

## Using a Detective Columbo Approach When Talking to Cult Members

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You will not be able to force your opinion of what a verse means on a cult member. But if you can help the cultist discover problems in their group's theology for himself, then you've really accomplished a good thing. Let's take the Jehovah's Witnesses as an example.

One great way of helping a Jehovah's Witness discover problems in Watchtower theology is by asking strategic questions based on key verses, all the while remaining tactful and kind (1 Peter 3:15). Remember, Jesus often asked questions to make a point (for example, Luke 9:20). David Reed notes that "rather than shower his listeners with information, [Jesus] used questions to draw answers out of them. A person can close his ears to facts he doesn't want to hear, but if a pointed question causes him to form the answer in his own mind, he cannot escape the conclusion — because it's a conclusion that he reached himself."<sup>1</sup> We must use this same type of methodology with Jehovah's Witnesses.

The right question asked in a nondefensive, nonchallenging, unemotional way may cause the Jehovah's Witness to find him- or herself face to face with a doctrine (such as the deity of Christ) that is completely contrary to what the Watchtower Society teaches. By considering such a question, the Jehovah's Witness is forced to come to a conclusion in his own mind.

Allow me to give a few examples. As a backdrop, note that the Jehovah's

Witnesses believe that God personally set up the Watchtower Society as his *visible representative on earth*. It is through this organization and no other that God teaches the Bible to humankind. Without the Watchtower Society and its vast literature, people are said to be *utterly unable* to ascertain the true meaning of Scripture. Jehovah's Witnesses are reminded of this over and over again in Watchtower publications.

So, you might ask the Jehovah's Witness: "If the Jehovah's Witnesses are the *only* true witnesses for God, and if the Jehovah's Witnesses as an organization came into being in the late nineteenth century (which is a historical *fact*), does this mean God was *without a witness* for over eighteen centuries throughout church history?"

Help the Jehovah's Witness understand the implications of this question. If there was not a "witness" for God for over eighteen centuries throughout church history, this implies that God *did not care* for people to come to know Him during those many centuries.

After driving this point home, switch gears and direct the Jehovah's Witness to the New Testament, where the clear focus is not on being witnesses *of Jehovah* but on being witnesses *of Jesus Christ*. Indeed, before ascending into heaven, Jesus told the disciples: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and *you shall be My witnesses* both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, italics added).

Ask the Jehovah's Witness: "According to Acts 1:8, are we supposed to be witnesses of Jesus or Jehovah?"

You might also ask:

- In whose name should we meet together (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 5:4)?
- Demons are subject to whose name (Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18; 17:18)?
- Repentance and forgiveness should be preached in whose name (Luke 24:47)?
- In whose name are you to believe and receive the forgiveness of sins (John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 10:43; 1 John 3:23; 5:13)?
- By whose name, and *no other*, do we obtain salvation (Acts 4:12)?
- Whose name should be invoked as we bring our petitions to God in prayer (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23, 24)?
- In whose name is the Holy Spirit sent (John 14:26)?
- Whose name and authority was invoked by the disciples in healing the sick and lame (Acts 3:16; 4:7-10, 30)?
- Whose name did Paul tell us to call upon (1 Cor. 1:2)?
- Whose name is above every name (Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9-11)?

These Detective Columbo questions will help the Jehovah's Witness come to the conclusion that the Bible is a Jesus book. Once they understand this, you've gone a long way toward undermining their whole theology.

Another good question to ask the Jehovah's Witness relates to how many true gods there are according to John 17:3. Allow him to open his New World Translation and ask him to read it aloud: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, *the only true God*, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ" (NWT, italics)

added). Based on this verse, the Jehovah's Witness will say that Jehovah (the Father) is the one true God.

Next, point out that according to John 1:1 in the New World Translation, Jesus is "a god." Ask the Jehovah's Witness if he or she agrees that Jesus is "a god." They'll say yes. Then ask whether Jesus is a "true" God or a "false" God. This will cause a dilemma for the Jehovah's Witness. If he or she says Jesus is a false god, he is contradicting the New World Translation of Scripture (since John 1:1 in this version says Jesus is a god). If he says Jesus is a true God, he is also contradicting his understanding of Scripture (since John 17:3 says there is only one true God — Jehovah).

You can then continue using the Columbo method to definitively establish that Jesus *truly is* God. You can do this by drawing a comparison between the Old Testament and the New Testament. As a backdrop, note that Jehovah's Witnesses argue that Jehovah created Jesus as the Archangel Michael billions of years ago, and then Jesus allegedly created everything else. In response, I like to quote Isaiah 44:24, where God Almighty asserts: "I, the LORD [Yahweh], am the *maker of all things*, stretching out the heavens *by Myself*, and spreading out the earth *all alone*" (italics added). I then like to quote John 1:3, where it says of Christ: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Clearly, these verses make it impossible to argue that Christ was created first by Jehovah and then Jehovah created all other things "through" Christ. The fact that Jehovah is the "maker of *all things*" who stretched out the heavens "by myself" and spread out the earth "all alone" (Isa. 44:24) — and the accompanying fact that Christ

Himself is the Creator of “*all things*” (John 1:3) — proves that Christ is God Almighty, just as the Father is.

In view of this, you might ask the Jehovah’s Witness: “Since Jehovah says in Isaiah 44:24, ‘I, the LORD, am the *maker of all things*, stretching out the heavens *by Myself*, and spreading out the earth *all alone*,’ how do you reconcile this with the Watchtower teaching that Jehovah first created Christ and then Christ created everything else? And how do you reconcile Jehovah’s assertion in Isaiah 44:24 with John 1:3, which says that Christ created *all things*? Can you detect a connection between Jesus and Jehovah here?”

I can use the same strategy in establishing the identity of the divine Savior. A study of the Old Testament indicates that it is *only God* that saves. In Isaiah 43:11, God asserts: “I, even I, am the LORD [Yahweh], and apart from me *there is no savior*” (italics added). This is an extremely important verse, for it indicates that (1) a claim to be Savior is, in itself, a claim to deity; and (2) there is only *one* Savior — God Almighty.

Against this backdrop, it is truly revealing of Christ’s divine nature that the New Testament refers to Jesus Christ as the Savior. Following the birth of Christ, an angel appeared to some neighboring shepherds and said: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). John’s Gospel records the conclusion of the Samaritans: Jesus “really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

In view of this, you might want to ask the Jehovah’s Witness: “If it is *only God* that can save — and if there is *no other Savior* than God (Isa. 43:11) — then doesn’t this mean that New Testament references to Jesus *as Savior* point to His deity? If not,

then how do you reconcile Jesus' role as Savior with Isaiah 43:11?"

Still another illustration of the Detective Columbo method relates to Isaiah 6:1-5, where the prophet recounts his vision of Yahweh "seated on a throne high and exalted" (verse 1). He said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord [*Yahweh*] Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (verse 3). Isaiah also quotes Yahweh as saying: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another" (42:8). Later, the apostle John — under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit — wrote that Isaiah "saw Jesus' glory" (John 12:41). Yahweh's glory and Jesus' glory are equated. In view of this, you might ask the Jehovah's Witness: "If Isaiah 6 indicates that Isaiah saw *Yahweh's* glory, and yet John 12:41 indicates that he saw *Jesus's* glory, doesn't this indicate that Jesus and Yahweh are equated here?"

You can also use the Detective Columbo approach to undermine the Jehovah's Witness view that Jesus was created as the Archangel Michael, was the first and highest of all created beings, and was spiritually resurrected as an angel creature. Questions you might ask include:

- Where is there any explicit statement in the pages of Scripture that Jesus was Michael the Archangel in the Old Testament?
- If Jesus is the first and highest of all created beings, as the Watchtower teaches — and if Jesus in his prehuman state was Michael the Archangel — then why is Michael called "*one of the chief princes*" in Daniel 10:13? Doesn't this verse indicate that Michael is *one among equals*?

- If no angel can ever be called God's son (Heb. 1:5) — and if Jesus is in fact the Son of God — then doesn't this mean Jesus cannot be the archangel Michael?
- If no angel can rule the world (Heb. 2:5) — and if Scripture clearly says that Christ *is* ruler of the world (Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 19:16) — then doesn't this mean that Christ cannot be the archangel Michael?
- Since Scripture teaches that Jesus is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), then how can it be said that Jesus was an angel, became a man, and then became an angel again?
- Since Michael the Archangel *could not* rebuke the Devil in his own authority (Jude 9) — and since Jesus *could* (and *did*) rebuke the Devil in His own authority (Matthew 16:23) — doesn't this mean that Michael and Jesus cannot be the same person?

Notice, here, that the goal is not to shove doctrine down the throat of the Jehovah's Witness. Rather, the goal is to respectfully ask questions that will cause them to come to their own conclusion regarding problems with Watchtower theology.

We can use this same Detective Columbo strategy when witnessing to Mormons. For example, Mormons often claim that following the death of the last apostle, the church fell into total worldwide apostasy. The gospel, the prophets, the priesthood, proper church organization, and correct doctrine were all allegedly lost. Mormons thus claim that their church is the *restored* church. One good Columbo-like question to ask a Mormon would therefore be this: “Since we have extremely accurate records regarding

the history of the early church, wouldn't we expect to see doctrines in the early church similar to those espoused by Mormons if indeed Mormonism is the *restored* church?" Of course, this question is a problem for Mormons, for in the early church we see nothing about such Mormon ideas as God being an exalted man.

Another illustration of the Columbo method relates to the Mormon claim that in the Old Testament the name *Elohim* refers to the Father while *Jehovah* refers to Jesus. Ask the Mormon how this view can be reconciled with Genesis 27:20, which says: "And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD [Jehovah] thy God [Elohim] brought it to me"? In this verse Isaac refers to *Jehovah thy Elohim*, clearly showing that Jehovah and Elohim are one and the same God. So, play the role of Columbo and ask how Elohim and Jehovah can be two separate gods in view of Isaac's reference to "Jehovah thy Elohim."

One final example I can provide relates to the Mormon claim that the Book of Mormon is the "fullness of the everlasting gospel." First point out to your Mormon friend that the Book of Mormon says nothing about

- (1) Mormon church organization;
- (2) the Aaronic priesthood;
- (3) the Melchizedek priesthood;
- (4) the "plurality of Gods" doctrine;
- (5) the "God is an exalted man" doctrine;
- (6) the doctrine that men may become Gods;
- (7) the doctrine of three degrees of glory, or three kingdoms; and



(8) the "plurality of wives" doctrine.

You might even ask your Mormon friend if the Book of Mormon says anything about these issues. (*He'll be stumped.*) Then you can ask: "How can it be said that the Book of Mormon is the 'fullness of the everlasting gospel' when so much important Mormon doctrine is missing from it?"

As was true with the Jehovah's Witnesses, your goal is not to shove doctrine down the throat of Mormons. Rather, the goal is to respectfully ask questions that will cause them to come to their own conclusions. The right question asked in a nondefensive, nonchallenging, unemotional way may cause the Mormon to find him- or herself face to face with a doctrine that is completely contrary to what their church has taught them. As you continue to undermine their belief system with such questions, you may find the Mormon or Jehovah's Witness increasingly open to hearing what you have to say about the true God, the true Jesus, and the true gospel that saves.

For those interested in virtually hundreds of questions that can be asked of Jehovah's Witnesses and/or Mormons, my two books may be of help:

- *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Jehovah's Witnesses* (Harvest House Publishers)
- *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Mormons* (Harvest House Publishers).

These books are available at most Christian bookstores, as well as from my web site (at a discount price): [www.ronrhodes.org](http://www.ronrhodes.org).

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<sup>1</sup>David Reed, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Answered Verse by Verse* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), p. 115.

