

Do You Wish to Avoid Being Deceived?

How would you know if you were in a religious cult? Have you been deceived?

Sincerity is not the same as truth, for it is possible to be sincerely wrong. **Truth can always stand being questioned; anything not true needs to be questioned!** God tells us not to blindly accept everything which seems to be of Him but to test it (1 Thessalonians 5:21, & 1 John 4:1).

The real tragedy of spiritual deception isn't that it always leads to destruction - but to live a life without serving the Master!

Before you read any further, let us pause briefly now and pray.

"Almighty God, you are the God of Truth. Your Word the Bible says it is impossible for you to lie. We pray that you would reveal the truth about your Son, Jesus Christ, to the reader. Would you now release your Holy Spirit to open the mind of the reader to the truth of your Word, the Bible, and all it contains. Please give understanding and true light, sweeping away all error and deception, even if this is held as 'truth', and may your Truth set us all free. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

WHAT IS A CULT?

Most people have only a hazy understanding of what cults are, but they generally regard them in a negative way. Those involved in cults are usually offended that their group is called a cult, as I have personally observed when talking with such people. Most dictionaries define cults in rather vague terms such as "a system of worship" or "a sect or religious denomination." The Chambers Dictionary comes close by describing cults as "Unorthodox or false religions." Dr. Walter Martin, probably the world's foremost expert on cults in many years, describes them as "a group of people gathered around someone's misinterpretation of the Bible!" This view is closest to the common usage of the term today.

James Sire, author of *Scripture Twisting*, goes further. He states a cult is "any religious movement that is organisationally distinct and has doctrines and/or practices that contradict those of the Scriptures as interpreted by traditional Christianity... and as expressed in such statements as the Apostles Creed."

Warnings

Jesus Christ warns us to...

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them," (Matthew 7: 15 & 16a).

The Apostle Paul continued this theme of warning believers to beware...

"For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it," (2 Corinthians 11:4 NKJV).

We need to know enough about the different religious groups that claim to be Christian to be certain whether they really are or not. Claiming the title is not enough.

ORIGINS OF A CULT

There are four main steps in the development of a cult.

- * First, they usually begin with a small group who break away from an established Christian body, and they are sincere in their desire to follow God's will and also to see a better world.
- * Secondly, special revelations or insights begin to develop.
- * Thirdly, these revelations or "truths" become authoritative. (To avoid much distress and heartache, this is the time to leave any group that shows these steps.)
- * Fourthly, allegiance is compulsory, coupled with an intolerance of any view that differs from the leadership.

COMMON TRAITS OF CULTS

* **Authoritarian leadership** - where doctrine/beliefs, practices and interpretation are set by one or more superior leaders. This is probably the single most obvious sign of a cult. There is a significant measure of control by the leaders over people's lives and property, including their finances. Legalism develops. Contacts with family members and friends outside the group are actively discouraged. Intimidation, guilt, manipulation or fear of expulsion are used to keep members in submission to leaders.

Those same leaders have a double standard - they may not account for the finances of the organisation (the Watchtower Society is a classic example) or their lifestyle (sometimes kept hidden from general members). True leadership will always look to Jesus Christ and the Bible, and encourage members to do likewise; false leadership will tolerate or encourage their own prestige and position, often relying on non-Biblical writings or visions to promote themselves or the organisation. (An obvious example would be the Mormons with the visions of Joseph Smith and their various other "scriptures.") All other authority is either rejected or devalued.

* **Rejection of the authority of the Bible**; the deity of Jesus Christ; the Cross and the Atoning sacrifice on it at Calvary. Minimising or rejecting the Jesus of the Bible is probably the second most obvious sign of a cult.

* **Exclusive** - other groups don't teach the "Whole Truth," like they claim to do.

* **Adversarial to major social institutions**, such as families, government, and the wider Christian church.

* **Subjective** - personal experience is emphasised and is often anti-intellectual (prevalent in New Age cults, and some Pentecostal groups which have cult tendencies).

* **Esoteric** - there is secret, exclusive or special knowledge (often from Eastern/occultic spirituality) that are available only to initiates. The public are told something else.

* **Cult groups tend to isolate their members** from the realities of the outside world (resulting in a form of Mind Control or even Brainwashing) that excludes all other opinions and people. Many groups also develop systems of reporting on one another to minimise members 'escaping.' That's why they visit in two's!

Please remember that if something is true it can stand being questioned; but if it is not true it needs to be questioned!

BASIC PATTERNS OF CULTS

Because there are so many cults it is hard to know what to include and exclude here. Those mentioned here are perhaps the better known ones. *"Most cults are not that bizarre; their followers dress like anyone else, work in normal jobs and on the whole are very sincere and honest individuals,"* according to Lorri MacGregor, a former Jehovah's Witness for fifteen years, now leader of one of the most effective counter-cult ministries involved in reaching cult members with the Gospel globally.

In fact most cult followers use Christian terminology fluently, and this can make them a bit difficult to spot at times. The differences that exist between cults and true Biblical Christianity lie in beliefs. Although the average cult member will frequently confess a belief in Jesus Christ, a reliance on the Bible as authority, and a devotion to God as a life-style, we need to remember that all these terms have been carefully redefined to hide the truth. Their words have different meanings to those understood by Christians. What the cults teach often deviates greatly from what the Bible actually teaches concerning key doctrines of Christian faith.

The average cult member believes their leadership have heard from God and have told them the truth. Quite often their leaders have deceived them, perhaps because they enjoy the power and privilege of their positions. This raises an important issue: at what point do the deceived become deceivers? When members are promoted to local, regional and national leadership they must become aware of the true nature of the organisation. Do they bury their conscience because they now have too much to lose? I have first-hand knowledge this does happen with some people.

1. Denying the Deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

The cults present a Jesus that has little or no resemblance to the Jesus of the Bible. If you are uncertain if someone belongs to a cult, then just ask them one simple question. *"Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Almighty God, who came in the flesh?"* That is what the Bible says He is (1 Timothy 3:16 & John 1:1-2), but the cults have very different views.

As Lorri MacGregor puts it, *"If we have the right Jesus Christ we are right for all eternity; but if we have the wrong Jesus, we are wrong for all eternity."*

The Christian Church is composed of believers in Jesus Christ, who believe that He is the only way to God (John 14:6, & 1 Timothy 2:4-5). But it is common among cults, including those that claim to be Christian, to deny that Jesus Christ is God, and the second person of the Godhead. Let's look briefly at what some of these groups believe.

* The "Jesus" of the **Jehovah's Witnesses** is Michael the archangel, the first and greatest creation of Jehovah God. They claim Michael came to earth and lived as a man, pointlessly got himself killed, and then rose as a spirit. In 1914 he invisibly returned to earth when the Millennium began, and established his headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.

* The "Jesus" of the **Latter-day Saints** (Mormons) is just one of a large number of gods. In fact all male Mormons are striving to become gods themselves (so one day they can inherit their own planet). This Mormon "Jesus" has a spirit-brother called Lucifer. It took a vote of the heavenly council of gods to decide which one should become the saviour and ruler of planet Earth. The Mormon "Jesus" won the vote! While he lived on Earth he was married to Martha and both the Marys. Yes, all three; the Mormons teach that only married men can become gods, so their Jesus had to be made to fit their teaching.

* The "Jesus" of the **Christian Scientists** was just a divine idea. As the spiritual Christ he was infallible, but as a man he was not the Christ.

* The "Jesus" of the **Spiritualists** was an advanced medium of the sixth sphere of the Astral Projection.

- * The "Jesus" of **Scientology** never achieved the level of "*Operating Thetan*," - what they claim is required before you can obtain godhood.
- * **Transcendental Meditation** says if you do enough Yoga exercises properly you can become as enlightened as Jesus was.
- * The "Jesus" of the **Moonies** failed in his mission because he got himself killed prior to completing it. Consequently he had to come again, and this time was born in Korea, and replaced as Messiah by Rev. Sun Myung Moon.
- * The "Jesus" of both the **Baha'i** and **Freemasons** is no more important than Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha, Vishnu or any other deity or prophet.
- * The "Jesus" of the **New Age** was merely an Ascended Master, a teacher, a good man who later realised his own deity through his own moral conduct.

Jesus was just a man, a created being, according to: The Anthroposophical Society; William Branham; Christian Spiritual Alliance; Christadelphians; Church Universal & Triumphant; the Cooneyites (Two by Twos, etc.); Dawn Bible Students Assn.; Freemasonry; The Inner Peace Movement; Laymans Home Missionary Movement; Rastafarians; Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Rosicrucians; Unitarian Universalist Assn; Unity School of Christianity; and The Way International, among many others. (*Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist based groups are not included here as they are listed in my book on "The New Age," "Signs & Symbols," & "To Whom Shall We Go."*)

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD			
ATTRIBUTE	GOD THE FATHER	GOD THE SON	GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT
Eternal	Psalm 90:2	Rev. 1:8,17	Hebrews 9:14
Omnipotent (all powerful)	1 Peter 1:5	2 Corinth. 12:9	Romans 15:19
Omniscient (all knowing)	Jeremiah 17:10	Rev. 2:23	1 Corinth. 2:11
Omnipresent (present everywhere)	Jeremiah 23:24	Matthew 18:20	Psalm 139:7
Holiness	Rev. 15:4	Acts 3:14	Luke 1:15
Truth	John 7:28	Revelation 3:7	1 John 5:6

I wonder if the people in those groups mentioned above have ever read the Bible because their teaching is so contrary to it. The Bible declares that Jesus is God; the Father calls Jesus "God" (Hebrews 1:8). The Disciples called Jesus "God" (John 20:28). Prophecy calls Jesus "God" (Isaiah 7:14). Jesus is described as Almighty God manifest in the flesh (John 1:1-2). Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9), and His salvation is sufficient once and for all time (Romans 5:11).

If the Holy Spirit is only "the power of God" and not God Himself, why is He addressed as "He" in passages such as Acts chapters five, thirteen and elsewhere? He has personality - "ego." He is entitled to "He," not "it," as much as you or I. Denial of the personality of the Holy Spirit and His work among us today appears to be the unforgiveable sin that Jesus explained in Matthew 12:31-32. (*Anyone wishing to study*

this further is encouraged to read the section on the Trinity in my book, "Holy Spirit Baptism & Filling" or "Unmasking the Watchtower.")

2. Adding to the Bible

The next pattern is the habit of adding to the Bible instead of accepting it as the sole authority for one's faith. Paul wrote to Timothy under the guidance of the Holy Spirit saying,

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Scripture referred to consists of the 66 books known as The Holy Bible, recognised as the complete and inerrant Word of God by Christians. It is not my purpose here to defend the accuracy of the Bible - there are plenty of others who have successfully done that already. Additions and selective subtractions are not acceptable to Christians, yet most cults add to the Bible, or reinterpret it to suit their own teaching, or even have their own extra book they claim to be of equal or greater importance to the Bible. We are warned in the Bible not to do that (Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:6 & Revelation 22:18-19) and real Christians wouldn't do it, but the cults disregard the warnings. Let me briefly give you four examples of this problem.

In their "Articles of Faith," **Mormons** state, *"We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly. We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the Word of God."* So the Book of Mormon is given precedence over the Bible. In addition the Mormons treat two other books as scripture, namely *"The Doctrines & Covenants,"* and *"The Pearl of Great Price."* These books all contradict each other on major doctrines. With regard to the Mormon claim that parts of the Bible have been mis-translated, Mormons have had over 160 years to provide evidence of any such mis-translations, and they have failed to provide a single scrap of reliable proof.

I have regularly invited Mormon Elders I have spoken with to provide any proof, and they never return with any - because there is none! Saying that the Bible is mis-translated is a convenient way of ignoring the clear teachings of the Bible against much Mormon teaching and practice, including the spiritualism in their Temple ceremonies (most of which are duplicated from Freemasonry initiation ceremonies for their first three degrees). Space prevents more than one quote from an authority on this subject. *"The errors (of translation) affect no more than one-onethousandth part of the Biblical text, so we believe them far too insignificant to shake our faith in the inerrancy of the original manuscripts,"* said Dr. René Pache, of Lausanne University, and Principal of the Emmaus Bible College. That means less than one page of a normal-sized Bible is even open to doubt about what is written.

The **Moonies** (or Unification Church) have a book called *The Divine Principle*, which they believe replaces the Bible in importance.

Jehovah's Witnesses state quite clearly that they believe the Bible to be the Word of God, but you must read their Watchtower magazines to be able to understand it. In 1910 The Watchtower recommended that people shouldn't read the Bible only as they would go into error. This message was repeated in the 15 August 1981 Watchtower, and stated that those who read the Bible on its own would revert back to Christian beliefs. Isn't that the purpose of the Bible? Actually they didn't like some of the Bible passages that were contradicting their own teaching, so they had the Bible rewritten, extensively drawing from a version by German spiritualist, Johannes Greber. Mr. Greber freely admits his writing was guided by demonic spirits. There is not one Hebrew or Greek scholar who has endorsed their *New World Translation*, and most call it a fraudulent mis-translation.

Christian Scientists affirm the Bible as God's Word and the source of their teaching; but in the book written by their founder, Mary Baker Eddy, called *Science & Health, with Key to the Scriptures*, she states that there are at least 300,000 errors in the New Testament. People were to use the only 'reliable' source of authority - namely Mary Baker Eddy and the Christian Science church to discover what the Bible really meant. Since there are less than 182,000 words or 7,959 verses in the KJV New Testament, claiming nearly two mistakes per word calls Mrs. Eddy's credibility more into question than the Bible.

3. Added Requirements for Salvation

The third pattern is that cults multiply the requirements of salvation. The Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christadelphians and Moonies and many others all teach that Salvation is obtained by **doing** things, so that grace alone is not sufficient. Many groups teach a redefined measure of grace with conditions, that really makes void the meaning of grace as *"unmerited favour you can never earn."* No Christian denomination would dare claim that they alone have the means of salvation exclusively - but cults do! Christians know that God's grace is sufficient for their salvation, whereas the cults add conditions. This again puts them at variance to the Bible, which says,

"For it is by Grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast," (Ephesians 2: 8 & 9).

Cults fail to understand that good works are the result of Biblical Salvation - not a condition. No-one can work their way to salvation or heaven or anything eternal. (See page 70 for details.)

4. Divided Loyalties - God or the Organisation

Cults try to make you put your faith in their organisation, or its founder or current leadership, or its publications as if these were more vital to your spiritual growth or salvation than the Bible and Jesus Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses are encouraged to put their faith in *"Our Victorious Organisation"* instead of the person of Jesus. The leaders of the Mormon Church have made the decree that the *"Living Prophet"* (their church president) is more vital (or important) than the "standard works" (their scriptures including the Book of Mormon, the Bible etc.). This teaching goes back to Brigham Young's time as Mormon president. No cult group listed here is *"The One True Church,"* despite their claims - what we need to look for is **"The One True Lord Jesus!"**

As Christians our first loyalty and commitment is to Jesus Christ, and not to any organisation, church, denomination or leader we may be involved with. Jesus spoke about the shepherd giving his life for the sheep, not vice versa. Pastoral leaders are no greater in God's eyes than the sheep, but should be their servants. Some leaders abuse their authority, but the Biblical pattern shows that leaders have authority to teach, preach, pray and overcome demonic realms. They have no special authority over the people because God instituted the **"Priesthood of ALL Believers,"** (1 Peter 2:9-10, Revelation 1:6). Apart from Jesus, God does not permit a mediator between Him and us (1 Timothy 2:5). Ministers, pastors and priests are called into full or part-time work to train and equip Believers in Bible-based beliefs and works of righteousness (Ephesians 4:11-13). Any other pattern is not from God.

Jesus said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me," (John 14:6).

"PRE-CULT SPIRITUALLY ABUSIVE CHURCHES?"

What about what we might call "*Pre-cult Spiritually Abusive Churches?*" Can a recognised Christian church/fellowship/assembly become a cult? The answer is an obvious yes - I know of quite a number. Is this process preventable? Is it reversible? The answer to both questions is "YES!" How? Such a process will require much prayer and sacrifice, and especially repentance by those leaders who have deviated from the Biblical order. Leaders who don't or won't repent should be removed.

How can we recognise such a "*Pre-cult Spiritually Abusive Church?*" Here are some questions which will assist uncovering such a sickness in the Body of Christ.

- * Is there any **compulsion** to attend several group meetings each week?
- * Is there **guilt** if you miss any?
- * Are there "inner" and "outer" circles of members, the inner ones being "**more spiritual?**"
- * Are members of the outer circle required to agree to "**shepherding,**" or control/direction by someone in the inner group? (We are not talking of normal discipleship here.)
- * Is there pressure or **manipulation** to give a minimum of 10% of your income only to that church/fellowship?
- * Are honest questions about doctrines or practises within the group regarded as "**criticism**" by leaders?

If the sort of things covered briefly in the last few pages are occurring in your church group, regardless of the label on the door, you have some praying and thinking to do. I believe it is valid for you to ask the Lord if He wants you to remain in that group. God doesn't want you hurt, although He may have a purpose for your staying if that is His direction.

To those who feel condemned because you even consider leaving such a group, you need to know it is not a sin to change churches. I do not encourage "church-hopping" and I have seen too many spiritual "gypsies" who are always on the move. Such people clearly have need of compassionate ministry to discover and deal with their sense of being unsettled. I am not writing about those who have left one church (for good reasons, including moving town, etc.) and who may visit a few churches in their area to find one that suits them. That is quite legitimate.

Look for a genuine Christian congregation that doesn't put people into bondage, but that equips and sets them free serve Jesus Christ. Showing you how to depend on God, and not the organisation, is the key. Ultimately leaving any group is a decision between God and you, and others should not interfere or manipulate you.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A CULT

1. Is the group reluctant to reveal all its doctrines on request?
2. Is it closed to inside and/or outside criticism?
3. Does it try to promote itself as Christian when major doctrines and practices are not Biblically supported?
4. Have its teachings been publicly questioned or opposed by recognised Bible Scholars?
5. Has it been called a cult? (If so, why?)
6. Have mistakes by past and present leaders been covered up instead of repented of?
7. Do leaders live a lifestyle inconsistent with the Bible or their own message to members?
8. Have its doctrines changed significantly over the years (and if so, why)?
9. Are members prevented or discouraged from reading other religious literature?
10. Do they believe that there are other books or magazines necessary besides the Bible to learn the truth?
11. Does it deny that complete truth can be obtained just by using the Bible?
12. Has the leadership claimed special direction from God not available to others in the organisation?
13. Do they believe that all other Christian groups are false?
14. Is all dissent seen as evidence of pride, sin or rebellion?
15. Can the Bible be interpreted correctly only by members of this organisation?
16. Have they misrepresented the Christian churches and their major teachings?
17. Are members required to sever all ties with the past?
18. Does it have an authoritarian structure?
19. Are people regimented by threats or bribes and disciplined to conform?
20. Are members obviously exploited financially?
21. Does it deny the unconditional acceptance of all scripture?
22. Does it deny the nature of Christ as fully God and fully man?
23. Does it deny the Trinity?
24. Does it deny salvation through personal acceptance of Christ's death on the cross as payment for all our sins?

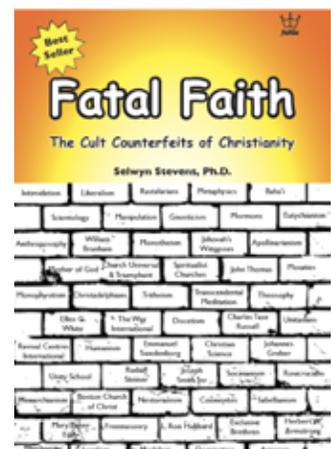
If the answer is “yes” to ten or more questions, it is almost certainly a cult.

Fatal Faith - the Cult Counterfeit of Christianity

This book explains how cults develop, what patterns to avoid. Key Christian and Cult beliefs are compared with the main active cults. How to handle door-knockers, cult exiting, pre-cult spiritually-abusive churches; and how to protect young people from cults. Major ancient & modern heresies examined. Best Seller **Book, E-book & DVD**



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HOW YOU CAN RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE!

Jesus said, "I am the way, and I am the truth and the life. The only way to the Father is through me," (John 14:6 International Children's Bible).

No-one else can give Eternal Life.

"God wants all people to be saved. And He wants everyone to know the truth. There is only one God. There is only one way that people can reach God. That way is through Jesus Christ," (1 Timothy 2:4,5 ICB).

"...You have been saved by grace because you believe. You did not save yourselves. It was a gift from God. You cannot brag that you are saved by the work you have done," (Ephesians 2: 8,9 ICB).

Pray to God in your own words - look up these Scriptures first so you know what you are doing:

- * **ADMIT** that you are a sinner, and that only the Lord Jesus can save you. (Romans 3:23)
- * **REPENT**, be willing to turn away from sin and submit to God. (Luke 13:5)
- * **BELIEVE** that Jesus Christ died on the cross and shed His blood to pay the price for your sins, and also believe that He arose from the dead. (Romans 10:9)
- * **ASK** God to save you. (Romans 10:13)
- * **ASK** Jesus Christ to be your Lord and take first place in your life. (Romans 12:1,2)

When you make Jesus your Lord, start acting like it!

- * Read your Bible every day to get to know Him better.
- * Invite God's Holy Spirit to come into your life, to equip you and give you strength.
- * Talk to God in prayer daily, and through the day.
- * Find & attend a Christian gathering where the Bible is taught as the complete Word of God, & which encourages your personal relationship with Jesus & other believers.
- * Be baptised in water. (Acts 2:38)

"Without faith no one can please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that He is real and that He rewards those who truly want to find Him," (Hebrews 11:8 ICB).