



Is It a CULT???

A Practical, Biblical Guide
to Recognizing a Cult...

As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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Is It a CULT???

A Practical, Biblical Guide to Recognizing a Cult...

The following are some signs of cults—groups in “christendom” that you should really be cautious of. These points are generally agreed upon. I think, though, that as you prayerfully read on, you’ll find that I’m calling you to “dig a little deeper” in weighing all the religious activity of our generation against these signs. Possibly we all have some things to learn?

While it is very dangerous to make accusations (Jesus said clearly that one engaging in name calling “will be in danger of the fire of Hell”—Mat. 5:22; 1 Cor. 11:18-22, 29-32; Eph. 4:29-32, 5:4-7; Jude 9-11), you will do very well to avoid any group that fails these tests.

No doubt I am, in this paper, too lenient towards those systems that have robbed so many precious lambs of their destinies in Christ and His Kingdom. These unbiblical expressions of “church” have turned multitudes of the innocent into spectators in the “wax museum” of the Christianity of a few men who lived 2000 years ago. Men and women are too often weak, unfruitful and slaves to sin... instead of warriors for Him, as they could be by now. Many are victims of cults and man-made religion. While all of this is true, of course, please, for the sake of Jesus and His Testimony, try to help (not just pass judgment on) those involved in these “churches” to see Biblical Truth and the Love of Jesus Christ. They are victims of the enemy. Try to be constructive while you stand for the Truth and Joy of His Kingdom. OK? Let’s proceed.

Is It A Cult? — TEST #1

Always first and foremost, who do these say that Jesus Christ is? We should completely refrain from “yoking” with those that teach that He was only a Prophet, a Son of God. Know that He is the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the Creator and Sustainer of the Heavens and the Earth, and the soon-coming King of those that are His and Judge of those that are not (2 John 7; 1 John 2:22-23; John 1:1-14; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4).

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” Colossians 1:15-20

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Isaiah 9:6-7

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Matthew 1:23

A cult may rationalize away these Truths with “fine sounding arguments” and complex (so-called) theology. If a child can’t appreciate the “simplicity of the Gospel” that they teach, then

it is not the Good News that Jesus spoke of (Mat. 11:25-27; 2 Cor.1:12-14, 11:3).

Is It A Cult? — TEST #2

A cult may teach the correct doctrine in regard to the Person of Jesus Christ. They may even very persuasively and zealously “defend the Faith,” and yet (watch this one—it’s very subtle!) deny the Truths of it by their lives.

A cult (or those that are not actually cults, but churches out of fellowship with their God) will seldom practice Truths of the Scriptures that are unpopular with the carnal and unsaved. As an example, seldom will they obey the clear, specific command of God in 1 Cor. 5:7-13; Heb. 12:15; Titus 3:10; etc. to deal with sin in their midst. Only in the most obvious and extreme cases—probably only in the case of overt immorality—would most dare to pay the consequences socially of obeying Almighty God Himself. What are we doing?! Read His Words and see for yourself if this obedience to the King of Kings in going on in the group that you are a part of:

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

“But now I have written to ‘you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral or materialistic or an idolater [anything usurping God’s absolute reign in money expenditure, time usage, decisions or priorities—whether family, T.V., job, computer, recreation, . . .], or with a foul tongue [yelling in anger or abusing, reviling, or degrading of other], or a drunkard, or an extortioner or manipulator—not even to eat with such a person.

“For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God

judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves that wicked person.'
1 Corinthians 5:7-13

The cult (and often those that are not in touch with what the Kingdom of God must be, according to the Bible, and are therefore out of God's pleasure) will justify or ignore sin. They might "preach about it," yet seldom will anyone do anything about it. This is raw and daring disobedience in practice of the One they theologically call "Lord."

Leaders not understanding how to live this out without legalism, or those not willing to pay the price of disfavor that will certainly come as a result of action, might say: "Who are we to judge?" and "That's not practical." Recently I've heard the ultimate pathetic excuse: "We might get sued." The shocking reality is, however, that those in the congregation are practicing utter wickedness and denial of the Lordship of Jesus Christ themselves when they allow "members" with job or family or hobby or entertainment idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Mat. 10: 34-39; Lk. 14:33), or other unrepented of sin, to coexist with those truly sold-out to Jesus Christ. Or at the very least they are destroying any real possibility of "pulverizing the Gates of Hell" and pleasing God in their community (I Cor. 5:6; Mat. 16:18; Eph. 3:10, 5:26-27; Josh. 7:3-25). This is all true, oddly enough, regardless of the doctrine proclaimed from the pulpit.

For the theologians amongst us, in Matthew 13, "the field is the world," not the church. Don't miss that, or you will absolutely deny the Nature of Christ's Lordship, the very definition of a "Christian," and the Nature of the Church of Jesus Christ. That's serious stuff.

There are several common motives for preaching that Jesus is Lord, and yet denying the premise by everlasting toleration of "lukewarmness." (Lukewarmness might best be defined as "a person that is a little hot and a little cold, depending on their preference at the time," Rev. 3:15-19.)

Motives for "hear no evil, see no evil, confront no evil" (except for those innocuous generalizations subtly offered from behind the bullet-proof pulpit) might include:

A) a desire to be successful at the "preaching trade" or "church building trade" and have a large number of members,

- B) a desire to be popular,
- C) fear of men's opposition or fear of losing one's "job",
- D) ignorance of the scriptures,
- E) sin in their own life that blinds them to sins in the church (Mat. 7:3-6; 1 Tim. 1: 5-7; 2 Thes. 2:11-12),
- F) lack of regeneracy in leadership (1 Jn. 3:3-10; 1 Cor. 2:14-16; Jude 11-16; 2 Tim. 3:5-9),
- G) such superficial and shallow relationships that sin is hidden in platitudes and handshakes, or
- H) greed ("ministers" often depend on religion to "earn a living" in a wrong sense and make a career or profession out of it—thus creating unbiblical and wickedly deceptive and powerfully guarded clergy/laity distinctions, and perverting the Truth of 1 Cor. 9:14 and Gal. 6:6).

"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." Matthew 7:16-27

*"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."
James 1:22*

Someone once said: “If you deceive someone else, you are wicked, but smart. If you deceive yourself, you’re STUPID!”

Be doers of God’s Word, and don’t let any group fool you with its big building and dynamic sermons, or all of the “love”—if they are not obeying 1 Cor. 5:7-13 (as one example of the principle) and removing those that justify their sins and ignore the sins of others. It is a common deception to instead concentrate on producing an exciting “worship service” and great “programs” and “Bible schools.” This approach will, at best, leave us as a group out of Fellowship with our Father. At worst, might we (rightfully, Biblically) be classified as a cult? Many, many groups are “socially acceptable” in 20th century America that, by their actions, in spite of their demagoguery, deny Jesus Christ and His right to reign in His church. This is, as the Apostle said, following “another Jesus” (2 Cor. 11:4).

What about the church that you are a part of? Is it on solid ground? I hope so.

Is It A Cult? — TEST #3

Cults will often, though not always, spawn a new source of “truth” other than the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Examples are the Book of Mormon, Moon’s Divine Principle, or the Jehovah Witnesses’ erroneous translation of the Scriptures.

When a group places church tradition on an equal basis with the authority of the Holy Scriptures it is just as tragic. This is equivalent to saying that all of the mistakes and corruption and doctrinal musings of men over the generations are OK to emulate. This cannot be. There is but one pattern: the Holy Scriptures.

Ironically, many of the churches that would wholeheartedly endorse what I’ve just said still call down curses on anyone that would dare to question their man-made additions to the “church”! Life just ain’t fair, is it?

What about the church or group that you are a part of? Where do they stand on all of this?

Is It A Cult? — TEST #4

Frequently, cults, such as the Way International and Jehovah Witnesses, deny the Fullness of the GodHead, by isolating Jesus and the Father, and the Holy Spirit into separate entities. These teachings are no small affront to the nature of our God.

Is It A Cult? — TEST #5

The “experts” seem to all agree on this next point. You can often identify a cult by their insistence on “works” and “issues” for initial salvation, or to maintain their salvation. A few verses of the multitude on the subject should be beneficial to those that are taught to “earn” their Salvation (though it is never expressed in those terms). Please read prayerfully: Rom. 3:10-31, 9:16; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 3:7-14, 1:6-10 and the Gospels.

A cult, for reference sake, will not shower a potential convert with the glories and beauty of Jesus Christ and His blood atonement. What would they (the group or church) have to gain by teaching that?

Instead, they inundate the seeker with information on why this group is better than other groups. The obvious conclusion is: “therefore you couldn’t have been saved before you came to our brand.” Unfortunately, many denominations do this as well. While not necessarily cults, they are a source of heartache for the Father when their eyes are not on His Son, but rather “things” (John 5:37-40).

Not Jesus, but facts and issues? A cult, or at least a tragedy.

Why would some do this? It is necessary, in many cases, to preserve their stranglehold of guilt and “if you don’t attend our version of ‘church’ (though possibly nothing similar to it exists in the Book of Acts) you’ll go to hell for sure! No one else has the Truth and does the liturgy in the worship service right like we do.” Don’t kid yourself; if everyone but your group is “going to hell” you need to stand against that, or move on, regardless of how “right” they tell you they are. Or no matter how many franchises of that particular group there are (“on every street corner in the Bible belt” doesn’t mean that it’s like the church of the Bible).

Certainly everyone that is “born of God” (“born of water and the Spirit”) will bear the fruit of being a New Creation. The cults (and the impoverished) will, however, need to make “issues” a mandate for salvation and will become exclusive; their brand will be the only true church (the “Lord’s church”). And, anyone who doesn’t embrace their “empty traditions” and cultural man-pleasing techniques, must be called names. Watch out for these types. They will make you slaves to their programs and bury you in guilt to take your money. They will carry your children away from you, their parents, to “youth group” events and the like, to become as world-loving as the others. Statistically, you will lose 70% of your children to the devil in this environment. Be careful! Please look up those Scriptures and don’t let any group fool you, even if it is considered a socially acceptable church in today’s religious climate.

Is It A Cult? — TEST #6

Cults will be man-centered and flesh-centered, rather than Jesus centered. They will draw crowds based on the eloquence or power or knowledge of a man “hired” by the church, or “founding” the church. The “worship band” and the “singles group” and the programs and building and “excitement” will dazzle the undiscerning. You can see on their “church” sign (or hear on the members’ lips) mere men’s names promoted. “Come Hear So-and-So Preach!” or “The worship ‘time’ was so exhilarating today!” Such things would have been an abomination in the first century, but gathering around men and flesh is commonplace in today’s religious market. (Just look around—which are the so-called growing churches? The ones with “super speakers?” and a marketing approach with music and programs? Disaster!).

Of course it is foolish to not recognize gifts and callings from on High (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 4:7-12). Nevertheless, a place that is “center-staging” men in the way mentioned above, Biblically speaking, might well be a cult.

Watch out! How does the church that you are a part of measure up? If it’s a cult, you’d better get out, even if all of your friends are there and “they do a lot of good there.”

Is It A Cult? — TEST #7

As stated, cults will sometimes derive their identity by drawing some acute distinction between themselves and other groups. They often claim that their “correctness” and others’ apostasy is obvious because of this “clear issue” of church government or eschatology or whatever.

Now, this is an interesting test of a cult, the flip side of the one just mentioned. The cults may be well-established, with several generations or centuries of heritage. In such a case, they will turn to their longevity or numbers as proof of their legitimacy. This has been very misleading to millions.

Lamentably, the STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT to determine “what is a cult” has often not been the nature of the church of the Bible. Clearly, the church of the Bible was characterized by “daily in public and from house to house,” “admonish one another DAILY so none are hardened by sin’s deceitfulness,” “confessing sins one to another,” “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament,” “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”—the Jesus-kind-of-life recorded in the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6.

Many embrace, instead of the Bible, the substitute standard of “what is the prevailing acceptable mode of religion today?” Today’s types of questions are more like: “Can we afford a good, competitive ‘church building?’” (“church building” is a contradiction of terms in itself—but few notice); or “Do we have the ‘correct’ or the most stirring choreography during the ‘services?’” (“Services”—as such, are another idea foreign to the New Testament church—but we dare not question “going to church” and offer the clear, Biblical alternative, because “everybody’s doin’ it!”). I’d better not go on lest I stir the wrath of those with something to lose!!

Liken this whole dilemma to an artist that copies a painting of a Master, a Genius. It may be a close replica, but not the work of the Virtuoso. After a generation, another artist tries to paint a duplicate—not from the Original, but from the copy.

In the next generation, the piece of art is still very popular, and another artist wishes to reproduce the work of art. Once again, the duplication

(with new added flaws by the artist) is not from the Original, but from the most recent copy. And on it goes for, say, nineteen centuries.

(I should add that after the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries some attempts were made to capture the essence of the Original by getting very old canvases and oil paints of the vintage of the Original—and attempting to copy from a reproduction done three centuries after the Original. In truth, it didn't work either.)

One day, some unknown artist discovered the Original itself, long misplaced. He was so mesmerized by it that he immediately set about immersing himself in, and reproducing the Masterpiece. Overtaken by the same spirit of the original Artist, the replica wasn't half bad. He brought it out under the same title that all of the other reproductions had been titled over the generations.

Lo and behold he came under great attack from the other artists, and even some that frequented the Galleries to look at the Pictures (“Gallery-Goers”) on Weekends and Wednesdays. “Fraud!” they proclaimed in unison. (Even those artists that had been bitter opponents, each declaring their own work most excellent, found a common cause to rally around. “Off with his head. He's a deceiver! His painting is nothing like ours at all!”)

Hmmmm.

Back to our world and the application to today's Christianity. Today, our Faith and resulting churches are very rarely from the Original, but rather from our “forefathers” of the 300's, the 1500's, and the 1800's. Our forefathers, historically and biblically (Mat. 23:30-32; Luk. 6:22-23), condemned anything close to the Original as “a cult.”

The problem, in addition to the poverty that this creates as the generations roll by, is that the masses then begin to mistakenly judge everyone else by that standard of “orthodoxy” (what all the other churches look like) rather than the One in the Word of God. Pretty tricky, huh?

Martin Luther, though he had problems in his understanding that he never did seem to overcome, faced a challenging dilemma. The “scholars” and powers-that-be ordered him to change his religious views and be silent. If

he refused to do so, he would be cut off from the “system” and all religious respectability (if not life itself, if they could get away with it).

Luther responded that he could not recant except they show him Scripture. Their response was “Yea, yea we believe in the Scriptures also. And since you, one lowly man, are contradicting all that is happening in the religious world, you must certainly be wrong. Who do you think you are?”

Luther’s response? “Show me in scripture that I am wrong, and I will change. I don’t care what everyone else is doing—I want to see all of this religious form justified by the Holy Scriptures, not by what everybody else is doing!”

Another classic illustration of this bizarre quirk of human nature occurred in Nazi Germany. Though we can all look back and see the wickedness of the “Holocaust” now, at the time the prevailing religion of the day (with their big-name conference, workshop, lectureship, and Gospel Meeting speakers) nearly universally accepted the reign of Hitler and the butchering of 6 million Jews. And guess what? As always, those that dissented from the vogue religious practices and folkways and mores of the day were surely heretics or “cults.”

We may consider our religious culture too sophisticated for all of that, but I’m here to tell you that unless the scriptures ALONE are our standard of what true Christianity is, we will persecute that which God honors highly. We will be fully persuaded that we are “doing God a favor” in exterminating this deranged aberration. Yet, because our benchmark is what we see around us rather than the Word of God, we will find ourselves warring against the Creator of the Galaxies. Not a secure position to be in.

“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?’

“He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men.”’

“And He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.’” Mark 7:5-9

True churches are like the church of the Bible, not simply believing the same things that the church of the Bible believed. “If we study the church of the Bible enough, that makes us the church of the Bible” doesn’t cut it!

Sometime invite an atheist or an un-Sunday-schooled child into the middle of the existence of the church you are a part of. By simple skills of unbiased observation, would they write down (unprompted) something similar to Acts 2:42-47 or Acts 17:6b (based on the Jesus Life of Luke 6:20-49) as a diary of what your church is like? If so, then you are possibly on the right track (Mat. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:9,12; Acts 5:13-14)!

However, if they wouldn’t be able to write down much except what kind of programs there are, what the basic belief system is, and whether the “service” was done “decently and in order” then you’re in trouble. That is far from what the observation of a child or an atheist would have been in the first century.

Think about it—you’ve only got one life to live. Let’s do it right, even if no one else wants to!

Is It A Cult? — TEST #8

Some cults are rightfully identified by extremes in “voodoo” magic show religion. They will be found pursuing external signs and wonders (as a “wicked and adulterous generation” will), putting God “to the test.” God is made to be, at the extreme of this viewpoint, something like a Grandfather Santa Claus whose primary job is, once we’ve found the secret combination of Biblical principles and special words, to give us anything we want. (I know I say things in an awkward, objectionable way sometimes. But please, even if you don’t like my way of saying things, consider these things. I just want to communicate somehow—lay your full trust no matter what happens in the magnificent and all-encompassing “Sign of Jonah” Mat. 12:39-41; Luke 10:18-20.)

Others of the “voodoo” classification, believe in magic water, incense, building statues of their dead leaders, putting figurines of their dead leaders on the dashboard of their automobiles, beads and rituals and other strange

things, bowing before men and kissing their rings, men wearing ornate robes and accepting “titles” that Jesus Himself FORBID in Matthew 23, blasphemies involving clergy and religious ceremonies and confessing sin to an assigned mere man and, as “mother Theresa” said, “We are saved by Mary.” This is past cultic into demon worship.

Still others stockpile weapons, or build mud homes and bunkers, worship home schooling and conservative politics and health food. They are obsessed with things that are far from Jesus, but use Jesus as an excuse for their bizarre fetish, whatever that hobby may be.

On the other extreme, some that probably ought to be classified as cults, Biblically speaking, have turned “Christ-ianity” into something so sterile and impotent that it is far removed from anything you could get a hint of in the Bible. Though that may sound unkind too (that’s not my heart), this “Providential Deist” stance has duped multitudes into following a different Jesus than the one of the Bible.

I hope that you can see the misfortune of doing a religion that teaches (and it is always a self-fulfilling prophecy) that God is passive towards His People’s heartaches and tragedies. What kind of Father would that be anyway?

In this erroneous form of religion, the “ministers” teach that satan can communicate, and is able to put thoughts into your head (called “temptation”), but God is power-less to interact in any way (other than the same way an atheist could interact with God if he wanted to—reading and cerebral calisthenics).

This is entirely unbiblical; such a christianity can be found nowhere in the Bible. I certainly am going to avoid any religion that I can’t see being lived out in the New Testament. The Scriptures clearly state that if an atheist can understand all of the thoughts of God in the same way that a regenerate person can, then it is the wrong “god” and not Christianity at all (1 Cor. 2:14-16; Mat. 11:25-27; etc.). Our God cannot, according to the Scriptures themselves, be approached simply by reading the Bible and applying one’s mind. This is not a game in which God gave us a book that would allow arrogant men to put Him in their hip pocket by decoding poems, letters, and activities and scientifically categorizing them. Yes, He

did give us a Book, but then rebuked those who used it to substitute for a living relationship.

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” John 5:39-40

In the “slumbering god” groups, they have “prayers,” but expect nothing out of God in the way of intervening in the affairs of men. Answer to a prayer for healing, for example, would be called a “miracle”—which God “does not do any more.”

One professor at a Christian college of this variety said that prayer is like transcendental meditation—it’s to soothe the conscience and give you peace of mind. That too qualifies as blasphemy. The Bible supports no such “new development” as this where God would no longer hear the prayers of His children and do things that could not have happened by men’s means or statistical probability.

“And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much: Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” James 5:15-18

It is unthinkable that anyone could call “Christian” the perversion of “chasing signs and wonders” to titillate their senses and “consume them on their own lusts.” In a similar manner, it must be bordering on cultic as well to stand with those that Paul stood against. As the apostle wrote of those “last day” pretenders, they will be “keeping up a make-believe of piety, and yet exclude its power” (Weymouth), “holding a form of piety {true religion}, yet they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it” (Amplified), “holding to a form of religion, but denying its power” (McCord), “men who preserve the outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality” (NEB).

Some might say that Paul couldn't have been speaking of their upstanding religious group, but what if...? What is the stance that your church takes towards God answering prayer and being involved actively and visibly in the lives of men? Does your congregation count heads and market and appeal to the flesh as a means of "growing"? Does it have "automatic" leaders and speakers, assigned by men, thus usurping the Headship of Jesus when God's People are together?

"What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. ... And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop." 1 Corinthians. 14:26-30

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6

Is It A Cult? — TEST #9

The last point in an inexhaustible list of qualities of cults: it is a well-known fact that cults tend to brainwash (actually, since the Word of God is for "washing"—Eph.5:26—let's refer to what rituals, traditions, lukewarmness, compromise, and hierarchies have done to legitimate Christianity henceforth as "brain-dirty") their members.

If a member of such, you may not ask any questions that challenge what they believe. This booklet, for example, will make very angry a leader of one of these groups. If you do ask too many questions, they are liable to label you. "He's a troublemaker. We'd better keep an eye on that one, and keep him in a place where he can't hurt anyone."

Honest men will let anyone hear the other side of the story and let each man or woman decide for themselves. Cultish groups would never allow such a thing. They will try to shield their members from anything that does not agree with their viewpoint. If something "sneaks in" and offers another perspective to their "subjects," they'll have to get in the last word and use their power and sarcasm to ridicule the "other side."

(I should mention that I am referring to poor expressions of Jesus' church, or cults, being dogmatic about "ideas." A church, however, that is intensively pursuing and dogmatic about righteous character and full consecration to God and His Purposes on earth in every member is to be commended. That is entirely different from "If you don't agree with the mainstream belief system, as we have defined mainstream, on every point, you must be beaten into submission or we can't 'fellowship.'" (Since, by definition, "fellowship"/koinonia means to share a communion of life together, true fellowship is so rare in our churches that what doesn't exist needn't be broken anyway!)

This modern day, not-so-mystical kind of brain-dirtying prohibits one from thinking for himself. Voicing an objection in a "class," seeking clarification or justification for the dogmas or the traditions of men, or presenting an alternative viewpoint on any of the "sacred cows" of that group is called heresy and "divisive." Men are pressured into doctrinal or social conformity in a cult, generally by fear of men. Is your "church" a cult?

In conclusion, you need to be aware of something. Cults are never cults to those that grow up in them, or have been converted to them. Everyone denies adamantly that their group or church is a cult. In spite of all of your feelings and friendships, Biblical tests, rather than the traditions of men, may very well demand inclusion of your church with the list of those historically labeled as cults. While your church, if it fared poorly in these tests, may not actually be a cult (but just the product of centuries of spiritual erosion), please let the Bible be the only standard. Nothing, or no one else can be the standard of measurement! Not your parents, the standards of modern day religion, your spouse,—or what seems most comfortable.

There's HOPE!

What does the Kingdom of God really look like? She's a special Lady, a "Bride PREPARED for the return of the Groom," the King of Glory. She's "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." She is an equal yoke for Jesus—compassionate, yet filled with fury towards hypocrisy, sensitive, yet relentlessly pursuing the completion of Her Father's business.

She'll be a church that is not bound by time and place, but "daily in public and from house to house." She'll be "joined and knit together by every supporting ligament," everyone members of one another," "confessing sins one to another," "admonishing one another daily so that none are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin," always loving and serving and "bearing one-another's burdens" in joy and thanksgiving. And a few tears. Her corporate gatherings will only be the overflow of what is happening on the streets and in the homes of all of her people. "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own."

The church will be characterized by "mega power" and "mega grace.." Sin will be exposed and eradicated with "ever-increasing Glory" in the lives of those in the church. Captives will, at long last, be set FREE. The singing of songs to our God won't be written in a menu printed a week in advance, but erupt even in the Burger King parking lot. What's real in one place must surely be real everywhere!

Together, with intimacy of relationships, we'll do what our Lord did (Jesus, the Christ of God, who lives now within us, individually and as a People— Col. 1:26-27; Rom. 8:9). This passage, in context, is for every generation that will walk with Him:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. Isaiah 61:1-7, Luke 4:18-19

"And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.

"You shall be named the Priests of the Lord, men shall call you the Servants of our God."

Now, that's better than a cult, or a boring or big-machine church any day, isn't it?!

Rest assured, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Will you "go for it"—no matter what everyone else is doing? Will you pay that price? I know you will. It's entirely worth it.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be GLORY in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." AMEN?