study real money can spot fake money, Christians who know the Bible well can recognize false teachings.

Ten Life Applications

1. Look Beneath the Surface

Application:

Do not judge truth based only on appearances, personality, or emotions.

Example:

A speaker may be kind, confident, and persuasive, but their message may not match Scripture.

Exercise:

This week, when you hear a teaching (sermon, podcast, or post), ask: *“Is this actually true according to the Bible, or does it just sound good?”*

2. Test Everything by Scripture

Application:

Always compare what you hear with the Bible to determine if it is true.

Example:

Instead of accepting a teaching because others believe it, you open your Bible and check it yourself.

Exercise:

Choose one teaching you've recently heard and find at least two Bible verses that confirm or challenge it.

3. Don't Let Emotions Drive Your Beliefs**Application:**

Recognize that feelings and experiences are not the same as truth.

Example:

Someone joins a group because it feels loving and welcoming, even though its teaching is incorrect.

Exercise:

Reflect on a time you made a decision based on feelings. Ask: *"Did truth guide me, or just emotion?"*

4. Learn the Whole Counsel of God**Application:**

Grow in a full understanding of Scripture so you are not easily misled.

Example:

A person who regularly studies the Bible can recognize when a teaching is incomplete or distorted.

Exercise:

Create a simple reading plan that helps you study different parts of the Bible, not just favorite passages.

5. Evaluate Both Teaching and Character**Application:**

Examine both what a person teaches and how they live.

Example:

A leader may speak well but live in a controlling or immoral way, revealing deeper problems.

Exercise:

Think of a teacher you respect. Write down both what they teach and what kind of life they live. Do they align?

6. Be Cautious of Controlling Leadership**Application:**

Avoid leaders who try to control your decisions or claim special authority over your life.

Example:

A leader says, "God told me what you should do," and pressures you to obey without question.

Exercise:

Ask yourself: *"Am I being encouraged to follow Christ, or being pressured to follow a person?"*

7. Practice Humility and Servant Leadership**Application:**

Value leaders who serve with humility rather than demand control.

Example:

A healthy leader guides, teaches, and models Christlike behavior instead of dominating others.

Exercise:

Identify one way you can lead or influence others this week through humility instead of authority.

8. Speak Truth with Love and Respect**Application:**

When discussing beliefs, respond with kindness, not harshness.

Example:

Instead of arguing aggressively, you listen carefully and respond with patience and care.

Exercise:

In your next spiritual conversation, focus first on understanding the other person before responding.

9. Focus on Core Truths, Not Side Issues**Application:**

Prioritize essential beliefs like who God is, who Jesus is, and how salvation works.

Example:

Rather than debating minor topics, you center conversations on foundational truths.

Exercise:

List three core Christian beliefs and review Scriptures that support each one.

10. Know the Truth Deeply to Recognize Error**Application:**

Spend time learning the truth so you can easily recognize false teaching.

Example:

Just like someone trained to spot counterfeit money studies real bills, a Christian studies Scripture.

Exercise:

Choose one key doctrine (like the nature of Christ) and study it in Scripture this week to strengthen your understanding.

STUDY QUESTIONS (from CSLI)**1** | How can evil be so deceptive?**2** | How do cults lure Christians?**3** | What is the danger of a sole reliance on testimonies?**4** | What are the threats from outside or inside the church?**5** | How do you discern the wolves from the sheep?**6** | What is a leader not to be? (I Peter 5:1f)**7** | How can you prepare yourself to engage the cults?

BUILDING FAITH CONVERSATIONS

1 | **What are some ways a person's emotional needs might make them more vulnerable to false teaching?**

2 | **Why is it important to understand *why* someone believes something before trying to respond to it?**

3 | **How can confidence, charisma, or strong communication skills sometimes distract us from evaluating truth carefully?**

4 | **What does it look like in real life to "test everything" instead of accepting ideas at face value?**

5 | **Why might someone stay in a group they later realize is unhealthy or unbiblical?**

6 | **How can a church better equip people to recognize false teaching before they encounter it?**

7 | **What are some signs that a leader is pointing people to themselves rather than to Christ?**

8 | **Why is it sometimes difficult to question someone who claims, "God told me..."?**

9	How can we balance standing firmly for truth while still showing gentleness and respect in conversations?
10	What are some practical ways you can grow in knowing Scripture deeply enough to recognize error when you hear it?

Links to Lectures and Notes: <https://srmatthews.com/tsg>



SAMPLE ARGUMENTS FROM THIS LECTURE

Here are 5 sample arguments from Set 4 – Lecture 4 on Cults, structured using the 5C framework (Context, Claim, Case, Challenge, Conclusion) and grounded in the lecture content:

1. The Appearance vs. Reality Argument

Context

Many people assume that something that looks good, loving, or persuasive must also be true.

Claim

External appearance is not a reliable guide to truth; false teaching often presents itself as good.

Case

The lecture highlights that false teachers can appear as “angels of light,” meaning they seem trustworthy, kind, and even spiritual. Groups may display warmth, love, and strong community, which attracts people emotionally. However, these outward qualities can mask false doctrine or harmful practices beneath the surface.

Challenge

If we rely on appearances or emotional impressions, how can we avoid being deceived by something that feels right but is actually false?

Conclusion

Truth must be evaluated by Scripture and substance, not by surface-level appeal or emotional attraction.

2. The Emotional Attraction Argument

Context

People often think others are persuaded into false beliefs through poor reasoning or lack of intelligence.

Claim

Most people are drawn into cults primarily through emotional and relational appeal, not intellectual argument.

Case

The lecture explains that individuals are often attracted during vulnerable times, such as loneliness or crisis. Practices like intense acceptance and “love bombing” create a strong emotional bond. Because the attraction is emotional, simply presenting logical arguments may not be enough to help someone leave.

Challenge

If people are not drawn in by logic, can purely logical arguments effectively lead them out?

Conclusion

Effective engagement must address the whole person—emotionally, relationally, and intellectually—not just win an argument.

3. The “Whole Counsel of God” Argument

Context

Many Christians have only partial knowledge of Scripture.

Claim

A lack of full biblical teaching leaves people vulnerable to false doctrines.

Case

The lecture emphasizes that the Apostle Paul taught the “whole purpose of God,” equipping believers to discern truth from error. Without this depth, individuals may not recognize when teachings are distorted or incomplete.

Challenge

If believers are not fully grounded in Scripture, how can they confidently identify and resist false teaching?

Conclusion

Comprehensive biblical teaching is essential for protecting believers from deception.

4. The Misuse of Authority Argument

Context

Spiritual authority can be a powerful influence in people’s lives.

Claim

Claims of divine authority (“God told me”) can be misused to control and manipulate others.

Case

The lecture gives examples of leaders who claim special revelation to direct personal decisions, finances, or relationships. These claims can pressure individuals to comply without questioning, even when the guidance is harmful or inconsistent.

Challenge

How can individuals respectfully question authority without feeling like they are disobeying God?

Conclusion

All claims of authority must be tested, and no human leader should replace personal responsibility before God.

5. The “Know the Truth to Spot Error” Argument**Context**

Many people try to avoid deception by studying every possible false teaching.

Claim

The most effective defense against falsehood is a deep knowledge of the truth.

Case

The lecture uses the analogy of currency experts who study real money to detect counterfeits. Similarly, believers who know Scripture well can recognize false teaching, even if they are not experts in every cult or belief system.

Challenge

Is it more practical to study every false belief, or to focus deeply on understanding the truth?

Conclusion

A strong foundation in biblical truth equips believers to discern and reject error with confidence.

Note: C.S. Lewis Institute provides this course at no charge. They are supported by faithful friends who give of their time, expertise, prayers, and finances to further the work of the institute. You can partner with CSLI through this link: <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/give/>

Set 4 - Lecture 4

(0:19 - 1:39) Let's start out with a word of prayer. Lord, thank you for who you are, for the great God you are, for your holiness, your justice, your love, your grace and mercy towards us. We pray that as we respond to this issue of cults that you might help us get clarity, biblically speaking, as to where false beliefs can impact us and how to discern that which is true from that which is false, and above all, teach us how to respond, speaking the truth in love, with gentleness and reverence, to people that we engage.

We ask this in Christ's name. Well, we've addressed in a previous talk what is a cult. I'd like to deal with in this session how we respond, biblically speaking, to this issue of cults.

Now, obviously, the New Testament doesn't use the word cult in the way we do, but it does talk about false beliefs and practices. And so I'd like to start out by looking at a few different passages of Scripture and seeing what they have to say about this phenomena. The first of them is 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 13 to 15.

(1:40 - 3:29) 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 13 to 15, says, "...for such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their deeds." Now, notice the idea of the false apostle, the deceitful worker, and it says Satan even disguises himself as an angel of light.

And the warning is that the worst evil can come under the guise of the greatest good. So that if an angel of light were to come into this place today, would you be tempted to accept what this angel had to say? The answer is yes. I mean, if Satan appeared in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork, then it's quite easy to see what's false.

But often the leaders of these groups can come in a very attractive fashion, and only later do you find out that there's a rub, that there's something beneath the surface that's happening. You may get hooked before you find out what the rub is, eventually. I remember a group that I was asked to come and counsel, because I had some degree of expertise in it, a group that had discovered that their leader, who was very respected in the evangelical community, had been involved in all kinds of difficult practices.

(3:30 - 5:50) He had been not only, as I heard reports and spent time with individuals involved, very controlling and manipulative in the way that he addressed people, to the extent that he actually got each member of the group to give their money to him in the name of the cause, including one person that had an inheritance of about a hundred thousand dollars, was put into the account. And it was later found out that he, perhaps thinking that he might be exposed for some other things that I'll mention, put it in a Swiss bank account, so that it would not be easy to get it back once he was exposed. He was also involved, as it turns out, with one person after another sexually, really with almost all the women in the group.

And one finally told that this was the case, and then all the others confessed. I was brought up in the midst of all of this, right after everything came out, to sort things out or at least bring some perspective, initial perspective, to people that were involved. But this man was very respected, very looked up to in the evangelical community, was to all intents a servant of righteousness, and yet underneath the surface, I mean, who knew what was going on until it was eventually exposed.

So what you see on the surface is not necessarily what you get. You have to look beneath the surface. Just appearing as an angel of light, being very articulate and charismatic in the sense of having a powerful personality, that does not necessarily mean that that person follows the truth.

You need to look at the teaching that's held to, and then also the fruit of that person's life, to be able to see what's true from what's false. And notice the disguise. It's not a disguise that's very easily seen.

Sometimes it's very easy to see someone's wearing a mask, but it's amazing when a person looks for all intents and purposes like their real person. You know, certainly in movies you'll see this where, like Mission Impossible, where that person will look for all intents and purposes exactly like the person that's being represented. They become very sophisticated in making disguises.

(5:52 - 13:16) And one of the ways that people are deceived and being drawn into a group like this is the phrase, but you can see love on their faces. There's a great book that I would recommend that you all read called *Unholy Devotion, Why Cults Lure Christians*, and it's by Harold Bussell, B-U-S-S-E-L-L. He at one point was a chaplain at Gordon College, and now he's a pastor out in Santa Barbara, California, of a church there.

And this book is excellent because it talks about, again, why cults lure Christians. *Unholy Devotion* is the title of the book. And it's very easy, unless kids are educated in how to discern truth from error, they can easily be drawn in to groups that are abusive.

And certain groups target kids on a college campus. One, Maranatha Campus Ministries is one that I mentioned, that really got kids at a very vulnerable time of life, where they may feel alone, and they may not have close friends initially. They're looking for friends, and the members of the group will come and befriend them and bring them into a Bible study and ask for increasing involvement.

And this acceptance initially feels good. And it's only later that they find out what some of the problems are with the group. But it's especially in emotional times of crisis that people get into some of these groups where they have a real need, and the certainty of this leader is very attractive, or the passionate commitment of the people around the group is very attractive.

And it's important to note this, though, because a lot of the reason that people get involved with these groups is not because they're argued into it biblically or theologically, but because they're attracted emotionally. So if you come along and give a biblical theological critique, that may not dent these people, because the main reason for attraction is not the theoretical, but it's more the practical or the emotional draw of the group. So that even once you were to convince that person intellectually, it still would be a very difficult thing for that person to pick up and leave the group, because it might mean that they have parents in the group or certainly very close friends in the group.

So there's an emotional cost, a great emotional cost in some cases, for people to leave. And also you have the chapter in Harold Bussell's book, but you can see love on their faces, has an attraction that these people come in and they're very accepting and they're very embracing. They draw people in, they ask them to come away to a weekend retreat and practice what's called love bombing or peanut butter and jelly evangelism, where a person would be the peanut butter and jelly and the sort of members of the group would be like the bread on both sides, just surround them with love and acceptance.

And of course, that's a good thing. And we could have youth group retreats that do that kind of thing too, but it's not enough to merely have love and acceptance. You've got to sift through in a deeper way what's involved in terms of the teaching.

So just the idea that they have love on their faces or they have an attractive leader or something's articulate and winsome about the group doesn't necessarily mean that beneath the surface there's something right or wrong. I think that also one of the things that's very appealing about these groups is that often they'll have people get up and give testimonials. I know I grew up in a church, an evangelical church, that had testimonies all the time and that's a good thing.

I'm not against testimonies, but all these groups, including cultic groups and new age groups, will have people get up and give testimonies. And if it's only, if your faith is only based upon the reality of personal experience and sharing and not based upon that which is true or historical or that which can be tested, then you can be very vulnerable to being persuaded by the testimonies of groups that are off the mark. And I found that to be very much the case.

It's one thing to have people be moved and give a testimony, it's another thing to sift through and provide biblical foundation for it, to go back and see why this teaching is true or not. That's very important. It shouldn't be based solely upon experience, but upon truth and upon that which can be tested.

It shouldn't be just it's true because it works. Sometimes if you get involved with these groups, it seems that you feel good, at least temporarily. It doesn't necessarily mean that the doctrine given is true.

It ought to be more the reverse, that it works because it's true. And you need to sift through the issues of truth. Is this true biblically, first of all? And is this true, can it be tested historically? It's very easy, say, for believers to take people away to a great weekend retreat and have a great time and people are overwhelmed in their testimonies at the end, and that's a good thing, but sooner or later they ought to be brought back and told, well, you know, why is the Bible true? What are the answers to fundamental questions that are being asked? They need to sift through just the experience they had, which may, as a matter of fact, be a real experience with Christ.

But is this really true and how do we know it to be true? That's certainly part of what's important as you address people, because if kids are sent away to, say, the university with only experience and testimony, then they may be vulnerable to groups that have experience in testimony and not be able to sift through or ask questions about the teachings that are involved or whether it's really true. Kids need to be encouraged to question, as do adults as well, to question the truthfulness of what's being taught so that it's important to realize that some of these groups will appear very good on the surface and even be angels of light, be very attractive, winsome and charismatic personalities, but may not be telling you the truth. And that goes very contrary to the culture that's so based upon the media and how people appear, how people look on television, and how they sound can be a major criteria to accepting that person and what they say.

Another aspect that you need to sift through is where angels of light can be deceiving is people that use the phrase, the Lord led me. Now, I'm not against the Lord's leading and guiding. Obviously, I do believe in that kind of thing, but people in these cults or aberrational groups can use this phrase, the Lord led me, to control their members.

(13:16 - 17:40) For instance, I've been told that Jim Jones at Jonestown, later in Guyana, when they were in San Francisco, he would get words from the Lord as to how much each person in the congregation should put in the offering plate on Sunday morning and send them a letter to that effect. Now, if you believe that Jim Jones was a prophet, you gave that amount because that was obviously from the Lord. If you thought that he was wrong on that, I suppose you ought to leave the church because he's not a true prophet of God.

So it was very controlling where the Lord led me became a means for control for people. And sometimes people deceive themselves about the Lord's leading. For instance, R.C. Sproul has told the story of one time where he had an offer after he had come back from Holland and doing his graduate study. He was around people of a charismatic community and he had five different offers to go to different churches and he had people praying about whether he ought to take the job at these different churches in different parts of the United States. And as he tells it, five different people came up and said that they had a word from the Lord, each one saying to go to a different church, you know. Now what happened there? Now, it could be that they were praying and R.C. came on their mind and the name of a particular church that they'd heard listed came to their mind and they felt that that strong impression was a word from the Lord. But at least four of them were wrong because they couldn't take all the different jobs. There were different places. So how is that possible? Sometimes the emotional impression is not necessarily a leading of the Lord. or I know I was elections board chairman at Seattle Pacific University and I talked to the homecoming queen right after her being elected. He said in the two weeks after she became homecoming queen, five guys had come up to her as a beautiful Christian godly woman on a Christian college campus. Five guys had come up and said that they were supposed to date and marry her, you know.

And of course her response is, the Lord has not told me. So that's happened a number of different times and I've seen it happen the other way around, where a woman will come up to a guy and say that, although it's usually the other way around. So what happened there? Well, it could be it's just manipulative, but it could be the guys happen to be praying and this vision of loveliness popped into their mind and they immediately thought that they were supposed to marry.

This is an indication from the Lord they were supposed to marry her. Very easy for people to be deceived on this matter. Again, I'm not speaking against a real leading and guiding from the Lord, only the fact that it can be very vulnerable to our emotions and sometimes needs questioning.

Usually I will not always question it, but if it's a major decision like a marriage to someone or say going to a college, and if I have reason for doubting that that's a good or wise decision, I might raise this kind of question and say, well, could be that this is from the Lord and if it is, who am I to doubt it or anybody else? But I found that sometimes people can be mistaken about the leading of the Lord. What makes you feel that this is a real leading from the Lord? Did you hear a voice? Well, inevitably it's no. Well, I had a feeling, an impression that this is the case.

Well, I just ask you to test that and really see whether that might be true for this reason. I think there are some questions I have to raise about this and I'll ask you to sort it through. Now, if you raise that kind of question, it might be the expense of the relationship.

I know I raised it for one woman, I don't think she came back to see us, you know, as a result. But sometimes people will come to appreciate you more if you raise that kind of question. It might actually strengthen the relationship and especially if you love that person and you're close to them and you think that they may be making a wrong decision, it's certainly valid to raise that question.

(17:41 - 19:37) People have often been deceived, as in a couple illustrations I've shown, about the leading of the Lord. It might be valid in some cases to raise that question. Now, it certainly would be valid in the case of Jim Jones and the offering to raise that question and in many other cases.

So, kids or adults ought to be encouraged to raise that question and not immediately be persuaded by that kind of language. Be at least open to questioning it, especially if it's unduly intrusive or manipulative or unduly controlling of your life. So, it's very important to educate kids and then also for adults to have that kind of approach to things.

Secondly, a great passage, one of my favorite passages of the New Testament, is in Acts chapter 20, verses 26 to 31. Acts chapter 20, verses 26 to 31. And this is part of Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders.

He's been with them for three years and then he gives them a farewell speech where he brings back to their mind some of the things he's practiced over the three years that he's been present. And I would love to be able to go through the whole thing, but we'll just pick one section here in verse 26. Acts 20, 26.

Therefore, I testify to you this day that I'm innocent of the blood of all men, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

(19:37 - 23:52) And from among your own selves, men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years, I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. Well, notice here that the Apostle Paul had a practice of traveling around and speaking to people in, say, large groups and house to house, if you look earlier, and then individually.

And he practiced this over three years, so he was very thoroughly involved with the lives of the people in the Ephesian congregation. And he says in verse 26, I'm innocent of the blood of all men, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Which suggests, perhaps using the language of, if you look back at Ezekiel chapter two and chapter three, the prophet Ezekiel was called to speak the truth, whether people will listen or not.

And that if you don't speak the truth, if you shrink back from declaring it, you might be guilty of the blood of these people. And that's what the Apostle Paul says. I gave them the whole purpose of God, even some things that were difficult to hear, even some things that people didn't want to hear.

And you might be tempted to shrink back for fear that they'll reject you. The Apostle Paul spoke of this whole purpose of God so that he says, I'm innocent, which suggests, again, if we shrink back, we may be guilty or responsible if we don't give people the fullness of biblical teaching. And by the way, this whole purpose of God, I think, is the antidote to the cults.

I think the reason that a lot of people are vulnerable to cults is they have not been taught about some of the deeper things of faith. It takes a controversy, a crisis, a book that comes out that assaults Christian belief, often to cause the church to react and begin to teach about some of these things. But if people were taught the whole purpose of God in the first place, they'd be equipped to be able to discern that which is false or faulty from that which is true.

But it's very rare that people will teach the whole purpose of God. Now, what is the whole purpose of God? I say that the Apostle Paul teaches in his various letters, or perhaps just starting with Genesis and going to Revelation, covering the whole Bible from beginning to end in occasional churches will actually do that, have a full teaching. I think First Baptist Church in Dallas, Dr. Criswell used to just start with Genesis and go all the way to Revelation over years and just teach right through the Bible.

Very rare that you have that kind of systematic Bible teaching within churches or even within ministries that do discipleship. But what we do need is equipping of all the main areas of biblical teaching, and the Apostle Paul said he was able to do that in three years. So that doesn't mean it's an indefinite curriculum.

You don't have to get a PhD or master's degree. I would suggest that these people were working full-time, and this teaching happened on evenings and weekends, or the times away from work, that they were equipped in this way. And he says especially that we're to equip them with the whole purpose of God.

He says be on guard for yourselves, for you elders, be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Now, by the way, the function of these ones that are elders was to be an overseer, or the word for that, episkopoi, is the word for bishop. I would suggest that all elders are bishops or overseers, that one of the functions of an elder is to be an overseer or to be a bishop or to be episkopoi over the people of God, to look carefully over the needs of people in their congregation.

He says, and the reason for that is, I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. We see that imagery being used a number of times, that groups will come in from outside the church to try to pick away sheep from their midst. That would be the issue of the cults that we're dealing with.

(23:53 - 25:02) Savage wolves will come in from the outside, that's why you need to be equipped with the whole purpose of God, and be on guard for people that are in your congregation. It says, and even from among your own selves, verse 30, men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them, so that even within the established churches that the apostle has planted, there will be people that arise that will come up with aberrant teaching, and notice one of the marks of this is that they do it to draw away disciples after them, that it tends to be self-promoting. They tend to be at the center, rather than the gospel of Christ being at the center, it tends to draw people to themselves, to draw away disciples after them, so they want to be the leader of a movement and have allegiance to a particular person, to be aware of someone who wants to draw people to themselves alone and doesn't really send people primarily to the scriptures and to the gospel of Christ as their primary emphasis.

(25:04 - 26:09) And says, therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. So the apostle not only taught publicly and from house to house, but went to individuals, would actually apply his teaching to individuals. Now that's a rare thing, that you actually have a pastor that's so concerned about each individual that they'll apply in specific that kind of teaching.

I know Richard Baxter, who was a pastor back in the sort of later Puritan period in England, used to not only preach sermons systematically, but make it a duty to go meet with each family once a year, and so he would have a chance to sit down with the family and actually speak to individuals about particular concerns. And that's a very rare thing, that a pastor will have that kind of individual contact with each person that's in their flock or in their congregations. And yet that was the apostle Paul.

(26:09 - 26:26) And notice that he did it with tears. A little bit later in verse 36 of chapter 20, it says, And when he said all these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. This is just when he departs.

(26:27 - 27:59) And they began to weep aloud and embrace Paul and repeatedly kiss them, grieving especially over the word which he'd spoken, that they should see his face no more. So it's because of the kind of love that he showed for them that was manifested in tears pouring down Paul's face as he spoke to them, and as he ministered to them, they so loved him and were weeping as he was leaving. It's a mark of sincerity.

It's said that George Whitefield, the great evangelist in the Great Awakening, when he preached, he often had tears running down his face as he spoke, as a mark of his sincerity. There's one scene where as he's speaking and tears are coming down his face that he was speaking to coal miners in the outdoors after they'd come out from work there in England. And as Whitefield was tears pouring down his face, these coal miners had tears coming down their face, and their face were very dirty from the coal mines.

So you see lines of tears coming down their face, you know. There's nothing like that mark of love, as the Apostle Paul showed, to produce love and response within people. Or like when George Whitefield spoke at Jonathan Edwards' church, Whitefield was weeping as he spoke and Edwards was sitting in the front pew weeping as he heard Whitefield speak.

(28:01 - 29:30) And later Whitefield wrote down, the pastor and the people wept much as they heard the word being preached. So there's a deep, deeply moved, moving message being preached, but it was also the pastor that was very deeply moved by what he was saying. That was the Apostle Paul there, speaking with tears coming down his face as he spoke to people.

I wonder how many times he had tears coming down his face as he spoke and as he taught them, as he was so concerned about them. So you have the savage wolves coming in from the outside and then some from among your own selves will arise to draw away disciples after them. Another classic passage on this issue is Matthew chapter 7, verse 15 following, 15 to 20.

This is Jesus as part of the Sermon on the Mount. It says, Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

(29:31 - 29:44) So then, you will know them by their fruits. Now again, it's similar to the passage in 2 Corinthians. You have a false prophet who comes in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves.

(29:44 - 30:30) They come in disguise. Now it'd be easy to see, just as if Satan appeared in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork, if these ravenous wolves were to come in a sheep's costume that was where you could easily see the zipper and where you could easily hear the growl that was behind the baa of the sheep. But this is not the case.

These are wolves that are pretty well disguised as sheep and not easy to see their true nature. It says, You will know them by their fruits. There's a good tree bears good fruit, but a rotten tree produces bad fruit.

(30:32 - 30:47) And the fruit would be twofold, I would say. First of all, doctrine. You would need to test what the prophet says, what the teacher says by the scriptures to see if these things are true.

(30:47 - 31:30) So that's the first kind of test that you need to have. The second kind of test would be the practical test to look beneath the surface of a person's ability to speak and to teach. There's a chapter title in Boussett's book, *Unholy Devotion*, I mentioned earlier, that says you have to hear our pastor.

And so you come and you just hear the very intelligent, articulate, charismatic pastor. By charismatic, again, I'm meaning that more as a personality type. And you're drawn because of the articulateness of the person involved.

(31:30 - 32:37) I remember one time R.C. Sproul gave a great illustration. He said one time he was speaking at a college. And of course, if anybody's heard R.C. speak, you know how articulate and persuasive and powerful he can be sometimes.

And he gave a really powerful talk at this chapel and he was walking up the aisle afterwards and a young man came up to him and said, R.C., that's the best talk I've ever heard. And R.C. looked at him and he said, well, what did I say? And the young man said, well, I don't know, but I sure like the way you say it. That's the way we can be in the culture.

We're more impressed by who the person is and how they say it than by what is said. You know, the medium and the message. There's a classic book a while ago about that.

We're more impressed by the messenger than by the message. That's a real danger. We need to look beneath the surface.

(32:37 - 34:00) I mean, it's great when people do have rhetorical gifts and when they can speak powerfully the truth of God. You certainly don't want to despise that or have people that are less charismatic and articulate. You really want that and should value that when that's the case.

But that alone should not be the thing that draws you. It should be that that person is communicating the truth in a powerful fashion. Again, this is George Whitefield.

I guess he had phenomenal rhetorical gifts, but he also spoke the truth. He not only spoke with tears coming down his face, but he could speak so articulately that the rich and the poor were equally drawn to him. He could so involve people in a sermon that people would actually believe that the illustrations he had were real.

He had the picture of a blind man getting very close to a cliff and he very dramatically described it so much that one of the lords there sitting in the back was so caught up in the talk that he shouted out in the middle of the talk, watch out! He was so involved. It was so real to him. So it's great when you have people that are that powerful and articulate, but obviously what's really important is the truth.

(34:02 - 42:06) And we need to sift out what's on the surface from what's true. It says you'll know them by their fruits. Every good tree bears good fruit and the rotten tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire so then you'll know them by their fruits. So the good tree produces good fruit.

Sometimes the fruit that is there can be and at least look to be real. I know one of the things I find in my house is that you can have fake fruit that looks to all intents and purposes like the real thing. You want to pick up the apple and actually eat it and you find out it's plastic.

I know one of the things that's most difficult to me is plants. When my wife goes away, I'm supposed to go water the plants. Now I just water them all to be safe, but I know that some of them are plastic and fake plants but they look for all intents and purposes like they're real.

I can't always tell on the surface what's the real from that which is not real. They can look so good that it's hard to tell. You sure don't want to miss the good one for the fake.

In any case, often the fruit of these false prophets looks for all intents and purposes real until you look beneath the surface. Again with Jim Jones, I mean many people looked at him as a very respected pastor in the pastoral meetings and community there in San Francisco, but if you look deeper and look within his church, even at that time there were some things going on that were very hidden like some sexual affairs and that sort of thing that were happening, but you didn't know about it. It was very hidden and covered.

You can't just always accept the presentation on the outside. You have to look deeper, not only the doctrinal fruit which is of course primary and you can see and know and then be discerning about the kind of fruit that is really there within the person's life. Another classic passage on this issue is 1 Peter chapter 5 verses 1 to 6. Therefore I exhort the elders among you as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you not

under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God and not for sordid gain but with eagerness nor yet as lording it over those who are allotted to your charge but proving to be examples to the flock and when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

You younger men likewise be subject to your elders and all of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you at the proper time. Now notice that the elders here are being called in verse 2, shepherd the flock of God among you. So there is a place for the shepherd and for the elder to be in a position of mentoring and helping and feeding the congregation that's there. They're to be on guard for themselves as I mentioned earlier first to make sure that they're applying the truth of God to their own lives before they're shepherding the flock but there is that place for that kind of shepherding but notice the characteristics of the true shepherd. It says the shepherd the flock of God among you not under compulsion but voluntarily not just because it's their job description or because they have people over them not under compulsion but voluntarily not for sordid gain but with eagerness not just for the money but because they're eagerly desiring to do the ministry. Verse 3, nor yet is lording it over those allotted to your charge but proving to be examples to the flock. It's very easy to lord it over those in your charge to be controlling or authoritarian as we've mentioned before in the previous lecture. Watch out for someone who wants to in effect play God over your life, wants to play Christ, wants to be lord over your conscience.

Watch out for those who in effect say my way is Yahweh that want to again play God in your life and there are a number of groups or people that I've seen as I've heard many stories from individuals that would be involved in not only cultic groups but churches where they have a very authoritarian controlling pastor where this has been a great problem where people have where the pastor has claimed their position as a means to control that person. How dare you criticize me? You've got to listen to what I say because I'm in charge over you. Watch out for those people that want to lord it over you or assert their necessary lordship over your life. Notice says nor yet is lording it over those allotted to your charge but proving to be examples to the flock. It's not so much that you're to be controlling in an authoritarian way but proving to be examples to those that are there. It's a moral authority that's to be involved not just a commanding authority.

It's a moral authority that you look at the example of that person and you want to listen to to what they say because they carry an authority in your life. It's not so much that they're demanding. Watch out for demandingness of pastors that are demanding allegiance or control to you as opposed to those who prove to be examples and thus gain the right to be heard a moral authority over your life.

In verse four it says and when the chief shepherd appears you'll receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men likewise be subject to your elders. Now this is what the shepherding movement often would emphasize. The young people should be subject to their elders and that's certainly to be true. And all of you though clothe yourselves with humility and beware of that kind of leader or shepherd that is not also humble. All of you it says clothe yourselves with humility towards one another for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Humble yourself yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you at the proper time. Francis Schaeffer used to say about this thing of humility that either be humble now or be humbled later. Be humble now or be humbled later. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God and then he will exalt you if that's proper or appropriate to happen. Don't you thrust yourself into a position of prominence. Wait for God to do that to exalt you. Francis Schaeffer used to say that take be willing to take the lower place because there there's relatively more peace than being in the higher place and wait for God to extrude you. I think of the picture of extruding as in toothpaste. Or you take a toothpaste tube and you squeeze the toothpaste out and you see it squeezing out.

(42:06 - 42:30) Wait for the Lord to extrude you to the higher place if he so desires. So this 1st Peter chapter 5 is a very powerful passage talking about the way shepherds are to be and the way shepherds are not to be. It's not enough to just pick out the shepherding or the authority issue without also talking about the ways that shepherds are to exercise that authority.

(42:32 - 44:53) Finally a practical response to approaching the cults. First of all let me stress that being involved in cult ministry is not for everyone. That it requires some real diligent study.

You wouldn't want to just be involved in going out and engaging cult members without really being trained. I know one man who was a regional area director for Young Life that ended up quitting his Young Life practice and going to seminary because he couldn't answer a Jehovah's Witness at the door. He figured he needed to go back and really study the doctrine and the Trinity and be able to have a more solid grounding himself.

So that if you have not been exposed to the whole purpose of God or not done some serious study on this issue, it may not be very helpful or appropriate for you to be involved in this kind of ministry. Also to note that if you do get involved with this kind of discussion, remember what I mentioned earlier that it's the total person that you're to be engaged with. Attitude is crucial. We're to be sympathetic, not be antagonistic or defensive. That will fit into what cult members are programmed to believe will happen. That defensiveness and the hostility that people will show.

If they see you approach them with love and with fairness, that will be disarming to them. Remember what I mentioned that most people join cults to meet emotional needs. It's not primarily for them an intellectual issue.

So just winning the argument or the debate may not be the crucial issue. You need to address that person on all levels, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually as well. It's important to address the whole person.

Be fair. This is a rule that I got from my professor, Dr. Gerstner, but it's also become my rule. Make it your goal to state their position to their satisfaction before you critique it.

Again, make it your goal to state their position to their satisfaction before you critique it. That means you've got to go a lot more slowly in any of these discussions with an atheist, with a new ager, with somebody that's involved in one of these cultic groups.

You've got to really listen.

(44:54 - 48:36) You can't just feel that because you've read something about the particular view in the past that that person will necessarily say it the exact way that it's been said in your books or you've heard in a lecture. So you really have to sit back and listen to what that person has to say and really try to understand and then try to say, well, do I understand you to say this? They might say, well, yeah, you got it this correctly this far, but you missed a little thing here. So to be able to state the other person's position to their satisfaction and then you respond to it.

It's not only fair but allows you to speak directly to the person, gives you time to understand it. Sometimes it means it's a longer discussion because we'd rather just jump right to it, but that's not only not the most effective way to do it, but it's not the fairest way to do it. You need to respect at least that person's statement of their position before you respond to it.

Above all, you need to speak the truth in love. In Ephesians 4.15, it says, speaking the truth in love. Don't be blown around by every wind of doctrine, but speaking the truth in love.

You're to engage people that have false beliefs. Or in 1 Peter 3.15, the classic passage that we started out with in this study about apologetics, it says, be able to give a reasonable defense for the hope that's within you, yet with gentleness and reverence. And the gentleness is to be the characteristic of the way that we are to respond to people, not with hostility or harshness, but gentleness, and with reverence or respect.

Certainly reverence before God because we're responsible for the witness we give to people in the manner that we speak to them, and also, I suppose, it could be respect for that other person's dignity. Not necessarily that you agree with their views, but you at least are willing to listen to them because you value them as a person who's made in the image of God. So you speak to them in a respectful fashion, even again, if you may regard their views as being erroneous.

So, yet with gentleness and reverence. You're to focus on the important root issues. I would look at this, and I use the example in other cases, but as a tree, you could think of the tree and the branches, there are certain elements of teachings of cults that you probably don't want to address.

Like, for instance, with the Jehovah's Witnesses, they disallow blood transfusions, or think that the cross was not our traditional cross, but a stake. These would be peripheral issues that I don't think are very important. Even if you were to win the argument, you won't necessarily have won anything of importance.

But go back to the trunk, or even more the roots, the very fundamental teachings about the group. Don't get involved in secondary issues, but focus on that which, if you make headway, you've dealt with something very significant or foundational to the group. That which is founded on the authority of the scriptures, on the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the nature of salvation.

These are very foundational things. So I wouldn't be easily distracted by things that are out there, leaves or branches or limbs, but go back to the trunk or the roots of a particular view. Focus on that which, if you make progress, it would be substantial.

(48:38 - 48:54) Like with Jehovah's Witnesses sometimes, what I will do is not just focus on that which they're most prepared to address, which is the deity of Christ, but focus on the deity and personality of the Spirit. They're often less able to address that kind of issue. You can sometimes make headway.

(48:55 - 50:24) The best way, though, to be able to respond to the cults is not necessarily to be a cult expert. I mean, it's good that you have time to really study a lot of books on cults or be able to teach on it, as I have, but it's important, I think, in the end to know

the genuine article. It said that people at the U.S. Treasury spend a lot of time with the authentic dollar bill, and they are able to look at it and get the feel of it.

The more you spend the time with the authentic dollar bill, the more you're able to get the look and the feel of that which is the counterfeit. So it's very important that you deal with the whole purpose of God so that you can at least know the counterfeit when you see it or you get the feel of it. You may not have all the details of the responses unless you do some serious study of the issue, but at least you you're not easily deceived by the counterfeit that's there.

So the more time you spend with the authentic article, the more you're able to be prepared to recognize the counterfeit. Also, one more point, that if you succeed in your work of really dealing with someone that's in a cult and you actually have them leave the cult, then your work is not over. It's actually just begun.

(50:26 - 53:15) I have one case where I met with a woman that was a Jehovah's Witness, and I once was teaching on that at the Ligonier Valley Study Center, and I used to role play a Jehovah's Witness, and used to argue that I or say that I'd never lost an argument as a Jehovah's Witness. You know, I knew pretty much their arguments, and so one guy took me up on that, and he said, well, I've got this Jehovah's Witness couple that have been involved in their kingdom hall I've been talking to, and you come up and talk to them. Initially I was reluctant.

I don't know, you know, spending a whole evening doing it, what profit it will have, but I ended up going up there, and we had a very good discussion for about three hours. I focused on the main issues. I didn't allow it to go into side roads or sidetracks too quickly, took one issue at a time, tried to pick passages that they were less able to address, and as I thought, they didn't immediately leave the Jehovah's Witness Church, but at the end of it, I said, I gave him a book called Studies in Theology by Lorraine Bettner that contains about a hundred pages on the deity of Christ and about 50 pages on the trinity that looks at passage after passage after passage that deals with this, and I also made the little quip that I used to role-play Jehovah's Witnesses, and I hadn't lost argument as a Jehovah's Witness, and during the discussion, I would often, as they would say something, I'd even strengthen their argument before I would critique it and say, well, some have even said this, you know, and make it even stronger and try to really speak to the strongest aspect of the argument, but again, I didn't expect to immediately have them come out, and I didn't really hear from them at all until I got a call from this woman seven years later, and she said, well, I'm so-and-so, and you talked to me about seven years ago, and I read through that book, Studies in Theology, a couple times, and I'd like to talk to you.

So we got together, and I talked, and we dealt with things, and it led to a whole process of her coming out of the Jehovah's Witnesses after her being in for 30 years, and her parents were Witnesses, her husband was a Jehovah's Witness, and so I remember one time in particular where we hadn't met for a couple weeks, and we got together for lunch, and she said, you know, something's happened in my heart for these many years. I used to fear Jesus, you know, for the first time, I think, I can say that I really love him. I thought, something's happening here, you know, well, and I remember, though, what it took when she actually chose to leave the Witnesses.

(53:15 - 55:09) It's a major step, but that was the beginning. I got her involved with many different people that could be part of discipleship with her, and I remember how difficult it was at each step for her, like the first time she went to a church. He wasn't allowed to go into a Christian church, so to actually step into a rather tame Presbyterian service was radical for her. He'd never been in that kind of thing. Everything was blowing her mind about it. It was very, very uncharacteristic of what happened in the Kingdom Hall, and I remember her courage and just stepping in there, because to step into what she had said for many years was the whore of Babylon, took great courage, and she took courage at many points, and I remember at one point we would have certain studies after she had come out, and go back over the passages she had argued, and I can remember as going through the passages on the deity of Christ, it was like the two hemispheres of her brain were going back and forth, that what she'd argued for many years as a Jehovah's Witness, and what I was saying, there was what I would call what one friend has called the yin and the yang, so on the one hand this, on the other hand that, and there was a cognitive dissonance in her mind, even after having made that commitment to come out.

It was easier to get her out of that cult than to get the cult out of her, and that's what I've often found. It takes real profound work to both correct the doctrinal practice and the often abusive psychological practices of a group. It takes a while to be able to sift that through, and yet it's important that we realize that if we succeed in winning that person, we've only just begun the work, so I think we'll stop at that point.