

## 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 2 – Neopaganism

### Introduction (from CSLI)

Some have said that Neopaganism is the fastest growing (percentage-wise) religious movement in the West. This approach (also known as “Wicca” or the “Craft”) has gained an influence far beyond its numbers. It has gained significant influence at many liberal theological seminaries. Neopaganism has been promoted in films, TV programs, and best-selling books. It is increasing by targeting a younger market. There are many “covens” in middle schools, high schools, and colleges. They are demanding chaplaincies in the armed services. We need to know about this relatively new cultural factor. Even though it is a “new witchcraft,” it doesn’t involve broomsticks and pointed hats. They repudiate Satanism—which is to them a Christian heresy—opposing or turning upside down the Biblical message. They want to put forward an entirely different worldview similar to the Eastern/occult approach. This lecture will develop a deeper understanding of Neopaganism and how to respond to it.

### Lecture Synopsis

#### Neo-Paganism and Wicca

This lecture talks about **neo-paganism**, especially a belief system called **Wicca**. The speaker explains that this movement has been growing in Western culture over the past few decades. Many people may not notice it at first, but it appears in movies, television shows, books, and even school clubs.

Wicca is a kind of **nature-based spirituality**. Many followers believe that nature itself is sacred or divine. Some people worship a **goddess or earth spirit** and celebrate nature through rituals and ceremonies that often happen outdoors. These ceremonies may take place during full moons or certain seasons of the year.

One important thing the lecture explains is that **Wiccans do not see themselves as Satanists**. They usually reject the idea of a devil or an absolute evil power. Instead, they often believe that good and evil are both part of nature and cannot be clearly separated.

A common saying in Wicca is **“Harm none and do as you will.”** This means people should try not to hurt others but should be free to live however they choose. However, the lecture raises an important question: if there is no real difference between good and evil, it can be difficult to explain why harming others is wrong.

The lecture also shows that many ideas in Wicca are connected to **New Age thinking**. These ideas include believing that everything in the universe is connected, that people have spiritual power within themselves, and that special rituals can help influence the forces of nature.

The speaker encourages Christians to respond carefully and thoughtfully. Many people who join these movements have been **hurt by churches or Christians in the past**, so it is important to listen to them with kindness and understanding.

In the end, the lecture says that **love, patience, and honest conversation** are very important when talking with people who hold these beliefs.

## Ten Life Applications

### 1. Learn Before You Critique

**Application:**

Understand a belief system accurately before responding to it. Productive conversations require knowledge, not caricatures.

**Example:**

Instead of assuming what a Wiccan or neopagan believes, a Christian reads a primary source like *Drawing Down the Moon* or listens carefully to someone explaining their beliefs.

**Exercise:**

Choose one worldview different from Christianity. Write down three things its followers believe and verify them using reliable sources or conversations.

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### 2. Speak Truth with Genuine Respect

**Application:**

Engage people of different beliefs without hostility or fear.

**Example:**

A Christian student meets someone involved in neopagan practices and chooses to ask thoughtful questions rather than immediately condemning them.

**Exercise:**

Practice asking open-ended questions such as, “How did you first become interested in this belief?” before offering your perspective.

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### 3. Recognize the Importance of Worldview Foundations

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Understand that ideas about truth, morality, and reality flow from deeper worldview assumptions.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

When discussing the idea “harm none,” a Christian respectfully asks how someone can define harm if there is no objective good or evil.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Write down three moral beliefs you hold and trace them back to the worldview assumptions that support them.

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### 4. Value Truth and Logic in Spiritual Discussions

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Faith should involve both heart and mind; reason is a gift that helps us discern truth.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

When someone says truth is only personal experience, a Christian gently asks whether that statement itself is meant to be universally true.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Take a common statement like “all beliefs are equally true.” Write down two logical questions that explore whether that claim is consistent.

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### 5. Practice Biblical Tolerance

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Christians should defend religious freedom while still holding firm convictions about truth.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

A believer supports the right of others to practice their religion while also clearly explaining why they believe Christ is the true path.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

List two ways Christians can show respect for others’ freedom while still speaking confidently about their faith.

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### 6. Show Compassion to Those Hurt by Religion

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Many people drawn to alternative spiritualities have experienced wounds from churches or Christians.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

Instead of debating immediately, a believer listens patiently to someone who describes painful experiences in church.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Practice responding to a story of spiritual hurt with empathy: “I’m sorry you went through that. Would you be willing to tell me more?”

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### 7. Care for Creation as a Christian Responsibility

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Christians should model stewardship of the environment as part of their biblical calling.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

A church organizes community efforts to care for local parks or waterways as an expression of Genesis stewardship.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Choose one small action this week that reflects care for God's creation (recycling, planting trees, cleaning a public area).

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### 8. Recognize the Appeal of Power and Control

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Some spiritual movements promise personal power or control over life. Christians must remember that true transformation comes from God, not manipulation of spiritual forces.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

Rather than seeking spiritual techniques to control outcomes, a believer prays for God's guidance and trusts His sovereignty.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Reflect on areas where you may desire control. Write a prayer surrendering those areas to God.

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### 9. Affirm the Reality of Good and Evil

**\*\*Application:\*\***

A Christian worldview provides a clear moral foundation for justice, compassion, and human dignity.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

When discussing issues like injustice or oppression, a believer explains that Christianity grounds these concerns in God's moral character.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Write down two current social issues and explain how the biblical view of good and evil informs your response to them.

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### 10. Lead with Love in Evangelism

**\*\*Application:\*\***

Arguments alone rarely change hearts; genuine love and relationship open doors for the gospel.

**\*\*Example:\*\***

A Christian builds a friendship with someone from a different spiritual background and demonstrates Christ's love through consistent kindness.

**\*\*Exercise:\*\***

Identify one person in your life with a different belief system. Pray for them daily and look for an opportunity to show practical kindness.

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**STUDY QUESTIONS (from CSLI)****1 | What are some examples of how Neopaganism has surfaced in our culture?****2 | How has the “Harry Potter” series helped neopaganism?****3 | What is the “occult principle”?****4 | How is this approach similar to and dissimilar from the Eastern or New Age philosophy?****5 | How does this new witchcraft repudiate Satanism?****6 | What is the Wiccan (Rede) creed? Why does it emphasize helping and healing?****7 | How does neopaganism address the idea of sin or evil?**

<b>BUILDING FAITH CONVERSATIONS</b>	
1	<b>The lecture describes neopaganism as a growing movement in Western culture. What factors might contribute to the growth of new spiritual movements in modern society?</b>
	<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How might cultural trends or social changes influence spiritual curiosity?</li> <li>* What role might media, books, or online communities play in spreading new beliefs?</li> </ul>
2	<b>The speaker notes that neopaganism often operates through small groups or covens that meet privately. What effects might small, close-knit groups have on the way beliefs are formed or shared?</b>
	<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How might belonging to a small spiritual community shape a person's identity?</li> <li>* What advantages or challenges might come from practicing spirituality in small groups?</li> </ul>
3	<b>The lecture mentions that neopaganism is often described as anti-doctrinal or anti-dogmatic. What might attract people to a spiritual system that allows wide freedom in personal beliefs?</b>
	<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How might flexibility in belief appeal to people who have had negative experiences with organized religion?</li> <li>* What questions might arise when beliefs are largely self-defined?</li> </ul>
4	<b>Some neopagan perspectives emphasize a strong connection to nature. What reasons might people have for finding nature-centered spirituality meaningful?</b>
	<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How might experiences in nature influence someone's view of spirituality?</li> <li>* In what ways might environmental concerns shape spiritual beliefs?</li> </ul>
5	<b>The lecture describes rituals and ceremonies as important practices within Wicca. What roles do rituals play in shaping spiritual identity or community life?</b>
	<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How might rituals influence the way participants interpret their spiritual experiences?</li> <li>* What similarities or differences might exist between rituals in various religions?</li> </ul>

6	<p>The lecture notes that some neopagan teachings place strong emphasis on personal autonomy. How might this emphasis affect the way individuals make moral decisions?</p>
<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b>  * What might guide ethical choices in a worldview that emphasizes personal freedom?  * How might different people interpret the idea of autonomy in different ways?</p>	
7	<p>The speaker discusses how experience is often valued highly in neopagan spirituality. What are some ways personal experiences can influence someone's beliefs about spiritual reality?</p>
<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b>  * How might people interpret the same experience in different ways?  * What role might emotions or intuition play in forming beliefs?</p>	
8	<p>The lecture explores connections between neopagan ideas and environmental activism. What relationships might exist between spiritual beliefs and views about caring for the natural world?</p>
<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b>  * How might different belief systems motivate environmental concern?  * What factors might influence how people connect spirituality and ecology?</p>	
9	<p>The lecture discusses debates about whether modern Wicca is connected to ancient pagan traditions or is a newer development. Why might the historical origins of a movement matter to some people?</p>
<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b>  * How might historical continuity influence the credibility of a belief system?  * Why might others see historical origins as less important?</p>	
10	<p>The lecture emphasizes the importance of listening carefully and showing care when engaging with people who hold different spiritual beliefs. How might thoughtful listening influence conversations about faith?</p>
<p><b>**For More Discussion: **</b>  * What might someone learn by hearing another person's spiritual journey?  * How might respectful dialogue change the tone of difficult discussions?</p>	



## SAMPLE ARGUMENTS FROM THIS LECTURE

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### The Moral Foundation Argument

#### >Context

Many neopagan or New Age perspectives emphasize tolerance and the principle “harm none and do as you will,” yet they also reject the idea of objective good and evil.

#### >Claim

A worldview that denies objective good and evil cannot consistently support moral principles such as tolerance or “harm none.”

#### >Case

If good and evil are only personal preferences, then statements like “harming people is wrong” become subjective opinions rather than moral truths. Yet neopagan ethics assume that harming others is genuinely wrong and helping others is good. Moral obligations only make sense if there is a real moral standard beyond personal preference. The Christian worldview provides this grounding because morality reflects the character of a morally perfect God.

#### >Challenge

If there is no objective moral standard, why should anyone follow the principle “harm none”? What makes harming others truly wrong rather than simply undesirable?

#### >Conclusion

The desire for moral principles such as justice, compassion, and tolerance points toward a worldview where good and evil are real—something that fits naturally within the Christian understanding of a moral God.

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### The Logic and Truth Argument

#### >Context

Some New Age and neopagan perspectives emphasize experience and intuition over reason and doctrine, sometimes claiming that logic and truth claims are limiting or unnecessary.

#### >Claim

Rejecting logic and objective truth is self-contradictory because any argument against logic must still rely on logic.

#### >Case

To say “there is no absolute truth” or “logic should not determine belief” is itself a truth claim. Communicating that claim requires the use of reasoning and logical distinctions between true and false. Even arguments that promote synthesis or “both-and thinking” must rely on logical statements to explain that position. Therefore, logic cannot be dismissed without undermining the argument itself.

#### >Challenge

If logic and objective truth are not valid tools for discovering reality, why use logical arguments to persuade others of that view?

#### >Conclusion

Reason and logic are unavoidable tools for thinking about truth. The Christian worldview embraces both faith and reason, affirming that truth ultimately reflects the rational nature of God.

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### The Environmental Stewardship Argument

#### >Context

Many neopagan and New Age thinkers emphasize ecological concern because they see nature as divine or part of a universal oneness.

#### >Claim

A worldview that denies real distinctions or moral categories struggles to explain why environmental destruction is objectively wrong.

#### >Case

If everything is ultimately one divine reality, then distinctions between a forest, a building, or smoke from burning trees become less meaningful. Without a real distinction between good and evil, it becomes difficult to say why harming the environment is morally wrong. The biblical worldview, however, teaches that creation is distinct from God and entrusted to humanity for stewardship. Because the earth is God's creation, humans have a moral responsibility to cultivate and protect it.

#### >Challenge

If nature is simply part of an undifferentiated divine whole, why should it matter whether a rainforest remains intact or becomes smoke?

#### >Conclusion

The Christian worldview provides a coherent reason to care for the environment: creation belongs to God, and humans are called to steward it responsibly.

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### The Experience vs. Truth Argument

#### >Context

Neopagan and New Age thought often elevate **personal spiritual experience above doctrine or objective truth**.

#### >Claim

Experience alone cannot determine truth because experiences can be interpreted in many different—and sometimes contradictory—ways.

#### >Case

People across many religions report profound spiritual experiences: meditation, visions, mystical feelings, or altered states of consciousness. However, these experiences often lead to **very different conclusions about reality**. If two people have powerful experiences that lead them to opposite beliefs, experience alone cannot determine which belief is true. Truth must be evaluated using reason, evidence, and coherence.

#### >Challenge

If spiritual experience alone determines truth, how do we decide between two conflicting experiences that lead to different conclusions?

#### >Conclusion

Experience can be meaningful and powerful, but it must be **tested against truth**. Christianity affirms spiritual experience while grounding it in the revealed truth of God.

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## The Justice Argument

### >Context

Many neopagan and New Age advocates speak passionately about \*\*justice issues—such as oppression, intolerance, or mistreatment of people\*\*.

### >Claim

Real justice requires a moral standard that distinguishes right from wrong.

### >Case

When people protest injustice, they are claiming that certain actions—such as oppression or cruelty—are truly wrong, not merely personally disliked. Yet if a worldview denies objective good and evil, moral judgments become subjective preferences rather than moral truths. The Christian worldview provides a foundation for justice because it affirms that human beings are created in God's image and that moral standards reflect God's character.

### >Challenge

If morality is only personal preference, what makes injustice truly wrong rather than simply something people dislike?

### >Conclusion

The universal human desire for justice suggests that moral truths are real. The Christian worldview explains this by grounding morality in the character of a just and righteous God.

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## Set 4 - Lecture 2

(0:17 - 12:03) Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your presence and your reality. We pray you might help us to speak the truth in love to those that oppose faith in Christ. You've said that we should tear down speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of Christ and take every thought captured to Christ. We pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, this issue of neo-paganism, Wicca or the craft, is one that's gotten increasing prominence within our culture. I'd say even 15 or 20 years ago, many people had not even heard of the issue. Now more and more people, it's more and more surfacing of this movement within the culture. I've been working on this subject for 20 or 25 years and it will be difficult to communicate in a short time all the things that I could say. So just view this as an introduction that will hopefully stimulate you to do some further reading and study. I was for five years on the board of Spiritual Counterfeits Project in Berkeley and because of that got opportunities to engage with many people in the New Age movement as well as many people within neo-paganism.

For instance, just one instance of a number of interactions that I've had, Brooks Alexander from Spiritual Counterfeits took me to the home of a Wiccan leader. In fact, he was the chief spokesman for the Covenant of the Goddess. And I met with he and his wife and we watched a video of a dialogue that Brooks had had with him in a school of religion out there in Berkeley. And Brooks about halfway through the dialogue just left me with them and we had, we ended up continuing to go through the tape and pausing it at various points and having comments or discussion about various things. And they appreciated the dialogue enough that they sought me out at the Spiritual Counterfeits Project office the next day and we went out and spent an afternoon sitting on the grass in the park with a lunch we purchased from a health food restaurant very close by there. And we had a great afternoon of discussion. And I had the idea that many people in neo-paganism and I've also found this with people in the New Age movement, really desire to have a discussion with believers that are

informed enough about their perspective that they don't have to get over the caricatures, that they can really have a direct discussion with people where believers' automatic response is not, you know, hostility and paranoia at meeting someone who's neo-pagan or a witch and can be able to engage on these issues. So, there's much that's to be said here and it's a growing movement. In fact, this man that I met with is still very prominent within Wiccan circles, Catherine Sanders, for instance, in her new book on Wicca, speaks about her interaction with him.

In fact, I met with her before writing the book, *Wicca's Charm*, and we talked a lot about our shared experiences with the Wiccan movement. Well, it's a new and rising movement in our culture that is manifested in many ways in TV programs. You probably know a number, but I'll just mention one, *The Craft*, for instance, is one that's on regular stations or some writers have pointed to *Buffy and the Vampire Slayer* as another purveyor of this and there are a number of TV programs that continue to come out with Wiccan themes to it.

A number of different movies that have appealed to various levels that have exposed people to this kind of practice. A whole bunch of books, including books targeted at the younger age group. There's a book called *Teen Witch* by Silver Ravenwolf that targets the teenager or the preteen in getting them to practice Wicca. I teach a lot with Young Life staff every year. I spend a week with a bunch of Young Life staff from around the country and I find that every single one of them in their high schools from around the U.S., in some cases around the world, have Wiccan groups that are present in their high schools. It's often present at the junior high level as well. So it's a phenomena where it's there all over the place in junior high sometimes and certainly in high schools and in most colleges around the U.S. You'll have a relatively small but growing and often vocal group of Wiccans. Sometimes they'll stay hidden because there can be persecution and paranoia about it, but sometimes they're very vocal in putting forward their causes and advocating for the neo-pagan cause. This approach of neo-paganism has often become the preferred spirituality of radical feminism because it focuses on the goddess.

You can put together your own distinctively feminine view of spirituality. In fact, one at one point noted evangelical feminist, I heard her speak say 20 years ago, has now become a Wiccan. It's interesting you move over from a more evangelical perspective to a very distinctly feminine deity. In fact, there have been some conferences that have been held that have become notorious and there have been a lot of articles written about them called the Sophia Conferences that were sponsored with money from the Methodist Church and Presbyterian Church, where there were various nature, you might call pagan rites and rituals observed. Thomas Oden, who's a theologian, has written a number of systematic theology works, talks about a time in his seminary chapel where there was a Wiccan ceremony that caused him, and perhaps the only time, to walk out on the chapel. It's not at all unusual to find this kind of thing surfacing, especially in light of the alternative theologies that are out there.

There's an increasing demand for chaplain status for Wiccans in the armed forces. We see it more visibly in the culture, but it often is beneath the surface. 20 years ago I had a list, and I have a list actually, of 1,100 names, addresses, and sometimes phone numbers of different Wiccan groups that are out there, but I'd say for every one of those or at least be ten that are unlisted, because the Wiccan perspective is often practiced with a coven, a very small group of people that meet very informally in a house or out in nature on the beach, in the woods, at various times under the moon, at the times of the solstice or various phases of the moon, they get out to meet in nature. And so for every one that's listed, there are probably ten that are unlisted. I think if you check the internet now, there'll probably be many thousands of ones that have a notice on the web, and again probably ten times the number that are in small groups all over the place. But the interesting thing about that list was just to see that it's in all the major cities, and many minor cities as well.

It's all over the place. Often we don't have eyes to see it or even know that it's happening. It's often up in the mountains, or we were out in Santa Cruz recently or in Santa Barbara, and there are many sites and places up in the mountains that are used for the ceremonies, that are Wiccan ceremonies. Or one time on the beach, I saw people with a circle drawn, and that was a, it seems like a Wiccan ceremony happening right there on the beach, a more isolated beach there in Santa Barbara. So it, you'll sometimes see it if you have eyes to see it, but it's happening all over the place within our culture. You'll find increasing amount of literature in bookstores, often under the New Age section, which stresses, and I'll try to underline this later, the profound connection and link between the New Age worldview that I've talked about in an earlier lecture, and then this New Age perspective on things.

In fact, I would say it's the same basic framework that's being held in the Neopaganism as in the New Age, but it's just approached through a different angle or direction. I'll come through and try to illustrate that later. Some of the representatives of Neopaganism would be Starhawk, one name, or Z Budapest, or another one, Margo Adler, who has a book called *Drawing Down the Moon*. She's one of the most sought after speakers at these various conferences. She's been a commentator on National Public Radio, and you'll often hear her giving comments on various kinds of issues. Very intelligent, sophisticated writer.

In fact, if you had to read one book on Neopaganism by a Neopagan, it would probably be this book, *Drawing Down the Moon*. If you had to read one book, say, in the New Age movement by a New Age writer, it would be Marilyn Ferguson's book, *The Inquiry and Conspiracy*. It would give you a short summary, a kind of paradigm by a very sophisticated advocate, in their own words, of what the position holds to. And that's, of course, very important if you're going to engage significantly or write about it, that you read some of the material by the best advocates of the position, and hopefully talk to some of these advocates as well. Well, what is Neopaganism, or the craft? Now, this is where we're on a little bit treacherous ground because it's notoriously anti-doctrinal, or anti-dogmatic. You might say anti-theological in terms of their own views of things.

They allow you very much freedom in making up your own teachings on various matters. But I'll just give you some fundamental introduction, realizing that different Neopagans, different Wiccans, may want to define in their own way the way that they view things. Often this idea of Neopaganism comes from the idea of pagan, which means country dweller or peasant in ancient times. Often the nature religion, which Neopaganism is associated with nature religion, has the idea of heathen, from the heaths or out in the country, territory. It's very interesting to get some of the history. For instance, Geoffrey Burton Russell's book, *History of Witchcraft*, would be a fascinating study for you of the historical continuities that are involved there in this movement.

(12:04 - 13:52) I have come across in my various studies, by going through the files of spiritual counterfeits and doing research on it, with occasional Wiccan creeds. Now, these creeds are not widely accepted. It's not demanded that you follow any particular creeds or doctrines or dogmas, as I just mentioned. But it's interesting that occasionally when Wiccans get together for big conferences and meetings where they have speakers and big events, that they'll get together in a group and say, well, let's at least sit down and define some of the things we hold in common, so we at least know what the basis of our unity is. And they'll occasionally come up with a list of things. Now, not everybody's bound by this confession.

You don't have to profess to believe in all these things. Some Wiccans might disagree with particular elements, but it's at least a help in getting the definition for these things. And so I came across some of these lists. And one principle that we need to understand, perhaps the number one thing we need to understand if we're going to approach a Wiccan, is they want to distance themselves from Satanism. In fact, they say we are not Satanists. We do not accept the concept of absolute evil, one writing says. Nor do we worship any entity known as Satan or the devil. Satanism is a Christian heresy, in a sense. You have basically the Christian doctrine and teaching say the Lord's Prayer. Satanism is a direct attack, but an acknowledgment of the truthfulness of the Christian perspective, but an opposition directly to it. That is not at all what the neo-pagans hold to. They want to go into a whole different ballpark.

(13:53 - 14:06) And that ballpark is a pagan view of life, where they get rid of the idea of good and evil. They don't want the idea of God and Satan. It's a whole other way of doing it.

(14:07 - 14:24) They also don't deal with broomsticks and black hats and cats and that sort of thing. It's very sophisticated, made up of very intelligent people. And as you meet people that are neo-pagan, you find that they're often very deeply feeling, very deeply intuitive, very experiential.

(14:25 - 14:50) They have a real connection with people, the idea of a connection with nature, a great aesthetic sense. And so they're very sophisticated people, very intelligent, and very much oriented in these ways. And some of the diversity is manifested among those kinds of people.

(14:51 - 19:53) Erica Young, for instance, makes this statement about Satanists. Satanists accept that Christian duality between good and evil. Pagans do not. Pagans see good and evil as intimately alive, in fact, indivisible. The idea would be, how can Wiccans then put forward their creed, which is the harm none and do as you will? This is probably the central

creed that's at the very center of the Wiccan approach. They say, we don't believe in any morality or any view of good and evil, right and wrong. We'll come back to that more in a minute. And they say that our single rule is harm none and do as you please. Originally it was do as you please, but then the harm none was added to it.

That they would advocate the whole purpose of the Wiccan perspective is to use the powers of the universe to help and to heal. That's the stated value on which they base things. However, if you denied the reality of good and evil, you wonder on what basis you can say that harming is bad and helping is good. Come back to that more in a little bit. There is a profound hostility to Christianity, in part because of its claim to exclusive truth and also in part because of the history involved with the Inquisition, its persecution of witches in Salem, witch trials, various other kinds of things. One of the Wiccan principles I came across says we do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy.

No authoritarian hierarchy, say in the church, certainly in the state, or even God. The idea of a God that's distinct from us, that has ability to command, is seen as a patriarchal thing, whereas they want to level things, put ourselves on the same level with everything else to create our own morality, to decide what is good and evil for us in terms of our own choices. Often there's a worship of Mother Earth along with this. The idea that nature is one, or divine somehow, but it contains various dualities. The dualities, say, of male and female, sometimes it will be articulated in terms of the moon goddess Diana, perceived in a triple form of, this is the way it's talked about, as a maiden mother or crone, or the idea of the moon waxing, full, or waning. That's often imagery that's associated with some neo-pagan thinking.

They gather together at certain Sabbaths at every full moon to dance in the light of the moon, and they often dance sky-clad, which is naked. They draw a great circle, and the great right with many is sexuality or sex in the center of the circle. That's why the Da Vinci Code has some connections with this neo-pagan or Wiccan perspective. You have a lot of that feminine, distinctly feminine spirituality coming through in the Da Vinci Code approach to things. Another principle of Wiccan belief in this list is we practice rights to attune ourselves to the natural rhythm of life forces, or nature is divinity made manifest. Another principle from one of these Wiccan lists is calling oneself witch does not make a witch.

A witch seeks to control the forces within him or herself that make life possible in order to live wisely and well, without harm to others, and in harmony with nature. This is some of the definitions that Wiccans give to themselves. With this idea that nature is somehow divine, or one, goes the ecological focus. I have friends that have been part of the C.S. Lewis Institute that I've gotten to know that have been part of the environmental community at the EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, and many other places, and have traveled to international conferences. At these international conferences, the bulk of people that are interested in these issues are often new age or neo-pagan in terms of their perspective. We'll come back to address the consistency or not in terms of this concern a little bit later.

(19:55 - 44:09) Another important thing that is emphasized by Wiccans is the goodness of sexuality. One of the principles in these lists is this. We value sexuality as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magical practice and religious worship. Another statement is eroticism in its religious reference venerates love play and the sexual act is divine. Sexual freedom in this comprehensive sense is a primary doctrine of most pagan religions. It is a freedom from guilt conditioned by repressive, anti-natural lifestyles.

So one of the things that is desired to be smashed is any kind of taboo within the realm of sexuality. Again, sexuality is divine somehow, a connection with the divine. Anything goes in the sexual realm. I think both in this area, neo-paganism, and the new age, part of the appeal is that it's very relativistic. You can do whatever you want to do, especially in this realm of sexuality, but you can have your cake and eat it too. You have your own spirituality and spiritual rites and rituals and yet also can do what you want.

Makes it very different from a more relativistic perspective, say in atheism or the postmodern perspective. You can have your spirituality, profoundly spiritual practices, and then be able to have a lack of restriction on your behavior by anybody or anything. Sometimes, in some neo-pagan groups, there is belief in reincarnation and karma, although not all. Well, I think one of the things that's profound in the relationship between, in the neo-pagan perspective, and where it's distinguished, New Age says that all is one, you are divine, the whole purpose of life is to alter consciousness, and the ultimate result is unlimited power. This is probably one of the most helpful insights I can give you as far as the relationship of the neo-pagan with the New Age assumptions. In all the Wiccan literature I've come across, in these statements from various conferences and lists of beliefs, you'll find all of these things represented. In some ways, you could, I suppose,

with regard to this worldview, start from the top down and start saying, all is one, you are divine, alter consciousness, and it will lead to unlimited power. But that's not the way either the New Age movement or neo-paganism approaches this issue, not so much in a linear way or in a logical way. But they would start, I'd say, most people in the New Age movement in the West get into that movement because of psychotechnologies, these methods and techniques that will help you alter your consciousness, to perceive that all is one and that you're divine.

So the entry point is, say, holistic health, yoga, acupuncture, various other approaches where you go and experience this seminar on some issues, civil mind control, Scientology, whatever it is, you go and it alters your consciousness, and then you see that which is implicit in what makes that approach work. Well, I'd say within the neo-pagan perspective, they start from the bottom up. They start with unlimited power, the promise of power to help and to heal. And they move through right and ritual to alter your consciousness. Certain rituals would be, for instance, like the ritual of drawing down the moon, which is in the back of Margot Adler's book by that title. And we'll list the kind of ritual you could use in these times where you do the rites out in the wilderness. But you could make up your own ritual, if you wish. But you use right and ritual to alter the consciousness. And that works because you are divine and all is one.

In fact, at the very root of the idea is the occult principle. And the occult principle is, as above, so below. For instance, in astrology, as the stars are up here, so are we down here.

And so there's a connection between the configuration under which you're born, in terms of the stars, and your everyday life. That's a principle of astrology. The occult principle not only works as above, so below, but as below, so above. There's this interconnection of oneness in the universe. So if you can learn how to, by right and ritual, set up ripples in the cosmos, so to speak, alter the, set up a disturbance in the force, and be able to control the movement of consciousness, or the movement of the forces of nature in a correct way, then you can help, or you can heal. And that's the idea behind the neo-pagan perspective, that all is one. And you can, by these rites and rituals, set up movements in the energies, or the forces of the universe, that can affect the world around you. And you do that individually, to help or to heal, to make things happen. Or you could do that on a social level, where witches will go to nuclear power plants, and that sort of thing, that they would oppose, and have rites and rituals there to channel the energies, perhaps in opposition to the things that they would want to challenge in their perspective.

So the really interesting thing here, though, is that you have one worldview, and it's the Eastern slash New Age slash occult slash neo-pagan perspective. It's the same worldview, but you may not see it all on the surface. Again, in the New Age, you wouldn't see it exactly.

You'd have somebody say, come to this seminar, come to this approach, you'll really enjoy it, you'll have an experience. Only later do you find out what it believes. They don't come and say, in a linear way, they don't teach it to you, they say, come along.

In the same way, the neo-pagan view says, well, you want to control your life? You want to be able to help and to heal people? Want to have power? Well, come along to this rite and ritual. And then you work back up this way. So this is one of the most helpful frameworks that I've come across.

You have this one worldview that's in opposition to the biblical or Christian worldview. How should we respond to this neo-paganism? Let me give you some thoughts on it. First of all, there's a stress in neo-pagan circles on tolerance, especially because of persecutions, which is throughout history. But what I would advocate is that denial of absolute truth or objective good and evil is in many ways inconsistent with their opposition to these things. Certainly, it would be right to oppose the abuses that have been done to people in the past. But in order to do so, you've got to say that there is virtue in vice, there is good and evil, that these things are really evil.

Yet, I don't see how you can say that on a neo-pagan foundation. If you're going to uphold tolerance or true tolerance, you need to have a tolerance that's true, and then another tolerance that's — you've got to be able to define what tolerance is and what intolerance is. And you've got to say tolerance is good and intolerance is evil. But if you can't say there's really good and evil, I don't see how you can uphold tolerance as a virtue that we need to follow. I think as believers, we can. In fact, I would argue that tolerance is a Christian virtue, and you can mark a clear line throughout history, and I'd give you a number of books on tolerance that would advocate that, that tolerance really comes out of the biblical and Christian perspective on things. And I think that we can and should uphold different kinds of tolerance. First of all, a legal tolerance.

I think it's a good thing to have something like the First Amendment, that Congress shall make no article respecting the establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

It's a good thing to have religious freedom. In fact, I would say it's not only good in principle, but it's good actually for religion. In places where churches are established, you often have a weakening of the level of faith and vitality of that church. Often when churches are free to compete with one another without it being established by the state, you have a vitality of faith. The ones that are the most persuasive, the most winsome, have the most followers. Ones that are the most healthy churches, one of the most healthy forms of religious practice, would draw the most people. But especially this legal tolerance is because we don't believe we either can or nor should physically coerce people into religious belief. And that's an axiom behind this legal tolerance position. Also with regard to social tolerance.

I don't see how there's any basis within neo-paganism to say that social tolerance is really right and social intolerance is really wrong, especially if they deny any kind of objective good or objective evil. Whereas within the biblical perspective, there are tremendous resources for calling us to love. Especially to love our neighbors as ourselves. To love even our enemies. We're caused to not go into ourselves but thrust out in a centrifugal way. To go out across the deepest divides with people with whom we differ.

We're called to reach out to people with whom we differ racially and different ethnic groups. People with whom we differ religiously and ethically in terms of our beliefs. We're still called to love people that are radically different and even in opposition to us. That's a very radical call. No other religious belief and system is so radical in terms of perpetuating this kind of social environment where we are tolerant in a certain sense or love people different from us. But the one thing that tolerance I think should not involve is a moral or religious equivalence.

If all moral values or all religions are basically the same and there's no real difference, then who needs tolerance? You only need tolerance if there are deep differences and divides between people. So I would suggest that even though the neo-pagans with some justice call for tolerance, I don't think they have a basis within their system because of a denial of objective good and evil to maintain that kind of tolerance. They also have a problem of evil that I alluded to a little bit earlier.

If all is one, if all is nature, if all is the god, goddess, on what basis can you say harm none but do as you will? In many ways this is similar to that golden rule but put in a negative sense. Do unto others as you would have them do to you. But you might say, well why should we live by the golden rule or why should we live by a kind of negative form of the golden rule, harm none and do as you please, if there is no ultimate distinction between good or evil? Is this just a mere preference? Is this something we like doing or is it something that's rooted in the structure of reality itself? Sometimes within a neo-pagan perspective they will talk about the idea of karma, good and bad karma, somehow the forces will come back to bite you if you live in certain negative ways, but I don't see how you can even have the distinction between good and bad karma if there's no good or evil.

In fact one of the things that has been said about the New Age movement or Eastern religious perspective in general is that the more philosophical the Hindu or New Age thinker or I would say neo-pagan thinker, the less place they'll give to karma in reincarnation because there's an inconsistency and I'd say even contradiction between talking about really good and really bad karma and denying that there is good and evil ultimately in the universe. I don't see how you can maintain those if you think carefully about it. Neo-pagans will say that evil comes back upon the doer three-fold, which is a kind of karma idea, but generally within the Wiccan community they would take common sense or pragmatic considerations to decide kind of what is good or bad for them, but there's no rule where you can impose your morality on somebody else.

In fact they want to be very autonomous. That's very much of the spirit of neo-paganism. But where's the ultimate basis between which we can distinguish good and evil? Starhawk says that nature of the goddess is never single. She is light and the darkness, the patroness of love and death who makes all possibilities. She brings forth comfort and pain. As crone she is the dark face of life which demands death and sacrifice. In witchcraft the dark waning aspect of the god is not evil. It's the vital part of the natural structure. So far from there being any real clear-cut distinction between good or evil, it's all just part of nature. It's all just part of like the waxing and waning moon. It's various lights or shadows. So there's no real clear basis by which you can judge good or evil or make the kind of condemnations or clear moral judgments that neo-pagans often make. There's also along with this a rejection of reason and logic and putting

experience at the very center. Essentially they want to use their reason to put forth their own view and critique others, but often scream Western rationalist and run when others use it against them. They want to exalt experience rather than intellect.

Starhawk for instance disdains any beliefs that would deny the authority of experience and thus upholding the lie that there's only one truth. Or Margot Adler argues for the superiority of experience over dogma and metaphor and myth over theology, doctrine and creed. So that again experience, metaphor and myth are to be at the very center. Now on the surface of it you might ask whether this exalting of experience over intellect is a dogma or doctrine itself. And obviously I think that it is such a doctrine. But you also have to use logic in order to deny logic.

Ravi Zacharias has a classic illustration along these lines. One time he was meeting with someone who was talking about you in the West, you make all these things into antithesis, true and false, good and evil, right and wrong. These things are antithetical. We in the East, or you might say we as neo-pagans if you were to add that in here, want to see things in terms of synthesis. Hegel talked about thesis, antithesis, synthesis. So you have this transcending of the antithetical categories in the ways that you think. And by the way that's one of the most important things to understand in dealing with the new age or neo-pagan belief systems. That there is that ultimate distinction. You have within the biblical perspective that which is true and that which is false. And then you have the God and Satan, good and evil, the true prophet, the false prophet, salvation, judgment, and so on and so on. You have the antithesis all the way down through the scriptures at every point, God and the idols. Whereas in the new age or neo-pagan perspective you have synthesis that you might use in drawing a circle.

They want to theoretically at least speak as if they're going to include everybody within the circle. That there is no real antithesis between belief systems and good and evil. However practically speaking, all inclusivists sooner or later become exclusivists. And the first people that they exclude from their belief system are the exclusivists. People that maintain the antithesis between true and false, good and evil. So that the stress is on the antithesis in terms of their belief system. But in any case, Robbie was talking to this advocate that was saying, okay, you in the west you believe in either or, the antithesis, the true and the false. We in the east, or you could add to this the neo-pagans, believe in the both and. We want to synthesize things and say that it's really not so clear cut or sharp or there's no antithesis in the way you say.

And Robbie responded though to that by saying, isn't it interesting to where you have to state the either or and both and in terms of the either or? Presumably you don't hold the same view as I hold on this subject. So you have to use logic, you have to use the either or, you have to use the antithesis to be even able to state that dilemma or the distinction between the either or and the both and. You've got to use the either or or logic to be able to put forward that very view itself. Also, it's interesting to note that all of this stress on ecology is not certainly at the center of the new age, the neo-pagan perspective. And as I say in these international conferences, it's a majority of people from this perspective or worldview. But you might ask the question, if this world is actually one, if nature is one, then the problem really is in the area of distinguishing between anything. If you really hold to the principle of non-distinction at the very root of your view, why then should you be so concerned about having a separate species or about endangered species? By the way, I believe we ought to be concerned as someone biblically about this, but why should you on that basis be concerned about a separate species if there's no separateness, if there's no individuality? Why should you be concerned about the snail dart or the humpback whale or distinct trees in the Brazilian rainforest? Why does it matter from their perspective whether you burn those trees? I mean, certainly the argument is on the surface that everything is divine. And so if you touch anything, you're touching divinity. But why does it matter what form that divinity takes, whether it's actual tree or smoke? It's divine in whatever form it is. And since there's no real evil, on what basis can we talk about good environmental policies and bad environmental policies? So the idea of Gaia or the idea of this environmental perspective on the earth, you might wonder on what basis can you judge real good or real evil in terms of anything, much less environment on that basis. On the other hand, I would uphold that biblically speaking, there's a great place to be able to forward environmental policies. The biblical basis is in the cultural mandate in Genesis 1, 26 and 28 that talks about us exercising dominion and rulership over the whole creation.

Now many in the New Age and neo-pagan world would say that's given license for Christians, this cultural mandate or exercising rulership and dominion, it's given license for Christians to rape and pillage the earth. And certainly sometimes Christians have dealt with nature and creation in a very bad, evil fashion. However, that's not the purpose of dominion as I

understand it. In fact, if you look at the rest of the biblical passages, in fact another passage right in the immediate context in Genesis, clarifies the importance of how we care for the earth and the environment. Like in Genesis 2, 15, and this ought to be a verse that you write down and know as well as you know the cultural mandate. Adam and Eve are put in the garden and here's what it says, the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

It seems that almost like rather than the garden being made for man, man is made for the garden. Not that I'd want to state it quite that blatantly, but it's at least important that mankind is there to cultivate and to keep, in the Hebrew words there, to care for the garden and to really preserve it, to cultivate it in a good fashion, as far from destroying it or just using it for whatever he desires there in terms of Adam. It's used to cultivate and to keep and to care and to preserve the goodness of that garden around him. And there are many other passages within scripture that talk about environmental concerns. Francis Schaeffer has written a book, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, that talks about how easy it is for other points of view like the New Age or neo-pagan to uphold the environmental concern where we have a big central call of scripture to do that. And he draws up many other biblical verses that talk about the importance of the care of the animals and the care of vegetation and many other things that are there within the scripture that often we have not noticed and not really drawn on in terms of our own faith. And so we've given over the capital that we have to people from other worldviews and not been properly concerned about how the biblical worldview puts this forward. There have been many believers that are putting forward a biblical basis on environment. We need to listen to them carefully because it's an issue that we need to be concerned with among others within a biblical context.

(44:10 - 53:20) Now, one question that's often asked within this, about neo-paganism, and I don't have time to go into the details of it, although there's much literature written about it, is neo-paganism, neo-paganism, or Wicca, really in continuity with the ancient paganism of say biblical days or throughout the Middle Ages and up through the ages, or is it essentially a new religion? Well, I would say, although I don't have time to defend it right now, that the Wicca that we see now is really a new religion, that it was created in certain times very recently. In fact, one of the principles in the Wiccan list of principles that I found in various statements is, as American witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the craft and the origins of various terms, the legitimacy of various aspects of different traditions. This is an acknowledgement of the idea that there may not be a continuity that goes back beyond the recent past to the present Wiccan movement.

If you want a study of this, Spiritual Counterfeits Project has a whole journal on witchcraft that was written by Brooks Alexander, one of their senior researchers on the subject, and it's a fascinating study of much of the history of witchcraft and some of the debates that go on there. In *Drawing Down the Moon*, this neo-pagan author, Margot Adler, talks about some of the history, too, and I think is quite honest with respect to these influences. She sees, which I think it's true, that contemporary Wicca comes from an English writer, Gerald Gardner, who is more recent in terms of his perspective. But you can study many of the different authors on this subject. It seems that Gerald Gardner put together the Wiccan form of approach, then Raymond Buckland came over and brought this philosophy to the US in the 1960s in a coven in New York City, and then it spread out from there to other places. One of the writers, neo-pagan Aidan Kelly, in *Crafting the Art of Magic*, written in 1991, says it is new, it's a new religion, and it doesn't matter.

Wicca is a recent invention, but its insights are still valid. So that there have been various people in the Wiccan world that have agreed with this perspective, that there's not a great continuity with the past. Geoffrey Barton Russell, who's written this *History of Witchcraft*, says that this lack of historicity does not deprive a religion of insight. However, he said it does deprive that religion of the spiritual power, authority, and confirmed validity that a genuine tradition represents. So that's an interesting point to be made. I just want you to be aware of that issue and that debate that's there in a lot of the different literature.

Marty Kyes, who's from Boston LaBrie, used to go to a number of different secular colleges and speak on a Christian view of feminism. And of course, in many ways, going into the mouth of lions, many people are very hostile to Christian perspective or to Christianity because of the history of abuses. But she would go in and argue something like this, that you who are feminists have real validity in some of your charges as to the injustice that's been done to women, the way women have been treated, minimized, treated unfairly in the workplace, treated unfairly in many different arenas. But you realize at the root of your critique, in terms of sexism and the way women have been mistreated, is the idea that this

mistreatment is really evil or unjust. It's really wrong. But within an atheist perspective, and of course I'm skipping over her argument that could be made here, and we've made some of this in previous lectures, atheism is notoriously relativistic.

There's no clear basis for right and wrong, good or evil. So on what basis can you call it evil if you take an atheist perspective? Or often one of the chosen spiritualities of radical feminism is the New Age. And you have a kind of spiritual perspective, but again, there's no ultimate distinction between good or evil there.

And perhaps the highest of the spiritualities that's been chosen for radical feminism is this neo-pagan perspective, because it offers the alternative of a feminine goddess. And yet neo-paganism is very hostile to this idea of right and wrong, good or evil. But if you take this neo-pagan spirituality, which is often the chosen spirituality of radical feminism, how do you get the idea of injustice to women? Or how do you critique in a prophetic way the evils that have been done and advocate for just policies or righteous policies to be put in place if you don't really believe in justice or injustice, right or wrong, good or evil? So that, interestingly, the only perspective that enables you to do so is theism in general, and she would argue Christianity in particular would give you a basis to uphold this injustice to women. And many Christians have been behind a feminist, a right kind of feminism, like feminism in America started in a Wesleyan church, and there were Christians behind this. It was Christian missionaries that were behind the abolition of sati, the burning of the widow and the husband's funeral pyre in India, behind the abolition of foot binding in China that really disfigured women's feet, behind the idea of sexual slavery today, and really abolishing it. So that many Christians have been on the forefront of dealing with this mistreatment of women.

So it's far from it being alien to a Christian perspective, many Christians have taken up that cause. Now that's not to deny that there have been many abuses and many injustices done to women within the Christian church. But on what basis can a New Age or neo-pagan advocate uphold justice or injustice, good or evil, in terms of how you treat women? And so basically that's the kind of argument she'd make, although I'm sure far better than I, in her talks. So that if you really want to have feminism, you've got to have this basis to say that this injustice is really wrong, or else you're giving up what you know at your heart. And what is the central drive of feminist perspective? So at the very root of this is this kind of perspective. And it's obviously a very powerful kind of argument that Mardi Kaj makes there.

So in dealing with the neo-pagans, there is a profoundly feeling perspective, and often neo-pagans are the unpaid bills of the church. Many neo-pagans, if you read Wicca's Charm by Catherine Sanders, you'll see many of them have been profoundly hurt by what's happened in their churches and Christianity, what Christians have done to them. So the very root of it is there's a necessity to not only understand something of what they believe and be able to have some critiques of the inconsistency that's present, but I'd say love is the ultimate thing that makes a difference there. To really show them someone who listens, someone who cares, someone who's willing to have a relationship, someone that's not immediately judgmental that fits into their worst caricatures, but is able to really engage them for the sake of the gospel and point out profound tensions, that there are certain things that they want that only, really, faith in Christ can provide. And if you take their position to the ultimate conclusion, it really undermines some of the things that they most deeply care about. So I think that that's important to keep in mind when you talk to them. But don't focus first on that argument, focus first on listening and really caring for the person that's involved, because often the emotional is even deeper than the rational objections that are there. Let's close at that point.