

CULTS 101 – WHAT ARE THEY?

WHAT IS A CULT?

The definition of a cult is it is "a system of religious worship or ritual"; "devoted attachment to, or extravagant admiration for, a person, principle, etc.", "a group of followers."

Generally, a cult is a group that is unorthodox in its beliefs and teachings, and calls for devotion to a person, object, or a set of new ideas.

The term cult can range from any group of worshippers of any God who pay no attention to the Bible, to a small, highly paranoid, apocalyptic people who gather around a charismatic leader that uses the Bible to control them.

FOUR BROAD CATEGORIES OF CULTS

A. PSEUDO (FALSE) CHRISTIAN CULTS

- Jehovah Witnesses
- Mormonism
- Christian Science
- Unification Church (Moonies)
- Boston Church of Christ

B. ORIENTAL CULTS

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- TM
- Hare Krishna
- Zen
- Yoga

C. HUMAN POTENTIAL CULTS

- New Age
- Scientology

D. THE OCCULT

- Spiritism
- Astrology
- Witchcraft
- Satanism

- Shamanism

HOW CAN I IDENTIFY A CULT?

One way to identify a cult is by using the B.I.T.E. method. This stands for:

- BEHAVIOR Control
- INFORMATION Control
- THOUGHT Control
- EMOTIONAL Control

These four components are guidelines. Not all groups do every aspect or do them extremely. What matters most is the overall impact on a person's free will and ability to make real choices. A person's uniqueness, talents, skills, creativity, and free will should be encouraged, not suppressed.

Another way to identify a cult is by using the acronym C.U.L.T.

C - Cut off from the world. Cult leaders and followers are isolated and cut off from normal interaction with people outside the group. They do not have the corrective influence of other perspectives. They lose their ability, and their desire, to verify information the cult gives them. They become alienated from family and friends and have an unhealthy need to belong to the cult group.

U – Undernourished – poor nutritional intake and sleep deprivation often characterizes cult members. They are near exhaustion and their resistance is low, so they can be easily manipulated, deceived, and exploited. Inadequate nutrition and sleep is disguised as a special practice or diet to improve health or advance spirituality.

L - Leadership is authoritarian and coercive. The leader claims divinity or special knowledge and authority from God, and often uses deception and has hidden objectives. Unquestioning obedience is expected. This leads the cult follower into total dependence upon the cult for belief, behaviour, and practice. He or she loses personal freedom and the ability to make choices.

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. Cults often promote the "we/they" syndrome, which also keeps members dependent and loyal to the cult.

Obviously, these are generalizations and not every cult exhibits each of these characteristics at all times. And, the major religions of the world, including Christian churches, sometimes express some of these traits. Corporations even

exhibit some of these traits! The difference is that the cults practice far more of these traits, and at a far greater intensity and frequency level.

Cults often put recruits through a grueling indoctrination period. Kevin Crawley of the University of Iowa lists these common "indoctrination techniques to recruit and maintain members into a totalist ideology."

1. Subjection to stress and fatigue
2. Social disruption, isolation and pressure
3. Self-criticism and humiliation
4. Fear, anxiety and paranoia
5. Control of information
6. Escalating commitment
7. Use of auto-hypnotism to induce 'peak' experiences

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTS.

- Cults all claim special revelation and privilege.
- Cults that use the Bible invariably interpret it in disharmony with generally accepted biblical understanding.
- Cults distort the true biblical doctrines that effect salvation sufficiently to void salvation.
- Cults add to the finished work of Jesus.

At the end of the life of Jesus, he cried out from the cross, "It is finished." So it must have been a success.

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross..."

- Cults add works to the finished work of salvation accomplished by Jesus on the cross.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.

- Cults twist Scripture.
 - Take Scripture out of context
 - Read into the Scriptures information that is not there
 - Pick and choose only the Scriptures that suit their needs
 - Ignore the full counsel of Scripture
 - Combine scriptures that don't have anything to do with each other
 - Incorrect definitions of key words
 - Mistranslate the Scripture.

- Some Cult groups add to the Bible.
 - Mormonism - the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price.
 - Christian Science - Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures.
 - The Jehovah's Witnesses - New World Translation

WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME INVOLVED IN CULTS?

SOMETIMES IT'S BECAUSE OF A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (NASB)

Matthew 15:14, "They are blind guides leading the blind, and both will fall into a ditch." (TLB)

SOMETIMES IT'S BECAUSE THEY ARE IN NEED

It might be an emotional need for acceptance, approval or encouragement. It might be a physical need for food, clothing or money. It might be an intellectual or spiritual need – these people are on fire...

Philippians 4:19 (GW) "My God will richly fill your every need in a glorious way through Christ Jesus."

SOMETIMES IT IS BECAUSE THEY ARE DISENCHANTED

It might be that they are unhappy with society as a whole or maybe the government, or, they might be disenchanted with their conventional religion.

WHAT CAN I DO?

BE ALERT

Romans 16:17 (NIV) "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."

COMPARE

1 John 4:1 (TLB) "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."

GROW SPIRITUALLY

2 Peter 3:18 (TEV) "But continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Walter Martin once stated "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."