

How To Know A Cult When You See One

TEXT: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Tim. 3:13).

THESIS:

INTRODUCTION:

1. Cults today are multiplying like rabbits and growing like weeds.
 - A. In the U.S. alone there are an estimated 5,000 cults actively recruiting people of all ages, from all walks of life, at the rate of tens of thousands of new recruits every year.
 - B. Several research studies estimate that five to ten million Americans have been at least partly involved with cultic groups.
 - C. Teenagers are being approached and influenced, so are adults as well as primary care physicians.
 1. The population is participating in more and more new religious and para religious movements.
2. But, what is A Cult?
 - A. While many religions may not believe or teach the entire Bible, they are not cults.
 1. The major religions of the world like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism are not cults.
 2. They are classified as "world religions."
 - B. So, what is a cult? It is a false religion that has some specific identification marks that separate them from other false religions.
 1. And, it should not come as a surprise that the Bible warns us that there are going to be many false teachers and false religions in the world.
 2. 2 Tim. 3:13, "... evil men and false teachers will become worse and worse, deceiving many, they themselves having been deceived by Satan." (TLB)

DISCUSSION:

- I. WHY SHOULD I STUDY THE CULTS?
 - A. Because they are present IN OUR WORLD.
 1. 2 Pet. 2:1, "False prophets were among God's people in the past, as false teachers will be among you. They will secretly bring in their own destructive teachings." (GW)
 - B. Because Jesus WARNED US about them.
 1. Matt. 24:11, "Many false prophets will come and cause many people to believe false things." (ICB)
 - C. Because they force us to KNOW THE BIBLE.
 1. Acts 20:29,32, "I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. 32 And now I entrust you to God and the word of his grace—his message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself."

(NLT)

2. Eph. 4:14-15, "We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15...we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (NRSV)
- D. You know, the American Banking Association has a training program that best describes the reason for studying about the cults.
1. Each year hundreds of bank tellers go to Washington D.C. in order to learn how to detect counterfeit money, although they never touch a counterfeit bill.
 2. The reason for this is because the American Banking Association is convinced that if a person is thoroughly familiar with the original then they will not be deceived by the counterfeit, no matter how much it might look like the original.
- II. Did you know that there are at least 20, cults within 8 miles of this building and some of them even take on the name of God or Jesus to disguise themselves as a church or disguise themselves as a social club?
- A. Jehovah Witness (1), Mormons (2), Fortune Tellers (14), Ghost Hunters (1), Spiritualism (1), Masonic Lodge (1),
 - B. Thus, we study cults to be able to detect them from true Christianity, which is why we are going to compare what they teach and at the same time learn the truth concerning many of the major doctrines found in the Bible.
- III. HOW CAN I IDENTIFY A CULT?
- A. One way to identify a cult is by using the B.I.T.E. method.
 1. This stands for:
 - a. BEHAVIOR Control
 - b. INFORMATION Control
 - c. THOUGHT Control
 - d. EMOTIONAL Control
 2. These four components are guidelines because not all groups do every aspect or do them extremely.
 - a. What matters most is the overall impact on a person's free will and ability to make real choices.
 - b. A person's uniqueness, talents, skills, creativity, and free will should be encouraged, not suppressed as with a cult.
 - B. Another way to identify a cult is by using the acronym C.U.L.T.
 1. C - Cut off from the world.
 - a. Cult leaders and followers are isolated and cut off from people outside the group.
 - b. Thus, they lose their ability, and their desire, to verify information the cult gives them.
 - c. And, who become alienated from family and friends.
 2. U - Undernourished--poor nutritional intake and sleep deprivation often

characterizes cult members.

- a. They are near exhaustion and their resistance is low, so they can easily be manipulated, deceived, and exploited.
 - b. This is described as a special practice or diet to improve health or spirituality.
3. L - Leadership is authoritarian and powerful.
 - a. The leaders claim divinity or special knowledge and authority from God as they use deception and hidden objectives.
 - b. The members are not allowed to question what is done and must be totally dependent on the cult for belief, behavior and freedom.
 - c. He or she loses personal freedom and the ability to make choices.
 4. T - Theology or beliefs of a cult always involve some unique or new perspectives, and they claim that truth is only found in what the cult says.
 - a. Cults often promote the "we/they" syndrome, which also keeps members dependent and loyal to the cult.
- C. Obviously, these are generalizations and not every cult exhibits each of these characteristics at all times.
1. And, the major religions of the world, including Christianity, sometimes express some of these traits.
 2. Corporations even exhibit some of these traits!
 3. The difference is that the cults practice far more of these traits, and at a far greater intensity and frequency level, than do religions or other non-cult groups.

IV. WHAT DO CULTS HAVE IN COMMON?

- A. They are devoted to a leader RATHER THAN GOD
 1. Jim Jones, the leader of the People's Temple.
 2. David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Dividians.
 3. Marshall Applewhite, the leader of Heaven's Gate.
 4. Joseph Smith; the founder of the Mormons.
 5. Charles Taze Russell, the founder of Jehovah's Witness.
 6. And the list could go on and on.
- B. Often these leaders are charismatic and great speakers.
 1. They do everything they can to become the center of attention in order to exercise complete physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual control over their followers.
 2. They do this by:
 - a. Making an image of spiritual superiority and special knowledge that no one has access to except their leader.
 - b. In some cases they claim special revelation from God, as in the case of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons and Charles Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
 - c. So, if a follower disobeys their leader they are punished either emotionally as in the case of the International Church of Christ (Boston

Movement), or physically as in the case of the Branch Dividians.

1. Any disagreement with the leader of a cult is not tolerated.
- C. Now, the Bible very clearly teaches that true religion demands submission to God, not man.
1. Worshiping or serving someone else in the place of God is Satanic in nature.
 2. Matt. 4:10, "Jesus said to the devil, "Go away from me, Satan! It is written in the Scriptures, 'You must worship the Lord your God. Serve only him!'" (ICB)
 3. Gal. 6:3, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." (NIV)
 4. Col. 1:18, "Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything." (NLT)

V. WHAT ELSE DO CULTS HAVE IN COMMON

A. They manipulate THE BIBLE.

1. 2 Pet. 3:16, "Sometimes there are things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand. And some people explain these things falsely. They are ignorant and weak in faith. They also falsely explain the other Scriptures. But they are destroying themselves by doing that." (ICB)
 - a. The Bible is twisted to fit the leader or group's interpretation.
 - b. Private interpretations are forbidden because the leader of the cult is the only one, who is considered able to understand God's voice properly.
 - c. Their teachings distort the historic claims of Christianity.
2. Mk. 7:8-13, "You abandon the commandments of God to follow human traditions." 9He added, "You have no trouble rejecting the commandments of God in order to keep your own traditions! 10For example, Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother' and 'Whoever curses father or mother must be put to death.' 11But you say, 'If a person tells his father or mother that whatever he might have used to help them is corban (that is, an offering to God), 12he no longer has to do anything for his father or mother.' 13Because of your traditions you have **destroyed the authority of God's word**. And you do many other things like that." (GW)
3. Prov. 30:5-6, "Every word of God proves true. He defends all who come to him for protection. 6Do not add to his words, or he may rebuke you, and you will be found a liar." (NLT)
 - a. Cults typically ADD to the word of God, SUBTRACT from the person and work of Jesus, MULTIPLY the requirements for salvation, and DIVIDE themselves from the rest of the world.
 - b. Rev. 22:18-19, "Here is my warning for everyone who hears the prophecies in this book: If you add anything to them, God will make you suffer all the terrible troubles written in this book. 19If you take anything away from these prophecies, God will not let you have part in the life-giving tree and in the holy city described in this book." (CEV)

B. What do cults have in common: They manipulate PEOPLE.

1. They manipulate people by using DECEPTION.

- a. 2 Jn. 1:7, "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist." (NIV)
- b. The ex-Moonie Christopher Edwards "on first assignment selling flowers was told to say, 'Buy some flowers from a Christian youth group...to help some needy children?'
 1. When he questioned the deceitfulness of what he was doing, he was told: "It's for your soul and the glory of heaven. Look, wouldn't you deceive a little to save your soul?' It's called Heavenly Deception."
2. They manipulate people: By using INTIMIDATION.
 - a. They tell people, "you'll be damned forever." or "No more food or financial help."
 - b. They threaten destruction by God if someone turns away from their teachings and sometimes threaten physically.
 - c. This can also be brought about by GUILT.
 - d. The person is told that to leave a cult is to betray God and the group leader.
3. They manipulate people: By using LOVE.
 - a. This is what is sometimes referred to "love bombing."
 1. This is where someone is surrounded with friendly people and smiling strangers who hold their hands and then shower them with compliments.
 2. During this constant affection there is a lot of physical contact like hugging, pats on the back, and touching.
 - b. They help new members emotionally, give food and clothes to them and make them the center of attention.
 1. But as one person said, "then you learn that the cause of the group is something you never dared could happen, and all of this sounds too good to be true because it probably is too good to be true!" - Jeanne Mills, former member of the People's Temple and victim of assassination following the Nov. 18, 1978 Jonestown suicides/murders of 911 adults and children.
4. They manipulate people: By using intensive indoctrination.
 - a. Members are bombarded with the idea that you are worth very little and that the leader is everything and that outsiders are misguided or hostile and to be feared and avoided.
 - b. Members share fears and secrets to produce intimacy and emotional vulnerability.
 - c. And so, when a person feels guilt and insufficiency a perfect leader begins to be attractive.
5. They manipulate people: by being brainwashed to the point where they cut ties with family and society.
 - a. Now, while there are some subtle differences between mind control and brainwashing the results are the same, obedience to the leader or group.

- b. A systematic teaching indoctrinates members into the beliefs of the cult by:
 - 1. Seducing and deceiving, telling lies over and over until believed and reprogramming the conscience to accept the leader's teachings.
 - 2. This is called mind conditioning and the new members are:
 - a. Subjection to stress and fatigue
 - b. Social disruption, isolation and pressure
 - c. Self-criticism and humiliation
 - d. Fear, anxiety and paranoia
 - e. Control of information
 - f. Escalating commitment
- 6. They manipulate people: By using isolation.
 - a. When people join a cult they are duped into separating themselves from members of their families who are not involved in the cult.
 - 1. An example of this can be seen in the People's Temple.
 - 2. In this cult the people actually left the country and isolated themselves in a compound in Guyana, which allowed him to exercise complete control over his followers without any outside influence or interference.
 - a. The same thing can be said of David Karesh in Waco, Texas.
 - b. This is done to prevent information that may expose what is really going on internally.
 - 1. So, cults cut off and/or badmouth outside sources of information.
 - 2. They are not allowed to read or speak to those who were part of the group and left.
 - 3. All family and friends are cut off so you are only exposed to the ones in the group.
- 7. As believers we are to be separate from worldliness, but nothing in the Bible tells us to be isolated from the world.
 - a. Jesus said in Jn. 17:15, "I'm not asking you to take them out of the world but to protect them from the evil one." (GW)
- C. What do cults have in common: They have an exclusive BELIEF SYSTEM.
 - 1. 1 Tim. 6:20-21, "Timothy, God has trusted you with many things. Keep those things safe. Stay away from people who say foolish things that are not from God. Stay away from those who argue against the truth. They use something they call "knowledge," but it is really not knowledge. 21They say that they have that "knowledge," but they have left the true faith." (ICB)
 - a. Cults often claim to have "cornered the market" on truth.
 - 2. Mormons believe they are the "latter day saints."
 - a. Brigham Young once said, "Every spirit that does not confess that God has sent Joseph Smith, and revealed the everlasting gospel to and through him, is of anti-Christ."
 - 3. Christian Science leader Mary Baker Eddy once claimed, "A Christian Scientist requires my work Science and Health for his textbook... because it is the

voice of truth to this age.”

4. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Moonies stated, “We are the only people who truly understand the heart of Jesus, and the hope of Jesus.”
 5. 1 Cor. 8:2, “Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much.” (NLT)
 - a. Not only is the belief system of a cult exclusive, it is also involves things that are unverifiable.
 - b. For instance, the Heaven’s Gate followers believed in a space ship behind the Hale-Bopp comet.
 - c. And, Joseph Smith said that an angel had appeared to him and gave him some golden tablets, which no one has ever seen.
- D. What do cults have in common: They want to be ACCEPTED AS CHRISTIANS
1. Matt. 7:15, “Beware of false teachers who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are wolves and will tear you apart.” (TLB)
 2. 2 Cor. 11:14-15, “Even Satan tries to make himself look like an angel of light. 15So why does it seem strange for Satan’s servants to pretend to do what is right? Someday they will get exactly what they deserve.” (CEV)
 3. Today more than ever before, we are seeing a wave of cults being accepted by the people and leaders of our country as "Christian churches".
 - a. This stems from a desire to become legitimate in the eyes of the world.
 - b. Some cults have already achieved this, such as the Worldwide Church of God, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Jehovah’s Witness, and so many, many more.

VI. WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME INVOLVED IN CULTS?

- A. Sometimes it’s because of a LACK OF KNOWLEDGE.
 1. Hos. 4:6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” (NASB-U)
 2. Matt. 15:14, “They are blind guides leading the blind, and both will fall into a ditch.” (TLB)
- B. Sometimes it’s because they are IN NEED.
 1. It might be an emotional need for acceptance, approval or encouragement.
 2. It might be a physical need for food, clothing or money.
 3. It might be an intellectual or spiritual need and they see the cult as having all the answers to their question.
 - a. But, Phil. 4:19 states, “My God will richly fill your every need in a glorious way through Christ Jesus.” (GW)
- C. Sometimes it is because they are let down.
 1. They might be unhappy with society as a whole or maybe the government.
 2. Or, they might be disappointed with “traditional church” and how some people have looked down upon them as a Pharisee did a sinner.
 - a. As one person said, “Cults are the unpaid bills of the church.”

CONCLUSION:

1. What can I do?

- A. 2 Cor. 11:3-4, "But I fear that somehow you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent. 4You seem to believe whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach about a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed." (NLT)
- 2. I can be ALERT.
 - A. Rom. 16:17, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." (NIV)
 - B. Acts 20:28-31, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." (NIV)
- 3. I can COMPARE.
 - A. 1 Jn. 4:1, "Dearly loved friends, don't always believe everything you hear just because someone says it is a message from God: test it first to see if it really is. For there are many false teachers around." (TLB)
- 4. I can CORRECT.
 - A. Tit. 1:9, "An elder must faithfully follow the truth just as we teach it. He must be able to help people by using true and right teaching. And he must be able to show those who are against the true teaching that they are wrong." (ICB)
- 5. I can GROW SPIRITUALLY.
 - A. 2 Pet. 3:18, "But continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (TEV)
- 6. You know, Walter Martin, who wrote an outstanding book, once said "It is a sad fact that a newly trained wonder from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society can turn the average Christian into a doctrinal pretzel in fifteen minutes."
- 7. Thus,
 - A. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it and be rooted in faith, which is what we have been studying.
 - B. We need to take people's questions about faith seriously and strive to provide answers.
 - C. We need to meet people's social and emotional needs where we treat one another like family and develop meaningful relationships, not just a "How r ya" atmosphere.
 - D. We need to meet people's spiritual needs and to live righteous lives because cults feed on the hypocrisy often found in the church, that is, where people claim to promote being zealous, when in actuality, they are not.