

IDENTIFYING AND WITNESSING TO THE CULTS

1. What is a cult?

- a. Webster defines a cult as a system or community of religious worshipers who follow dogma and practice rituals established by a founder and who have an obsessive devotion to that person and/or his ideas.
- b. A cult is a religious system of beliefs, worship, and rituals which grow out of and deviate from some previously established religion.
- c. A cult includes the body of adherents to a person, idea, or thing regarded as unorthodox or spurious by others.

2. What is a so-called Christian cult?

- a. Many religious groups take the name, **Christian**, but they do not adhere to the **fundamentals** of the **Christian faith**, “...*which was once and for all delivered to the saints.*” (Jude 3c)
- b. The basic and **essential tenets of Christianity** include the following:
 - (1) **One God in essence** as understood in the **functionally distinct persons of the trinity**: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19)
 - (2) The **deity of Jesus Christ**, the second person of the trinity. (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3)
 - (3) The **true humanity of Jesus Christ** revealed through of the incarnation. (Matt. 1:21-25)
 - (4) The **total sinfulness of mankind**. (Rom. 3:10-12, 23)
 - (5) The eternal **salvation of mankind** is provided totally by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross where He bore the sins of the entire human race once for all time. (2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Heb. 9:28; 10:10, 12, 14; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 Jn. 2:2)
 - (6) This salvation is **individually appropriated by believing in Jesus Christ** as one’s savior, putting one’s faith alone in Christ alone. (Acts 4:12; 16:31)
 - (7) The **scriptures** including Genesis through Revelation and excluding all other writings **are the final and absolute authority** in all matters of life and spirituality. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)
 - (8) The **interpretation of all scriptures** is to be **straight forward and literal** unless the context clearly demands a figure of speech. [Examples: “...*all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*” (Isa. 55:12), and “*The eyes of the Lord are in every place.*” (Prov. 15:3a)]
- c. While a cult may grow out of and deviate from any previously established religion, so-called **Christian cults base their beliefs on the Bible**, but they distort the text, the meaning of words and the text, and/or add to the text. Those involved in Christian cults always claim to be **the only true Christians**.

- d. These **Christian cults** which deviate from the fundamentals of the faith, “*once delivered to the saints,*” should be the concern of every Christian. (Jude 3c)
- (1) Christians are to be “*wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.*” (Matt. 10:16)
 - (2) Christians must “*test the spirits to see whether they are from God;*”
(1 John 4:1)
 - (3) Christians must remember that in the last days many will pay “*attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,*” (1 Tim. 4:1)
 - (4) Christians must be able to **recognize false teachers** and false prophets, wolves in sheep’s clothes (1 John 4:1b; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; cf. Matt. 7:15)
 - (5) Christians must be able to give a “*defense for the hope that is*” within them.
(1 Peter 3:15)
 - (6) Christians are not to be deceived and “*led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*” (2 Cor. 11:3; cf. Rom. 15:17, 18)
 - (7) Christians are not to accept “*another Jesus*” or a “*different gospel*” than those which The New Testament writers presented. (2 Cor. 11:4; cf. Gal. 1:8, 9)
 - (8) Christians are not to be so foolish that “*Having begun by the (Holy) Spirit, they are now somehow being perfected by the flesh.*” (Gal. 3:3)
- e. The closest word in the New Testament to “**cult**” is the word “**sect,**” found nine times (from the Greek: αἵρεσις - airesis - meaning: religious sect, heretical sect, dissension, division).
- (1) The **Sadducees** (meaning: righteousness) were the Jewish party from the priesthood and were aristocrats and people of rank. They were strong adherents to the letter of the written law, but they rejected the later traditions of the elders. While they believed in the free will of man, they did not believe in the resurrection of the body or of any future life after death. They were described as a “**sect**” by the apostles. (Acts 5:17; cf. 23:8)
 - (2) Paul was called “*the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*” (followers of Jesus Christ.). (Acts 24:5, 14)
 - (3) The **Pharisees** (meaning: separated, separatists) were the Jewish party from the scribes and were strong adherents to the letter of the law, which they continued to multiply into a form of extreme legalism. They held to a literal but fatalistic interpretation of the scriptures. They are described as a “**sect**” by the apostles. (Acts 15:5; 26:5)
 - (4) Peter writes concerning “**destructive heresies**” which will be introduced among believers. (2 Peter 2:1) Paul describes **heresies (factions)** as deeds of the flesh. (Gal. 5:20)
 - (5) Paul speaks to the Jewish leadership in Rome concerning “*this sect,*” (Christianity) which they claim “*is spoken against everywhere.*” (Acts. 28:22)

3. Some tenants and peculiarities of Christian Cults:

- a. There is usually **one person** who exercises **dictatorial powers** over the cult and this person has the final authority above the Bible in all matters.
- b. Rituals, worship, and practices of the cult are **at variance with known scripture**.
- c. Support for such rituals, worship, and practices are often found in **writings other than the Bible**.
- d. Cults place strong **emphasis on human works** to obtain salvation, to maintain spirituality, or to retain good standing in the cult. (Eph 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5-7; Gal. 3:1-3)
- e. Many cults **replace Israel** in the scriptures with their own adherents. (Rom. 11:1, 2, 28, 29)
- f. There are often **secret doctrines and rituals** known only by those initiated into the cult, or known only to a select group within the cult, or known only after so-called spiritual advance within the cult.
- g. Cults usually use a **non-literal interpretation** of the Bible.
- h. The **exclusivity of cults** often precludes anyone outside of their organization from obtaining salvation, spirituality, or any potential blessing from God.

4. Questions to ask suspected cultists?

- a. Do you **base your teachings** on revelations or secret writings or manifestations other than the 66 books of the Bible? (Col. 2:18, 23; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18, 19)
There must be internal and external consistency. (Gal. 1:6-9)
- b. Is your **primary evangelistic task** the preaching of the gospel, as taught in the Bible, to those who are not of your number? (Mk. 13:10; Acts 10:36-43; 16:31; Rom. 1:15, 16; 1 Cor. 1:17, 18, 21, 23; 2:1, 2; 15:1)
- c. Do you believe that **Jesus of Nazareth** is the one, true, **eternal creator God** of the universe? (John 10:30; Col. 1:13-22; 2:9, 10; Heb. 1:2-4ff)
- d. Do you believe that Jesus Christ's **death on the cross** (Rom. 1:15, 16; 1 Cor. 1:17, 1 Cor. 1:18, 23; Phil. 2:8) is the **only basis** for the **forgiveness of your sins** and The only provision for **your eternal salvation**? (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 1:14, 20; 1 Thess. 5:9, 10; Heb. 9:26-28; 10:10, 12, 13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:1, 2)

- e. Do you believe that **Jesus Christ rose from the dead** in a bodily resurrection form? (Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:34; Rom. 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:4, 20-22)
- f. Are you **personally trusting in Jesus Christ** as your savior? (John 1:12; John 3:16; 11:25, 26; 14:1; Acts 4:12; 16:31)
- g. Do you depend on your work or any works other than the **work of Christ on the cross**, even in part for your salvation? (John 6:29; Gal. 2:16; 3:1-3; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5; 1 John 5:11-13)

5. How should you witness to members of a cult?

- a. **Know basic Bible teachings, the truth** of the Scriptures. (Jn. 8:32; 2 Tim. 2:15)
- b. **Don't assume** that every cultist believes the same thing.
- c. Ask **strategic and specific questions**. (cf. point 4)
- d. Cultists are **trained to answer objections** and they have **so-called proof texts**.
- e. **Always use your Bible** and check the Scriptures and the contexts. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb 4:12)
- f. Always **define Biblical terms** clearly.
- g. **Be loving, gentle, and respectful**. (1 Pet. 3:15)
- h. **Emphasize the gospel**. (1 Cor. 15:1-4ff; Gal. 1:7-9, 11; 2 Cor. 11:4; cf. Eph. 1:7; 2:8, 9)
- i. **Demonstrate the deity of Jesus Christ:**
 - (1) Jesus is **the Creator (He is Sovereign)**. (Col 1:16; John 1:3; Heb. 1:2, 10)
 - (2) Jesus is of the **Nature of the Godhead**. (John 1:1, 18; 8:56-59; 10:30; 14:11; Col. 1:15; 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:3, 8; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 4)
 - (3) Jesus is **the Savior**. (Matt. 1:21; Acts 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:1; Titus 2:13)
 - (4) Jesus **forgave Sins**. (Matt. 9:2-6; Mark 2:5-10; Lk. 5:20-25; Acts 10:43)
 - (5) Jesus Christ **gives Eternal life** (John 5:21; Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:11-13)
 - (6) Jesus **was worshiped as God**. (Matt. 2:2; John 9:38; Rev. 4:8-11; 5:11-14)
 - (7) Jesus is **the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last**. (Rev. 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8)
 - (8) Jesus is **Omnipotent**, (all powerful). (Matt. 8:26, 27; John 10:17, 18; Col. 1:17; Rev. 19:6)
 - (9) Jesus is **Omniscient**. (all knowing). (Col. 2:2, 3)
 - (10) Jesus is **Omnipresent**. (Matt. 28:20; John 8:56-59)

- (11) Jesus is **Truth**. (John 1:14, 17; 14:6)
- (12) **Jesus Christ is righteous**. (2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 2:1)
- (13) Jesus is **the Great Judge**. (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42)
- (14) Jesus is **Immutable**. (Heb. 13:8)
- (15) Jesus is **Love**. (Rom. 8:38, 39; Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:8, 9, 16)

j. **Give your testimony**. (Acts 22:1-21; 26:4-23)

6. What are the major Christian Cults:

(These are described by Walter Martin in his book, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Jan Karel Van Baalen in his book, *The Chaos of the Cults*, and Bob Larson in his book, *Larson's Book of Cults*)

- a. Mormonism
- b. Jehovah's Witnesses
- c. The Catholic Church (not listed in these books of cults)
- d. Christian Science
- e. Worldwide Church of God (Anglo-Israelism; founder: Herbert W. Armstrong))
- f. Unity School of Christianity (The largest gnostic cult in Christendom)
- g. Seventh-day Adventism (?)
- h. Destiny of America
- i. Swedenborgianism (The Church of the New Jerusalem)
- j. Buchmanism (now: Moral Re-Armament)
- k. The Way International
- l. Children of God

7. The term cult is sometimes used to describe religions which do not use the Bible as their basis. These cults are described in depth in the previously mentioned books in point 7 (this list is not exhaustive):

- a. Spiritism (The Cult of Antiquity)
- b. Theosophy (The Theosophical Society)
- c. Zen Buddhism
- d. The Baha'I Faith
- e. Scientology (L. Ron Hubbard)
- f. Unification Church (founder: Rev. Sun Myung Moon)
- g. Unitarianism (Unitarian Universalist Association)
- h. Rosicrucian Fellowship
- i. Freemasonry (Masonic Lodge)
- j. Hare Krishna
- k. Eckankar
- l. Transcendental Meditation
- m. Silva Mind Control