A Five Week Study in Comparative Religions and Worldviews

Presented by:
Gathering Pointe Church
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Introduction

One may ask, why a series on comparative religions and worldviews? That is a really good question. Never before has our country been a melting pot of not only people groups, but of beliefs and world views. There are varying opinions on who God is or who God is not. To ask 10 people about who God is, or how one gets to heaven, and you are likely to get about 10 different answers. The cultural center of America has shifted away from Christian, or at least Judeo-Christian, morals and attitudes, to post-Christian. Relative thinking, the idea that there is no objective absolute truth and "what's true or right for you isn’t necessarily true or right for me," has captured the imagination of vast numbers of people.

The American Christ-follower often times feels inadequate to defend their faith, to say the least. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 3.15:

"…always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect"

How many of us feel ready to that in our places of work or on our streets?

Your World View

Before we move on too much further, let's take a moment and define what a world view is. A world view is the set of assumptions that make up your personal outlook on the nature of the world and how to live in that world day by day. It is your "set of beliefs about the most important issues in life." Whether you realize it or not or can state it, everyone has a world view. It influences your decisions, emotions, actions and opinions. It defines your answers to life's most pressing questions:

1) Who or what is God? 2) Who am I and how do I operate in my world? 3) How can I tell right from wrong? 4) When it's all over, where do I go? 5) How can I know the truth; for that matter, how can I be sure that I know anything? 6) What does my life mean, and how do I fit into history, if at all?

Our Study

The Apostle Peter wrote to his audience years ago that they should, “…always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..” (1 Peter 3.15). I firmly believe that the church should constantly be helping and equipping each other to “be prepared”. The goal of this study is NOT to bash other people, their faith or belief systems. The goal of this series is to present the difference between Christianity and other religions and worldviews, the goal is to sharpen your perspective on your own biblical worldview. While there is no way to completely look at the

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Christian world view or other competing world views in their fullest forms, we hope to pique your interest in studying not only what we should believe as Christians, but perhaps give you a better understanding of what your co-worker, neighbor, or even family member might believe as well.

We will first give ourselves a plum line. A measuring stick of sorts by talking through the major points of Biblical Christianity. We will make many references to the Bible to define the differences between the basic truths on which Christianity was founded and what other faiths believe. I Corinthians 15.3-4 will serve as our basic foundation.

In the following weeks of Mythbusters, we will examine Islam, the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormonism and Post Modernism. We will try to give you as many resources as possible for your own investigation and study. We will even be putting this series on CD's for you to have for future reference.

The main source of information in the series will come from the classic work of Fritz Ridenour, "So What's the Difference?" At the end of this syllabus, you will find an appendix of other great sources, both books and websites to enhance your study.

Let's get started.
Setting the Plumb Line:

Biblical Christianity

Plumb Line

What is a plumb line? A plumb line—a string with a pointed weight on the end—is still used today by masons to make sure they lay a brick wall straight and true.

In the same way, we will use the Bible to be the plumb line used in our study to define the differences between the basic truths on which Christianity was founded and what other faiths and worldviews believe. We will explore the teachings of the Bible on three key points, all contained in capsule form in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures…

Now, to be sure, there is a lot more to Christianity than just these two verses. However, in these two verses, we will find a tremendous plumb line to compare the worldviews we will be examining in this series.

Out of these three verses, we will explore three key points that separate Biblical Christianity from all other worldviews:

1. The person and work of Christ: who He is and what He did for us.
2. Mankind's major problem: all of us are sinners in rebellion against God and in need of a Savior.
3. The truth and reliability of the Bible: the divine inspiration of Scripture.

The Person and Work of Jesus

Ridenour writes, "By definition, the backbone of Christianity is Christ." Most worldviews will first attack the person of Jesus Christ. They will deny who He was/is (God) and what He did (die for the sins of mankind). If opponents of Christianity can "disprove" who Jesus is and what He did, the very foundation of Biblical Christianity crumbles. As followers of Christ, we must adamantly defend the deity of Christ.

Was Jesus Really God or just a great teacher/man?

While it is true that the Bible never comes out and directly gives us the words "Jesus is God", the biblical record clearly and frequently teaches that Jesus Christ is, in fact, God. For example, in the John 1.1, John refers to Jesus as the "Word" and tells us that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So according to John:

Jesus = the Word and the Word = God, so therefore, Jesus = God.

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3 Ridenour. (pp. 6-7). Kindle Edition.
4 Note: We will discuss John 1.1 in more detail as we look at the section dealing with Jehovah Witnesses.
John will go on to write just a couple of verses later that (John 1.14):

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.

Next, consider what Jesus says about Himself and His equality with God:

- "I and the Father are one" John 10.30
- He tells His disciples, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" John 14.9
- He tells the Pharisees, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" The Pharisees, being excellent Bible students, knew that in Exodus 3:14 God had said to Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." The Pharisees knew that Jesus was claiming to be the God of Israel. They picked up stones and would have tried to kill Him, but He slipped away. John 8.58

So, if Jesus Christ was not who He claimed to be (God), but only a man, then Christianity is a complete fraud and Jesus would have to be the greatest liar of all time liar or the craziest lunatic who ever lived! C. S. Lewis said, "He leaves us no other alternative. He did not intend to."  

Was Jesus really born of a virgin?

Theologian Millard Erickson writes, "After the resurrection, the virgin birth is the most contested event in the life of Jesus Christ." Why is that? Simply because so much is riding on whether Jesus is just a man or fully God…or both! People with an atheistic or naturalistic worldview scoff at this story because they cannot accept miracles or the supernatural. Other people object to the doctrine of the virgin birth on the grounds that it is similar to another legend, like pagan (polytheistic) stories of heroes who were half god, half man. According to theologian Wayne Grudem, "The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person."

There are several crucial passages that deal with the virgin birth of Jesus, here are three:

- Isaiah 7.14 (written hundreds of years before hand)
- Matthew 1
- Luke 1

Did Jesus really have to die for me?

Most religions and cults will acknowledge the problem of sin, but the answer to salvation is to find it through being good, doing good works or keeping a list of rules. The Bible teaches us that salvation and redemption is only found through the death of Christ. Paul writes in Romans 3.23-24:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus…

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There are two words we would like to briefly address here as it relates to Christ's death for our sins:

- **Justification**: When we place our faith and trust in the fact that Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, we are justified, meaning that God's justice has been satisfied through the death of His Son Jesus Christ, and we have been brought into a correct relationship with God. The Bible teaches that there is nothing we can do to earn this justification. Paul writes in Ephesians 2.8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

- **Atonement**: Very simply stated, atonement is the just and obedient suffering of Christ for our sins. Atonement involves both the justice and love of God. God justice demands that a penalty be paid for sin. We should have paid that sin. But this is where God's love comes in; God paid that price. Christ's atonement met four needs we have as sinners: (1) we deserved to die as the penalty of our sin, (2) we deserved to bear God's wrath, (3) we were separated from God, and (4) we were slaves to sin. Jesus paid it all. When Jesus Christ; God incarnate died on the cross, He rendered satisfaction to God's holy standard and paid the penalty for the sin of all mankind.

The importance of Jesus' Resurrection

As previously noted, the resurrection of Jesus is the most contested event surrounding Jesus. In rising from the grave Jesus accomplished the following:

- Proved He was/is God.
- Ensured that all who believe in Him have eternal life. John 1.25-26 As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15.17, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."
- Give us hope, not just for our eternity, but for our now: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness…” 2 Peter 1.3
- He lives today and serves as our Mediator before God I Timothy 2.5

Dr. Wilbur M. Smith, well-known American Bible scholar, "The absolute uniqueness and the supernaturalness of the person of Jesus Christ, and the particular hope which he has brought to men. . . . Remove the truth of resurrection from the New Testament and its whole doctrinal structure collapses, and hope vanishes."

If the Christian's hope is in a dead Christ who was martyred because He threatened the existing religious establishment, then the Christian is in the same boat with the Muslim, the Buddhist and the follower of Confucius. Mohammed is dead. Buddha is dead. Confucius is dead. But the Bible affirms that Christ is alive; and because He lives, the Christian will live also, eternally.

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Mankind's Major Problem

While most people wouldn't be so arrogant to say we are perfect (or even all good), many people would not admit that we are all bad, or evil. That we are somewhere in between. Think of a typical eulogy at a funeral. Someone might get up and say that the deceased was a "great guy", when in fact he hated his in-laws, cheated on his wife, held a 20 year grudge against his neighbor and cheated on his income taxes.

The Bible is extremely clear that all humans are born with a major flaw in our nature...that flaw being sin. Paul writes in Ephesians 2.1 "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." The reason we are sinners, born spiritually dead goes all the way back to the first man, Adam. According to Genesis 1:26, Adam was made in the image of God. He was a free moral agent. Of his own choice, Adam sinned (disobeyed God), and the entire human race was plunged into sin.\(^\text{11}\)

Many people view this is unfair! Why am I held accountable for something that I didn't do? Scripture teaches that we are all descended from Adam, and because we are part of Adam's family (the entire human race), we all have Adam's nature—a sinful heart. Grudem writes, "Every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions; our hearts (the center of our desires in decision-making processes), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies."\(^\text{12}\) But here is the good news: we are redeemable! This is the great news of the Gospel. That God loved us, and sent Jesus to die for us (John 3.16).

Mentioning the dirty "S" word (sin)

We live in a day and age where no one likes to talk about sin. America is now in a post-modern society.\(^\text{13}\) Basically, post-modernism states there is no absolute truth or morals. It is a day of relativism. When Christians speak of sin, we are making the claim that there are absolute morals and truth. That does not fly well within post-modernism. All questions and issues of right and wrong are seen as relative to the situation and or culture, and to each person's personal opinion. Each person must make their own decisions on what is right and wrong, i.e, "Well, that is your opinion, but I believe...". Ridenour makes this observation, "To claim there are absolute truths about right and wrong is viewed as being intolerant, bigoted or judgmental—the three great "sins" of our postmodern secular culture."\(^\text{14}\)

God has shown us how to know what is absolutely wrong and right. In other words, God has defined sin for us and He has done it through two ways:

- **General Revelation.** Paul tells us how this works when he writes in Romans 1.20, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

- **Special Revelation.** The Bible is what we call special revelation. The Bible is full of definitions and examples of what God classifies as sin. Ridenour sums sin as, "proud, independent rebellion against God in active or passive form."\(^\text{15}\)

  - "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness". 1 John 3:4
  - "all wrongdoing is sin"1 John 5:17
  - The Ten Commandments of Exodus 20.
  - We can aptly classify Biblical sin into areas of lust, selfishness, greed, jealousy, pride, indifference and lack of love; just to name a few.

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\(^\text{11}\) Note: See Gen. 3 and Rom. 5: 12-21 for the account and the implications of what is commonly known as the Fall.

\(^\text{12}\) Grudem, "The Doctrine of Inherited Sin," section C in Systematic Theology, pp. 497

\(^\text{13}\) Note: we will be looking at the post-modern mind set in week 5.


The Truth and Reliability of the Bible

None of the previous discussion does any good if the Bible is not true or accurate. For the Bible believing Christian, we believe (must believe) the Bible is the inspired, written word of God. Why is this crucial? Ridenour comments:

If the Bible cannot be trusted to be the inspired Word of God, then its claims concerning the deity of Christ, our sinful state and our need for salvation through faith in Christ's death and resurrection have no force. The biblical Christian recognizes the Old and New Testaments as the only words that come from God Himself—the final authority for faith and practice. For biblical Christians, all claims to authority must be judged according to Scripture.\(^\text{16}\)

Just about all Christians look to the Bible itself to validate its truth claims of being inspired by God. 2 Timothy 3.16 is the classic defense, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God". Perhaps a better translation for "inspiration" is "God-Breathed. In other words, God the Holy Spirit guided or acted on the minds of the authors of Scripture, revealing to them what He wanted written (see also 2 Pet. 1:21).

What kind of proof do we have?

We all want proof don't we? If we are going to be able to defend our truth claim in a post modern culture, we had better be armed with proof. As Christians, we take things by faith (or at least we should) but our faith should not be ignorant. So what can we offer our friends as proof for what we are claiming about the Bible?

- Fulfilled prophecy. Many religious books claim to be divinely inspired, but only the Bible has evidence of supernatural confirmation. The biblical authors made hundreds of specific prophecies of future events that have come to pass in the manner they were predicted. No book in history can compare to the Bible when it comes to the fulfillment of prophecy.
  - The Old Testament contains over 300 references to the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Computations using the science of probability on just 8 of these prophecies show the chance that someone could have fulfilled all 8 prophecies is \(10^{17}\) power, or 1 in 100 quadrillion.\(^\text{17}\)
  - Peter Stoner in Science Speaks illustrates these staggering numbers by supposing that, we take \(10^{17}\) silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state 2 feet deep.\(^\text{18}\)
- Archeological Evidence. While we must never elevate archeology to the point that it becomes the judge for the validity of Scripture, The Bible has proven to be an accurate and trustworthy source of history.
  - Nelson Glueck writes, "It may be clearly stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible."\(^\text{19}\)
  - Dr. William Albright, who is still respected as probably the foremost authority in Middle Eastern archaeology, said this about the Bible: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament."\(^\text{20}\)
  - For an excellent online article on the importance of archeology and the Old Testament, see the note below.\(^\text{21}\)

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• Unity of the Bible. The Bible covers hundreds of topics, yet it does not contradict itself. It remains united in its theme. For example:
  o It was written over a span of fifteen hundred years
  o It was written by more than forty men from every walk of life. For example, Moses was educated in Egypt, Peter was a fisherman, Solomon was a king, Luke was a doctor, Amos was a shepherd, and Matthew was a tax collector.
  o It was written on three different continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Moses wrote in the desert of Sinai, Paul wrote in a prison in Rome, Daniel wrote in exile in Babylon, and Ezra wrote in the ruined city of Jerusalem.
  o It was written under many different circumstances. David wrote during a time of war, Jeremiah wrote at the sorrowful time of Israel’s downfall, Peter wrote while Israel was under Roman domination, and Joshua wrote while invading the land of Canaan.
  o When J. B. Phillips began work on his New Testament in Modern English, he was not predisposed to regard the Bible as verbally inspired (that the very words were God-breathed). But as he worked, he was increasingly amazed at the unity that existed throughout the books of the Bible. He said, "In their different ways and from their different angles, these writers are all talking about the same thing and talking with a certainty as to bring a wonderful envy into a modern heart."22

Does the Bible have errors?

This is a huge question and accusation among critics of Biblical Christianity. The answers to these types of questions are not usually easy to answer. However, take a look at the following chart that compares just the New Testament against famous works and some of their respective works:

![Chart comparing the New Testament to other ancient writings](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4955427/k.3D58/Archaeology_and_the_Old_Testament.htm#text3)

21[http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4955427/k.3D58/Archaeology_and_the_Old_Testament.htm#text3](accessed 9.14.11)

Consider this as well, of the 643 copies of Homer’s work, *Iliad*, the accuracy of those copies is 95%. The bible enjoys a 99.5% accuracy among its 5,366 copies. If the Bible is singled out to be criticized as unreliable then all the other writings listed above must also be discarded.

**Conclusion**

Obviously, we have only scratched the surface of these topics. In fact, I am sure that there were many more questions created. That is a good thing. I will be honest, I don’t know all the answers; none of us can. Many of the answers to your questions are going to require much more attention than the scope of this study. I encourage you to use the other resources listed to begin your own study to the questions you have.

As Ridenour concludes:

> Holding a biblical worldview based on the absolute truth of Scripture can sound like Christians believe they have all the truth. Christians do not claim to possess all the truth because only God knows all the truth perfectly and exhaustively. At best, we can know truth only partially as 1 Corinthians 13:12 clearly teaches. Neither do Christians claim that there is absolutely no truth in non-Christian religions and other worldviews. There are many truths that are common to all people. Nor do Christians claim that they alone are immune from cultural blinders or other errors. Error and foolishness is a common human problem, even among Christians.

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23 if you take that 1/2 of 1% and examine it, you find that the majority of the "problems" are nothing more than spelling errors and very minor word alterations.

A Five Week Study in Comparative Religions and Worldviews

Week 2: Islam

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Introduction

Pop Quiz:
1. Which major religion has gained thousands of converts in North America, including hundreds of professional athletes?
2. is the youngest religion, but one of the largest?
3. is the fastest growing religion?

If you answered Islam, you would be correct (you would also be very observant!).

The second largest religion in the world after Christianity, Islam is also the fastest growing religion. In the United States, for example, nearly 80 percent of the more than 1,200 mosques have been built in the past 12 years.

Islam claims nearly 1 billion followers in countries throughout the world. Islam originated in what is now Saudi Arabia, and from there it expanded along trade routes to Africa and Asia. The country with the most Muslims is Indonesia, with 120 million. In addition, there are millions more in parts of Eastern and Western Europe and in the Americas. One out of every six human beings on the face of the earth subscribes to the faith of Islam.25

In light of recent history, Americans have a very hostile outlook towards the Middle East in general and perhaps Muslims specifically. What comes to your mind when you read the words:
- Islam?
- Middle East?

I would dare say when Americans think of Islam, Muslims or any of the middle Eastern countries, we don't have kind thoughts. We surely don't have love in our hearts for them...nor compassion. After all, they're our enemies aren't they? We should want them taken out right? Eradicated. God should just wipe them off the planet...shouldn't He? The proud American in us could easily want us to go over there and just make a man made lake out of their countries. It's easy to want isn't it? After all, the Muslims want to wipe us out. They are the ones holding to the Islamic teaching of "Kill the infidel" (and by the way, if you're not a Muslim, that does mean you). I mean, we should kill them before they kill us right?

Let us be mindful of Matthew 5.43-48. One of the things that Jesus says is that, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

Love your enemies. God's love and the Gospel isn't just for those living within our borders. It isn't for people that just live under a Republic form of government. It is for all people. Even those who hate us.

Not only should we pray for Muslims, but we should know what it is that they believe so that we can more effectively share the truth of God's Word with them.

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Often times for Americans, there is a deep misunderstanding of the hostility that is in the Middle East right now. For years, American presidents and the American public have been trying to see peace in the Middle East. Presidents and other world leaders have tried over and over again for Israel and other Middle Eastern countries to sign peace treaties. While achieving peace in the Middle East is a right and good thing to pray for and work towards, the often simple forms of a "Western" peace treaty completely miss the mark and reveal a misunderstanding of what is at the core of the conflict, specifically around the land that is now occupied by Israel.

There is an explicit biblical explanation for this animosity, it goes all the way back to Abraham. The Jews are descendants of Abraham’s son Isaac. The Arabs\(^{26}\) are descendants of Abraham’s son Ishmael. With Ishmael being the son of a slave woman (Genesis 16:1-16) and Isaac being the promised son who would inherit the blessings of Abraham (Genesis 21:1-3), obviously there would be some animosity between the two sons. As a result of Ishmael’s mocking Isaac (Genesis 21:9), Sarah talked Abraham into sending Hagar and Ishmael away (Genesis 21:11-21). Likely, this caused even more contempt in Ishmael’s heart towards Isaac. An angel prophesied to Hagar that Ishmael would “live in hostility toward all his brothers” (Genesis 16:11-12).

The religion of Islam, to which a majority of Arabs are adherents, has made this hostility more profound. The Qur'an contains somewhat contradictory instructions for Muslims regarding Jews. At one point it instructs Muslims to treat Jews as brothers and at another point commands Muslims to attack Jews who refuse to convert to Islam. The Qur'an also introduces a conflict as to which son of Abraham was truly the son of promise. The Hebrew Scriptures say it was Isaac. The Qur'an says it was Ishmael. The Qur'an teaches that it was Ishmael whom Abraham almost sacrificed to the Lord, not Isaac (in contradiction to Genesis chapter 22). This debate over who was the son of promise contributes to the hostility today.

Islam's Prophet, Mohammed

Islam as a religion can be traced to their prophet, Muhammad, who lived from about 570-632 AD. He was a trader from the Arabian city of Mecca (or Makkah, in west-central Saudi Arabia) who grew increasingly spiritual in his adulthood. At the age of 40 he was on a retreat in a cave outside Mecca when he received his first revelation as the angel Gabriel (or Jibreel) appeared to him. Muhammad received a number of revelations, and three years after these began he began preaching to the locals, who were mostly polytheistic and kept idols for worship. Muhammad preached that there is only one God (Allah), that there was to be no idolatry, that there was to be complete submission to God in all of life. Because of his revelations, Muhammad was considered a prophet, and came to be thought of as the last and greatest of the line of prophets. The religion revealed to Muhammad was thought of as a restoration of the true religion which had come through the Jews and Christians, but the Jews and Christians had corrupted the holy books as well as the message. Therefore the great characters of the Bible, such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and even Jesus, are revered by Islam as prophets of God that taught the true way of Islam.

After Muhammad began preaching, he was not well received by the residents of Mecca. He and his small but growing band of followers were treated badly and basically run out of town. In 622 Muhammad took his followers to Medina, about 280 miles to the north, an emigration that is called “hijra,” (pronounced hij-ruh) marked by Muslims as the beginning of their calendar (Muslims follow a 12 month lunar calendar of 354 days; this is currently the Muslim year 1431 AH, or “al-hijra”). In Medina, Muhammad became a leader of

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\(^{26}\) Note: it is important to understand that not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs, that not all Arabs hate Jews, not all Muslims hate Jews, and not all Jews hate Arabs and Muslims. We must be careful to avoid stereotyping people. However, generally speaking, Arabs and Muslims have a dislike of and distrust for Jews, and vice-versa.
note, uniting various warring tribes and growing thousands of adherents to his religious way. They continued to fight with the Meccan tribes, until finally Muhammad was returned to Mecca victorious, having united most of the Arabian peninsula under his new religion and law before he died.

Muhammad continued to receive revelations throughout his life, and these were written down by his closest followers. These written revelations were collected into the Qur'an (or Koran), the holiest book of Islam.

**The Writings of Islam**

**The Qur'an**

Muslim tradition states that the angel Gabriel visited Muhammad and gave him the words directly from Allah. These words were Allah's words of wisdom, truth, and commandments to His creation. The Quran is divided into 114 suras, which are somewhat like chapters. In general, the longest chapters are at the front of the Quran, and the briefest at the end. Each sura bears a title, often from key statements or themes that catch attention or open the sura. Each sura is divided into ayat, which are brief, like verses. Mohammed dictated parts of the Qur'an, while the rest came from the writings of disciples who remembered his oral teachings after he died. Muslims claim that it is copied from an original in Arabic, which is in heaven.

**The Sunnah (soo n-uh) and the Hadith (hah-deeth)**

In addition to the Qur'an, Mohammed developed important teachings and sayings called Sunnah (literally, "path"). The Sunnah became a base for traditions built on Mohammed's conduct as a prophet and how he handled things while being guide, judge and ruler of his Muslim followers. The Sunnah were gathered into one body of work called the Hadith, which supplements the Qur'an in the same way the Talmud supplements the Hebrew Bible in Judaism.

**The Shariah (shah-ree-ah)**

Still another important body of teachings in Islam is the Shariah. The Shariah is a combination of legal interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Shariah means "law," and it lays down a strict and comprehensive guide of life and conduct for Muslims. It includes prohibitions against eating pork and drinking alcoholic beverages, as well as punishments for stealing, adultery, apostasy (denying Islam) and blasphemy (saying anything derogatory about Islam or Mohammed).

**The Teachings of Islam**

**Six Crucial Doctrines**

Following are the doctrines that every Muslim is required to believe:

1. God. There is only one true God and His name is Allah. Allah is all-seeing, all-knowing and all-powerful.

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27 This is the title for the codification of the Jewish Oral Tradition. In short, it is the collective wisdom of the Jewish teachers through the years.
2. **Angels.** The chief angel is Gabriel, who is said to have appeared to Mohammed. There is also a fallen angel named Shaitan (from the Hebrew "Satan"), as well as the followers of Shaitan, the jinns (demons).

3. **Scripture.** Muslims believe in four God-inspired books: the Torah of Moses (what Christians call the Pentateuch), the Zabur (Psalms of David), the Injil (Gospel) of Jesus, and the Qur'an. But, because Muslims believe that Jews and Christians corrupted their Scriptures, the Qur'an is Allah's final word to mankind. It supersedes and overrules all previous writings.

4. **Mohammed.** The Qur'an lists 28 prophets of Allah. These include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah and Jesus. To the Muslim, the last and greatest prophet is Mohammed.

5. **The end times.** On the "last day," the dead will be resurrected. Allah will be the judge, and each person will be sent to heaven or hell. Heaven is a place of sensual pleasure. Hell is for those who oppose Allah and his prophet Mohammed.

6. **Predestination.** Allah has determined what He pleases, and no one can change what He has decreed (also known as kismet, the doctrine of fate). From this doctrine comes the most common Islamic phrase, "If it is Allah's will."

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**The Five Pillars of Islam**

1. **Shahada (shah-hah-duh)**

   - The Shahada is the Islamic proclamation that "There is no true God except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."
   - This is the confession that Allah is the one and only true God, that Allah alone is worthy of worship, that Allah alone is the sovereign lord who does what he wills with whoever he wills. It means that all his rules and laws found in the Koran are to be followed. It means that the Christian doctrine of God as a Trinity is false as are all other belief systems including pantheism.
   - Muhammad is the true and greatest prophet of Allah and recognition of Muhammad as the Prophet of God is required. It was through Muhammad that Allah conveyed the last and final revelation.

2. **Prayer (Salat)**

   - Prayer involves confession of sins which begins with the purification of the body and ends with the purification of the soul. Prayer is performed five times a day. The first prayer is at dawn and the last at sunset.
   - The names of the prayers are Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, Isha. The Maghrib prayer is the sunset prayer. Isha is the prayer that is said after sunset. There is also a prayer that is said right after Fajr known as Shurooq.

3. **Fasting (Saum)**

   - The month of Ramadan is the month of fasting in Islam. It is an act of worship where the faithful follower denies his own needs and seeks Allah. Usually, this fasting entails no drinking, eating, or sexual relations during the daylight hours for the entire month of Ramadan.
4. Alms-giving or charity (Zakat)

- Charity given to the poor. It benefits the poor and it helps the giver by moving him towards more holiness and submission to Allah. Alms-giving is considered a form of worship to God.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj)

- This is the pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims, if they are able, are to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. If the pilgrimage is too difficult or dangerous for the believer, he can send someone in his place. It involves financial sacrifice and is an act of worship. Muslims must make the pilgrimage the first half of the last month of the lunar year.

Summing up the major differences

- **Regarding God:** Muslims believe there is no God but Allah; Christians believe that God is revealed in Scripture as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons who are coeternally God (see Mart. 3:13-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

- **Regarding Jesus Christ:** Muslims believe that Jesus was only a man, a prophet below Mohammed in importance, who did not die for man's sins; Christians say Christ is the Son of God, the sinless Redeemer who died and rose again for sinful man (see John 1:13,14; 1 Pet. 3:18).

- **Regarding sin:** Muslims claim that humans are born with hearts that are clean slates. If they commit sins, these can be overcome by acts of the will; Christians counter that we are born corrupted by sin, spiritually dead apart from God's grace, and that no one does good apart from faith (see Rom. 3:12; Eph. 5:8-10).

- **Regarding salvation:** Muslims say that Allah does not love those who do wrong, and each person must earn his or her own salvation; Christians contend that a loving God sent His Son to die for our sins, according to the inspired Word (see Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3,4).

Comparison grid between Christianity and Islam doctrine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Islam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>Christians will be with the Lord in heaven (Phil. 1:21-24), in our resurrected bodies (1 Cor. 15:50-58). Non-Christians will be cast into hell forever (Matt. 25:46).</td>
<td>There is an afterlife (75:12) experienced as either an ideal life of Paradise (29:64), for faithful Muslims or Hell for those who are not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Created beings, non-human, some of which, fell into sin and became evil. They are very powerful. The unfallen angels carry out the will of God.</td>
<td>Created beings without free will that serve God. Angels were created from light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atonement</td>
<td>The sacrifice of Christ on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24) whereby His blood becomes the</td>
<td>There is no atonement work in Islam other than a sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God</strong> (1 John 2:2) from the sinner when the sinner receives (John 1:12), by faith (Rom. 5:1), the work of Christ on the cross.</td>
<td>confession of sin and repentance by the sinner.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bible</strong></td>
<td>The inspired and inerrant word of God in the original manuscripts (2 Tim. 3:16).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crucifixion</strong></td>
<td>The place where Jesus atoned for the sins of the world. It is only through this sacrifice that anyone can be saved from the wrath of God (1 Pet. 2:24).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Devil</strong></td>
<td>A fallen Angel who opposes God in all ways. He also seeks to destroy humanity (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:13-15).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>God</strong></td>
<td>God is a trinity of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not three gods in one god, nor is it one person who took three forms. Trinitarianism is strictly monotheistic. There is no other God in existence. God is known as Allah. Allah is one person, a strict unity. There is no other God in existence. He is the creator of the universe (3:191), sovereign over all (6:61-62).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heaven (Paradise)</strong></td>
<td>The place where God dwells. Heaven is the eventual home of the Christians who are saved by God's grace. It is heaven because it is where God is and Christians will enjoy eternal Fellowship with Him. Paradise to Muslims, a place of unimaginable bliss (32:17), a garden with trees and food (13:35; 15:45-48) where the desires of faithful Muslims are met, (3:133; 9:38; 13:35; 39:34; 43:71; 53:13-15).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hell</strong></td>
<td>A place of torment in fire out of the presence of God. There is no escape from Hell (Matt. 25:46). Hell is a place of eternal punishment and torment (14:17; 25:65; 39:26), in fire (104:6-7) for those who are not Muslims (3:131) as well as those who were and whose works and faith were not sufficient (14:17; 25:65; 104:6-7).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holy Spirit</strong></td>
<td>Third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is fully God in nature. The arch-angel Gabriel who delivered the words of the Koran to Muhammad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus</strong></td>
<td>Second person of the Trinity. He is the word who became flesh (John 1:1, 14). He is both God and man (Col. 2:9). A very great prophet, second only to Muhammad. Jesus is not the son of God (9:30) and certainly is not divine (5:17, 75) and he was not crucified (4:157).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Judgment Day** | Occurs on the day of resurrection (John 12:48) where God will judge all people. Occurs on the day of resurrection where God will
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>go to heaven. All others to hell (Matt. 25:46).</td>
<td>judge all people. Muslims go to paradise (3:142, 183-185, 198). All others to hell (3:196-197). Judgment is based on a person's deeds (5:9; 42:26; 8:29).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Koran</td>
<td>The work of Muhammad. It is not inspired, nor is it scripture. There is no verification for its accurate transmission from the originals.</td>
<td>The final revelation of God to all of mankind given through the archangel Gabriel to Muhammad over a 23 year period. It is without error and guarded from error by Allah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). This does not mean that God has a body, but that man is made like God in abilities (reason, faith, love, etc.).</td>
<td>Not made in the image of God (42:11). Man is made out of the dust of the earth (23:12) and Allah breathed life into man (32:9; 15:29).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad</td>
<td>A non-inspired man born in 570 in Mecca who started the Islamic religion.</td>
<td>The last and greatest of all prophets of Allah whose Qur'an is the greatest of all inspired books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Sin</td>
<td>This is a term used to describe the effect of Adam's sin on his descendants (Rom. 5:12-23). Specifically, it is our inheritance of a sinful nature from Adam. The sinful nature originated with Adam and is passed down from parent to child. We are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3).</td>
<td>There is no original sin. All people are sinless until they rebel against God. They do not have sinful natures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurrection</td>
<td>Bodily resurrection of all people, non-Christians to damnation and Christians are resurrected to eternal life (1 Cor. 15:50-58).</td>
<td>Bodily resurrection, some to heaven, some to hell (3:77; 15:25; 75:36-40; 22:6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation</td>
<td>A free gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9) to the person who trusts in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. He is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). No works are sufficient in any way to merit salvation since our works are all unacceptable to God (Isaiah 64:6).</td>
<td>Forgiveness of sins is obtained by Allah's grace without a mediator. The Muslim must believe Allah exists, believe in the fundamental doctrines of Islam, believe that Muhammad is his prophet, and follow the commands of Allah given in the Koran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son of God</td>
<td>A term used to designate that Jesus is divine though he is not the literal son of God in a physical sense (John 5:18).</td>
<td>A literal son of God. Therefore, Jesus cannot be the son of Allah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>One God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit</td>
<td>The Father, Jesus, and Mary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Five Week Study in Comparative Religions and Worldviews

Week 3: Cults - Jehovah Witnesses

Presented by:
Gathering Pointe Church
October, 2011
Discussing Cults

Before we get into the specific belief systems of the Jehovah Witnesses, we need to take a brief moment and discuss what we mean when we use the term 'cult'. In a post modern culture as we find ourselves in\textsuperscript{32}, which puts such a premium on tolerance, the label 'cult' can be viewed as insensitive, arrogant name calling. Often times when we use the word 'cult' it conjures thoughts and images of mindless, brainwashed weirdoes who end their lives by drinking the kool-aid. That is not our intent here.

So what do we mean when we use the term 'cult'? Webster defines the term cult as, "a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious". In other words, cults are organizations or groups which we do not believe hold to orthodox (biblical) Christian views. The term 'cult' is not intended to be derogatory but only a way to recognize the difference between biblical Christianity and the beliefs that other groups may hold.\textsuperscript{33}

Major Characteristics of Cults\textsuperscript{34}

- There are several characteristics of all major cults. The first is that they reject the Trinity; that is, they disbelieve in Jesus Christ as God. Cults may say good things about Jesus and assign Him a certain position of importance, but they almost always attack or undermine the true biblical deity of Jesus Christ, either lowering Him to the level of man or raising man to His level.
- Second, cultists usually believe that all Christian churches are wrong and that their group has the only real truth about God.
- Third, they claim to believe the Bible but they distort its teachings to suit their own peculiar view of mankind, God, the Holy Spirit, heaven and hell, salvation and many other doctrines. They usually find the source of these peculiar beliefs in their leaders, who claim to have new interpretations of the Bible or even valuable additions to it.
- A fourth point is that all cults deny that people can be saved by faith in Christ alone. They teach their members that they can make themselves right with God through good works and through obedience to the doctrines and requirements the cult has set down as "God's will" for their lives.
- Fifth, cults are skillful at using Christian terminology, but they are not talking the same language as biblical Christians. Beware of the semantics barrier. Commonly understood words like "God," "Christ," "faith," "sin," "salvation," etc., mean entirely different things to a cultist and a Christian. The first task, then, when sharing your faith with someone who seems to have different ideas, is to define terms.
- Lastly, cults seems to offer practical solutions to problems like loneliness, spiritual emptiness and the desire to find a way to please God by serving Him faithfully. However, the fellowship in many cults is conditional - that is, you must stay in line. Express even the smallest deviation in doctrine and you usually will be rejected, shunned or expelled.

As we conclude this brief into on cults, Ridenour offers some great advice:

> As you learn about these various groups, be aware that your first line of defense against their lure and attractiveness is to know God's Word and be able to "test all things" with biblical truth (see 1 Thess. 5:21,22; 2 Tim. 2:4-16). Only by knowing the real difference between what you believe and what certain cultists believe can you reach out to them with the all-fulfilling truth and power of the gospel.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Note: post modernism will be defined and discussed in week five.

\textsuperscript{33} Ridenour. So What's the Difference? (p.11). Kindle Edition

\textsuperscript{34} Ridenour. So What's the Difference? (pp. 111-112). Kindle Edition.

Jehovah's Witnesses
There is no Hell, Hard Work Earns Paradise

An Overview

Chances are, you have been visited by a Jehovah's Witness (hereafter referred to as JWs) at your home...or at least you have had them knock on your door. JWs are widely known for their aggressive door to door evangelism program. The amount of time JWs spend "preaching" (going door-to-door or standing in front of restaurants and other public places sharing literature) is staggering. In 1998, JWs spent almost 183,000,000 hours preaching in the United States alone. Total hours worldwide were almost 1.2 billion.\(^{36}\)

The Watchtower Organization

The Watchtower organization is the guide, the teacher, and the expounder of correct doctrine. The average JW attends several meetings each week where he is repeatedly indoctrinated to believe Watchtower doctrines. Every JW thinks very much alike and has the same standard answers because they read from the same sources and are conditioned into the same way of thinking: the Watchtower way.\(^{37}\)

The JWs are totally convinced by Watchtower headquarters that all those who disagree with them—particularly biblical Christians—are not only wrong but are mortal enemies who will finally be destroyed by Jehovah at the great battle of Armageddon, which is yet to come.

The Watchtower organization believes that it alone is God's organization for the earth and mankind; not the Church:

> It should be expected that the Lord would have a means of communication to his people on the earth, and he has clearly shown that the magazine called The Watchtower is used for that purpose. (1939 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, p. 85).

The Watchtower also claims that they are the only way to really understand the Bible. Ridenour observes, "JWs are tightly controlled by Watchtower headquarters and are constantly told they cannot interpret the Bible for themselves in any way; they must avoid independent thinking; they are never to question the counsel provided by the Watchtower."\(^{38}\)

> "Thus the Bible is an organizational book and belongs to the Christian congregation as an organization, not to individuals, regardless of how sincerely they may believe that they can interpret the Bible," (Watchtower, Oct. 1, 1967, p. 587).

A Brief History

The JWs history is actually anything but brief, but we will try to condense it as much as possible.

- Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). As a teenager, Russell rejected many of the views taught in his Congregational church, particularly the doctrines of hell and the Trinity, which struck him as unreasonable. By the time he was 18, Russell formed his own Bible study and began developing his own system of theology, emphasizing the second coming of Christ, which he had predicted would happen in 1874. When it didn't happen, Russell was further influenced by some Adventists who

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decided that Christ's coming had happened in a "spiritual and invisible way" in 1874. In 1879, Russell parted company with the Adventists and launched his own magazine, eventually known as The Watchtower. Financing the magazine and the spread of his movement with personal income from his profitable men's clothing business, Russell set 1914 as the year of the battle of Armageddon when God would destroy all present governments of the earth, end "Gentile times" and establish His kingdom.

By 1896, Russell had founded the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. In 1908, he moved his headquarters from Pennsylvania to New York City, and the Watchtower organization soon owned entire blocks in Brooklyn. Watchtower headquarters are still in Brooklyn today, where it owns a huge up-to-date printing plant, a modern apartment building, offices, a Bible school and other enterprises.

When World War I started in 1914, Russell claimed that it was the "beginning of Armageddon." But Armageddon never happened that year, or even the next. Russell died in 1916, a failed Watchtower prophet, but he would not be the last.

- Joseph F. Rutherford (1869-1942). Rutherford was a lawyer who became JWs president in 1917. He set 1925 as the new date for Armageddon, which was widely advertised across the nation, particularly in The Watchtower, as being not of man but of God and "absolutely and unqualifiedly correct. When 1925 came and went without Armageddon, the WTBTS and Rutherford backed away from his prediction, claiming that he had been "misunderstood" by JW faithful who had "erroneously" anticipated the end, which wasn't what the Lord had stated at all. Rutherford is credited for the door-to-door visitation program for which JWs are famous. As president of WTBTS, one of Rutherford's main goals was to increase membership, which he attempted to do by spreading the word that only 144,000 people were going to make it to heaven. Throughout the 1920s, JW's preached This message from door-to-door, but as the 1930s arrived, Rutherford and the Watchtower had a real problem. The ranks were tilling fast, Armageddon still had not happened, and soon there would be more than 144,000 members in the Watchtower organization. Rutherford then announced that everyone who had become a JW before 1935 would go to heaven (the "little flock"), while everyone who became a JW after 1935 would be among the "great crowd" who would not go to heaven but could look forward to living on Earth in a new paradise after Armageddon and the Millennium.

- Nathan Knorr (1905-1977). Under Knorr, the Watchtower, released a book entitled "The Truth Shall Make You Free", which was the first step in coming up with a new dating system teaching that Jesus had not returned invisibly in 1874, as Russell had taught. The new Watchtower revelation taught that Christ had returned invisibly in 1914; and, in accordance with Matthew 24:34, the generation that had been alive in 1914 would not "pass away" before Armageddon would occur. As the years went by with no Armageddon, Knott- and the Watchtower did some shuffling of the 6,000 years of history concept that originally had been taught by Charles Russell. According to Russell, the 6,000 years were supposed to have ended in the 1870s with Christ's return, followed by Armageddon. When this didn't happen, Russell revised his thinking to say that Christ had returned invisibly and the 6,000 years of human history would end in 1914. The new system installed during Knorr's presidency taught that the latest-and certainly the "absolutely final"-date for Armageddon would be 1975. The year 1975 arrived, but Armageddon did not. Although he joined Rutherford and Russell as a failed prophet, Knorr's presidency was, nonetheless, marked by a strong emphasis on training and education, as well as increases in world mission work and individual evangelism. Despite the reversals of 1975 and huge defections from the ranks, when Knorr died in 1977 there were still over 2 million active JWs around the world.
Frederick Franz (1893-1992). Touted as the Watchtower's most "knowledgeable" Hebrew scholar, Franz suffered the same fate during a court trial as did Charles Russell. In Franz's case, he had to confess he could not cast a simple Bible verse (Gen. 2:4) back into Hebrew, even though he claimed he was knowledgeable in Greek and Hebrew, as well as many other languages." During his term as president, Franz refrained from setting any more specific dates, but he steadfastly taught that persons alive during 1914 would definitely experience Armageddon. Franz died in 1992 at the age of 99, and JW's were running out of time and people who had been alive in 1914.

Milton G. Henschel (1920-2003). The JW's solved the generational issue by discarding the entire 1914 generation prophecy by producing more new light" (a favorite JW term to explain its many changes in doctrine and teachings). An article in The Watchtower explained that the word "generation" had nothing to do with individuals who had been alive in 1914; now it simply applied to all people of the earth in any generation who would see the signs of Christ's coming but "fail to mend their ways".

The Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses

JW's Deny the Trinity

JW's call the doctrine of the Trinity as an insult to "God-given intelligence and reason." And, because God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), they reason that He would never author such a confusing doctrine; Satan is the author instead. JW's love to point out that the word "Trinity" is not in the Bible, and this adds to the "unbiblical" nature of the term.

"Never was there a more deceptive doctrine advanced than that of the trinity" (Reconciliation, 1928)

"...sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God" (Let God Be True, 1946)

"Satan is the originator of the trinity doctrine" (Ibid.)

JW's Deny the Deity of Christ

A natural outgrowth of the denial of the Trinity by JW's is their denial of Christ's deity. It is not that they do not give Christ "honor." That they do, but they damn Him with faint praise. In fact, JW's teach a kind of polytheism with their doctrine of "two gods." They say Jehovah is the Almighty God who created Jesus. Following the teachings of Charles Russell, JW's say Jesus Christ had been the archangel Michael in heaven before He came to Earth:

The Son of God was known as Michael before he came to earth" (Reasoning from the Scriptures, p. 218).

Jesus was an angel who became a man (Watchtower, 5/15/63, p 307).

He was just a man, however -- not God in the flesh (Reasoning from the Scriptures, 1985, p 306).

Michael supposedly gave up his "godlike" characteristics, leaving only his "life force." Jehovah then placed the "life force" of Michael in the womb of the virgin Mary so Jesus could be born a human being. According to JW's, while on Earth, Jesus was a perfect man but nothing more than that. After dying on the Cross, His
humanity was annihilated; then He was raised as an immortal spirit who returned to heaven to become once again the archangel Michael.\footnote{James Bjornstad, Counterfeits at Your Door. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), pp. 66, 67.}

In regards to Christ's deity, JWs use John 1.1 as a text proof to assert that Jesus was not \textit{God}, but a \textit{god}. As Biblical Christians, we must understand the importance of how this verse is translated, or in this case, mistranslated.

In the JW version of the Bible\footnote{Note: The JWs Bible is called, "The New World Translation"}, John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was \textit{a god}" [emphasis added].

In our Christian Bibles, John 1.1. says, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was \textit{God}" [emphasis added].

In the Greek, John 1.1 does not include the definite article "the" before the phrase, "and the Word was God". The JWs claim, that if John wanted us to believe that the Word (Jesus) was truly God, then the definite article would be there. In other words, "and the Word was \textit{the God}". Since there is no definite article, JWs claim that Jesus was merely a god.

As apologetic Norman Geisler points out, "The absence of the definite article "the" does not indicate that this verse should be translated, "the Word was a god". The grammatical construction with out the definite article means, "the Word was the essence of God", which is a strong way to describe His deity."\footnote{Norman Geisler, Christian Apologetics. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), p338.}

The misconception of JWs is that there are only two possibilities to translate nouns without an article, either it is indefinite or definite. However, that is not the case. There is a third option to consider, and that is the anarthrous (without an article) noun is qualitative\footnote{Note: JW's will often misquote a Greek rule called "Colwell's Rule" which should be better understood as "Colwell's Construction which states, "An anarthrous preverbal PN is normally qualitative, sometimes indefinite, and only rarely indefinite" See Daniel Wallace footnote 43 (p.117).}, which emphasizes the nature of Jesus, rather than His identity. As world renowned Greek grammmarian Daniel Wallace writes:

Such an option does not at all impugn the deity of Christ. Rather, it stresses that, although the person of Christ is not the person of the Father, their \textit{essence} is identical. The idea of the qualitative [noun, God] here is that the Word had all the attributes and qualities that "the God of [John 1.1b] had. In other words, he shared the \textit{essence} of the Father, though they differed in person. \textit{The construction [that John] chose to express this idea was the most concise way he could have stated that the Word was God and yet was distinct from the Father}. (author's emphasis)\footnote{Daniel B. Wallace, The Basics of New Testament Greek Syntax, The Abridgement of \textit{Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics}. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 120.}
Summing up major differences

While much more could be said in detail about the major differences between Jehovah's Witnesses and Biblical Christianity, Ridenour summarizes the following:

- **Regarding authority**: JWs may do no independent thinking and trust absolutely adhere to the decisions and scriptural understanding of the Watchtower Society. Christians depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they read the Scriptures and learn to obey God, not man (see Acts 5:29; 17:11; 1 John 2:26,27).

- **Regarding the Trinity, Christ's deity and the Resurrection**: JWs find it difficult to worship "a three-headed God. They call Jesus a "mighty god," but not the Almighty God-Jehovah;" they say Jesus was raised from the grave, "not a human creature but a spirit." Christians believe that God is three coequal, coeternal Persons who exist as one divine Being (see Matt. 3:13-17; 2 Cor. 13:14). Christ is divine, the second person of the Trinity, and equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit (see John 1:1; Col. 1:15-19; Phil. 2:5-11). Christ rose bodily from the grave, was touched by His disciples and ate before them (see John 20:24-29; Luke 24:36-43).

- **Regarding salvation**: JWs say Christ's death provides the opportunity for men and women to work for their salvation; Christians believe that Christ's death completely paid for all mankind's sins and that believers are justified freely by God's grace through redemption in Christ (see Rom. 3:24,25; 5:12-19; 1 Pet. 2:24).

- **Regarding Christ's return and man's immortality**: JWs believe that Christ returned to Earth invisibly in 1914 and now rules from heaven, "no longer visible to human sight." They claim that man does not have an immortal soul; and at death man's spirit (life force) goes out and "no longer exists." Christians believe that Christ will return to Earth physically, visibly and audibly (see 1 Thess. 4:1-17) and that man has an eternal, immortal soul (i.e., spirit) that, at death, either goes to be with Christ (see Luke 23:46; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:22,23) or awaits judgment (see John 5:24-30).

For Witnessing to JW's, see your CD

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A Five Week Study in Comparative Religions and Worldviews

Week 4: Cults - Mormons

Presented by:
Gathering Pointe Church
October, 2011
An Overview

The fastest growing and most successful cult in the history of the United States, and perhaps the world, is the Mormons, officially known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). Increasing at an average rate of 300,000 converts a year (as many as 75 percent of whom may be former Protestants), membership in the Mormon Church reached 10.6 million worldwide in 1999.

In their multimillion dollar promotion program, as well as their practice, the Mormons create a highly attractive and admirable facade that communicates caring, a strong emphasis on building the family, clean living and a commitment to Christ that would appear to outdo many Christians in evangelical churches.

Why, then, refer to them as a cult? Mormons strongly insist they do not fit the definition of a cult and claim they are bona fide Christians who believe in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost and in the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first difference to grasp between the Mormon Church and biblical Christianity is one of semantics. The Mormons use but have redefined many key terms employed by evangelical Christians (a definitive sign of a cult). Analysis of Mormon views, past and present, reveals that they dismiss, twist, change or add to all biblical doctrines, particularly revelation, the Trinity and salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

In recent years, some Mormon scholars and leaders have taken positions that seem to refute what Mormon prophets, apostles and other leaders clearly taught during the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth. This "later viewpoint" insists that Mormons and evangelicals are far closer in doctrine than they might think and that anti-Mormon views expressed over the years are all wrong about what LDS believe.

A Brief History

Joseph Smith. The story of Mormonism started when a 14-year-old boy named Joseph Smith, Jr., had a vision in which two personages-whom he believed to be the Father and the Son—appeared before him. He asked them which Christian denomination he should join and they told him to join none of them because they were all "wrong and corrupt."

In 1823, Smith, then 17, saw the angel Moroni appear at his bedside and tell him of a book written on golden plates by former inhabitants of the continent that would contain "the fullness of the everlasting gospel." Four years later, Smith dug up the plates and began translating their "Reformed Egyptian" writing with the help of two special stones called "Urim" and "Thummim."

By 1830, Smith had published the BOM and had founded the Mormon Church, which grew quite rapidly. From 1831 to 1844, Smith established Mormon strongholds in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois. Wherever they went, the Mormons drew hostility and persecution, either because non-Mormons did not trust Smith or they were suspicious of Mormon teachings and practices. At times, Mormons were treated horrifically. At one point, the Missouri militia slaughtered, raped and pillaged Mormon believers, obeying an "extermination" order issued by the governor.

From the early 1830s to the early 1840s, Smith continued to receive revelations that guided him in where to go and what to do next, as well as how to establish new and different doctrines. The first edition of the compilation of these revelations—65 chapters—was published in 1833 under the title Book of Commandments (BOM). By 1835, a second edition was released under the new title Doctrine and Covenants (DC), which would become "inspired Scripture" alongside the BOM.

By 1838, the Mormons had been driven completely from Missouri into Illinois, where Smith led in the development of the thriving city of Nauvoo. It was here that he came up with revelations concerning the Godhead, origin and destiny of the human race, eternal progression, baptism for the dead, plural marriage (polygamy) and sacred temple ordinances. Smith’s revelation regarding polygamy was released on August 12, 1843, and included a threat that Smith’s first wife, Emma, would be “destroyed” if she resisted the idea.

**Brigham Young.** Following Joseph Smith’s death, Brigham Young won a power struggle for leadership and led a large number of LDS west, where they settled in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in 1847. Under Young, polygamy became a formal practice of the church, and he himself had 20 wives and fathered 57 children. But not all Mormons followed Young west. A significant minority, headed by Smith’s wife Emma and his son Joseph III, remained in Missouri and Illinois and formed the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, headquartered today in Independence, Missouri. Many other Mormon splinter groups also survived, and some still exist. The Mormons officially practiced polygamy until 1890. Due to increasing enforcement of a federal law against polygamy, which included fines and imprisonment, Wilford Woodruff, fourth president/prophet, rescinded polygamy as a practice (but not as a doctrine) out of practical necessity. Government pressure threatened the very existence of all Mormon temples, and polygamy had been a chief reason Utah had been denied statehood at least six times.

As the Mormon Church headed into the twentieth century, with polygamy rescinded and statehood gained, a more positive public image was sought in order to gain more converts. A new strategy, designed to blend the Mormon Church with mainstream Christianity, claimed, "Mormonism is Christianity; Christianity is Mormonism; they are one and the same."47

**Mormon Writings**

The Book Of Mormon. The Book of Mormon claims to be history of "the period from 600 BC to 421 AD during which the Nephite, Lamanite, and Mulekite civilizations flourished."48 It is also believed by the Mormon Church that these civilizations were descendants of Lehi, a Jew who led a colony of people from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BC.

According to Bruce R. McConkie, a Mormon scholar, the Book of Mormon has three purposes49:

1. To bear record of Christ and clarify his Divine Sonship and mission, proving that he is the Redeemer and Savior;
2. To teach the doctrines of the gospel in such a perfect way that the plan of salvation will be clearly revealed;
3. To stand as a witness that Joseph Smith was the Lord’s anointed through whom the latter-day work of restoration would be accomplished. (According to the Mormon Church, Christianity was corrupted after the death of the last apostle and Joseph Smith was anointed by God to restore the true church.)

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48 McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 98.
49http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217687/k.CCBF/Mormon_Beliefs_about_Prophecy_Heavenand_Celestial_Marriage.htm#text1
According to Russ White:

The underlying problem with the Book of Mormon is that there is absolutely no objective, external evidence for much of the information found in the book. And the information that is trustworthy was plagiarized right out of the King James Bible. Beyond the fact that the Book of Mormon cannot be verified externally, the potential convert is told that the Smithsonian Institution uses the Book of Mormon to aid its archaeological work. However, in a letter referring to this Mormon claim, the Smithsonian Institution Department of Anthropology states: "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archaeologists see no connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book."

Despite its numerous problems, Smith claimed the BOM to be the most correct of any book on the earth. The LDS firmly maintain the Book of Mormon is the inspired Word of God and they make this same claim for Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price, two other books produced for the most part by Joseph Smith.

**Doctrines and Covenants.** Although Joseph Smith claimed that the BOM was the most complete book on Earth and that it contains "the fullness of the gospel," he added 13 key Mormon doctrines in DC that aren't found anywhere in the BOM. Among these new revelations were: plurality of gods (polytheism), God as an exalted man, a human being's ability to become God, three degrees of heaven, polygamy, eternal progression and baptism for the dead. In addition, DC contains a number of prophesies by Smith that did not come true, which makes him a false prophet, according to the Bible (see Deut. 18:20-22).

**The Pearl of Great Price.** Unlike the BOM and D'C, the PGP was translated (in part) from papyri fragments, which Smith bought, along with some Egyptian mummies, from a traveling lecturer in 1835. According to Smith, the Egyptian hieroglyphics on the parchment were a record of writings by Abraham while he was in Egypt. The "Book of Abraham" became part of PGP, which was first compiled and published in 1851 and incorporated into the canon by the LDS Church in 1880. Assumed lost or destroyed for many years, the papyri fragments turned up in 1967 and were returned to the Mormon Church. Investigation of the fragments by Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists showed that the papyri contained nothing more than an Egyptian funeral text with instructions to embalmers. Smith had taken Egyptian characters that actually translate into one or two words, such as "water," and created long passages teaching Mormon doctrines such as preexistence, the priesthood and the nature of the Godhead. Undismayed by this scientific evidence, The Encyclopedia of Mormonism unblushingly states that when Smith looked at the Egyptian hieroglyphics on the piece of papyrus, he "sought revelation from the Lord" and "received the Book of Abraham."

**A Few Mormon Teachings**

**Regarding Salvation.** Biblical Christianity states that Salvation is found in Christ, that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead (see 1 Cor. 15.3-4). This salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2.8-9). But what do we find when we look at the gospel according to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? How are the Mormons saved from their sins, and what must they do to be forgiven?

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50 Ibid.
51 Letter from the Smithsonian Institution (SIL-76, Summer 1979).
The Book of Mormon says, “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23).

BYU Professor Daniel H. Ludlow comments:

On the same basis men cannot be saved in their sins (Alma 11:37); the Lord has ordained the laws by which salvation and all good things come, and until obedience prepares the way, the promised blessings are withheld (D&C 88:21-24; 130:20-21; 132:5). Men can no more be saved without obedience than they can be healed without faith. All things operate by law; blessings result from obedience to law and are withheld when there is no obedience.53

Mormons list eight requirements that must be met if a person is to merit forgiveness from personal sins and thereby attain godhood. Some of these include: faith in Christ, being baptized, becoming a member of the LDS church, keeping the commandments, doing temple work and accepting Joseph Smith and his successors as "God's mouthpiece."54

**Eternal Progression.** LDS apostle James Talmadge wrote, "The Church proclaims the eternal truth, 'as man is, God once was: as God is, man may be.'"55 What does that mean? The Mormon doctrine of eternal progression teaches that God the Father was once a man, who progressed to Godhood through obedience to certain laws and ordinances. Part of this obedience involved getting married to a woman ("The Heavenly Mother"), who gives birth to God's spirit children, who are sent to earth to inhabit bodies of flesh and bone. These spirit children, if they are Mormons, remain obedient to the laws of the Mormon Church, and are married in the Mormon temple, have the potential to become gods themselves. They will produce spirit children and rule their own planet. This process is then repeated.

Mormon theology teaches that when Jesus came to Earth from the spirit world to become Savior of mankind, He was born of Mary but not conceived by the Holy Spirit as the Bible teaches. A common Mormon teaching over the years has been that God the Father came down to Earth in human form to have sexual intercourse with Mary, and she conceived the baby Jesus. Many Mormon leaders have believed this, from Brigham Young to Ezra Taft Benson, the thirteenth prophet/president of the LDS.

After His death on the cross, Jesus "gained fullness," which he attained through a resurrected body. He returned to heaven, fully exalted, and from there He reigns with the Father-God in power and glory. According to Smith, Jesus will eventually take the Father-God's place as Father-God moves on to even higher realms of glory, exaltation and progression.

Smith taught, "You have got to learn to become Gods yourselves ... the same as all Gods have done before you-namely, by going from one small degree to another." The Bible, however, clearly teaches,

"Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me" (Isa. 43:10)
"I am God, and not man" (Hos. 11:9)
"I the LORD do not change" (Mal. 3:6)
Regarding the Trinity. To Mormons, the Trinity is not one God whose essence is found in three persons, but three Gods-three distinct bodies. The Mormons take standard Scripture passages that Christians use to teach the Trinity and turn them around to teach their own doctrines. For example, when God said, "Let us make man in our image" in Genesis 1:26, or when Jesus used the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Matthew 28:19, these verses only show Mormons there is "more than one God".

John 1:1, which teaches that Jesus Christ—the Word—was with God the Father in the very beginning and, in fact, created everything, is said by the Mormons to teach "two Gods." Because of their worldview, which says that God is an exalted man and that all men can attain godhood, the Trinity—one God existing as three persons—is simply incredible, illogical and nonsensical to Mormons. Their polytheism (in the case of the Trinity, their tri-theism) makes more sense to them.

In fact, Joseph Smith openly mocks the ideal of the Biblical Trinity when he writes:

> Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God anyhow--three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization…All are to be crammed into one God…It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God--he would be a giant or a monster.56

Summing up the major differences57

- **Regarding Scripture:** The Mormons believe that the canon of Scripture is not closed and that "modern revelation is necessary ... (God) continues to speak, because He is unchangeable." The LDS Church accepts as Scripture the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible (KJV), with the reservation that the Bible is "the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly." Biblical Christians hold that the canon is closed and accept only the Bible as Scripture, believing it is "God-breathed" (see 2 Tim. 3:16) and complete, containing "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3; see also Gal. 1:8: 2 Pet. 1:3).

- **Regarding God and the Trinity:** Joseph Smith taught that "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's." Apostle James Talmadge said, "We believe in a God who is ... a Being who has attained His exalted state by a path which now His children are permitted to follow ... the church proclaims the eternal truth: 'as man is, God once was; as God is, man may be.'" Talmadge also said the doctrine of the Trinity was a jumble of "inconsistencies and contradictions." Joseph Smith taught that Jesus Christ, God the Father and the Holy Ghost were "three distinct personages and three Gods." Biblical Christians believe God is a Spirit (see John 4:24) and creator of the universe (see Gen. 1:1). The biblical God says, "I am God, and there is no other" (Isa. 46:9), and "Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me" (43:10). The word "trinity" means "three-in-oneness" and summarizes Scripture's teaching that "God is three Persons, yet one God" (see Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19).

- **Regarding sin and salvation:** Joseph Smith taught that "men will be punished for their own sins, but not for Adam's transgression." The BOM says Adam and Eve were foreordained to sin in order to provide parentage for the spirit children of God, who were waiting for the experience of earthly life (see 2 Nephi 2:25). Individual (or Full) salvation comes only through the LDS Church, and without the Mormon priesthood and continuous revelation, "there would be no salvation." Biblical Christians believe salvation is a free gift, provided by God's grace for all who believe in Christ and His atoning work on the cross (see Eph. 2:8,9). Christians do good works not to earn salvation but because they have salvation (see Rom. 3:24-26; Eph. 2:10).

• **Regarding heaven**: Joseph Smith taught that most of mankind will enter one of three levels of heaven: telestial, terrestrial or celestial (see DC 76:30-119). Apostle Bruce McConkie taught that eternal life in celestial heaven is for Mormons only. Biblical Christians believe heaven is the dwelling place of God (see Ps. 73:25), which will become home for all believers in Christ's full atonement for personal sins (see 1 John 4:10). To be in heaven is to be in Christ's presence (see Luke 23:43; John 14:3; 2 Cor. 5:8; 1 John 3:2).
A Five Week Study in Comparative Religions and Worldviews

Week 5: Postmodernism

Presented by:
Gathering Pointe Church
October, 2011
An Overview

Trying to define or nail down the ideals and concepts of Postmodernism is like trying to wrestle a greased pig; it is nearly impossible. We live in a world that has dramatically changed its view of truth, and thus have inherited an ethical system that denies the existence of truth. The complex ideas and jargon of postmodernism are not easy to understand, but Christians must try to do so if they are to cope with a foe even more dangerous than secular humanism. Many Christian analysts and observers believe the Church is in the center of a cultural shift that is permeating all of society and that "we are fast becoming a postmodern culture."

What follows in our study of Postmodernism is more of concepts or characteristics of thought than a pure definition. We will look at a couple of key terms that will almost always surface in any discussion of Postmodernism and then look to see how they play out in specific arenas of our lives.

Origin/background.

The postmodern worldview did not originate with the thinking of any one person or group. Rather, the term emerged during the twentieth century as it began to be used by philosophers, theologians, literary critics, historians and even architects to refer in general to a backlash against the failures of modernism (i.e., secular humanism). Rather than ushering in a predicted Utopia, modernism's scientific wonders and advancements had created institutions and social conditions that were oppressive, burdensome and, at times, tyrannical.

We live in a world that has dramatically changed its view of truth, and thus have inherited an ethical system that denies the existence of truth. The worldview of the twenty-first century is postmodernism, and the dominant ethical system of the last two centuries has been relativism.

To understand this changed view of truth, we need to consider the story of three baseball umpires. One said, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way they are." Another said, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way I see 'em." And the third umpire said, "There's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't nothing until I call them."59

Kerby Anderson explains the above illustration like this:

Their three different views of balls and strikes correspond with three different views of truth. The first is what we might call premodernism. This is a God-centered view of the universe that believes in divine revelation. Most of the ancient world had this view of true and believed that truth is absolute ("I call 'em the way they are"). By the time of the Enlightenment, Western culture was moving into a time of modernism (1850-1945). This view was influenced by the scientific revolution, and began to reject a belief in God. In this period, truth is relative ("I call 'em the way I see 'em"). Today we live in what many call postmodernism (1945-present). In this view, there is a complete loss of hope for truth. Truth is not discovered; truth is created ("they ain't nothing until I call them").60

Some key terms.

- Tolerance: One Word, Two Meanings.\textsuperscript{61}
  - Traditional Tolerance. Webster’s defines \textit{Tolerate} as, “to recognize and respect [other’s beliefs, practices, etc.] without sharing them,” and “to bear or put up with [someone or something not especially liked].”

  The Bible says that we are to live in harmony with one another, and if it is all possible, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12.16, 18)

  Galatians 6.10: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

  Hebrews 12.14: “Strive for peace with everyone…”

  Matthew 5.9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

  Traditional tolerance is perfectly compatible with these biblical commands. These commands do not require us to sacrifice godly principles to achieve peace. After all, Jesus (even though a Jew) spoke respectfully and peaceably to a Samaritan women, ate with hated tax collectors, prostitutes and criminals and even touched lepers.

  Traditional tolerance respects and loves the individual without necessarily approving of or participating in their beliefs, behaviors or lifestyles. Traditional Tolerance can differentiate between what a person thinks or does and the person himself.

  - The New Tolerance. Our culture as redefined the word tolerance. When we hear school teachers, government officials, etc refer to tolerance, it almost never is meant to be taken in the sense of traditional tolerance. Stanly Grenz writes in his book \textit{A Primer to Postmodernism}, this new tolerance is based on the unbiblical belief that, “truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths.”\textsuperscript{62}

    In the new tolerance, you cannot judge (pronounce wrong) the thoughts, ideas or actions of another culture or another person because his or her idea of reality (truth) is different from yours. Each person's reality (truth) is in his or her own mind. You construct your own reality. Whatever is real to you is your reality.

    In contrast to traditional tolerance, the new tolerance is teaching our children (and you) that what every person believes or says is equally right and equally valid. In other words, each person not only has the right to their own beliefs, all beliefs are equal and true, all values are equal, all lifestyles are equal, and all truth claims are equal.

    Thomas A. Helmbock, the executive VP of the national Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity writes, “The definition of new tolerance is that every individual’s beliefs, values, lifestyles, and the perception of truth claims are equal. There is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal, and all truth is relative.”\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{63} Thomas A. Helmbock, “Insights on Tolerance,” \textit{Cross and Crescent} (the publication of the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity), summer 1996, 2.
• Religious Pluralism. This is the belief that every religion is true. While it is proper to show respect for people of different religious faiths, it is incorrect to assume that all religions are true.

Various religions and religious groups make competing truth claims, so they cannot all be true. For example, God is either personal or God is impersonal. If God is personal then Judaism, Christianity, and Islam could be true. But the eastern religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) are false. Either Jesus is the Messiah or He is not. If He is the Messiah then Christianity is true, and Judaism is false.

Religious pluralism essentially violates the "Law of Non-contradiction." This law states that A and the opposite of A cannot both be true (at the same time in the same way). You cannot have square circles. And you cannot have competing and contradictory religious truth claims all be true at the same time.

Jesus made this very clear in John 14:6 when He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jesus taught that salvation was through Him and no one else. This contradicts other religions.

• Moral Relativism. The worldview of postmodernism provides the foundation for moral relativism. If there is no absolute truth, then there is no absolute standard for ethical behavior. And if truth is merely personal preference, then certainly ethics is personal and situational.

Moral relativism is the belief that morality is relative to the person. In other words, there is no set of rules that universally applies to everyone. In a sense, moral relativism can be summed up with the phrase: "It all depends." Is murder always wrong? Relativists would say, "It depends on the circumstances." Is adultery wrong? They would say, "It just depends on whether you are caught."

• Intolerance. If you have ever objected to someone’s values, lifestyles, or even opinion, you may have had the experience of being labeled as intolerant...or even worse, a bigot. “Who are you to judge?” or “You don’t have the right to judge me” are other often slogans of the postmodern. Josh McDowell observes:

In a postmodern society – a society that regards all values, beliefs, lifestyles, and truth claims as equally valid – there can be only one virtue: tolerance. And, if tolerance is the cardinal virtue, the sole absolute, then there can be only one evil: intolerance. And that is exactly the attitude we see among the proponents of the new tolerance.

School administer Dr. Fredrick W. Hill states his goal when he writes, “It is the mission of public schools not to tolerate intolerances.”

University of Ottawa philosophy professor Leslie Armour states, “Our idea is that to be a virtuous citizen is to be one who tolerates everything except intolerance.”

65 Ibid.
We’re told that in order to have a pluralistic society or a functioning democracy, it is necessary to respect all different beliefs in word and deed. Those who speak out against any movement purporting to promote tolerance are denounced and vilified as hateful, bigoted, racist, extremist or having phobias. Take for example this situation:

Debra J Saunders, writing in The San Francisco Chronicle, reported the reaction of one “old fashion” father who protested the content of the sex education his son was receiving in public school. “When I complained that my elementary school son was too young to understand homosexuality,” the father said, “they called me a ‘homophobe.’ They wouldn’t listen, the just called me names.”69

I find it interesting or ironic at best (at worst hypocritical) that adherents of this new tolerance are so absolute in the criticism of absolutism! The very premise of this new tolerance is flawed and self contradictory.

Playing out the realities of Postmodernism.70

• In Education. As parents, we must be extremely vigilant when it comes to our children’s education. It is our jobs as parents to be involved in their education. Whether you choose home school, Christian school or the public school, we must be involved. Too many parents have revoked their own rights to raise their kids and rely to heavily on other systems. Note, these statements are not an endorsement of homeschooling, nor are they intended to vilify other forms and systems of education. But especially for parents of public school children, you must be involved and educated on how this new tolerance is playing out in your kid’s education.

Here are some chilling words from Stephen Bates, “Tolerance may indeed be the dominant theme of the modern culture…One study of American history books found toleration presented as ‘the only religious’ idea worth remembering.”71 Also consider these words from the chairman of New Hampshire’s Christian Coalition, “If children come to school with different values than those they are taught at school, teachers should encourage the kids to discard the lessons their parents are teaching.”72

What are some ways that this new tolerance indoctrinating our kids? Josh McDowell sites at least six areas:

- Sacrificing Achievement for self-esteem. Real achievement in the classroom is often sacrificed in order not to harm the student’s self esteem. Education has become less about learning or achieving because, “their educational system is turning many of their teachers into social workers, whose primary goal is not to educate but to help their students ‘feel good about the assignment.’”73
- Sacrificing substance for style. Multi-culturalism is the new cry for today’s education. While it is not wrong to learn about different cultures, educators have replaced basic educational elements such as math, English and the sciences. According to one educational activist, we

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70 Note: I will only include on area in which the realities of Postmodernism (education) b/c quite frankly, there are just too many details to adequately evaluate the numerous dangers. I cannot stress enough the importance of reading Josh McDowell’s book.
72 George W. Fellendorf in a personal conversation with Josh McDowell, 7 April 1998.
have, “seriously eroded the core competencies we used to take for granted…[we now have college graduates] without a command of English.”

- Sacrificing History for Propaganda. Two historians from the University of Penn write:

  We are all engaged in writing a kind of propaganda…Rather than believe in the absolute truth of what we are writing, we must believe in the moral and political position we are taking with it…Historians should assess an argument on the basis of its persuasiveness, its political unity, and its political sincerity.

In other words, history is being written without the need to be accurate, but aim for political persuasiveness. It is not longer, “is it true?” rather, “is it useful?”

- Sacrificing Fact for Fiction.
- Sacrificing Freedom for Political Correctness. Consider the following cases of political correctness in suppressing Christianity:
  - An 11 year old boy was forbidden to recite a poem in school because it contained a reference to Jesus.
  - A young Pennsylvania student was told it was inappropriate to write, “Jesus love you” on a lunch box.
  - High school students in Texas were banned from advertising their after school Bible club unless they omitted the names of God and Jesus.

- Sacrificing Parental Rights for Government Authority. A direct result of this new tolerance is that parent’s right to guide and influence their children are being undermined and overthrown. Consider this statement from Paul Kurtz of State University of New York, “Parents have no right to impose their religion on their children or to prevent them from being exposed to other points of view.”

- In Government.
- In Society.
- In the Church. The most compelling argument that Christians can make against post-modernism is to stand on the absolute truth of God's Word. Unfortunately, statistics gathered by Christian and secular pollsters alike more than suggest that not all Christians are sure about absolute truth. Josh McDowell, who has taught biblical principles and apologetics to thousands of teenagers and college students throughout the world, has estimated that 57 percent of churched youth do not believe in an objective standard of truth.

According to Christian pollster George Barna, 53 percent of Bible-believing conservative Christian adults do not believe in absolute truth. According to a 1997 report in Christianity Today, 84 percent of first-year Christian college students find it difficult to adequately defend or explain their beliefs.

From the Gallup poll comes perhaps the most striking statistic of all. Of the 70 percent of Americans who say it is important to follow biblical teachings, two-thirds of these do not believe in moral absolutes.

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Living out our faith in our culture.

There is little doubt that living out our Christian worldview is very difficult. It is not easy to stand on truth in a culture that is constantly re-defining what truth is…or isn’t. To be marked as intolerant, a hater, or a bigot is never an easy thing, not to mention, often times absolutely incorrect. In fact, the easiest thing we can do is shut down and keep the Truth and the Gospel to ourselves. But this is the exact opposite of what we need to be doing. It has been said that there is never a right time to do the wrong thing, nor is there never a wrong time to do the right thing. As Biblical Christians, we must do the right thing. We must commit ourselves to the truth of the Gospel. We must commit ourselves to not just knowing about the Truth, but to KNOW the Truth and to live it out. Josh McDowell provides some incredibly practical ways for us to do just that.

• Develop Community. Our culture is hurting. Our culture is lonely. And whether our friends and family will admit this, they are looking for something real and fulfilling. The Church ought to be a beacon to provide what is missing in so many of our friend's lives: Community.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13.34-35

• Show Compassion. There is little doubt and sadly so, that many Christians come across as angry, bitter and unbiblically judgmental. Often in the name of Christ, Christians have given those on the outside plenty of ammunition to fire accusations against not only us, but Jesus and the Church.

We serve a God of compassion. 2 Corinthians 1.3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort…” McDowell comments, “Even a culture dominated by the new tolerance will find it difficult to resist the compassionate heart of a believer and follower of the one true God. We will more often gain a hearing as we impart the truth of God by compassionately caring for the needs of others.”

• Model Godly Marital and Family Relationships. In 1994 McDowell’s research team conducted a study of churched youth revealed that out of a list of fifteen desirable conditions, 85 percent chose “one marriage partner for life” as their number one desire. They chose that over “good physical health,” “a close relationship with God,” and “having a comfortable lifestyle” McDowell further comments, “I believe the church must show that the Christian faith is not only credible but also relevant to healthy and rewarding marriages and families.”

• Sharing the Gospel in Love through our Lives. The mandate is clear. The commission is bold. Jesus tells us in Matthew 28.19 to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. The more relevant the Truth is to our very own lives, the more attractive the Gospel will be to those whom we come into contact with everyday. I am convinced that people will not care how much we know, until they know how much we care.

What Christians must do above all else is make a new commitment to biblical truth and morality. There is absolute truth in the Word of God. There is absolute morality in the teachings of Scripture. And there is the ultimate absolute behind it all – Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, the Way, and the Life.
Resources for Further Study

General Apologetic Books:

Boa, Ken and Larry Moody. "I Am Glad You Asked"
Colson, Charles and Pearcey, Nancy Pearcy. "Now Shall We Live?"
Colson. Answers to Your Kids' Questions.
Corduan, Winfried. "A Christian Introduction to World Religions: Neighboring Faiths"
Geisler, Norman. "Christian Apologetics"
Grenz, Stanly. “A Primer to Postmodernism”
Keller, Tim. "The Reason for God"
McDowell, Josh. "The New Tolerance"
McDowell. "Evidence that Demands a Verdict"
McDowell. "The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict"
McFarland, Alex. "Stand: Core Truths You Must Know for an Unshakable Faith"
Mohler, Al. "The Disappearance of God: Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness"
Nash, Ronald. "Worldviews in Conflict"
Piper, John. "50 Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die"
Stanely, Andy. "Since Nobody's Perfect...How Good is Good Enough?"
Strobel, Lee. "The Case for Faith"

General Apologetic Websites:

www.alwaysbeready.com
www.apologeticspress.org
www.biblearchaeology.org
www.carm.org
www.probe.org