

What Make Something A Cult?

I have heard that most cults believe some “secret knowledge” is necessary for salvation. What do they mean by this “secret knowledge”? While each cult varies in their expression, all of them are related to an early Christian heresy called Gnosticism. Gnosis means "special knowledge." Instead of salvation by grace through faith, the believer needed gnosis (special knowledge) unknown to others. This made the Gnostic group absolutely necessary for the believer since that is where this special knowledge came from. This special knowledge can take on a variety of forms, but it usually focuses on some secret teaching by the cult leader. Once the seeker goes through a special rite or teaching, they then possess this secret knowledge.

What do Gnostic cults primarily teach about the human body? Gnostic cults, which make up the vast majority of all cults, believe that the human body is a burden that needs to be shed. Two extremes can arise from this belief. One belief is that the body needs to be subjugated by harsh treatment. Some cults require the beating of the body in order to overcome its hold on the believer. The other extreme is sexual abuse of the body since it does not matter what happens to the body. Cults who adhere to this teaching promote sex in a variety of forms with a variety of partners.

If the body doesn't matter to the cults, what does? Cults teach that God, who is spirit, is completely good. For the cult member the spirit is all that matters. The sooner the member can shed their body and become complete spirit, the better. This world means nothing. All that matters is the spirit world and the future.

Christianity teaches that salvation begins now by faith in Jesus Christ. How do cults differ from this belief? Salvation is achieved by escaping the body. Jesus as savior is not the issue even though many would be confused by cult language that talks about Jesus as Lord, Messiah, and/or Savior. The cult means something quite different with these terms than orthodox Christianity.

What do cults believe and teach about Jesus? Jesus as human is denied. There are two dominant views that are very old in origin. One view is Docetism. Docetism teaches that the Christ only appeared to have a body but was in fact all spirit. A second view is called Cerinthianism. This view teaches that the Christ indwelt the man Jesus at baptism but departed just before the crucifixion.

What is the difference between a believer in Christianity and a member of a cult? There are several significant differences. Cult members behave as the leader tells them.

Christian members behave as the Lord directs them through the Word. Cult members are told how much to give in time and money. Christian members give time as they feel called and encouraged to give, out of thankfulness. Cult members are warned that leaving the group could cost them their salvation. Christian members can move from church to church knowing their salvation is secure by faith in Jesus.

Why are people attracted to cults in the first place? There are three reasons. 1. They come to believe that the cult can reveal something to them that they have not been able to discover before. 2. The initial warmth and family atmosphere of the cult provides a safe haven from the world. 3. Cults provide the rules to live by. Life is no longer ambiguous, but concrete and understandable.

How can I identify a false leader? What does this teacher say about Jesus? In Matthew 16:15-16, Jesus asks, "*But what about you?*" he asked. "*Who do you say I am?*" *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God."* In 2 John we read *Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. ..Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.* In other words, Jesus Christ and His work of redemption is of utmost importance; beware of anyone who denies that Jesus is equal with God, who downplays Jesus' substitutionary death, or who rejects Jesus' humanity. I John 2:22 says, *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.*

Does this teacher preach the gospel? The gospel is defined as the good news concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4). As Paul warns in Galatians 1:7, "*There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.*" No one, not even a great preacher, has the right to change the message that God gave us. "*If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed*" (Galatians 1:9).

Does this teacher exhibit character qualities that glorify the Lord? Speaking of false teachers, Jude 11 says, *Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.* In other words, a false teacher can be known by his pride (Cain's rejection of God's plan), greed (Balaam's prophesying for money), and rebellion (Korah's promotion of himself over Moses).

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