

Opening Notes

- DON'T FORGET TO PRAY to open up the time!
- Feel free to interrupt me with questions as we go along. This is meant to be a type of class, not a sermon
- Bring your Bibles to class!
- All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise stated
- What are we here to do for this seminar? We're going to take a close look at 5 major religious groups that all claim to have belief in Christ. These are all groups that if you ask them they will all say "YES, we believe in Jesus"
- We're going to spend time discussing some essential and core doctrines and how they are brought to bear on these 5 groups as well as on ourselves. It's not enough to point at these groups and call out their bad teaching. We're going to look at what the Bible says about these topics so that we ensure that we're believing the right things ourselves.
 - o The best way to discern and avoid error is to know truth!
- This is an important topic but this can also be a messy topic so we're going to try to be careful while walking through it and make it a blessing to all of us.
- What is the purpose of this class?
 - o It is to educate you on the 5 most well-known false Christian churches and equip you to effectively reach out to them
 - You're guaranteed to bump into numerous people who hold to these false traditions. Several of them will come right to your doorstep whether you like it or not!
 - How many people here in this room today have a friend or family member who is part of one of these traditions? Wouldn't it be nice to learn more about their beliefs so that you can better witness to them?
 - Note: It might be the case that individuals who you know are already saved and don't understand the issues enough to know they're in a false church. If that is the case, then you will be equipped to give them what they need to remove themselves from these false groups and get involved in the true Church.
 - I personally have friends or family members in each and every one of these false traditions and have invited many others into my home to have discussions with them
 - o To educate you on essential Christian doctrines and equip you to defend them
 - o To encourage and increase your faith in Christ and bring Glory to God!
- So... let's get into it! If you want to know if somebody you meet is a Christian, what's generally the first question you would ask?
 - **Do you believe in Jesus?** Or some variation of this question
 - However, I want to argue that it is not enough to just ask the question "Do you believe in Jesus?" Billions of people today will answer yes to that question but that does NOT make them Christians.
 - Let's ask a more important question that gets down to the heart of the matter: **What do you believe ABOUT Jesus?** That will help you to understand what a

- person actually believes and enable you to determine whether they are a Christian or not.
- So we're going to take a look at 5 major religious groups, all present here in America, who all are claiming to believe in Jesus and examine what they believe **ABOUT** Jesus and compare that to what **the Bible** says about Jesus. So it's going to be looking at their attitude towards Jesus, salvation, the Bible, spiritual authority, and a few other things. Then we're going to talk about how to approach them.
 - Those groups are: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons (LDS), Catholics, Progressive Christians, Bethel & Hillsong
 - I understand that the inclusion of a few of these groups will be controversial. Particularly with the Catholic Church and Bethel Church though pushback on the others is not unheard of. Rest assured, you will understand why we're taking a position against these groups when we get to them. Also, feel free to bring questions and push back as we go through each lesson. You won't be dragged out back and flogged for putting up a defense of these groups if you feel like it is needed!
 - BUT FIRST, let's lay some ground rules before we get started.
 - What we are NOT here to do: Judge the salvation of individual people! I cannot possibly answer the question as to whether specific individuals within these groups are saved or not. That includes specific celebrities or family members or friends you may know within these groups. What determines that is what is going on between their hearts and the Lord Jesus Christ. What we're going to do is evaluate the official teachings, or doctrines, of these 5 groups and determine whether they line up with a Biblical worldview or not. Do they lead you to salvation or not?
 - Now, that is not to say that salvation isn't a question here. It absolutely is. But we're going to be answering that question in how it relates to teachings, not specific individuals you may know. Are there any questions about that??
 - For example, Are there genuine Christians tucked away in Catholic churches across the world? Undoubtedly! But, they are saved in spite of the official doctrine of the church they attend. Catholicism teaches a works + grace based salvation system. I won't expound on that now but we're going to spend a whole hour on this later in the seminar! This teaching does not lead to Christ and consequentially salvation! However, it is totally possible that members of the church get enough scripture from weekly mass that they have come to put their faith in Christ alone and not at all in their own works and continue in the church misunderstanding what is going on each week.
 - I just want to emphasize this again... please don't get offended if your grandmother, or some other friend or family member is a member of one of these groups. I am most certainly not trying to attack them personally at all. BUT you should be aware that the teachings of these groups are having an impact on that person you care about. So it is important for you to understand what those teachings are so that you better understand how they're being impacted and can witness to them more effectively.

- Going back to example of the saved Catholic... while they are saved because of their faith in Christ, they are continuing to feed off a system that gives them no real spiritual food. For example, they will be taught to pray to Mary and not to Christ and be robbed of true Christian growth in their lives because of it.
 - We're not going to spend any time mocking, ridiculing, or making fun of these groups
 - I am going to make a strong effort to accurately relay the teachings of these groups. I do not want to set up straw men or misrepresent these groups. Doing either of those would counter the purpose of this seminar and it wouldn't bring glory to Christ
 - With that being said, understand that individuals within each of these groups will vary. The same is true with all of us in this room and within the rest of this church. We don't all believe the exact same things in the exact same way. We are not all educated on theology to the same level. It is no different with them. So when you encounter people who are members of these groups they might not fit perfectly into their group's official teachings. However, with that being said, if they truly are members of these groups they will generally believe along the lines of these doctrines just how each one of us does so with the doctrinal statements of Riverview.
- So, let's take some time to examine who exactly is a Christian? What is the definition of a Christian? What places somebody outside the bounds of Christianity?
 - Wide umbrella Christianity: One who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Essentially everybody who claims to be Christian (includes everybody who claims to be a Christian, regardless of whether they really are or not)
 - Those surveys you read that say 2.4 billion people on Earth are Christians include everybody
 - According to this survey, about 247,000,000 people in America are Christians out of 331,000,000. That's just shy of 75%. Does anybody here believe that 3 out of every 4 people in America are Christians? No, I didn't think so!
 - Let's narrow it down: Only those groups which teach correct Christian doctrine essential to the faith (i.e. those that touch on or are adjacent to the Gospel)
 - Even more: Someone who has been born again by God and has put faith and trust in Jesus Christ
 - Believing correct doctrine is fundamental to the Christian faith. It makes the difference between saved and not saved in some cases!
 - So how do we evaluate the importance of individual doctrines? Should you be part of a church that has different variations of a doctrine than you? An analogy that I have heard many times is that of an open and closed fist. Keep your fist closed on the essentials and keep it open (be charitable) to issues that aren't essential. However, is this approach good enough? I don't think so. It's a bit more complicated than dividing all doctrines into two categories, essential and non-essential.
 - It works well for things like the bodily return of Christ. This is a closed fist doctrine. However, the timing of Christ's return is an open hand issue. Unfortunately, this analogy doesn't work well for more complicated issues.
 - For example, what do you do about an Assemblies of God Church? A normal Sunday morning service looks a lot different from ours. People will occasionally shout things out

during prayer and worship, people will share what they believe are words from the Lord, and might even dance around a little. They'll say things like "the spirit said to me..." and gather around somebody in groups and lay hands on them when they pray. Even stranger to most of us people will be speaking in tongues, which sounds like gibberish! Almost none of that goes on during a service here at Riverview. Nobody ever shouts anything during the service, nobody ever stands on the stage and says "the spirit is saying to us..." and certainly nobody ever gets up and speaks in tongues before the congregation!

- Are one of these groups NOT Christians based on these differences? How do you know? There are people on both sides who claim that the ability to speak in tongues is evidence as to whether that person is saved or not. Is merely a difference in Christian practice enough to declare another group as being outside the bounds of Christianity? Or an even better question: Does bad Christian practice exclude you from salvation?
 - Now, I could have picked a wide variety of churches that practice their Christianity different than ours. Methodists conduct their services quite differently than ours as well. I just picked an AoG church because the differences are the starkest.
 - Now, what if I told you that that same church that practices all those things I mentioned above: tongues, prophecy, prayers for physical healing, laying on of hands, etc. also taught that God is three persons in one being? The Trinity. What if I also told you that they preach that the Bible is God's inspired word and is without error? Furthermore, what if I told you that that same church that practices all those things that we think are bizarre also preaches weekly that salvation is through Christ alone by faith alone? What do you do about that?
 - Here is another issue: The timing of the rapture. People have been ripping each other's spleens out over this issue for a long time. But is it really an essential doctrine that is worth dividing over?
 - Do you see why the open/closed hand way of looking at doctrine isn't a sufficient way of looking at things? Let me propose a different way of looking at doctrines: A doctrinal tag system
- I don't know if anybody else teaches this type of system for evaluating doctrines. I haven't heard it anywhere else but it's been the way I've thought about them for years. Basically, I used to work in a factory where we made actuators. If you don't know what an actuator is, just think of it as a device that makes something else move. For example, there is an actuator in a hospital bed that makes it go up and down when you press the button on the remote. Anyways, we had to test every single actuator before packaging it up and sending it to the customer. We didn't want to send out defective products. Well, we had a tagging system for the actuators. Green tags meant it was good to go and could be sent out; blue tags meant it was too loud and needed to be sent back to be adjusted; orange tags meant something was broken but it could be repaired; red meant it was broken beyond repair. I want to apply that same kind of system to doctrines.
- I really like this idea of assigning tags to doctrines. This is the way I have it set up in my mind right now but I've never actually put it out there for examination before. So if you look at this and think that there is a better way to arrange the tags or to

have better meanings attached to each tag, then I'm all ears. I'd love to refine this more so please share feedback with me about it.

- Tags analogy for doctrines
 - Disclaimer: When it says "will not fellowship with" I do not mean that you can't invite them into your home, talk with them (public or private), etc. I mean you generally wouldn't attend a church that teaches this doctrine.
 - Red – Essential doctrine: salvation issue. Do not associate.
 - Jesus is truly God and truly man
 - Trinity
 - Salvation through Christ alone by grace alone
 - Orange/Yellow – Important but not essential, will not fellowship with
 - Orange if stronger, yellow if lesser
 - Infant vs Believer's baptism
 - Female pastors
 - Calvinism/Arminianism
 - See main bullet point after "Green" below
 - Charismatic/Gifts of the Spirit
 - Blue – Difference of opinion, will remain in fellowship
 - Church governance/polity
 - Eschatology (I have real strong opinions on eschatology but I also recognize that except in a few specific ways (i.e. the physical return of Christ) there needs to be a large amount of leeway given here. There really are multiple different ways these passages can be interpreted. I can be at a church that holds to anything from pre-millennialism to amillennialism without much issue). This is ironically, a doctrine that many many many people divide quite harshly over.
 - Green – Not significant or just personal preference
 - Worship style: Choir, band, Hymns, modern music, etc.
 - There's always going to be some difference of opinion between all of us on which tags belong to which doctrines. And honestly, that is okay for anything less than a red tag issue. A red tag means NOT CHRISTIAN. Regardless of how they identify themselves, if they do not believe in a red tag doctrine, they are outside the bounds of Christianity.
 - The most important thing is to have your priorities in the right order. Don't elevate yellow or blue tag doctrines to red tag status and especially don't lower red tag issues!
 - There are going to be situations where you may need to be flexible with this. For example, if I lived in a small town out in the middle of nowhere and there is a conservative Presbyterian church and a liberal Baptist church available as options, I am going to the Presbyterian Church despite some orange/yellow tag doctrinal differences. These issues might preclude me from becoming a member at that church but I'm still going to attend regularly and be involved in the daily life of the people who attend. I cannot attend the liberal Baptist church due to the presence of RED TAG doctrinal issues.

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- You can be wrong on an issue but still be a Christian (i.e. women in ministry, eschatology, etc.)
 - This is meant to be a neutral statement for the purposes of this class. Both of these topics could use a whole seminar in and of themselves. I'm intending to convey that where you stand on the issue of women in ministry for example has no bearing on your salvation. Though it does have a bearing on how and where you worship God.
- Some issues most certainly do exclude you from Christianity (i.e. lack of belief in the full deity of Christ)
- Denominations & False Churches
 - I am about to astound you with my incredible graphic design abilities... prepare to be amazed!
 - Graphic of bounds of Christianity (see power point)
 - Denominations inside the box are Christian because they correctly teach red tag doctrines. They are closer to the center or edge based on how well they teach on other important doctrines (orange/yellow)
 - Don't get hung up on the exact positions of each group... I'm just trying to make a general point, not make exact representations of where each group is. However, I did intentionally place groups outside the box if they're bad on those red tag doctrines
 - Denominations can also be divided into liberal and Bible-believing parts
 - ELCA vs Missouri Synod
 - American Baptist vs SBC?? Or NBC
 - Presbyterian Church USA vs Orthodox Presbyterian Church
 - United Methodist vs Global Methodist
 - Graphic for faithfulness to sound doctrine over history (see power point)
 - This is another representation of the same information from the previous slide, just put in a historical framework
 - The two black lines define the boundaries of true Christian churches; groups that move outside those boundaries become false churches
 - As you can see, groups break off of one another and some move quickly or slowly outside of those boundaries
 - Again, this is just a very rough approximation and not meant to be an exact representation and does not include everybody.. It is meant to convey a general idea of how to look at these groups
 - Denomination: A Christian group that believes correct doctrines on red tag issues but will differ on lesser, while still important, other doctrines (Orange/Yellow, Blue)
 - Conservative Methodists, Conservative Anglicans/Episcopalian, Lutherans, Assemblies of God, Baptists, Presbyterians
 - This is not an exhaustive list
 - On the number of denominations:
 - Denominations exist because of the existence of the Orange/Yellow tag category

- All true denominations have a shared belief in red tag doctrines and therefore remain a true piece of Christ’s Church
- The notion that there are tens of thousands of denominations out there is really a myth, mostly perpetuated by the Catholic Church (in my opinion)
- There really are only a handful of denominations out there and all of them fall under the umbrella of Protestant or Evangelical if you prefer
 - Denominations will have sub groups based on yellow or blue tag doctrinal differences
 - I don’t think that this is necessarily a bad thing
 - What makes it bad is when those issues are elevated into red tag status
- False Church/Cult: A group calling itself Christian but believes wrongly on red tag doctrines and is therefore NOT Christian
 - Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons (LDS), Catholics, Progressives, Hyper Charismatic, Word of Faith, Bethel Church, World Mission Society Church of God (Mother of God), Christian Science Church, United Pentecostal Church, Hebrew Israelites, Unitarian Church
 - This is not an exhaustive list
- Unfortunately we won’t have time to look at other groups like the Amish, Mennonites, Quakers, Eastern Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventists, and Coptic Christians
 - I’m not trying to indicate that these groups are false churches... I’m just saying we don’t have time to cover them

Why look at Christian cults?

- Know the danger of their beliefs and their attacks
 - So that you’re not surprised when they raise objections or challenges
- Know how to reach out to them
 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And I then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” Matthew 7:21-23
 - Quote from Got Questions about who this verse applies to:
 - “...they claim the name of Christ. These are not Muslims, Buddhists, or atheists. These are those who would gladly say, “I am a Christian.” They work their works in Jesus’ name. They pray and heal in Jesus’ name. They preach and teach in Jesus’ name. They build huge churches and ministries in Jesus’ name. They claim a relationship with Him. But they are none of His. In fact, He sends them away, not with commendation for their good works in His name (and many good works are done in Jesus’ name by false professors), but by disowning their every deed and word. He “never” knew

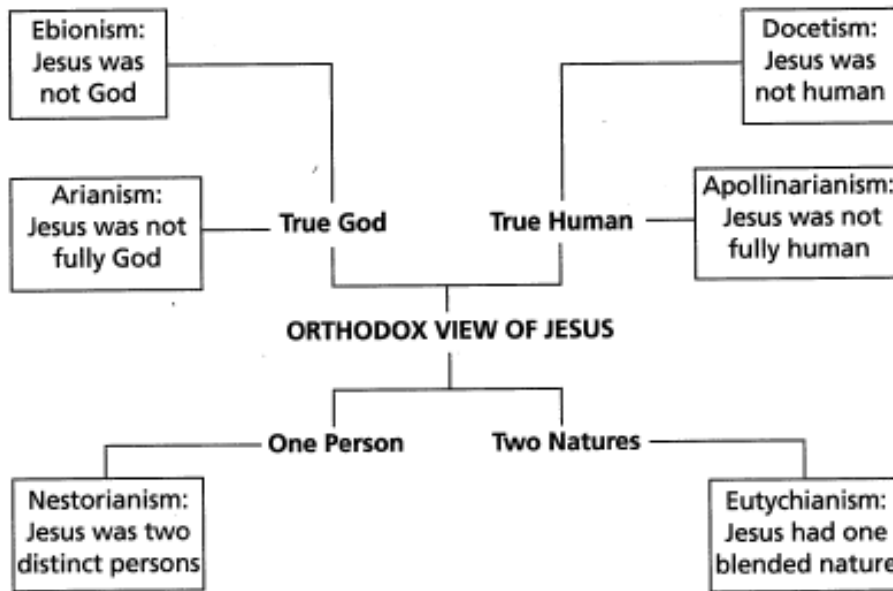
them, nor did they ever truly know Him. They weren't Christians who lost their salvation. They were never part of the elect of God, chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), set apart and sanctified by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:21), and justified by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The ones Christ puts away from Himself with harsh words of condemnation, calling them doers of evil, never came to Him in faith, despite their outward good works and miracles.

- This verse applies to these groups!! How terrifying to think you've served Christ and are going to Heaven only to be rejected and sent to Hell!
- It is worth arguing about!
 - Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 3-4
- There are real world consequences for these beliefs... for example, let's say that you're in a scenario where you're with somebody who is fatally wounded and only has a few moments to live. What do you want to say to that person in those final moments? Lest you think I'm just making up a scenario that will never happen, let me give you a real life story. Young Shirley O'Neill, a Catholic, was swimming with a friend she had recently met at school, Albert Kogler. Kogler seemingly was an agnostic. O'Neill reported that he had told her that he 'didn't need religion. I have myself.' While they were swimming, a 16.5ft Great White Shark attacked Kogler, giving him fatal injuries. I won't give you the details (I read the report) but it was a brutal attack. O'Neill heroically grabbed him and pulled him to shore where she was faced with this very dilemma.
 - If you were in her place, what would you say to him, knowing that his wounds were going to be fatal? I'll tell you what she did.... She baptized him. Catholics believe that baptism cleanses you of your sins. So effectively, she believed that he was allowing that young man to die in a state of sinlessness, allowing him to go to heaven regardless of what he believed about Jesus. In fact, she knew that he didn't believe in Jesus because he had told her! Does that sound biblical to you? Now, I cannot say with certainty where that man went when he died because I don't know for certain what he really believed. But I do know for certain that the "baptism" that occurred on the beach was completely irrelevant in determining that. We'll learn more about that when we get to the classes on the Catholic Church.
 - Sources: https://www.sharkattackfile.net/spreadsheets/pdf_directory/1959.05.07-Kogler_Collier.pdf
 - <https://washingtondigitalnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=CATHNWP19590515.2.22&e=----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->
 - <https://www.thespectrum.com/story/opinion/2021/07/01/greatest-act-courage/7815657002/>
- NT authors wrote against false doctrines often!
 - Galatians 1:6-7
 - 2 Peter 2:1

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- 1 Tim 1:3
- 2 Tim 2:18
- Titus 1:10-16
- Romans 6:1-2
- Preaching/Teaching against false doctrines in a sign of a healthy church. Most people don't even know what groups are cults because the preaching/teaching is so lacking in far too many churches
 - This isn't a problem at Riverview!
 - We are rooted in our desire to turn to the scriptures
- Anytime the opinion of man is elevated and the Word of God is brought low, beware! That church is on its way to becoming a social club.
- First, second, third, and fourth century Christians wrote against heresies often
 - Augustine vs Pelagius
 - Athanasius vs Arius
 - Irenaeus wrote "Against heresies"
 - Church councils were convened
 - We're not going to talk about all the early church councils, just the ones that will be relevant to the groups we will be discussing for the rest of this seminar.
 - First Council of Nicaea (325) – Defined the doctrine of the Trinity. Where we got the Nicene Creed. This is the one where legend says that St. Nickolas punched Arius during the debate.
 - First Council of Constantinople (381) – Revised the doctrine of the Trinity to clarify the role of the Holy Spirit
 - Council of Ephesus (431) – Nestorianism, Theotokos, Pelagianism
 - Nestorianism was professed by a Bishop named Nestorius. He argued that Jesus had distinct human and divine persons. That is to say that Jesus was two persons in one body. This was determined to be heresy.
 - Theotokos – Greek word, Theo (God) and Tikto (to bear). So God-bearer. It is the title given to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Nestorius argued it should be Christotokos (Christ-bearer). He did this because he was trying to separate Christ's divinity from his humanity.
 - We'll talk more about Mary being the God-bearer vs the Mother of God when we talk about Mary and Catholicism later on
 - Pelagius was a monk and theologian who espoused the view that humans are not born into sin. They are born without the taint of sin and are capable of living a sinless life. Augustine of Hippo, probably the most famous theologian in Church history, opposed him strongly. Pelagianism was denounced as heresy. The doctrine of Original Sin is the orthodox view.
 - Council of Chalcedon (451) – The divinity and humanity of Christ

- This chart is a basic summary of what these councils affirmed the Bible teaches about who Jesus was. All views outside of the Orthodox views and considered heresy and therefore, NOT Christian!



- 1

Define what a Christian cult is

- Most people think of groups like People’s Temple or Heaven’s Gate when they hear the word cult. I won’t explain the gory details of what happened with these groups but hundreds of people died from their actions. The People’s Temple cult is where we get the phrase “drinking the Kool-Aid” from.
- This isn’t the type of cult I am talking about. When I say “cult” I mean a group that practices a type of false Christianity.
- These are all going to be offshoots of Christianity—groups that twist Christian doctrines and then still claim to be Christian
- COMMON THEMES
 - Bible/Church was corrupted/perverted
 - A new prophet is called to restore the church
 - Massive claims of authority, even over the Bible
- Remember: It is not THAT you believe in Jesus but WHAT you believe about Jesus
 - James 2:19 “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”
 - The Devil and his demons all believe in Jesus and not a single one of them are saved
 - Belief in Christ is not going to save you if you believe in the wrong Jesus
 - Let’s draw an analogy of how this works. Let’s say that you’re walking about in another state and run into somebody who says that they know me. You get excited because you know me as well. What would you think if this

¹ This chart is taken from Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, ed. L. Arnold Hustad (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 230.

person then proceeded to tell you that I am 6' 2" tall with blue-green eyes? And then this person tells you that I was a former military officer and statesman. Oh, and he also mentions to you that I have a set of false teeth!

- Obviously, because all of you here actually do know me, you understand that this person does not know me at all and has somehow managed to confuse me with George Washington. Now, it's possible that they have indeed heard about me and might even know some correct things about me. But they clearly do not know me.
 - So you explain to this person you met on the street that they are mistaken. Because Trent is 5' 11" tall, has brown-green eyes, has never served in the military, and while he does indeed work in politics, definitely is not known for his statesmanship. You expect them to realize their mistake but instead are met with obstinate opposition as they adamantly argue that they do know me and that YOU are the one who doesn't know who I am!
 - As you can see, knowing that somebody exists and knowing who they are can be two totally different things. It is a difference that matters!
 - How would you verify which one of you is correct in their knowledge of me?
 - Ask for ways from the class
 - Exactly, many of those are valid ways in which you could verify who knows me and who does not
 - How do we verify which groups truly know who Jesus is and are worshipping him correctly?
 - The Bible! That is why we're going to be spending time looking at what the Bible says on a multitude of topics surrounding the person of Christ
 - We're going to be examining their beliefs about Jesus, salvation, spiritual authority, and a few other things
- Individuals will all have variances.... Same as what you find in this Church!
- These are groups that you should NOT say are different denominations! They are false churches that should be avoided

Tips

- Remember, don't let your guest play "What About?" and drag you all over the New Testament. Stick to the verses at hand.
- Be prepared for Spiritual Warfare!!
 - For example: I went to a JW meeting recently to continue to get to know some of the people there and look for opportunities to witness to them. I walked into the meeting with confidence and probably a slight air of superiority because I knew the truth and they didn't. Well, after getting into the seating area, I saw a young woman there and was immediately filled with lust for her. I had thoughts like "I could become a JW if it meant I could be with her." It caught me off guard! I made a mistake by walking into a spiritual stronghold of the enemy while thinking I could manage it with my own intellect and my own power. After all, I had studied their beliefs and I knew how to counter their arguments. It was very hard to look away

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and control my thoughts. I had to pray and take action such as positioning myself in a way that I could not see her, such as sitting closer to the front. This could easily have gone in a terrible direction! I'm thankful to God who protected me and is keeping me in his care.

- So be careful when engaging! Be in prayer! Don't try to do it yourself! Do it with Christ and for Christ!