
The Messenger



"... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" Romans 10:15

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Seven Danger Signs of a Cult

by Dempsey Collins

I. Introduction

- A. II Peter 2:13 warns against “destructive heresies”. These destructive heresies have taken on many forms but one of the most insidious of all is cultism.
- B. Various cults have nearly always plagued mankind, but in the last 30 years they have rapidly spread in this country.
- C. Since cults are very secretive, the exact number of them is unknown. It is clear however, that millions of Americans are caught up in some form of cultism: Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Hare Krishna’s certainly meet the criteria.
- D. Unfortunately many have come to the point of equating cultism with virtually any religion that teaches the Bible as absolute truth or an absolute standard.
- E. This is certainly a false conclusion and grows out of gross ignorance of Biblical teaching.
- F. Because Peter warns of “false teachers” who “secretly introduce destructive heresies,” we have a right to be concerned about the genuineness of religious claims. No one, of course, wants to be caught up in some cult. But how are we to know the difference between the true religion of Jesus Christ and the deceptive cults of men. What are the characteristics of a cult?

II. Cultism Defined – A cult may be defined as “a religious group that demands blind faith and unquestioning obedience; groups which concentrate on one belief or custom out of proportion to everything else; usually crystallized around a charismatic personality” (Don Givens).

III. Seven Danger Signs of a Cult

- A. A cult centers on a charismatic human leader.
 - 1. The People’s Temple religion centered on Jim Jones.
 - 2. The Davidian church centered around David Koresh (actual name Vernon Howell).
 - 3. Both of the above mentioned men claimed to be the Messiah.
 - 4. The Mormon religion centers on Joseph Smith who claimed to be God’s special latter day prophet.
 - 5. The Church of Scientology centers on Ron Hubbard.
 - 6. The Christian Science religion centers on Mary Baker Eddy.
 - 7. You may know of other examples.

8. One writer noted, "Cults emerge when groups ... commit themselves completely to the leadership of charismatic and highly authoritarian figures" (*Newsweek*, Dec. 4, 1978, p. 72).

COMPARE: In the church of the Lord, only Jesus is exalted as the head of the church (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). Christ has ultimate and complete authority over His subjects (Matt. 28:18). The apostle Paul forbade the exalting of men (I Cor. 1:11-15), and declared, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). Jesus warned against men who will arise claiming to be "the Christ" or a prophet (Matt. 24:23-25).

- B. Cultic leaders usually claim special powers and abilities which others do not have.
 1. David Koresh claimed to be the sole interpreter of the Bible.
 2. Jim Jones claimed extraordinary powers including the ability to heal.
 3. Joseph Smith claimed he alone had been selected by God to receive latter day revelation through the angel Moroni.
 4. Ron Hubbard claimed he alone knew the secret to inward healing which he reveals in his book, "Dianetics".
 5. Charles Russel, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, claimed he alone could accurately interpret scripture, etc.

COMPARE: The scriptures reveal all such claims to be false. The scriptures are complete (II Pet. 1:3). And able to thoroughly furnish us unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Miracles have served their purpose (John 20:30, 31; Heb. 2:4) and ceased (I Cor. 13:8-10). The apostle Paul urges every man to read and understand the scriptures (Eph. 3:4).

- C. Cultic leaders deny the Bible as the sole source of religious authority.
 1. Cultic leaders usually claim special revelations from God. They claim visions or mystic experiences to which others are not privy. This, of course, makes the members dependent upon these men for guidance.
 2. In some cases the leader will use the Bible as a tool to lure people and then discredit the Bible. This refocuses attention on themselves. Jim Jones (founder of the People's Church) began by playing on people's Biblical ignorance, but in Jonestown, Guyana, where 931 souls committed mass suicide, no Bibles were to be found.

COMPARE: It is not the Bible that makes cults, but men's abuses of scripture and lust for greed and power that make cults. Any time a man teaches his work instead of "**the word**" (I Tim. 4:2) it is a "destructive heresy". The apostle John warns us "not to go beyond the doctrine of Christ" (II John 9). The scriptures are a complete guide unto salvation (II Tim. 3:15-17) and condemn all who tamper with their contents (Gal. 1:8, 9). Beware of all who substitute personal experiences for Bible truth!

- D. Cults practice isolationism.
 1. The cultic leader wants total control and so seeks to separate members from family and friends.
 2. New converts are led to believe the whole world, including their own family, is against them; that sinister plots are being formed by the whole world against them.
 3. This is nothing but "brainwashing" and mind control.

COMPARE: The scriptures teach us to love and take care of our families (Eph. 6:1-4; I Tim. 5:3-8, 16). We are not to have fellowship with sinful practices, but we must live in the world around sinful people (I Cor. 5:9-13). We are to be friendly toward all men, even our enemies (Matt. 5:44-48). Jesus went to sinners and saved them (Luke 19:1-10).