

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 8, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THE TRUTH ABOUT CULTS CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN
A Look at Other Cults and How A Christian Should Respond to the Cults
Matthew 7:15-20, Galatians 1:6-9

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¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” – Matthew 7:15-20 (NIV)

In our study we have emphasized Dr. Walter Martin's definition of a cult. Dr. Martin defined a cult as Cults are groups that often claim to be in harmony with Christianity but deny foundational Christian doctrines such as the Trinity or the unique deity of Jesus Christ. In our key text for our study, Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus gives us a warning about the coming of the cults. He states, *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."* What Jesus was warning was that these may sometimes look, act, and sound like they are Christian. However, that is in external appearance only. Upon closer inspection of "their fruit" something else is revealed. Upon closer examination of at least two of these groups, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, and their own teaching, beliefs, doctrines and practices it become obvious that they have deviated from orthodox Christianity and its teaching. But these are only two of a very vast and rapidly growing group of cults and false religious groups. This study will seek to give us some good resources for checking out other cults and false religious groups as well as a list of some of those to watch out for. We will also be concluding our study by briefly looking at how a Christian should respond.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER CULTS TO WATCH FOR?

According to Bob Pardon, Director of the New England Institute of Religious Research (NEIRR) in Lakeville, MA, and an AIIA Resource Associate, the following are the ten most dangerous groups in America today, based on one or both of the above stated concerns:

Top 10 Most Dangerous Cults in America Today:

1. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism)** - A very subtle, spiritual deception started in 1830 by Joseph Smith. This aggressively evangelistic group contends that it is the only true Church, and that all Christians outside Mormonism are following a deficient Gospel and a false Christ.
2. **The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses)** - Militantly anti-historic Christian tenets. This group began in the 1870s with Charles Taze Russell. They not only deny the essentials of the Christian faith, but the control exercised over the membership is highly destructive.
3. **The Church of Scientology** - A do-it-yourself salvation, science fiction group that masquerades as the true Church, lightly sprayed with a thin veneer of Christianity. Seeks to destroy through litigation and character assassination those who speak out against the group.
4. **The Twelve Tribes** - This group began in the early 1970s with Elbert Eugene Spriggs. They claim that salvation can only be found by giving all possessions to them and living in their community. All personal decision-making power is given over to the leadership.
5. **The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church or "Moonies")** - Founded in 1954 by Sun Myung Moon, this highly authoritarian and destructive group teaches that Jesus failed on the cross. Moon is now the mediator between God and man.
6. **The International Churches of Christ (Boston Movement)** - This highly evangelistic group which began in 1978 with Kip McKean embraces most of the main tenets of the historic Church. Teaches that it is the only true Church and is highly authoritarian, with immense control over members' lives.

7. **The Family (Children of God)** - This communal group was founded by David "Moses" Berg. A strange mixture of basic Christian tenets and almost total sexual license. Very controlling and manipulative.
8. **Christian Identity Movement (Aryan Nations, Christian Identity Church, Klu Klux Klan, etc.)** - A loose-knit confederation of various small groups that are militantly anti-government and conspiracy driven. Each group holds differing, deviant Christian tenets. All hold to Caucasians being the descendants of the ten "lost" Tribes of Israel, God's true people.
9. **The Nation of Islam (Black Muslims)** - Began in 1930s by W. D. Fard. Group teaches that the black man is good, the white man is the devil, and that Jesus was merely a prophet. Highly controlling group. Today the group is led by Louis Farrakhan and has embraced the works of L. Ron Hubbard, especially Dianetics, practicing auditing and other such practices. The group is becoming increasingly linked with the Church of Scientology. Another dangerously militant group associated with the Nation of Islam is the Black Panthers.
10. **United Pentecostal Church (UPC)** - A highly controlling, legalistic group that was formed in 1945. This group denies the Trinity and teaches that in order to be saved one must be baptized in the name of Jesus only.

According to cult watch groups and Christian apologetic groups, there are approximately **2,500 known and identified cults in America today** and that number is rapidly rising. Added to that number those that may remain unidentified and/or intentionally hidden it is almost impossible to say how many cults and non-Christian groups there are in the United States today. Therefore, giving an exhaustive list of all the cults is not only difficult and lengthy, it would be useless as more and more groups are being added almost monthly. The most useful tool available today for those interested in further research on the topic of cults, or for those seeking information on a particular group is the internet and the good work being done by several Christian cult watch group and research engines that are available today. Here are two that I recommend that provide good cult list and information about those groups. Both of these are reputable and trustworthy sources that are Biblically sound.

2 Sources for Identifying Cult Groups :

1. **Christian Apologetics and Research Ministries** – www.carm.org When you get to their website go to the Index of Cults and Religious Group. From there you can look up the groups you are interested in or just search it out.
2. **Watchman Fellowship** – www.watchman.org When you get to their website go to Religious Groups and Cults in the panel located on the left hand side of the page. Here you will have to search by in alphabetical listing to find the groups you are interested in.

**Other resources and website are listed on the provided "Suggested Resources for Further Study on the Cults" handout. Another good resources for further study on Cults and other Christian and religious type questions is www.gotquestion.org It is excellent and I use it quite frequently in preparing Bible Studies and Sermons.*

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A CULT? (Galatians 1:6-9)

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a cult is simply a system of religious beliefs and ritual. In general, a cult is a group that claims to belong to a specific religion but misrepresents any core teaching that would prevent a believer from being saved according to that religion. **In Christian terms, a cult is "a religious group that denies one or more of the fundamentals of biblical truth."** Specifically, it is a group that claims to be Christian, but whose teaching, if

believed, would prevent someone from having a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And that's the rub... right? Our concern is that these cults and religious groups are preaching a false gospel and telling people that in order to be saved they must believe their way and do what their religion requires and essentially it's false, misleading, and ultimately won't save them. In other words those who believe that way are lost, and will face eternal separation from God.

3 Core Principles of the Christian Message: The core of the Christian salvation message is essentially as follows...

1. **Jesus Christ is both God and perfect man -**
2. **Jesus Christ died and rose again -**
3. **Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross is solely sufficient to pay for our sins and restore our relationship with God -**

If any group claims to be Christian but deviates from this message, they are a cult. While many Christian groups and sects differ on minor matters, those who teach a different gospel are not Christian. For example: a Christian sect may believe that Christians are obligated to observe the Sabbath; a cult would teach that honoring the Sabbath is a requirement for salvation.

2 Common Cult Teaching:

1. **Jesus was not God**
2. **Salvation is not by faith alone**

The two most common Christian cult teachings are that Jesus was not God and that salvation is not by faith alone. Both lead to the belief that Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient to pay for our sins, and our effort is needed in the process of salvation, which is directly contrary to Scripture. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast."* The two most prominent cult groups who teach this are the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Mormons teach that Jesus is not God, and that even God had to earn His position as Supreme Being. Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is Michael the archangel. Both cults teach that salvation is the result of faith and those good works which are listed by their respective churches.

Cults are nearly as old as the church, itself. They're particularly dangerous because they may use the same language and claim to be Christian, but their teachings pull people away from God instead of drawing people toward Him. Their words sound right, their adherents are sincere, but their way leads to death. Paul confronted this in his day. Notice what he writes in Galatians 1:6-9, *"⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!"*

Paul's Biblical Recognition of A Cult Group and How We May Recognize Them: (Galatians 1:6-9)

1. **Denial of Biblical Grace (v.6)**

2. **A Different Gospel (v.6)**
 3. **Confusing Truth (v.7)**
 4. **Perversion of God's Revealed Word (v.7)**
 5. **Are Under God's Curse (vv.8-9) – Why?** They are lost themselves, deceivers, and leading others astray and away from a God who loves them and died for them.
- *It boils down to what they do with Jesus and Salvation*

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE AND SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE TOLERANT OF OTHER RELIGIOUS BELIEFS? (Various Scripture)

So given all of this and the things that have been revealed about cults in our study what are we to do with groups like this who are clearly wrong and misleading others, sealing the fate of some to eternal separation from God and lostness?

We established some ground rules early in our study for Christians studying other religions and cults. These are important so that our intent in looking at these groups we don't denigrate into our own spiritual arrogance and pride, nor into spiteful malice and bigoted hatred toward other peoples and groups. So here are the pre-established ground rules we have maintained throughout our study:

Ground Rules:

1. **A study of other faiths (cults) is not to be done in a spirit of criticism or ill will** – Please, please, please be aware that we do not conduct a study like this one to be divisive, unmerciful, or from a lack of compassion and love for others. Believer (Christians) must never be bigoted, injurious or prejudicial toward those who differ from us. This only further divides and drives away those for whom Christ died. However...
2. **A study of other faiths (cults) is bound to bring up differences and disagreements** - To disagree with someone is not necessarily equal to criticizing him or tearing him down. We can disagree in love. ***Sidenote: Remember that others have a right to believe like they want to believe and unless the Holy Spirit quickens the heart of an unbeliever they will not come to the truth, therefore pray, pray, pray.***
3. **A study of others faiths (cults) may help us to see what you can learn from other faiths** - This study is conducted from an orthodox Christian view and interpretation of Scripture... a Biblical view. This should be kept in mind as we proceed through the study.
4. **To compare orthodox Christianity with other faiths in order to help Christians better understand their own belief** – A major objective of a study like this one is not to tear down or criticize other beliefs, but to strengthen your own... to drive us to go deeper in our own faith and discover why we believe what we believe.

5 Ground Rules for The Study of Cults and Non-Christian Religious Groups:

1. **Be respectful** – Again, let me remind you that Christians do believe in and affirm religious liberty and the right and freedom of Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and others to practice and share their faith. We must be respectful of them as people that God loves and that Jesus died for, and although we may disagree with them, they are due the respect and dignity as human beings created by God.
2. **Be discerning** – While being respectful, we acquiescence (ascend into agreement) with their error. We must beware of their error and the subtle slide that can be made into error.

Remember Scripture itself tells us, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV)* Therefore Jesus, Himself, tells us to *“... be wise as serpents (discerning) and harmless as doves (respectful).” (Matthew 10:16 NKJV)* And the Apostle Paul tells us in *Ephesians 5:15-16*, *“¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”*

3. **Be Scriptural** – We have emphasized over and over throughout the introduction of this study the importance of being grounded in God’s Word. The Apostle Paul tells us in *Colossians 2:6-8*, *“⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces^[a] of this world rather than on Christ.* And Paul instructs Timothy and us in *2 Timothy 3:14-17*, *“¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy (of his faith) you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*
4. **Be truthful** – Listen to *2 Timothy 4:1-5*, *“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”* In other words, we must stand for the truth and we must speak the truth in love.
5. **Be burdened** – We are to be burdened for all of those who are lost and separated from Christ for whatever reason. We should have a heartfelt compassion and burden for those who are deceived by false religion and false teaching. If you don’t, ask God to burden your heart for the lost and for those caught up in false teaching.

Even this become difficult in the day and age in which we live that is preaching and promoting a universalist idea that there are many paths to god, that all religions are equal, we must welcome and practice tolerance and diversity. **What’s wrong with this? (Allow time for response)**

Understanding Tolerance... 2 Definitions: The original definition of tolerance and the way in which the word is used now are quite different. Place a check in the box beside the one you feel is the proper understanding of “tolerance,” and the way Christian should see tolerance.

1. **To acknowledge that others have differing beliefs and accept that it is their right to do so** – Originally this was meaning of tolerance. In this way, Christians are to absolutely be tolerant.
2. **To embrace the diversity that all beliefs contribute and accept them as equally true as your own** – This is something Christians absolutely cannot do. Recently, tolerance has come

to mean that all religious beliefs are of value and true. That Christianity, as practiced and embraced by some is too narrow.

The Bible is specific that we should expect others to have different beliefs about God. **Galatians 4:8** says that those who don't know the true God are slaves to what are not gods. **Romans 1:18-25** explains that although God has given evidence of His nature in creation, many will refuse to believe what their eyes tell them. And **Luke 10:21-22** says that on occasion, it is to God's purpose that people do not see Him; God often closes the eyes of those who in pride rely on their wits to find Him instead of in humility seek Him with their hearts.

Christians are to tolerate others when they have different beliefs about God. But here is a good question...Are we to expect tolerance in return? **Luke 6:22** says, "*Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*" **What is Jesus saying here, do you think?** In other words, we are blessed when others reject us because we follow Christ. And **John 15:18** says, "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.*" When the world hates us, we need to remember they do so because they hated Christ first. It is foolish to expect tolerance from others toward our Christian beliefs, even if they demand tolerance for their own. God has told us clearly: we will not get it.

But God has also told Christians what our response should be when we are faced with intolerance. Jesus speaking, said in **Matthew 5:43-48** said we are to love our enemies and pray for them. And Paul goes so far as to say in **Romans 12:20** says we are to provide for them, "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.*" **What do you think he is saying?** We do not play by the world's rules. We do not respond to intolerance with fear and hate. Instead, we express the love of Christ in us.

Unfortunately, the world no longer defines "tolerance" as acknowledgement that others have a differing belief. It has come to mean full acceptance of those beliefs. Of course this definition makes no logical sense because to embrace this type of tolerance precludes any personal opinion or belief. Christians are not to endorse religious beliefs that run counter to what the Bible teaches.

The problem with tolerance as it is now meant is that it rejects the possibility that objective truth exists. The Bible teaches that truth does exist, that God is truth, and that we are to follow in His truth. **John 1:14 and 17** says that Jesus, who came from the Father, gives us truth. And in **John 14:6**, Jesus says He is the truth. **John 8:32** and **Romans 6:16-23** says that the truth sets us free from the control of sin.

The Bible is also clear regarding those who hide or distort the truth in the name of tolerance. **Romans 1:18** says whoever suppresses the truth will receive the wrath of God. In **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus says that our mission is to teach others of the truth about Him. **1 Corinthians 13:6** (NIV) says, "*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*" Again, **John 14:6** says that *Jesus* is the truth. While Christians can acknowledge the right of others to have different beliefs, we cannot allow those beliefs to go unchallenged for one simple reason: it is not loving, and Jesus calls us to love (Luke 10:25-37).

It's inevitable that the world will call believers intolerant, but we can mitigate the damage by being intolerant in the way God tells us to.

How to Practice Tolerance God's Way:

1. **We must know what we believe (1 Peter 3:15)** – *“¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”*
2. **We need to know how to teach what we believe (2 Timothy 2:23-26)** - *“²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”*

Practical Observation to Remember: In the heat of the moment, faced with personal attack and rejection, it's easy to forget the reason we speak truth. It is not so that we'll be proved right and vindicated, but in the hope that the truth will set another free.

Should a Christian be tolerant of others' religious beliefs? Yes, in the classical sense. The Bible teaches that many will reject God. We should be prepared to accept that, as well as the fact that those who reject God will reject His followers. Christians should not be tolerant in the modern sense. We should not endorse the belief that all religions lead to God, that truth is a personal construct, or that everyone's beliefs are valid. Jesus is the truth. Christians are called to tolerate – and even to love – people without accepting their false beliefs.

IS THERE A GOOD WAY TO EVANGELIZE (WITNESS TO) PEOPLE IN CULTS AND FALSE RELIGIONS? (1 Peter 3:8-17)

While every person and each religious movement is unique, there are many important principles that help us better share our faith with others.

Some Important Principles to Follow in Witnessing to Those in a Cult or False Religion:

1. **Be prayerful** - First, we are called to pray for those who have yet to believe. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, *“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* We seek to help unbelievers "see" the truth and love of Jesus Christ by first asking God to open their eyes to Him. Apart from God's intervention in another person's life, our efforts will be ineffective in reaching others for Christ (John 16:7-11).
2. **Be a bold witness** - Second, we must be unashamed and unafraid to share our faith in Jesus Christ with others. 1 Peter 3:15 says, *“...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...”* Romans 1:16 teaches us to be unashamed, regardless of the other person's background. Paul said, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*
3. **Be consistent (live what you profess/be a light)** - Third, our lives must reflect the beliefs we share. 1 Peter 3:15-16 continues, *“...yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ*

may be put to shame." Jesus compared this to the way a city on a hill cannot be hidden and to the way a lamp in a room is seen by everyone in the room. He instructed, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

4. **Be willing to be ridiculed and persecuted** - Finally, we must be willing to suffer when others oppose our message, including those from other religious backgrounds. Peter taught, *"For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil"* (1 Peter 3:17). Jesus serves as our ultimate example for suffering for what is right. His teaching led to both suffering and death, giving His life for all who would believe in Him (John 3:16).

When sharing our faith with people involved in cults or in other religions, we may find it helpful to have somewhat of an understanding of what they believe. Satan often likes to distort the truth to lead people astray. We can see in other religions a hint of God's truth, but it is incomplete. Knowing where the pitfalls in a particular person's belief system lie may help us to better understand that person and to know how to better share our faith with them. For instance, if a person already believes that God is creator, we may not need to share as much about our similar belief. However, if a person believes Jesus was nothing more than a prophet, we may wish to share how the fact that He is God makes a difference to us. In any type of evangelism, it is important to respect the person to whom we are speaking. Our God is loving; Jesus came in grace and truth ([John 1:14](#)), and our approach should be the same.

"A key to how well you understand other religious faiths and cults is how well you understand you own." –Fritz Ridenour, "So What's The Difference"