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## **Recognizing Cults: And Ministering to Cult Members**

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### **Introduction**

A cult is a religious group that is separated from orthodox Christianity by false doctrine. To please God and to help those in bondage, it is useful to more fully understand the phenomenon of cults. We must also understand that cults are more dangerous for a new or immature believer than they are for an atheist. When a cult member knocks on an atheist's door, the atheist will most likely be disinterested. However, if that same person had been thinking seriously about the things of God before the cult member knocked - watch out! The cult will present evidence that they are the "true and faithful church," and the victim may be disarmed by words like, "We believe that the Bible is the word of God". Jesus said:

***Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. - Matthew 7:15-20***

## Recognizing a Cult

Not all cultic practices are external to the church. There is no definite line between cults and some churches. Since all cultic practices go against the teachings of Christ, the more of the following characteristics a church has, the more cultic it is, until finally it may not even be a Christian church at all.

### Thirteen Cultic Practices

#### ☛ Exclusivity

*And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because **he follower not with us**. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us. - Luke 9:49-50*

Cults usually believe that they, and they alone, are the one true church. It is surprising how many different groups believe that they alone are the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7. Therefore, most cults teach that, in order to go to Heaven, one must be a member of their church.

#### ☛ Isolation

*I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. - John 17:15*

Some cults openly isolate their members; others, being more discreet, create traditions<sup>5</sup> that isolate members from their family and friends. It is true that we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. However, the isolation of cults is to keep their members from hearing any challenge to their doctrine. Rather than maturing as Christians, cult members often become more and more dependent on the cult leadership. This isolation may be hard for some cult members to recognize, especially if they are actively proselytizing for their group. Yet, while they may go house to house, they will not be interested in attending to your church, nor will they be interested in any Bible study of which they are not in control.

*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, **neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.** - 3 John 1:9-10*

#### ☛ Dishonor Parents

Cult members are often encouraged, and even forced, to separate from family members. Cult leaders will use Luke 14:26 to force the separation.

*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. - Luke 14:26*

These leaders will never bother to teach Matthew 15:5-6.

*But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. - Matthew 15:5-6*

Those who love God may have their family turn against them; nevertheless, those on the narrow path will not neglect to honor their parents. Some cult leaders do not go so far as to teach open rebellion against parents, however they do have traditions which subtly separate families.

#### ☛ Apostles & Prophets

*Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. - Matthew 23:10*

Cults have leaders, or prophets, who are only recognized by their group. These leaders have absolute authority and yet are not accountable to anyone. The prophets (or teachers) are often given authority equal to or greater than the Bible. While many cults deny this, yet they all believe that one cannot properly understand the Bible without the cults prophets or teachers, thus they make their prophets the highest authority. The leader is always right.

#### ☛ Sermons

*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. - 1 Corinthians 2:1-2*

The leader of a cult will preach sermons that uplift himself or the doctrines that separate them from other Christians. They feel the need to justify their separation from the rest of the church. Whenever the group's doctrine or leader is questioned it, it will be perceived as persecution.

While occasional sermons on a peripheral topic are necessary, as a rule sermons should be preoccupied in lifting up Jesus and encouraging us to become like Him.

#### ☛ Bible Studies

*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. - 2 Timothy 2:15*

Cults are always holding Bible studies, which would be wonderful if they actually studied the Bible. Unfortunately, these studies lead members to think that they know the Scriptures, when, in reality, the leaders are simply using a Bible verse, often taken out of context, to prove their foregone conclusions. These studies, carefully orchestrated by cult leaders, teach about how the Bible supports their pet doctrines, rather than studying the Bible for what it actually says.

A cult will never teach its members hermeneutics (the science of studying the Bible) because this would expose the incompetence of the cult leader. The leadership is the exclusive means of knowing truth, no other means of discovery is credible. Followers are often discouraged from studying the Bible on their own, the cult leader will study it on their behalf.

## ☛ No Personal Thoughts

Since cult members are required to obey their prophets without question, the individual person is not allowed to think for himself. Therefore, everyone believes exactly the same thing. In other words, they aren't allowed to question what is in their catechism, or to believe what isn't. While it may sound good for everybody in a church to believe exactly the same thing, it is an indication that the church's members have not been allowed to think for themselves. A person (this includes a leader) who has always believed the same thing has never matured spiritually.

*Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is **instructed unto the kingdom** of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which **bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.** - Matthew 13:52*

After being recruited there is little tolerance for critical questions or inquiry.

## ☛ Redefine Words

Cults redefine words that are commonly used by Christians, or they will refrain from using those words at all. Unfortunately, this causes their members to misunderstand some of the most basic doctrines that Jesus taught. For example, a cult that does not believe in the devil, may teach its members to think 'carnal mind' every time that they see the word 'Satan' or 'the devil' in their Bibles.

*Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.  
- John 8:43*

## ☛ Saved by Works

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9*

Followers feel that they have to work their way into Heaven, they often feel that they will never be good enough. While some cults may claim salvation by grace, if you continue to study under them, you will find that, in reality, they believe that their salvation is really dependent upon their conduct.<sup>6</sup>

## ☛ Legalism

It's necessary for all cults to be legalistic. A cult's version of which rules to follow not only separates it from other churches, it justifies an overbearing leadership. Therefore, the more cultic a church is, the more legalistic it will be. If you're not sure whether or not a church is being too legalistic, compare its rules to those that the apostles gave to the church in Acts chapter 15.<sup>3</sup>

## ☛ Secret Doctrines

*Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing.  
- John 18:20*

Cults often have secret doctrines, which only their members know about. Cult members are often required to lie, in order to protect these secret doctrines. For example, the member of a cult that does not believe in the devil may be asked about this doctrine. If it is a secret doctrine, he

will be taught to say that he does believe. But he will finish the sentence in his mind with, "...that the devil is my carnal mind." Thus, he believes that he's being honest with his own heart.

Compare this to Jesus, who taught openly. It's true that Christianity has some doctrines that are foolish to the unbeliever, but these are never kept secret from the unbeliever.

After reading this page, a parent concerned about his children, sent me an email asking a question, "Could you kindly inform us whether you have any information on [name] church? I responded by saying,

I did not have any personal information on the [name] Church so I went to their website and looked at their doctrines and statement of faith. In studying I found some things that I do not agree with, however as they are trying to live a holy life and they believe salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Nor, according to their website, do they believe that they are the only ones on the narrow path. Therefore I would not forbid my children from attend that church.

I hope this helps some.

A short time later, completely unrelated to the above, I received an email from a person who left that church.

Hi, I stumbled on upon your website as I was up late looking (as I often do) for more clues to continue to convince myself that I actually did leave a cult after 25 years.

I am shocked how well you described the Church I was raised in. I quit the church about 3 years ago and now me and my family go to what I consider a normal mainstream church now. It's unbelievably difficult to voluntarily leave church and mindset you have had most of your life. To God be the glory there. Even as an immature teen I recognized issues within the exclusive beliefs that I was taught as gospel.

[...]

What you have written was so similar to [name] I would have thought you to be a former member.

Though I may have described this cult-church like a former member, the only thing in know for sure is that they have secret doctrines.

### ☪ Sacred Writings

Cults often have their own sacred writings, which they claim are necessary to understand the Bible. Some cults even have books that they believe are equal in authority to the Holy Bible. Some of the larger cults have their own printing press. If you ask the pastor a question on any given topic, he will hand you one of his pamphlets or books, instead of going to the Bible for his answer. Cult leaders will often have disdain for other Christian or secular leaders, and will discourage or forbid members from reading anything that has not been pre-approved by their leaders.

While some study books are helpful, none of them are necessary to interpret the Bible. The Bible should be used to judge other books.

*Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

*- Proverbs 30:5-6*

### ☪ Pride

*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6b*

Pride causes cult members to look down on those who are not members. Since they view non-members as heretics, they are unable to learn anything from them. Cult members are at the complete mercy of the 'anointed' cult leader. A person who cannot be corrected by someone outside of his church is spiritually immature.

*Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.*

*- Proverbs 9:8*

### Conclusion

*And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, **and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.** - 1 Thessalonians 5:13*

When we look at cult practices we must be careful that we do not reject all authority. There are legitimate ministries where the leaders are very controlling. They may isolate their flock, and have many other rules, but if these rules are in place to help a person to overcome a destructive lifestyle, they may be a legitimate Christian ministry. However, the leaders themselves must be accountable to oversight, and should not believe in exclusivity<sup>8</sup>. The difference between Biblical Christianity and a cult is more than just a list of rules. It is the difference between light and darkness, freedom and slavery.

Cults are a real and serious problem to new believers, as well as to old believers who have not learned sound doctrine. The first step in protecting yourself from these wolves is to recognize that,

*... your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: - 1 Peter 5:8b*

The solution is to become established in sound Biblical doctrine. Look for fellowship with Christians who believe that the Bible is the word of God, and who are themselves open to correction. Do not fellowship with those who practice the errors mentioned above.

## Why are Cults Attractive?

We, as Christians, should try and understand the attraction of cults. If we do, we will be better equipped to reach someone who is trapped in a cult, as well as prevent others from being indoctrinated.

Part of the problem is that some traditional churches have made compromises, offering a contemporary environment, or easy-believeism. The compromise and lukewarm atmosphere of many churches give cult leaders much ammunition to use in their sermons.

Cult members think that they are the normal ones and are in relative safety. From their perspective, it is the outsider who has not thought his position through; therefore, it is the outsider who is in danger. Let's look at some examples.

### ☛ Counterfeit Spiritual Truths

*They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. - 1 John 2:19*

Cults do not draw their strength from their errors. They draw their strength from their ability to counterfeit spiritual truths. Rat poison is 99.9% good food; it's that 0.1% poison that kills the rat. The spiritual truths taught by Jesus are powerful; the cult leaders' ability to slightly twist these truths make their teachings not only attractive, but deadly.

*As also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which **they that are unlearned and unstable wrest**, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.  
- 2 Peter 3:16*

### ☛ Personal Sacrifice

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.- Romans 12:1*

Cult leaders demand personal sacrifice and obedience. I am not just talking about going around knocking on doors every Saturday. I personally know of one group (their apostle's name was David McKay), where many of the members have donated one of their kidneys at his urging.

The teaching that we must 'present our bodies as a living sacrifice' is missing in many traditional churches. Nor does our self-indulgent culture satisfy the inner man. Therefore cult members who are living sacrificially see themselves as being in far less danger, and living a more satisfying life than the self-indulgent outsiders.

### ☛ Idealism

All cults offer a sort of idealism which gives meaning to their members' lives. They compare themselves to those traditional churches that focus on updating their music program or offering a more contemporary atmosphere to increase their membership. Being a member for idealistic

reasons rather than for entertainment is evidence to the cult member that he is in the true church, and that those on the outside are the ones in danger.

#### ☛ First Love

*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.  
- Revelation 2:4*

Many Christians are hard to recognize as such during the week. Often their lifestyles will imply a love for the world rather than a love for God. Again, while a cult member's love may be misdirected, they see themselves in a far more spiritual position than the outsider.

#### ☛ Persecution

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:10*

Being ridiculed by those in traditional churches, or by having doors slammed in their faces by those on the outside, is evidence to the cult member that he is in the true church. Again, from his perspective, those on the outside are the ones in danger.

#### ☛ Escape Judgment

*For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. - Matthew 24:38-39*

The draw of many cults is the promise that, as God's chosen people, they will escape the immanent doom which is coming to the earth. They see the world today just as Jesus described it, and they see themselves making a sincere effort to avoid God's judgment. At the same time, they see outsiders being unconcerned. Therefore they see us, not themselves, as the ones in danger.

#### ☛ Leader's Charisma

*He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. - Isaiah 53:2b*

AND

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.  
- 2 Timothy 4:3*

We pick our movie stars, rock stars and other idols because they have some personal charisma. Cult leaders often come to power for the same reason<sup>9</sup>. The mistaken assumption is that a teacher who has been gifted poetically, articulately, and charismatically, has also been gifted spiritually.

*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. - Matthew 7:15*

## ☛ Sense of Family

*But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. - 1 Thessalonians 4:9*

Cults offer a sense of family to their members. Often this is the first family the member has ever had. An essential part of recruiting for most cults is to shower their proselytes with love. It is nice to feel part of a family. What the potential recruits don't consider is that they are being showered with attention because they are being recruited. We should not let personal attention cause us to shut our eyes.

*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. - 1 John 4:1*

AND

*And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And **through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.** - 2 Peter 2:2-3a*

## ☛ Exclusivity

*He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride. - Job 41:34*

Most cults are exclusive. This exclusivity appeals to a person's pride, making him feel that he is a part of God's select group. The rest of the church, from his perspective, is on the outside.

## Conclusion

Understanding a cult member's dedication and motives should help us to see that any sort of ridicule is counter productive. We should also reflect on our own passion for God. Put yourself in the cult member's place. He thinks he has found the truth. Will he really be persuaded to leave the cult by a person whose life is not dedicated wholly to God?

*Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. - Matthew 7:4-5*

## Contrasts Between a Cult & a Bible Believing Church

There seem to be many similar draws between Christianity and cults. The personal sacrifice, idealism, and sense of family are all things that they have in common. Because of this, a cult may be hard to recognize at first glance. But a careful look will show that the doctrine of a cult is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus.

## Jesus vs. Cult Leaders

*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. - Titus 1:16*

- ☑ Jesus did not ask people to make sacrifices so that He could live well. He led by example. He came to serve, not to be served. Jesus always showed meekness.
- ☐ Cult leaders cannot manifest the fruit of the Spirit. Time will usually show the fruit of a cult leader's life. Cult leaders will not only have a problem with anger or patience, they are also very arrogant. Many justify their sins, including fornication, while keeping up the illusion of being 'spiritual'.

### **Christian Leaders vs. Cult Leaders**

*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. **For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.** - Jude 1:3-4*

- ☑ A Bible believing church should appoint its leaders and hold them to the standard Paul taught in 1st Timothy chapter 3. If a pastor backslides in a Christian Church, he is removed from leadership.
- ☐ Cult leaders are not picked using biblical guidelines, nor is possible to reform or remove a bad leader.

### **The Bible vs. the Leader as the Final Authority**

*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. - John 16:13*

- ☑ In a healthy church the Bible is the final authority. Christians read its passages in context; they pray about what they are reading and wait for God to give them understanding.
- ☐ If a Bible is used (not all cults use one), it is only to quote single verses for promoting the leadership's foregone conclusions. Even in this case, the members need a leader to interpret the Bible for them.

### **Personal Growth vs. Dependency on the Leader**

*My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. - John 10:29*

- ☑ Christians should encourage each other, but our dependency is on Jesus Christ, so a good pastor will encourage personal growth.
- ☐ A cult member is taught that he will never be able to leave the cult without falling completely back into sin (or some version of this). I have heard leaders say things like: "You can't make it without me or our church". Why create this dependence?

## **Integrity at All Costs vs. What Promotes the Group**

*Abstain from all appearance of evil. - 1 Thessalonians 5:22*

- ☑ The individual Christian and the church should act with integrity at all costs. A look through history will show how big that cost can be.
- ☐ In contrast, while individuals may have high personal standards, most cult leaders justify questionable activities if they protect or promote their group. They may compare their behavior to the Israelites "spoiling the Egyptians". They may justify lying by teaching that they're only required to "tell the truth to whom the truth is due," or by telling half-truths. They may believe that they are telling the truth, even though what they are saying means something different to their hearers than it does to themselves.

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?  
- Jeremiah 17:9*

## **Persecuted vs. Ill-treated**

*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, **for my sake**. - Matthew 5:11*

- ☑ Christians may be rejected or persecuted because of their identification with Christ. In order to receive the blessing mentioned in Matthew 5, the oppressor's words must be false and the persecution must be for Jesus' sake.
- ☐ Cult members may also be persecuted because of their identification with Christ. However, when they are rejected because their words are false, there is no blessing. (As a side note: since slamming a door on a cult member simply reinforces his persecution complex, Christians should say no nicely and shut the door gently.)

## **Recognition of Non-members vs. Exclusive Revelation**

*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. - 1 Corinthians 12:13*

- ☑ The church is one body and Jesus Christ is the head. A healthy, Bible-believing church will feel free to fellowship with other denominations who put Jesus as the head.
- ☐ Cults usually believe that they, and they alone, are the one true church. A cult's leadership will be more likely to attack the beliefs of another denomination than to cite a manuscript from another denomination in a positive light. If Jesus showed up at the door of a cult, as a none member, they would not receive Him any more than the religious leaders of His day received Him.

*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. - 3 John 1:9-10*

## Stressing vs. Stretching Scripture

*As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, **which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.** - 2 Peter 3:16*

- ☑ Jesus taught plainly in the common language, so that everyone, even children, were able to understand His teachings. If common, uneducated multitudes were able to understand what Jesus taught, we can too.

*And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, **and become as little children**, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 18:3*

- ☐ A cult leader will take a proof text out of context to teach his doctrine. When words like baptism, salvation, the devil or hell (or any other word) have a different meaning for one group than it does for the Christian church at large, then Scripture is being mistaught. If a group uses the Bible to 'redefine' words, it's members become powerfully brain washed. This is a common practice in most cults! If a teacher is using one of Paul's letters to teach different doctrine than Paul taught, one of them will be embarrassed on the Day of Judgment.

*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. - Matthew 12:36*

## Salvation by Grace vs. Additional Requirements

*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. - Romans 10:9*

- ☑ Our salvation by grace alone is of paramount importance. While Christ requires those He has saved to forgive<sup>10</sup> others and to repent<sup>11</sup> from their evil ways, it was He alone that pulled us out of the pit. Our salvation is dependant solely on what Christ has done for us. There is no greater love than a man die for his friend. God became man so that He could pay the price for our sins in His death. We are saved by God's ultimate love; there is none greater.
- ☐ When cults add good works as a requirement to being saved, they are insulting God by saying that His ultimate love is insufficient. Instead of their behavior being from motivations of love and thankfulness for what Christ has done, it becomes motivated by pride.

*Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: **but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.** - Luke 7:47*

## Voluntary Giving in Secret vs. Compelled Giving

*Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. - Matthew 6:1-2*

- ☑ In the Christian community, giving is voluntary. Unfortunately, some Christian churches have fallen into the trap of compulsory giving. They demand a tithe or use heavy-handed tactics to raise money.
- ☐ In a cult, the member's behavior is so controlled that it renders all personal and secret giving nearly impossible. Many cults compel their members to give up all personal possessions. In those cases, the individual may need help, as not having any personal resources will make it very difficult to leave the group, once his eyes are opened.

### **Honoring Parents vs. Withdrawing From Families**

*[Moses, as quoted by Jesus] Honor thy father and thy mother; and, whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: - Mark 7:10*

- ☑ As Christians, we should obey Jesus' unconditional commandment to honor our parents, whether our parents are Christians or not.
- ☐ Cult members are often encouraged to separate from their families, which is dishonoring to their parents. Other cults, which may not be quite so separatist, will still disown their parents, should those parents ever leave the cult.

### **The Historical Jesus Christ vs. A New Revelation of Christ**

*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. - Galatians 1:8*

- ☑ Christians are to hold to the same gospel that was given to us by Jesus during His ministry on earth. We are not to add or to subtract from it.  
*Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. - Revelation 3:11*
- ☐ I do not know of any cults that reject Christ up front. Even in Islamic countries, where Christians are persecuted and you are not allowed to possess a Bible, Jesus is still regarded a prophet. However, in a cult the historical Jesus will be replaced with another, perhaps new age, Jesus, or their Jesus will have new doctrines that the church never knew existed. Often Jesus' importance is replaced by the importance of the cult leaders.

### **Other Contrasts**

Some less common tactics used by cults to manipulate their members are games, sleep deprivation, peer pressure, lack of privacy, diet, or chanting (Matthew 6:7). The result of this mind control is hypnotic, so that members accept the leader's teaching without question. Of course, none of these tactics were taught by Jesus.

## Leaving a Cult

A person leaving a cult will have many struggles. If you know of someone who is leaving a cult, or if you are leaving one yourself, it will be helpful to understand the following:

### A Feeling of Going into Darkness

I mention this struggle first because it is the most important. Even if a cult member can see the leader for who he is, and can recognize that the group is full of errors, leaving the group will still feel like going from light into darkness. This feeling of leaving the truth is **common with everyone who leaves any cult.**

*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.  
- Hebrews 13:13*

Remember the story of the emperor who was in the parade with no clothes on? His pride made him continue walking naked even after he was exposed. It's difficult for a person coming out of a cult to acknowledge that everything he so firmly believed is wrong. Can he really leave behind what he once believed with all his heart? There will be doubts because he will have given so many sacrifices to the group. All of his 'family' will think he's crazy, and will try to persuade him not to leave; no one will understand his point of view; he will be alone. He is giving up everything, occasionally even his biological family.

*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: **for whom I have suffered the loss of all things**, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, - Philippians 3:8*

If a person is obedient to Christ, this feeling of darkness will pass. The truth is that our feelings are not reliable, and they will change with time. If a member makes a clean break, in a short time the feeling of darkness will be replaced with a feeling of relief and freedom; it will be like scales falling from his eyes.

### Encourage Their Walk in Christ

When a person leaves a group that professed to be Christian, it's difficult not to throw the baby out with the bath water. It may take some encouragement to help him not give up on the Christian walk. But there is hope. After the pride of being in a cult, the humility of admitting wrong is refreshing to God. Remember that it is God who has opened the person's eyes, so even if they don't have everything figured out right away, God will patiently show them the truth.

*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6*

Encourage a person coming out of a cult that God may use his experience to help others in the future.

## **Recognizing a Safe Church.**

1. The pastor will answer your questions without becoming judgmental and punitive.
2. A safe church is transparent, it will disclose information such as finances. Its leaders are willing to tell you more than you want to know.
3. The pastor will sharing decision making with his church elders and encouraging accountability.
4. A good pastor will admit failings and he will listen to constructive criticism without being defensive. It is Jesus Christ who is lifted up as being perfect, not ourselves.
5. A good church may have former members who are disgruntled, however the pastor will not forbid or excommunicate current members for talking to them.
6. A good church will encourage family relationships and community involvement, we are the light of the world and should not hide it under a basket. Existing friendships, unless they violate a scriptural mandate, will not feel threatened.

*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.  
- Ephesians 5:11*

7. A good church will encourage critical thinking. It will also encourage its members to study the Bible together as well as on their own. A good church knows that its leadership is not the only source of knowledge and learning, but realizes that God uses others from different denominations. It will take advantage of these resources.
8. In a good church we truly love one another with no special emphasis toward those being recruited.

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.  
- John 13:35*

## **Help From His Cult's Ex-members**

While not all ex-cult members are reliable resources, many times someone who has experienced exactly what a person leaving a cult is going through can be very helpful. He knows firsthand the struggles and deceptions specific to his cult. It will be encouraging to be able to connect with someone familiar.

## **Burnt Bridges**

*And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. - Luke 9:61-62*

When a person enters a cult, he burns a lot of bridges. It's difficult for him to come back and restore broken relationships. However, the sooner he picks up the pieces, the sooner his healing will start. Now, for the last time, he must burn one more bridge. It may encourage him to remember that God knows where he is and where he has come from.

## **It is Easier to do Nothing**

*For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, **now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.** - 2 Corinthians 6:2*

When the pain exceeds the pleasure, we quit what we're doing. My father could never muster the determination to overcome smoking, until he found out he had cancer. After that he quit smoking, but by then it was too late and he died a slow painful death.

Even when a cult member knows he should leave, it will be easier for him to continue doing nothing. However, the longer he waits, the more he has to lose. On the Day of Judgment, when we stand before Jesus, he will wish that he hadn't buried his talent.

*And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: - Luke 19:20*

**AND**

*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.  
- Luke 21:36*

## **For Christians**

### **Make a Preemptive Strike**

The next time you hear of two people knocking on a friend's door, don't waste a moment. Open the scriptures to him (or her). Make a copy of the first section of this study, and use it to show him how to recognize a cult. Before he joins the cult, it will be much easier to expose its errors. For reasons mentioned earlier, it will be easier to convince him to let you pull his wisdom teeth with vise grips than to point out the cult's errors or show the simple truths of Scripture, after he has joined.

### **Share this Study with a Cult Member**

This study was put together with the help of ex-members from different cults. Though each of their groups was exclusive, they shared most of the characteristics discussed in this study. Share this study with cult members, challenging them with the fact that, though the writer of this study did not know his group's name, he was able to describe many of its characteristics.

### **Build With Gold**

*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. - I Corinthians 3:11-15*

For the Christian who is in a church that has some cultic characteristics, I acknowledge that you are a brother in the Lord. Nevertheless, if you are a member of a wayward church, you should consider that you are allowing your name to give credibility to that church. Unless you are actually making an effort to correct the problems from within, you are building with wood hay and stubble. So let us build with gold.

*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed: - 2 John 1:8-10*

## **Conclusion**

*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ [I am anointed]; and shall deceive many. - Matthew 24:4-5*

There are many gifted Christians who walk humbly and do not draw men after themselves. But many have come in Jesus' name, professing themselves to be prophets or apostles, or claiming to have some special anointing. Without exception, every time a leader (or leaders) has claimed a special anointing, he has deceived his followers.

We will all stand before God on the Day of Judgment. Which would you rather hear?

*Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.  
- Matthew 25:23b*

*OR*

*Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. - Matthew 15:13b-14*

Written by [Jeff Barnes](#).

PS. If you have a personal testimony that you are willing to share or if you have any comments that would be helpful, I would like to hear from you. May God bless you as you serve Him.

## Footnotes:

[3] *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*

[4] *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

[5] For example, some cults forbid the celebration of holidays. This prohibition is very effective in separating family members.

[6] One cult member told me he believed that Jesus died for his sins. Later it slipped out that their group really believed that, if you are sincere, all roads lead to heaven. When challenged about the difference, the member responded that he personally believed in Jesus; however, it is your sincerity, not your belief, that really matters to God.

[8] The belief that one is part of a special group, or that their group alone is saved.

[9] It is also true that many Christians decide where to fellowship based on how charismatic the leader is.

[10] *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

[11] *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

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## Beth-Haran Ministries

More studies are available at [www.the-Gospel.org](http://www.the-Gospel.org)  
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