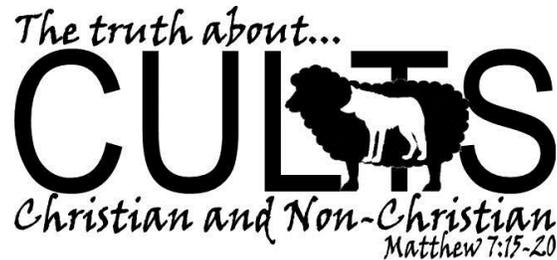


Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 3, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THE TRUTH ABOUT CULTS CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN A Look at Mormonism *Matthew 7:15-20,*

IMPORTANT TERMS MATCHING EXERCISE: Try your hand at this. Match the important terms on the left to the proper definition of that term on the right.

<i>Orthodoxy</i>	<i>A rule or principle that forms the basis of a belief, theory or practice (Doctrine)</i>
<i>Tradition</i>	<i>Relating to, involving, or characteristic of magic, witchcraft, or supernatural phenomena (Occult)</i>
<i>Doctrine</i>	<i>Beliefs and practices that is accepted by most people as being correct and/or usual (Orthodoxy)</i>
<i>Cult</i>	<i>An institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine (Religion)</i>
<i>Occult</i>	<i>A long-established action or pattern of customs and beliefs viewed as a set of precedents (Tradition)</i>
<i>Religion</i>	<i>A system of religious or spiritual beliefs, especially an informal and transient belief system regarded as misguided or unorthodox (Cult)</i>

These terms are important as we consider a study of cults and other religious groups. For example what are we speaking of when we speak of “Orthodox Christianity” or “traditional Christian teaching or doctrine”? What is the difference between a “cult and the “occult”?

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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)

Dr. Walter Martin, defined a cult as “A group of people polarized around someone’s interpretation of the Bible and is characterized by major deviations from orthodox Christianity particularly the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ.” Cults are groups that 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 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 their own teaching, beliefs, doctrines and practices it become obvious that they have deviated from orthodox Christianity and it’s teaching. This is certainly true of Mormonism. Are Mormons “Christians” as defined by traditional Christian orthodoxy and teaching? According to Dr. Albert R. Mohler, one of the most respected Southern Baptist theologians and scholars of our day and president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, “The answer to that question (*Are Mormons ‘Christian’ as defined by traditional Christian orthodoxy?*) is easy and straightforward, and it is ‘no.’” He goes on to say, “...the (no) answer is made easy, not only by the structure of Christian

orthodoxy (a structure Mormonism denies) but by the central argument of Mormonism itself - that the true faith was restored through Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century in America and that the entire structure of Christian orthodoxy as affirmed by the post-apostolic church is corrupt and false. In other words, Mormonism rejects traditional Christian orthodoxy at the onset - this rejection is the very logic of Mormonism's establishment and existence (see attached "Is Mormonism Christian? By Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.).

So for the record, while you may hear Mormon teachers and proponents and some professing Mormons claim to be Christian, there are virtually no respected "Christian" theologians or Biblical scholars who will make that claim for them. All agree that Mormonism is clearly not "Christianity," but rather pseudo-Christian or cult in both its doctrine and practice.

With that said and established, lets quickly review some ground rules before we look closer at Mormonism and seek to understand why this claim of Mormonism not being Christian is made.

GROUND RULES FOR THE STUDY OF THE CULTS

We established some ground rules early in our study for Christians studying other religions and cults. These are important so that our intent in studying these groups does not denigrate into our own spiritual arrogance and pride, nor into hateful malice and bigoted hatred toward other peoples and groups. Let me make an important statement here at this point, even about Mormonism; Christians do and should respect the Mormon affirmation of the family and the zeal of Mormon youth in their missionary work. Christians also must affirm religious liberty and the right of Mormons to practice and share their faith. So here are our pre-established ground rules for our study:

Ground Rules:

1. **A study of other faiths 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 thing 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 important 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.

With those ground rules for the study restated, let’s take a look at a brief history of Mormonism as we seek to understand this rapidly ground group and why they may be considered a cult and not Christian.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MORMONISM

A Worldwide Presence - Some fact about Mormonism today.

1. **Mormonism originated in America**
2. **It is now headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah.**
3. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism) is one of the fastest growing pseudo-Christian religions in the world.**
4. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism) has a presence today in more than 140 nations and over 21 territories and possessions.**
5. **As of the end of 2013, the church claimed a worldwide membership of 15 million.** *(Southern Baptist have 16 million members and are considered the second largest Christian body in the US after the Catholic Church, so Mormons are nearly equal to the second largest denomination in Christianity)*
6. **Mormons claim 60,850 full-time missionaries throughout the world.** *(The SBC has slightly over 5,000 Foreign Missionaries in 153 countries... today there are approximately only 29,000 Evangelical missionaries worldwide [that all Evangelical Christian denominations])*
7. **There are over 100 partial or complete translations of the Book of Mormon into other languages and dialects.**
8. **There are over 107 Mormon temples in use, with at least 18 more planned or under construction around the world**

Needless to say, Mormonism has grown from a small aberrant sect into the significance of a world religion.

The Founding

1. **The founder of the Mormon church is Joseph Smith** - Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder and first prophet of the Mormon church, was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont. The Smith family migrated to western New York, near Palmyra, in 1816. It was there that Joseph spent his teenage years.
2. **The Mormon church came about due to Joseph Smith's teenage concern with which Christian church to join due to conflicts in those churches** - As Joseph himself recounted, when he was fourteen years old (1820), he became concerned as to which church to join. The different churches in his area were at odds with one another, each claiming to be the true church. After reading James 1:5, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"* (KJV)--he went into the woods to prayerfully ask God which church he should join.
3. **According to Joseph, while praying in the woods near his home, he received his "first vision" of God** - As Joseph Smith, 14 years of age, was battling the powers of darkness, he was delivered when a pillar of light descended upon him. Two personages appeared in the pillar of light. Although they never explicitly identified themselves, Joseph described the personages as God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.
4. **In his "first vision Joseph asked the Son which church he should join and Jesus none of them, that all Christian churches are wrong and an "abomination."** - Claimed Joseph, "I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong... that all their creeds

were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt..." (*Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:19).

5. **In September of 1823 Joseph allegedly received several visitations from the angel Moroni (reportedly, a resurrected prophet/warrior)** - According to Moroni, God had chosen Joseph to be the prophet of the restoration of the true church. He was to restore the power and authority of the priesthood, and translate a book containing an account of the origin and history of the former inhabitants of Central America. This book contained an alleged account of the resurrected Jesus visiting these people.
6. **It was not until 1827 that Joseph was lead by the angel Moroni to unearth the golden plates, upon which was inscribed the text of the Book of Mormon in "Reformed Egyptian."**
7. **In May of 1829, while in the process of translating the golden plates, Joseph Smith and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, decided to pray and ask God about baptism and the authority to baptize (they had read of it in the Book of Mormon)** - As they prayed, a light engulfed them and John the Baptist allegedly appeared. He bestowed the Aaronic Priesthood upon both Joseph and Oliver authorizing them to preach the gospel and to baptize and administer the sacraments. But this priesthood was only one of two priesthoods reportedly granted to Joseph. Being the lesser, it did not authorize the laying on of hands, nor did it authorize the reestablishment of the true church. Sometime in 1829 or 1830, Joseph and Oliver prayed and were answered in another vision. This time, the apostles Peter, James and John are said to have appeared to bestow the Melchizedek Priesthood (the more authoritative priesthood) upon both Joseph and Oliver.
8. **On April 6, 1830, the "Church of Christ" was established in Fayette, New York, and the new church quickly grew. (The current name of the church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was adopted in 1834.)** -
9. **In 1831, the church began constructing its first temple in Kirkland, Ohio** -
10. **After a few years, opposition to the church grew strong, and in 1838 the church migrated to Independence, Missouri** -
11. **In 1839 the church established the city of Nauvoo, Illinois, which soon grew to be one of the largest cities in the state, second only to Chicago. It was here that Joseph's practice of polygamy became known to the public** - Because of this practice, in addition to several doctrinal changes, opposition to Joseph and his church increased among members and non-members alike.
12. **After being excommunicated from the church for opposing Joseph's polygamy and unbiblical teachings (e.g. a plurality of gods), William Law, a citizen of Nauvoo, along with several associates, founded The Nauvoo Expositor (a newspaper exposing these doctrines and practices of the "fallen prophet")** - Upon the newspapers first issue, Joseph, as mayor of the city, declared the press a public nuisance. The city marshal, along with hundreds of Mormon men, destroyed the press and office of the Expositor.
13. **Joseph Smith involvement in the destruction of the newspaper office he was arrested** - This event eventually led to Joseph's incarceration in Carthage, Illinois.
14. **On June 27, 1844, an armed mob attacked the Carthage jail and Joseph Smith and his brother Hiram were both killed** - Although Joseph shot three of the intruders (killing two) with a handgun that had been smuggled into the jail, both he and his brother, Hiram, were overwhelmed and killed. Following Joseph's death, great confusion arose as to who would be his successor.

15. Two factions gained significant control. One group, lead by Joseph's widow, Emma, and her son, Joseph Smith, III, parted and settled in Missouri. They are known today as The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
16. The second and larger group was led by Brigham Young to the Utah Territory. It is known today as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

SUMMARY TO BE GLEANED FROM THE HISTORY AND FOUNDING OF MORMONISM

1. At best Mormonism was founded by a young teenage boy (14 years of age), who was searching for answers... where was the church? **Fighting!** What does this tell us about our responsibility as believers and as the church, the body of Christ today? What effects are we having on our young people and what is our responsibility to those who are coming along behind us?
2. The Mormon church was founded on the idea that all other Christians churches with their creeds and beliefs were in error or an abomination... what was one of the first characteristics of a cult? **New truth, new interpretation of Scripture, rejection of orthodox Christianity!**
3. The Mormon church was formed at its inception around a strong charismatic leader, Joseph Smith... what is the danger of this? **Cults center on a leading charismatic leader who considers themselves a messenger of God with unique access to the Almighty.**