# Week One: No Apology Needed Discernment, Doctrine & Apologetics

**Why Study This? (Slide Two)**

Last week we talked about why we should be ready to reach out to people of other faiths, and a little about how. Today we’re going to look at the most important aspect: How to identify false doctrines. Knowing what you believe and why you believe it is your greatest weapon in the mission field, whether here at home or in a distant country. I will encourage you over and over to know your Bible and to know what you believe. 1 Peter 3:15 says it well: Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that lies within you.

Ready or not, *you are a missionary*. God has strategically placed people in your life who do not know Him and need to hear the gospel. How do I know that? In the United States, about 70% of the population is Christian or claims to be Christian. How many of you know ten people? Odds are three of them don’t know Christ. Worldwide the picture is darker still. Christianity makes up about a third of the world’s population. That means two thirds don’t know Christ. Caveat: This figure comes from Pew Research, which is a secular organization. Their ‘one third’ figure contains all who are or claim to be Christian, so that means this includes Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Universalists, and so on. Factoring that out, the number is probably closer to 20 percent. If you further factor out people who go to church but do not profess to be Christian, the number shrinks further.

We mentioned this last week, but it bears mentioning again: There is strong opposition to the message of the gospel. If you believe that there is a war in the heavenly realms, as indicated in the book of Daniel (10:12-13), then it comes as no surprise that there is an active enemy seeking to oppose the Gospel. The forces who oppose Christianity from outside are obvious, but not all challenges to Biblical authority come from outside the church. Many of the greatest challenges we face come from people who believe they are Christians but are not, or who pretend to be Christians for monetary gain (TBN Televangelists), political gain, or other reasons.

**(Slide Three)** One of the best signs that a religious group that claims to be Christian is not is the insistence that canonized scripture is not enough, or that their special version of the Bible must be used. This is a big red flag because it usually means they have changed things to fit their theology instead of fitting their theology to what the Bible already says. They are guilty of placing man’s word above God’s. Groups like this attempt to sidestep their revision of scripture in various ways, knowing that anyone with a whit of discernment will see right through their deception. The Mormons, for example, claim that the Book of Mormon was delivered to their founder by an angel named Moroni. What does the Bible have to say about that? Galatians 1:8-9. Despite using the KJV Bible as one of their core texts, the Mormons insist this is not so.

29 Woe be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! (2 Nephi 28:29)

And again, horrible grammar aside:   
 3 And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. (2 Nephi 29:3)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, a man called an apostle by the Mormon Church, once noted, “Strange as it may seem to present day enemies of the truth, their very opposition to the receipt of more of the word of the Lord by way of the Book of Mormon is one of the signs of the times.” From the highest level, and from their own scriptures, the Mormon Church declares Galatians 1:8-9 invalid. Their gospel, supposedly delivered by an angel, is most certainly different from the Bible and yet it is you and I who are ‘enemies of the truth’ according to the Mormons; twisted logic, indeed. More on this when we talk about Mormonism specifically, but the point is that false religions frequently mock the idea of Sola Scriptura - the Bible alone as scripture.

**(Slide Four) Criteria. What is a religion?**

1. What is ultimate realty?
   1. Who is god or how many gods are there?
      1. Hinduism says there are about 33,000,000 gods, and that the universe itself is god.
      2. Mormons, if they are honest, can’t tell you how many gods they believe there are.
      3. Adherents of Shinto worship their ancestors
      4. God is balance in Taoism, while in Buddhism there is no god.
      5. Contrast with Christianity. One God, triune in nature. 1 Corinthians 8:5-6
2. What is the nature of the world?
   1. In Buddhism and Hinduism the world is in flux with aspects of the universe constantly arising and passing away.
   2. Islam mirrors Christianity in many ways, but though the world begins and ends with Allah. Humans are to respect nature and cherish it as a gift. Allah is the steward of the world.
   3. Christianity teaches that God created the world and gave it to man as a gift but with a command to rule over it… subdue it. We are stewards of the Earth.
3. What is the nature of humanity?
   1. The human condition. Almost all agree man is imperfect. It’s tough to sell a religion that says you are already perfect and there is nothing better than you. There is one, though: Secular humanism.
   2. Why and how was man created (or not, for humanists)
      1. Hinduism says man and gods were created by an impersonal entity, give or take. Humans must work toward perfection so that eventually the soul can eventually merge with the universe.
      2. Islam states that man and angels were created as servants – literally slaves – of Allah. Humans must work diligently as faithful Muslims and submit themselves to the will of Allah as spoken through the prophet Mohammed.
      3. Christianity says man is fallen and must be granted salvation by God through faith alone. Ephesians 2:8. Good works flow out of our salvation as a thanks offering back to God. It is the only religion that does not force man to work in some way to attain salvation.
4. What is humanity’s primary problem?
   1. Buddhism pegs suffering as a reason to seek enlightenment; an escape from the harsh reality of the physical world (which is an illusion anyway. Got that? No? Don’t worry, we’ll study eastern religions later). Our problem is that we exist, basically.
   2. Islam says our problem is failing to ask Allah for guidance in all things (total submission)
   3. Hinduism says our problem is that we haven’t realized our true divinity.
   4. Judaism says our problem is that we broke God’s laws. Christianity agrees, but sees this as a general rebellion against God that can only be redeemed through Jesus.
5. What happens to us after death?
   1. In Zoroastrianism we join the battle against evil. Eventually we make it to either heaven or hell.
   2. Tao says that we will be allowed to live in the spirit world in some form, maybe.
   3. In Mormonism, if we were good in life, we become gods and are given a planet (or universe, depending on interpretation) of our own to rule over. That’s why they can’t tell you how many gods there are. If we’re bad we go to hell, but can still be saved if a practicing Mormon is baptized on our behalf.
   4. Christianity is pretty clear on this point. I’ll let the Bible do the talking: Hebrews 9:27-28. Revelation 20.

**(Slide Five) What is a cult: Behaviors: Reminder of definitions from session zero.**

A relatively small group of people devoted to the worship of a specific person or object. Practices are often considered sinister or strange by those outside the group. Not a mainstream religion – must be a splinter group of a larger organization. It doesn’t have to look weird to be a cult – Universal Unitarianism. Ideology held together by charismatic relationships with an emphasis on total commitment.

Not just religious: By 5 criteria above could be commercial, political, or even psychological.

Has anyone ever heard the phrase ‘don’t drink the Kool-Aid’, or something similar? Did you know that has its roots in a cultic group? Specifically, it refers to the People’s Temple, a communist group headed by this man, **(Slide Six)** Jim Jones. They started in California and eventually founded an agricultural commune in Guyana, South America at a place that has come to be known as Jonestown, although they had a different name for it **(click)**. The People’s Temple Agricultural Project. Sounds harmless, right? In short, Jones eventually convinced his followers that the CIA was going to attack them and the only solution was mass suicide, saying "you can go down in history, deciding you chose your own way to go, and it is your commitment to refuse capitalism and in support of socialism." Later that day 909 members of the People’s Temple, 304 of them children, killed themselves by drinking Kool-Aid that had been laced with cyanide. Jones killed himself later in the afternoon. This next picture may be a bit graphic for some of you, so I’m sorry in advance, but I think it’s important for you to see first-hand the danger posed by some cult groups **(click)**. This was not really a religious cult, it was a political cult, but it had its roots in a church that held some very dangerous theology. Knowledge of the Bible, in this case, could have potentially saved nearly a thousand lives.

**(Slide Seven)** How are people drawn in? Tactics for recruiting (bag of tricks) and personal vulnerability of the recruit. Cults are not only joined by weirdos and misfits. Tom Cruise. Traumatic emotional events make a person far more vulnerable. Love them until they join, then hit them with the truth (maybe). To the famished man, any bitter thing is sweet. Proverbs 27:7b is true for food, but also for anything we hunger for, including truth.

**(Slide Eight) What is a cult: Beliefs are heretical: Reminder of definitions from session zero.**

Heresy: A teaching which opposes the true teachings of the Christian faith. Not a minor matter of opinion such as how to practice communion or what day of the week to go to church. These are major things, like whether or not you believe Jesus is actually God. There are churches that deny that, such as the Universal Unitarian Church.

Heresy as defined by Alistair McGrath, Kings College London: Heresy is best seen as a form of Christian belief that ultimately ends up subverting, destabilizing, destroying the core of the Christian faith. It’s a Trojan horse. Heresy appears to be Christian, but it’s actually an enemy of faith, and sows the seeds of faith’s destruction.

There is a language barrier in dealing with cults. They often use the same terms we do, but they redefine those terms.

Five areas of heresy: **(Slide Nine)**

1. Revelation. Teachings that distort, deny, or add to scripture in a way that leads people away from true faith and toward destruction.
   1. Progressive Revelation – Later sections of the Bible are somehow more complete or contain better information that the older sections.
      1. Old Testament God vs. New Testament God canard
      2. Some churches, Mormons, say that even newer writings are better still. Book of Mormon, for example, ‘completes the Bible’.
   2. False claims of prophetic or apostolic authority.
      1. “Faithful and Discreet Slave Class” of JWs claimed prophetic authority until 2012 when their authority was taken by the (internally elected) governing body.
      2. Apostles and prophets in the Mormon Church
         1. Quorum of twelve – governing body
         2. Prophet – President. Currently Thomas Monson.
2. Errors about God/Christ: Trinitarian doctrines. Denial of Christ’s Lordship, divinity.
   1. In Mormonism, the trinity is three distinct persons
   2. To JW’s, only God the Father is God. Jesus is Michael the Archangel and the Spirit is an impersonal force. “What is the spirit”, not who.
3. Salvation: Legalism or license to sin. Deny the gospel of death and resurrection.
   1. Jehovah’s Witnesses; Absolute obedience to the governing body
   2. Mormons mix works and salvation.
   3. Christian Science: Matter, sin, and sickness are not real, but only illusions.
   4. Wicca: Do anything as long as it hurts no one and you’re willing to have it done to you three times over.
4. The church: Churches are wrong, so we must start over.
   1. Mormon first vision
5. The future: False predictions. Deuteronomy 18:22: Test of a prophet
   1. Jehovah’s witnesses and the end of the world. 1914, 1925, 1975.
   2. Benny Hin: Homosexuals in America destroyed by fire in 1994 or 1995
   3. Oneness Pentecostals: End of the world in 1977. California will slide into the ocean, the USA will be destroyed by atomic bombs, and the World Council of Churches, under the control of the Catholic Church will consume all other religions.

The Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) has predicted, in print, the return of Christ several times, moving the date when it failed to come about and then finally giving up on date setting about 50 years ago. 1914, then more specifically October 1914. Sorry, we read the Bible wrong but trust us, we’re right this time: 1925 is the year. From Watchtower, March 1, 1923, p. 106: “Our thought is, that 1925 is definitely settled by the Scriptures. The Christian now has much more upon which to base his faith than Noah had upon which to base his faith in a coming deluge.” Really? God talked to Noah directly. We just have to take the word of a panel of old guys from Brooklyn. Believing that does take a lot of faith…

From Watchtower, Jan. 1, 1925, p. 3: “The year 1925 is here. Many confidently expect that all members of the body of Christ will be changed into heavenly glory during this year.”

When their prediction was proved false here is the official response from the church, found in Watchtower, Volume 1926, p. 232: “Some anticipated that the work would end in 1925, but the Lord did not state so. The difficulty was that their friends inflated their imaginations beyond reason; and that when their imaginations burst asunder, they were inclined to throw away everything!” Yep. That’s it. Christ didn’t return and it’s all the fault of those pesky non-believers. What punks.

Maybe if they read the Bible *alone* they would know that, “of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” Matthew 24:36. The mature have their senses trained to detect error. That is true discernment. Ephesians 4:14. 1 Tess 5:21-22. Test the spirits. Examine the doctrines and prophetic messages. It is not always a word from God because it sounds holy. Don’t reject and condemn. Extend a hand of love.

An extra word on progressive revelation: You will see this in the study of cults A LOT. Cults are, to one degree or another, based on a lie. Eventually, those lies are found out or become inconvenient enough that even core doctrines have to change. “Holy” texts are frequently revised to make them acceptable to the current crop of followers. Mormonism once embraced slavery as a right punishment of dark-skinned people, co-opting dark skin as the mark of Cain found in Genesis. They meant Indians, not blacks, but the point is the same. Many parts still do embrace polygamy, though secretly or under the radar. Elizabeth Smart.

Ben Franklin: “The best part about telling the truth is that you need not recall later what you lied about.”

If not progressive revelation, then how does God speak to us?

## Christian Doctrine and Apologetics

1. God Reveals Himself to us **(Slide 10)**
   1. General Revelation in Nature
      1. Psalm 19 – The Heavens declare God’s glory
      2. Romans 1:20 – The creation reveals God’s glory
   2. Special Revelation through the Holy Spirit
      1. 2 Peter 1:16-21 – God declares the divinity of Christ
      2. 2 Timothy 3:16 & 17 – All scripture is God breathed
2. Heresy vs. Orthodoxy
   1. Heresy. Defined earlier. Greek *Hairesis* meaning ‘choice’ or ‘grouping’. **(Slide 11)**
      1. Gnosticism (The world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.)
      2. Arianism (Denial of the true divinity of Jesus Christ taking various specific forms, but all agreed that Jesus Christ was created by the Father, that he had a beginning in time, and that the title "Son of God" was a courtesy.)
      3. Sabellianism (Belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three characterizations of one God, rather than three distinct "persons" in one God.)
   2. Orthodoxy. Define: A belief that conforms to the core beliefs of the faith. Greek: *Ortho* meaning ‘right’ and *Doxa* meaning ‘belief’.
3. Creeds: Read first two. Two you likely know about, two you probably don’t. **(Slide 12).** Creeds are an underappreciated tool given to us by the early church. They are a brief, authoritative formula of belief that helps us determine truth from error as well as essential vs. non-essential. Open handed doctrines vs. closed handed doctrines. Express the faith in a simple form that even a child can learn to recite.
   1. Apostle’s Creed (Small ‘c’ catholic, big ‘C’ church) – Second century. An early statement of Christian beliefs but does not address heresies that arose later, such as Arianism. Largely supplanted by the Nicene Creed. Considered acceptable by some heretical groups, Arians and Unitarians, because it does not mention that Jesus and the Spirit are God (non-Trinitarian).
   2. Nicene Creed – 325 AD, amended to present form in 381 AD. A profession of faith and belief in core Christian doctrines.
   3. Athanasian Creed – Provide printed text instead of reading. Sixth century AD, established Trinitarian doctrine.
   4. Definition of Chalcedon – 451 AD. Codified the Alexandrian (Orthodox) view that Christ is both fully God and fully man.

Apostle’s Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the begotten of God the Father, the Only-begotten, that is of the essence of the Father: God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten and not made; of the very same nature of the Father, by whom all things came into being, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

Who for us humanity and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate, was made human, was born perfectly of the holy Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, by whom He took body, soul, and mind, and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance. He suffered, was crucified, was buried, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven with the same body, [and] sat at the right hand of the Father. He is to come with the same body and with the glory of the Father, to judge the living and the dead; of His kingdom there is no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, in the uncreated and the perfect; who spoke through the Law, prophets, and Gospels; Who came down upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles, and lived in the saints.

We believe also in only One, Universal, Apostolic, and [Holy] Church; in one baptism in repentance, for the remission, and forgiveness of sins; and in the resurrection of the dead, in the everlasting judgment of souls and bodies, and the Kingdom of Heaven and in the everlasting life.

1. A (Baker’s) Dozen Essential Doctrines
   1. God’s Unity – There is only one God. Eternal, uncreated. **(Slide 13)**
      1. Deuteronomy 6:4 (4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.)
      2. 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 (5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.)
   2. The Trinity
      1. 2 Thessalonians 1:2 (2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.) – No one really debates that God the Father is God.
      2. John 1:1 (1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.)
      3. Acts 5:3-4 (3 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”)
      4. 1 Corinthians 3:17 (17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.)
   3. Human Depravity **(Slide 14)**
      1. Romans 3:9-20 – Look up and read
      2. John 3:3 (3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again[a] he cannot see the kingdom of God.”)
   4. The virgin birth **(Slide 15)**
      1. Luke 1:34-35 (34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.)
      2. Matthew 1:18 (18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.)
   5. The sinlessness of Christ
      1. Hebrews 4:15 (15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.)
      2. 1 Peter 2:22 (22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.)
      3. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.)
   6. Christ’s deity and humanity **(Slide 16)**
      1. John 1:14 (14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.)
      2. Hebrews 1:1-8
      3. Philippians 2:6-11 (6 ...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.)
      4. Galatians 4:4-5 (4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.)
      5. 1 John 4:2-3 (2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.)
   7. God’s grace
      1. Romans 5:10 (10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.)
      2. Titus 3:5 (5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit)
   8. Faith
      1. Ephesians 2:8-9 (8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.)
   9. Christ’s atoning death **(Slide 17)**
      1. Romans 3:25-26 (25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.)
   10. Jesus’ bodily resurrection **(Slide 18)**
       1. 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.)
   11. Christ’s second coming **(Slide 19)**
       1. Acts 1:11 (11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”)
       2. Revelation 1:7 (7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail[a] on account of him. Even so. Amen.)
       3. I want to use this slide for one other thing before we move on. How important is it to know what the Bible really says? There are two pictures here that don’t accurately represent what we read in scripture. Anyone care to guess which two? Cult groups and others love to point out that ‘the Bible is full of inconsistencies.’ It isn’t, of course, but misquoted scripture is frequently where they get this idea from. The top right picture is supposedly a depiction of the New Jerusalem promised by God in Revelation 21… but if we’re honest it will probably look more like this. (**Click)** Inaccurate portrayals of what the Bible says lend to the impression that we don’t take the accuracy of scripture seriously. “The lion will lay down with the lamb.” Who has heard that before? What does Isaiah 11:6 *really* say? **(Click)** Does it change the meaning at all? Of course not… but it does give nonbelievers an impression that we don’t care about accuracy and that is where cults often find a foothold.
   12. Predestination
       1. Romans 8:29 (29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.)
   13. Hell **(Slide 20)**
       1. Revelation 20:11-15 (11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.)