

Eleven Marks of a cult

What is a cult? A cult is any religious group that follows another source of authority other than the Bible. A cult usually has books, besides the Bible, which they say were written by prophets who received extra-Biblical revelation from God. They usually deviate from the Bible in their view of who Jesus is and the way of salvation outlined in the Bible. They often are led by people with very powerful personalities who make rigid and legalistic demands of their followers (sometimes called gurus). They are usually very nice and sincere people, but most of the time they do not tell you all they believe right away. They tend to de-emphasize the atonement of Jesus on the cross and emphasize instead righteousness by works. They usually have proof-texts from the Bible, but take the passages out of context and interpret them wrongly.

Marks of a cult:

- 1. They add to the Word of God.** They use other extra-Biblical books and claim that their prophets have received direct revelations from God.
- 2. They subtract from Jesus.** They say that he was less than God and some say he was only a created being like the angels.
- 3. They multiply the requirements for salvation.** In the New Testament the Jews said that people had to be circumcised to be a Christian. But the Bible says this is not a requirement for salvation. Today people may say that you have to worship on the Sabbath, observe certain religious festivals, go through cultic rituals, follow other books, or certain philosophies or creeds to be saved. The Bible simply says that we are saved by God's grace operating through the blood of Jesus and the resurrection with a response from us through faith, repentance, confession of Jesus as Lord and baptism.
- 4. They subtract the Biblical requirements for salvation.** Some groups say that repentance and baptism are not conditions for salvation, but the Bible is very clear that we must repent and be baptized (Acts 2: 38). They falsely put baptism in the category of a "work" in a negative sense when Colossians 2: 11-12 clearly says it is a work done by Christ and the power of God. Others say that just being a good person is enough to be saved. Then, still others say that it does not matter what religion you are part of just so you are sincere and try your best. There are also those who do not believe that Jesus was really crucified and raised from the dead. Of course, then they say it is not necessary to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins and his resurrection for our justification. Others say that abiding in Jesus is not a requirement for salvation. The Bible clearly says in John 15: 5 that if one does not abide in Jesus, he is like a branch that *"is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."* Revelation 2: 10 says, *"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."* The Bible says in Galatians 5: 21 that the way we live our lives has everything to do with whether we will be saved or not. It says about those who live a life of sin, *"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."* Hebrews 6: 4-6 speaks specifically of the possibility of a Christian falling away from the faith. The correct assumption from this is that to be saved one must continue in the faith. Also, Hebrews 3: 12 says, *"See to it, brothers that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."*
- 5. They divide by being extremely exclusive.** These groups think that they are the only ones who have the truth and say they are the only ones who will be saved. Sometimes they may even require that their members not associate with others in other churches or groups.
- 6. They deceive you by not telling you the whole truth about what they believe up front.** For example, in their writings they often cover up doctrinal deviations until the end. They can be very friendly in their

presentation and much of what they say at first might be correct. However, when they "convert" you and you get into their group, you find out what they truly believe. Then when you have already established relationships it is difficult to get out of the group.

7. They sometimes exalt their leaders as infallible prophets. People often blindly follow the leader and sometimes try to cover up his mistakes and weaknesses.

8. They misuse the Bible by taking verses out of context and twisting the meaning or even mistranslating the Bible from the original Greek.

9. They manipulate their members. Often they manipulate them to give money in an extreme manner. Some go so far as saying that all the funds belong to the main leader of the group. Sometimes, they also manipulate their members to have some kind of religious "experience" rather than trusting the Holy Spirit to guide, lead, and influence them to follow the way of truth.

10. Their methods in converting people are sometimes deceptive and forceful. Also, they are sometimes not good listeners.

11. In addition, they seem to put emphasis on teaching people who don't know the Bible very well. For example, they seem to love trying to teach international students.

Some modern day cults are: Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Good Books to help you learn more:

--- *Fast Facts On False Teachings*, Ron Carlson and Ed Decker, 1994.

--- *Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. and updated ed., Ravi Zacharias and Walter Martin
Bethany House, 2003.

--- *Kingdom of the Cults* pdf at: <http://www.full-proof.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Martin-Walter-Kingdom-of-the-Cults.pdf> or another site to get this is:

<http://www.watchmenfaithministries.com/images/KingdomOfTheCultsWalterMartin.pdf>

--- *Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, David W. Bercot 1999.