

Christianity, Cults & Religions

Definitions, Discernment and Defending the Faith

1. Scriptural Foundation

- a. Matthew 28:18-20a [Jesus said:] *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*
- b. Jude 1:3-4 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.
- c. Acts 20:28-31a Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!
- d. Galatians 1:9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be eternally condemned!

2. Practical Definitions

- a. Religion: an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods (James 1:26-27 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.)
- b. Cult: a group of people basing their religion on heretical religious beliefs or practices
- c. Heresy: a belief, opinion or activity contrary to orthodox, essential Christian doctrine

3. Six critical subjects often containing false teachings

Revelation	Jesus	Church
God	Salvation	Future

4. Why are people drawn into cults?

- a. Tactics used to recruit, convert and hold members (primarily based in deception)
- b. Vulnerability of the potential recruit
 - Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

5. How can we respond?

- a. Have a mature grasp of Scripture
 - Hebrews 5:13-14 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.
- b. Be vigilant
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.
 - Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
- c. Practice caring outreach
 - 1 Peter 3:15b Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

6. Three Key Issues

- a. Jesus gave many warnings about the dangers of false teachings

Matthew 7:15-20 [Jesus said:] **Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**
- b. John gave assurances on how to resist deception

1 John 4:1-6 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.
- c. John taught how to deal with those who oppose sound teaching

2 Timothy 2:24-26 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

7. Common Characteristics of Cults

- a. Most Cults start by an individual who claims to have had a new and correct revelation of truth.
[God personally planned and guided the start and development of Judaism and Christianity. These actions have been accurately reported by God's Spirit through men in His Word (the Bible). Also, the Bible can be shown to be true and accurate, with no provable internal inconsistencies.]
- b. To the Cults, God does not exist, is in everything (pantheism) or is aloof & unapproachable.
[The God of the Bible is loving, accommodating, readily available and a faithful/devoted Father.]
- c. Every Cult teaches a focus on self-centeredness; therefore putting the total responsibility on the "works" of the individual follower to determine the circumstances in and the end result of their life.
[Jesus provided the power for believers to live as He lived – for others. What happens to a person in the future is based solely on their decision to either accept or reject Jesus as Lord & Savior.]
- d. Cults tend to either (1) claim sin, heaven and hell either do not exist or only exist in the mind; and thus proclaim "universalism" or simply a sense of "freedom" to do whatever followers want to do, or (2) govern their supporters through fear by creating a rigid set of rules that are required to be followed or the individual will face dreadful consequences (death, damned to hell, etc).
[The Bible states that believers also have the "freedom" to do anything, but God also explains that not all things are "beneficial" or "constructive", and that there are consequences for some actions.]
- e. Some Cults claim to profess "love", but the only purpose of that love is to produce self-satisfaction.
[Love taught and modeled by Jesus is a love rooted in commitment, not emotion like the world.]
- f. Most Cults claim to believe in some of the Biblical text, principles and/or characters (e.g., Jesus).
[Christianity clearly proclaims the absolute truth of everything in the original Biblical manuscripts.]
- g. In spite of the irrefutable fact that civilized mankind will only live on Earth a few tens of thousands of years, many Cults assert that people have numerous (some claim as many as millions of) chances (reincarnations) to perform the correct life activities in order to reach a higher level of life.
[The Word clearly teaches that each person has only one life to determine their eternal destiny.]

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions about Christian beliefs and witnessing to people in other religious groups.

1. Why should Christians study other religions?
2. Read Galatians 1:6–9. Why do you think Scripture speaks so strongly against false teachers?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–18. Why is Jesus' resurrection important?
4. Have you shared your testimony to someone in another religion or cult? What was easy or difficult about it? What was the person's response?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. How can you apply these verses in your own conversations and interactions with people in other religions?

Discussion questions for groups that use the Bible and/or Christian terminology such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarian Church, Unity, Christian Science, and others.

1. How do other groups use the Bible? How is this different than how Christianity regards the Bible?
2. What differences and similarities do you notice between Christianity and other groups about who they say Jesus is?
3. What differences and similarities do you notice between Christianity and other groups about what "salvation" is, and what it takes to be "saved"?
4. Share about a conversation you had with a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon. What did you learn from that experience?
5. What difficulties and challenges do you think someone would face if he or she left a group such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, or Unitarian Church, and became a Christian?

Discussion questions about occultic groups such as New Age, Soka Gakkai, Wicca, Kabbalah, and others.

1. Occult practices are condemned many times in the Bible. What do you think are some reasons why God so strongly forbids occult practices—even things that people may think are harmless like horoscopes, charms, and crystals?
2. Read Philippians 1:21–23 and 1 Corinthians 15:42–54. What happens to believers in Jesus after they die—and how is this different than what many groups teach about the afterlife?
3. Read Acts 8:9–24. How is the power of the Holy Spirit through Philip, Peter, and John different from the sorcery of Simon?
4. How is the gospel of Jesus "good news" for people involved in the occult?
5. What makes astrology and horoscopes appealing? What does Jesus offer us instead?

Discussion questions for world religions such as Bahai, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, Islam, and others.

1. Share about a time that you had an interaction or conversation with someone in another religion. What did you learn from that experience?
2. How would you respond to someone who said, "Religions are just different paths to escaping pain and getting to God. Christianity and other religions are basically the same."?
3. How would you describe Jesus of Christianity to someone who believes Jesus was a guru or an enlightened person (bodhisattva)?
4. How is salvation in Islamic teaching different than what Jesus taught about how to be saved? How is salvation different in the teachings of eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism?
5. What difficulties and challenges do you think someone who is a follower of an eastern religion would face if he or she became a Christian? What challenges would a Muslim face?