

Challenging the Cults

Introduction to the Cults



What is a Cult?

Defining a cult can be a difficult task. One person's cult is another person's truth. First century Romans considered belief in Jesus a superstitious cult. Tacitus, the 2nd century Roman historian writes,

To dispel the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and treated with the most extreme punishments, some people, popularly known as Christians, whose disgraceful activities were notorious. The originator of that name, Christus, had been executed when Tiberius was emperor, by order of the procurator Pontius Pilatus. But the deadly cult, though checked for a time, was now breaking out again not only in Judea, the birthplace of this evil, but even throughout Rome,
Tacitus 109 AD

Today, many Jews consider any Jewish person joining "Jews for Jesus" as part of a cult. North

Koreans worship the leader of North Korea, Kim IL Sung II, even though the country is officially atheist. So just how do we know, what is a cult?

The word cult^[1] is from the Latin word "*Cultus*" meaning, to care or adore, derived from the word "Colere" to cultivate. The word "Culture" is related to the same root meaning to cultivate.

The question, "what is a cult?" ultimately gets down to what is "Truth". If someone feels hope in the worship of a statue, person or organization, to them the issue is life and eternity. People put hope in where they feel their salvation is. To the North Korean, faced with execution for not worshipping Kim IL Sung II, the issue is life or death. However, the North Korean Christian, who would rather be tortured and die than reject Christ, believes his salvation is not in this life by worshipping an image, but in the words of Jesus, who promised eternal life. Like the early Christians of Rome, Christians in North Korea face a similar problem. Do you bow to the emperor? Do you put your trust in Christ alone?

Early Christians had a choice; they could worship Caesar or die. Polycarp, a 2nd century martyr, after he was taken by the Romans in his old age was asked by the *Roman Pro-council* to reproach Christ and live. Polycarp answered,

"Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?"^[2]

Polycarp believed and trusted in Christ, he was burned at the stake. He thought about the Jesus he served, he knew this life was not over when he died in the flames, his death was not the end, but the start of his eternity. The same is true with many Christians who choose death rather than submission to national cults and religions.

Christianity and the Cults

Christianity is not a religion based on emotion or culture. Christianity is not just one choice of many religions. Christianity claims to be exclusive "Truth". Christianity's basis is "Truth", reality as opposed to falsehood. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). *Logic, facts and history* confirm the "Truth" of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ was an historical figure who was crucified and rose from the dead. Over 500 people witnessed his death and resurrection. Paul writes,

³For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.
I Corinthians 15: 3-6

The non-believing Romans even wrote about the Christian belief in Christ's resurrection and its spread throughout the Empire.

The discussion of the "Truth" of Christianity belongs to the field of *Apologetics*, which is another topic. In short, the super-natural evidence of Bible prophecy, history and archeology confirm Christianity. Over 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the book of Daniel, foretells the exact day of his death, in the *Seventy weeks of Daniel*. Daniel also wrote about events following his death, including the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.^[3] Isaiah seven-hundred years before Jesus, described His death and rejection by Israel (Isaiah 53) demonstrating the super-natural character of the Bible and the identity of Jesus as recorded in the scriptures.

The Bible and Cults

In the Bible, worship apart from God is idolatrous. The adoration of idols, whether people or organizations, apart from the "True" God, revealed in scripture is cultic. The word for cult is derived from the Latin root, "*Cultus*" meaning to adoration. Isaiah writes about the vanity in idol adoration and construction,

¹⁰ Who would form a god or mold an image *That profits him nothing?*¹² The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, Fashions it with hammers, And works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; He drinks no water and is faint.¹³ The craftsman stretches out *his* rule, He marks one out with chalk; He fashions it with a plane, He marks it out with the compass, And makes it like the figure of a man,..... He falls down before it and worships *it*, Prays to it and says "Deliver me, for you are my god!"
Isaiah 44:10-13,17b

In a biblical sense, a cult is akin to "Idol worship", worship of the man made. A cult is a man made religion, not according to "Biblical truth". Since Biblical Christianity is the "Truth", and the distortion of this truth is not of God, but man and ultimately Satan. Paul writes,

¹³For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.
2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Using orthodox Christianity as a standard of truth, Dr. Walter Martin defines a cult as,

A cult, then is a group of people polarized around someone's interpretation of the Bible and is 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.^[4]

What are the characteristics of a cult?

From a biblical perspective, many of the "Things" the world's puts trust and hope in are idolatrous in nature. The Bible consistently warns against putting hope in the vain things of this world. In particular, cults derived from a perversion of the Gospel by false apostles are nothing less than Satanic.

²⁰ Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

1 Corinthians 10:20-21

Most of these cults have distinct characteristics which allow them to be identified^[5].

1. New Truth Mohammed introduced the idea that it was Ishmael and not Isaac, who was taken to the top of Mt. Moriah. Mohammed was born in 572 AD the event took place 2100 BC. Twenty-six centuries after the event, "New Truth" has been introduced.

The same can be said of Mormonism that introduced the idea that after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus did not go to heaven but came to America and spoke to the Indians.

2. New Interpretations of Scripture Many cults will change literal meaning of scripture to apply to their own particular purposes. The Jehovah Witnesses for example claim the 144,000 spoken

of in the book of Revelation is not speaking of Jews, even though it says Jews, but of Jehovah Witnesses who were gathered in NY most of whom are dead today.

3. A-Non Biblical Source of Authority One characteristic in many cults is the need for a non-biblical source of authority. Most time this is the current or founding prophet's writings or saying. These writing for the most part will give the Bible "lip-service" and place second to their revelation, which supersedes the Scriptures.

The Muslims have the Quran, and though many Muslims might say the Bible is "God's word", they will claim it is corrupt and can only be used to support the Quran. The Mormons also have three additional books to the Bible, the *Book of Mormon, Doctrine and the Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price*, all of which are considered superior to the Bible.

4. Another Jesus The cults Jesus is always a different Jesus then in the Bible. The Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses is a created Angel, Not God, to be worshipped. The Mormon Jesus is the brother of Satan and the product of sexual relations between Elohim and Mary. The Muslim Jesus is just a prophet, with no special divine nature.

5. Rejection of Orthodox Christianity Another character of cults is their attack on orthodox Christianity. In their claim of "New Revelation", they will attack church as corrupt and departing from the "Truth", hence the need for their groups arrival.

6. Double Talk The cults also disguise their real beliefs behind familiar sounding words with completely different meanings. The word God in Mormonism is the belief in an endless multitude of gods, including a God over God the Father and God over the God of Father.

7. Non-biblical teaching on the nature of God (Trinity) The Trinitarian view of God is also a prime target for Cults. This often labeled as pagan in origin.

8. Changing Theology The theology of Cults is in a constant state of change as new prophecies override old ones. Polygamy once considered a command by God for Mormons, was later removed by additional revelation. To be accepted as a state, Utah needed to renounce the act and prophecy was revealed removing it.

9. Strong Leadership Strong dictatorial leadership is another characteristic of cults, people are given instructions, on what to wear and how to interact with the world by their leaders.

10. Salvation by works... All cults are works oriented. They tend to focus on accepting the prophet and the organization as the source of all truth. Followers need to actively work for their salvation, promoting the organization to establish "Worthiness" for salvation. The Gospel, the "Good News" of salvation by "Faith alone" in Christ is totally absent.

11. False Prophecy... One area that clearly demonstrates the false nature of "Cults" is their propensity for false prophecies. Since many really believe God is speaking through them they have tendency to foretell and proclaim events that do not happen. The Jehovah Witnesses under Rutherford's leadership built a house called "Beth Sarim" (House of the princes) in the early 1930's because the princes, (David, Abraham and Joseph) would be returning and they would live in this house in San Diego, where Judge Rutherford was living waiting for their soon return. This failed to occur and the house was later sold.

Joseph Smith had also prophesied about men on the Moon who looked like Quakers, were 6 feet tall and lived to be a thousand years old, as recorded by his followers.

By using the *Test of a Prophet* many of these false prophets and their organizations can be exposed, the lost freed.

[1] Etymology: French culte, from Latin cultus care, adoration, from colere to cultivate— more at wheel
Date: 1617 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

[2] Fox's book of Martyrs, Chapter 2, The Ten Primitive Persecutions

[3] Seventy -Weeks of Daniel, Daniel 9:24-27, <http://www.truthnet.org/apologetics> and <http://www.truthnet.org/dan70.html>

[4] Walter Martin, The Rise of the Cults, pg. 12

[5] Handbook of Today's Religion, Chapter 2, Pgs. 20-25, Campus Crusade for Christ 1992