

CULTS AND SECTS
A SURVEY OF PSEUDO-CHRISTIAN BELIEFS
Part of Hope Chapel's Discipling Series.



*Such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen,
masquerading as apostles of Christ.
And no wonder, for Satan himself
masquerades as an angel of light.
(2Co 11:13-14 ^{NIV})*

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1. Introduction

This course is designed to familiarize you with the sort of belief systems that purport to be Christian, but are *not*. We want to help you spot errors in the claims of various groups, and to recognize their misuse of the Bible. We're not going to compare Christianity with non-Christian religions. This is not a comparative religion course.

Some religions won't be confused with Christianity, and therefore, they're not the focus of this course. For example, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Animism are clearly *not* Christian. Their adherents aren't trying to mislead anyone into believing that they *are* Christian. The gospel sufficiently refutes such beliefs. What we're going to focus on are belief systems that *do* portray themselves as Christian.

Now, OTHER RELIGIONS are *outside* Christianity. HERESIES are found *inside* Christianity – they contradict established doctrines. **Cults** are *outside* Christianity, but they **claim** to be *inside* Christianity. And CULTS share a common trait of subduing their practitioners through fear – fear of outsiders, fear of harm if they disobey, fear of the cult's leaders, fear of retribution by other followers, or an irrational fear of the very gods they worship.

VOODOO is a cult. ISLAM is a cult (as well as a political creed). Such cults won't easily be confused with Christianity. But *some* cults use Christian terms, and mention Jesus in their beliefs. And yet, their beliefs contradict the gospel truth. They lure the unwary into thinking that they're Christian, by misusing or distorting biblical truth, or by mixing the truth of Scripture with other beliefs and practices (they *add* to Scripture).

Cults offer “another gospel.” They offer a different salvation. They offer a different God, a different Savior, a different heaven, and a different way of life. And as we said, **they misuse Christian terms**. They twist what the Bible reveals about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their distortions and deceits tend to be subtle. Any Christian who is not well grounded in sound doctrine and practice, may be misled into joining such cults, or will be ill-equipped to refute their errors.

Cults and sects which claim to be Christian — those that might be perceived as being part of the church — present a special challenge. We need *specialized knowledge to withstand them*, because we need a deeper understanding of what the Christian cult or sect is really teaching, and how it departs from biblical truth. **That's what this course is for.**

Their beliefs are so far from the gospel, that they put the cult or sect outside the bounds of Christianity. And yet the leaders of such organizations have convinced their followers (and they try to convince *Christians*) that they're not wolves in sheep's clothing.

There are many definitions of cults. Some are so loose that they can be applied to other religions, or to corporate cultures, or to zealotry and fanaticism of any kind. We need to be careful in defining what we mean by a cult, so we don't misapply the term.

A cult is not defined just by external appearances or practices. It isn't defined by haircuts, dress, speech, or slogans — but by how the followers are governed by the organization's leaders. Its leaders claim to be prophets of God. They claim to be the sole source of authority for their people, or to speak on behalf of God to them. They claim to be Mediators and Intercessors before God, **in place of Christ** (this contradicts 1Tim 2.5).

For our purposes, cults involve some form of *worship* of God. We'll see how CULTS are distinguished from Christian SECTS, and also from reformed Christianity. This approach was used by Walter Martin in his classic book, "Kingdom of the Cults." ¹

As we said, CULTS use *fear* or *coercion* in one form or another ² to get their followers to submit to the organization's leaders. Its leaders are the sole authority for the beliefs and practices of their organization, *not the Bible*.

Some cults portray themselves as Christian, e.g., JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES and MORMONS. Other cults, like ISLAM, *oppose* Christianity. Their teachings refer to the Bible and to Christians, and yet their adherents claim that the cult is the only path to salvation. They say that all other religions, including Christianity, are false. Both types must be *refuted*.

Some (e.g., the Christian Research Institute) don't believe Roman Catholicism is a cult, despite its use of fear and superstition, and despite its unbiblical beliefs. Most reformers did believe Roman Catholicism is outside the bounds of Biblical Christianity. They put the Eastern Orthodox Church in the same category. The Reformers went so far as to call the pope, the ANTICHRIST. Are there Roman and Orthodox Catholics who are biblical Christians in their personal beliefs? *Yes*. But the clergy of those churches reject salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They teach another gospel.

SECTS — By contrast to a cult, SECTS intentionally distance themselves from mainstream Christianity; yet they still call themselves *Christian*. Sects oppose one or more essentials of the historic Christian faith; or, they might add additional beliefs or practices to the essentials. Unlike a *cult*, *sects* don't use coercion or fear to subdue their followers. Adherents follow willingly, even if mistakenly.

Unitarianism is a sect outside the bounds of Christianity, because it rejects the Trinity, which is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. Those who belong to that sect, find that it expresses their own beliefs; and therefore, they don't need to be persuaded of it.

The Pentecostal "Oneness" Movement is likewise a sect outside of Christianity. The term refers to the movement's view of the Godhead. They reject the Trinitarian view of God, believing that it is tri-theism. Rather than be guilty of polytheism, they conclude that Jesus Christ is Himself the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a variation on the ancient heresies known as MONARCHIANISM and MONOPHYSITISM. The largest denomination of Oneness Pentecostals is the United Pentecostal Church International (UPC, or UPCI). Philips, Craig, and Dean professed the ONENESS view, but they have since renounced it, as well as their MODALIST view of God (another ancient heresy). T.D. Jakes was likewise a proponent of these two heresies, and of the errors of the WORD OF FAITH movement. He too has apparently renounced them. Time will tell.

These heretical views are addressed in our Heresies & Errors class.

¹ Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Pub., Minn. MN, 1965, updated 2003), ed. Ravi Zacharias. See also Ron Rhodes' book, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 2001).

² It can be economic, physical, or mental. There may not be outright intimidation, but it goes beyond mere persuasion. There is typically manipulation of the facts, or of the circumstances in which its followers find themselves. They freely "choose" to follow the cult leader(s) — but cults convince their followers that they have no other choice. This is further explained in the chapter on the *Culture of Cults*.

And that takes us to the ***dual purpose of this course***:

- 1) To protect Christians and their families from the *error* and the *danger* of cults.
- 2) To provide sufficient information about a given sect, that a Christian is able to tell the difference between the truth of Scripture, and the errors of that sect.

Our goal is the same for both: to uphold the gospel truth of God, and to proclaim the gospel truth to those who have been driven or enticed into following another gospel. We seek to protect the body of Christ from error, and to summon the lost to Christ.

This course is intended to help you put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6.11), so that you may effectively participate in the cause of God and truth. May God grant you the wisdom and discernment you need to stand against the wiles of the devil, and to proclaim liberty to the captives, through the only true gospel of Jesus Christ (Isa 61.1; Luk 4.18).

The Gospel Truth

What then are the primary Christian (or anti-Christian) cults of our day? Where do they come from? Why are they so popular? What do they teach? And how do we refute them? Before we address the beliefs and practices of cults and sects, we need to be clear about the gospel, and the core beliefs of biblical Christianity.

What distinguishes Christianity from all other belief systems, is that salvation is by God's grace alone, and not by our own works or good deeds. We cannot earn our salvation. There is nothing we can do that merits salvation, as if it could be won or demanded from God.

Salvation is comprised of two God-ordained conditions:

- (1) JUSTIFICATION, which is by God's grace alone through our faith alone (Rom 3.28).
- (2) SANCTIFICATION, which is by God's grace alone through our faith alone (Act 26.18).

Justification is begun and completed entirely by God, who calls and justifies the ungodly through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4.5). The faith of someone who believes in Christ, and trusts entirely in what He did on his behalf, is accounted to that believer, by God, as his own righteousness. And what Christ did, was to perfectly obey the law of God; by his death on the cross, Christ redeemed the sinner from the debt incurred by his sin.

Sanctification (righteous or godly living) plays no part in the believer's justification. Once he has been justified through faith alone, the believer is completely saved; nothing can be added to or taken away from it, so as to jeopardize his salvation. **But**, sanctification (godly living) is an inevitable and expected *response* to a believer's justification (Jas 2.24). It is Spirit-enabled (2Th 2.13); therefore, all believers receive the Spirit of Christ at conversion (Act 2.38). The believer willingly and joyfully pursues godly living. Why? In gratitude for the justification he has already received by God's grace through faith in Christ.

Though sanctification isn't necessary to justification, it's the necessary *evidence* of it — of having *saving faith*. Even the thief on the cross, unable to do good deeds, publicly proclaimed his faith in Christ: he rebuked his fellow thief for his unbelief. That was a visible response to the truth he knew. It was therefore an *act* of faith, seen by all, and it *evidenced* his faith, which could not otherwise be seen.

Jesus Christ is truly God, and truly Man. He is *both at once*, without mixture or confusion between them (Nicene Creed). Thus, He alone is able to live forever in bodily form, to

represent God to Man through His Spirit, and to represent Man to God as Mediator and Intercessor at the Mercy Seat of God (Heb 7.25). Jesus was tempted in every way to sin, just as we are – yet he was without sin (Heb 4.15). He is the only perfect sacrifice which is acceptable to God to atone for our sin; he died on our behalf to bring us to God (1Pet 3.18).

A sin against an infinite God, is an infinite sin, which no finite being can atone for. But being infinite in his nature, Christ alone is able to pay the infinite cost of sin. His sacrifice is *sufficient* to cover all the sins, of all mankind, forever. It redeems all those who have been given into his hand by God the Father, for redemption on the cross (Joh 10.28-29). That redemption is received through faith in the One who paid the price on our behalf. His atonement is therefore *efficient* only for the elect of God; it is applied to them and no others (Eph 1.3-6).

Lastly, Jesus commanded only two sacraments: *The Lord's Supper* and *Baptism*. Neither one, by partaking in it, can save you. These are external signs of what Christ has already done internally in a believer. The only “power” they have, comes by faith in Christ himself.

Every cult, every sect, every other religion and worldview, rejects one or more aspects of this gospel truth. This will not be an exhaustive study, by any means. This is a *survey course*. We'll provide only enough information to familiarize you with the main features of cults and sects. We'll list particular beliefs and practices of the most common ones, so you know what sort of things to beware of, and what Scripture teaches by comparison. If you want to go deeper, there are many references listed for further personal study.

Now let's see where a few major CULTS and SECTS have led their followers astray.

NOTES:

Major Cults

When we say “major” cults, this is not an assessment of how dangerous they are. There was the Jonestown cult in Guyana in 1978, under Jim Jones. Nine hundred followers died after drinking poisoned Kool-Aid. In the Waco TX tragedy in 1993, an armed conflict between the Branch Davidian cult under David Koresh, and FBI agents, resulted in their complex being burned to the ground. Seventy-six died. These are horrific numbers, yet they are relatively small.

When we say “major” cults, we’re talking about the sheer number of followers, who have a significant social and cultural impact. We’ll be examining “the big three”: Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Islam.

PROTESTANTS number more than 900 million worldwide. In 2010, that included 300 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, 260 million in the Americas, 140 million in the Asia-Pacific region, 100 million in Europe, and 2 million in the Middle East and North Africa.

CATHOLICISM, both Roman and Orthodox, number some 1.5 billion worldwide. You should know that these two branches are *not* the same in doctrine and practice, though each affirms that you must be a member of the visible church to be saved.

In 2010, the Pew Forum estimated over 67 million Christians in China, comprised of 35 million “independent” Protestants, 23 million Three-Self Protestants (the state church), 9 million Catholics, and 20,000 Orthodox Catholics.

HINDUISM is a *non-Christian* religion. It had over 1 billion adherents worldwide in 2012 (15% of the world’s population), with about 95% living in India.

BUDDHISM is technically not a religion (it has no god). It is practiced by an estimated 488 million in the world as of 2010, representing 9% of the world’s population. China is the country with the largest population of Buddhists — approximately 244 million.

ISLAM had 1.5 billion adherents in 2010, or 22% of the world’s population. According to the Pew Research Center, there were 50 Muslim-majority countries in 2015.

MORMONS had an estimated 14.8 million adherents in 2012, with roughly 57 percent living outside the United States.

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES, as of 2017, reported approximately 8.2 million actively involved in preaching worldwide, with 2.5 million of those in the United States. Altogether they may number 13 million worldwide.

Most other cults and sects number in the thousands rather than the millions (Scientology, Christian Science, etc.). But they are no less dangerous, nor misleading, nor tempting.

We will therefore begin with a *general description of cults*, how they lure followers, and how they entrap those followers in a web of deceptions and fears. That way, you don’t have to become familiar with the teachings and practices of every possible cult. They all have common traits and practices to beware of — warning signs of danger ahead.

A Cult Checklist

It's impossible to know everything about all religions, or even a minority of them. While it's good to be aware of different religions and cults, it is much more valuable to be in touch with the truth of the Bible. Many are surprised by what they can discern once they become familiar with the Word of God, and what we call the "key tenets" of the Christian faith. Knowing what the Bible says about God, man, and salvation will enable a Christian to spot a cult within moments of talking to a follower, or by reading their materials. Being familiar with the truth is the best protection against deception.

The following 18-point checklist can be used as a guide to assess a teaching, doctrine, movement, ministry, or alleged "spiritual gift." It can serve as a guide to learning some key points that a believer should watch for when discerning whether an organization, or a particular teaching, *does not adhere to the Biblical standards* that are specified in the historic creeds of the Faith.

1. Does it attack or change doctrines concerning the person, work, or deity of Christ?
2. Is salvation by a new, unique, non-scriptural method, by works, or by anything other than faith in Jesus and His work on the cross?
3. Is membership with this group required for salvation?
4. Is the doctrine of the Trinity compromised?
5. Does it change doctrines concerning the person, deity, or work of the Holy Spirit?
6. Is the leading of the Holy Spirit alleged to reveal things that are contrary to what He has already revealed in the Bible?
7. Is God made to seem more like a man?
8. Is man made to seem more like God?
9. Is someone or something presented as an authority equal to or superior to the Bible?
10. Is the teaching or interpretation of one person, or a select group of people, seen as the only acceptable guide by which you are to study the Bible? ¹
11. Does it edify the Church and build up the body of Christ, or does it seek to give glory to a person or organization?
12. Are claims or prophecies made that can't be verified, or have failed to come true?
13. Are common Christian terms redefined and given non-biblical meanings?
14. Is the teaching or activity consistent with the New Testament?
15. Is this a matter of tradition, culture, and emotions — or is it governed by the Bible?
16. Does this teaching result in interpretations which make the Bible contradict itself?
17. Does this movement or group produce healthy, well-balanced, growing disciples of Christ?
18. Is the teaching, movement, or group focused on the entire message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or are they focused on only a few specific issues? (For example end-time prophecy, a deliverance ministry, healing campaigns, prosperity teachings, etc.)

Adapted from <http://www.christianarsenal.com/Apologetics/CultCharacter.htm>

Pseudo-Christian religions use Christian *vocabulary*, but not a biblical *dictionary*. For this reason, confusion can arise while witnessing. Always be prepared to ask, "**What do you mean by that?**" Christians also need to be able to explain what they themselves mean by what they say. If a cultist continually agrees with you, then either they don't know what their organization teaches, or you haven't defined your terms well. Clearly defining terms is essential for good communication — with *everyone*.

¹ There are accepted rules of Biblical interpretation that enable us to judge the truth of Scripture for ourselves. This is asking if other rules are substituted for them, or if someone demands an interpretation that is inconsistent with them.

2. The Culture of Cults

Adapted from <http://www.isotsurvivors.info/CultureOfCults.htm>

A cult can be generally defined as any group of people holding to a common belief system. But in practice, the term *cult* is often used to refer specifically to,

‘a quasi-religious organization using devious psychological techniques to gain and *control* adherents.’ (Collins English Dictionary)

A cult controls its members primarily through promoting and instilling a hierarchical belief system in a person’s own mind, rather than by using external, physical restraints. The belief system itself is the primary active agent in cult mind-control. ¹ They market a product, like any commercial enterprise.

Because of the nature of their product — which is *a belief system* — cults do not really operate in the public domain. They operate in a private world, within an individual’s personal religious framework or set of beliefs, and within an individual’s own subjective world of self-esteem and self-confidence. *They operate within a person’s mind.*

Cult belief systems

Cult belief systems differ from conventional belief systems in several subtle but significant ways, which may not be apparent to an outsider. Cult belief systems typically are:

- *Independent and not accountable* – believers follow their own self-justifying moral codes: e.g. Moonies may justify deceptive recruiting as ‘deceiving evil into goodness’.
- *Aspirational* – they appeal to ambitious, idealistic people. The assumption that only weak, gullible people join cults, is not necessarily true.
- *Personal and experiential* – it is not possible to exercise informed free choice *in advance*, about whether a belief system is valid or not; nor what the benefits are of following the study and training opportunities offered by the group. The benefits of group involvement, if any, can only be evaluated *after* some time is spent with the group. Now, how long a period it takes, depends on the individual; it can’t be determined in advance. But investigation can quickly turn into participation. ²
- *Hierarchical and dualistic* – cult belief systems revolve around ideas about higher and lower levels of understanding. There is a hierarchy of awareness, and a path from lower to higher levels. Believers tend to divide the world into the *saved* and the *fallen*, the *awakened* and the *deluded*, etc.

¹ Its desirability to the individual is a type of *self*-persuasion. It enables others to control or manipulate that individual’s thoughts and behaviors as the person relinquishes *self*-control, in order to obtain what is so deeply desired. The person will not have God rule over them by His word; therefore, they *choose* to be ruled by another. The concept is used by more than just cults. It’s the basis of advertising, corporate culture, military boot camp, and even public education. The issue is whether the belief system contradicts God’s order or His commands. We must not relinquish control to another, even as we *submit* to another. We must choose whom to serve, and what to gratify, as against serving Christ and gratifying Him alone. (Jos 24.15; Act 4.19; Rom 8.13-14; 1Cor 6.12; 10.23; Col 3.23; 1Pet 2.11)

² You have to participate in order to become familiar enough with its teachings to reject it; but by participating, you become susceptible to its teachings, and are less likely to reject it. It’s like taking narcotics to know if they’re addictive.

- *Bi-polar* – believers experience alternating episodes of faith and doubt, confidence and anxiety, self-righteousness and guilt, depending on how well or how badly they feel they are progressing along the cult’s specified path of progress.
- *Addictive* – believers may become intoxicated with the ideals of the belief system, and feel a vicarious pride in being associated with these ideals. Cults tend to be cliquish and elitist; believers can become dependent on the approval of the group’s elite to maintain their own self-esteem. At an extreme, believers fear they will go to hell if they leave the group.
- *Psychologically damaging* – when established members leave or are expelled, they may develop a particular kind of cult-induced mental disorder, marked by anxiety and difficulty in making decisions. The disorder exhibits similarities to (but not identical with) post-traumatic stress disorder, and other types of adjustment disorders.
- *Non-falsifiable* – a cult belief system can never be shown to be invalid or wrong. This is partly why critics have low credibility, and why it can be difficult to warn people about the dangers of a particular cult.

Utopianism

In general, cult organizations promote utopian ideals ¹ of self-awareness or of self-transcendence, ostensibly for the benefit both of the individual and of the world at large. Cult belief systems present a vision in which any individual, through following the group’s teachings, can begin to realize their own higher potential. Believers begin to aspire to a ‘new life’ or a ‘new self,’ based on these ideals. As they begin to aspire to this improved new self, believers begin to see their old self, their pre-cult personality, as having fallen short of the ideal. An old-self vs. new-self dichotomy can grow in a cult member’s mind, as he gradually discards beliefs and behaviors associated with his old self, and adopts attitudes and affiliations that seem appropriate for the new self. Members may come to see their unreformed old self as the enemy of their emerging new self. ²

In a sense, a cult uses a person’s own energy and aspirations against him. There is a “Demand for Purity.” It creates a culture of guilt and shame by holding up standards of perfection that no human being can accomplish. People are punished, and learn to punish themselves, for not living up to the group’s ideals. ³

A cult belief system ‘guilt-trips’ aspiring individuals, by first holding up a utopian goal, and then encouraging aspirants to feel ashamed when they’re unable to fully realize it. Aspirants are encouraged to see their recalcitrant old self as an obstacle and a hindrance, preventing them from realizing their full potential. This type of dichotomy is implicit in cult-type belief systems.

¹ Characterized by or aspiring to impracticable perfection; it ignores the fallen nature of man.

² This is very much the approach of Buddhism, a religion of self-control. Notice how this terminology appropriates and then corrupts the description of the old and new self in the bible. “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge **according to the image of Him who created him...**” (Col 3:9-10 NKJ) The cult offers a *different image* than Christ to aspire to.

³ “Demand for Purity” – from Dr. R. J. Lifton’s, ‘Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism’ (W.W. Norton & Co., 1961). This is now reprinted by the University of North Carolina Press, 1989. **Jonathan Haidt’s** book, *The Righteous Mind*, suggests that “purity” is one of the five moral foundations of all human beings. In other words, demanding purity is not what *defines* a cult; a cult *uses* purity as one part of its persuasive methodology.

Marketing a Cult

No one is forced to join a cult. No one is forced to adopt a new belief system, in whole or in part. Equally true, no one can make an informed assessment of a belief system in advance; there must be some personal experience of it. Cults compete to market their belief systems, and to gain adherents; just as commercial organizations compete to market their products or services in order to gain new customers. Some of the marketing techniques are similar. But **cults** have *two advantages over commercial organizations*.

(1) As a quasi-religious organization, a cult is **protected** from outside investigation by a legal system which protects freedom of religion and freedom of belief. There are no consumer protection laws to regulate the marketing of personal or religious beliefs, and no independent quality control of the product.

(2) Because the belief system operates within the subjective realm of a person's own mind, the product marketed by a cult, and any consequences resulting from that product, are largely subjective and intangible in nature. No claims of a harmful effect on a member's mind or behavior by a cult's belief system, can be *objectively* proved. Therefore, the burden of proof remains with the *critic*, not the *cult*.

What makes a Cult un-Christian?

Alan Gomes, in his 1995 book 'Unmasking the Cults,' gives the following definition of a Christian-based cult:

'A *cult* of Christianity is a group of people which, claiming to be Christian, embraces a particular doctrine system taught by an individual leader, group of leaders, or organization, which denies (either explicitly or implicitly) one or more of the central doctrines of the Christian Faith as taught in the sixty-six books of the Bible.'

Denying Christian doctrine implies it is a distinctly *different belief system*. A theological definition of *cult* provides a means to broadly differentiate between cults, sects, and mainstream religious or secular belief systems. This is done by considering the degree to which a particular group's belief system and culture originates from *within* the group, and is separate and distinct from the relevant mainstream belief system and culture.

From this perspective, **sects** can be characterized as tending to disagree with some *details* of the relevant mainstream belief system; while **cults** tend to deny and outright reject *significant parts* of the relevant mainstream belief system.

A cult tends to invent completely new scriptures or tenets of belief — or at least to radically reinterpret existing scriptures and tenets. Cult leaders may claim some special revelation or insight which is accessible to *them*, but not to those outside the group. They may claim a special ability to go back to first principles and to practice a purer version of the tradition, or they claim a special ability to reinterpret traditional teachings in a way which is more appropriate for the modern world. As mentioned, cults tend to be cliquish, elitist, and hierarchical — *that's the attraction!* And there's usually a distinct difference in status (in the eyes of cult leaders and their followers) between believers and unbelievers, between the committed and the uncommitted, and between the saved and the fallen.

Group-defined Morality apart from the Law

If the belief system originates primarily from the group's leadership, then the group's leaders also define ethics and assess morality. They act as both law-maker and judge, and

can therefore make up the rules as they go along. The danger is that their ethical standards may become expendable, as they adjust definitions of right and wrong to put themselves in the right. If these moral arbiters are unwilling to modify their behavior, they can instead modify their moral codes to justify their behavior. Freedom of belief can become freedom without responsibility or accountability.

Many organized groups holding wholly or partly to self-originated belief systems, are keen to defend religious freedom. For example, a lawsuit filed in 1999 by a coalition of plaintiffs, including the Seventh-day Adventists and the 'International Coalition for Religious Freedom' (Moonies) claimed that the State of Maryland's task force studying religious cults on college campuses was violating constitutional rights, and conducting a 'religious inquisition'. Representing the plaintiffs, attorney Kendrick Moxon (believed to be a Scientologist) was quoted as saying: 'The government cannot, absolutely cannot, get involved in adjudicating what's a *right* religion and what's a *wrong* religion.'

The Process of Persuasion by a Cult

Some cults promote an overtly religious type of belief system. Others, such as so-called *therapy* cults, promote a secular type of belief system, based on quasi-scientific or quasi-psychological principles. Some New Age cults combine religious and secular elements in their belief system. Again, cult organizations promote UTOPIAN ideals of self-awareness or self-transcendence, ostensibly for the benefit both of the individual and the world at large. For example:

'The central teaching of the Buddha is that we can change our lives. Buddhism offers clear and practical guidelines as to how men and women can realize their full potential for understanding and kindness. Meditation is a direct way of working on ourselves, to bring about positive transformation. We teach two simple and complementary meditations. One helps us develop a calm, clear, focused mind; the other transforms our emotional life, enabling us to enjoy greater self-confidence and positivity towards others.'¹

The type of belief system implied above is not unique to cults. Many belief systems could be described as aspirational and soteriological (purifying or saving), and even utopian, in the sense that they proclaim an ideal to be realized, and propose a path or a lifestyle for believers that leads towards realization of that ideal.

However, **cult belief systems** have *two additional characteristics*.

- (1) They tend to be *strongly hierarchical* in perspective, revolving around ideas about lower and higher levels of personal insight.
- (2) Cult belief systems tend to be *dualistic* and bi-polar: they make a clear distinction between lower and higher, and between the mundane and the ultimate.

Recruitment by Cults

By no means will everyone who encounters a cult be drawn in. So clearly, mind control 'techniques' are not all-powerful. In general, less than 10%, and probably closer to 1% of people who attend a cult's introductory talk or a short course, might go on to become full members of the group.

¹ FWBO Norwich Buddhist Centre leaflet and program of classes, Autumn 1999.

The process of recruitment involves *befriending* and then *mentoring* or discipling a newcomer, and this takes time. An established member may only be able to effectively befriend and mentor two or three newcomers at a time. So there's an arithmetical limit to the rate at which a cult can recruit new members, however many people may attend their introductory events.

There is often an element of *deception* or *disingenuousness* in the way that cults present themselves to the public. Someone encountering a group such as 'Sterling Management' (Scientologists) or the 'Women's Federation for World Peace' (Moonies) may have no particular reason to be cautious of the group. Initial contact is usually through an apparently neutral agency which has no visible cult associations, such as a meditation center, or a stress management course. Once initial contact has been established, selected individuals are targeted by the group's recruiters. In that sense, a person doesn't choose a cult; the cult chooses them.

Established members acting as recruiters don't want to feel that their efforts have been wasted. They tend to target individuals who appear more open to the ideals of the group. Recruiters are instinctively able to spot people who are similar in outlook and temperament to themselves, and with whom they can simply re-enact the same processes by which they themselves were originally drawn into the group. Of course, recruiters don't consciously think of themselves as 'recruiters.' They're more likely to see themselves as *altruists*, reaching out to share their aspirations and beliefs with others. It acts like a chain letter, or a pyramid sales scheme.

A cult recruiter's role is essentially to make a newcomer feel welcome and appreciated. He encourages them to feel an affinity for the idealistic belief system of the group. If this can be achieved, the belief system will largely do the rest. Again, it is the belief system itself which is the primary active agent in cult "mind-control."

Successful recruitment tends to enhance a recruiter's status within the group, and it also confirms their own faith and confidence in the group's belief system. This ego-utopian feedback loop provides cults with a well-motivated sales force that would be the envy of many conventional businesses.

The young and idealistic may be vulnerable to recruitment, as may individuals who are undergoing some change, uncertainty, or re-evaluation in their lives — for example, when leaving home to begin college, leaving college to enter the job market, changing jobs, or after a bereavement. This kind of situation can present a chance for a cult recruiter. People who maintain an established career and circle of friends are less likely to be drawn in.

Distinguishing Churches from Cults

If this description of cult culture is a bit disconcerting, that's understandable, because it sounds just like what we do in our own church. On Sunday morning, our greeters engage newcomers, like recruiters do. We evangelize, celebrating new converts, and praise those who proclaim the gospel. We emphasize *transformation* — how the gospel changes our life. We talk about *sanctification*, putting away sin to become more Christlike — it's an ideal towards which we strive daily.

But it's not that *we* act like a cult. It's that *cults* act like us. Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2Cor 11.14). Cults mimic Christian beliefs, values, and fellowship. But there are

important differences between what we teach and practice, and the sort of fellowship we enjoy in the church — and what is taught, practiced, and enjoyed in a cult.

By the same token, there are things that cults do, which churches also do, but *shouldn't do*. By understanding the sinful habits of cults, we can avoid such habits ourselves. We want to avoid lording it over one another in our churches (Mat 20.25-26), putting others down, ranking believers (2Cor 10.12), judging one another (Rom 14.4), shaming one another, etc.

Christ has set us all free *by grace*. He has paid the debt of *every* sin. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8.1).

Next, we'll learn the methods used by Cults, to lure the unaware into their ranks, and keep them there.

Tribalism: The Need to Belong and Conform

Societies have an identifiable culture.¹ It can be ethnic, linguistic, religious, or ideological. Individuals identify with it by believing in and adopting its culture. We each have a natural desire to belong to a “tribe,” and to participate in a glorious enterprise. Cults, gangs, sports teams, and even corporations, use this desire to gain members and loyal followers.

Philip G. Zimbardo, professor of psychology at Stanford University, and a former American Psychiatric Association president writes this:

A remarkable thing about cult mind control is that it's so *ordinary* in the tactics and strategies of social influence employed. They are variants of well-known social psychological principles of compliance, conformity, persuasion, dissonance, reactance, framing, emotional manipulation, and others that are used on all of us daily to entice us: to buy, to try, to donate, to vote, to join, to change, to believe, to love, to hate the enemy.

Culture and personal beliefs are complex and inter-related. Each culture has a set of *shared* beliefs, and each individual has a set of *personal* beliefs. Cults either try to convince an individual to change his beliefs to those of the cult; or else they try to convince him that his beliefs and the beliefs of the cult are closely aligned — that they share the same goals and/or values. “We're your tribe. We're like-minded. Join us.” That means we need to be sure that *their* beliefs, and *our* beliefs, are *biblical* beliefs.

“Brain-Washing”

Dr. R.J. Lifton's book on thought-reform programs,² was the outgrowth of his studies for military intelligence, of Mao Tse-Tung's “thought-reform programs,” commonly known as “brainwashing.” In Chapter 22, Lifton outlines eight indicators of an environment that exercises “thought-reform” or mind control. Lifton wrote that any group has some aspects of these indicators. However, if an environment exhibits *all eight* of these indicators, *and*

¹ Society or culture is defined as a group of people with shared beliefs, values, and behaviors. Social norms are generally understood and accepted. As social norms change, or where sub-cultures have grown so large or influential that mainstream norms are no longer widely accepted, confusion arises. Mutual expectations conflict, because there is no longer a single standard of right and wrong. Society no longer “makes sense.” Polarization and even civil war result.

² See earlier footnote, p. 10, on “Demand for Purity.”

implements them in the extreme, then there is the possibility of unhealthy thought reform taking place.

1. Information Control – Environment control and control of human communication. This is not just communication between people, but communication within people’s minds, to themselves.

2. Mystical Manipulation – Everyone is manipulating everyone, under the belief that it advances the “ultimate purpose.” Experiences are engineered to appear to be spontaneous, when, in fact, they are contrived to have a deliberate effect. People misattribute their experiences to spiritual causes when, in fact, they are concocted by human beings.

3. Loading the Language – Controlling *words* helps to control people’s *thoughts*. A totalist group uses totalist language to make reality compressed into black or white - “thought-terminating clichés.” Non-members cannot simply understand what believers are talking about. The words constrict rather than expand human understanding.

4. Dogma Over Person – No matter what a person experiences, believing the dogma is most important. Group belief supersedes personal conscience and integrity.

5. Sacred Science – The group’s belief is that their dogma is absolutely scientific and morally true. No alternative viewpoint is allowed. No questions of the dogma are permitted.

6. The Cult of Confession – The environment demands that personal boundaries are destroyed, and that every thought, feeling, or action that does not conform to the group’s rules be confessed; there is little or no privacy.

7. The Demand for Purity – They create a culture of guilt and shame by holding up standards of perfection that no human being can accomplish. People are punished, and learn to punish themselves, for not living up to the group’s ideals.

“The demand for purity can create a Manichean quality in cults, as in some other religious and political groups. Such a demand calls for radical separation of pure and impure, of good and evil, within an environment *and* within oneself. Absolute purification is a continuing process. It is often institutionalized; and, as a source of stimulation of guilt and shame, it ties in with the confession process. Ideological movements... take hold of an individual’s guilt and shame mechanisms to achieve intense influence over the changes he or she undergoes. This is done within a confession process that has its own structure. Sessions in which one confesses to one’s sins, are accompanied by patterns of criticism and self-criticism, generally transpiring within small groups, and with an active and dynamic thrust toward personal change.”¹

8. The Dispensing of Existence – The group decides who has a right to exist and who does not. There is no other legitimate alternative to the group. In political regimes, this permits state executions.

It could be argued that all eight of Lifton’s criteria are applicable to society at large. They can be observed in operation within both cults and non-cults. They reflect the nature and interior dynamics of *any* hierarchical belief system, which inculcates beliefs about higher and lower levels of personal awareness and understanding, and ideas about rejecting the

¹ Robert J. Lifton, “The demand for purity’ in the essay “Cults: Religious Totalism and Civil Liberties,” in *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (New York, Basic Books, 1987).

old self and developing a new self. From this perspective, Lifton’s “Demand for Purity” could be broadly interpreted as the desire of a believer for the purification of their old self, and the creation of a pure new self. This, in fact, is a biblical command, and it is therefore a *Christian* desire (Rom 6.6; Eph 4.22; Col 3.9-10). It is not restricted to cultist methods.

Focus on Content, not Methods

Our concern, therefore, is not the *methodology* of cults, but their *beliefs, values, and behaviors*. How they instill these in their followers, is how *any* social institution, including the Church, may instill such things in its members. We are not commanded to take captive some methodology of instruction, but to take captive our own thoughts:

For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2Cor 10:4-5)

As we deal with cults, whether in apologetics and evangelism, or in order to protect our members from their influence, lies, and deceptions, we must keep in mind that not all those involved in a cult, know and accept all the beliefs of that cult. The language of Christian cults, as we said in the *Introduction*, is often deceptive. What they mean by the terms they use, can mislead a faithful Christian into thinking they are dealing with a fellow Christian, or a Christian church – when in fact they are *not*.

Mormons don’t know everything that Mormonism teaches. JW’s don’t know everything that true Christianity teaches. Their followers have limited information, controlled by the hierarchy. We need to be able to explain *Christianity*, simply and accurately. Our aim is to expose them to what they don’t know or understand – not to put them down – not to win a debate – but to draw them to Christ, who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

It is easy to become involved in a cult, and difficult to escape. We’re teaching this course to “inoculate” you, to *sensitize* you, to the lies and deceptions of a cult. How? By familiarizing you with the foundational truths of the Reformed Protestant faith. Our hope is that, if you know the *genuine* biblical faith, as contained in God’s word, you can spot the *counterfeits*.

Next time, we’ll compare and contrast some specific cults, with the Bible’s description of what the Body of Christ teaches, and how it behaves, so that you’ll have a clearer picture of the differences between what cults demand, and what Christ commands.

NOTES:

3. Mormonism

Mormonism is a very subtle, spiritual deception started in 1830 by Joseph Smith. This aggressively evangelistic group contends that it is the only true Church, and that all Christians outside Mormonism are following a deficient Gospel and a false Christ.

Four books comprise the scriptures of the Mormon church; these are known as “The Standard Works”: the Bible (King James Version), the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*.

Mormon Religious Texts

THE BIBLE

The eighth Article of Faith of the Mormon church reads, “We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated **correctly**” (emphasis added). Although Mormons believe the Bible is the word of God, they believe that the text has been corrupted by the errors of copyists and translators. They also believe that key doctrines, even entire books, have been omitted over the course of its transmission. As stated in the Book of Mormon,

“Wherefore, thou seest that after the book [the Bible] hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 13:28).

Thus, they deny that the Bible is wholly trustworthy and reliable.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

First published in 1830, the Book of Mormon was given a new subtitle in 1972: “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” Supposedly translated from “reformed Egyptian” (an unverified language) inscribed on golden plates, this book alleges that the resurrected Jesus Christ visited the Americas. It also contains selections of the history of the inhabitants of the ancient Americas. Two groups are primary to the narrative: the Nephites, who were mainly faithful to God; and the Lamanites, who were enemies both of God and the Nephites. As these two groups battled, the Lamanites gained victory over the Nephites. One of the last living Nephites, Moroni (the angel who allegedly appeared to Joseph), buried golden plates in the hill Cumorah, located in upstate New York. These plates contained the *Book of Mormon*.

While Mormons hold strong allegiance to the *Book of Mormon*, it is interesting to note that it contains very little distinctly Mormon doctrine. It does not teach a plurality of gods, that humans may progress to godhood, temple marriage, or baptism for the dead.

THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

First published in its present form in 1870, the *Doctrine and Covenants* is a compilation of modern revelations, primarily received by Joseph Smith. It consists of 138 “sections” (individual revelations), and two “Official Declarations.” One was delivered in 1890 by the fourth President of the church, Wilford Woodruff, disallowing polygamous marriages; and one was delivered in 1978 by the twelfth President, Spencer W. Kimball, allowing black males to hold the priesthoods of the church.

Unlike the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants* presents several distinctly Mormon doctrines. For example, it teaches there are three levels of heaven (Section 76);

the Word of Wisdom (Section 89); the practice of baptism for the dead (Sections 124, 127, 128); that God the Father has a body of flesh and bone just like humans (Section 130); the necessity of temple marriage (Celestial Marriage) for all eternity (Section 131); polygamy and godhood (Section 132); and missionary work in the spirit world (Section 138).

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

The Pearl of Great Price is a compilation of several different writings: selections from the Book of Moses (a reworking of Genesis); the Book of Abraham (allegedly translated by Joseph Smith from ancient papyri; also a reworking of Genesis, teaching a plurality of gods); a brief extract from Joseph Smith's "translation" of the Bible; Joseph Smith History (which contains accounts of Joseph's alleged visions and early persecutions); and The Articles of Faith (a vague summary of Mormon beliefs).

The beliefs of the Mormon church are based primarily on the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the numerous teachings of church leaders. They are based little on the Book of Mormon, and only verbally on the Bible. Several contemporary leaders of the church speak and write about their doctrines, expounding upon them and developing them.

Mormon Beliefs

THE GREAT APOSTASY

The Mormon church teaches that the original apostles were given the charge of teaching the gospel and establishing Christ's church. But they were often opposed and persecuted, and many were killed. Other believers also were persecuted and killed, leaving only the less faithful who were carried away by false teachings and unrighteousness. Because of this, God took the priesthood authority from the Earth, and neither the fullness of the gospel nor the authority of the true church remained. Since no church was directed by divine revelation, many have mistaken man-made doctrines for divine revelations. Mormons call this sad state of the church the *great apostasy*; and they believe this apostasy persisted until the time of the restoration.

THE RESTORATION

Mormons believe that through Joseph Smith, the true church has been restored to the Earth. The priesthood authority, the fullness of the gospel, and the guidance of continuing revelation, are again available in their fullness through the Mormon church.

GOD

The first Article of Faith of the Mormon church reads:

We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

While this may sound Christian at first glance, upon further examination, it is found to be radically different. The Mormon church explicitly rejects the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Said Joseph Smith,

"I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and *three Gods*" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 370; emphasis added).

Our Father in Heaven

Mormons believe that our Father in heaven has not always been God, but was once a mortal man who progressed to godhood. Joseph Smith declared:

“God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man... I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see... [H]e was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an Earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did...” (Ibid., pp. 345, 346; italics in original).

Mormons also believe that God is *literally* the Father of our spirits, that he is married, and that with his wives he procreates spirit children:

“Our Heavenly Father and mother [*sic*] live in an exalted state because they achieved a celestial marriage. As we achieve a like marriage, we shall become as they are, and begin the creation of worlds for our own spirit children” (*Achieving a Celestial Marriage*, p. 1).

They also believe that all faithful members may become gods (or goddesses), just as our heavenly Father and Mother have.

Jesus Christ

Mormons believe that Jesus is literally our older brother, the firstborn of our Heavenly Parents, and that he progressed to godhood while in the preexistence before he came to Earth.

The church teaches that while still in the preexistence, both Jesus and Lucifer (the second-born of our heavenly parents) offered plans of salvation. Jesus’ plan was accepted, and Lucifer’s was rejected. Lucifer rebelled, along with one-third of the spirits in heaven (who literally are our spirit-brothers and sisters), thus becoming Satan and the demons.

The Mormon church teaches that our Father in heaven, who has a body of flesh and bone like man (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 130), with Mary, procreated the human Jesus in a natural, human way. As Joseph Fielding Smith, a former prophet of the Mormon church, alludes,

“Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of Man, and *that Man was God!*” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p. 18).

Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit

Mormon doctrine distinguishes between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit, even though there is no biblical distinction. (This teaching actually derives from the King James Version of the Bible. The translators translated the same Greek words [*hagios pneuma*] sometimes “Holy Spirit” and sometimes “Holy Ghost.”) The *Holy Ghost* is a personal being, a god, although without a body of flesh and bone. The *Holy Spirit* is a force of God, the “power” or “presence” of God.

MANKIND

According to Mormon doctrine, all humans preexisted as spirit children of God before coming to Earth. Even before we became spirits, we existed eternally as individual intelligences. Now that we have come to Earth and have mortal bodies, we have the opportunity to become worthy to return to our Father in heaven and become gods. This

is the core teaching of Mormonism, and is called “the Law of Eternal Progression.” (See, McConkie, pp. 589-590.)

The Fall of Mankind

The fall of Adam and Eve was a necessary and important event. According to Mormon teaching; it allowed for us to enter a mortal state where we can become worthy to return to our Father in heaven.

The Mormon church teaches that Adam and Eve were given two conflicting commands: 1) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and 2) to multiply and fill the Earth. Allegedly, Adam and Eve could not have children while in a state of innocence, an immortal unfallen state. Therefore, they could not procreate bodies for all the spirit children still in heaven. Adam and Eve had to make a choice between mortality and immortality; and Mormons believe the right choice was made when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

M. Russell Ballard, an apostle of the Mormon church, has written,

“Indeed, we honor and respect Adam and Eve for their wisdom and foresight. Their lives in the Garden of Eden were blissful and pleasant; choosing to leave that behind so they and the entire human family could experience both the triumphs and travails of mortality; it must not have been easy. But we believe that they *did* choose mortality, and in so doing made it possible for all of us to participate in Heavenly Father’s great eternal plan” (Ballard, 87).

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

The Mormon church’s teaching on the plan of salvation is well-developed, and shows that their belief system is very different from biblical Christianity.

The Atonement of Christ

The Mormon church teaches that Jesus Christ made atonement for both Adam’s sin and our sins. By *actually* making atonement for Adam’s transgression, Jesus made resurrection sure for all men. By *hypothetically* making atonement for our sins, Jesus made it possible, *if* we repent, believe the Mormon gospel, and keep the commandments, to attain exaltation in the life hereafter (see Ballard, 12).

Peculiar to Mormon doctrine is the belief that the atonement of Jesus Christ took place in the Garden of Gethsemane, when “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). It was here that he achieved spiritual redemption. Physical redemption was accomplished by Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection (see Ballard, 12).

General (Unconditional) Salvation

Mormons believe in two kinds of salvation: *general salvation* and *individual salvation*. General salvation is also called *immortality*. It is given to all mankind because of the atonement of Jesus Christ for Adam’s transgression. This salvation is by grace alone; it is not conditioned upon any individual’s faith or works. This salvation allows all mankind to be physically resurrected.

Individual (Conditional) Salvation

This salvation is also known as *exaltation* or *eternal life*, and it can be achieved only by individual faith, repentance, and obedience to God’s laws and ordinances. One is exalted

based on one's worthiness. These laws include temple marriage, obeying the Word of Wisdom, proper tithing, faithful church attendance, and obeying the Mormon prophets (see *Gospel Principles*, 289-292; see also Ballard, 88).

If one gains exaltation, then one will attain ultimate salvation according to Mormonism: one will live forever in the presence of our Father in heaven, and one will become a god. Joseph Smith taught,

“Here, then, is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves... *When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel. You must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation*” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 346, 348; italics in original).

LIFE AFTER DEATH

According to Mormon doctrine, at death people either go to spirit prison or to paradise. Mormon spirits go to paradise where they will continue to progress toward godhood, and they will also have opportunities to present the Mormon gospel to the spirits in spirit prison. If the spirits in prison receive the Mormon gospel, they will also receive the benefit of proxy baptism; living Mormons will be baptized on their behalf (this is known as *baptism for the dead*).

With few exceptions, everyone will attain to one of three levels of heaven or heavenly kingdoms: the Celestial Kingdom, the Terrestrial Kingdom, and the Telestial Kingdom.

The Celestial Kingdom

Those who are faithful in the things of God, baptism, membership in the Mormon Church, keeping the Word of Wisdom, etc., will live with Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost forever in the Celestial Kingdom, and will have their faithful family members with them (hence the Mormon commercials regarding “Families are Forever”). Those who attain the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom by means of complete faithfulness, which includes temple marriage, will become *gods*: creators of their own planets, and procreators of their own spirit children. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:51-53, 62; 131:1-4)

The Terrestrial Kingdom

Those who did not receive the Mormon gospel while on Earth, but receive it in spirit prison, and those who did receive the Mormon gospel but weren't faithful, will inherit this level of heaven. Their family unit will not be retained, and they will be eternally single. Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost will visit them, but Heavenly Father will not. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:73-79; 131:1-4)

The Telestial Kingdom

This is the lowest of the heavenly kingdoms. The occupants did not receive the Mormon gospel either on Earth or in spirit prison, and they suffer for their sins in hell, though only temporarily. They will be forever single, without their family members. Neither the Father nor Jesus Christ will visit them, but they will be visited by the Holy Ghost (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:81-86, 103-106).

Hell

Mormons believe hell is a place where the future inhabitants of the Telestial Kingdom (the lowest heaven) will suffer for their own sins; though their punishment is not eternal in duration. As Joseph Fielding Smith wrote,

“Those who live lives of wickedness may also be heirs of salvation, that is, they too shall be redeemed from death and from hell *eventually*. These, however, must suffer in hell the torments of the damned *until* they pay the price of their sinning, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, 133-134).

Outer Darkness

Those who received the Mormon gospel and the Holy Ghost, but reject both, will be cast into outer darkness. Like the biblical doctrine of an eternal hell, assignment here is for all eternity (Doctrine and Covenants 76:28-35, 44-48).

TEMPLE WORK

The rites and rituals performed in Mormon temples are essential for individual salvation.

Endowment Ceremony

This is the initial ceremony of the temple. Through this ceremony, individuals are believed to be endowed with divine power and special protection. One can participate in this ceremony either when embarking on a Mormon mission, or when seeking to obtain a celestial marriage.

Celestial Marriage

This is marriage for time *and all eternity*. Mormons believe this practice will allow them to live with their family members in the life hereafter. Celestial marriage is essential to attaining godhood. Worthy Mormons who attain exaltation (godhood) will, in this married state, be able to procreate spirit children to populate their own planetary system, just as their heavenly parents have.

Baptism for the Dead

This is a practice whereby living Mormons are baptized proxy for the spirits of the dead, who are in “spirit prison” (see above, under “LIFE AFTER DEATH”). Mormon youth often participate in this ceremony.

The practice of baptism for the dead is the driving force behind Mormon genealogical research, for which they are widely known. The purpose is to gather the names of people who did not have an opportunity to become Mormons in their earthly lives, and to be baptized on their behalf.

THE WORD OF WISDOM

The Word of Wisdom is a set of dietary rules that faithful Mormons are expected to obey. These rules are commonly summarized as abstaining from caffeinated drinks, tobacco products, alcoholic drinks, and illegal drugs. Mormons, in order to achieve the celestial kingdom, are expected to abide by the Word of Wisdom. (The original revelation also allowed the consumption of meat only in the winter, and then only sparingly. Most Mormons take no heed of this and other elements of the Word of Wisdom.) (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 89).

Comparison Chart - Mormonism

CHRISTIANITY	MORMONISM
<p>One Trinitarian God</p> <p>The Bible teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God (Joh 1:1; 20:28) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4); and that they are distinct Persons in the Godhead, not to be confused with one another (Mat 28:19; 1Cor 12:4-6). There is only one true God (Deu 6:4; Isa 43:10; 1Cor 8:4).</p>	<p>Many Gods</p> <p>Joseph Smith taught, “I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and <i>three Gods</i>” (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, 370; emphasis added).</p>
<p>God Has Always Been God</p> <p>God has always been God (Gen 21:33; Psa 90:2; Isa 40:28). God is spirit, not an exalted man with flesh and bone (Joh 4:24; Luke 24:39; Hosea 11:9; Num 23:19). God does not change (Mal 3:6), nor does He grow in knowledge (Isa 40:13). There is none like him; he is unique; he is the only true God (Exo 8:10; 2 Sam 7:22; Isa 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 21-22; 46:9; 1Cor 8:5). (Note that though Jesus, being God, did become human in his incarnation [Joh 1:1, 14], this is quite different from a man <i>progressing</i> to become a god.)</p>	<p>God, Once a Man, Progressed to Godhood</p> <p>Joseph Smith taught, “<i>God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. ...I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see... [H]e was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an Earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did...</i>” (Ibid., 345, 346; italics in original).</p>
<p>Humans Cannot Become Gods</p> <p>Men cannot become gods (Isa 43:10). Man is a created being, unlike God who has always been (Gen 21:33). God will not share his glory with another (Isa 42:8).</p>	<p>Humans Can Become Gods</p> <p>Joseph Smith taught, “Here, then, is eternal life: to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you” (Ibid., 346).</p>
<p>Humans Were Created</p> <p>Humans are created, not procreated, by God (Gen 1:26; 2:7). Our existence begins in the womb of our mothers (Psa 139:13). Humans cannot compare themselves to Jesus and his preexistence, for they are not deity by nature, as is Jesus. He preexisted because he is God (Isa 9:6; Joh 1:1; 17:5; Phi 2:6-7). Jesus alone is from heaven; we are from the Earth (Joh 3:13, 31; 8:23-24).</p>	<p>Humans Were Procreated in the Pre-existence</p> <p>M. Russell Ballard wrote, “Before the world was created, we all lived as the spirit children of our Heavenly Father [and Mother]. Through a natural process of inheritance we received in embryo, the traits and attributes of our Heavenly Father” (Ballard, <i>Our Search for Happiness</i>, 70). Mormons also infer this from the preexistence of Jesus Christ.</p>

<p>The Church Remains Forever</p> <p>In Mat 16:18 Jesus declared, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Given that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on Earth, we can trust that this promise would not fail (Mat 28:18). While there are several passages that refer to an apostasy, it is <i>never</i> said to be a universal or complete apostasy (e.g., Acts 20:30; 2Thes 2:3; 1Tim 4:1). Rather, we know that God will be glorified in the Church throughout all ages (Ephesians 3:21), and that Christians have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28; cf. Dan 2:44).</p>	<p>A Complete Apostasy of the Church</p> <p>M. Russell Ballard wrote, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that God’s full authority was lost from the Earth for centuries following the mortal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ... In short, the church Christ organized, gradually disintegrated, and the fullness of the gospel was lost” (Ibid., 26, 31).</p>
<p>The Bible is <i>Reliable</i> and <i>Sufficient</i></p> <p>God has promised that his word, the Bible, would stand forever (Isa 40:3). We know that his word is true (Joh 17:17); it contains wisdom unto salvation, and thoroughly equips God’s people for <i>every</i> good work (2Tim 3:15-17). God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2Pet 1:2).</p>	<p>The Bible is <i>Corrupted</i> and <i>Incomplete</i></p> <p>Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, “Latter-day Saints recognize that errors have crept into this sacred work because of the manner in which the book has come to us. Moreover, they regard it as not being complete as a guide” (Hinckley, <i>What of the Mormons?</i> p. 26).</p>
<p>Salvation is Based on the Righteousness of Christ</p> <p>The Bible never interprets mere resurrection as salvation (Joh 5:29). Those who receive Jesus have eternal life, but the wrath of God remains on those who reject him (Joh 3:36). Christians are called to keep God’s commandments (e.g. Joh 14:15), but salvation is in no way based on our own righteous deeds (Eph 2:8-10; Tit 3:5-8). It is through the atonement of Christ that we are made perfect (Heb 10:13-18). The atonement took place, not in the Garden of Gethsemane, but through his blood shed on the cross (Col 1:20; 1Peter 2:24).</p>	<p>Works Necessary to Live with God Forever (Salvation)</p> <p>M Russell Ballard wrote, “Jesus Christ accomplished two incomparable feats through His atoning sacrifice. First, He conquered death; and as a result, all people will have the privilege of everlasting life with a resurrected body. Second, He suffered the burden and pains of our sins so that we might have the privilege of eternal life in the presence of God, if we have faith in Christ as our Savior, and choose to repent of our sins and keep His commandments” (Ballard, <i>Our Search for Happiness</i>, 88).¹</p>

¹ Mormonism is adapting to criticisms of its doctrines. For example: “So it is easy to understand that we must accept the mission of Jesus Christ. *We must believe that it is through his grace that we are saved, that he performed for us that labor which we were unable to perform for ourselves, and did for us those things which were essential to our salvation, which were beyond our power; and also that we are under the commandment and the necessity of performing the labors that are required of us as set forth in the commandments known as the gospel of Jesus Christ.*” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 2:310–11.)

Mormon president Joseph Fielding Smith writes, “Thus, we can with Paul fervently exclaim that “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). We should continue to stress the importance of obedience, of repentance, of faith, and strive with all our hearts to demonstrate good works in our lives. But we should never lose sight of the great overriding fact of the grace of God and the wholly *central* part it plays in our atonement and salvation. <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1981/04/salvation-by-grace-or-by-works?lang=eng>

<p>Heaven</p> <p>The context of 1Corinthians 15:40-41 is the contrast between resurrection (celestial or heavenly) and pre-resurrection (terrestrial or Earthly) bodies, not heavenly kingdoms. The Bible <i>does</i> speak of three heavens: the atmospheric heaven, where birds fly and from which the rains fall (Gen 7:23;8:2); the astronomic heaven, where the stars and planets reside (Gen 1:14, 15; 22:17); and the third heaven, the throne of God (Mat 6:9; Rev 4:2).</p>	<p>Heaven(s)</p> <p>There are three heavenly kingdoms: the Celestial, Terrestrial and Telestial. Mormons argue for this belief from 1Cor 15:40-41, and 2Cor 12:2 (where the apostle Paul says he was caught up to the “third heaven”). See “Three Levels of Heaven” under “The Beliefs of Mormonism” above.</p>
<p>Hell</p> <p>One’s abode in hell is as eternal as one’s abode in heaven (Mat 25:46). There is no second chance after death (Heb 9:27). At the final judgment, men either receive the resurrection of life, or the resurrection of condemnation (Dan 12:2; Joh 5:29); they are assigned either to heaven or hell.</p>	<p>Hell</p> <p>Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, “Those who live lives of wickedness may also be heirs of salvation; that is, they too shall be redeemed from death and from hell <i>eventually</i>. These, however, must suffer in hell the torments of the damned <i>until</i> they pay the price of their sinning, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them” (Smith, <i>Doctrines of Salvation</i>, vol. 2, 133-134).</p>

<https://christiananswers.net/evangelism/beliefs/mormonism-overview.html>

NOTES:

4. Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs)

Also known as the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society* and the *Bible Student movement*. This cult was begun in the 1870s by Charles T. Russell. He claimed that his writings were necessary to understand Scripture, and were in many ways superior to Scripture. After Russell's death, Judge Joseph F. Rutherford picked up Russell's anti-Christian crusade. But his leadership led to a schism in 1917. Those who maintained fellowship with the Watch Tower Society adopted the name *Jehovah's Witnesses* in 1931; those who left, formed their own groups, including the *Pastoral Bible Institute* in 1918, the *Laymen's Home Missionary Movement* in 1919, and the *Dawn Bible Students Association* in 1929.

JWs militantly oppose historic Christian beliefs. They not only deny the essentials of the Christian faith, but they exercise harmful control over their members.

JW Doctrines

- God is *not* a Trinity.
- The word or logos is a god who was made human, as Jesus.
- His death was a redemptive price paid only for obedient men (works).
- The bible is the inerrant, infallible word of God, as translated in their New World Translation (NWT), and as *they* interpret it.
- Satan was a rebellious angel.
- Accepts imputed sin, but Christ redeemed us only from *that* sin (as Mormons do).
- Christ's resurrection was spiritual only.
- The soul of man is mortal and can die
- Animals have souls, but man's is superior
- Hell as a place of torment does not exist. It is only *sheol*, a resting place awaiting the resurrection.
- Eternal punishment is a penalty without end, but annihilation (the 2nd death) is the destruction of penalized souls.
- Jesus Christ returned to earth in 1914. His return was not physical.
- He has now expelled Satan from heaven and is actively overthrowing Satan's organization.
- Human government is the visible representation of Satan's organization. Any allegiance to government is therefore against God's kingdom.
- Satan is the originator of the Trinity, a concept which only confuses the mind.
- Jesus cannot have died if he was God, because no one would be there to run the universe. He *did* die, and therefore he was *not* God.
- Jesus was a *created being*, inferior to God; he was the first created being.
- If Jesus was "sent," he was inferior by definition.
- The Holy Spirit is a moving, motivational *force* of God, not a person. *It* is therefore not equal with God. It is like a radar beam or electric current.
- Mary did have a virgin birth, but Jesus was not an incarnation of God. He was fully human, not fully God.
- Salvation comes by faith, which means *obedience*. It does not come by grace. And therefore salvation can be lost.

Challenging JW Beliefs

Encounters between Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses typically revolve around a discussion of *deity*. The reason for this is twofold. First, this is the area where Watchtower theology deviates most dramatically from orthodox Christianity. In contrast to the Trinitarian concept of one God in three Persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — the JWs have been taught to believe that God the Father alone is “Jehovah,” the only true God; that Jesus Christ is Michael the archangel, the first angelic being created by God; and that the Holy Spirit is neither God nor a person, but rather God's impersonal “active force.” Second, the subject of deity is a frequent confrontational focus because both Jehovah's Witnesses and Christians (at least those who like to witness to JWs) feel confident and well-prepared to defend their stand and attack the opposing viewpoint.

Due to the profound theological differences, such discussions often take the form of spiritual trench warfare — a long series of arguments and counter-arguments, getting nowhere and ending in mutual frustration. But this need not be the case, especially if the Christian will “become all things to all men” by taking a moment to put himself in the Witness's shoes, so to speak (see 1 Cor 9:22). In the JW's mind, he himself is a worshiper of the true God of the Bible, while you are a lost soul who has been misled by the devil into worshiping a pagan three-headed deity. He is, no doubt, quite sincere in these beliefs and feels both threatened and offended by the doctrine of the Trinity. To give any serious consideration to your arguments in support of the Trinity is simply unthinkable to the JW; he would be sinning against Jehovah God to entertain such a thought.

So, in order to make any headway with the Witness, it is necessary to bridge the gap — to find common ground that will enable him to rethink his theology. Rather than plunging into a defense of “the doctrine of the Trinity,” which can be mind-boggling even to a Christian, take things one step at a time.

A good first step would be to consider the question, “Is Jesus Christ really an angel?” It will be frightening to the Jehovah's Witness to open this cherished belief of his to critical re-examination, but not nearly as frightening as to start off discussing evidence that God is triune.

Since the Watchtower Society speaks of “Jesus Christ, whom we understand from the Scriptures to be Michael the archangel” (*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1979, p. 31), put the JW on the spot and ask him to show you “the Scriptures” that say Jesus is Michael. *There are none*. The Watchtower Society New World Translation (NWT) mentions Michael five times as: 1) “one of the foremost princes” (Dan. 10:13); 2) “the prince of [Daniel's] people” (Dan. 10:21); 3) “the great prince who is standing in behalf of the sons of [Daniel's] people” (Dan. 12:1); 4) “the archangel” who “had a difference with the devil and was disputing about Moses body” but “did not dare to bring a judgment against him in abusive terms” (Jude 9); and 5) a participant in heavenly conflict when “Michael and his angels battled with the dragon” (Rev. 12:7).

Ask the Jehovah's Witness which one of these verses says that Michael is Jesus Christ. Help him to see that it is necessary to read Scripture plus a complicated Watchtower argument to reach that conclusion. Rather than being merely “one of the foremost princes,” Jesus Christ is “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14, NWT) and is “far above every government and authority and power and lordship and every name named,

not only in this system of things, but also in that to come” (Ephesians 1:21, NWT). And, unlike “Michael who did not dare condemn the Devil with insulting words, but said, The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 9, Today’s English Version), Jesus Christ displayed His authority over the devil when He freely commanded him, “Go away, Satan!” (Matthew 4:10, NWT).

In arguing that Jesus is Michael the archangel, the Watchtower Society also points to another verse that does not use the name Michael but says that “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding call, with an archangels voice and with God’s trumpet...” (1Thes 4:16, NWT).

However, the expression “with an archangels voice” simply means that the archangel, like God’s trumpet, will herald the coming of the Lord, not that the Lord is an archangel. Point out to the JW that none of the verses he has attempted to use as proof-texts even comes close to stating that Jesus Christ is Michael the archangel. In fact, Scripture clearly teaches the opposite: namely, that the Son of God is superior to the angels. The entire first chapter of Hebrews is devoted to this theme. Have the Witness read Hebrews chapter one aloud with you, and, as you do so, interrupt to point out the sharp contrast between angels and the Son of God. “For to what angel did God ever say, Thou art my Son...? And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, Let all God’s angels worship him” (vv. 5,6, Revised Standard Version).

Remind the JW that angels consistently refuse worship (“Be careful! Do not do that! ...Worship God,” Revelation 22:8,9, NWT), but the Father’s command concerning the Son is, “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Hebrews 1:6). That is how the Watchtowers own New World Translation read for some 20 years until, in 1970, the Society changed it to read “do obeisance to him” instead of “worship him” — part of their consistent campaign to eliminate from their Bible all references to the deity of Christ. (See Joh 10:36 comment.)

True, you have not yet proved the “doctrine of the Trinity” in this discussion. But you have laid a good foundation by giving the Jehovah’s Witness convincing evidence that Jesus Christ is not an angel (he is now faced with the question of who Jesus really is), and you have shown that the Watchtower Society has misled him, even resorting to altering Scripture to do so. Now you are in a much better position to go on to present the gospel.

Author: David A. Reed, Ex-Jehovah’s Witness elder. Excerpted from *The Evidence Bible* by Ray Comfort

How weak churches indirectly help JWs

There has been a disturbing trend in evangelical preaching for many years, to refocus the gospel from its emphasis on saving faith and godly living, to self-help advice. Christianity then becomes a means to have a better life, a better marriage, better relationships, etc. It shifts the object of our faith from Christ and what he asks of us, to personal well-being and what we want for ourselves. Christianity becomes a means to a better self. It’s a gospel of health, wealth, and self-gratification.

If you’ve ever been visited by JWs at your door, their literature, it is remarkably *practical*, and provides a lot of good counsel. It sounds just like those self-help sermons that have become so popular in evangelical circles. A recent Awake Magazine is titled, “12 Secrets of Successful Families.” It’s *familiar teaching*.

How does this focus on self-help in evangelical sermons help JWs (and other cults)? Such sermons enable the cultists prove that they're just like you, just like any other Christian. They are better able to convince the unwary that they share the same beliefs, goals, and values. "Don't you want a successful family? WE do too! **Join us!**" We're no threat to you. We're nice people. *We're your tribe.* That's part of the culture of cults. It's how they recruit others, as we saw in lesson 2 (Tribalism: The Need to Belong and Conform).

To affirm how much they share in common with you, and how *Christian* they are, the Awake magazine they hand you "spring-boards" from the Bible. It uses a few bible verses to support the self-help program they've laid out for you. They justify their false teachings by implying that if *this* teaching about marriage and families is *right*, and *biblical*, then you can trust their *other* beliefs too.

But what is missing in all their teaching, is the person and work of Jesus Christ. The goal or motivation of following their advice isn't to demonstrate any gratitude for who Christ is and what he did on the cross. Rather, it's to obtain a desired end *apart from Christ*. The Bible is treated as a manual for self-improvement and happiness, instead of a testimony of Jesus Christ, the risen Savior, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

It's not always what they *say*, but what they're *not* saying, that raises a flag. They tend to hide their beliefs about Christ, or evade a comparison with biblical Christianity. *That's the deception*: being silent about who Christ is, as revealed in God's word. They consider him a moral teacher, but *not* God incarnate, *not* Savior and Redeemer, and *not* eternal Mediator. The magazine uses concocted comments from fictitious characters to illustrate right and wrong behaviors – instead of quoting from the Bible. If Christ is just a moral teacher, then *any* moral teacher will do, even a fictitious one.

Another way churches indirectly help JWs, is by how individual Christians treat JWs who knock on their door. The JW teacher or recruiter brings along a novice to show them the ropes, and to experience "evangelism" first-hand. They've been desensitized to criticism, by being told to expect rejection, and what that rejection might look like.

So, when a true Christian greets them affably, and accepts their literature, and sends them politely on their way with kindness and grace the recruiter uses that as an affirmation that JWs are acceptable to Christians, because a known Christian didn't reject or condemn them. They've been "certified" by our silence. That doesn't mean we need to rebuke them.

We have two ways to look at someone who is recruiting for a cult like the JWs. We can see them as the enemy, as Satan's agent who deserves a scathing indictment for serving him. Or we can see them as lost souls, used and abused by Satan. They need to be set free as much as the novices they're recruiting and indoctrinating. We shouldn't condemn them for peddling their false beliefs, any more than we would if we were evangelizing them. What good does it do to condemn the lost for being lost? Explain to them why they're lost, and then tell them to flee to Christ for salvation!

Instead, sound believing Christians will often rebuke those trapped in this destructive cult, argue with them, debate with them, and show them all the errors of the Watchtower and its founder. The result is that the JW's heart is hardened, not softened; their mind is closed, not opened. Why? Because they haven't been cared for as lost lambs, but treated as wolves instead.

Here are seven ways to harden the heart of JW:

1. Don't answer the door. Hide and turn off the lights. You left the battlefield: they won.
2. Accuse them: "You're JWs. You people are a false cult and belong to the devil!" That's a *great* way to begin a gospel proclamation. The conversation is over, and they won.
3. Agree to debate them: Give them 20 minutes to explain their beliefs, if they'll give you 20 minutes to refute what they've said. They leave after 20 minutes: they won.
4. Use 2Joh 1.10 as an excuse to shoo them off your doorstep. "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.*" That refers to aiding and abetting them in their proselytizing; it doesn't forbid inviting them in to proclaim the gospel. They don't hear it: they won.
5. Cut them off. Use your Christian beliefs as an excuse to end the conversation. "I'm a Christian, and I'm not interested in your religion, so good-bye." That shows them that you're refusing to stand up for your faith – you won't even talk about it. They remain loyal to the Watchtower, and they won.
6. Tell them you're too busy to talk. Use a disgusted tone, and them to stop bothering you. Again, because you were rude, you lost, and they won.
7. Bring up the usual objections that they've been well-trained to refute, like the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, man's immortal soul, hell-fire, the 144,000, false prophecies, or the Watchtower's *New World Translation* of the Bible.

If a JW departs from the Watchtower Society, it's either because they reject the Society's domineering ways, or because of the lack of love among the JWs. So we need to show them Christ's love! They're sinners, for whom Christ died (1Tim 1.15). Their major problem is that they cannot realize the depth of their own sinful heart until they hear the one true gospel!

Most Christians are not aware that the JWs spend 45 minutes every week having mock conversations on just about every subject people will bring up; and because they've spent many hours going from door to door, they're familiar with most subjects and are very well prepared to refute them. At the start of the conversation, the Christian will get out his or her Bible and play "Bible ping-pong." The only trouble is that in most of the cases the JW is much better at playing Bible ping-pong and familiar with many verses, and they usually win! So after one or two attempts, the Christian is the one who gives up, not the JW.

It takes time to witness to JWs effectively! One man was a JW for 33 years. He estimated that he had gone to 75,000 homes. He said that in that period of time he couldn't remember more than five thought-provoking ideas that were presented to him. Most JWs have never met a kind, loving Christian. They don't know they exist, because just about all of us have been rude.

We need to stop hardening the hearts of the JWs towards Biblical Christianity, and begin learning to present them with the Gospel of Grace, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Here's what we can do.

How to Present the Gospel to a JW

When the JWs come to your door, be polite and listen to what they have to say, which is usually brief at first. Smile and ask them, "You believe the Bible, don't you?" They will answer "Yes," and feel elated because they think you're going to ask a question about the Bible, and they think they're prepared to answer whatever it is.

Here's a sample testimony that you might give. They can't refute it, because it's *your* testimony. Tell them what you came to realize about sin, death, and salvation.

“There was a time in my life when I came to realize that I was an ungodly, wicked sinner before God. When I speak of sin, I don't just mean outward sins that can be seen, like stealing, fighting with others, and disobedience to my parents. I mean sins that only I know about, like being angry, wanting revenge, jealousy, envy, telling lies, selfishness, thinking badly of others, being self-centered, and self-righteous — things like that. I realized that by nature I was a ‘child of wrath,’ which made me a slave of Satan. That's why I couldn't break the power of sin in my life by myself.

“But then I heard someone explain from the Bible that God the Father sent His Son down from heaven into this world to solve the problem of sin. Jesus lived a sinless life; and in the end, He died and shed His blood for sinners.

Don't use the word ‘cross,’ because JW's think it's pagan. They say ‘torture stake,’ so you can use that instead of ‘cross.’

As I heard this message, something clicked. I was being told from the Bible that I was a very bad sinner. To this I had to agree. But then I was told that Jesus Christ died for sinners! I realized that I was a sinner, therefore I had the qualification for receiving the forgiveness of sin that Jesus was offering! Right there I bowed my head, confessed my sins, repented and asked Jesus to be my personal Savior. Do you know what He did? He did exactly what He said He would do. He forgave me of all my sins--past, present, and future--released me from being a slave to Satan, taking away the heavy burden of sin I had been carrying for years--and I was adopted into the family of God and I became one of His born-again children and no longer a slave to sin and Satan. So you can see why I am so thrilled with Jesus! But just because my sins are forgiven, it is not a license to continue to live in sin. Now I read my Bible daily to learn how to please my heavenly Father and live a life of righteousness and holiness. In fact, I am so thrilled with Jesus I want to go from door to door telling people. Also, I want to see the Kingdom preached all over the world.

Ask the question that lets them respond to the Gospel you just proclaimed:

Now would you please tell me what is wrong with a faith like that?”

You have a captive audience. You gave the complete message of salvation. Since this is something most JW's have never heard, they will probably say, “That's very nice, but we have to go now.” You've been polite and given them something to think about instead of encouraging them in their attachment to a false Organization.

Adapted from <http://lovetoshareministries.com/jehovahs-witnesses/all-christians-reach-jws.html>

NOTES:

Comparison Chart - JW's

	Biblical Christianity	Jehovah's Witnesses
Authority	The Bible is divinely inspired revelation, the Word of God, reliable in everything it affirms; the sole authority for faith and practice. 2Tim. 3:16-17.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bible (<i>New World "Translation" NWT</i>) as interpreted by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. 2. Watchtower magazine 3. Awake magazine
God	There is one supreme God, Creator and Lord of everything. The trinity eternally exists as three God-persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God is holy, just, and loving. Gen. 1; Deu. 6:4; Mat. 28:19	God is <i>one</i> person, properly called Jehovah. His Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. They deny the trinity.
Jesus' person	Has full deity (true God). Born of the virgin Mary and fully human (true man). He is the living Word, revealing the Father and his love to mankind. Joh 1:1-13	<p>He is a created being with stages of existence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Archangel Michael, or the Word. 2. Jesus, perfect man, became Messiah at his baptism 3. He rose spiritually, became Michael again, but retains the name Jesus. 4. Returned to earth spiritually in 1914
Jesus' work	He lived a sinless life, and willingly died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of humanity, finally saving all believers. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. Joh 1:14-18; 3:16	Christ's ransom (the sacrifice of his body on a "stake") only made salvation <i>possible</i> . His resurrection was spiritual, not physical.
Man	Created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28). When Adam freely chose to disobey God, all mankind fell with him. Every human being is a sinner, alienated from God, and without hope apart from faith in Christ. Gen.3; Rom. 3:10-18.	Created in Jehovah's image; the soul is not immortal; all are capable of responding to Jehovah, but willfully rebel against Him.
Salvation	A gracious gift from God, through faith in Christ, by his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. It gives us eternal life as God's children, freed from the guilt and penalty of sin. Joh 1:12; 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9	Jesus made it <i>possible</i> to earn our salvation: Allegiance to Jehovah plus works (baptism, faithfulness in Kingdom Hall attendance and work); Anyone ignorant of Jehovah is given a chance to believe during the millennium.
Afterlife	Eternal communion with God (heaven), or else eternal separation from God (hell). Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20-22	The end of the world is soon; 144,000 "elect" now reign with Christ in the Kingdom of God (heaven). Other Jehovah's Witnesses will live on earth as a glorified paradise. Annihilation for all who reject Jehovah (i.e., <i>no hell</i>).
Other	Christian living is led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, including a consistent witness to the lost by both deeds and words.	No blood transfusions; no celebration of holidays; no religious images; all earthly organizations are controlled by Satan; Jehovah's Witnesses are required to obey Jehovah's laws as explained by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

NOTES:

5. Islam

Islam can be traced back to Muhammad, who was born into the Qurayah tribe, c. A.D. 570 at Mecca, in western Saudi Arabia. This Arab clan was the guardian of the Kaabah (or Ka'bah), the great shrine at Mecca, in whose walls the sacred black stone was embedded. According to Arabian tradition, the black stone fell from heaven in the time of Adam. Muslims believe that, on his pilgrimage to Mecca with Ishmael, Abraham built the Kaabah and positioned the meteorite within its walls. This shrine, which figures prominently in Muhammad's life and in the establishment and development of Islam, was dedicated to the Arabs' pantheon of deities.

With the support of his wealthy wife, Muhammad increasingly spent much of his time in the seclusion of the desert meditating and reflecting on life (Schmalzfuss, 1982, p. 311). He developed a passionate monotheistic belief, and became frustrated with the polytheism and superstitions of his fellow Arabs. Though it is difficult to determine the extent to which Christianity and Judaism influenced the development of his monotheism, it is clear that "at some period of his life he absorbed much teaching from Talmudic sources and had contact with some form of Christianity." His teachings were recorded in the Qur'an (or Koran), the sacred text of Islam.

Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an is not a coherent body of propositional truths. It is more poetic than prosaic. Thus, it is to be read and recited in its original language. There are English translations of it, but all would agree that this voids it of its beauty and power, and of the transcendent effect it has on the listener or reader.

The Qur'an

To Muslims, the Qur'an is not merely the counterpart of the Christian Bible; it is the Islamic equivalent of Christ. According to Muslim scholar, Yusuf K. Ibish, "If you want to compare it with anything in Christianity, you must compare it with Christ Himself" (as quoted in Geisler and Saleeb, 1993, p. 179). Consistent with Ibish's observation, Muslims assign to the Qur'an the same attributes that Christians apply to Christ. For example, just as Jesus is the human manifestation of the eternal God in biblical Christology (Joh 1:1-3,14; Hebrews 1:1-3), the Qur'an is the linguistic representation of God's eternal Word. In short, while in Christianity the divine Word became a human being, in Islam the eternal Word became a book.¹

Muslims further argue that the Qur'an not only is the inspired, inerrant, eternal, and final revelation of God that supersedes all others, but is also the ultimate divine miracle. It was the only miracle Muhammad offered when asked to display his prophetic credentials. In support of the Qur'an's claim of divine authorship, Islamic apologists offer the alleged perfect preservation of the Qur'anic text, fulfilled prophecies, its unity, and scientific accuracy. These evidences, however, prove to be unconvincing (see Geisler and Saleeb, 1993, pp. 204; Lawson, 1991).

Political Context

Historically, Muslims have equated, and continue to equate the West with Christianity. From this perspective, "Christian" and "Muslim" nations have had a long history of

¹ For Muslims, it isn't just the words of the Qur'an that are holy, but the ink and paper by which the words are recorded. To desecrate the book in any way, is to blaspheme Allah.

conflict, leaving both with animosity toward one another. Western nations subjugated about ninety percent of the Muslim world, which instilled in many Muslims a deep desire to avenge such shame and humiliation. Perhaps the greatest blow to the Islamic ego was when, after 1300 years of occupation, they lost possession of Jerusalem to the Jews in 1967. Muslims blame this turn of events on the “Christian” West for creating the state of Israel in 1948 (see McCurry, 1994). We cannot separate the religion from this political context. Both must be understood together. In Islam, there is no “separation of church and state.”

Major Divisions of Islam

As with most religions, Islam has moderates and extremists, liberals and fundamentalists. But two very different sects arose in Islam after Muhammad’s death.

The Sunni – The Sunni branch, claiming approximately 90% of all Muslims, argued that the Caliph ¹ should belong to Muhammad’s tribe, the Qurayah, and that the community should choose him by the process of consensus (*ijma*). Since Muhammad was the “Seal of the Prophets,” the Sunnis considered it the responsibility of the Caliph to merely guard—not continue—the prophetic legacy, and to provide “for the administration of community affairs in obedience to the Qur’an and prophetic precedent.” Within thirty years of Muhammad’s death, four Caliphs were appointed in succession: Abu Bakr (632-634), ‘Umar (634-644), ‘Uthman (644-656), and ‘Ali (656-661). Sunnis regard these first Islamic leaders as “the four rightly guided Caliphs,” since they lived so near in time to Muhammad. Because of that, Sunnis believe that the *sunna* (behavior or practice) of these four Caliphs, together with the Prophet’s, is authoritative for all Muslims. The Sunnis derive their name from this emphasis on the *sunna*. While there are subdivisions of this group, distinguished by specific points of interpretation, they all call themselves *Sunni*.

The Shi’a - The other major branch of Islam, which claims about 10% of the Muslim population, and exists primarily in Iraq and Iran, is the more militant Shi’a. The *Shi’ites*, splintered from the *Sunnis* primarily over the question of the Caliphate. There are two points of disagreement. **FIRST**, they differ over the genealogical *descent* of the Caliph. The Sunnis believe that the Caliph should be a descendent merely of Muhammad’s tribe; while the Shi’ites argue that the Caliph should descend specifically from ‘Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law. In fact, the word Shi’ite means “partisan” and indicates that Shi’ites are “partisans of ‘Ali” (Rood, 1994). **SECOND**, the Shi’ites differ with the Sunnis regarding the *authority* of the Caliph. Unlike the Sunnis, Shi’ite Muslims believe that the Islamic leader, whom they call the *imam*, is more than merely a guardian of Muhammad’s prophetic legacy. Rather, Muhammad bequeathed his *wilaya* to ‘Ali (*i.e.*, his “spiritual abilities”), enabling him to interpret the Qur’an and to lead the Islamic community infallibly. Though there are various interpretations, Shi’ites generally believe that the *wilaya* has been passed down through the subsequent generations of ‘Ali’s descendants. They further believe that this “cycle of the *wilaya*” will continue until the last day, when humankind will be resurrected and judged (see Kerr, 1982, p. 331).

The majority faction within the Shi’a branch, known as the Imamis (most of whom live in Iran), believes that the completion of the *wilaya* cycle will end with the messianic return of the twelfth *imam*. According to this sect, the twelfth *imam* has been in “occultation”

¹ *Caliph*: the civil and religious leader of a Muslim state, considered to be a representative of Allah on earth.

(the state of hiding) since the third century of Islam. They believe, however, that the *ayatollahs* (senior experts in Islamic law) have access to the hidden *imam*, and thus have the right to interpret Islamic law and make religious rulings (Kerr, 1982, p. 331). The late Ayatollah Khomeini, perhaps the most widely remembered Shi'ite leader among contemporary Westerners, was considered to be the spokesman for the hidden *imam*.

Sufis – Sufis are a movement within the Sunni and Shi'a sects, rather than a separate sect. Reacting to the externally oriented and legalistic disposition of the Islamic religious system, Sufis seek a *mystical experience of God*. The word *Sufism* is usually translated “mysticism,” which reflects this emphasis on a personal religious experience. Since Sufis, desire more than an intellectual knowledge of Allah, they are prone to a number of superstitious practices (Rood, 1994).

Basic Beliefs of Islam

As might be expected, in light of the vast diversity in Islam, there are many variant beliefs among Muslims worldwide. Though there are differences of opinion surrounding their application, **SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH** form the core of the Islamic religion.

1. **Monotheism.** As indicated earlier, pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. Due to Muhammad's successful monotheistic campaign, Muslims recognize and devote themselves to only one God, whom they call Allah. Worshiping or attributing deity to any other being is considered by Muslims to be *shirk*, or blasphemy.

2. **Angels and jinn.** Muslims believe in a well-structured organization of angelic beings. At the lowest level in the hierarchy of spirit beings in Islamic thought are the *jinn*, who are capable both of committing good and evil deeds, and of inhabiting human beings. After his first frightening encounter with Gabriel, Muhammad feared that he was possessed by one of these potentially fiendish beings. The angels of God are above the *jinn* in rank. In Islamic angelology, each Muslim is accompanied by two angels—one on the right, the other on the left. This angelic pair is responsible for recording the good and evil deeds of the Muslim, respectively.

3. **God's holy books.** The Qur'an refers to numerous other volumes that Muslims consider as God's holy books. Chief among the Islamic sacred texts are these: the Mosaic Law; the Davidic Psalms; the Gospel (*Injil*) given to Jesus; and the Qur'an revealed to Muhammad. Muslims, following Muhammad's allegation, contend that the original Torah (Pentateuch), Psalms, and Gospels have been corrupted by Christian and Jewish writers, and essentially lost. As the final revelation from God, the Qur'an supersedes all previous revelations and truth claims.

4. **God's prophets.** Muslims believe that there has been a long succession of prophets through whom Allah revealed his will. While there is no consensus regarding the exact number, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are considered the five prophetic predecessors to Muhammad. There seems to be universal agreement among Muslims that Muhammad was God's supreme and final prophet—the “seal” of the prophets.

5. **Resurrection and Judgment.** Similar to elements of Christian eschatology, Muslims believe in a general resurrection of humankind, followed by a final judgment. In this connection, human works are central. How successful a Muslim was at keeping the mandates of Islamic law determines his or her eternal fate. Those who have accomplished more good deeds than bad, will be admitted into paradise, a place abounding with sensual

pleasures (e.g., luxury, physical comfort, abundant food, lovely maidens, etc., see *sura* 4:57-58; 37:45-48). Those who are deficient in good deeds will be consigned to hell, in which, among other excruciating torments, they will be attired in fiery garments (*sura* 22:19-20; cf., 18:28-29).

6. Predestination. Though not a mandatory doctrine, most Muslims accept a rigid form of predestination reflected in the comment made by the devout: “If Allah wills it.” This belief holds that all events, good or bad, are determined directly by Allah. It is thus the duty of the dedicated Muslim to “submit to that divine determination with obedient thankfulness,” though he or she still must face Allah’s strict justice (Shorosh, p. 32).

Basic Practices of Islam

As already indicated, human works play a crucial role in Islam. The most important works or duties generally acknowledged by Muslims may be summarized in what are commonly called the “Five Pillars of Islam.”

1. **The creed** (*kalima* or *shahada*). “*La ilaha il’ Allah, Muhammadan Rasoulu Allah.*” These words, translated, “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,” constitute the essential creed of Islam. This is the first duty of every Muslim, for it is necessary to recite this creed before at least two witnesses to become a Muslim. And, the faithful Muslim will repeat this creed constantly.

2. **Prayers** (*salat*). Muslims, regardless of their social or economic status, submit to a rigorous daily regimen of prayer. Five times a day (only three for Shi’ites), Muslims respond to the call to prayer by the *muezzin* (a Muslim crier) from a tower called a *minaret*, which is part of the *mosque* (the place of public worship). They recite prescribed prayers together with the appropriate action of placing the forehead to the ground. Regardless of their geographic location, the faithful Muslim will face toward Mecca and perform this prayer ritual at the appropriate intervals. It is further incumbent on all adult male Muslims to gather each Friday at noon for community prayer, and to hear a weekly sermon.

3. **Almsgiving** (*zakat* and *sadaqa*). Orphaned himself at a young age, Muhammad was very sensitive to the plight of the destitute. Though some do so more extensively than others, several Qur’anic *suras* emphasize the duty of Muslims to give alms (2, 4, 19, 23, 33, 107). Almsgiving is divided into two broad categories. The *zakat* are the legal alms, which require that Muslims allocate 2.5% (one-fortieth) of their income and merchandise for this charitable purpose. Different percentages are assigned to agricultural produce and cattle. The *sadaqa* are free-will offerings that are above and beyond the legally binding proportion of almsgiving.

4. **Fasting** (*Ramadan*). During the month of *Ramadan* (the ninth lunar month of the Islamic year), all healthy, adult Muslims (except pregnant women, nursing mothers, and travelers) are required to abstain from food, liquids, and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. There are both historical and theological reasons for *Ramadan*. Historically, Muslims believe that during the ninth lunar month, Muhammad received the first revelations from God, and that during this same month he and his followers made their historic escape from Mecca to Medina. Theologically, the fast helps develop a Muslim’s self-control, reliance on Allah, and sympathy for the poor.

5. **The Pilgrimage** (*Hajj*). Every Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. Since the rituals involved in the pilgrimage are physically demanding, the old or infirm can perform this duty by proxy. The *Hajj* serves to solidify Islamic faith, and to promote the ideas of worldwide unity and equality among Muslims (Rood, 1994; McDowell, 1983, p. 392).

6. **The Holy War** (*jihad*). Though not a part of the Five Pillars, the *jihad* is a duty usually associated with them. The word means “exertion” or “struggle” on behalf of God. Muslims are divided regarding the Qur’an’s call to *jihad*. Extremists interpret *jihad* as literal warfare against non-Muslims, and believe that Muslims who die in a holy war are assured of a place in paradise. More moderate interpreters suggest that the Qur’an’s call to arms refers to a specific incident of Muhammad’s armed conflict with his enemies, and should neither be applied universally nor pressed literally (Al-Ashmawy, 1995, p. 158).

In addition to these basic beliefs and practices, Muslims are guided by numerous laws and traditions contained in the *hadith*. The *hadith*, which was compiled after the Qur’an was completed, reportedly contains Muhammad’s examples and statements regarding various topics. The Qur’an and *hadith* address virtually every aspect of life, making Islam not just a religion, but an all-encompassing way of life.

The Monotheism of Islam

At first glance, it appears that the rigid monotheism of Islam is largely compatible with Christian thought. The idea expressed in the Qur’an that God is “the one, the most unique,” and the “immanently indispensable” to Whom “no one is comparable” (*sura* 112:1-2,4), generally agrees with biblical concepts of God (cf. Deu 6:4; Psa 86:8; Isa 40:18; 44:6). Yet, the monotheism of Islam is so rigid and inflexible that it repudiates two crucial, and inextricably linked, doctrines of historic Christianity.

The Trinity.

Though questioned by some groups within the pale of Christianity, the concept of the trinity has strong biblical support (see Bromling, 1991). This doctrine does not suggest, as alleged by non-Trinitarians, a tri-theistic construct of God. It simply affirms that there are three distinct persons (i.e., the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), yet all are one in **essence**. In other words, while the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sustain distinct relationships to one another, they share the same divine nature (see Geisler and Saleeb, 1993, p. 266). In this regard, Christianity and Islam are firmly opposed to one another. Unlike the monotheism of Christianity that allows for a plurality within the divine essence, Islam condemns such a pluralistic concept of God (see Kaleem, 1994). The Qur’an cautions the “people of the book” (i.e., Christians) against calling God “Trinity” for “God is only one God” (*sura* 4:171).

The Nature of God

As already indicated, the stringent monotheism of Islam categorizes the Trinitarian concept of deity espoused by Christians as tri-theism. This is due to a misunderstanding of the Father-Son relationship between God and Jesus as mentioned in the Bible (see John 10:29-33). For Jesus to sustain such a filial kinship to God, “often in the Muslim mind implies some kind of sexual generation” (Geisler and Saleeb, 1993, pp. 134-135). Of course, the term “Father” or “Son” does not necessitate physical procreation any more than Saddam Hussein’s description of the Gulf War as the “Mother of all Battles” demands

that the conflict had a physical womb. The description of Jesus as the “only begotten Son” of God (Joh 3:16) refers, not to a physical act of procreation, but to His unique relationship to God the Father.

The idea expressed in the Qur’an that God’s glory prohibits Him from begetting a son (in the carnal sense; *sura* 4:171) provides further insight into the theology of Islam. God is so transcendent and unified to Himself that He is dissociated totally from creation, and thus acts impersonally (McDowell, 1983, p. 393). To many Muslims, this implies that God is so detached from our human existence that He has no (knowable) essence; He is absolute Will. A God with no essence means a God with no essential characteristics. From this perspective, though the Qur’an extols God as “the Compassionate, the Merciful,” such characteristics are not rooted in His *essence*, but are the results of His *capricious will*. As the Qur’an indicates, God is merciful simply because “He has **decreed** mercy for Himself” (*sura* 6:12). In short, in Islamic theology, what God **does** determines who God **is**. Since God’s actions are contingent on His arbitrary will, then who God is, is ultimately an act of His volition.

Such a concept of God, however, involves a serious moral difficulty. It implies the possibility that, if God had willed it, He might have been “The Merciless” as easily as “The Merciful.” For, as Geisler and Saleeb have observed, “if God is Will, without any real essence, then he does not do things because they are right; rather, they are right because he does them” (1993, pp. 136-137). In the final analysis, the God of Islam has no nature by which He is inherently prohibited from, or motivated toward, certain actions. The God of Christianity, however, has such a nature that self-limits His actions (e.g., He cannot lie, Titus 1:2). In addition, rather than being the products of His *volition*, the benevolent attributes of the Christian God (e.g., goodness, mercy, love, grace) are part of His *essence*.

These divergent concepts of God find practical expression in profoundly different ways. Consistent with Islamic theology, the concern of orthodox Muslims is not to *know* God in an intimate fashion, but simply to *obey* Him. The God of Islam does not reveal *Himself*; rather, He reveals only His *will*, to which Muslims are to submit in an external fashion. By contrast, the God of Christianity has revealed not only His propositional truth in the Bible, but also His essence in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christians seek not only to do God’s will, but to be in a *covenant relationship* with Him. Due to the Islamic concept of God, together with its works-oriented means of salvation, Muslims cannot have the sense of security that Christians enjoy through God’s grace as taught in the Bible.

The Deity of Jesus.

Consistent with Islam’s repudiation of the Trinitarian concept of God, the Qur’an, though it exalts Jesus in many particulars, explicitly *denies the deity of Jesus*. While the Qur’an acknowledges that Jesus was a miraculous “sign” and divine “blessing” (19:21), Islamic Christology is totally devoid of divine content (see Kuitse, 1992, 20:357). Since God’s transcendent glory prohibits His begetting a son, the Qur’an presents Jesus only as the “son of Mary,” not the Son of God (4:171). Rather than possessing the divine nature as in biblical Christology (Phi 2:8-12; Col 1:18), the Qur’anic Jesus “was only a creature” (43:59) brought into existence by God’s creative word (3:42-52). Islam’s view of Jesus demonstrates the vast difference between it and Christianity. And far from being a peripheral issue, the deity of Jesus is an essential tenet of Christianity. Thus, while

Christianity and Islam share a common monotheistic belief, there is no resolving their Christological differences as they stand.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

Another cardinal doctrine of Christianity—the atonement—is discarded by the Qur’an. That Jesus died **for our sins**, was buried, and rose again from the grave according to the Scriptures is the thrust of the gospel message (1Cor 15:1-4). Contrary to the conclusion of some modern theologians, Paul argued that Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection were actual events of history. Following Paul’s line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, if Christ did not actually rise from the dead, there is no gospel, and the entire Christian system is annulled (1Cor 15:12-19). A denial of these core events is tantamount to rejecting the veracity of Christianity.

Yet, Islam *does* deny these central Christian events, charging that Jesus actually did not die on the cross (see Ijaz, n.d.). In a context in which the Jews are excoriated for repeatedly breaking God’s covenant, the Qur’an reads:

And for saying [in boast]: “We killed the Christ, Jesus, son of Mary, who was an apostle of God;” but they neither killed nor crucified him, though it so appeared to them. Those who disagree in the matter are only lost in doubt. They have no knowledge about it other than conjecture, for surely they did not kill him, but God raised him up (in position) and closer to Himself; and God is all-mighty and all wise (*sura* 4:157-158).

This one reading has generated considerable debate among Islamic commentators. The phrase, “so it appeared to them,” has been particularly problematic. Generally, orthodox Muslims have interpreted this to mean that in some mysterious manner, God made another person so resemble Jesus that he was crucified by mistake. By this means God intervened and frustrated the Jews’ evil purpose, and subsequently transported Jesus into heaven (see Geisler and Saleeb, 1992, pp. 64-65). According to Norman Anderson, Muhammad’s aversion to Jesus’ death, as reflected in the Qur’an, could have been motivated by several factors. Perhaps it was due, Anderson suggests, to the influence of Gnostic views; to his disdain for the “superstitious veneration” of the symbol of the cross in seventh-century Asia; or to his disbelief that God would allow one of His prophets to die in such a disgraceful manner (1975, p. 101). Of these possibilities, the latter is the most likely candidate.

Regardless of the rationale behind Islam’s denial of Jesus’ crucifixion, one fact remains: Islam rejects the idea of Jesus’ crucifixion, and by implication, His vicarious suffering for sinful humanity. As already indicated, such a denial strikes at the very heart of the Christian system. Once again, any points of contact between Islam and Christianity are eclipsed by this fundamental difference.

Means of Salvation

As a corollary to its denial of Jesus’ death, Islam differs significantly with Christianity regarding the means of humankind’s salvation. In the Christian system, all responsible human beings without Christ, are powerless slaves to a ruthless taskmaster—sin (Romans 5:6-11; 6:15-18; Eph 2:14-18). Since there is no means of liberating ourselves from the bondage of sin, human beings are in desperate need of a savior. In response to this critical condition, God, motivated by His love, entered into human history as a man, and offered His sinless life for humanity. The New Testament writers employed several images

(financial, military, sacrificial, and legal) to convey in a concrete way the soteriological purpose of Christ's death. Through the cross, sinners are purchased (1Cor 6:20; 7:23), victorious (Col 1:12; 2:15; 1Cor 15:24-28), atoned for (Rom 3:25; 1Cor 5:7), and acquitted and reconciled (2Cor 5:16-19; Col 1:19-20; see Guthrie, 1994, pp. 251-256). While scholars continue to debate the theological details of these images, it is clear from the New Testament, that God took the initiative in the salvation of humanity. It further emphasizes that salvation is not by human works of merit, but by God's grace through an expressive faith in the redemptive act of Christ on the cross (Eph 2:8-9).

Islam, however, has no place for a suffering savior in its redemptive system. It does not view human beings as enslaved by sin, without the ability of self-emancipation. Though it emphasizes the role of God's mercy and forgiveness in salvation, Islam teaches that God's pleasure, and thus one's place in Heaven, are *earned* (cf. *suras* 2:207; 39:69). On the Day of Judgment, according to Islam, those who have fulfilled their religious duties, and compensated for their altruistic deficiencies by performing additional good deeds, will attain salvation. Those whose good deeds are insufficient, however, "shall forfeit their souls and abide in Hell forever" (*sura* 23:102-103). In the final analysis, humankind's spiritual need is not for a divine *Savior*, but simply for divine *guidance*.

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NOTES:

6. Major Sects

Any camp of Protestantism might refer to any other camp as a “sect.” And any camp might assert that what it advocates is biblical truth, in opposition to misinterpretations (if not outright errors) by other camps. Now, infant baptists and credo-baptists are two camps of the Protestant faith. Infant baptists respect as valid, the baptism of credo-baptists; but that respect is not always reciprocated. Yet these two camps don’t rise to the level of being *sects*, which we defined as being outside the mainstream of the historic Protestant creeds.

By contrast, modern DISPENSATIONALISM (Darbyism) was an invention of John Darby in the 1830s. It proposes one salvation by faith, and a separate salvation for the nation of Israel. It asserts that physical Israel will reign over all nations during the millennium, rather than Christ reigning through His Church. Thus, the Church is not comprised of all those called by God since Adam. Instead, it begins in the New Testament. This concept of having a separate purpose and salvation for physical Israel, was denounced by the reformers. Nonetheless, the Scofield Study Bible made it popular in the early 1900s, and Dallas Theological Seminary was founded to promote it. It is so widespread now, that its adherents would be shocked to hear it called a “sect.”¹

ROMAN CATHOLICISM is a sect by definition – it is outside the historic Protestant creeds. And yet it is so diverse in its beliefs and practices throughout the world, that it is hard to characterize it as a whole. It asserts that salvation is indeed by faith in Christ, but not faith in Christ *alone*. It adds membership in the visible church, and regular participation in the sacraments, as necessary to salvation. It asserts the authority of the Bible, but only as it is interpreted by an “infallible” pope – which effectively substitutes the authority of the pope for the authority of Scripture. It is therefore a sect.

Saying that any set of alleged “Christian” beliefs is outside of mainstream Christianity, results in objections by those who hold them. But if there’s no orthodoxy – no established doctrines which define Christianity as distinct from all other belief systems – then there can be no heresy, no cults, no sects, no falsehood, and no church discipline. All truth would be equally true, because no truth could be exclusively true.

In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity.

We are a *reformed* church. We still enjoy biblical fellowship with other Christian camps in the essentials, even though we may disagree on non-essentials. But we can have no such fellowship with those who disagree on essentials of the faith. Cults are not only outside the doctrines of the *reformed* faith, they are outside of Christianity. Sects are outside of the reformed tradition, but may or may not be outside of Christianity.

Next, we’ll provide a comparison of a few major sects, with the historic Protestant faith. We’ll begin with Dispensationalism, because it is so widespread in evangelicalism.

¹ You may read A.W. Pink’s refutation here: http://www.onthewing.org/user/Pink_Dispensationalism.pdf.

Dispensationalism - A Reformed Evaluation

by J. Ligon Duncan

Condensed from https://www.the-highway.com/dispensationalism_Duncan.html

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom 2:28-29)

Vern Poythress' book, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, gives an idea of the intricacies of the Dispensational system, and why Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are so diametrically opposed.

A Brief Background to Dispensationalism

The Dispensational system of theology is actually a 19th c. phenomenon. It is associated with John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren movement in Britain in the 19th c. In America, it is associated with C.I. Scofield, and the Scofield Study Bible (1909). The Dispensational movement created its own seminary in Dallas TX (1924). For many years, a theological journal called *Bibliotheca Sacra* has been its official journal.

Dispensationalism is not necessarily for or against Calvinism and Arminianism. But they do see their theological system in opposition to Covenant or Federal Theology. However, there are several similarities between Dispensationalism and the Arminian alternative to Covenant Theology. All Federalists have been Calvinists, but not all Dispensationalists have been Calvinists. Most 16th and 17th c. Calvinists were Federalists.

Differences – Eschatological

Dispensationalists are *premillennial*. Essentially, premillennial means you believe that Christ returns prior to the millennium described in the book of Revelation, chapter 20. Because it is essential to their theological system, it is perhaps the fundamental point of Dispensationalism that Israel and the Church are distinct, and the Law/Gospel distinction must be preserved at all costs. That is the heart and core of classic Dispensationalism: you should never mix Law and Gospel, and you should never mix Israel and the Church.

Classic Dispensational is also *pre-tribulation*. That means you believe in a rapture of the church that occurs prior to the great Tribulation mentioned in the book of Revelation.

On the other hand, most Covenant Theologians have been either postmillennial or amillennial. Simply defined, postmillennial means that the coming of Christ is after the millennium, and amillennialism is a sub category of postmillennialism. You can only have two views: Christ is either coming *before* or *after* the millennium.

Amillennialists tend to stress the heavenly character of that millennium. The millennial reign is going on now, in heaven. It is a *spiritual* millennium. Postmillennialists tend to stress a more *earthly* character to that millennium, and often project it as a golden age which is yet to be experienced, but which will occur before the time of Christ. This is how many postmillennialists viewed it in the last century (e.g., B.B. Warfield). The Puritans' view of the millennium was a post millennium view.

Differences – Literal Israel and the Church

The fundamental difference between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism is seen in the difference between Israel and the church.

There are multiple systems of Dispensational Theology. Blaising and Bock come up with three basic categories of Dispensationalism, each with a slightly different twist on how Israel and church relate:

- 1) CLASSIC or historical Dispensationalism (John Nelson Darby, C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer);
- 2) REVISED or modified Dispensationalism (John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, Charles Feinberg, Alva McClain); and
- 3) PROGRESSIVE Dispensationalism (Craig A. Blaising, Darrell L. Bock, and Robert L. Saucy).

Dispensationalism stresses the literal fulfillment of prophecy about Israel, and it posits an essential difference between physical Israel and the church. They take the term Israel literally. Covenant theologians think that these prophecies about Israel and Judah in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the church, and in the coming in of the Gentiles into the church. Dispensationalists do not believe that the Church is prophesied about in the Old Testament. They believe that the prophecies about Israel and Judah in the Old Testament are to be literally fulfilled in Israel, in Judah, in the New Covenant.

Covenant Theology, on the other hand, sees the Church as the fulfillment of Israel in New Covenant prophecy. Covenant Theology is happy to acknowledge the uniqueness of the Church, especially in its post-Pentecost phase. But Covenant Theology sees all believers in essential continuity. There are not two peoples of God. There is one people of God.

Covenant Theologians would agree that the institutional forms of the people of God, was different under the Old and under the New Covenant. The form of the people of God under the Old Covenant was expressed primarily in Israel – which was an ethnic, ecclesiastical, and national community. In the New Covenant, the institutional form of the people of God is the Church. And the Church in the New Testament is trans-ethnic, trans-national, and purely ecclesiastical, as opposed to ecclesiastical and civil. There is no question that there was a blending of civil and ecclesiastical matters in the Old Covenant for the people of God, but that is not the case in the New Covenant.

Classic Dispensationalism contends that God has two peoples with two destinies. The two peoples of God, Israel and the Church, have two separate destinies. They see Israel, with the earthly millennial reign of David in the land of Israel, restored to its Davidic and Solomonic boundaries. For the Church, there is heaven. Covenant Theology strenuously argues that there is only one people of God in all ages, and there is only one destiny for all the people of God.

In Romans 2:28-29, Paul obviously had a great concern to address precisely these kinds of issues. And in that passage, Paul makes it clear that not all Israel is Israel, cf. Romans 9:6. He makes it clear that Israel was from the very beginning a spiritual entity, even though there was an external aspect to Israel. Circumcision was not simply a matter of an outward form and sign, but there was an inward spiritual reality which was necessary for fellowship with God.

The Covenant Theologian understands that Israel, from the very beginning, had within her bounds, both the elect and the reprobate. And God's promises were not made simply to external Israel, but to those who had indeed embraced and appropriated the promises of the Covenant with Abraham. God's plan is the same in the New Covenant as it was in the Old. That is a disputed point between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

Differences – Only One Plan from Eternity for All God's People

Probably the greatest difference between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology concerns God's saving purposes in the Old Testament. Some older Dispensationalists argued that salvation was by works in the Old Testament, and by faith in the New. Most Dispensationalists today don't argue that particular point of view. Covenant Theologians point out that it would contradict the essential Reformation doctrine of *sola gratia*, or salvation by grace alone, if that were the case. The Reformers argued that salvation is not just by grace alone *now* — it has been by grace alone since the Fall.

Today, mainstream Dispensationalism has suggested that Old Testament believers were not saved by works, but by faith; yet they differ from Covenant Theologians in their description of the nature of that faith. They tend to argue that sinners in the Old Testament were not justified by faith in the Gospel of the Messiah as sin-bearer (Christ crucified); rather, their faith was in promises that were peculiar to their individual era in redemptive history. So they may have received occasional messianic prophecy, but that was not essential to their saving faith, *per se*.

Now, this isn't just out of accord with Covenant Theology, but this is the area where Dispensationalism has been most out of accord with Protestant theology. This is out of accord with all Calvinism, all Lutheranism, and even mainstream Anabaptist thought at the Reformation, who all taught that Old Testament believers were justified by faith in the coming Messiah as sin-bearer. These Old Testament believers all heard the Gospel, the Reformers argued. How? Through the prophecies and types. Therefore, the essential content of their faith was materially the same in all ages, including the NT. So, though the New Covenant believer may have a firmer grasp on the Gospel, because the events of the Gospel are now retrospective for the New Covenant, yet the Gospel was set forth in shadows and in types to the Old Covenant believer. So that justifying faith in the Old Testament was in Messiah, it was in Christ as sin bearer, and they were *expecting* His coming. Whereas, the New Covenant looks *back* upon the finished work of Christ, the Messiah. That is a fundamentally Protestant point of view about saving faith in the Old Testament. And Dispensationalism tends to take issue with it.

The historic Protestant view is that the essential content of faith has been materially the same in all ages. Its teaching is that no one has ever been justified except by faith in Christ crucified. That is the essence of the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, or salvation by faith alone. And so, when classic forms of Dispensationalism disagree with that point, they are not just disagreeing with Covenant Theology; they are also disagreeing with Protestantism as a whole. And in that light, you see why it is impossible to harmonize the two systems. That fundamental difference is at the core. Calvinism has always held that the saints in both Old and in New Testament are *all* in Christ. They are part of the body of Christ, part of the bride of Christ, because of God's election.

Major distinctions between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism

I'll give you a contrast between classic Dispensationalism and classic Covenant Theology.

1. First of all, Dispensationalists may be an Arminian or four-point Calvinists, but Dispensationalists are almost never five-point Calvinists. The point that they drop out is LIMITED ATONEMENT. Covenant Theologians are five-point Calvinists by definition.

2. Dispensationalists speak in terms of a literal interpretation of the Bible. Of course, the implication being that Covenant Theologians don't. Covenant Theologians argue that they too interpret the Bible literally, but believe that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. They believe that the New Testament is the hermeneutical manual for the Old. Dispensationalists are suspicious of that, because they feel you are about to spiritualize something that the Old Testament has said for them very clearly. The Covenant Theologian believes the New Testament has the final word as the meaning of that passage, giving the New Testament hermeneutical control. Dispensationalists tend to interpret the Old Testament, then attempt to harmonize the particular teaching of the New Testament with their previous interpretation of the Old Testament passage.

In a classic example of this, Scofield tells you that the most important passage in the Bible, from a Dispensational perspective, is Amos chapter 9. Of course, Amos chapter 9 is interpreted in Acts chapter 15. But the interpretation of Amos chapter 9, that is given in Acts chapter 15 is diametrically opposed to the central principle of Dispensationalism. So how does the Dispensationalist deal with that? Well, he gives you his "literal interpretation" of Amos 9, and then he attempts to harmonize the teaching of Acts 15 with his previous literal interpretation of Amos 9. The Covenant Theologian says no, "In Acts chapter 15, James tells you what Amos 9 means. And therefore, James' interpretation must exercise all hermeneutical control even when you are doing your own original exegesis of Amos 9." Because if James says that is what Amos 9 means, and James is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts chapter 15, then that is what Amos 9 means. So you see a fundamentally different approach to Old Testament and New Testament interpretation.

3. Dispensationalists do not accept the Protestant idea of the analogy of faith, that "Scripture interprets Scripture." We find it in The Westminster Confession, and in all of the Protestant confessions. Again, Dispensationalists are dubious about that principle, because they think that it is a way to spiritualize away literal prophecies in the Old Testament. Even if you say you believe in inerrancy, in authority, and inspiration, there will be a concern that, hermeneutically, you are spiritualizing away the meaning of Scripture. So they do not accept the analogy of faith.

4. For the Classic Dispensationalist, Israel always means the literal physical descendants of Jacob. For the Covenant Theologian, Israel may mean the literal physical descendants of Jacob, or it may mean spiritual Israel which may be a subset of literal physical Israel, or it may actually be larger than the subset of literal physical Israel. It could refer to Gentiles as well. Of course, that is the point Dispensationalists must argue against.

5. Dispensationalists say that Galatians 6:16, where Paul uses the phrase *Israel of God*, means physical Israel alone. However, Covenant Theologians tend to argue that *Israel of God* is a reference to spiritual Israel, parallel with Paul's other statements in Gal 3:29 and Rom 2:20-28; Rom 9:6; and Phi 3:3.

6. For Dispensationalists, God has two peoples with two separate destinies; Israel with an earthly destiny, and the Church with a heavenly destiny. For the Covenant Theologian, God has always had only one people. Though there is a sense in which the church is a post Pentecost phenomenon, he understands there is also a sense in which the Church is the people of God in all ages.

7. For Dispensationalists, the Church began at Pentecost, not before. The people of God in the Old Testament were Israel, while the people of God in the New Testament are the church. On the Covenant Theology side, the church began with Adam, and it reaches its fulfillment and culmination in the New Testament. They point to passages like Acts 7:38, where Stephen speaks about the *Church* in the wilderness, when he is actually speaking of *Israel* in the wilderness.

8. According to classic Dispensationalism, the Church was not prophesied about in the Old Testament. There is no mention of the church in the Old Testament. It was a mystery until the New Testament. For Covenant Theologians, there are many Old Testament prophecies that speak of the Church.

9. All Old Testament prophecies about Israel are for the literal Israel, not for the Church. For the Dispensationalists, all Old Testament prophecies are for physical Israel, the literal Israel, but not for the church. For a Covenant Theologian, some Old Testament prophecies pertain to literal Israel, and some pertain to a spiritual Israel.

10. THE CHURCH. For the Dispensational side, the Church is a parenthesis in God's program for the ages. It is a temporary thing in the flow of history. You may have heard the phrase, "The Great Parenthesis," which is used for the time when Messiah came, and the Jews shockingly rejected Him. Dispensationalists say this actually thwarted God's plan, because the original plan was for Messiah to come and set up a kingdom in Israel, but oops, the Jews rejected Him. At that point the prophetic clock stopped, and we entered into the period of the Gentiles, the Great Parenthesis. That is a period about which there was no prophecy in the Old Testament. At the end of the period of the Great Parenthesis, the end of the time of the Gentiles — as the Dispensationalists interpret that section in Romans chapter 11 — the Church is removed. That is the rapture. Then the prophetic clock starts ticking again, and God's dealings with Israel resume.

That gives you a clue as to why a pre-tribulation rapture is so important for consistent classical Dispensationalism. You have to get rid of Gentile believers in the program of God, before you can get on with the work that God is doing with literal, physical, earthly Israel. And that is why mid-trib and post-trib Dispensationalism does not work — because you're mixing God's dealings with the church and earthly Israel. A pretribulation rapture in Dispensationalist eschatology, removes the Church so that God's program for Israel can resume. You get the Church out of the way before the tribulation, and then things start happening among the Jews. By the way, this stuff is hot on the market again. Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* novels are classic Dispensationalism, where some people disappear one day, and others are left behind.

For Covenant Theologians, the Church is the culmination of God's saving purposes for the ages. The Church is God's great masterpiece. It is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ.

11. For Dispensationalism in its classic form, the main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel. The Covenant Theologian understands that the main heir to Abraham's covenant was Christ (Gal 3.16); and spiritual Israel is all who have faith in Him.
12. For Dispensationalism, there is no redemptive covenant within the Trinity. For Covenant Theology, however, there is an inter-trinitarian covenant which effects election.
13. For Dispensationalists, there was no Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden. Whereas, Covenant Theology believes that God made a conditional covenant of works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.
14. For Dispensationalism, there was no Covenant of Grace with Adam. For Covenant Theology, God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people, including Adam.
15. For Dispensationalism, Israel was rash to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai. Scofield said, "That was a big mistake. The children of Israel should have said, 'We don't want law, we want grace.'" For Covenant Theology, Israel didn't have a choice as to whether to accept the covenant arrangement at Sinai. It wasn't an option.
16. For Dispensationalism, the New Covenant of Jer. 31 is for literal Israel, and it is not fulfilled in Luke 22:20. For the Covenant Theologian, the New Covenant of Jer. 31 is the New Covenant spoken of by the Lord Jesus in Luke 22. Both are for spiritual Israel.
17. For classic Dispensationalists, God's program in history is mainly through separate Dispensations. For Covenant Theologians, God's program in history is through related and progressive covenants. You might expect Dispensationalism to stress discontinuity in redemptive history, and Covenant Theology to stress continuity; but it is not an absolute for either.
18. As we mentioned before, some Dispensationalists have argued that salvation was by works in the Old Testament. Covenant Theology argues that no man has been saved by works since the fall. Salvation is by grace alone.
19. Many Dispensationalists teach that the nature of Old Testament faith is different from the nature of New Testament faith. The nature of Old Testament and New Testament faith is different. Covenant Theologians argue that all those who have ever been saved, have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, though that has been progressively revealed with greater fullness as God unfolded His plan of redemption.
20. Classic Dispensationalists argue that the Old Testament sacrifices were not recognized by the Old Testament saints as Gospel types. They were only seen as such in retrospect. Covenant Theologians argue that Old Testament believers believed in the Gospel of the Messiah as sin-bearer, through the sacrifices, their types, and prophecies.
21. Dispensationalists argue that the Holy Spirit only indwells New Testament believers; He did not indwell Old Testament believers. And He will not indwell believers after the rapture. The Covenant Theologian argues that there is no such thing as a believer who is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

22. Dispensationalists teach that Jesus made an offer of the kingdom to literal Israel, but Israel rejected it; and so the kingdom was postponed. Covenant Theologians teach that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of heaven, which from the outset was a spiritual kingdom. Though rejected by many Jews, it was also accepted by many Jews and Gentiles alike.
23. Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament believers are not in Christ. They are not part of the body or bride of Christ. Covenant Theology side teach that believers in all ages are in Christ.
24. Dispensationalists teach that the law has been abolished for believers in the New Covenant (i.e., for believers in the church age). Some go as far as to argue that the Sermon on the Mount is not for Christians. The Sermon on the Mount is for the kingdom age, and so we can only indirectly learn from the Sermon on the Mount. Covenant Theology teaches that the law continues to have three uses in the New Covenant: to restrain sin, to lead to Christ, and to instruct Christians in godliness. Those are the three uses of the law.
25. Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament laws are not in effect unless they are repeated in the New Covenant or in the New Testament. Covenant Theologians teach that the Old Testament moral law remains in effect in the New Covenant, though the civil and ceremonial laws have been abrogated.
26. For the Dispensationalists, the millennium is the kingdom of God. For Covenant Theologians, the kingdom of God is much broader than the millennium. The church is its institutional form. Covenant Theologians are usually amillennial or postmillennial.
27. Dispensationalists believe that Old Testament animal sacrifices will be restored in the millennium. Covenant Theologians believe that the Old Testament sacrifices were fulfilled in Christ, and have been abolished forever.
28. Classic Dispensationalists teach that David will reign on the millennial throne in Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Covenant Theologians teach that Christ is reigning on the throne, and His saints will rule under Him in the new earth.

Author

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He served on the staff of The Covenant Presbyterian Church of St. Louis from 1984-1987, and supplied pulpits in churches of the Presbyterian Association of England, Church of Scotland, and Free Church of Scotland while in Britain from 1987-1990. In 1990 he was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and joined the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), Jackson, Mississippi where he was Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology, and the John R. Richardson Professor of Theology. At RTS he was responsible for teaching courses such as Systematic Theology, Ethics, Apologetics, History of Philosophy and Christian Thought, Covenant Theology, Patristics, Evangelism, and Theology of the Westminster Standards. He became the Senior Minister of First Presbyterian, Jackson in 1996.

Comparison Chart – Dispensationalism

Summarized from “Dispensationalism” by Dr. Ligon Duncan

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY	COVENANT THEOLOGY
May be Arminian or modified Calvinist. Almost never 5-point Calvinist.	Always Calvinist. Usually 5-point.
Stresses ‘literal’ interpretation of the Bible.	Accepts both literal and figurative interpretation of the Bible.
Usually does not accept the idea of the ‘Analogy of Faith.’	Almost always accepts the idea of the ‘Analogy of Faith.’
‘Israel’ always means only the literal, physical descendants of Jacob.	‘Israel’ may mean either literal, physical descendants of Jacob or the figurative, spiritual Israel, depending on context.
‘Israel of God’ in Gal. 6:16 means physical Israel alone.	‘Israel of God’ in Gal. 6:16 means spiritual Israel, parallel to Gal. 3:29, Rom. 2:28-29, 9:6, Phil. 3:3.
God has 2 peoples with 2 separate destinies: Israel (earthly) and the Church (heavenly).	God has always had only one people, the Church gradually developed.
The Church was born at Pentecost.	The Church began in the OT (Acts 7:38) and reached fulfillment in the NT
The Church was not prophesied as such in the OT but was a hidden mystery until the NT	There are many OT prophecies of the NT Church.
All OT prophecies for Israel, are for literal Israel, not the Church.	Some OT prophecies are for literal Israel, others are for spiritual Israel.
God’s main purpose in history is literal Israel.	God’s main purpose in history is Christ and secondarily the Church.
The Church is a parenthesis in God’s program for the ages.	The Church is the culmination of God’s saving purpose for the ages.
The main heir to Abraham’s covenant was Isaac and literal Israel.	The main heir to Abraham’s covenant was Christ and spiritual Israel.
No eternal Covenant of Redemption within the Trinity.	The eternal Covenant of Redemption was within the Trinity to effect election.
No Covenant of Grace concerning Adam.	God made a conditional Covenant of Works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.
No Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden of Eden.	God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people, including Adam
Israel was rash to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.	Israel was right to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.
The ‘New Covenant’ of Jer. 31:31-34 is only for literal Israel and is not the New Covenant of Luk. 22:20.	The ‘New Covenant’ of Jer. 31 is the same as in Luk. 22; both are for spiritual Israel according to Heb. 8.

God's program in history is mainly through separate dispensations.	God's program in history is mainly through related covenants.
Some have said that OT sinners were saved by works.	No man has ever been saved by works, but only by grace.
Most teach that men in the OT were saved by faith in a revelation peculiar to their Dispensation, but this did not include faith in the Messiah as their sin-bearer.	All men who have ever been saved have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, which has been progressively revealed in every age.
The OT sacrifices were not recognized as the Gospel or types of the Messiah as sin-bearer, but only seen as such in retrospect.	OT believers believed in the Gospel of Messiah as sin-bearer mainly by the sacrifices as types and prophecies.
The Holy Spirit indwells only believers in the Dispensation of Grace, not OT and not after the Rapture.	The Holy Spirit has indwelt believers in all ages, especially in the present NT era, and will not be withdrawn.
Jesus made an offer of the literal Kingdom to Israel; since Israel rejected it, it is postponed.	Jesus made only an offer of the spiritual Kingdom, which was rejected by literal Israel but has gradually been accepted by spiritual Israel.
OT believers were not 'in Christ,' nor part of the Body or Bride of Christ.	Believers in all ages are all 'in Christ' and part of the Body and Bride of Christ.
The Law has been abolished.	The Law has 3 uses: (1) to restrain sin in society, (2) to lead to Christ, and (3) to instruct Christians in godliness. The ceremonial laws have been abolished; the civil laws have been abolished except for their general equity; the moral laws continue.
OT laws are no longer in effect unless repeated in the NT	OT laws are still in effect unless abrogated in the NT
The Millennium is the Kingdom of God. Dispensationalists are always Premillennial and usually Pre-Tribulational.	The Church is the Kingdom of God. Covenanters are usually Amillennial, sometimes Premillennial or Postmillennial, rarely Pre-Tribulational.
The OT animal sacrifices will be restored in the Millennium.	The OT sacrifices were fulfilled and forever abolished in Christ.
The Millennium will fulfill the Covenant to Abraham. Israel has a future.	Christ fulfilled the Covenant to Abraham. Some Covenanters believe in a future for literal Israel, most do not.
David will sit on the Millennial throne in Jerusalem.	Christ alone sits on the throne. Saints rule under Him.

7. Major Sects (cont'd)

Quakerism

There are about 210,000 Quakers across the world. That's not very many. But they had a dramatic impact on the early history of the United States; and most Christians think of them as fellow Christians. They built Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. Yet Quakers were decried by the Puritans, especially John Owen. And during the American Revolution, they were decried by fellow Americans as "overly timid in all but complaint." Adams famously had a dispute with a Quaker named John Dickinson over the issue of whether it was wise for the American colonies to declare independence from England.

They were idealists and pietists; some were pacifists, often portrayed as fanatics. They were irritatingly outspoken, often making their voices heard at the wrong time and place.

In 1654, two harmless women were, in their belief, "moved by the Spirit" to speak in a "steeplehouse [a Quaker church], after the priest was done," in refutation of what he had said. They had also rebuked the students, who in turn treated them roughly, thrusting them into "the pool called Giles's, and causing one of them to fall into an open grave." When the poor women were brought before the magistrates, the mayor was willing to discharge them, but Owen insisted on their punishment. A full account of this was published in a [Quaker] pamphlet, entitled, "A true Testimony of the Zeal of the Oxford Professors and University Men, in persecuting the Servants of the living God." — Lond.1654. Owen had a strong prejudice against the Friends, as appears from his *Exercitationes apologeticae adversus hujus temporis Fanaticos*. Oxon, 1658.¹

What, then, do Quakers believe? What are their practices? Why were they opposed by the Puritans?

Quaker pietism is justification by works (Pelagianism); they reject imputed righteousness. Puritan John Owen, had five primary criticisms of Quakerism:

- 1) He saw its teaching about the inner light is an attack on the work and person of the Holy Spirit; the role of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, not himself.
- 2) Quakers deny that the sacraments are biblical; they forsake the gospel's emphasis on the atoning work of Christ, in order to focus on the inward light.
- 3) They deny the Trinity; "Convince any of them of the doctrine of the Trinity, and all the rest of their imaginations vanish into smoke."
- 4) They deny the necessity of Scripture and the doctrine of 'sola Scriptura' (Scripture alone). Quakers insist that Scripture is not needed once a person heeds the "inner light." The Scriptures, according to the Friends, are only "a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit," or in other words, to the inward light.
- 5) Their doctrine of the inner light is a denial of the fall of man into sin, and the consequent radical depravity of humanity. Since Adam's fall, his descendants are born in sin; and therefore they are by nature in darkness. ²

These doctrinal stances are sufficient to put them outside the Protestant faith. What, then, was their reputation in the 17th century? They were arrested by the thousands for refusing

¹ Described in a footnote in Chas. Stanford's biography of Joseph Alleine, London 1861, p. 48.

² From *A Puritan Theology*, Joel Beeke & Mark Jones (Reform. Heritage, Grand Rapids MI, 2012), pp. 429-441.

to take an oath. And their “moving of the Spirit” made them the brunt of many jokes: “A Quaker debtor replied to his creditor, ‘Tis revealed to me that I owe you nothing.”

Joseph Alleine’s wife wrote of her encounters with them in prison. Her husband had been arrested following the Great Ejection of 1662. Mrs. Alleine says that, “the Quakers would molest them with their trivial objections during the times of their preaching, praying, and singing; and would come and work in their callings nearby them, while they were at their duties.”¹ John Owen writes critically of what he believed was only a surface pietism:²

What first recommended [Quakers] was an *appearance* of mortification; which maybe some of them also really intended, though it is evident that they never understood the *nature* of it. For even in the height of their outward appearances, they came short of the sorry weeds,³ begging habits, macerated countenances, and severe looks of many monks in the Roman church, and of the dervishes among the Mohammedans. Quakers were so far from restraining or mortifying their real inclinations, that they seemed instead to excite and provoke themselves to exceed all others in their clamors, railings, evil-speaking, reproaches, calumnies, and malicious treatment of those who dissented from them. They were without the least discovery of a heart filled with kindness and benignity to mankind, or love toward any but themselves.

Quakers tend to be rabid anti-Calvinists — maybe because of their historical treatment by Calvinists, maybe because of their own animosity toward Calvinist doctrine, or maybe those early accusations of fanaticism were valid.

Seventh Day Adventists

This group is included under “sects” to illustrate that labelling others as a *cult* or a *sect*, is the result of embracing our own orthodoxy as “truth,” and anything else as “error.” There’s a tendency to lump groups together which have any similarities at all — regardless of the rest of their theology. *Adventism* was first known as *Millerism*, from which the Jehovah’s Witnesses sprang. They shared a desire to predict the second coming of Christ, based on their interpretation of various passages in the Bible. Those who tie Adventism to the Watchtower, paint them both with the same brush: they consider them both cults.

Walter Martin wrote, “It is my conviction that one cannot be a true Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Christian Scientist, etc., and be a Christian in the biblical sense of the term; but it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ despite certain *heterodox* concepts...” Those who call it a cult, “come from orthodox theological positions, such as traditional Reformed, that reject Arminian viewpoints as heretical, and thus reject Adventism on that ground.”⁴ Dr. Martin then explains its roots.

The Historical Background of Seventh-Day Adventism

Seventh-day Adventism sprang from the “Great Second Advent Awakening,” which shook the religious world just before the middle of the nineteenth century when a reemphasis on the second advent of Jesus Christ was rampant in Britain and on the continent of Europe. Before long, many of the Old-World views of prophetic interpretation crossed the Atlantic and penetrated American theological circles.

¹ Stanford, p. 215.

² John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in Works of Owen, vol. 3, Goold’s ed. 1849-53, pp. 556-557.

³ A black garment worn as a sign of mourning and sorrow.

⁴ Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 2003 ed., pp. 535-536.

Based largely upon the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, the theology of the Advent Movement was discussed in the newspapers as well as in theological journals. New Testament eschatology competed with stock market quotations for front-page space, and the “seventy weeks,” “twenty-three hundred days,” and “the abomination of desolation” (Daniel 8–9) were common subjects of conversation.

Following the chronology of Archbishop Ussher, and interpreting the 2300 days of Daniel as 2300 years, many Bible students of various denominations concluded that Christ would come back about the year 1843. Of this studious number was one William Miller, a Baptist minister and resident of Lower Hampton, New York. The Great Second Advent Awakening, which swept the United States in the 1840’s, stemmed largely from the activities of this William Miller, who confidently taught in the year 1818 that in “about” twenty-five years, i.e., 1843, Jesus Christ would come again. As Miller himself put it, “I was thus brought in 1818 at the close of my two-year study of the Scriptures to the solemn conclusion that in about twenty-five years from that time all the affairs of our present state would be wound up.”

Miller was teaching in contradiction to the Word of God (see Mat 24.36, 42, 44; 25.13; Mk 13.35; Act 1.7) Compare the two positions, Miller versus the Scriptures: God declared that no man would know the time; Miller stated that he did know the time. God said the times and seasons were within His own power; the Millerites declared that they had the prophetic key given to them. Jesus Christ stated, “No man knows the day or the hour,” but the Millerites set the exact day (October 22, 1844). And history bears a bitter record of their terrible disappointment.

The final phase of the movement closed with the “Great Disappointment of 1844,” but as the Millerites disbanded, there emerged other groups, such as the First-day Adventists... William Miller, it should be noted, was *never* a Seventh-day Adventist and stated that he had “no confidence” in the “new theories” that emerged from the shambles of the Millerite movement.

Dr. Anthony Hoekema, a vocal critic of Adventism, writes this assessment of their core theology:

I am of the conviction that Seventh-day Adventism is a cult and not an evangelical denomination. ... It is recognized with gratitude that there are certain soundly scriptural emphases in the teaching of Seventh-day Adventism. We are thankful for the Adventists’ affirmation of the infallibility of the Bible, of the Trinity, and of the full deity of Jesus Christ. We gratefully acknowledge their teachings on creation and providence, on the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, on the absolute necessity for regeneration, on sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and on Christ’s literal return. ¹

Walter Martin then observes, “It is puzzling to me, as a student of non-Christian cult systems, how any group can hold the above doctrines in their proper biblical context, which Dr. Hoekema admits the Adventists do, and still be a non-Christian cult.”

All of this is to say that there are sects in the Christian family, who are within the pale of Christianity, who have a number of doctrines or practices that are, as Dr. Martin observes,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 551; Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 389, 403.

heterodox: those specific beliefs “depart from accepted beliefs or standards.” But because they don’t concern the essentials of saving faith, and they don’t involve the sort of manipulation described in the *Culture of Cults*, they don’t rise to the level of heresy, nor do they constitute a cult. And so, we have described them as a *sect* —a dissenting or fringe group within the bounds of “Christianity.”

The following doctrinal summaries are drawn from *Questions on Doctrine*. They show the Seventh-day Adventist position in relation to historical Christianity, as well as those areas where Adventism *differs* from the orthodox Christian position. It is a useful means to affirm what we believe, as well as to learn what the Adventists believe.

I. Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

Seventh-day Adventists believe that all Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, was “given by inspiration of God,” and constitutes the very Word of God. They recognize it as the final authority on truth. They hold the Protestant position that the Bible is the sole rule of faith and practice. All theological beliefs must be judged by it. Whatever is out of harmony with its message, is to be rejected. They believe in the authority, veracity, reliability, and truth of the Holy Scriptures.

II. The Nature of Christ

Jesus Christ is very God, and He has existed with the Father from all eternity. He is the Word of God, who became incarnate through the miraculous conception and the Virgin Birth; and He lived an absolutely sinless life here on earth. In purity and holiness, he is connected with God and beloved by God. He began where the first Adam began. He willingly passed over the ground where Adam fell, and redeemed Adam’s failure.

In taking upon himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. He was subject to the infirmities and weaknesses by which man is encompassed. ... He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He “knew no sin.” He was the Lamb “without blemish and without spot.” ... We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.

In His human nature He maintained the purity of His divine character. He was unsullied by corruption, a stranger to sin. ... He was a mighty petitioner, not possessing the passions of our human, fallen natures, but having like infirmities, he was tempted in all points as we are. He was perfect, and undefiled by sin. He was without spot or blemish.

III. The Atonement

On Calvary, the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of Christ was offered for our salvation. “We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all” (Heb 10:10). Those who view this aspect of the work of Christ as a *completed* atonement, apply this term only to what Christ accomplished on the cross. They do not include in their definition the application of the *benefits* of the atonement to the individual sinner.

Seventh-day Adventists do *not* believe that Christ made only a partial or incomplete atonement on the cross. The all-sufficient atoning sacrifice was offered and completed on the cross of Calvary. This was done for **all** mankind, for “he is the propitiation ... for the sins of the **whole** world” (1Joh 2:2). But this sacrificial work will *actually* benefit human hearts only as we surrender our lives to God and experience new birth. In this experience,

Jesus our high priest applies to us the benefits of His atoning sacrifice. Our sins are forgiven, we become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and the peace of God dwells in our hearts.¹

When Adventists say that Christ is making atonement now, they mean that Christ is now making application of the benefits of the sacrificial atonement He made on the cross; that He is making it *efficacious* for us individually, according to our needs and requests.

IV. The Resurrection (*his and ours*)

Jesus Christ arose literally and bodily from the grave and ascended literally and bodily into heaven. He now serves as our advocate and mediator before the Father. There will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust. The resurrection of the just will take place at the second coming of Christ; *the resurrection of the unjust will take place a thousand years later, at the end of the millennium* (Joh 5:28-29; 1Th 4:13-18; Rev 20:5-10).

V. The Second Coming

Jesus Christ will return in a premillennial, personal, imminent second advent. This is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Adventist faith. Jesus will assuredly come the second time. His second advent will be visible, audible, and personal. There will be one visible, personal, glorious second coming of Christ.²

VI. The Plan of Salvation

The vicarious, atoning death of Jesus Christ, once for all, is all-sufficient for the redemption of a lost race. Man was created sinless, but by his subsequent fall he entered a state of alienation and depravity. SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST IS BY GRACE ALONE, and through faith in His blood. Entrance upon the new life in Christ is by REGENERATION, or the *new birth*. Man is justified by faith, and sanctified by the indwelling Christ through the Holy Spirit. In order to obtain salvation Every person must experience the new birth. This comprises an entire transformation of life and character by the recreative power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Joh 3:16; Mat 18:3 and Act 2:37-39).

The Ten Commandments point out sin, the penalty for which is death. The law cannot save the transgressor from his sin, nor impart power to keep him from sinning. In infinite love and mercy, God provides a way by which this may be done. He furnishes a substitute, who is Christ the Righteous One, to die in man's stead, making "him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2Cor 5:21). We are justified, not by obedience to the law, but by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. By accepting Christ, man is reconciled to God, justified by His blood for the sins of the past, and saved from the power of sin by His indwelling life.

By believing these things, we can assuredly know that we are born again, and fully accepted by the Lord. We have in our soul the assurance of present salvation, and do not need to be at all uncertain. We may know this so fully that we can truly "rejoice in the Lord" (Phi 4:4), and say, "You are the God of my salvation" (Psa 24:5).

Nothing we can ever do will merit the favor of God. Salvation is of grace. It is grace that "brings salvation" (Tit 2:11). It is "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be

¹ Reformed theologians agree: Christ's atonement was *sufficient* for all, but *efficient* (effective) only for the elect.

² This would seem to be at odds with *IV. The Resurrection*. If there are two judgments, surely there are two returns.

saved” (Acts 15:11). We are not saved by “works” (Rom 4:6; Eph 2:8-9 and 2Tim 1:9), even though they are good works. Nor can we be saved by “law” (Rom 8:3), nor by the “deeds” or the “works” of the law (Rom 3:20 and Gal 3:2, 5, 10). ... The law of God was never designed to save men. It is a looking glass in which, when we gaze, we see our sinfulness. That is as far as the law of God can go with a sinful man. It can reveal his sin, but it is powerless to remove it or to save him from its guilt, penalty, and power.

VII. The Spiritual Nature of Man

Adventists believe that, in general, the Scriptures teach that the soul of man represents the whole man, and not a particular part that is independent of the other component parts of man’s nature. Furthermore, they say the soul cannot exist apart from the body, for a man is a unit. *Therefore*, man rests in the tomb until the resurrection morning. Then, at the first resurrection (Rev 20:4–5), which is the resurrection of the just (Act 24:15), the righteous come forth immortalized, at the call of Christ. They then enter into life everlasting, in their eternal home in the kingdom of glory. In other words, Adventists do not accept the reformed view that the soul goes immediately to be with Christ, awaiting the resurrection of the body at the Last Day.

VIII. Punishment of the Wicked (eternal hell, or annihilation?)

Adventists believe that the expression “eternal punishment” refers to all eternity — not as a *process*, but as a *result*. It is not an endless process of punishment, “but an effectual punishment, which will be final and forever.” They reject the doctrine of eternal torment for the following reasons:

- (1) Because everlasting life is a gift of God (Rom 6:23). The wicked don’t possess this and “shall not see life” (Joh 3:36); “no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1Joh 3:15).
- (2) Because eternal torment would perpetuate and immortalize sin, suffering, and woe, and contradict divine revelation, which envisions the time when these things shall be no more (Rev 21:4).
- (3) Because it seems to provide a plague-spot in the universe of God throughout eternity; it seems to indicate that it is impossible for God himself to ever abolish it.
- (4) Because it would detract from the attribute of love as seen in the character of God, and it conceives of a wrath which is never appeased.
- (5) Because the Scriptures teach that the atoning work of Christ is to “put away sin” (Heb 9:26)—first from the individual, and ultimately from the universe. The full fruition of Christ’s sacrificial, atoning work will be seen not only in a *redeemed* people but in a *restored* heaven and earth (Eph 1:13–14) (543).

IX. The Sanctuary and the Investigative Judgment

This is a unique Adventist teaching, related to the Atonement (see III above). The question is whether the *application* of the benefits of the Atonement obtained at the cross, is a second work of Christ that is needed to make our justification effective for the elect. If the answer is *yes*, that would be error according to the reformed view. The Adventists answer, “No, it is *not* a subsequent work of Christ.”

The death of Christ on Calvary’s cross provides the only sacrifice by which man can be saved. This “one sacrifice” (Heb 10:12) or “one offering” of Christ was “forever” (verse 14),

and obtained “eternal redemption” for man (Heb 9:12). The sacrifice was completely efficacious. It provided *complete* atonement for *all* mankind.

The time of the CLEANSING OF THE SANCTUARY, per Revelation 14, is a time of INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT; first, with reference to the *dead*, and second, with reference to the *living*. This investigative judgment determines who of the myriad sleeping in the dust of the earth are worthy of a part in the first resurrection, and who of its living multitudes are worthy of translation (1Pet 4:17-18; Dan 7:9-10; Rev 14:6-7 and Luk 20:35).

This doctrine declares that accepting Christ at conversion *does not seal a person's destiny*. His life record **after** conversion is also important. A man may go back on his repentance (fall away), or by careless inattention let the very life he has espoused slip away. Nor is a man's record closed when he comes to the end of his days. He is responsible for his influence for good or evil, even after he is dead. It isn't clear how this is consistent with our certainty (our assurance) of salvation under VI. above.

They believe that blotting out names in the book of life is a work of the INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT. A thorough check of all the candidates for eternal life needs to be completed before Christ comes in the clouds of heaven. When He appears, the decisions for life and death are already made. The dead in Christ are called to life, and the living followers of Christ are translated (1Th 4:15-17).

X. The Scapegoat Teaching

Two goats were required, and used, on the Day of Atonement, because there is a twofold responsibility for sin—first, our responsibility as the perpetrator, agent, or medium; and second, Satan's responsibility as the instigator or tempter, in whose heart sin was first conceived. Now, concerning our sin, Christ died for our sins (Rom 5:8). He assumed our responsibilities, and His blood alone cleanses us from all sin. Concerning Satan's sin and his responsibility as instigator and tempter, no salvation is provided for him. He must be punished for his responsibility. There is no savior, no substitute, to bear his punishment. He must himself “atone” for his sin in causing men to transgress, in the same way that a master criminal suffers on the gallows or in the electric chair for his responsibility in the crimes that he has caused others to commit. It is in this sense that Adventists understand the words of Leviticus 16:10 concerning the scapegoat, “To make an atonement with him.” Under criminal law, the instigator, or mastermind, may be punished more severely than his agents. Satan is the responsible mastermind in the great crime of sin, and his responsibility will return upon his head. The crushing weight of his responsibility in the sins of the whole world—of the wicked as well as the righteous—must be rolled back upon him. Simple justice demands that while Christ suffers for our guilt, Satan must *also* be punished as the instigator of sin (Rev 20.10).

XI. The Sabbath and the Mark of the Beast

The Sabbath was instituted in Eden *before* sin entered – and therefore it remains on the seventh day. It was honored by God, set apart by divine appointment, and given to mankind as a perpetual memorial of a finished creation – for God himself rested from His work of creation (Gen 2:1–3 and Mk 2:27).

Adventists regard the observance of the Sabbath as a test of loyalty to Christ as Creator and Redeemer. Seventh-day Adventists do not rely on their Sabbath-keeping as a means of salvation or of winning merit before God. *We are saved by grace alone*. Hence their

Sabbath observance is an expression of love for our Creator and Redeemer. We are saved through the righteousness of Jesus Christ received as a gift of grace, and grace *alone*. But having been saved, we rejoice that the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in the Christian “who walks not after the flesh but after the spirit,” and who by the grace of God lives in harmony with the revealed will of God.

The question, then, is whether other Christians who worship on Sunday, not Saturday, have the mark of apostasy, or “the mark of the beast” (Rev 16.2), as Ellen G. White taught. Adventists make it clear that their doctrinal positions are based on the Bible and not Mrs. White’s writings. They say that all those who are sincerely trusting in Christ for salvation, and following Him according to their best light, are unquestionably saved.

XII. The Question of Unclean Foods

Adventists refrain from eating certain foods. They say it is not because the law of Moses had any binding claims on us. Rather, we stand fast in the liberty with which God has set us free. And their health teaching is not a matter of religious taboo. It is following a well-balanced health program. It is our Christian duty, they say, to preserve our bodies in the best of health for the service and glory of God. We believe that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3:16 and 2Cor 6:16), and therefore, whatever we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we “do all to the glory of God” (1Cor 10:31).

XIII. The “Remnant Church”

Some allege that Seventh-day Adventists teach that they alone constitute the finally completed “remnant church” mentioned in Revelation 12.17. Is that true?

If “remnant” means the Church Invisible, their answer is *no*. Seventh-day Adventists have never equated their church with the Church Invisible. But they do apply this Scripture to the Advent Movement and its work. They believe that Rev 12:17 points to them as a people of prophecy. It is the logical conclusion of their system of prophetic interpretation.

But they say that doesn’t imply they believe they are the only true Christians in the world, or the only ones who will be saved. They firmly believe that God has a precious remnant of earnest, sincere believers, in every church, scattered throughout the world. They are not part of the “Babylon” in John’s Revelation. The majority of these still observe Sunday. But Adventists cannot do so, and believe that God is calling for a reformation in this. But they respect and love those fellow Christians who don’t interpret God’s Word as they do.

Christ’s Human Nature

Critics say that Seventh-day Adventists believe Christ possessed a *sinful human nature* during the Incarnation – by which they mean he could only sin, being incapacitated from doing anything pleasing to God; he was as much in bondage to his flesh as we are. Adventists do not believe that, *nor do we*.

In her book, *Desire of the Ages*, Adventist ELLEN G. WHITE says, “Our Savior took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation.” White also speaks of “fallen nature.” Understandably, not having read all she has written on the subject, these critics conclude that she means that Christ possessed a sinful, carnal, or degenerate human nature. However, White’s writings clearly indicate that when she speaks of the fallen nature of Christ, she means the physical properties of

the race, which degenerated since the time of Adam, who was created perfect without the ravages of sin upon either his physical or spiritual being.

Adam did not age before the Fall, but Christ was born into the world a true man and with the curse of sin operative upon the physical properties of the human race. For over thirty years He endured the aging process. He could not have reached this point in life without organic changes taking place in His body, and were He not subject to the physical decline of the race, he would not have been a true man, “made under the law” (Gal 4:4).

White’s position has been held by many eminent scholars who have never been accused of being either heretics or non-Christians. Why, then, should she and the Adventists be condemned for holding this view? For centuries Christians have argued about the human nature of Christ. Some have believed that He could have sinned, but did not. Others, including Walter Martin, that He could *not* have sinned.¹ However, it is a theological issue not likely to be resolved by trite phrases and dogmatic pronouncements.²

NOTES:

¹ The question may be asked, “If Christ could not sin, then how was Christ tempted in every way, as we are tempted? And where was His victory over it, if there was no battle?” (Heb 4.15; 1Cor 15.56-57) This is not easily answered.

² Ibid., pp. 551-560

8. Other Gospels

Introduction

As we pointed out in chapter 6, Major Sects are aberrant beliefs within the Christian community, that contradict one or more major tenets of the traditional Protestant faith. But when it comes to Roman Catholicism, and the Greek or Russian Eastern Orthodox churches, there is a radical and irreconcilable difference with Protestantism. Yet these traditions would assert that they are “orthodox” Christians, and that Protestants have abandoned the faith of the founding fathers. The Eastern Orthodox churches say that same thing about Roman Catholics.

Are they Christians, even though their doctrines and practices radically differ from the Protestant Faith? Because of the diversity in each tradition, it’s difficult to say one way or the other, about all those who may be found in those churches – even among the clergy. But their avowed doctrines and practices have been shown to be at odds with the Bible. And that is the only standard by which we call them “sects”, and their beliefs “aberrant.”

What is our proof? All the writings of the Reformers and Puritans. And we leave it at that. What follows is a general comparison of Protestant theology to Roman Catholic theology, and then a comparison of Eastern Orthodoxy with Roman Catholicism. The result shows that Eastern Orthodoxy is not as aberrant as Roman Catholicism, but neither is it within the bounds of Protestant orthodoxy. These two traditions cannot be reconciled with the Protestant Faith, despite attempts by those who signed the document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” in 1992. They agreed to work together in pursuit of common goals; but one of those goals was missions – the proclamation of the one true Gospel.

4. The one Christ and one mission includes many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as *Evangelical*. All Christians are encompassed in the prayer, “May they all be one.” (John 17) Our present statement attends to the specific problems and opportunities in the relationship between Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants.

This chapter lays out the essential differences between these traditions, and the reformed faith, so that you may understand more clearly, (1) the right *doctrines* of saving faith, and (2) the right *practices* of saving faith. We are called to walk in the truth and in the light (1Joh 1.6-7; Eph 5.8). We must know what that gospel truth and light *are*, and what they *are not*, if we are to walk in them faithfully and confidently, and glorify God.

Roman Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church portrays itself as the one legitimate heir to New Testament Christianity, and the pope as the successor to Peter, the first bishop of Rome. Protestants reject that assertion as a twisting of Matthew 16.18. Jesus Christ is our Rock (Psa 95.1). If the church is not built on Him, it must fall down and decay (Mat 7.24-25).

In our course on *Heresies in Church History*, we looked at some primary *heresies* that were part of Roman Catholic *orthodoxy*. Let's repeat them here:

Sacerdotalism – Separating clergy and laity, rejecting the priesthood of all believers. In the Lord's Supper, the wine was reserved for priests alone, as a mark of distinction. From this separation came INDULGENCES, PRIESTLY INTERCESSION, the CONFSSIONAL BOOTH, and IMPUTATION of righteousness from a *priest*, instead of from *Christ alone*.

Imputed Sin and Free Will – Adam's fall only weakened our freedom of will. Therefore under grace we may win merit for ourselves by good works.

Repentance – For sins committed after baptism the process of forgiveness involves remorse, confession and then meritorious works. The greater the sin, the greater the need for penitence, or paying back. Whether it is enough remains a mystery till death.

Intercession of the Saints – Because the effectiveness of our penance is unknown, we may appeal to past saints for intercession on our behalf with Christ. Gregory did not originate this belief, but he did ratify it.

Holy Relics – Saints' and Martyrs' locks of hair, finger nails, toes, garments etc. were believed to have great power especially for defense against evil.

Pilgrimages – This was in aid of searching for holy relics, holy water from a fountain in Jerusalem, resulting in idolatry or an excessive reverence of earthly places. This opposes Jesus' caution in Joh 4.21-24, "The hour is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, ...but in spirit and truth."

Purgatory – A middle ground to finish sanctification after death if full penance had not been made in this life.

Eucharist – The bread and wine were "transubstantiated" or transmuted into the actual blood and flesh of Christ. The meal was seen as a sacrifice offered by the priest for the sins of men – not the same as Christ's sacrifice for all his people – but for the post-baptismal sins of its participants, or for those who had already departed and were in purgatory (it provided an early release).

On the next page is a brief listing of major Roman Catholic doctrines, compared to the orthodoxy of the reformed churches, with supporting Bible verses. These doctrines were slowly adopted over many years as various popes issued decrees. In many cases, the doctrines are not based on Scripture, but on a document of the church. Most Roman Catholics consider themselves to be Christians, and are unaware of the differences between their beliefs and the Bible.

Comparison Chart – Roman Catholicism

Biblical Teaching	Roman Catholicism
Christ, the head of the body, rules the universal church (Col 1:18).	The bishops, with the pope as their head, rule the universal Church.
God has entrusted revelation to the saints (Jude 3).	God has entrusted revelation to the bishops.
God alone is infallible (Num 23:19 ; Acts 17:11).	The pope is infallible in his teaching.
Scripture alone is the Word of God (Joh 10:35 ; 2Tim 3:16,17 ; 2Pet 1:20,21 ; Mk 7:1-13).	Scripture and Tradition together are the Word of God.
Christ alone is the Redeemer, for He alone suffered and died for sin (1Pet 1:18,19).	Mary is the co-redeemer, for she participated with Christ in the painful act of redemption.
Christ Jesus is the one mediator to whom we can entrust all our cares and petitions (1Tim 2:5 ; Joh 14:13,14 ; 1Pet 5:7).	Mary is the co-mediator, to whom we can entrust all our cares and petitions.
Justification is by faith alone (Rom 3:28).	Initial justification is by means of baptism.
God justifies ungodly sinners who believe (Rom 4:5). Good works are the result of salvation, not the cause (Eph 2:8-10).	Adults must prepare for justification through faith and good works.
Grace is a free gift (Rom 11:6).	Grace is merited by good works.
Salvation is attained by grace through faith apart from works (Eph 2:10).	Salvation is attained by cooperating with grace through faith, good works, and participation in the sacraments.
The believer can know that he has eternal life by the Word of God and the testimony of the Holy Spirit who indwells believers (1 Joh 5:13 ; Rom 8:16).	No one can know if he will attain to eternal life.
There is salvation in no one but the Lord Jesus Christ, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).	The Roman Catholic Church is necessary for salvation.
The bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, and He is bodily present in heaven (1Cor 11:23-25 ; Heb 10:12,13).	Christ’s body and blood exist wholly and entirely in every fragment of consecrated bread and wine in every Roman Catholic church around the world.
The sacrifice of the cross is finished (Joh 19:30).	The sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated in the sacrifice of the Mass.
The once-for-all sacrifice of the cross fully appeased God’s wrath against sin (Heb 10:12-18).	Each sacrifice of the Mass appeases God’s wrath against sin.
The sacrificial work of redemption was finished when Christ gave His life for us on the cross (Eph 1:7 ; Heb 1:3).	The sacrificial work of redemption is continually carried out through the sacrifice of the Mass.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Roman-Catholicism.html>

Eastern Orthodox

Roman Catholic vs. Greek Orthodox Churches

With the Great Schism in 1054 AD, came the birth of the Greek Orthodox Church (Eastern Orthodox). It was similar to Roman Catholicism in ways largely related to the teachings of the Apostles and Jesus Christ.

As these two religions were nourished, however, certain differences emerged; they are carried by their believers' faith to this day.

- The first difference is related to the **Pope**. For the Roman Catholics, the Pope is infallible; he can contradict lower ranking church leaders. On the other hand, Greek Orthodox believers consider a 'highest bishop', also known as the 'first among equals'. This bishop is not infallible and does not have supreme authority over the churches.
- Another difference between these two is related to the **language** used during church services. In Roman Catholic churches, services are held in Latin, while in Greek Orthodox churches, native languages are used.
- Another difference between the two religions is the concept of **original sin**. Even though both believe in the so-called 'original sin' that can be purified through baptism, they have varying ideas regarding its effects on humanity.
- They also differ when it comes to how it can be applied to **Mary**, the mother of Jesus Christ. For Catholics, Mary was born with no original sin (immaculate conception). According to the Greek Orthodox, Mary was just like all other humans. She was born, then died. She was selected to be Christ's mother due to her righteous life.

Aside from these major differences, there are some minor ones as well.

- One of these is related to **icons** and **statues**. Churches of the Eastern Orthodox pay homage to icons, while Roman Catholic churches have statues.
- Additionally, in the Roman Catholic Church, the **doctrines**, which are changed over time by popes, bishops, and other known instruments of the Holy Spirit, are considered to be more intellectual, bearing the enlightenment provided by the Spirit itself. This is in line with what they call 'Doctrinal Development'.
- For Eastern Orthodox, the New Testament must not be changed. The early Church and the Bible must not be altered in any way. For them, this is a way to avoid heresies and false doctrines, and abide by Jesus's warning that tells them to be cautious of human traditions connected to Christ's doctrines.
- Furthermore, Eastern Orthodox priests are allowed to **marry before** they are ordained, while in the Roman Catholic Church, priests cannot marry at all.
- Additionally, Eastern Orthodox believers do not accept the concept of **purgatory** nor the **Stations of the Cross**, as opposed to the Roman Catholics, who do.
- In relation to the sacrament of the **Holy Eucharist**, while Roman Catholics make use of an unleavened wafer, members of the Greek Orthodox Church use leavened bread.

They also have differences in the calculations of the days pertaining to **Easter** and **Christmas**.

Greek Orthodox is considered to be **mystical** and dependent on *spiritual practices*; while Roman Catholicism tends to be **legalistic**, and dependent on *intellectual speculation*.

Summary:

1. Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox believers both believe in the same God.
2. Roman Catholics deem the Pope as infallible, while Greek Orthodox believers don't.
3. Roman Catholics believe that Mary is free from original sin, while Greek Orthodox believers don't.
4. Roman Catholic priests cannot marry, while priests in the Greek Orthodox can marry before they are ordained.
5. Latin is the main language used during Roman Catholic services, while Greek Orthodox churches use native languages.
6. Roman Catholics venerate statues as much as Greek Orthodox believers venerate icons.
7. Doctrines can be changed in Roman Catholicism, as opposed to Greek Orthodox.
8. Unlike Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox believers do not accept the concepts of purgatory and Stations of the Cross.

<http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/religion-miscellaneous/differences-between-the-roman-catholic-and-greek-orthodox-churches/#ixzz584GnDgoP>

Keepers of the Authentic New Testament

<http://www.serfes.org/orthodox/scripturesinthechurch.htm>

As mentioned above, an important distinctive of Eastern Orthodox churches concerns the “authorized” version of the Bible. Here are some observations made by Father Demetrios Serfes, in answer to a series of questions:

The Church is NOT Based on the Bible. Rather, *the Bible is a product of the Church.* For the first few centuries of the Christian era, no one could have put his hands on a single volume called “The Bible.” In fact, there was no agreement regarding which “books” of Scripture were to be considered accurate and correct, or canonical.

When the Council at Laodicea specified the content of the bible as we know it, the Liturgy was pretty much well-defined and established, and the reading of these books had been “canonized” by common usage. This was 39 years after the First Ecumenical Council (325 AD) and 17 years before the second Ecumenical Council (381 AD).

It was not until the invention of the printing press in Western Europe, coinciding with the period of the Protestant Reformation of Western Christianity that “The Bible” was widely disseminated as a single volume. The Church, however, guided by the Holy Spirit, distinguished between authentic and inauthentic manuscripts, discarding or ignoring the latter, copying and handing on the former.

The Authentic Greek Text of the Bible is preserved by the Orthodox Church. When translating the New Testament into English, there are many Greek manuscripts to choose from. To ask, “What does the original Greek say?” is to beg the question, *which* Greek text? For Orthodox Christians this is a very easy question to answer. We simply use the Greek text handed down within the Orthodox Church, which has been proven consistent by 2000 years of liturgical use and which the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has given us.

To Scripture scholars, there is a huge body of ancient Greek manuscripts, known as the Byzantine text-type, which embodies the Orthodox textual tradition. These old manuscripts and lectionaries differ very little from each other, and are indeed in overwhelming agreement with each other throughout the whole New Testament. Furthermore, they are great in number and comprise the vast majority of existing Greek manuscripts.

There is another, bogus, Greek text of the Bible. Beside the Byzantine text-type family of manuscripts, there is a minor collection of Greek Scripture texts which are very old, and sometimes predate the Byzantine texts by hundreds of years. In the middle of the last century, “modern” Scripture scholars, or critics, determined that newly-“discovered” ancient texts – such as the *Codex Sinaiticus*, the *Alexandrian Codex*, the *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus* – dating from the fourth through the sixth centuries, had determining authority in establishing the original text of the Gospels and the words of the Lord.

Criticism was leveled against these critics by other scholars who maintained that the older manuscripts had been preserved through the ages precisely because they were set aside and unused since they were inferior copies – obvious from the ineptitude of the hands that wrote them and the many misspellings. They argued that it was hardly logical to prefer inferior texts from one text family, over the received Byzantine texts which were in agreement. Furthermore, they noted that the received text has even more ancient parallels – in second century Syriac and Latin versions – and is widely quoted in the Fathers.

Even papyrus fragments from the first century bear out the veracity of the Byzantine text, and refute the validity of the older texts. Amazingly – indeed, even unbelievably – most modern translators work from an “eclectic” or “critical text, which draws very heavily from the older Codices. This eclectic text is a patchwork of readings from the various manuscripts which differ from each other *and from the Byzantine text*.

Any Greek Orthodox Christian can take a copy of the Nestle-Aland critical (eclectic) text into church, and compare the Epistles with those in the *Apostolos*. They differ – often, radically – in hundreds of places, not only in words and word order, but also in tenses and meanings!

The “Protestant” Old Testament is Antithetical to Christian Truth. When Protestant Christians reviewed the canonical books of Scripture, they adopted the “Hebrew Canon” accepted by the Jews since 100 AD. The so-called *Apocrypha*, or Deutero-canonical books were a problem for Jews living after the time of Christ, since they often clearly prophesy concerning Our Lord, and indicate His divinity. Not surprisingly, these were rejected from the “canon” of books formally pronounced by a rabbinical council at Jamnia (c. 100 AD). That council stated that all canonical Scripture had to have been written in Palestine, in Hebrew (not Greek), more than 400 years prior to that time (i.e., 300 BC).

In addition, the authorized *Hebrew* “translation” was at variance with the accepted *Septuagint* version, prepared by 72 translators working in Alexandria Egypt, c. 250 BC. This is significant, because the Apostles, who were the authors of the New Testament, as well as the early Church Fathers, frequently cite passages *only found in the Septuagint*,

which has significant differences in meaning from the Hebrew. Moreover, they frequently cite passages from the “Apocryphal” books of the Old Testament.

The Holy Scriptures were preserved only by the Orthodox Church. These were studied, copied, collected, and recopied, from one group of early Christians to another, read in Church services, and used by the Church Fathers in their deliberations at local and Ecumenical councils.

CONCLUSIONS

Determining what is heresy and error *inside* the church, is governed by our orthodoxy. That applies as much to cults and sects, which are *outside* the church. And because deceit is involved, we need to be sure to define the terms clearly by repeatedly asking, “*What do you mean by that?*” Identifying cults and sects is further complicated by the fact that there are some aspects of cults, that may be found in many churches. It’s a matter of extremes.

We saw that it’s not the *methods* of cults, but the *content* of their teachings that makes them dangerous or unsound. When dealing with those who belong to what we consider to be a cult, like Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses, it’s best to approach their followers with kindness and love, and not start a debate. We don’t want to *refute* them; we want to *convert* them. If we’re serious about saving their souls, we want to present them with our personal testimony of the gospel truth – not attack their beliefs. What good is it to win the argument, but lose the soul?

And yet, we are charged by God to protect you from error, so you’re not led into a snare or deceived by Satan’s lies. To that end, we’ve provided you with lots of facts about what the major cults and sects believe, and explained some of the subtleties of their beliefs – things which may sound like the truth, but are actually poison. They are designed to lead you away from the person and work of Jesus Christ. You now have a lot of examples of what that deception might contain, and how it runs counter to the gospel truth you know. When a brother or sister in the faith – when your friends or children – are mesmerized by the Magician, you now have some tools to help them see the hook behind the bait, and to identify the snare before they’re captivated by it. Smoke and mirrors distract us from Satan’s aim, which is to harm the children of the Bride. (Rev 12.17)

Cover such conversations in prayer, and gird your loins with the full armor of God. Do it **before** you engage in spiritual battle. Have no doubt that you’re in a contest with principalities and authorities in the heavenly realms (Eph 6.12), and not with the person you’re talking to. *They’re* not the enemy. *Satan* is. He’s a powerful enemy that we must not take lightly. As Luther put it, “On earth is not his equal.” *But*, “one little word will fell him:” *the name of Jesus*.

Therefore, when you engage his agents, you’re in as much danger as they are. Christ said, “The prince of this world is coming, but he has no hold on me...” (Joh 14:30) Being in Christ, he has no hold on you either – unless you give it to him. *Don’t do that*. Your shield is your faith in Christ, and your weapon is God’s word. Learn to exercise them with the power of God’s Spirit – not in your own strength. Don’t try to use persuasive words of human wisdom (1Cor 2.4). The Gospel speaks for itself. *Let it speak*.

APPENDIX

The following articles are provided not only as warnings against the specific cults, sects, and movements that we've included here, but as examples of the sorts of things to beware of with *any* organization or movement.

As we said at the start, even groups that begin with the best of intentions, can embrace teachings or practices that run contrary to Scripture, or historical Protestantism. That's why it's so important to rely on the Bible alone as our final authority in faith and practice.

Appendix

1. Secular Tolerance as Religious Intolerance

“Tolerance” has become a virtue in today’s culture. For some, it has become an ideological passion – a virtue in and of itself. In trying to avoid bitter disputes, and violence against those whose beliefs differ (which we all detest), advocates of tolerance assert that “strongly held beliefs” are the cause of such anger and violence. Therefore, they say, we must all accept that there is no absolute truth, only a subjective interpretation of reality. In their estimation, all truths, all cultures, all religions, and all values are equally valid. Therefore, *none* is true. This is a basic tenet of advocates for globalism, nations without borders, and what is now termed “identity politics.” It has led to the legalization of same-sex marriages around the world, and self-defined gender.

This aberrant view of tolerance and truth has become an international movement. Unfortunately, it serves the purposes of those who would centralize power, and exert their own influence on others, by “controlling the message.” They use public schools, legislation, and mass media to impose their belief system on others, while claiming that all other belief systems are dangerous.

This international culture war is the great battle of our generation. If we want freedom of religion, and if we want to teach our children the Gospel truth, then we must engage the culture, and oppose this religion of tolerance, as a necessary part of proclaiming the Gospel. This is nothing new. What’s *new* is the extent of control that now exists over all means of communication, and the pervasive means of social indoctrination that are now available to a ruling elite.

Public education has become increasingly centralized and standardized. The same textbooks are used in nearly all public schools, which regiments a secular worldview among our children. The youngest are the most susceptible to such indoctrination. When these indoctrinated students grow up, they take positions of power and influence in the government, corporations, media, and schools – all of them thinking, talking, and walking in lock-step. George Orwell’s *1984* is not only possible, it is being implemented in our time.

This movement towards radical tolerance, is intolerant of anyone who believes there is a truth which *rightly* and *justifiably* divides us. They reject the notion that *truth is exclusive and divisive by nature* (if one thing is true, then whatever contradicts it cannot also be true). They call anyone who asserts this view of truth, a fascist or a bigot; and speaking such truth is called *hate-speech*. It will get you excluded from college campuses, corporate leadership, and local school boards. You have departed from the party line, and are opposing the established *secular orthodoxy*. They encourage their followers to silence, decry, and vilify those “intolerant” truth-speakers. They say verbal and physical violence against such “heretics” are not only acceptable, but required.

If they succeed in silencing opposing views by law, it will put an end to free speech and freedom of religion. They will make themselves the sole voice of authority, quickly turning tolerance into tyranny. The Bible itself is portrayed as hate-speech. And to most who have been indoctrinated through public education and mass media, all of this looks and sounds... *good!*

Our Lord Jesus Christ made truth-claims. In fact, he claimed to *be* the Truth, and that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him. Therefore, Christianity has become intolerable to those in modern culture who *themselves* desire to be the truth and the authority. Jesus said,

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Mat 10:34-38 ^{ESV})

Though the Gospel is proclaimed to all, and all may freely accept or reject it (which is the hallmark of tolerance), those who claim to be tolerant cannot tolerate it. They are blinded (2Cor 4.4).

Appendix

2. The Challenge of Ecumenism

When the politics of tolerance enter the church, we see a tendency to silence opponents, or to treat all truth-claims as equally valid. “Can’t we all just get along?” Now, there are some doctrines and practices that are matters of indifference, and may be set aside without affecting the Gospel truth. They have nothing to do with who Jesus Christ is, or what he accomplished on the cross – or they involve things about which the Bible is unclear. These things tend to concern *how* and *when* God implements His Grace. They may involve the mysteries of God, or the return of Christ, which we’re prone to conjecture about.

But there are some things that are central to the Gospel of Grace, that must not be compromised or overlooked. The FIVE SOLAS of the Reformation distinguished Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. But as the Reformation progressed, there was a splintering of Protestantism into national churches, denominations, then independent churches, out of which was the rise of cults. There was no single standard of Christianity by which to judge the cults as false gospels. They claimed to be a *church*, just a different kind of church, like all those other splintered churches. So, if you asked someone what they thought the Church teaches, they might ask, “Which Church?”

In an effort to have Protestants speak with a single voice, a movement arose in the 1940s called *Evangelicalism*. Notice the *-ism* on the end. Unfortunately, it quickly dissolved into a search for the lowest common denominator among the Christian camps – a statement of faith to which all Protestant churches might subscribe. By the 1960s, evangelicalism had compromised many of the basic tenets of Protestantism, and of the Gospel. In 1984, Francis Schaeffer wrote this:

“Here is the great evangelical disaster - the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this - namely accommodation: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. First, there has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches - truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality.... And second, there has been accommodation on the issues, with no clear stand being taken even on matters of life and death.”¹

Evangelicalism had *ecumenism* as its overarching value, and *accommodation* as its methodology.

ECUMENISM doesn’t deny the truth; nor does it say all truths are equally valid. Instead, it says that some truths are more important than others. Therefore “unimportant” truths may be set aside in order to attain Christian unity, cooperation, and better understanding among different religious denominations. Deciding which truths are optional, is where evangelicalism went astray.

The desire for ecumenism among the churches, led evangelicalism to embrace aberrant sects and even other *religions*. To do that, it denied that biblical truth is exclusive. The Bible was no longer accepted as the sole authority for faith and practice. Evangelicalism set aside the essential doctrine that eternal salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

But the term “evangelicalism” is widely disputed as to its meaning, and what it does and does not include, and which organizations come under its banner. This is an example of a group that began with the best of intentions, but over time embraced some teachings and practices that are at odds with Scripture or with historical Protestantism.

¹ *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, p. 37

Appendix

3. ECT – Evangelicals & Catholics Together

<https://www.jeremiahproject.com/deceptions/ect-evangelicals-catholics-together/>

Note: *this is not an endorsement of the Jeremiah Project.*

On March 29, 1994, leading evangelicals and Catholics signed a joint declaration, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the 3rd. Millennium.” Contained within the document, which attempts to bring ecumenical unity, are some seriously compromising agreements regarding proselytizing and doctrinal distinctions.

The 25-page document, originated by Chuck Colson and Catholic social critic Richard John Neuhaus, was signed by 40 noted evangelical and Catholic leaders including Pat Robertson, heads of the Home Mission Board and Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Bill Bright – founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Mark Noll of Wheaton University, Os Guinness, Jesse Miranda (Assemblies of God), Richard Mauw (President, Fuller Seminary), J.I. Packer, and Herbert Schlossberg.

It called for Catholic and evangelical cooperation on social and cultural issues where both traditions share common goals, one example being the fight against abortion. The accord also stressed mutual allegiance to the Apostles’ Creed, world evangelism, justification “by grace through faith because of Christ,” and encouraged “civil” discourse over doctrinal differences.

Chuck Colson has been fervently criticized for his part in this accord, and in his defense, I can only say he has a desire to see Christ’s high priestly prayer (John 17) maintained. He said in his publication, Jubilee,

“All true Christians are one in Christ. That has to be. That isn’t just a theological proposition. That is a statement of ultimate reality, because God has created us all, and those He has regenerated and called to Himself all belong to the same, one God. Disunity is a condition that God does not want; it defies what God has done. Therefore it is an affirmative duty on the part of every Christian to work for unity among true believers, **never compromising truth**, of course, but always to work *for* unity.”

The challenge, as I see it, for Mr. Colson and others working toward true Biblical unity of the church is the dilution of their own faith. While I believe there are most likely “born-again” saved people in the Catholic Church, whose faith in Christ transcends the teachings and doctrines of the Church, *there is a danger of losing sight of the fact that the Catholic Church promises salvation apart from the finished work of Christ on the cross.*

The distinction is not in the common words they use, but in the *definitions* of those same words. While Catholics and non-Catholics may agree with the Apostles’ Creed, they don’t necessarily share the meaning. While Catholics may say they agree with justification “by grace through faith because of Christ,” their actions sometimes show otherwise.

While “civil” discourse over doctrinal differences may be good, if that civility reduces the impact of world evangelism and bringing the lost to Christ (including non-saved Catholics), it does nothing to advance Christ’s prayer for unity and hinders the responsibility of believers to spread the gospel throughout the world.

Subsequent Developments

Colson and other signers later agreed to a five-point statement clarifying Protestant distinctives that were not clear in ECT. Critics claimed that the statement blurs doctrinal lines on key issues, including salvation by faith alone. John MacArthur, pastor of the independent Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, told “Christianity Today” magazine that his greatest concern was the apparent disregard for “evangelical doctrinal distinctives.”

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The new statement says cooperation between evangelicals and “evangelically committed Roman Catholics” on common concerns is no endorsement of the Roman Catholic “church system” or “doctrinal distinctives.” It affirms the Protestant understanding of salvation and legitimate evangelism efforts. Excerpts from the follow-up agreement:

- “We understand the statement that ‘we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ,’ in terms of the substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness of Christ, leading to full assurance of eternal salvation; we seek to testify in all circumstances and contexts to this, the historic Protestant understanding of salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*).
- “While we view all who profess to be Christian—Protestant and Catholic and Orthodox—with charity and hope, our confidence that anyone is truly a brother and sister in Christ depends not only on the content of his or her confession but on our perceiving signs of regeneration in his or her life.
- “Though we reject proselytizing as ECT defines it (that is, ‘sheep-stealing’ for denominational aggrandizement), we hold that evangelism and church planting are always legitimate, whatever forms of church life are present already.”

In November 1997, a group of evangelicals and Catholics led by Charles Colson and Father Richard John Neuhaus released a statement, “The Gift of Salvation,” in which they say together,

“We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone.” The statement says, *“We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that He bears us in His Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification.”*

You can’t believe two contradictory propositions at the same time! You can’t believe Christ obtained redemption through His blood, and **also** believe redemption is being accomplished through Catholic liturgy. You can’t believe salvation is by faith and “not of works,” and **at the same time** believe that good works earn salvation.

Only 35 short years ago Roman Catholicism was included among the “modern Cults,” about which Harold Lindsell warned his students in a course by that name at Fuller. Today, in spite of its false gospel of works and ritual which millions of martyrs faithfully opposed to the death, Catholicism is embraced by our most trusted evangelical leaders.

While ECT and later agreements may allow some “convergence and cooperation” between evangelicals and Catholics in many public tasks, there remain some important differences, including “the meaning of baptismal regeneration, the Eucharist ... diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences; Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the lives of salvation, etc....”

One often hears the naive expression, especially in justifying the new ecumenical acceptance of Roman Catholics as Christians, “I embrace all those as brethren who ‘love Jesus’ and ‘name the name of Christ.’” Yet many cultists profess to love Jesus and almost all “name the name of Christ.” One must discern what is meant by such words.

The gospel of God’s grace is denied by every cult and false religion, including Roman Catholicism, where infant baptism removes original sin and makes one a child of God, salvation is in the church and its sacraments, redemption is an ongoing process of perpetually offering the body and blood of Christ upon its altars, and good works merit acceptance with God.

Modern Christian Ecumenical Movements

Even a cursory review of what has taken place in the Church during the last 25 years will reveal a fierce undermining of the faith. Precisely as the Bible warns, today’s most effective enemies of Christ are those who claim to be Christians and call mankind not just to any old false religion but to a *counterfeit Christianity*. – See 2Thes 2:3-4

Appendix

4. YWAM – Youth with a Mission

<http://letusreason.org/ecumen30.htm> (2015)

<https://www.equip.org/article/the-false-god-and-gospel-of-moral-government-theology/> (2009)

Youth With a Mission (YWAM), is a nondenominational, youth-oriented missionary movement. It was founded by Loren Cunningham, an AG minister, in 1960-61, but he left the AG in 1964 after he and AG officials could not agree on policy for YWAM. Today, YWAM has 16,000 full-time volunteer workers and trains 25,000 short-term workers annually, operating in 180 countries, with over 1000 training centers.

Loren Cunningham is the founder and president of YWAM. The University of the Nations is YWAM's global university with headquarters in Hawaii. A variety of teachers come from all over the world. They teach for a week and leave. They offer modular courses without accreditation in the United States. But what does YWAM actually teach these missionary students?

Moral Government Theology

Contemporary Moral Government Theology (MGT) is principally the brainchild of the late Gordon C. Olson. During the 1930s and 1940s, Olson's studies led him to believe that God's foreknowledge is necessarily limited by human free will, and that the classical doctrines of original sin, human depravity and moral inability, the Atonement, and justification, were as wrong as the classical doctrine of absolute foreknowledge.¹

During the 1960s and 1970s, Olson and an engineering associate of his, named Harry Conn, began to teach moral government theology for various mission organizations. This was often done in recruiting, motivating, or training young people. MGT first began to spread rapidly when Olson and Conn became regular speakers for Youth With A Mission (YWAM), which has since become one of the larger youth missionary organizations in the world. Contrary to YWAM's repeated denials that MGT was an important part of its teaching, it was YWAM training that led tens of thousands of students from the late 1970s through the 1980s, and some even into the 1990s, to learn MGT – although some YWAM leaders speak against MGT today.²

Internal Personality Cults

Coupled with YWAM's ecumenism, are cultic tendencies in some leaders which have been pointed out in numerous complaints. People in different countries have seen the same things in YWAM training. Stories by ex-members of YWAM are numerous, so this is not an occasional problem nor isolated. Many have spoken up on the authoritarian leadership, where intimidation and shaming can be used, and I have seen it personally. I have come across enough people who come home

¹ That's **Socinianism**. Moral government theology traces its roots back to a 17th-century Dutch jurist named Hugo Grotius, whose ideas were refuted by John Owen. Moral government theology is based on the error that both God and man have limited sovereignty, known as the "power of contrary choice." That's **Arminianism**. For man, this power enables all men to act and make choices free from the tyranny of our sin nature. Moral government theology claims that man is born morally neutral, that he is always capable of choosing whether or not to sin, and his moral character is determined by his choices. That's **Arianism** – which is *legalism*. For God, the power of contrary choice means He cannot know His own future choices because, if He did, He would be restricted by those plans and no longer be able to make those choices freely. It also means His moral character is determined by His choices; this implies that His will and His nature are changeable. Moral government theology is the basis of the "open theism" heresy which is currently gaining popularity in evangelical circles.

² For thorough documentation that MGT has been a widespread and often central element of YWAM training, see Alan W. Gomes, *Lead Us Not into Deception: A Biblical Examination of Moral Government Theology*, 3d rev. ed. (La Mirada, CA: published by the author, 1986), Appendices A and B. At least during the 1970s and the early 1980s, MGT was the dominant theological perspective at every YWAM training base around the world that Gomes and E. Calvin Beisner, with the help of many contacts both inside and outside YWAM, were able to check. As well, many of YWAM's most respected teachers, both on and off staff, taught MGT, according to firsthand testimony by YWAM students.

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after being on the YWAM mission field who were worn out and ruined when it comes to being in ministry.

Many are concerned that so much wrong finds its resting place there. Because of its structure, there is little protection from false doctrine for the young people who join YWAM. There are regional directors but no main overseeing of each of their bases. These directors can be in error, and it will be passed on unchallenged. Because of children's naïveté, parents need to watch carefully what their children are being taught and the changes that occur in their personalities and faith.

YWAM is known for its theological diversity, and each base may vary as to what it believes. However, there are certain teachings and methods that are consistently taught throughout. They pride themselves on being creative and implementing the newest ways to reach the different cultures.

False Spiritual Warfare

The SENTINEL GROUP is led by George Otis, Jr., an apostle of Wagner & Pierce's NAR (New Apostolic Reformation). Otis promotes a latter rain message in his spiritual warfare videos, which is found in the teaching of the new prophetic and apostolic movements. In his book, "The God They Never Knew," Otis says that sin is a *sickness*. He speaks against sin being present in mankind as our *nature*. He writes, "Thus we concur that though a sinful nature is present, it originates *by choice*." So, he claims, we make ourselves sinners.

"The assertion that Jesus paid for our sins has caused immeasurable damage to the Body of Christ." (p. 93) "Jesus literally purchasing our salvation with His blood, portrays God as vindictive and bloodthirsty, and is totally incompatible with biblical forgiveness" (p.109).

The purpose of YWAM training programs is to raise up men and women who will "disciple nations and *transform cultures*." The spiritual warfare concepts of John Dawson are used to transform cities and nations, which is not about gospel preaching to disciple individuals (as the Scripture actually reads). *Transforming cultures* is mainstay of their evangelization program. It has been reported that YWAM's founder Loren Cunningham, along with Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade, developed a strategy in 1975 for influencing seven main segments or spheres of society and culture; "spheres of influence," such as education, government, arts and entertainment, media and communication, business and commerce, family, and church, which some have seen as the Seven Mountains promoted in the NAR: Family, Church, Business, Government, Education, Arts and Media. This is a *dominionist* concept that will only be seen when the Messiah rules over the earth.¹

Reconciliational Repentance

One of the main practices is *reconciliation repentance* through reconciliation walks. YWAM with those from A.D. 2000 & Beyond, organized "A Walk of Reconciliation" in order to "promote better understanding between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. ... These Reconciliation Walks operate by apologizing for the harm done to other people groups, even in former generations.

Identificational Repentance proposes that iniquity passes from generation to generation, nations' sins are corporately done, and only a corporate group confessing that nation's sins can stop the cycle of hereditary iniquity. The result - God can "heal the land" (2 Chr 7:14). This is not individual repentance by the preaching of the gospel, but repentance on behalf of those who have not repented. *Identificational Repentance* was called for in order to "purge the corporate sin of

¹ See our course on HERESIES & ERRORS, *handouts* – "The Lure of Dominionism."

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Christians during the Crusades.” The project had the intent to “result in substantial reconciliation between the major monotheistic faiths.”

We have NO examples in the Scripture of Reconciliation Walks to apologize to various religious groups for creating peace or bring an openness for the Gospel. The Statement of Faith of Youth With A Mission “affirms the Bible as the authoritative word of God.” But they have ignored and gone beyond what the Word specifically teaches on these matters. Throughout the history of YWAM, they have believed and taught numerous practices not found in Scripture.

John Dawson was formerly the International Director for Urban Ministries of YWAM (he later became president of YWAM). His Gnostic “spiritual warfare” concepts were adopted in the New Apostolic program of Peter Wagner; “strategic-level spiritual warfare movement.”

In fact, when it comes to spiritual warfare or certain other certain practices, one has a hard time distinguishing YWAM from the New Apostolic / prophetic movement as they both are involved with each other. C. Peter Wagner was on the YWAM “Board of Reference” for the 30 Days Muslim Prayer Focus and for the 30 Days Hindu Prayer Focus.

Peter Wagner, in National School of the Prophets conference on Friday May 12, 2000 11:00 am session, introduces Bickle saying, “God called Mike Bickle to turn over his church in Kansas City to Floyd McClung Jr., who you might know from YWAM (former International Executive Director), because he felt God calling him to start a prayer unit, a prayer house for the whole city of Kansas City, not just for one church, called The International House of Prayer, which for short means the Kansas City IHOP. Bickle’s books are a favorite read in YWAM.

Bickle claims that God is restoring contemplative prayer to the church, that this is a God ordained means of entering into the fullness of God. Bickle was formerly with the Kansas City Prophets who had Paul Cain as their senior prophet. They came into the Vineyard by invitation of John Wimber and brought the heretical “latter rain” teachings. Bickle who is now heading up IHOP has a teaching of Bridal Intimacy is directly linked to the dominionism that was founded in the Latter Rain, i.e., the endtime taking of the nations.

The young impressionable adults who are involved have no idea they are being introduced to some of the worst false teachers in the church today.

Universal God Theory

On the DVD *Fingerprints of God*, we see Daniel Kikawa in Japan apologizing to the Japanese, which exemplifies the YWAM practice of this non-biblical teaching that foreign gods, are actually God in a different guise, and that the values of all cultures are therefore equally valid. *Kikawa*:

“We have told you that your culture is not honorable, and not good enough for God. As an American Christian I want to ask you for forgiveness for that. And tell you that God has left so much beauty in your culture. Please, I want to do this, to say please forgive me.”

Culture is the mainstay object in YWAM, and is part of Kikawa’s “universal God theory” where he believes God made everyone’s culture through history. YWAM believes we should redeem the culture. A YWAM training manual states: “Appreciating one’s culture is appreciating the creation of God in a unique and beautiful manner. As disciples of Jesus Christ *we are also called to redeem our culture as we grow in God*” (YWAM, Island Breeze Training, “What is Discipleship Training”). Island Breeze Training is part of YWAM.

Where is this taught in the Bible? On the contrary, the Bible talks about other cultures which followed pagan false gods. What YWAM is teaching is an objective under “dominionist teaching.” Christianize the nations, which is done by demon chasing, spiritual warfare, and Christianizing the culture, i.e. Sanitize the cultures’ former god[s].

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YWAM has always been open to new ideas for mission work, *before* knowing or confirming the validity of these new ideas. Don Richardson and Daniel Kikawa's teaching of *the gods of the nations can be the true God* is just one example (Richardson is on Kikawa's Aloha ke Akua board.) In Kikawa's book "Perpetuated in Righteousness," he teaches the cult concept that Jesus is Hindu: "He is the Indian Prajapati, the Supreme God who sacrificed Himself (p.166, Perpetuated in Righteousness).

To force Jesus into other religions, which reject Him, is **not** *evangelism* – it is *inclusivism*.

YWAM used new concepts, such as Muslims who accept Christ as their Savior (calling them Messianic Muslims), who yet continue to visit the mosques, say their daily prayers, and read the Koran. This strategy has been tried in several countries and was expanded to other religions as well. Kikawa's method that has been favored in YWAM is to take the ancient gods of cultures (the supreme gods) and use them as the true god - this is the beginning of *redeeming their culture*.

Aloha ke Akua's mission statement on their website explains his methodology: This is part of him leaving: "many treasures and worthy traditions within their culture." *'The Creator God of the Bible is not a foreign God. He loves indigenous people and has been a part of their history and culture from the beginning.'*

Again, the Bible does not say this, it actually says the opposite. The Bible says he is a foreign god; but this evangelism tactic, the new methodology they employ, removes this. Kikawa's method that YWAM has accepted, is to "cease representing Jesus as the Son of the foreign God, of a foreign people... We should instead introduce Jesus **as the Son of their creator God.**"

This is reviving the ancient gods of the nations, Jesus is now the son of *all* gods, instead of being the Son of David, the God of Israel! This has been taught in Hawaii by the director of Honolulu YWAM for many years. He has said,

"When the missionaries first went into Korea, they didn't know what name to call God, they knew that if they went in using the name Jehovah or Yahweh right off the bat, these people would have thought they were talking about some ethnic Jewish tribal God that was limited to the Jewish people. So the missionaries tried to find the best name they could for God. They found one linked with a Chinese word for God. It didn't seem to go over well; and it was the one Catholic missionaries had used for years. But ask any Korean, and they'll tell you that God's name is Hananim. It was the best alternative they could find for the names in the Bible – Jehovah, Yahweh, El shaddai, or el Elyon. They found that this was a good strategy. If you talk to Korean historians about the church of Jesus Christ in Korea, it was because of that strategy that there was this incredible move of God in Korea, which has now seen tens of millions of people come to Jesus Christ."

(10/7/13 word to the world, Danny Lehmann, KLHT radio).

Lehmann approves of YWAM accepting the ancient Korean god as God, instead of introducing the Koreans to the Hebrew God of the Bible.

YWAM permits and promotes such distortions of biblical truth, and such aberrant evangelistic practices, that the organization should be considered a sect, if not altogether a cult.

Appendix

5. Bill Gothard Ministries

<http://www.battereddsheep.com/gothard.html> (2006)

A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard & the Christian Life

by Don Veinot, Joy Veinot, Ron Henzel. 21st Century Press, 2002.

This is adapted from a review done by Paul Sue of the above-mentioned book. It provides examples of the sort of teachings and practices that suggest an organization or its leadership may be a cult or sect.

It's safe to say that most Christians in North America have either heard of, or even attended, one of Bill Gothard's seminars. Because of the popularity and mass appeal of his ministry, attempting to question it or criticize it is to face the wrath and anathema of the legion of **blindly loyal fans**. They get angry and defensive when you question their beloved leader's teachings or integrity, as if he is somehow beyond reproach or accountability. To such die-hard supporters, little will sway them from their steadfast adherence to Gothardism: a case of the blind leading the blind.

Let's begin with a brief overview of the historical developments of the American religious milieu to set the background for the genesis of Gothard's *Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts* (now IBLP, *Institute in Basic Life Principles*). Gothard's early and humble efforts were to reach the troubled youth of the turbulent 1960's. Parents appreciated Gothard's teachings as an antidote to the rebellious anti-authoritarian attitudes of the hippie culture. Soon his seminar attendance swelled, and unfortunately, so did Gothard's head. In the early days of his ministry, he was already accused of "spiritual pride." At the time, he was humble enough to confess it.

However, as his ministry continued to grow, problems began to emerge. In the mid-1970's, Bill Gothard's brother (who at the time was vice-president of the ministry), was involved in **sexual misconduct** with several ministry employees. Bill chose not to deal with it. The scandal finally came into the open in 1980. Dr. Samuel Schultz, professor of OT at Wheaton College, and board member since 1965, resigned. He wrote:

In May 1980 we were shocked to learn of gross immorality that had prevailed for years among the staff under Bill's supervision as president. Bill failed to share this information with the board, nor did he seek their counsel. By the end of that year it became apparent that Bill continued his authoritarian style of leadership, dismissing those on the board as well as staff who disagreed with him. Consequently I found it necessary to resign.

Gothard himself had indecent contact with some of his female staff, and admitted in staff meetings that these actions were 'moral failures' on his part. I think the biblical term is "sin," not "moral failures". This is simply to point out Bill's style of leadership, especially his **reluctance to deal with matters in a timely and biblical fashion**, his **dogmatism** and **authoritarianism**, his **lack of integrity**, and his increasing tendency towards a **legalistic reading of the Bible**. His penchant for taking passages out of context, **proof-texting**, and his **misunderstanding of basic hermeneutical principles**, resulted in bizarre and aberrational teachings that alarmed many in the evangelical community. Dr. Ronald Allen, Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, attended a Gothard seminar in 1973, and wrote of his experience:

In this seminar, I was regularly assaulted by the misuse of the Bible, particularly of the Old Testament, on a level that I have never experienced in a public ministry before that time.

Dr. Allen tried unsuccessfully for over 20 years to meet with Bill Gothard, anywhere, at any time, at his own expense if necessary, including lunch or dinner. But Bill Gothard steadfastly refused to meet with him. This reflects Gothard's **refusal to be corrected or to be held accountable**. Instead of answering his critics' concerns, he insinuated that opponents lacked his special insight into the Scripture, claiming his novel interpretations were binding on his followers (*Gnosticism*).

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Of course, we are all guilty of misapplying Scripture from time to time. The concern is that, with Gothard, abuse of Scripture happened so frequently, and got much worse over time. The elevation of his personal opinions to the status of scriptural authority extended into *medical advice*. These included his teaching that Cabbage Patch dolls interfere with the birth of children — adoption prevents tracing family lineage to bind ancestral demons — other *mystical elements*, like needing a hedge of thorns, an umbrella of authority/protection against the sins of the father, etc.

Such harmful teachings can dramatically affect lives, families, and churches. Gothard's teachings have been the **cause** of great **personal trauma**, the cause of **family breakups**, and the source of **church divisions**. Bill wooed one pastor to supposedly begin a new ministry. After a series of **broken commitments**, and being disillusioned by the ungodly way IBLP was administered, the pastor resigned, still not receiving the balance of the money owed him. And that brings up the **lack of financial integrity** in Gothard's ministry.

One couple volunteered to help out with a log cabin program that Gothard was planning for juvenile delinquents. It turned out that Gothard's ministry had failed to comply with state building codes. Instead of acknowledging the problem, he **shifted blame, misrepresented the issues, and slandered his critics**, accusing them of rebelling and fault-finding. To ignore the authority of the laws of the land, was hypocritical for a ministry that preached obeying such authority. In the end, the couple paid additional expenses out of their own pocket to fix the problems due to IBLP's negligence. Gothard's staff then secretly removed Institute property from the premises. Subsequently, they sent a letter to the couple's attorney demanding reimbursement for lost income and expenses related to the property!

Gothard attempted to **bring his teachings into all areas of life**: use of cosmetics, clothing, beards, sleep schedules, home-schooling, courtship and marriage, and even medical advice. What emerges is the unbendable and unquestionable authority that Gothard wields over his staff and followers. The lack of accountability and resistance to correction also characterizes the ministry as a whole. In light of what and how he teaches, Gothard **did not exhibit a teachable spirit**. There is a total **lack of references to other books and scholars in his published materials**. While this may give an impression of spirituality ("we let the Bible speak for itself"), appealing to those who distrust biblical scholarship, it reflects a "**Lone Ranger**" attitude. Gothard uses the KJV only, as if *that* is the Word of God, instead of a mere translation of it.

Gothard has a simplistic approach to the Christian life. He has reduced biblical discipleship into a number of "non-optional" life principles. His **teachings are devoid of grace**. His perspective on the Bible is legalistic and moralistic, **not the cross-centered** view that Paul expounds. There is little teaching about the empowering presence of the Spirit to enable us to live godly lives.

We mentioned Gothard's inconsistent and incoherent approach to biblical interpretation. Instead of trying to understand a text in its historical, literary, and theological contexts, he searches for aphorisms — pithy one-liners. This results in all kinds of incorrect applications from OT texts. It is instructive that Gothard prefers OT law over NT grace, in which *Christ* fulfilled the law, for us.

Some say we shouldn't criticize a ministry that seems so successful, and thus has "God's blessing" on it. *First*, ministry's success is not measured according to the world's standards (i.e. numbers, finances, and glowing testimonies). *Secondly*, it is presumptuous for us to claim "God's blessing" on any ministry! Our goal is to be faithful to the Word, and accountable to one another. *Lastly*, we are called to be discerning and not to just blindly accept any teaching that comes our way. Even Paul's message was scrutinized by the Bereans - and they were commended for doing so (Acts 17:10-12). Questioning or criticizing someone's *teachings* doesn't mean we're judging *the person*.

In such an environment, if followers spot signs of spiritual abuse, hypocrisy, or oppression, they're more likely to blame *themselves* than find fault with their 'godly' leaders. Gothard's response to

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the accusations made against him, was to **counterattack**. Questioning in itself, he said, indicates a rebellious spirit — as if questioning “God’s appointed “ is tantamount to questioning God.

There are common reasons why people refuse to leave an authoritarian or abusive group, even when the evidence of being a cult or sect is overwhelming:

- they’ve invested too much (time, money, effort, emotion) in the group and are afraid to leave
- fear of ridicule from others; fear that if they were wrong about the group, then they have wasted their lives (p. 321)
- fear of catastrophic events if they were to leave the protective umbrella of the group; they’ve been brainwashed into believing that the chain of authority to God goes through their leader (the “fortress/remnant” mentality)
- the people in the group seem so nice
- they’re afraid of being shunned by family and friends, most of whom are in the group (people who join authoritarian groups tend to be isolationists)
- they’re afraid of being cut off from God

Beware legalism, authoritarianism, and blind submission to fallible leaders. **All** Christians to be discerning in an age of biblical illiteracy, theological confusion, and false substitutes for the one true gospel.

Church leaders have failed to train Christians to be discerning, by giving them the tools they need to understand the Scriptures for themselves.

Church hierarchy – top-down structures – may facilitate an unhealthy view of authority, and promote spiritual dependence on men, instead of the word of God.

Christians themselves may allow authoritarian and abusive organizations to lord it over them:

- fascination with novelty (buying into the latest bestseller or fad)
- laziness (why study the Bible when you can just follow a few “basic life principles”)
- superstition (Cabbage Patch dolls are evil; Proctor & Gamble are satanic)
- sentimentalism (more influenced by *T.V.* and *popular movements*, than Paul or John)
- moralism (“let’s clean up our nation for God!”)
- desire for a strong authority figure to give moral guidance and a sense of security in an increasingly wicked society
- attraction to a personality cult (looking for *charisma*, not *Christ*)

Until churches take seriously the task of equipping believers to study the Bible for themselves, and gain a deeper understanding and ability to discern truth from error, Christians will continue to fall prey to false teaching.