

Jude 3 Missions
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How Do We Identify A Cult?

INTRODUCTION: The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are to be of sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2:1). Not all people are willing to listen to sound doctrine. Some will exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25). Just because something may sound right, then that does not mean that it is from God (Proverbs 16:25). We must test all things and hold tenaciously to what is true (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

- I. In our modern society we have literally thousands of cults built upon man-made doctrines. We will compare five of these major cults with the Bible. However, we must first define what is a cult.
 - A. **DEFINITION:** A cult is a group of people basing their beliefs upon one person's interpretation of God, life, and the hereafter; which always denies the central doctrines of Christianity as taught within the Bible.¹
 - B. Cults apply false definitions to biblical terminology. Paul warns us about false concepts about Jesus, a false Spirit, and a false gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4).
- II. What are some of the common marks for identifying a cult?
 - A. Single leadership.
 1. Cults generally focus around the teachings of a single leader, perhaps their founder or current prophet. This single leader usually claims special revelation from God that they claim is unavailable to the members. This is what keeps the leader in his position. Examples are:
 - a. In 1830 Joseph Smith, Jr., founded the Mormon Church (LDS).
 - b. In 1875 Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Science (CS).
 - c. In 1884 Charles Taze Russell founded the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, known as Jehovah's Witnesses (JW).
 - d. In 1954 L. Ron Hubbard founded Scientology (SCI).
 - e. In 1954 Sun Myung Moon founded the Unification Church (UC).
 2. Christianity does not have a single leader on earth, because our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, heads the Church through many of his servants. All pastors and followers of Jesus Christ are considered equal (Galatians 3:28). Jesus is our only source of truth because He is God incarnate (Matthew 1:23; John 20:28). Jesus is the full revelation of God to man, hence, we need no human revelator to supplement Him (John 1:18).
 - B. Extra-biblical Revelation.
 1. The cults thrive upon revelation outside of the Bible, which they call Scripture.
 - a. The LDS have the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.
 - b. CS has Science and Health, with Keys to the Scriptures.
 - c. JWs have the Watchtower publications, the Watchtower and Awake magazines.
 - d. SCI has the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, which were declared "scripture."
 - e. UC has the Divine Principle, which is a revelation by Sun Myung Moon.
 2. The Bible, in contrast to this, is the only revelation needed by Christians (2 Timothy 3:16; John 20:31; Romans 15:4; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
 - C. Alteration of the Bible.
 1. The cults change the Bible in one of two ways. They either retranslate it inadequately or redefine the terminology so as to cloud the meaning.
 - a. The LDS retranslated it into the Joseph Smith Translation and the JWs retranslated it into the New World Translation.
 - b. CS, SCI, and UC alter the Bible by redefining it words in their writings. Anyone who reads the Bible through these redefined words will have a clouded message.
 2. The Bible clearly warns us about those who attempt to alter God's Word (Proverbs 30:5-6; 2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9).

¹ This definition was used in McDowell, Josh, with Don Stewart (assisted by Kurt Van Gorden), *The Deceivers* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992).