

Cults

Week 1

June 19, 2005

Mark Edward Sohmer
mark@sohmer.net

Fellowship Bible Church
Summer 2005

notes and other materials available at:
<http://cults.sohmer.net>

What Is a Cult?

- November 18, 1978, in northern Guyana, 913 followers of Jim Jones committed mass suicide at “Jonestown” after murdering a US Congressman.
- March 27, 1997, in California, 39 followers of Marshall Herff Applewhite (aka “Bo” and “Do”) committed suicide in an attempt to join a spaceship that allegedly was hiding behind the comet Hale-Bopp.

Message?

- Cults are unusual and bizarre.
- Cults are rare.
- *Normal* people don't have too much to be concerned about.

Why We Are Concerned:

- Cults do not always appear unusual and bizarre.
- Cults are sadly not rare.
- *Normal* people ought to be concerned.
- Cults say something about God that isn't so.

Acts 17:16

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry”

As Christians, our hearts ought to be stirred up when we see abominable errors!

What Is a Cult?

(secular definition)

- a system of religious beliefs and ritual;
also : its body of adherents
- a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious; *also* : its body of adherents

What Is a Cult?

(Biblical definition)

There are a number of doctrinal characteristics of cults. One will typically find an emphasis on new revelation from God, a denial of the sole authority of the Bible, a denial of the Trinity, a distorted view of God and Jesus, or a denial of salvation by grace.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

What Is a Cult?

(Biblical definition)

In addition to the doctrinal characteristics of cults, many (not all) cults also have sociological traits. These include authoritarianism, exclusivism, dogmatism, close-mindedness, susceptibility, compartmentalization, isolation, and even antagonism.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

What Is a Cult?

(Biblical definition)

On top of the doctrinal and sociological traits of cults, there are also some moral dimensions to be considered. Among those that crop up most often are legalism, sexual perversion, intolerance, and psychological or even physical abuse. Again, though, not every cult manifests every one of these traits.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

Three Types of Groups:

- Cults
- Occult
- Other Religions

Cult

- claims to be Christian, but isn't.

Occult

- does not claim to be Christian.
- out of the mainstream.

Other Religion

- does not claim to be Christian.
- within the mainstream.

Cult, Occult, or Other Religion?

(Contemporary)

- Jehovah's Witnesses? Cult
- Branch Davidians? Cult
- Satanism? Occult
- Islam? Other Religion
- Judaism? Other Religion
- Roman Catholicism? Cult
- Witchcraft/Wicca? Occult
or Other
Religion?

Cult, Occult, or Other Religion?

(Biblical Examples)

- **Gnosticism:** **Cult**
believed that body and soul were evil, but spirit was good and divine. Salvation is using knowledge to liberate the spirit out of the earthly dungeon of the body.
- **Nicolaitanism:** **Cult**
believed in a religious hierarchy, where one class of people were closer to God than others. (Rev 2:6, Rev 2:15)
- **Witchcraft:** **Occult**
power comes from Satan. (1 Sam 15:23, Gal 5:19-21)
- **Baal Worship:** **Other Religion**
worship of the Canaanite fertility god known as Baal.
(Judges 2:13 1 Kings 18:21)

Twofold Error of Cults:

■ Wrong Theology:

- adding to Word of God
- authority other than the Word of God
- subtracting from Jesus
- manipulation of salvation

■ Manipulative Practices:

- dividing the loyalty of the follower
- fear of searching outside the cult

Wrong Theology:

There are a number of doctrinal characteristics of cults. One will typically find an emphasis on new revelation from God, a denial of the sole authority of the Bible, a denial of the Trinity, a distorted view of God and Jesus, or a denial of salvation by grace.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

Wrong Theology:

The difference between the cult and true Christianity lies in belief. Though the average cult member will confess a belief in Jesus Christ, a reliance on the Bible as his authority, and devotion to God as a lifestyle, in reality, all of the terms have been redefined. What appears on the surface to be Christian deviates greatly from what the Scriptures actually teach concerning the key doctrines of the Christian faith.

Manipulative Practices:

In addition to the doctrinal characteristics of cults, many (not all) cults also have sociological traits. These include authoritarianism, exclusivism, dogmatism, close-mindedness, susceptibility, compartmentalization, isolation, and even antagonism...

On top of the doctrinal and sociological traits of cults, there are also some moral dimensions to be considered. Among those that crop up most often are legalism, sexual perversion, intolerance, and psychological or even physical abuse. Again, though, not every cult manifests every one of these traits.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

Why Do Cults Exist?

One noted cult researcher observed that the cults are “the unpaid bills of the church.” The church has failed to doctrinally train its members; it has failed to make a real moral difference in the lives of its members; it has failed to meet people’s deepest needs; and it has failed to provide people with a sense of belonging. The failure of the church is wide and deep, and this has made it easy for the cults to flourish.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

Why Do Cults Exist?

Indeed, if the Christian church were more zealous in true evangelism, the world would have less cultic proselytizing.

Geisler, N. L., & Rhodes, R. 1997. *When Cultists Ask : A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Mich.

Is This True?

Do cults exist because of the failure of the church?

or, said another way...

If the church did better, would cults go away?

God's Sovereignty!

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion... For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Romans 9:15,17-18

God's Sovereignty!

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them.

Mark 4:11-12

God's Sovereignty!

But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, *as appeareth* this day.

Deuteronomy 2:30

God's Sovereignty!

O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

Jeremiah 10:23

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Proverbs 16:9

God's Sovereignty!

The LORD hath made *all things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

Proverbs 16:4

What if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory

Romans 9:22-23

Cults

Week 2

June 26, 2005

Mark Edward Sohmer
mark@sohmer.net

Fellowship Bible Church
Summer 2005

notes and other materials available at:
<http://cults.sohmer.net>

Review

Why We Are Concerned:

- Cults do not always appear unusual and bizarre.
- Cults are sadly not rare.
- *Normal* people ought to be concerned.
- Cults say something about God that isn't so.

Acts 17:16

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry"

As Christians, our hearts ought to be stirred up when we see abominable errors!

Cult

- claims to be Christian, but isn't.

Occult

- does not claim to be Christian.
- out of the mainstream.

Other Religion

- does not claim to be Christian.
- within the mainstream.

Cult, Occult, and Other Religions

(Contemporary & Biblical)

- Gnosticism
- Nicolaitanism
- Witchcraft
- Baal Worship
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Branch Davidians
- Satanism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Roman Catholicism
- Witchcraft/Wicca

Twofold Error of Cults:

■ Wrong Theology:

- adding to Word of God
- authority other than the Word of God
- subtracting from Jesus
- manipulation of salvation

■ Manipulative Practices:

- dividing the loyalty of the follower
- fear of searching outside the cult

Why Do Cults Exist?

Do cults exist because of the failure of the church?

or, said another way...

If the church did better, would cults go away?

God's Sovereignty!

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion... For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Romans 9:15,17-18

God's Sovereignty!

The LORD hath made *all things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

Proverbs 16:4

What if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory

Romans 9:22-23