

**Twelve Lessons**

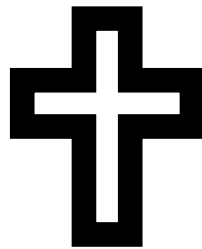
*on*

***Cults***

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE CULTS – LESSON 1**

**Introduction:** A Cult can be defined as any religious group which differs significantly in belief or practice from a correctly interpreted Bible. Additionally, a Cult can be defined as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person's misinterpretation of the Bible.

### **Lesson Goals:**

1. Give the definition of a cult.
2. Give examples of Cults and the traits shared by all cults.
3. Study the doctrinal issues which all cults build their doctrines upon.

### **Definitions of Important Terms/Phrases:**

1. Cult – A religious group of people gathered about a specific person or person's misinterpretation of the Bible.
2. Isolationism – Placing one's self or organization by itself separating from all others.
3. Dogmatism – Positive assertion; arrogance; positiveness in opinion.

### **Things to Consider:**

1. Examples of Cults – Jehovah's Witnesses follow the interpretations of Charles T. Russell and J. F. Rutherford; Christian Scientists follow the interpretations of Mary Baker Eddy; Mormons adhere to those interpretations found in the writings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young; The People's Church followed the teachings of Jim Jones; The Branch Davidians followed the teachings of David Koresh.
2. It has been alleged that Christianity is a Cult because it has been built around the man Jesus Christ. The only difference is that Jesus Christ can be correctly interpreted by the Laws of Hermeneutics. Prophecy described His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Over 162 prophecies were fulfilled to the detail during His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Biblical proof that doesn't contradict Jesus' life proves He was the true Messiah.

**I. HOW TO PREPARE TO DEAL WITH A CULTIST** – The key word is perversion. It refers to the twisting of Bible terms and Scriptures to enforce their false doctrine. Learn to deal with a cultist in the following areas.

**A. Terminology** – “Hell” to the Cultist may not mean the Hell of the Bible. The average cultist knows his own terminology very thoroughly. He also has a historic knowledge of Christian usage, and is therefore prepared to discuss many areas of Christian theology intelligently. In order to witness to a Cultist, study their terms compared to true Bible terms and expose the error.

**B. Avoidance** – The well-trained cultist will carefully avoid definition of Cardinal Doctrines such as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Atonement, the Bodily Resurrection of our Lord, the Process of Salvation by Grace and Justification by Faith. If pressed in these areas, the Cultist will redefine the doctrine to fit the Cultist teaching and therefore will expose himself when confronted with true Bible interpretation.

**C. Departure** – The informed Christian must watch for the cultist to depart from truth, especially the authority of the Scriptures. This departure can become a powerful and useful tool in the hands of the Christian to prove the Cultist's error.

**D. Remember** – The informed Christian must stress heavily the issue of terminology and a proper definition of terms in his study and dealing with Cultists. Any term or definition that is not based on Scripture is a departure from truth and must be exposed.

## **II. SIMILARITIES IN ALL CULTS**

### **A. Outwardly – Cults profess to be different**

1. Jehovah's Witnesses stress Eschatology and Prophecy
2. Mormons stress Priestly Authority, Secret Rituals, and Symbols
3. Christian Scientists stress Metaphysical Pantheism (a study of the Universe that teaches that God and the Universe are the same and one) and physical healing.

### **B. Inwardly – Cults all have the same Psychological Characteristics**

1. They all emphasize Eschatology and Prophecy.
  - a. Psychologically they play on people's fears – “Is the world a threatening place, or is it an accepting place?”
  - b. These are basic fears and needs. Everyone has a fear of the unknown; Everyone has a need of being

- accepted; The Cults play on people's fears and needs.
2. They All Emphasize Authority
    - a. Since humans have a basic need of having someone in authority over them, the Cults thrive in meeting this need. The Scripture says "*All we like sheep have gone astray.*" – Isaiah 53:6 People need authority and guidance.
    - b. The big question is "Whose authority is a person willing to accept in matters pertaining to the functions of life?" The Bible is the only authority but a Cult leader can misinterpret the Bible and deceive an individual.
  3. They All Emphasize Control of the Family Life – One in-road the Mormons have used is the home. Why? Because of the break-up of the home, the marriage, many are seeking an answer and they have one, but it is the wrong one.

### **C. Cults All have the Same Doctrinal Characteristics**

1. Close-mindedness – They are not interested in a rational cognitive evaluation of the facts. Their doctrine is stated as truth and backed by a Scripture taken out of context or by an announcement of its founder who is considered having infallible truth even though it contradicts right interpretation.
2. Antagonism – This usually is antagonism over personalities rather than true Biblical doctrine, since the cultist almost always identifies his dislike of the Christian message with the messenger who holds such opposing beliefs.
  - a. The average Cultist believes anyone who attacks his doctrine is attacking him personally.
3. Isolationism – This is one of the most powerful mental and emotional chains with which the Cultist can enslave his disciple. If the tragedy of Jonestown on November 18, 1978, when over 900 cult followers of "Rev." Jim Jones committed forced suicide, has taught us anything, it has taught us the despair and isolationism of cultists. The following quote from *People's Temple-- People's Tomb* (Phil Kerns with Doug Wead, Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1979, p. 205) illustrates this graphically:

A sealed note found on the cult commander's body, apparently written by a follower just prior to the ritual suicide, gave additional credence to this theory. "Dad," the note said, "I see no way out--I agree with your decision--I fear only that without you the world may not make it to communism. For my part I am more than tired of this wretched, merciless planet and the hell it holds for so many masses of beautiful people--thank you for the ONLY life I've known."

4. Institutional Dogmatism – They have no tolerance for any position but their own.
5. Extra-Biblical Revelations
  - a. Mormons – When Joseph Smith Jr. the Mormon prophet, and his successor, Brigham Young, wished to implement doctrines or changes of practice in the Mormon Church, they prefaced their remarks with proclamations that God had revealed to them the necessity of such doctrines or practices among the "saints". The error – The first edition of *The Book of Mormon* and the present edition of *The Book of Mormon* are quite different in 3,913 separate instances (over 25,000 including punctuation changes), the first edition having been revised and corrected by Joseph Smith and his successors over the last one hundred and fifty years. Yet both the errors and the revisions of *The Book of Mormon* are heralded as divine revelation by Mormons.
  - b. Jehovah's Witnesses – Charles T. Russell boldly claimed that his writings were indispensable to the study of the Bible for Jehovah's Witnesses, and that to study the Bible apart from his inspired comments was to go into spiritual darkness. The error – The Watchtower organization under the leadership of Judge Rutherford maintained that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would return to earth before the close of the 1920's, and even bought a home for the patriarchs to dwell in (San Diego, California, Beth Sarim, "the house of princes"). Yet they have never appeared. In 1975 they predicted that the Battle of Armageddon would occur. It obviously hasn't occurred yet, but they're still knocking on doors telling of the "light" they receive through Jehovah's organization.
  - c. Christian Science – Mary Baker Eddy also conformed to this pattern by requiring her followers to read her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* as a divine revelation, and spoke of her religion as a "higher, clearer, and more permanent revelation than before." The error – Mary Baker Eddy spoke vigorously against doctors and drugs as well as vigorously affirming the unreality of pain, suffering, and disease, she herself was frequently attended in her declining years by doctors, received injections of morphine for the alleviation of pain, wore glasses, and had her teeth removed when they became diseased. Yet the Christian Science Church still insists upon the validity of Mrs. Eddy's teachings.