

Nature and Identity of Cults

Cults come in all different forms and can range from groups with misguided theology to the enslavement of its members. It is important to be aware of what a cult is, what it believes and how to help those who are trapped in them.

Why Study Cults?

To Be Able to Guard Yourself Against False Doctrines

“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will correspond to their actions.” (2 Cor. 11:14-15)

“He must hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he will be able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it.” (Titus 1:9)

“Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.” (Eph. 6:10-11)

“But examine all things; hold fast to what is good. Stay away from every form of evil.” (1 Thess. 5:21-22)

To Be Able to Witness to those Who Are in a Cult

“And the Lord’s slave must not engage in heated disputes but be kind toward all, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance and then knowledge of the truth and they will come to their senses and escape the devil’s trap where they are held captive to do his will.” (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

“But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess.” (1 Pet. 3:15)

“Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior, since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:3-4)

What Is a Cult?

1) Formal religious veneration; worship, 2) a system of religious beliefs and ritual; also its body of adherents, 3) a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious; also its body of adherents, 4) a great devotion to a person, idea, object, movement, or work (as a film or book); especially such devotion regarded as a literary or intellectual fad. (Webster’s Dictionary.)

“A group of people polarized around someone’s interpretation of the Bible and characterized by major deviations from orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ.” (Walter Martin. *Rise of the Cults*. p. 12.)

“A Cult is any religious movement, which claims the backing of Christ or the Bible, but distorts the eternal message of Christianity by an additional revelation and by displacing a fundamental tenet of faith with a secondary matter.” (Gordon Lewis. *Confronting the Cults*, p. 4.)

The 12 Marks of a Cult

1. **Defective Christology:** Denies some aspect of Christ; His deity, humanity, origin, or the union of his two natures in one.
2. **A False Basis of Salvation:** Teaches that eternal life depends upon works other than faith in the atonement of Christ on the cross.
3. **Uncertain Hope:** The issue of a cult member’s salvation is unknown and is based on one’s obedience to the leader and their doctrine.
4. **Extra Biblical Revelation:** They deny God’s Word as the only source of authority. They add or elevate their own teachings as authoritative.
5. **Special Revelation:** They claim new and continual, exclusive revelation given to them through visions.
6. **False Messianic Leadership:** The leader is seen as the only interpreter of Scripture appointed by God and therefore should not be disobeyed.
7. **Denunciation of Others:** The members are taught that their community is the only true group and that all other groups are false.
8. **Doctrinal Ambiguity:** Their “doctrine” tends to be unclear or continually changing.
9. **Segmented Biblical Attention:** They tend to focus on one verse or passage of the Bible to the exclusion of others, violating the context.
10. **Syncretism:** They combine different teachings from differing systems of belief, which results in a new teaching or belief system.
11. **Enslaving Organizational Structure:** They demand total commitment from their followers that usually destroys their individual will.
12. **Financial Exploitation:** The leader strongly implies that money given to the cause will grant blessings, powers, and salvation.

Testing the Spirits

“Suppose your own full brother, your son, your daughter, your beloved wife, or your closest friend should seduce you secretly and encourage you to go and serve other gods that neither you nor your ancestors have previously known, the gods of the surrounding people (whether near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other). You must not give in to him or even listen to him; do not feel sympathy for him or spare him or cover up for him. Instead, you must kill him without fail! Your own hand must be the first to strike him, and then the hands of the whole community. You must stone him to death because he tried to entice you away from the Lord your God, who delivered you from the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. Thus all Israel will hear and be afraid; no longer will they continue to do evil like this among you.” (Deut. 13:6-11)

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn the abhorrent practices of those nations. There must never be found among you anyone who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, anyone who practices divination, an omen reader, a soothsayer, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, one who conjures up spirits, a practitioner of the occult, or a necromancer. Whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord and because of these detestable things the Lord your God is about to drive them out from before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. Those nations that you are about to dispossess listen to omen readers and diviners, but the Lord your God has not given you permission to do such things... But if any prophet presumes to speak anything in my name that I have not authorized him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die. Now if you say to yourselves, ‘How can we tell that a message is not from the Lord?’ – whenever a prophet speaks in my name and the prediction is not fulfilled, then I have not spoken it; the prophet has presumed to speak it, so you need not fear him.” (Deut. 18:9-14, 20-22)

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses Jesus as the Christ who has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God, and this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and now is already in the world.” (1 Jn. 4:1-3)