

## 16 Earmarks of a Cult

Since the People's Temple cult made headlines with its shocking murders and mass suicides, many have become aware of the dangers of the cults. The question has risen over and over again in the past few months, "what is a cult"?

This article will strive to answer that question with more than a flip answer. It will strive to give the earmark of a cult.

It is difficult to give a description of a cult in one sentence. If I were to do so, I would describe it as "an organized heresy that deviates from traditional Christianity, and follows the interpretation of a contemporary Messiah that allegedly has further revelation from God."

A cult is usually built upon the personality of a modern prophet

The interpretation of Scriptures of these prophets become law to those in

the cult. The advocates of these cults enshrine the founder's birthplace and dedicate buildings on the sites where the prophet or prophetess did some monumental feat.

Cultism could not survive without a call back to the teachings of the personality that began the cult.

**2.** Cultism is usually built upon some additional revelation.

These revelations may be complete books or magazines, which become official organs of the cult. Cultism seeks to place these additional writings on a par with Scriptures. These writings are considered as valid as that of the apostles and more relevant because they are given in these end times. We should be aware of any doctrine that is perpetuated solely in the writings of a recent pretended prophet.

**3.** Another earmark of a cult is a stress of the lack of dependability of the English Bible. Cults stress that the Bible has been translated over and over again, and so is unreliable and untrustworthy. This makes the need for their added revelation and professed translation more palatable.

**4.** Most cults hide some doctrine except from their followers. Many doctrines that astound our thinking and are repulsive to finer minds are taught to the initiates of the cult. Cultist first brainwash their followers before the ambiguous doctrine that is held back from the seeker of the truth.

**5.** The founders of the cults and their followers are almost always at odds with the rest of the religious world. They are usually aggressive in their attack of other religions. All other teachings are termed dishonest, deceitful, and deluded. Cultists are told the preachers of evangelical churches are in it for the money. This is used to protect them from learning the truth of the cult. Persecution is welcomed and even gloried in, for cults thrive on its followers believing they are being persecuted for righteousness sake.

**6.** The next earmark of a cult is the perversion of the person Jesus. The cults will almost always have poor Christology. We need to beware of anyone who does not admit the deity of our Lord.

**7.** The use of proof texts of difficult passages. Just leave it to the cults to build doctrines on the texts of polygamy, soul sleeping, Sabbath keeping, annihilationism, baptism for the dead, eternity of matter, degradation of Negroes, baptism of the Holy Spirit, celestial marriages and dozens of other false doctrines. A text out of context is a pretext....

**8.** The cults, for the most part, do not see man as an immortal being. They have him as an animal without a soul or on the other hand, as a being which is being perfected or adopted into the family of God to the point of becoming gods. They do not see man as a spirit clothed in a body of flesh awaiting the redemption of body and soul.

9. The cults like to pretend they know all about God's timetable.

They use the passage of Daniel concerning the end of the Gentiles or of the 2300 years or other passages dealing with time, to predict the end time. Since the Lord has told us that not even the angels in Heaven don't know of the end time, we need to be suspicious of any group which sets dates relative to the end of the world.

10. The cults attempt to keep the people believing in a continual revelation. Almost all cultist wait for further revelation on some controversial subject. We should, however, beware of a religion that conveniently changes its doctrine according to the whim of people.

11. Another earmark of a cult is the deceptiveness of the use of plagiarism. The basis for the **Book of Mormon** was Solomon Spaulding's supposed history of the Jews trip to America. **The Book of Abraham** is a perversion of the **Book of the Dead**. Mary Baker Eddy's work is a plagiarism of Phineas P. Quinby's **Science of Man**, and Dr. Francis Lubar's work, **The Medical Physical Religion of Hegel**. These pretended prophets are obviously fake, to have to use the same language as

the literature of the world to reveal their pretended new truths. We should beware of any pretended revelation that uses the same ideas and wording as secular authors.

12. Another earmark of the cult is the common bond of the cult's advocacy of the doctrines of premillennialism. A doctrine should not be rejected merely because a cult teaches it. A broken watch is right twice a day. A doctrine should be suspect that has the backing of all the cults. The reason that all the cults accept this doctrine is because most cults thrive on the doctrine of the earthly reign of the cult upon the earth. Cults are interested in living on the earth and ruling over those not of their cult. Theirs is

an earthly kingdom and so their concepts are on an earthly Zion.

We should hold any doctrine at arm length that does not look for a heavenly city, whose builder and maker is God.

13. Another earmark we should consider of the cults, is the perversion of the doctrine of the need for atonement. There is always a deficiency in the cults understanding of the atoning work of Christ. We should stand aghast at the gospel that denies the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, or the need of his doing so for our personal salvation.

14. The next earmark of the cultist is the misunderstanding of the person of the Holy Spirit. To Christian Scientists, it is "the divine science-" To Witnesses and Armstrongism, it is "but the power of God," rather than a divine personality. To Mormons, the Holy Spirit is the highest order of matter or substance. Such blasphemies of the Holy Spirit are to be guarded against.

15. Another earmark of the cultist we shall note, is their misunderstanding of life after death and retribution. The Mormons teach that the righteous shall be gods or, if evil, lesser beings. They teach that almost all men shall be saved and few shall actually go to hell. Witnesses believe that the second death is extinction. Adventists believe in soul sleeping and annihilationism. Armstrong denies the existence of hell. Christian Scientists deny either the reality or the need for a Day of Judgment. We should beware of the existence of a place, which Jesus told us, awaited the unrighteous.

16. The cults usually have distinguishing "prohibitions" that cement the followers of the cult. It is ironic that the Lord's people are so afraid of strict preaching against sin. The cult leaders know that strictness in some outward form is the seal of keeping their members faithful. The Mormons forbid coffee and tea. Witnesses forbid birthday celebrations and blood transfusions.. Christian Scientists frown on their members going to Doctors. Armstrongism forbids involvement in politics, scouts, PTA and the eating of certain meats. Adventists forbid the eating of pork. The prohibition of these

things distinguishes the cult members and serves as a separation from so called "Gentiles-" We should beware of anyone who legislates against practices, when God has not spoken.

**CONCLUSION:** These earmarks are brief and to the point. It is our prayer that these words of warning about the earmarks will keep you from being involved with the cults. Jesus is God in the flesh, He died for your sins, that you may be saved. You personally must accept Jesus as your Savior. His death, burial, and bodily resurrection is essential to your salvation. Without Christ, you will suffer the pains of eternal torment. With Christ as King of your life, you can enjoy that heavenly city that God has promised to those who obey him.

These are not the only cults that are in the world. These earmarks are useful in guarding against any cult. If you will note, some of these are applicable to certain denominational churches that are considered evangelical. Beware of false teachers who try to make merchandise of you ...