

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THE TRUTH ABOUT CULTS CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN *Introduction to the Cults – Part 2*

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HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE CULTS?

If you were asked to name a cult, that name would perhaps come fairly quickly to you depending on the Christian tradition you were raised in and your understanding of the subject. Many groups have been labeled by this title... some deservedly and some reservedly. If, on the other hand, you were asked to define a cult... now that task could be a little more tricky. So much has been written and said about cults, the rise of cults, the practice of cults, what is and isn't a cult that the whole subject can get pretty grey, if not down-right confusing. Many Christians don't

really even now what a cult is, much less why studying the cults could possibly have anything to do with them... why it is important. This study is aimed at clarifying, educating, preparing, and hopefully scripturally grounding believers, Christians, on the subject of cults. It is not an exhaustive study of the subject matter, but it will hopefully be grounding and at least give a Biblical foundation and understanding for further and deeper study, and a strong base for your own Biblically based Christian beliefs.

The following quiz... if just for fun to test your own knowledge on things you have heard and perhaps observed, maybe these are some things that you know about a few of the cults that have been around for a while. See how you do:

SOMETIMES HITS CLOSE TO HOME CULTS QUIZ

In recent years a number of religious cults have been in the headlines. Test your knowledge of these groups. Some of these may hit close to home, or have a familiar ring to them. Circle the correct answer for each of the following:

1. Scientology is a system of various beliefs including such concepts as reincarnation, mysticism, and self-actualization. For instance, it views psychiatry as destructive and abusive. "Dianetics" (1950) is a self-help book that stresses independence and survival. The entire concept is revealed to applicants only after donation goals are met. John Travolta, Tom Cruise, and Michael Jackson are reported members. Who brought the concept of Scientology to the public?

a. J.R. Tolkien b. Stephen R. Covey c. L. Ron Hubbard d. J.K. Rowling

ANSWER: c. L. Ron Hubbard – L. Ron Hubbard. was the author of over 138 adventure and science-fiction novels. He grew up as a "navy brat" who followed his career navy father to many ports. Hubbard claimed at various times to have been made a lama priest and a shaman of the Blackfeet tribe. He had a bumpy career as a naval officer and a complicated personal life. After "Dianetics", he wrote science-fiction as an expansion of his ideas on Scientology. His legal difficulties are too numerous to detail here but he died of a stroke in 1986 leaving an estate of 600 million dollars.

2. Hare Krishna is a devotion based on Eastern principles of meditation and chanting. Intoning the mantra will bring the individual to spiritual enlightenment. Which of these characteristics is NOT part of Hare Krishna practice?

a. Pigtails b. Sexual liberation c. Flowing robes d. Shaved heads

ANSWER: b. Sexual liberation - Hare Krishna became a central focus for the hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Hare Krishna called for abstinence from intoxicants, a restricted diet banning meat, fish, and eggs, no gambling, and no sexual relations outside of marriage. Applicants were required to repeat the mantra: "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare" for hours

3. A Korean teenage boy built a humble church from cardboard and mud and went on to establish what is known as the Unification Church. The broad stated goal was to continue Jesus' work on earth until the second coming. What was the name of the founder of this church?

a. Kim Jong-un b. Cho Yong-gi c. Sun Myung Moon d. Fa Mulan

ANSWER: c. Sun Myung Moon - Adherents to this faith are often called 'moonies'. The church calls for the unification of all faiths. It considers the Christian Cross to be offensive to God as it brings God sorrow and stands as an obstacle to the uniting of religions. Mass marriages practiced by the church -- marrying many couples at one time -- has drawn media attention. Arranged marriages between people of different backgrounds, such as between Koreans and Japanese, is regarded as a step in unification. Some members believe that Moon himself is the second coming although Moon has never made this claim. Charges of 'brainwashing' have been made. The Church is reported to have vast real estate holdings.

4. The Children of God grew out of the hippie movement of the 1960s and 70s. What was the central theme of this group established by David Berg (also known as Moses David, Mo, and Dad)?

- a. Homophobia b. Anti-Semitism c. Abstinence from all sex d. Sexual liberation

ANSWER: d. Sexual liberation - The doctrine of the Children of God was spelled out in over 3000 'Mo Letters', that is, writings of David Berg (i.e. Moses Berg). The philosophy changed from time to time but advocated sex with children, later renounced. There was an open door to homosexuals and bisexuals. At one time there was a 'Flirty Fishing'. This was a squad of generally female believers who would seduce unsuspecting males into sexually compromising situations in order to bring them into the faith. It is reported that over 300 children were born through this system, and were referred to as 'Jesus children'. Berg himself fathered children and published an illustrated book detailing pictures and narratives of the sexual abuse of his young son.

5. What cult leader and convicted felon founded the International Society of Divine Love just outside of Buda, Texas and built a famous temple and ashram complex there known as Radha Madhav Dham, the oldest Hindu Temple in Texas and the largest in North America – it is one of the largest Hindu Temple complexes in the Western Hemisphere and is listed in Newsmax as one of the top 13 Most Fascinating Cathedrals and Houses of Worship in America.

- a. Prakashanand Saraswati b. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu c. Vrinda Devi d. Raj Goel

ANSWER: a. Prakashanand Saraswati - Prakashanand Saraswati (born 1929) is a convicted [felon](#), spiritual leader, social reformer and award winning author from Ayodhya, [India](#) who founded [Radha Madhav Dham](#) in the United States. He is a Rasik Saint in the tradition of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. His trial for child molestation in Hays County led to much public attention. In 2011, a jury found Swami Prakashanand Saraswati guilty on 20 counts of indecency with a child. He is still a fugitive and appeared on [Americas Most Wanted](#). In April 2011, following the disappearance of [Prakashanand Saraswati](#) after his conviction on 20 charges of sexual indecency with a child at the Hindu Temple, the organization changed/adapted its name . According to [Austin American-Statesman](#), "Barsana Dham has moved aggressively on the Internet to wipe out all traces of its connection to the convicted guru. The name of the ashram has been changed to JKP Radha Madhav Dham." In 2012, on the one year anniversary of the trial, Vrinda Devi, Radha Madhav Dham spokeswoman, stated that "What we've been trying to do since then is moving forward." She added that, "As far as Swamiji's presence, we've subdued that in order to go on and survive as a minority religious community.

6. The word 'evil' conjures up images of icons who personify evil, such as Hitler and Idi Amin. But, for many, Charles Manson and his cult , known as the Family (or the Manson Family), are the epitome of evil. Supposedly the 1969 rampage of the Family was partly inspired by a Beatles song. What was the Beatles song?

- a. Day Tripper b. Helter Skelter c. Yesterday d. Hey Jude

ANSWER: b. Helter Skelter - "Helter Skelter" is also the name of the book by Vincent Bugliosi which maps the Manson history. Manson was a petty criminal, a rock-and-roll music hanger-on, who had the charisma to attract others, particularly young women, to him. It was at the height of the hippie movement that Manson brought his prophecy of a race war, at the conclusion of which he and his followers would emerge as spiritual leaders of a new society. It was a cult more of personality than of beliefs.

7. Heaven's Gate was an esthetic society formed under the belief that the earth was to be destroyed as we know it and the only salvation was to migrate to another system. They believed that through a mass suicide they could attach their souls to a comet that was cycling near the earth. What was the name of this comet?

- a. Comet Encke B. Halley's Comet c. Hale-Bopp Comet d. Comet Biela

ANSWER: b. Hale-Bopp Comet On March 26th 1997, authorities in San Diego, California, found the bodies of 39 suicides. Each was dressed in identical attire, each with a five dollar bill and three quarters in their pockets, and wearing a brand new pair of Nikes. Suicide was accomplished through a combination of vodka and phenobarbital

and a plastic bag over the head. The suicides were in shifts to allow for clean-up. How many reached Hale-Bopp is unclear.

8. Solar Temple was a cult that claimed to be modern incarnation of the medieval Knights Templar who claimed to be the protector of the Holy Grail. In 1994 Joseph Di Mambro, the Solar Temple leader in Quebec, Canada, ordered the death of a three-month-old infant by repeated stabbing with a wooden stake. What was the reason for this act?
- It was a blood sacrifice to the Virgin Mary
 - Di Mambro believed the child was the anti-Christ
 - It was part of demonic ritual ceremony
 - No reason was given.

Answer: b. DI Mambro believe the child was the anti-Christ - A few days after the infanticide, two mass suicides occurred in Switzerland of Solar Temple members after a ritual Last Supper. The Solar Temple sought to correct common ideas of power and authority, placed spiritual over temporal values, and wished to prepare for the Second Coming and the unification of faiths. It was a strange mix of medieval concepts of chivalry and New Age philosophy.

9. On April 19, 1993 the fifty-one day siege by two federal agencies, the FBI and the ATF, on the Branch Davidian compound came to a disastrous conclusion. In what city was the compound located?
- El Paso, Texas
 - Austin, Texas
 - Waco, Texas
 - Corpus Christi, Texas

Answer: c. Waco, Texas - The feds believed that there was child abuse, polygamy, and a cache of illegal firearms in the compound. The Davidians felt that the federal authorities did not understand the Christian nature of their beliefs. The Davidians historically split from the Seven Day Adventists in the early 1930s. They were called Davidians long before David Koresh was born. Koresh, whose real name was Vernon Howell, allegedly had an affair with the 78-year-old leader of the Waco Davidians and over time became the acknowledged leader. In the April 19th raid, sixty-six Davidians died, of whom fifteen were under seventeen years of age. The Davidians claimed that the fire came as a result of a government flare fired into the compound; the feds claimed the fire was set by the Davidians themselves. The Davidians claimed that the deaths were the result of federal bullets; the counterclaim is that they were shot by Davidians as an act of suicide.

10. It was the largest purposeful loss of life of American civilians in a single day, until 9/11. Nine hundred and eighteen (918) people of the People's Temple, including two hundred and seventy (270) children, died November 18, 1978 at the Jonestown compound in Guyana under cult leader, Jim Jones. Included in the death toll was a U.S. Congressman... the only congressman ever to be murdered in the line of duty. What was his name?
- Joseph Cao
 - Tom Lantos
 - Leo Ryan
 - Pete Stark

ANSWER: Leo Ryan - Ryan was a congressman from the San Francisco area and was on a mission to investigate Jim Jones. Several People's Temple members asked to leave with Ryan. To prevent this, Ryan and his entire press contingent were murdered. It was then that Jones ordered the mass suicide by cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. Jim Jones was an avowed communist and atheist. Jones rationalized that what better institution to infiltrate than the Church? He mainly masked his Marxist views and built a small (about 3000 people) but tightly controlled congregation in San Francisco. He moved to Guyana to have more control without outside interference.

Challenge of the Cults

Listen as the following description is read and see if you can guess what religious group/cult is being described:

“This church is growing so rapidly, sociologist Rodney Stark predicts that by the year 2080, it will become the most important world religion to emerge since the rise of Islam.” ¹ Dr. Rodney Stark

What church is Dr. Stark describing? It is not a Christian church but the Mormon Church, an organization labeled as a cult. The rise of the Mormon Church represents the growing challenge facing the church, the kingdom of the cults.

What is a cult?

Probably the greatest authority on the cults in the past 100 years is the late Dr. Walter Martin, who wrote "Kingdom of the Cults" and founded The Christian Research Institute. Dr. Walter Martin described a cult as:

"A group of people gathered around a specific person's misinterpretation of the Bible."²

That is a very basic and staring place definition, but it is helpful. Generally cults are groups that claim to be in harmony with Christianity on some level (at least if they are identified as a "Christian cult") but deny foundational Christian doctrines such as the Trinity or the unique deity of Jesus Christ.

In [Matthew 7:15-17](#), 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 cultists will look, act, and sound like Christians. However, that is only in external appearance. One can parade as a true believer for a time, but eventually one's words, actions, and especially one's beliefs--their "fruit"--will give one away as a counterfeit.

The growth of the cults can be attributed to several factors.

3 Factors for the Growth of Cults:

1. **Last days signature (as prophesied in Scripture)** - First, it is a fulfillment of the warning given by Jesus and the apostles. In [Matthew 24:23-26](#), Jesus warns us that as His return draws near, there will be an increase in false prophets who will ensnare many in their false teachings. In [2 Peter 2:1-3](#), Peter warns us that false teachers will arise from within the church. And the Apostle Paul put it this way in [2 Timothy 4:3](#), *"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."*
2. **Breakdown of the family unit** - The second factor in the growth of the cults is the breakdown of the family. Cults provide the family atmosphere many from broken homes long for; the cult leader often takes the place of a father figure.
3. **Biblically illiterate and/or poorly grounded Christians** - Finally, we can attribute the growth of the cults to the failure of the church. As one cult expert has repeatedly stated, "The cults are the unpaid bills of the church." The cults thrive because Christians are lacking in biblical and theological understanding. Dr. Martin stated, "The rise of the cults is directly proportional to the fluctuating emphasis which the church has placed on the teachings of biblical doctrine to Christian laymen. To be sure, few pastors, teachers, and evangelists defend adequately their beliefs, but most of them -- and most of the average Christian laymen - are hard put to confront and refute a well-trained cultist of almost any variety."³ If the church engaged in solid and in-depth Bible teaching, the cults would not flourish as they do today.

Doctrinal Character of the Cults

How do you know if a religious group is a cult? We will be digging into this question more as the study progresses, but let's give some basics here. Jesus said that you will know false prophets by their fruits. In stating this he was not only speaking of their words and actions but of their doctrinal beliefs as well. *Cults deviate from biblical Christianity in several key areas of doctrine.*

4 Basic Deviations that Characterize Cults:

1. **False teaching on the nature of God** - The Bible teaches there is one God revealed in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The central feature that distinguishes cults from biblical Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. All cults have a distorted view of this doctrine. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses condemn the doctrine of the Trinity, and Mormons teach tritheism, three gods who make up the godhead.
2. **A false view of Jesus** - The Bible teaches that Christ is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. This has been called the *hypostatic union*. In [2 Corinthians 11:4](#), Paul warned about false teachers teaching another Jesus. A modern-day example of false teaching is Christian Science which teaches that Jesus was not God but a man who displayed the Christ idea. He neither died for sins, nor was He resurrected.
3. **A false teaching on salvation** - All cults have a works-oriented Gospel. The death of Christ is believed to give followers the *potential* to be saved. So after believing in Christ, one must serve the organization to attain salvation. Salvation is found in the organization and one is never really sure if one has done enough to be worthy of salvation. In the International Church of Christ, for example, disciples are scrutinized by their discipler daily to determine if they performed as worthy disciples. Failure to meet the standards may result in discipline. Disciples can never be certain they have done enough for salvation.
4. **Extra-biblical revelation and the denial of the sole authority of the Bible** - Cults claim that extra revelation is given to the leader whose words are seen as inspired by God and equal to the Bible or often seen as greater than and superseding the Bible. If there is a conflict between the Bible and the leader's words, the latter takes precedence. So in reality, the leader's writings take precedence over the Bible. When interacting with cultists, I often hear them claim their teachings are consistent with the Bible. However, when I point out where their teachings deviate from the Bible, they eventually claim the Bible to be in error. In most cases, cultists claim the Bible has somehow been corrupted by the church.

Sociological Structure of the Cults

Not only do cults deviate doctrinally from biblical Christianity, they have distinctive sociological characteristics.

6 Sociological Distinctives of Cults:

1. **Authoritarianism** - The first is authoritarianism. The leader or organization exercises complete control over a follower's life. The words of the leadership are ultimate and often considered divinely inspired. Going against the leadership is equivalent to going against the commands of God.

2. **Elitist Mentality** - The second characteristic is an elitist mentality. Most cults believe they are the true church and the only ones who will be saved. This is because the group believes they have new revelation or understanding that gives them superior standing.
3. **Isolationism** - Third is isolationism. Due to their elitist mentality, cultists believe those who do not agree with them are deceived or under the influence of Satan. Therefore, many feel their members must be protected from the outside world, and physical or psychological barriers are created. Members are prohibited from communicating with those outside the organization who do not agree with the teachings of the group.
4. **Controlled Thinking** - Fourth, there is closed-mindedness and the discouragement of individual thinking. Because of its authoritarian nature, leaders are the only ones thought to be able to properly interpret the Bible. All members are to turn to the organization for biblical interpretation and advice on life decisions. Therefore, individual thinking and questioning is discouraged. There is an unwillingness to dialogue and consider other viewpoints.
5. **Legalistic lifestyle** - Fifth is a legalistic lifestyle. As mentioned earlier, salvation is not based on grace; cults teach a works-oriented gospel. This leads to a lifestyle of legalism. Followers must live up to the group's standards in order to attain or maintain their membership and hope for eternal life. Followers are required to faithfully serve, and attend meetings, studies, and services. As a result, there is tremendous pressure to live up to the requirements of the organization.
6. **Difficult Exit Process** - Finally there is a difficult exit process. Since salvation is found in the organization, leaving the organization is considered by many to be leaving God. All former members who leave cults are shunned by members which often includes members of their own family. Many are warned that if they leave, they will be condemned to hell, or seduced by Satan. Many ex-members are harassed by the organization even after they leave. Exiting members often end up distrusting any religious organization and end up feeling isolated and alone.

Life in the cults is marked by fear of judgment, pressure, and legalism. This is a far cry from what we are taught in the Bible. Jesus and the apostles taught that the new life in Christ is one of grace, love, and freedom from the law. In [Matthew 11:28](#), Jesus said, *"Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."* The peace and rest promised by Christ is seldom experienced by those in the cults.

Cultic Methodology

When you receive a knock on your door in the mornings, who do you assume it to be? A salesman? A Girl Scout selling cookies? For many of us, we assume it to be a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon missionary looking to tell us about his or her organization. One of the reasons cults have grown is their methodology. The methods cults use to win converts are moral deception, aggressive proselytizing, and Scripture twisting.

3 Methods Used By Cults:

1. **Moral Deception** - By moral deception I mean cults use Christian terminology to win converts. For example, New Agers use the term *born again* to support reincarnation. Mormons use terms like the *Trinity* and *salvation by grace* but these terms have different

meanings than what the Bible teaches. Therefore, many untrained Christians are deceived into believing these groups are actually Christian.

2. **Aggressive Proselytizing** - Aggressive proselytizing is another method of the cults. Although many Christian groups use aggressive evangelism, they do so out of a love for God and a desire to see others come to know Christ. Many cultists proselytize for much the same reasons but added to this is the desire to win God's approval. They work *for* grace rather than *from* grace. The cults require their members to evangelize. Many groups hold their members accountable for the number of hours they spend witnessing for the organization. Many members feel guilty if a day or so goes by without them proselytizing.
3. **Scripture Gymnastics** - Scripture twisting is another method of the cults. Cultist quote verses in the Bible that support their position, but skip over the verses that do not. Often, there is gross misinterpretation of Scripture so that contradictory verses will better fall in line with their views. For example, Jehovah's Witness and Mormons try to use verses to show Jesus is a created being. However, their position is easily shown to be incorrect when you explain the context and correct meaning of the terms. Also, when you show additional verses that contradict their position, they are often surprised and realize they have never seen those verse before or that the organization's explanations of those verses are unable to be supported.

To successfully engage in conversation and effectively witness to those in the cults, Christians must be prepared in the following ways. **1 Peter 3:15** states that we must 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."* We must be prepared by knowing the word of God through diligent study of it. Second, we must be prepared to overcome our fears and lovingly reach out to cult members, exercising the fruits of patience and gentleness as we share the truth.

Danger of the Cults

The rise of the cults pose a serious challenge to the church because they present several dangers to the church and families involved.

4 Real Dangers of Cults:

1. **Spiritual Danger** - First, there is a spiritual danger. **First Timothy 4:1** states "...that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." Ultimately the spirit behind all lies and deception is the devil, so the ultimate force behind the cults is the evil one. **Galatians 1:8** states, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." The false gospel of the cults cannot lead anyone to salvation. There are eternal consequences for false beliefs. For this reason Jesus and the apostles are very harsh on false teachers.
2. **Psychological Danger** - There is also a psychological danger. The mind controlling techniques used by the organizations can cause immense damage mentally and emotionally. Living under the pressure, guilt, and dependence on the organization has proven to have tremendous negative effects on individuals.
3. **Domestic Danger** - Third, there is domestic danger. Individuals are taught that loyalty to the organization is equivalent to allegiance with God. Therefore, loyalty to the organization supercedes loyalty to family. Thus, if a family member begins conducting himself in a way the organization does not approve of, the cult will often separate the family from the

individual member. Isolation can be emotional or physical. Numerous families have been separated as a result.

4. **Physical Danger** - In some cases there is a physical danger. The teachings of David Koresh cost the Branch Davidians their lives. Hobart Freeman taught that believers did not need medicine for illnesses, and told his followers to throw all theirs away. As a result, he and fifty-two of his members died from curable conditions.

In light of this threat, what are Christians called to do?

3 Things a Genuine Christian Should Do In Light of the Fact of Cults:

1. **Study and know the Word of God** - First, we are called to study and know the Word of God... in other words, get grounded. Paul writes to Timothy and all saints saying, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the world of truth." Christians should master the Bible so that they will not be deceived by any false teaching.
2. **Be prepared to defend the faith** - Second, Titus commands us to be able to confront and refute false teachers. This doesn't mean that we take up arms and destroy those who are against us physically. It does mean that we know what we believe and can adequately and effectively state it and defend it when attacked.
3. **Protect the flock** - Finally, in [Acts 20](#), Paul exhorts the leaders of the church to protect their flock from the false teachers that will prey upon the sheep. Every Christian is called to know the truth so well they can confront false teaching, and protect their church and family from it.

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¹Richard Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper Collins Publishing Inc. 1999), p. XVI.

²Walter Martin & Hank Hannegraph, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, Mich.: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 17.

³Norman Geisler, *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), p. 15.

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“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”