

# Introduction to Cults

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# **WHAT IS A CULT?**

Our English word “**cult**” comes from the Latin word **cultus**, which literally means “worship.” However, modern people don't have worship on their minds when they use the word “cult.” Definitions are essential when categorizing a group of people as a cult, rather than a church. Rhodes argues that there are two necessary definitions for cults: both theological and sociological. Let's begin with the first definition.

## **THEOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF A CULT**

What is the difference between a Christian denomination and a Christian cult? Let's consider several characteristics that are common within cults, but are not permitted in genuine Christian churches:

### **1. New scripture**

Cult leaders will usually claim that they have a direct pipeline to God—even if it is in contradiction to the Bible. This would include adding new Scriptures or teachings as equal or even above the authority of the Bible. Against this view, Paul writes that even the apostles themselves were subject to the doctrine of the gospel message (Galatians 1:6-9). Likewise, Jude writes of “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). As believers in the Bible, we shouldn't expect new teaching or revelation to contradict what God has revealed through the Bible. Jesus himself said, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He also said, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition” (Mark 7:8-9).

Therefore, to articulate their view on Scripture, churches will often agree to certain doctrinal statements about the Bible

### **2. Denial of core doctrine**

Core doctrines are those teachings that are central or mandatory for Christian faith. While some doctrines are debated among Christians (eg the rapture, the millennial kingdom, etc.). Other doctrines are so essential that without them, you can no longer be considered Christian (eg deity of Christ, the Trinity, the resurrection, the Second coming, etc

### **3. Denial of grace**

Whenever a “Christian” group claims that you need grace plus works, this is unbiblical. The doctrine of grace is essential to Christian faith. Regarding the legalistic teachers of his day, Paul writes, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). According to Paul, if we are adding works onto grace, this is no longer Christian teaching. It's surprising how quickly cult groups try to make good works necessary for salvation. When investigating a so-called Christian group, it is helpful to see where they stand on this important issue.

### **4. Exclusivity from Christian churches**

Cults almost always exclude themselves from legitimate Christian churches. Secular cult expert Margaret Singer writes, “Cults appear to be innovative and exclusive.” In cult groups, one will often hear the language that their group is “the only way” to God. Of course, as Christians, our problem with this claim is not that it is exclusive. Jesus was exclusive in his claims to salvation (John 14:6), and so were the apostles (1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 4:12). But these exclusive biblical claims are centered around doctrine—not an organization. This is a crucial difference. Whenever a supposed “church” says that you need to belong to their organization for salvation, this is aberrant and anti-biblical teaching.

Of course, some churches are no doubt healthier than others in their doctrine and practice. Jesus' comments make this clear when he speaks to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

However, while it is healthy for church members to have a high view of their own church, it is going too far when they say that theirs is the only true Christian church on Earth.

In addition to this, we feel it is healthy for Christian groups to spend time with those outside of their own church. While these practices aren't mandatory for Christian churches, we feel that they are good ways to get outside of our own paradigm, and these are signs of a healthy Christian group.

### **SOCIOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF A CULT**

In addition to a theological definition for a cult, we should also consider a sociological definition. While Christians can identify cults based on what they believe (ie theological definition), they can also identify them on how they behave (ie sociological definition). In her

famous work *Cults in our Midst* (2003), cult expert Margaret Thaler Singer offers several common sociological characteristics within every cult: (1) leader, (2) structure, (3) thought reform, (4) healthy dissent and disagreement, (5) excluding members from friends and family, and (6) promoting secrecy with information.

## **1. Leader**

Cult groups typically revere (and in some cases deify) their leader. Singer writes, “Priests, rabbis, ministers, democratic leaders, and leaders of genuinely altruistic movements keep the veneration of adherents focused on God, abstract principles, or the group's purpose. Cult leaders, in contrast, keep the focus of love, devotion, and allegiance on themselves.” From a Christian perspective, we should be able to discern when a group of people has moved from following God, to following an individual leader. It is biblical to follow the example of Christian leaders (Heb. 13:7), and God uses leaders to make an impact on people. However, we should follow Christian leaders only if they themselves are following God. As Paul writes, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

## **2. Structure**

Singer describes the cult structure as an inverted “T” with the leader at the top and all others at the bottom. In other words, cult leaders have all of the authority in decision-making and the direction of the organization. Furthermore, leaders of cult groups are not accountable to anyone, and they make decision by fiat. By contrast, in healthy churches, everyone is accountable—even top level leaders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:2).

## **3. Thought Control**

Paul teaches that believers should be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). But this refers to persuasion—not manipulation. Cults will try to control the thinking of their members by not giving them both sides of an issue—only their side. Singer explains, The key to successful thought reform is to keep the subjects unaware that they are being manipulated and controlled—and especially to keep them unaware that they are being moved

along a path of change that will lead them to serve interests that are to their disadvantage. The usual outcome of thought-reform processes is that a person or group gains almost limitless control over the subjects for varying periods of time.

Of course, devoted Christians should desire to hand their lives over to Christ, but never to a human authority, who will make their decisions for them. In our training curriculum for leaders, we call this the “parent-child” distinction. That is, leaders should never make decisions for a member that would be akin to a parent-child relationship. Singer writes, “A cultic relationship is one in which a person intentionally induces others to become totally or nearly totally dependent on him or her for almost all major life decisions.” Church leaders should not tell Christians what jobs they may take, how to spend their money, who to date, or other issues unrelated to running the church.” These subjects are outside of the realm of a leader's authority. Christian leaders should be careful to respect healthy boundaries.

#### **4. Healthy dissent and disagreement**

Cults prohibit members from dissenting or disagreeing with the prerogatives of the church. Singer explains, “[In a cult group] you are not allowed to question or doubt a tenet or rule or to call attention to factual information that suggests some internal contradiction within the belief system or a contradiction with what you've been told.”<sup>12</sup>

This type of control is anti-biblical. Jesus warned us to “beware of false prophets... You will know them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:15-16). Here, Jesus says that we can recognize false teachers, and we should be vocal about this. Paul tells us, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment” (1 Corinthians 14:29). He instructs us to “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). How could we “examine everything” if we aren't allowed to read dissenting materials (cf Acts 17:11; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1)?

Biblically, it is the responsibility of the church community to judge the teaching that they are hearing. The Bible was given to the members of the church, and it is expected to be interpreted by them.

### **5. Excluding members from friends and family**

Cults often try to exclude members from their family so they can foster even greater dependency upon the cult. Members' contacts with former ties are either completely cut off or strongly discouraged by both leadership and peers.

The Bible explicitly teaches that we should love and honor our parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:2). Instead of abandoning our families, the Bible teaches that we should reach our families with the love and message of Christ. Often times, there is tension between commitment to Christ and commitment to our own families. Jesus taught that we should love God more than anything else in our lives, including our own families (Matthew 10:37; 6:33). So it shouldn't surprise us if there is difficulty here. But the crucial way to identify a cult is the teaching of the group. If the group teaches to abandon one's family, this is non-biblical.

### **6. Promoting Secrecy of Information**

Cults often use a “bait-and-switch” method. Instead of being forthcoming about their beliefs and goals in the organization, they retain information and often lie about their motives. Cultists sometimes call this “heavenly deception” or “transcendental trickery.” If a church is operating honestly, why would they feel the need to hide information? This is a sure sign of suspicion.

## **HOW CAN WE FIGHT CULTS TODAY?**

Many people in our postmodern culture feel uncomfortable calling a group a cult, but we don't agree. Cults rob people of their lives and souls, and they should be battled by Christian believers. Consider counterfeit money. We might make a lot of purchases with counterfeit money in the short term, but once the fake currency is taken to the bank, it can't be deposited. Similarly, counterfeit Christianity might do some short term good in people's lives, but it will ultimately turn out to rob people of their souls. With this in mind, we believe that there are at least two central ways to combat cultic practice:

First, don't allow the cults to confuse true spirituality. The NT teaches that false teachers will arise in order to confuse the truth of Christ (**Matthew 7:15; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians**

**15:12; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 11:13-15; Galatians 1: 6-9; 5:10-12; Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:16-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,2; 1 Timothy 1:3ff.; 4:1-5; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-8; Titus 1:10-16; 3:9-11; Hebrews 13:9; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 1 John 2:18-26; 4:1-6; 2 John 1 :7-9; 3 John 1:9-10; Jude 1:4ff.; Revelation 2:2, 15, 20).**

With so many biblical passages, we should be well warned of false teaching. In fact, warnings against false teaching occur in 17 out of the 22 letters of the NT (if we include the letters to the churches in Revelation).

False teaching is surely a strategy of Satan to disguise the truth of Christ. Satan does this by disguising people with aberrant versions of Christianity. Thus, when we finally hear about the real message of Christ, we often regard it alongside the bizarre claims of cult groups. Cults often have similar features to Christian churches, and this makes the genuine truth blend in with falsehood. Therefore, if we allow cult groups to make us cynical of the truth, then they will have accomplished their mission: keeping us from the truth and love of Christ.

Second, develop an intellectual depth to your biblical study. JP Moreland argues that two of the great Christian cults were started on the heels of the great American revivals. Because many of these new Christians didn't know their Bibles very well, they were easily captured by the false teaching of these cult groups. Paul predicted that the false teachers in Ephesus would actually arise from within the church itself (Acts 20:29-30). Therefore, in the modern church, we need to learn how to interpret and read our Bibles with clarity in order to combat false teaching like this..



## **THREE MAJOR TYPES OF CULT GROUP**

In this study, we will be discussing different cultish groups. Three major groups are as follows:

**1. Jehovah's Witness 2. Mormons and 3. Seventh- Day Adventist.**

### **Jehovah's Witness**

The sect known today as the Jehovah's Witnesses started out in Pennsylvania in 1870 as a Bible class led by **Charles Taze Russell**. Russell named his group the “**Millennial Dawn Bible Study,**” and those who followed him were called “Bible students.” Charles T. Russell began writing a series of books he called The **Millennial Dawn**, which stretched to six volumes before his death and contained much of the theology Jehovah's Witnesses now hold.

**The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society** was founded in 1886 and quickly became the vehicle through which the “Millennial Dawn” movement began distributing their views. Group members were sometimes disparagingly called “**Russellites.**” After Russell's death in 1916, Judge JF Rutherford, Russell's successor, wrote the seventh and final volume of the Millennial Dawn series, The Finished Mystery, in 1917. That was also the year that the organization split. Those who followed Rutherford began calling themselves “**Jehovah's Witnesses.**”

### **What do Jehovah's Witnesses believe?**

Close scrutiny of their doctrinal position on such subjects as the deity of Christ, salvation, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and the atonement shows beyond a doubt that they do not hold to orthodox Christian positions on these subjects. Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is Michael the archangel, the highest created being. This contradicts many passages of Scripture that clearly declare Jesus to be God (**John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30**). Jehovah's Witnesses believe salvation is obtained by a combination of faith, good works, and obedience. This contradicts Scripture,

which declares salvation to be received by grace through faith (**John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5**). Jehovah's Witnesses reject the doctrine of the Trinity, believing Jesus to be a created being and the Holy Spirit to essentially be the inanimate power of God. Jehovah's Witnesses reject the concept of Christ's substitutionary atonement and instead hold to a ransom theory, that Jesus' death was a ransom payment for Adam's sin.

### **How do the Jehovah's Witnesses justify these unbiblical doctrines?**

First, they claim that the church has corrupted the Bible over the centuries; thus, they have re-translated the Bible to reflect their unique doctrines—the result is the New World Translation. The New World Translation has gone through numerous editions, as the Jehovah's Witnesses discover more and more passages of Scripture that contradict their doctrines.

The Watchtower bases its beliefs and doctrines on the original and expanded teachings of Charles Taze Russell, Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford, and their successors. The governing body of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society claims sole authority to interpret Scripture. In other words, what the governing body says concerning any scriptural passage is viewed as the last word, and independent thinking is strongly discouraged. This is in direct opposition to Paul's admonition to Timothy (and to us as well) to study to be approved by God, so that we need not be ashamed as we correctly handle the Word of God (**2 Timothy 2:15**). God's children are to be like the Berean Christians, who searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things they were being taught lined up with the Word (**Acts 17:11**).

There is probably no religious group that is more faithful than the Jehovah's Witnesses at spreading their message. Unfortunately, the message is full of distortions, deceptions, and false doctrine. May God open the eyes of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the truth of the gospel and the true teaching of God's Word.

A student, who is a Christian, asked why I referred to Jehovah's Witnesses as a cult. “After all,” he said, “they believe in Jesus.” Yes, they believe in Jesus, but is it the Jesus of the scriptures who is the Son of God, the Savior who died for the sins of the world?

A cult is a group of people that embraces a counterfeit Christian religion. All cults have a leader who claims to be uniquely called by God. Not all cults follow all of the characteristics of a cult,

but following any one of them should be a warning to us to stay away. The group requires the study of books other than the Bible. Their “revealed truths” supersede or contradict the Bible. They claim to be the only true church and do not hold back from criticizing all Christian churches. Cults use excessive control by the leaders of the group. They often claim new revelations from God and change their beliefs with new revelations. Their doctrine is nothing short of a total lie.

Charles Taze Russell was the leader of the Jehovah's Witness group that formed in 1870. The group has now grown to about 8.7 million actively involved people. The markings for this movement are cultish.

## **How does their doctrinal position line up with the central tenets of the Christian faith?**

### **1. The deity of Christ**

Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is Michael, the archangel, the highest created being. This belief contradicts many Scriptures which declare Jesus to be God.

- The JW's bible, called The New World Translation, translates John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was a god.”
- John 1:1 from the Christian Bible reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”
- John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
- John 8:58, “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I said to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

### **2. Salvation.**

Jehovah's Witnesses believe salvation comes through faith, good works, and obedience. Once again, their belief in works for salvation contradicts the heart of the Christian scriptures, which declares that salvation comes by faith in Christ's death and resurrection.

- “For God so loved the world, [a] that he gave his only Son from him, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16) • “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,” (Ephesians 2:8,9)

- He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” (Titus 3:5)

### **3. The Trinity**

The trinity in Christian doctrine believes there is one eternal being of God, indivisible and infinite. This one being of God is shared by three co-equal, co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the trinity.

- “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;” (Matthew 3:16,17)

### **4. Holy Spirit**

Jehovah's Witnesses reject God the Holy Spirit as a part of the trinity and yield to the false belief that the Holy Spirit is an inanimate power of God.

- “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

### **5. Christ's Substitutionary Atonement**

The JW's reject Christ's substitutionary atonement that Jesus Christ died as a substitute for all sinners. The Scriptures teach that all men are sinners (Romans 3:9-18, 23). The penalty for our sinfulness is death. Romans 6:23 reads, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is essential to know that Jehovah's Witnesses are not bad people. They are all misled as to the nature of the One True God. They do not understand that God is a relational God who loves all He created. We are all called by God to go into the world and disciple those who are lost. Are you prepared to share and engage with those who desperately need to know the truth of Jesus?

- “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15),
- “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of

season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

## **MORMONISM**

Joseph Smith is widely known as the founder of the Mormon Church, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Joseph Smith from an early age was thought to have certain occult powers. He was known at a young age as a seer and reportedly used a seer stone to tell him where he could find such precious metals as silver. Both he and his father were known as “treasure seekers” and used divination and magic to carry out treasure-seeking excursions. This, of course, brought him a name and a reputation. To this day, he is considered by some a saint and by others a complete charlatan.

Joseph Smith grew up during a time of spiritual revival in America known as restorationism. It was at this time, 1820, that Joseph Smith claimed to have received a marvelous vision in which God the Father and God the Son materialized and spoke to him as he was praying in the woods. The account of the vision has changed dozens of times, and it is unclear whether it was Jesus, there were two angels, one angel, or the Father and the Son that appeared to Joseph. He reportedly said that the two “characters” took a rather dim view of the Christian church and, for that matter, the world at large and announced that a restoration of Christianity was needed and that Smith had been chosen to launch the new dispensation.

Joseph Smith claimed to have special visions and an incredible opening up of heaven to him (Joseph Smith – History 1:17). But a statement signed by sixty-two residents of Palmyra, New York, who wanted others to know that they had known him, his family, his beliefs, and his occult excursions to find treasure, declared him to be “entirely destitute of moral character.” and addicted to vicious habits.” Yet Smith claimed to be God's mouthpiece, and, when he spoke, he claimed that God was speaking. This powerful position was taken seriously by many followers, and, when Smith had a vision it was to be taken seriously, no matter if it flew in the face of Christian moral standards. His new “revelation from God” on polygamy is but one example.

Popular or not, Smith's pronouncements “from God” took him quite a few years. His highly imaginative stories from him always read like science fiction, mixing and twisting biblical truth

with imagination. He was always careful to imitate biblical truth, and many times he rewrites the Bible. To many, his theology of him is a twisted mirror image of real theology. It tempts by using a smattering of the real thing, the things that people know as Bible truth.

Joseph Smith met his end at the hands of an angry mob. Having attempted to quiet the polygamy issue after the church had settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, Smith and his followers destroyed an anti-Mormon newspaper building and consequently were arrested and in a jail awaiting trial. The jail was stormed by an angry mob of two hundred people and Joseph Smith and his brother were murdered. After his untimely death of him, there was a split in the “church.” The church Smith established remains centralized today both in Missouri (the Community of Christ—RLDS) and in Utah, where many Mormons had followed their new leader, Brigham Young.

*(Editor's note: many of the references in our articles on Mormonism are Mormon publications, such as Mormon Doctrine, Articles of Faith, Doctrines of Salvation, History of the Church, Doctrine and Covenants, and so forth. Others are from the Book of Mormon itself, eg, books*

Mormons believe that there are in fact four sources of divinely inspired words, not just one:

- 1) the Bible “as far as it is translated correctly”** (8th Article of Faith). Which verses are considered incorrectly translated is not always made clear.
- 2) The Book of Mormon, which was “translated”** by Smith and published in 1830. Smith claimed it is the “most correct book” on earth and that a person can get closer to God by following its precepts “than by any other book ” (History of the Church 4:461).
- 3) Doctrine and Covenants**, containing a collection of modern revelations regarding the “Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored.”
- 4) The Pearl of Great Price**, which is considered by Mormons to “clarify” doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible (Articles of Faith, p. 182–185) and adds its own information about the earth's creation.

***Mormons believe the following about God:***

1. He has not always been the Supreme Being of the universe (Mormon Doctrine, p. 321) but attained that status through righteous living and persistent effort (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345).
2. They believe God the Father has a “body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Brigham Young taught that Adam actually was God and the father of Jesus Christ—although this teaching has been abandoned by modern Mormon leaders.

**In contrast, Christians know this about God: there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6–8). He always has existed and always will exist (Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17). He was not created but he is the Creator (Genesis 1; Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 37:16). He is perfect, and no one else is equal to Him (Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 40:25). God the Father is not a man, nor was He ever (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hosea 11:9). He is Spirit (John 4:24), and Spirit is not made of flesh and bone (Luke 24:39).**

3. Mormons believe that there are different levels or kingdoms in the afterlife: the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, the telestial kingdom, and outer darkness (Mormon Doctrine, p. 348). Where mankind will end up depends on what they believe and do in this life (2 Nephi 25:23; Articles of Faith, p.79).

**In contrast, the Bible tells us that after death we go to heaven or hell based on whether or not we had faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. To be absent from our bodies means, as believers, we are with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6–8). Unbelievers are sent to hell or the place of the dead (Luke 16:22–23). When Jesus comes the second time, we will receive resurrected, glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50–54). There will be a new heaven and new earth for believers (Revelation 21:1), and unbelievers will be thrown into an everlasting lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15). There is no second chance for redemption after death (Hebrews 9:27).**

4. Mormon leaders have taught that Jesus' incarnation was the result of a physical relationship



between God the Father and Mary (Journal of Discourses, vol. 8, p. 115; Mormon Doctrine, p. 547).

5. Mormons believe Jesus is a god, but that any human can also become a god (Doctrine and Covenants 132:20; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345–354).

6. Mormonism teaches that salvation can be earned by a combination of faith and good works (LDS Bible Dictionary, p. 697).

*Contrary to this, Christians historically have taught that no one can achieve the status of God—only He is holy (1 Samuel 2:2). We can only be made holy in God's sight through faith in Him (1 Corinthians 1:2). Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16), he is the only one ever to have lived a sinless life, and now has the highest place of honor in heaven (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus and God are one in essence, Jesus being the only man who existed before physical birth (John 1:1–8; 8:56). Jesus gave Himself to us as a sacrifice, God raised Him from the dead, and one day everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:6–11). Jesus tells us it is impossible to get to heaven by our own works and that only by faith in Him is it possible (Matthew 19:26). We all deserve eternal punishment for our sins, but God's infinite love and grace have allowed us a way out. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).*

Clearly, there is only one way to receive salvation and that is to know God and His Son, Jesus (John 17:3). Receiving salvation is not done by works but by faith (Romans 1:17; 3:28). We can receive this gift no matter who we are or what we have done (Romans 3:22). “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by whom we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Although Mormons are usually friendly, loving, and kind people, they are deceived by a false religion that distorts the nature of God, the Person of Jesus Christ, and the means of salvation.

*(Editor's note: many of the references in our articles on Mormonism are Mormon publications, such as Mormon Doctrine, Articles of Faith, Doctrines of Salvation, History of the Church,*

*Doctrine and Covenants, and so forth. Others are from the Book of Mormon itself, eg, books such as 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and Alma.)*

- Mormons consider themselves Christians, but many Christians don't recognize Mormonism as an official denomination.
- Mormons believe in the crucifixion, resurrection and divinity of Jesus Christ. Followers claim that God sent more prophets after Jesus's death. They say that the original church has been restored in modern times.
- Mormons embrace four different texts: The Christian Bible, The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price.
- According to the LDS church, Adam and Eve lived in Daviess County, Missouri after being driven from the Garden of Eden.
- There are three levels of heaven—celestial, terrestrial and telestial—in Mormonism. Only those in the celestial kingdom will live in God's presence.
- Followers don't recognize the Christian concept of the trinity (God existing in three persons). Instead, they believe the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three separate gods.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints considers Joseph Smith, who founded Mormonism, a prophet.
- Mormons follow a strict healthy lifestyle that doesn't allow them to consume alcohol, tobacco, coffee or tea.
- Family life, good deeds, respect for authority and missionary work are important values in Mormonism.
- Mormons practice clothing rituals that include wearing special undergarments that have religious significance. Known as the “temple garment,” the attire is worn by adult members who make sacred promises to God.
- Not all Mormon churches accept the label "Mormon," because the term has at times been used in a derogatory manner, and it does not allow for the variety of beliefs that exist among churches that follow the Book of Mormon and the teachings of Joseph Smith.

## Conclusion

Mormonism teaches doctrines that are in direct contradiction to the essentials of the Christian faith. it denies the true nature of God, the true nature of Christ, and the true nature of salvation. In fact, if you want to know what the Bible says are the essential doctrines, then check out the article “essential doctrines of Christianity.” that article lists out the Scriptures that tell us what the essentials of the faith are. Mormonism clearly contradicts those essentials.

The Mormons will claim they are Christians because they say they follow the Jesus of the Bible, in reality, they are following a false Christ. Jesus is not the brother of the devil as Mormonism teaches. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. Jesus did not atone for our sins in the garden of Gethsemane as Mormonism teaches.

Laurel Rohlifing, “Sharing Time: The Atonement,” Friend, Mar. 1989, p. 39

. Instead, he did it on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

Finally, we do not hate the Mormons, and we pray for their repentance, that they would stop believing in false gods. We want them to believe in the true God and the true Christ and the true gospel. But, unfortunately, Mormonism has deceived millions of people and it is most definitely not Christian. Mormonism is a non-Christian cult.

## **Seventh-Day Adventism (SDA) to Cult?**

Seventh-day Adventism is a sect of Christianity that believes, among other things, that worship services should be conducted on **the “seventh day” (the Sabbath) instead of on Sunday**. There seem to be different "degrees" of Seventh-day Adventism. Some Seventh-day Adventists believe identically to orthodox Christians, other than holding to the Saturday Sabbath. Other Adventists, however, go much further into aberrant doctrine.

Seventh-day Adventism has its roots in Adventism, a 19th-century movement that anticipated the imminent appearance (or advent) of Jesus Christ. The Adventists were also called Millerites because their group was founded by **William Miller**, a false prophet who predicted Jesus would return in either 1843 or 1844. When Miller's prediction of Christ's second coming failed to come to pass, the Millerites disbanded in dismay; this event became known as **“the Great Disappointment.”** But then a couple of Miller's followers claimed to have visions to account for the failed prophecy. Instead of coming to earth, Jesus had entered the heavenly temple—thus, Miller was right, after all, they said, except his prophecy of him had a spiritual fulfillment instead of a physical one. One of the seers who covered for Miller was **17-year-old Ellen G. Harmon**, who had her first of 2,000 purported visions in a prayer meeting shortly after Miller's disgrace. With her vision of her, Ellen soon became a beacon of hope for disillusioned Millerites. She united Adventist factions and became the spiritual guide for a new religious group.

In 1846, Ellen married **James White, an Adventist preacher**. Soon they became convinced that Sabbath-keeping was for all Christians. In 1847, Ellen G. White had another vision—this one confirming her new belief that Sabbath-keeping was to be a primary doctrine. The Adventists under Ellen G. White's influence became Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen G. White's many visions and writings—she was a prolific writer—greatly shaped the doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism. Today, most Seventh-day Adventists still consider Ellen White to be a prophetess of God, even though many of her prophecies failed to come true. In fact, Seventh-day Adventists consider Revelation 19:10 (“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”) to be a reference to Ellen G. White's writings of her.

In 1855, the Seventh-day Adventists settled in Battle Creek, Michigan, and in May 1863 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was officially incorporated. In the next five decades, Ellen G. White wrote nearly 10,000 pages of prophetic material. Included in the visions was the doctrine of “The Great Controversy,” a cosmic war being waged between Jesus and His angelic army of him and Satan and his of him. Other visions dealt with healthy eating habits, which Mrs. White called “the gospel of health” (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6, p. 327). Seventh-day Adventism places restrictions on consuming meat, or “flesh food,” as Adventists call it. “Flesh food is injurious to health, and whatever affects the body has a corresponding effect on the mind and the soul” (The Ministry of Healing, Chapter 24: “Flesh as Food,” p. 316).

Interestingly, **Kellogg's Corn Flakes** was an Adventist creation: **John Harvey Kellogg** was a Seventh-day Adventist doctor in Battle Creek who wanted to manufacture a “healthy” vegetarian alternative to “unhealthy” breakfasts containing meat. Meanwhile, Mrs. White kept having visions, and she began teaching the unorthodox doctrines of soul sleep and annihilationism (**which contradicts Matthew 25:46**).

Other problematic doctrines in Seventh-day Adventism include the teaching that Satan is the “scapegoat” and will bear believers' sins (**The Great Controversy, p. 422, 485**)—this is the opposite of what the Bible says about who bore our sins (**1 Peter 2:24**). Seventh-day Adventism also identifies Jesus as Michael the archangel (Jude 1:9, Clear Word Bible, published by Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994)—a doctrine that denies the true nature of Christ—and teaches that Jesus entered a second phase of His redemptive work on October 22, 1844, as prophesied by Hiram Edson. And, of course, the Adventist promotion of Sabbath-keeping as a primary doctrine goes against the teaching of Scripture on the matter (**see Romans 14:5**).

Seventh-Day Adventism is a diverse movement, and not all SDA groups hold to all the doctrines mentioned above. But all Seventh-Day Adventists should seriously consider the following: a recognized prophetess in their church was a teacher of aberrant doctrine, and their church has its roots in the failed prophecies of William Miller.

So, should a Christian attend a Seventh-day Adventist church? Due to the penchant of Adventists to accept extra-biblical revelation and the doctrinal issues mentioned above, we would strongly encourage believers to not get involved in Seventh-day Adventism. Yes, a person can be an

advocate of Seventh-day Adventism and still be a believer. At the same time, there are enough potential risks to warn us against joining a Seventh-day Adventist church.

In the 1840s, SDA emerged after the “**Great Disappointment.**” Baptist pastor William Miller had predicted that Jesus' second advent would occur between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. When that failed, Hiram Edson said that Jesus had returned, but not to Earth; He had returned to “the heavenly sanctuary.” Edson's teaching led to the founding of SDA by Joseph Bates and James and Ellen White.

Ellen White claimed she received 2,000 visions and dreams. She published over 40 books and 5,000 articles. Much of what she published was later shown to have been plagiarized.

To the SDA, White's writings are on par with Scripture. Even this official statement by the SDA, called the “27 Fundamental Beliefs,” states: “Her writings from her speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make it clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”

While some might construe that to be a denial that White's writings are additional Scripture, it is reasonable to conclude that her writings of her are indeed considered inspired by SDAs.

An article on SDA at the Gospel Coalition website says, “As Nathan Busenitz says, 'In spite of the ecumenical spirit that has pervaded evangelicalism over the last few decades, there are still major deficiencies within official SDA theology that ought to give evangelical Christians serious pause’”

“Kenneth R. Samples identifies five positions commonly held by Traditional Adventists:

**1. Righteousness by faith:** Righteousness by faith included both justification and sanctification. Our standing before God rests both in the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ (God's work for me and in me). Justification is for sins committed in the past only.

**2. The human nature of Christ:** Jesus Christ possessed a human nature that not only was weakened by sin, but had propensities toward sin itself. His nature of him was like that of Adam after the fall. Because of his success in overcoming sin, Jesus is primarily our example.

**3. The events of 1844:** Jesus entered into the second compartment of the heavenly sanctuary for the first time on October 22, 1844, and began an investigative judgment. This judgment is the fulfillment of the second phase of Christ's atoning work.

**4. Assurance of salvation:** Our standing before God rests in both the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ; assurance of salvation before the judgment is presumptuous. As Jesus, our example, showed us, perfect commandment keeping is possible.

**5. The authority of Ellen G. White:** The spirit of prophecy was manifested in the ministry of Ellen White as a sign of the remnant church. Her writings of her are inspired counsel from the Lord and authoritative in doctrinal matters. Those points demonstrate that:

SDA does not believe in everlasting life as a secure possession apart from perseverance in faith and good works.

SDA believes in works salvation.

SDA does not believe we can be sure of our salvation prior to death.



SDA elevates the writings of Ellen White to the status of Scripture.

SDA has an unhealthy obsession with knowing the timing of Christ's return.

Clearly, SDA teaches a false gospel and has many of the hallmarks of a cult.

## **Beliefs held by Seventh-day Adventists**

The Seventh-day Adventists share most of their beliefs with the mainstream Christian churches, but have some extra beliefs of their own:

### **1. Creation**

Seventh-day Adventists believe in a literal and historical six-day creation.

### **2. Salvation**

The Adventist doctrine of salvation is an entirely conventional one of salvation by grace through faith, although it is surrounded with some ideas that are outside the Christian mainstream.

### **3. The Remnant**

The remnant is a church that has the duty of keeping faith in Jesus and obedience to God's commandments alive in this time when many people have abandoned true faith.

This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of the second coming.

### **The Great Controversy**

The great controversy is the battle between Satan and Christ. Humanity is involved in this battle and should choose Christ.

### **The Heavenly Sanctuary**

The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our

faith. The Old Testament teaches that the Aaronic priests ministered within a sanctuary.

That sanctuary (a tabernacle or a temple) was a man-made version of the sanctuary that God created in Heaven, which is the Temple of God in Heaven; the place where God lives.

Adventists believe that Christ, as the high priest of the new covenant, ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. He said to me, 'It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be resecrated.' **(Daniel 8:14)**

We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

**(Hebrews 8:1-2)**

The heavenly sanctuary has two areas - the holy place and the most holy place. When Christ went from Earth to Heaven he went into the holy place. Adventists believe that after 2300 years (in 1844), Christ went into the most holy place to cleanse it before his second coming on Earth, and that while he is doing that, the Holy Spirit is working to cleanse God's people.

Christ works in the heavenly sanctuary as both priest and sacrifice.

His work of him in the heavenly sanctuary is a work of investigative judgment which reveals which of the dead are righteous and should be resurrected at the second coming, and which of the living are worthy of Heaven.

Those who pretended to be followers of God, but whose lives were not righteous, will be discovered by this investigation. Christ, however, cannot assure salvation for those who only profess to be Christians on the basis of how many good deeds they have performed. The heavenly records, therefore, are more than just a tool for sifting the genuine from the false. They are also the foundation for confirming the genuine believers before the angels.