



Basic Apologetics Course

Set IV: Responding to New Age and Cults

How to Use This Study Guide

While individuals can certainly learn from this course, you will get the maximum value from the Basic Apologetics Course by using the following approach:

1. Convene a group of four to six others who are interested in studying apologetics and are willing to commit themselves to meeting regularly for discussion and processing. (The small size of the group allows more time for each person to take part in the discussion.)
2. Each member of the group should commit themselves to pray regularly that God will help them to understand truth and share it with grace, love and humility.
3. In preparation for the regular meeting, everyone should complete the recommended reading for the lecture. When this is not feasible, the recommended book for the lecture should be read by at least one group member, who will share key insights with the group at discussion time.
4. When the group meets, plan for two hours in order to view the video lecture and then discuss the study questions, drawing on insights from the recommended reading. If you find that you cannot cover the material in two hours, consider scheduling a follow-on meeting to complete your processing. In some cases, it may be more practical to ask group members to view the lecture on the C.S. Lewis Institute web site prior to meeting in order to allow more time for discussion.
5. When you meet, seek to clearly understand the study material but avoid the temptation to focus exclusively on the intellectual dimension. Also seek to understand why people hold such views and look for ways to engage them with truth in a gentle, humble and respectful manner. The purpose of apologetics is not only to strengthen our own faith but also to equip us to share it winsomely with those who do not yet believe.

Introduction

Apologetics is being able to give a reasonable defense for the hope that is within you (1 Peter 3:15). The Basic Apologetics Course is designed for those who wish to be better equipped to reach non-believers by giving honest answers to honest questions with gentleness and respect. Obviously, this course cannot cover everything one may wish (or even need) to know, but it does address many of the fundamental questions one encounters today. The converging lines of evidence found in the lectures and readings demonstrate that God exists, that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God. They also counter the major oppos-

ing worldviews we face – atheism and pantheism. The cumulative weight of these reasons for belief will enable you to respond effectively to those who ask you for a reason for the hope within you and will strengthen your personal faith in the process. C.S. Lewis maintained that he believed in Jesus as he believed that the sun is risen, not because he saw it all clearly, but because by it he saw everything else. These lectures will help us see clearly as we seek to engage those around us in a confident and winsome way, understanding their worldview and seeking an opportunity to present our own views in a relevant and compelling way.

Set IV: Responding to New Age and Cults

We face a bewildering array of new religious movements in our culture today. The New Age movement and the new witchcraft – Neopaganism – have exploded on to the scene in the last twenty

years. Numerous cults contend for a hearing, knocking on your door or using the media to gain influence. How can we respond? These lectures will provide help.

Lecture I – Responding to the New Age: Eastern Religion Meets the West

C.S. Lewis said he believed that the two great religious rivalries were between Christianity (as the highest representative of theism) and Pantheism (All is One). The New Age Movement has exploded onto the scene in the West in the last thirty years. Eastern religious philosophy (of various types) has infiltrated many areas of our everyday life. Film series like Star Wars, various holistic health approaches, and transpersonal psychology are just a few places where this view impacts our society. The New Age

book sections in leading bookstores are as large or larger than the Christian book sections. If we fail to understand this growing movement, we will be unable to respond to those affected by it or perhaps even be unaware of how it is affecting us. Even though the New Age Movement has “new” elements, it is really an ancient philosophy. This “All is One” and “You are god” approach goes back to Old Testament paganism.

Study Questions

1. What is the New Age Movement? How can it be defined?
2. Why do we need to know about it?
3. What are some examples of how it has impacted our culture?
4. What is a “psychotechnology”?
5. Why does the “All is One” philosophy have such a difficult time dealing with (distinct) reality?
6. How does the New Age Movement have a greater problem of evil than Christianity?
7. How can Christ’s love shown through believers be a unique witness to those in this movement?

Lecture II – Neopaganism: Responding to the New Witchcraft

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 chaplain-

cies 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.

Study Questions

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?

Lecture III – What is a Cult: Isn’t One Person’s Cult Another’s Religion?

Sometimes cults get very wide exposure. The 900 suicides at “Jonestown” in 1978 are still an object of shock and fascination. The events at the Branch Davidian compound in 1993 at Waco (ending in a massive fire) and the suicides surrounding “Heaven’s Gate” shocked the world. However, unless a family member is affected or we get a knock on the door from Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons, cults often fly under the radar. When we study cults, we see the effects of wrong doctrine and practice in peoples’ lives. It makes us appreciate and hold onto healthy faith and life practices.

It is difficult to define what a cult is because one person’s “cult” is another’s religion. When we use the term, we need to know the standard we are using – whether sociological, theological, or psychological. Many “cults,” such as Mormonism, are desiring to become part of the mainstream or mainline churches. Others, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, want to remain on the outside. How can we evaluate this complex situation? This lecture introduces a way of approaching these issues.

Study Questions

1. What cults have you encountered?
2. What is the sociological definition of a cult? How do cults try to become mainline? Have any succeeded?
3. What is the theological definition of a cult?
4. What is the psychological definition of a cult? How might this (in part) apply to some churches or ministries?
5. What are the central ways cults work?
6. Why are cults the “unpaid bills of the church”?
7. Why is “false-centeredness” such a problem?

Lecture IV – Dealing with Cults: How Can You Respond to Cults?

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.

Study Questions

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?

Lecture V – Argument From Agape: Can Love Lead You to Knowing Christ?

It is well known that love is central in biblical faith. But few are aware that a central argument for Christ and against other world-views such as materialism (atheism) and pantheism (New Age) is the reality and nature of Christ’s love. “Agape” love could be defined as the sacrifice of self in the service of another. There is no basis to motivate or justify this kind of love in materialism (atheism). Richard Dawkins (atheist) author of *The God Delu-*

sion calls agape love a “genetic misfiring” or a “Darwinian mistake.” He also writes about *The Selfish Gene* (the title of one of his books). Darwin maintained that even one act of unselfish love would annihilate his system. Christ’s love and that of many believers after him demonstrate such love. Agape love is utterly unique and acts as a pointer to the truth and reality of Christ’s claims. This lecture develops these themes.

Study Questions

1. How will people know Christ’s true disciples?
2. Why do so many people not know the reality of Christ?
3. Why does pantheism (New Age) necessarily contradict agape love philosophically?
4. Why would the existence of agape love prove materialism (atheism) false?
5. How does the New Testament emphasis on love contrast with Judaism (of Jesus’ day) and with the Greek religion?
6. How does the affirmation “God is love” contrast with other religions throughout history?
7. What’s the biggest difference between the Old Testament view of love and that of the New Testament?

Recommended Readings:

1. *The New Age Rage*, by Karen Hoyt
2. *Wicca’s Charm: Understanding the Spiritual Hunger Behind the Rise of Modern Witchcraft and Pagan Spirituality*, by Catherine Sanders
3. *Unholy Devotion: Why Cults Lure Christians*, by Harold Russell
- Alternate: *A Guide to New Religious Movements*, by Ronald Enroth
4. *The Kingdom of the Cults*, by Walter Martin and Ravi Zacharias
5. *Love, The Ultimate Apologetic: The Heart of Christian Witness*, by Art Lindsley