

A. What makes a church or group non-Christian?

There are many non-Christian religions and cults in America: Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Unity, The Way International, Unitarianism, Islam, Hinduism, etc. They all claim *special revelation* and privilege and those that use the Bible invariably interpret it in disharmony with standard biblical understanding. And groups like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses object to being labeled a "cult" because it often gets an emotional reaction as well as is a label they want to avoid.

The dictionary defines cult as "a system of religious worship or ritual"; "devoted attachment to, or extravagant admiration for, a person, principle, etc.", "a group of followers."

This is a typical secular definition and, by it, any believer *in any god* is a cultist, even atheists since they have an admiration for a principle and are a group of followers of the philosophy of atheism. Therefore, this is too broad a definition since it doesn't sufficiently address the issue of true and false religious systems.

The definition I choose to use for "non-Christian cult" or "non-Christian religion" is a group that may or may not include the Bible in its set of authoritative scriptures.

If it does include the Bible, it distorts the true biblical doctrines that effect salvation sufficiently so as to void salvation.

If it doesn't use the Bible, it is a non-Christian religion and does not participate in the benefit of divine revelation.

What makes something non-Christian is when it denies the essential doctrines of the Bible.

1. The Deity of Christ, which involves The Trinity
2. The Resurrection
3. Salvation by Grace

All of them add to the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Some cult groups even add to the Bible, i.e., Mormonism which has the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price. Also, Christian Science has added Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, however, have actually changed the text of the Bible to make it fit what they want it to. They have rewritten the Bible and use a "bible" that is the New World Translation.

Cults add their own efforts, their own works of righteousness to the finished work of salvation accomplished by Jesus on the cross. All Cults say that Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient, but that our works must be 'mixed with' or 'added to' His in order to prove that we are saved and worthy of salvation. They say one thing but believe another.

They maintain that they must prove themselves worthy and that they must try their best to please God and prove to Him that they are sincere, have worked hard, and are then worthy to be with Him. In other words, they do their best and God takes care of the rest.

This is absolutely wrong. The Bible says that we are saved by grace, not by works: (Eph. 2:8-9) ***"For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man one should boast,"*** It is not by anything we do: ***"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified (cleared of all guilt) by faith without the deeds of the law,"*** (Rom. 3:28).

If there was anything that we could do to merit the forgiveness of our sins, then Jesus died needlessly: (Gal. 2:16, 21). ***"16) knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. 21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain"***

People in cults will often cite James 2:26 where it says that ***faith without works is dead*** in an attempt to demonstrate that works are part of becoming saved. While it is true that faith without works is dead, it isn't the works that save us. James is saying that if you have real and true faith, it will result in real and true works of Christianity. In other words, you do good works because you *are* saved, not to *get* saved. He isn't saying that our works are what saves us, or that they, in combination with the finished work of Christ, save us. James is simply telling us that if we say we have faith (James 2:14) but we have no works in correspondence to that faith, then that faith won't save us because it is a dead faith.

This agrees with Paul who tells us that faith is what saves us, (Rom. 5:1) **"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."** This faith is real faith, or true saving faith, not just an empty mental acknowledgement of God's existence - which is what those who say they have faith but show no corresponding godliness are guilty of. Incidentally, you should realize that faith is only as good as who you put it in. Just having faith in something doesn't mean you're saved. That is why it is important to have the True Jesus, because if you have great faith but it is in the wrong Jesus -the Jesus of a cult- then your faith is useless.

In Mormonism Jesus is the brother of the devil begotten through sexual intercourse from a God who came from another planet. In Jehovah's Witnesses, he is Michael the Archangel who became a man. In the New Age Movement, he is a man in tune with the divine consciousness.

Which is true? The only true Jesus is the one of the Bible, the one who is prayed to (1 Cor. 1:1-2 with Psalm 116:1; Acts 7:55-60); worshipped (Matt. 2:2, 11, 14:33, John 9:35-38, 6), and called God (John 20:28; Col. 2:9). The Jesus of the Cults is not prayed to, worshipped, or called God. And since the Jesus of the Bible is the only one who reveals the Father (Luke 10:22) so that you may have eternal life (John 17:3), you must have the true Jesus who alone is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Another common denominator among the Cults is their methods for twisting scripture. Some of the errors they commit in interpreting Scripture are:

1. Taking Scripture out of context;
2. Reading into the Scriptures information that is not there;
3. Picking and choosing only the Scriptures that suit their needs;
4. Ignoring other explanations;
5. Combining scriptures that don't have anything to do with each other;
6. Quoting a verse without giving its location;
7. Incorrect definitions of key words; and
8. Incorrect translations.

These are only a few of the many ways Cults misuse Scripture. If you want to be able to witness well to a person in a cult, you need to understand their doctrines as well as your own. Jesus warned us that in the last days false Christs and false prophets would arise and deceive many people. (Matt. 24:24) The Lord knew that there would be a rise of the spirit of Antichrist (1 John 4:1-3) in the last days. Its manifestation is here in the forms of Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the New Age Movement, among others.

SPIRIT OF LIFE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
BIBLE SCHOOL SECOND EDITION
SESSION 212

CULTS: PART 1 – WHAT MAKES A CHURCH OR GROUP NON CHRISTIAN

We acknowledge some information has been taken from:

<https://carm.org/what-makes-church-or-group-non-christian>

B. CHARACTER TRAITS OF CULTS

Cults are everywhere. Some are mainstream and widely accepted. Others are isolationist and hide from examination at great expense. They are growing and flourishing. Some cause great suffering while others appear very helpful and beneficial. Whichever group it is, their ultimate end is their destruction when the Lord returns to claim His own.

What is a cult? Here are some characteristics to consider:

Generally, it is a group that is unorthodox, esoteric, and has a devotion to a person, object, or a set of new ideas.

- 1. New Teaching** - has a new theology and doctrine.
- 2. Only True Teaching** - often considers traditional religious systems to be apostate and it alone possesses the complete truth.
- 3. Strong Leadership** - often an individual or small but powerful leadership group holds control of the group's teachings and practices.
- 4. Asset Acquisition** - often requires tithing and/or property transfer to the religious system.
- 5. Isolationist** - to facilitate control over the members physically, intellectually, financially, and emotionally.
- 6. Controlling** - exercises control over the members. Sometimes this is through fear, threatening loss of salvation if you leave the group. Sometimes through indoctrination.
- 7. Indoctrination** - possesses methods to reinforce the cult's beliefs and standards where opposing views are ridiculed and often misrepresented.
- 8. Apocalyptic** - to give the members a future focus and philosophical purpose in avoiding the apocalypse or being delivered through it.
- 9. Experience** - various practices including meditation, repetition of words and/or phrases, and 'spiritual' enlightenment with God are used as confirmation of their truth.
 - a. Depravation- sleep and food depravation which weakens the will of the subject. This is uncommon, though practiced by more severe cults.

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10. Persecution - predictions of being persecuted, often combined with claiming any opposing views demonstrated against them as a form of persecution.

11. Many have non-verifiable belief systems;

- a. For example, they would teach something that cannot be verified.
 - 1. Like they came from a spaceship behind Hale-Bop comet
 - 2. Or, that God, an alien, or angel appeared to the leader and gave him a revelation.
 - 3. Or that the members are seeded angels from another world, etc.

Often, the philosophy makes sense only if you adopt the full set of values and definitions that it teaches. With this kind of belief, truth becomes unverifiable, internalized, and easily manipulated through the philosophical systems of its inventor.

12. The Leader of a Cult who is:

a. ***Often charismatic*** and is considered very special for varying reasons:

- 1. The cult leader has received special revelation from God.
- 2. The cult leader claims to be the incarnation of a deity, angel, or special messenger.
- 3. The cult leader claims to be appointed by God for a mission.
- 4. The cult leader claims to have special abilities.
- 5. The leader is often above reproach and is not to be denied or contradicted.

b. **Cult ethos**

- 1. Usually seeks to do good works, otherwise no one would join them.
- 2. They are usually moral and possess a good standard of ethical teaching.
- 3. Many times the Bible is used or additional "scriptures" are penned. The Bible, when used, is always distorted with private interpretations. Many cults recruit Jesus as one of their own and redefine him accordingly.

13. Cult groups vary greatly

- a. From the **ascetic** (severe discipline, i.e. abstaining from all forms of indulgence, and including a life of fasting and prayer and manual labor) to the promiscuous (anything goes).
- b. From esoteric knowledge (only a few understand) to very simple teachings.
- c. From the rich and powerful to the poor and weak.

14. Who is vulnerable to a cult?

Everyone is vulnerable from the rich, the poor, the educated, the non-educated, the old, the young, the previously religious and the atheist.

A general profile of a cult member could be some or all of these:

- Disenchanted with conventional religious establishments
- Intellectually confused over religious and/or philosophical issues.
- Sometimes disenchanted with society as a whole.
- Has a need for encouragement and support
- Emotionally needy
- Needs a sense of purpose.
- Financially needy
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15. Recruitment techniques

- a. They find a need and fill it. One of the ways they do this is called **Love Bombing** – Constant positive affection in word and deed.
- b. Sometimes there is a lot of physical contact like hugging, pats on the back, and touching.
- c. Cult group members will lend emotional support to someone in need.
- d. They may help them in various ways...whatever is needed so the person becomes indebted to them.

e. They may compliment them, reassure them, and make them the center of attention.

f. Many cults use the influence of the bible and/or mention Jesus as being one of their own; thereby adding validity to their system. They do this through Scripture twisting. They use the Bible verses out of context to build their doctrine. They mix their misinterpreted verses with the aberrant philosophy.

16. Gradualism

- Slow altering of thinking processes and belief system through repeated teaching.
- People usually accept cult doctrines one point at a time.
- New beliefs are reinforced by other cult members.

C. WHY WOULD SOMEONE JOIN A CULT?

1. The cult satisfies various needs:

- Psychological – Someone could have a weak personality and is easily led.
- emotional – someone could have recently suffered an emotional trauma.
- Intellectual – someone has questions that this group answers.

2. The cult gives them approval, acceptance, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

3. The cult is appealing for some reason. They could be:

- Moral rigidity and purity.
- Financial security.
- Promises of exaltation, redemption, higher consciousness, or a host of other rewards.

D. HOW ARE THEY KEPT IN THE CULT?

1. Dependence

a. People often want to stay because the cult meets their psychological, intellectual, and spiritual needs.

2. Isolation

a. Outside contacts are reduced and more and more of the life of the member is built around the cult. It then becomes very easy to control and shape the member.

3. Cognitive Reconstruction (Brainwashing)

a. Once the person is indoctrinated, their thinking processes are reconstructed to be consistent with the cult and to be submissive to its leaders.

b. This facilitates control by the cult leader(s)

4. Substitution

a. The Cult and cult leaders often take the place of mother, father, priest, teacher, and healer.

b. Often the member takes on the characteristics of a dependent child seeking to win the approval of the leader and or group.

5. Indebtedness

a. The member becomes indebted to the group emotionally, financially, etc.
Guilt

b. The person is told that to leave is to betray the leader, God, the group, etc.

c. the person is told that to leave would mean to reject the love and help the group has given.

E. HOW DO YOU GET THEM OUT?

1. The best thing is to try not to let them get trapped in the first place. If you are a Christian, then pray. But to get a person out of a cult takes time, energy, and support. Teach them the truth. Give them a true replacement for their aberrant belief system.
2. Show the cult group's philosophic inconsistencies.
 - a. Study the group and learn its history seeking clues and information.
 - b. Show them scriptures that lead them to the truth.

Try and get them physically away from the cult group. Give them the support they need emotionally. Alleviate the threat that if they leave the group that they are doomed or in danger.

Generally, don't attack the leader of the group...that comes later. Converts often feel a loyalty and respect for the founder of the group.