Who Is Telling The Truth?

How To Identify A Religious Cult – Primarily A Christian-Like Cult

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INTRODUCTION

First, let us identify what we mean by a cult: a counterfeit Christian organization that is not preaching the truth about how to get to heaven.

> *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."* (Galatians 1:8)

So then, in order to identify a cult, we need to show that they are preaching a false gospel, a false message of salvation. To identify a false gospel, we must first know what the true Gospel is. According to the Holy Bible, the true Gospel is the message that only the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ (plus NOTHING) can cleanse us of our sins and save us from eternal separation from God in Hell. Because the Bible says that "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9). Any religious institution that adds ANY other criteria for salvation to this message is preaching another gospel! Christ's work is now complete. We sinners have nothing to offer God that will in any way contribute to our salvation. Many other Bible verses back up these statements such as Titus 3:5, Romans 5:8, and Isaiah 64:6.

THE KEY TO DETECTING COUNTERFEITS

God has given true believers His Spirit and His Word, the Holy Bible, to guide the true Church and protect the true Church from heresy and apostasy. If we, like the Bereans mentioned in Acts 17:11, study the scriptures CAREFULLY, we will find out how to distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit. As with money, a good counterfeit is not easy to spot. You must be looking for it to find it. Likewise, a false church preaching a false gospel will not always appear false on the surface. We may have to ask probing questions and dig deep to find out how a false church's doctrine conflicts with the true Gospel.

> *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (1 John 4:1)

True Bible-based Christianity is truly unique and its message of salvation is of immeasurable value and like many genuine things of great value, there are many who wish to counterfeit it. At the same time, there are many who don't like the plan of salvation that God provided so they have invented a kind of salvation more to their liking with lots of bells and whistles to disguise the fact that they are hopelessly lost sinners without Christ. Likewise, there are many who believe and preach that mankind can somehow save himself or at least contribute to his own salvation.

> *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."* (Colossians 2:8)

True Christianity is not just another legitimate religion in the vast smorgasbord of world religions. It is positively ONE OF A KIND. It is the only religion where God truly revealed Himself (in person) to mankind and where God Himself became man's Savior. This is dramatically different from all the man-made world religions which are just man's attempt to define God and to specify man's own idea of salvation. God already made the rules. He has already outlined the plan of salvation. He already earned salvation for those He intends to save since He knew we were incapable of meriting it.

> *"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."* (2 John 9)

Any religious organization whose teachings are not in agreement with the true Gospel mentioned above, is a false religious system in the eyes of God and people who follow these false religions, trusting in them and their unbiblical teachings for salvation, are headed for hell.

HOW NARROW IS THE ROAD TO HEAVEN?

> *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."* (Matthew 7:13-14)

Fundamental biblical truths are those characteristics of Bible-based Christianity that make it unique from all other religious systems. They are the

doctrines of the Christian faith that support Christ's claims that there is only one narrow road to heaven, faith in the substitutionary death (and resurrection) of Christ alone as the sole means of a person's salvation.

> *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24)

Considering that the Bible says we must worship God in spirit and in truth, it is important for people to know what the truth is, especially with regards to God's precious gift of eternal life and with regards to the simple plan of salvation described in the Bible. Unless a Christian really understands how God saved them, they will not know who to pray for (with regards to salvation) or who to share the gospel with. A Christian's job is to share the true Gospel with those who are lost so that through the scriptures, God can reveal to the lost that they are truly lost.

MODERN DAY CULTS

> *"Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* (Mark 7:7)

Some of the major so-called Christian groups **that preach false gospels of Christ** (our definition of a cult for this discussion) are listed here along with some of their writings that they elevate above the authority of the Bible:
Mormons (Latter Day Saints) – the book of Mormon and other writings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young
Jehovah's Witnesses (Russellites) – Awake magazine, Reasoning From The Scriptures and other publications of The Watchtower Society
Seventh-Day Adventists (Millerites) – The Great Controversy and other writings of Ellen G. White
Christian Science – writings of Mary Baker Eddy
Unification Church (Moonies) – the teachings of Sun Myung Moon
International Church of Christ (the Boston movement) – the teachings of Chuck Lukas and Kip McKean and the original Churches of Christ
Roman Catholic Church – various Catechisms and the decrees of popes and Vatican Councils
the Catholic-like Orthodox churches (Eastern, Greek, Russian, etc.) – decrees of Ecumenical Councils, writings of various "Saints" and "Church Fathers"
All the above religious organizations teach that you must DO something to obtain salvation from sin, primarily: follow the *example* of Jesus Christ or the *teachings* of some prophet, prophetess or some church/cult founder. True Christianity has to do with trusting in NOTHING BUT the FINISHED work of Christ on the cross on behalf of those He came to save:

> *"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."* (Matthew 18:11)

> *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* (John 3:36)
>
> *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (1John 1:8)
>
> *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* (Hebrews 9:12)

Salvation according to true Christianity and according to Jesus Christ is not a matter of human effort (i.e. following some doctrine or creed or tradition). In fact, Christ repeatedly made this point very clear:

> *"Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"* (Matthew 15:1-3)

In contrast, the Bible teaches that salvation is a gift that is not earned by man (because Christ earned it) and that a person receives salvation *in this lifetime*:

> *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Upon receiving the gift of salvation, a person becomes able (through the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling them) to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ – able to follow those teachings the way that Christ intended as compared to how the unsaved follow Christ:

> *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* (Romans 10:3)

MODERN DAY FALSE PROPHETS

> *"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."* (Matthew 24:24)

Some of today's false prophets in Christian circles who preach false gospels

involving miracles, prophecies, prosperity, positive thinking, visions, 'words of knowledge', etc. include:

- Edgar Cayce
- Kenneth Copeland
- Paul Yonggi Cho
- Morris Cerullo
- Robert Tilton
- Paul Crouch
- Kenneth Hagin
- Marylin Hickey
- Benny Hinn
- Norman Vincent Peale
- Frederick Price
- Oral Roberts
- Pat Robertson
- Robert Schuller

See the links at the bottom of this article for more information about these cult leaders

You may wonder why the above people have such large ministries with so many people following them and supporting them. The answer is found in the Bible:

> *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;"* (2 Timothy 4:3)
>
> *"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"* (Jeremiah 5:31)

NON-BIBLICAL BELIEFS OF RELIGIOUS CULTS

***"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12)**

The beliefs listed below are not necessarily the beliefs of individuals but rather teachings of their organizations. All false Christian-like organizations subscribe to at least one of the beliefs listed. This list is by no means complete, but it covers many of the most common and significant conflicts with Scripture – things that cults and false churches do or preach because they do not understand or believe in the sufficiency of Christ's finished work of salvation.

1. They deny the inerrancy of the Word of God (the Holy Bible) directly or indirectly by elevating someone or something such as traditions, customs, or private revelations of some individual, above God's word. They may have some books or writings that they believe have equal or greater weight than the Bible. **This belief is contrary to Psalm 138:2. See also Matthew 15:5-9 & Mark 7:13.**

2. They preach that something in addition to the completed work of Christ is required for salvation, most often something unique to their organization. This may include having to be baptized, being a member of their organization, some kind of works or rituals or human effort of some kind. **This belief is**

contrary to Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, and Colossians 2:10.

3. They have false prophets who have made false prophecies. **This is a fulfillment of warnings in Matthew 24:23-24 and 1 John 4:1.**

4. They deny the deity of Jesus Christ (that Jesus is eternal God). **This belief is contrary to John 1:1, Colossians 2:9 and 1 Timothy 3:16.**

5. They claim man can become a god or god-like. **This is what satan said to Eve in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3:5.**

6. They deny the existence of a literal hell – the place of eternal judgment in torment of those whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Rev 20:15). They might offer the 'annihilation theory' as an alternative, where it is claimed that you cease to exist when you die if you don't qualify for heaven. **This belief is contrary to Matthew 18:8-9 and Revelation 20:15 & 21:8.**

7. They have a unique founder (who had his or her own unique revelations) or they have their own messiah – other than Jesus Christ. **This belief is contrary to John 14:6 and Colossians 1:18.**

8. They deny the existence of the Holy Trinity – God manifested in 3 persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **This belief is contrary to Genesis 1:26, Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19, Luke 1:35 and 1 John 5:7.**

9. They control what information members can access and they usually tell followers that anything that is not official church material is corrupt, of the devil, etc. They may also tell members not to visit other 'unapproved' churches. **This attitude is contrary to 1 John 4:1 which says we should test the spirits to see if they are of God.**

10. They claim that the nature of man is basically good rather than sinful. **This belief is contrary to Isaiah 53:6 and Romans 3:10-12 and Romans 3:23.**

11. They claim that only certain elite individuals in their organization are able to properly interpret the Bible for the rest of the followers. **This is a fulfillment of 2 Peter 2:1-3 and contrary to 2 Peter 1:20.**

12. They offer legalism, which is the earning of salvation based solely upon obedience to a set of rules which they determine. **This is contrary to Matthew 15:17-20, Colossians 2:16 and Titus 3:5.**

13. They have a false concept of heaven such as:

> A. it is a place for an elite few, who their leadership usually specifies. **This belief contradicts Deuteronomy 10:17.**
> B. it is a place where everyone will end up. **This contradicts Matthew 7:14.**

C. it does not exist. **This is contrary to John 14:2-3, Matthew 6:10 and Revelation 4:1.**

14. They say the head of the 'Church' on earth is someone other than Jesus Christ (i.e. THEIR leader). **This is contrary to Ephesians 1:22 and 5:23.**

15. They say that the true 'Church' is some physical, visible organization (i.e. THEIRS) rather than a world-wide group of spiritually-born believers in Christ who are united by the Holy Spirit. **This belief is contrary to 1 Corinthians 12:13.**

SUMMARY

It is important to remember that there may be some people who have become truly, scripturally saved (born-again) and yet are members of churches that subscribe to some of the unscriptural beliefs listed above. These individuals must sooner or later, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, leave their corrupt churches and seek out born-again, Bible-believing churches if they wish to be obedient to God who says His worshippers "worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

If you have not yet realized your spiritual bankruptcy before an infinitely holy God, then ask God to open your eyes to the truth about your spiritual condition and about the one and only remedy, Jesus Christ, for your lost sin-sick soul. No amount of good deeds or self-righteousness can save you from the wrath of God. Only by Christ's precious blood, can a person's sins be completely blotted out so that they are made fit for heaven. Human effort of any kind saves no one. God must do ALL the work. It is He alone who takes hearts of stone and turns them into hearts of flesh, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Cry out to God to have mercy on your sin diseased soul that he might save you just as you are.

> *"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man [Jesus], after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."* (Hebrews 10:11-14)

How do you know if this material you are reading is true? Check the various Bible references and ask God, in prayer, to reveal the truth to you. He will – in His time, if you seek Him and search for Him with all your heart.

***"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32)**

LINKS FOR INFO ABOUT CULTS AND CULT LEADERS:

Biblical Discernment Ministries (formerly at Rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm)
Berean Research
Christian Discernment & Apologetics section at thenarrowingpath.com
Articles on cults at monergism.com