

How to Identify a Christian Cult *(or other false doctrine)*

BE ON GUARD, DO NOT BE DECEIVED:

We are warned in the Bible to watch out for false prophets, false teachers, and false doctrine/teachings. And remember the comfort and security for the believer that the Lord knows those who belong to Him (2 Timothy 2:19, John 10:27-30).

UNDERSTAND “THE ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES”:

These are the doctrines (teachings) in the Bible that **MUST** be agreed upon for true Christian fellowship. We must not follow a different Jesus, a different spirit, or a different gospel. Read: 2 Corinthians 11:4, Romans 8:15, Galatians 1:6-9

1. Doctrines of God (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit):
 - a. The deity of God the Father, Jesus Christ and His virgin birth (“God in the flesh”, 1 John 4:2), and God the Holy Spirit
 - b. The verbal inspiration of scripture (cannot deny nor separate the Word in flesh from the written Word – it is the only way we can find out Who God is).

2. Doctrines of Salvation (the Gospel):
 - a. Jesus’ substitutional death for sinners
 - b. His bodily resurrection
 - c. Christ’s ascension and future return
 - d. Reality of heaven and hell

SEPARATE FROM FALSE TEACHING:

1. Test the teachings/doctrines/beliefs to the contextual (in context) and literal interpretation of scripture (and interpret scripture with scripture which means that scripture cannot contradict itself) – Acts 17:11, 1 Thess. 5:21-22, 1 John 4:1, 1 Cor. 14:29
2. Among godly church leadership, discuss and test the teaching in question; oppose it if wrong doctrine and command them not to teach it – Acts 15:1-31, 1 Timothy 1:3, Galatians 2:11
3. Do not ignore wrong teaching – Rev. 2:2,14-15,20 (not ignoring it was commendable), 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15
 - a. Question: What about allowing “them” to teach within your church or home via videos, audios, or printed books?
4. Guard against – 1 Timothy 6:20-21, Proverbs 4:23

5. Watch out for anyone changing a godly church's teaching. Romans 16:17-18, 2 John 7-11
6. Flee from and avoid false teaching and pursue the truth instead. 1 Timothy 6:3-11, 2 Tim. 3:13-17, Ephesians 4:14, 25-27
7. Confront, Warn other believers, and Speak/Teach the Truth - Eph. 4:15 (context is dealing with winds of doctrines and deceitful teachings), 1 Timothy 4:6-7, 2 Timothy 4:15
8. Separate from/have no fellowship with/not yoked with. - 2 Tim. 3:5-8, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Titus 3:10
9. With the Word of God and prayer, dressed in the armor of light that God provides, spiritually "fight" for the faith/true doctrine. Stand for truth verbally and when choosing options. Jude 3, 1 Timothy 6:12, Romans 13:12, Ephesians 6:10-18.
10. Be not ashamed of the truth for it is the power of God. Always be ready to give an answer of your hope in Him. - Romans 1:16-17, 1 Peter 3:15.

STILL PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE CAUGHT AND REACH OUT WITH GOD'S TRUTH IN LOVE WHEN HE LEADS YOU.

Sow the seed of the Word of God – respectfully share Bible verses!

"...in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."
2 Timothy 2:25-26 NKJV (cf. Jude 1:20-23)

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."
Ephesians 2:1-5 NKJV

Definitions:

A sociological cult is religious group whose members are controlled or dominated almost entirely by a single individual or single organization. They have authoritative, manipulative, and sometimes communal features.

A theological cult is a religious group that claims to be Christian but in fact is not Christian because it denies one or more of the essential doctrines of historic, orthodox Christianity (that is, Biblical Christianity as settled by true believers in Jesus Christ and the word of God down throughout history).

Main Characteristics of False Doctrine Groups (e.g. cults):

1. They use some of the same words but they change the meaning of these words. Examples, “Christ”, “born again”, “salvation”, “atonement”, “resurrection”, “Son of God”, “grace”.
 - a. TRUTH: Read the Scriptures in context and as a whole to understand the right meaning of the words.
2. They believe their group is the ONLY true church on the earth.
 - a. TRUTH: The Church includes all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ all over the world. This includes individuals from various church denomination/organization.
 - b. TRUTH: Jesus Christ (not a group or organization) is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Salvation is not found in following any group but rather found in the person of Jesus Christ. (i.e. a church cannot save anyone).
3. They believe in “new” revelations other than the original Bible. (Examples: another sacred book of writings, their own mistranslation of the Bible, the authority of a leader as if he or she were God, “new visions and messages”)
 - a. TRUTH: The Bible is the sole and final authority as the inspired Word of God.
4. They believe in a salvation by works, not by grace and faith alone.
 - a. TRUTH: Salvation is by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 2:11)
 - b. TRUTH: Assurance - We know for sure now that we are saved (1 John 5:11, 13)
5. They do not believe that Jesus is fully both God and Man. (Sometimes they will say that He is a Son of God but they do not believe that He is fully God. Sometimes they ignore His humanity.)

TRUTH: (1 John 4:2, Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 2:23) Jesus is God in Human Flesh. He is both fully God and man at the same time. It is essential to believe in the true God and Saviour – the Lord Jesus Christ.	
<u>His Divine Nature</u>	<u>His Human Nature</u>
He is worshipped (Matt. 2:2, 11; 14:33) He was called God (John 20:28; Heb. 1:8, 2 Pet.1:1, Titus 2:13) He was called Son of God (Mark 1:1) He is prayed to (Acts 7:59) He is sinless (1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15) He knows all things (John 21:17) He gives eternal life (John 10:28) All the fullness of deity (God) dwells in Him (Col. 2:9; John 1:1, 14; 10:30-33; Phil.2:5-8;)	He came in the flesh He glorified the Father (John 17) He prayed to the Father (John 17, 11:41) He was called Son of Man, Man (John 9:35-37; 1 Tim. 2:5) He was tempted (Matt.4:1, Heb. 4:15) He died (Romans 5:8) He has a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39) He was familiar with suffering and sorrow (Isaiah 53:3, John 11:35)

Other warning signs of cult potential (which may also be features in some non-cult groups):

1. A “one-man show” – where a leader does not answer to anyone but himself or herself and/or where a leader tells you that you cannot know what God means in Scripture unless the leader or his organization interprets it for you. Examples to avoid: self-appointed prophets, churches with one pastor that is accountable to no other leader in a mission organization or a board of elders, etc., churches where only one person or family may lead any ministry in the church, neighbourhood study groups that have no accountability to other Christians within the group or outside of it.
 - a. Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches us that the Church has been gifted by God with more than one person to do God’s work.
 - b. John 16:13 teaches us that it is the Holy Spirit Who will guide us into all truth. While we should listen and learn from godly teachers, we can and should learn to read Scripture for ourselves under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, not just depending on a leader to interpret it for us.

2. Groups that stress some topics out of proportion to other topics in Scripture. Sometimes presentations may attract people because the topic involves how to get power/control, money, or what the future will be like (see point 3b.).

3. Groups that claim some “new insights” or “secrets” or “methods” that they have just discovered for how to know God. It could be just someone stating about something that has just been learned as a Christian growing or it could be actually false ideas. Always check out the “new insights” with what the Bible teaches (2 Timothy 3:14-17).
 - a. Sometimes it might sound a little odd or strange compared to what you already understand (Ephesians 4:14)
 - b. And sometimes it might sound pretty attractive to believe (1 Timothy 6:9-10, 2 Timothy 2:16, 3:4-7, 4:3-5). Regardless of who tells you what, prayerfully look it up in the Bible and study the context and related cross-references.

(This printable was compiled and written by Joy, from a variety of resources including past adult Sunday School lessons, Christian reference books, and Bible-based websites.)