

CULT: BEWARE!

To their neighbors, the folks in the big house in San Diego, California, were a little different: Strange haircuts, funny clothes. But they seemed harmless enough. Then one day, police cars, ambulances, and TV crews appeared at the house. And one by one, dead bodies were brought out.

What happened? Murder? A terrible accident? No, it was a mass suicide. Thirty-nine people, from teenagers to the elderly, killed themselves. What happened? These people were members of a cult called Heaven's Gate. They believed that a comet in the sky would take them to a better world. What a terrible tragedy.

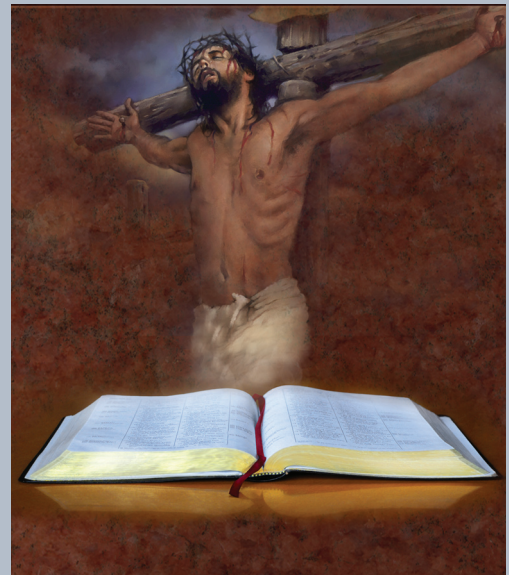
KEY POINTS

There are thousands of cults in the world today, all of which are capable of luring people into their web. With this in mind, we want to spend some time looking at some characteristics of a cult. **The first**, we need to remember is that any cult, no matter what it calls itself, will have some source other than the Bible as its ultimate authority. The group may quote the Bible and say they believe in the Bible, but if it is a cult, there will be something else they use that has higher authority for them than the Bible. It could be the words of their leader, or some other book or special revelation. But if it has higher authority to its followers than the Word of God, we can be sure the group is a cult.

When Jesus faced the devil and his temptations he always went to the Bible. The Bible was Christ's final authority. "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God..." (Matt. 4:1-10; Luke 24:44-45)

That doesn't mean that the Bible must be the only source of truth. Remember what Jesus said of John the Baptist? "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." (Luke 7:27, 28) Yet, John did not write a word of the Bible. But Jesus called him a prophet. Among the gifts of the Spirit is listed the gift of prophecy. (See also Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:8-9) Yet, everything must be tested by the Bible. If the words of a prophet don't agree with the Bible, watch out!

The second characteristic of a cult is that its followers do not believe that salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Notice what the Bible says about that: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) This is the great truth of the Bible! But Satan does not want you to know this. That's why he has so many counterfeit religions and cults that will teach you everything but salvation by faith in the righteousness of Jesus alone. They will tell you that you have to do this or that to be saved. But the Bible says that we are saved by faith in the death of Jesus for us and nothing else.



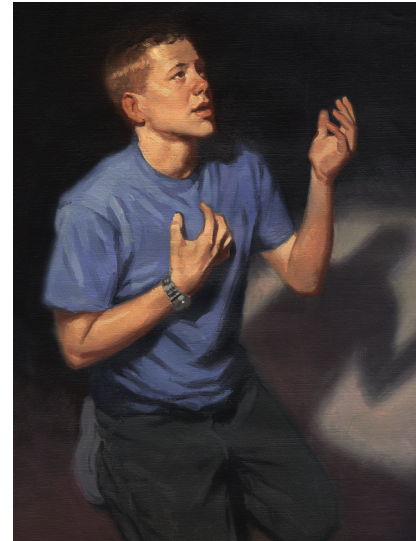
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The Bible is the ultimate authority.

A third sign of a cult is a group that stresses that human beings aren't really all that bad. Such a group will teach that there is a good within us and we just have to focus on that. Often these groups teach there is divinity naturally within us. Some even say that we are gods. The Bible, of course, teaches just the opposite. "But the Scripture has concluded all are under sin." (Galatians 3:22)

The Bible teaches that we are all sinners, that we've all done wrong and have corrupt hearts. That is a basic Bible teaching, and it's so important. Because if we don't think we are bad, we won't seek Jesus for forgiveness. Years ago, a woman wrote about what she believed to be a "divine" person who appeared to her. This being told her we should love one another and be kind to one another. It all sounded quite wonderful. In fact, the statements sounded like Jesus. The woman really thought that the being was Jesus.



Each of us shall give an account of himself to God.

But this "divine" being never mentioned a word about the woman being a sinner, or needing forgiveness; nothing about salvation, or the cross and the death of Jesus in her behalf; nothing about a final judgment--things that Jesus and the New Testament writers all stressed. He taught her much good but totally omitted the one thing that Satan didn't want this person to know: eternal life through Jesus! No wonder the apostle Paul warned us: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14)

Finally, a cult will teach that salvation is found only in its group alone and that you need to do exactly what its leaders tell you to do. Cults often turn people against their own families. And so a person ends up surrendering to the group when he or she should be surrendering only to God. Should we surrender ourselves to others? No. What does the Bible teach? "So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)

In the end, our ultimate allegiance must be to God alone and nowhere else. Any group that demands our total allegiance should be avoided. It is likely a cult.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

In most countries, there is a special department in the government whose job it is to stop counterfeiters. How do you think they train for this? Do they spend all day looking at counterfeit bills? No, they spend more time looking at the original money. They want to know the true so well they can spot a counterfeit immediately. And that's what we have been doing in this series of meetings these past few weeks. We've been searching God's Word for truth. For by knowing truth, we can spot the counterfeit when it appears. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:15).

BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

Make sure Jesus has your heart and you can walk through each day with the peace of being right with God. You can have the assurance that He will see you through the difficult days ahead. Make sure that the Word of God is the lamp that will guide your feet and light your path. As you trust in Jesus and His Word you will safely navigate through life's challenges and temptations and live with the hope of eternity in the earth made new!