

CULTS



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Marks of a Cult

Cults are unfortunately big news these days. People are desperately searching for God and there are some really dangerous frauds, con-men and lunatics out there fleecing the flock. This article deals with how to spot cults and false teachers by referring to biblical warnings about their characteristic behaviors.

Thieves and Wolves

When Jesus talks about the Good Shepherd, He talks about "the thief", and "the wolf" that comes to destroy the flock and says John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. In Matthew 7:15-16 He declares: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. And in Acts 20: 28-32 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you. The phrase "wolves in sheep's clothing" originated with the Greek storyteller - Aesop , and one of his fables where a cunning wolf used to dress up as a sheep in order to get close to the flock and kill them. It became a watchword people who were outwardly nice but whose real inner intent was to devour those around them.

In this article I shall tackle the question of what is a cult from two aspects - distortion of truths concerning God, and the characteristic behaviors of cults.

Attacks on Jesus and On God

All cults draw the person away from the truth concerning Jesus Christ; this is done in a number of ways:

- (1) By denying Jesus Christ is God.
- (2) By identifying Jesus with other bible characters or spiritual people e.g. by saying that instead He is the archangel Michael or Satan's brother conceived when the Father had sex with Mary.
- (3) By saying that Jesus was god with a small "g" and that we all can become god, as the Mormons (Latter Day Saints) believe.
- (4) By saying God is "The Force" or some sort of creating/evolving energy, not personal, does not possess the ability to love, forgive, hold judgment etc.
- (5) By saying Jesus did not come in the flesh but is instead a divine principle a Cosmic Christ or other such being.
- (6) By seeing Christ as just human nature achieving at top potential - human potential. we all have "Christ in us" and our job is to "get in contact with it" and achieve our inner potential. However, this "Christ" is not a historical person but
- (7) Jesus not historical - "Christ consciousness" is substituted for faith in a historical Jesus.

(8) Jesus not God, became the Christ when he attained Christ-consciousness at age 30.

(9) Two Jesus theory - outer historical and inner mystical Jesus.

(10) Jesus one of many ascended masters

(11) Jesus just a good man, prophet or teacher.

(12) Holy Spirit not God but a force emanating from God.

If a group teaches any of these things it is NOT historical, biblical Christianity. Such a group is not teaching the truth about God as recorded in the Scriptures and should be avoided by Christians.

The Characteristic Behaviors of Cults

Cults are remarkably alike in that they exhibit certain "odd" behaviors in order to appear more spiritual than the truth and freedom that is in Jesus Christ. In the end though these "super-spiritual behaviors" are profitless and often make a person eccentric, bizarre and spiritually proud.

(1 Timothy 4:1-7 NASB) But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, {2} by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, {3} men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. {4} For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; {5} for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. {6} In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. {7} But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness...

Our first four behaviors from the above passage are:

1. Involvement with spirits - which deceive them.
2. Forbidding marriage.
3. Dietary restrictions on normal foods.
4. Ungodly Superstition.

We see cults forbidding marriage, or arranging marriages or in the case of David Koresh claiming all women belonged to him. Most cults have some dietary restrictions and forbid certain kinds of foods, not out of common sense or health reasons but out of the desire to "be spiritual" or attain "energy" or to seem pure and exalted above the common lot of mankind. Thus people substitute food for character and handling for holiness. They think "I am good person because I do not eat pork" rather than "I am a good person because I love God and my neighbor." This leads to a false sense of spirituality that is so common in cults.

In his letter to the Colossian church Paul writes:

(Colossians 2:16-23 NASB) Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- {17} things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. {18} Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on

visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, {19} and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. {20} If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, {21} "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" {22} (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? {23} These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Here Paul lists a few more behaviors associated with the false spirituality of cults:

5. Legalism - do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.
6. False humility.
7. Harsh treatment of the body -especially for so called "purification".
8. Worship of angels (and other such beings).
9. People going into great detail about what they have seen in the spiritual realm.
10. Enormous spiritual pride.
11. Experience takes over, Christ is no longer central and no longer a source of life.
12. Emphasis on religious festivals, new moons and Sabbath days.
13. Their regulations appear to be wise but are in fact ineffective for restraining fleshly indulgence.
14. Self-made religion - worship made up by man rather than truly revealed from God and inspired by God

The apostle Peter also had a few words to say about this self-deluded form of worship: (2 Peter 2:18-19 NASB) For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, {19} promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

Thus we see that cults are frequently:

15. Boastful
16. Promise false "freedom" - many cults do this.
17. Appeal to the lusts of the flesh - a wise sales tactic
18. Slaves to sin and corruption

The final words must be with Jude the brother of Jesus who writes:

(Jude 1:8-16 NASB) Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. {9} But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." {10} But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. {11} Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. {12} These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; {13} wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. {14} And about these

also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, {15} to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." {16} These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

19. Boastful to the point of rejecting all authority, even that of angels.
20. Pollute their own bodies
21. Without shame
22. React abusively against whatever they do not understand.
23. Live by instinct and run headfirst into evil.

Some cults involve the promotion of the grossest immorality under the banner of "love-ins" and David Koresh's gross immorality was so he could "experience the depths of sin" for the world. These 23 points cover most of the behaviors commonly associated with cults in Scripture. Any one of them should be a "red flag" to a Christian. When three or more of them are present, the group is almost certainly wandering away from the will of God.

How Cults Convert People

Many people now agree that cults frequently psychologically manipulate their membership to ensure conformity and control. Steve Hassan's excellent book "Combating Cult Mind-Control" is a great starting point. The following points come from numerous sources. Not all of these are found in every cult but enough of them are found in most cults to make them very frightening places that inflict deep psychological damage on their membership.

1. Submission to Leadership - Leaders tend to be absolute, prophets of God, God Himself, specially anointed apostle, or just a strong, controlling, manipulative person who demands submission even if changes or conflicts occur in ideology or behavior.
2. Polarized World View - The group is all that is good; everything outside is bad.
3. Feeling Over Thought - Emotions, intuitions, mystical insights are promoted as more important than rational conclusions.
4. Manipulation of Feelings - Techniques designed to stimulate emotions, usually employing group dynamics to influence responses.
5. Denigration of Critical Thinking - Can go so far as to characterize any independent thought as selfish, and rational use of intellect as evil.
6. Salvation or Fulfillment can only be realized in the group.
7. End Justifies the Means - Any action or behavior is justifiable as long as it furthers the group's goals. The group (leader) becomes absolute truth and is above all man-made laws.
8. Group Over Individual - The group's concerns supersede an individual's goals, needs, aspirations, and concerns. Conformity is the key.
9. Warnings of severe or supernatural sanctions for defection or even criticism of the cult - This can go so far as to apply to negative or critical thought about the group or its leaders.
10. Severing of Ties with Past, Family, Friends, Goals, and Interests - Especially if they are negative towards or impede the goals of the group.
11. Barratrous Abuse - Some cults use "cult lawyers" to sue ex-cult members and critics often using fabricated evidence and causing financial stress by repeated trivial law suits. The cult's aim is not so much to win the lawsuit (though they often do) as to harass and intimidate their critics into silence.

Cult Conversion Techniques

Conversion into a cult is usually the result of two interacting dynamics. The first is the personal vulnerability of the potential recruit. This vulnerability may be enhanced by, but not limited to, transitional situations such as divorce, abuse, job or career change, moving away from home or leaving college, an illness, or death of a loved one.

The second dynamic are the tactics used to convert, indoctrinate (brainwash) and hold the members. Some groups attempt a radical and rapid conversion over an intensive week-end or week, such as The Forum or Scientology. Others have a more subtle approach which may take weeks or months, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. The following are techniques of unethical thought reform and mind control:

The importance of cognitive dissonance

Any person will act so as to reduce conflict between their thoughts, their emotions and their behavior. When these things are at odds with each other a person experiences 'dissonance' (the opposite of harmony). Cognitive dissonance is when what a person knows is right is at odds with either what they feel is right or what they are doing. Cults quickly move to control four key areas of a person's life during the conversion process -

Behavior - by intense involvement in activity and isolation from others. Behaviour is closely prescribed and carefully supervised.

Emotions - a new recruit is often "love bombed" and greeted enthusiastically and told they are very special. They are made to feel that everyone in the cult loves them and that "nothing could be wrong with such a loving group of people". However, this does not last. Emotions are sent on a rollercoaster and the only hope of emotional stability is total conformity and pleasing the cult leadership.

Thought - indoctrination, extended "teaching sessions", memorisation of cult dogma, "auditing sessions" where inner secrets are revealed and thought processes exposed - all are a part of attempts at thought control so that the thought life of the convert is taken up entirely with the group.

Information - isolation from peers, TV, radio, newspapers, (often labelled as "Satanic") and careful control of associations ensures that little or no material critical of the cult reaches the new recruit during the conversion process.

The combination of all these factors make it very likely that if the new recruit stays in the cult for any length of time they will come to believe in it utterly. We are not as objective as we like to think and when all these powerful forces combine even very intelligent people will be "converted" but not by God.

A Quick List of Nasty Practices

1. A Focus on felt needs, defects, with exaggerated promises of fulfillment.
2. Rigid Control of Time and Activities - Often physically and emotionally draining activities leaving little time for reflection, questioning and privacy.
3. Information Control - Cutting off or denigrating outside sources of information especially if it is critical of the group. This can also include misrepresentation and information overload.
4. Language Manipulation - Ascribing new "inside" meanings in ordinary words or the use of an exclusive vocabulary subtly moving a person to want to become an insider.

5. Discouraging Critical, Rational Thought and Questions - For instance, comments like, "Satan is the cause of all doubt; he wants to keep you from the Truth", or, "one must move beyond the cognitive left-brain and get in touch with one's higher self, his right-brain, intuitive self for true knowledge".
6. Instruction and Repetition in Trance Induction Techniques - These include progressive relaxation, chanting, hypnosis, meditation, trance states, guided imagery or visualization, deep breathing exercises, all of which make a person highly suggestible, often unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality, and can cause psychopathology such as relaxation induced anxiety.
7. Confession Sessions - Promoting full disclosure of all secret sins, thoughts, temptations which can become a powerful tool to manipulate, blackmail, and emotionally bond people to the leader or group. It is actually a depersonalization or stripping of the inner self , a forced submission to the group.
8. Guilt, Fear - Weapons used to maintain group loyalty, suppress questions and defections.
9. Control of Sexuality and Intimacy within the Cult - This may extend to marriage decisions (Moonies), sexual relations, promiscuity (Children of God), group sex (New Age Therapy groups), child sex, adultery, and polygamy (Branch-Davidians).
10. Excessive Financial Obligations - More and more money is needed to attain higher degrees of spirituality (Scientology), or complete submission to God requires one to give up everything to the group or leader (pp. 26-29).

The more points of ideology and conversion methodology that are in place, and the degree of intensity of their application is proportionate to the effect and damage of mind control. These factors tend to make normal evangelism, or even dialogue, much more difficult. Therefore, some people have looked to deprogrammers or exit-counselors to help break the mental head-locks of their loved ones in an attempt to rescue them from the cult.

Can an Orthodox Christian Group Get Like This?

Yes they can!!! Just because the theology is straight down the line does not mean the behavior will be. I was in a mission society that in a particular place under the influence of a leader with a great deal of charisma and authority became "cultic" for a year or so. That has been corrected but much damage was done.

Some Christian groups start off great -like the "children of God" and end up utterly wrong and evil. The church needs strong leaders, but they must always be accountable to Scripture and to other wise Christians.

We must allow people to be critical, to think for themselves and to understand scripture freely apart from the dictates of any leader. We must allow a great deal of emotional and intellectual freedom and renounce our desires to control others if we are to have healthy churches where people rejoice in the Truth.

Cults and Crazy Thinking

This is a simplified and "Christianised" model of three dimensions to ethics and mental health. The **Love-Hate** dimension is probably better labeled **Unconditional Love vs Paranoid Thinking**. The key test is the question "How do they treat their enemies?". A paranoid group goes from suspicion to suspicion, living in fear and employing "guilt by association" to mark people as those to beware of. A paranoid cult group is preoccupied with its fortress mentality, its thought life is disproportionately centered around warding off evil rather than pursuing good. While guarding against sin and compromise is an essential part of the Christian life being paranoid is not! Jesus was sinless - but He still loved His enemies and prayed for those who persecuted Him.

The second dimension is that of **Wisdom versus Foolishness**. More technical names might be "**embracing Truth wherever it can be found**" versus "**idiosyncratic reality**". Cults tend to create "worlds of their own", bizarre conspiracy theories, quaint world-views, mystical and other-worldly perspectives. While the man or woman of faith will sometimes see life very differently they do not disregard the insights of others. The fool says "my system is all I need". There is no searching for objective Truth, rather there is a loud and clamant glorying in one's own "wisdom". Such people are among those that bombard the Internet with posts all in caps and full of strange sounding jargon that sets you on edge when you read it. Their claims are often untestable as they may be set in the future or in dreams or visions that the reader has no way of verifying. When their claims can be checked out, they generally prove to be inaccurate. Cults limit the outside information available to recruits and enmesh them in this alternate reality. It is often the quest for objective truth that causes some recruits to question and finally to leave the cult.

The third dimension is that of **mercy versus cruelty**. These terms are quite accurate in my view. All you need to do to be cruel is to think exclusively of yourself. People in cults don't "hate" their families in general - they just do not see them, care for them, or meet their needs. Cults develop a very inward form of thinking where the recruit spends most of their time either working for the cult or pondering their own deficiencies. This phenomenal self-absorption can cause parents to neglect their children and several have died as a result of parents refusing basic medical treatment on religious grounds. Jesus never asked anyone to throw away their medicines! Cults neglect the needs of the outer world and their social action programs are practically non-existent. Where they do exist they tend to focus on cult members or be thinly disguised recruiting mechanisms. The "mainline churches" are extensively involved on caring for those outside of their membership and many of the best hospitals, schools and rehabilitation programs are run by them. Though cults are large (about a quarter of the size of the mainline churches) their contribution in these areas is small indeed.

Let's consider someone like Jim Jones or David Koresh. Both had well-defined "enemies" which they guarded against and were pre-occupied with. Both had their own reality that they followed in total disregard of objective Truth and biblical wisdom. Both were cruel men who isolated others from their families and eventually caused the death of their followers. Hitler again had his own strange truth, a concoction of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and others. Hitler was cruel and expected cruelty of others, and Hitler was pathologically paranoid and filled with hate. Whether it be Hitler, Stalin, or cult leaders this model points out their pathology quite clearly. On the other hand we have Jesus - full of mercy, wisdom and love. He is at the exact opposite corner of the diagram from Hitler or David Koresh. A cult like the Branch Davidians may be

Christian in name but in nature it can be shown to the polar opposite of Christianity when this model is used.

Understanding Those Caught in Cults

A good Christian couple find that their young and intelligent son or daughter no longer listens to them and is caught up in a group that raises deep concerns within them. They are "no longer themselves" and when the wrong theology or poor morals of the group are pointed out the parents are called "agents of Satan". Finally their son or daughter leaves them and joins the group full-time. Their child seems lost to them forever.

This article will look at what happens to people who join cults and why they join. It will also help you develop some coping strategies. A cult is a mind-control trap. The person entering the cult did not want to enter a trap. They are deceived people. They thought they were entering something wonderful but they in fact have entered something very destructive. Their emotions, thoughts, access to information and behavior are often tightly controlled through isolation from others, a very prescriptive lifestyle, indoctrination and emotional game-playing of a very sinister kind. A very full analysis of cult mind control techniques can be found in Steve Hassan's invaluable book "Combating Cult Mind Control".

If you have relative or friend in a destructive cult you may be wondering about how they have changed and how they are "no longer themselves". This is because the indoctrination process used by cults produces a second personality, one that Steve Hassan calls John-cult, the real personality "John-John" is still there but is suppressed. Accessing the real self is the key to helping your loved one leave a cult. Here are some pointers to help you understand what you are dealing with.

1. The person you know is "still there" but a second "cult personality" has been superimposed over the top of it. The "cult personality" has an enormous need to conform in order to receive approval from the group and/or its leader.
2. "Cult personalities" are cheap imitations and look plastic. For instance the whole group may use the same clichés, wear similar clothes, smile the same way, laugh the same way and have the same intensity about them. Normal churches are a mixture of sad and happy, grumpy and kind, extrovert and introvert and so on. Cults destroy this natural diversity. They replace it with an artificial and manageable persona.
3. The superimposed cult personality is not very robust outside the group. The "real personality" has enormous energy and wants to reassert itself. It's like keeping a spring down - you need force. This is why cults manipulate people. If the person can be lovingly re-united with old friends and family, sometimes for as little as 3 days then the real self gets "fresh air" and will resurface. This however, may not be easy to manage. Also deep and fearful suggestions are planted so that the person may truly believe that their life is of little or no value outside of the group.
4. The super-imposed personality has its foundations in unmet emotional needs for affection and approval and frequently has a very limited critical or reflective ability outside of cult dogma. Direct confrontations based on reason, therefore, probably will not work if the "cult personality" is the one you are dealing with.

5. The 'real self' who is your best ally has been badly hurt by the coercive and freedom denying manipulations of the cult. The "real self" is thus almost hyper-sensitive to manipulation. But it will probably be deeply gratified by true and genuine love.

6. While the cult personality largely falls apart after they come out of the group it still will have extraordinary power in some areas. People frequently feel they are "outside God's will" or "unsaved" or "no longer part of God's plan for this generation". They often feel they have made a huge compromise by leaving the cult and that life from now on is essentially trivial and meaningless. This is because the cult has planted these suggestions deep in their subconscious as part of the indoctrination process (cult good-world evil) and these suggestions may take years to be erased. However, if the techniques of mind-control are carefully explained and good counseling offered then people will often see these thoughts and feelings for what they are . This will enable them to resist going back to the cult as a source of meaning.

Now you understand this you may be asking "How can I get him/her out?". That question takes a lot longer to answer than I can ethically put in this article. The process has so many variables that you really need to sit down with someone specializing in cults, or a good minister and work things through. There are four absolutely fundamental things I ask people to do.

A. Create a welcoming environment. Do not be angry or confrontational. People change in response to love not anger. In the story about the wind and the sun trying to get a man's coat off the harder the wind blew the tighter the man held his coat whereas the sun just smiled and shone and soon the coat was gone. The cult personality is like that coat. Your anger will cause it to be wrapped around the person even more tightly and you will probably just be labeled as "agents of the Devil". Your love will cause the cult personality to have little or no reason to be there. The emotional needs they long for will have been met and the coat will drop away. Step two is part of creating a welcoming atmosphere - get help with your family dynamics.

B. I advise families with a member in a cult to try at least three sessions of family therapy with a good counselor if they can afford it. This accomplishes a few purposes. Firstly, it helps the family face any conflicts they may have with the member in the cult. Secondly it helps them understand how groups work and gives them a basic knowledge of group dynamics. Thirdly, if successful, it makes home a more comfortable place for the person to return to. It will generally do no harm and potentially can do much good.

C. Get as much information about the group, how it operates, its indoctrination techniques, its leadership etc that you can. Talk to former members. This is important as it will give you a good idea how cult members are programmed to react and which approaches will work best. Do some research in Scripture about the beliefs the cult holds so that you can show from the Word of God that their beliefs are erroneous and that the group takes verses out of context etc. To help someone leave a cult both the head and the heart need to be spoken to.

D. Form a prayer group of say six people to specifically pray for your loved one. Try to meet each week and pray for the following: (a) That the deception may be broken and that the person may spot the inconsistencies, lies and selfishness that exist at the core of every cult. That the spiritual forces of darkness may be bound and broken. That the manipulations may lose their power over the person.(b) That the person may remember the good times and good conditions they had at home. (c) That there may arise a deep dissatisfaction with the cult and a great desire to leave the group. (d) That they may be given the courage to act and that God would sovereignly arrange some good opportunities for them to leave. (E) For physical, emotional and spiritual protection for you as you tackle this very real evil. God can reach people through their

spirit and even through dreams when we cannot communicate with them. He can arrange circumstances when all we feel is frustration. He is LORD!

The next thing you have to do is some very specific research. Here are 20 questions that will help you understand yourself, why your loved one entered the cult, the group itself and help anyone helping you to get them out. The answers to these questions can serve as a basis for further action and prayer.

Emotions and Relationships

1. What stresses was he/she going through in the two years prior to joining the cult? Death of a loved one, divorce, relocations, work stresses, illness, legal involvements etc
2. Was he /she generally a happy and successful person? Were loneliness or depression a problem?
3. Could the person often be easily duped in "tricks" at home? Were they very gullible and trusting? How strong are the critical faculties of the real self? Are the critical faculties unevenly distributed e.g. are they very logical and sharp intellectually but emotionally vulnerable and prone to forming unwise relationships?
4. Did they seek to escape reality through day-dreaming, drug-use, fantasies, alcohol, promiscuity or other behaviors? If so - why was reality so bad for them? Were they bullied or abused in any way?
5. Were they happy at home? Were they constantly feuding with siblings or parents? Did they express love for their family? Were they sure/unsure of the families love for them?

The Cult Itself

6. Did they enter the cult suddenly or gradually over a period of time? How long did it take?
7. What were the first changes you noticed?
8. How did things develop from there? Write out a detailed sequence of events as you perceived them. Compare this with the sequence of events as seen by other friends and family. Collate as much information as you can.
9. Which of the following mind control techniques do you sense/know are being used?
 - a. Control of access to information - restricted access to media such as TV, newspapers.
 - b. Control over behavior - very prescriptive lifestyle. Happiness through performance.
 - c. Emotional manipulation - approval followed by disapproval etc. Fear and guilt.
 - d. Indoctrination with a rigid belief structure. False teaching.
 - e. Painting life outside the group as evil, fearful or demonic.
 - f. Abuse of authority. Person cannot do even small things without asking a superior.
 - g. Chanting, hyper-ventilation, hypnosis, long work hours, starvation, sleep deprivation.
 - h. Is the person being humiliated, used sexually, or abased in other ways?
 - i. Are finances being tightly controlled? Is the person expected to "give all"?
 - j Elitism - is the person being made to feel part of an elite group?
 - k. Group will over individual will - who has the final say?

- l. Modeling the leader - do they all look the same?
- m. Strict control of marriage, sexual practices, diet & food.
- n. Experiences (rather than character qualities) made the basis of status in the group. Visions, dreams etc the basis of spiritual authority and prestige. This makes it incumbent on the member to "have" these experiences.

10. Would the real person (John-John) object to how he is now being treated? If so, what would annoy him most? This may become an important part of your communication strategy.

Getting Them Back Home

11. Are you looking after yourself properly and strengthening your resource base? Or are you "thrashing around" depleting yourself worrying about "the cult"? Are other family members being neglected? Don't make this crisis your whole life. He/she is going to be attracted out of the cult by your happy, functional and welcoming lifestyle. Work hard on being happy, healthy and functional. Prepare yourself and your family for constructive action-taking.

12. Can the police, tax department or other authorities be called in to investigate this cult? Would the media be interested? Start with your LOCAL papers not "60 minutes". A local paper will be more likely to pick it up and to devote real time and energy to the story. Local papers are read by bigger concerns and wire networks. It is surprising what can happen when you start small and let God take it from there.

13. How much can you afford, realistically, to spend on your campaign and how will it best be used? Draw up a "cult campaign budget" and ask God to provide the funds. Include counseling fees, travel, books, phone calls, accommodation in some cases - whatever you think will be needed.

14. Do you know any former members of the cult? Would they be willing to help you get your loved one out? What do they have to say about conditions inside the cult?

15. What sort of family occasion would be most likely to attract them to visit home again? Is there any honest way they could be away from the cult for three days while they were spoken to by counselors, family, friends and a good pastor?

The Follow-Up Period (up to two years)

16. Have you developed basic skills in listening? Many places offer six week courses in listening skills or basic counseling. The ability to reflectively listen so that you can quickly build rapport and understanding is a critical skill. During the first few hours of contact they are frequently very nervous about what you might have to say about the cult. You need to be able to skillfully build communication bridges.

17. Do you notice the person in the cult reacting strangely when certain trigger words are used or music is played? For instance a former "Moonie" may think of the cults founder the Rev Moon every time the word "moon" is used in normal contexts, or modern pop songs or beach sound used during indoctrination may have powerful impulses and associations. The way out is to help the person build new associations that are more constructive or pleasant. Teach them to think of something pleasant when they hear the music or trigger word. Most good psychologists will be able to help them get over this cult flashback experience known as "floating".

18. Do they have nightmares? Guilt? Emotional problems? Counseling may be called for if this is the case.

19. Can they read as well as before? What is their concentration and memory like? This may take some time to be restored.

20. Is there a group that can help them make it back into the real world and a more normal life? A mainstream church? A support group for ex-cult members? Good friends?

As you can see there is a fair bit of work involved. It's now up to you. Seek out all the help you can. Read the other articles in Asian Internet Bible Institute on cults - you can find them indexed on the "Articles On Cults" index page.

When a Church Goes Wrong

My name is Brent. Last year my wife and I started attending a new church. It has been a difficult transition for us. The people in our new church are so different from the people we have come to know so well for the last six years in our old church. At times we have wondered if these people love God at all, or are they just acting.

You see, we learned how a Christian should be from our old church. We learned how a Christian should be:

1. Completely submitted to the authority appointed over them.
2. Doing all things in agreement with the church, for unity's sake.
3. Attending church whenever the doors are open, unless given permission to be absent by the pastor.
4. Having no fellowship with darkness. (Unsaved loved ones) Unless preaching the Word to them.
5. Willing to forsake all for the vision of the ministry. (Jobs, family, personal choice, etc.)
6. Willing to back up the leadership, especially the pastor. (Cover up faults and flaws)
7. Faith in the leadership is a must. (they are Gods ministers, called to lead us)
8. Ready to proclaim the gospel in and out of season. (The gospel is an offense, so it's not our fault if people are offended!)

Our new church has some different ideas. They talk to each other sometimes without even pointing out each other's faults. I guess they don't know that we are supposed to rebuke and exhort each other. Sometimes after service people even ask the pastor to clarify what he said during his message. Maybe they are rebellious or just lack the faith to trust in Gods messenger. One of the strangest things is that the pastor admits he makes mistakes sometimes. I've always been taught that Gods messenger is to be trusted in all things.

My wife sometimes seems like she wants to go back to our old church. Whenever we talk with old friends they say we should too. It doesn't seem like we see our old friends any more. Our old pastor told us if we left our old church we would be cursed. I think our old friends are afraid they might be cursed as well. Maybe they just think of us as backsliders. That's how we always thought of others who left. Of course there are a few close friends who still say hi when we see them at the store.

We call or exchange email with a couple sometimes. Of course they are just being rebellious, disobedient to their pastor. We always talk of doing "something" together. We never do. We try to keep our distance. We wouldn't want them to get in trouble with their pastor. We can't say much without seeming to be causing division or being troublemakers. We wouldn't want to invite anyone to visit our new church. That would be stealing sheep.

We have been spending more time with our families lately. My mom has even asked me to pray for her. No matter how much I preached to her before she never asked me to pray for her. She always told me to stop trying to push my religion on her. This is a strange change.

My dad is a Christian. Even though I've been taught that He attends a "dry bones" denomination, I can tell he loves us. He always seems to be there for us to talk to lately. I don't know why I never really took him too seriously before. I'm glad he's there for us now.

Our new pastor isn't as forceful as our old pastor. But he seems to have a real concern for us. He seems to smile and nod a lot as he listens to what we have to say. I like that. We're used to a stern gaze and a harsh rebuke. I always ridiculed those "lovey dovey churches". Isn't the Word of God a double edged Sword? A consuming Fire?

I think our new church will do just fine.

Classic Cults

Classic Cults are cults of long standing that deny the basics of the faith and which can be easily traced back to early heresies of the Church. Such cults include the Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, Mormons etc. This article is in two parts firstly Rod Cook's article "Who Said Jesus Is God" that looks at the deity of Jesus which is contested by many cults. Then an article from the Christian Research Institute on the Mormon "high Christology" and why it just doesn't fit with Scripture. Between these two articles you should be able to refute most arguments by traditional cults.

Past One: WHO SAID JESUS IS GOD?

(Originally prepared by Rod Cook, Townsville)

APOSTLE JOHN...

In the beginning was the Word; the Word was with God; the Word was God"
(John 1:1)

APOSTLE THOMAS...

"Thomas answered Him, (Jesus) 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'" (John 20:28)

1 John 5:20

Rom. 9:5

Heb. 1:8-9

John 1:18

APOSTLE PETER...

"Simeon Peter, servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been given a faith like ours in the justifying power of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:" (2 Peter 1:1 The New American Bible)

APOSTLE PAUL...

"awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us." (Titus 2:13)

JEREMIAH...

"See, the days are coming--it is Yahweh who speaks--when I will raise a virtuous Branch for David, who will reign as true King and be wise, practicing honesty and integrity in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel dwell in confidence. And this is the name he will be called: Yahweh-our- integrity." (Jer. 23:5 The Jerusalem Bible)

ISAIAH...

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

Peace." (Isa. 9:6)

JUSTIN MARTYR (110-165AD)...

"For Christ is King, and Priest, and God and Lord, and angel and man, and captain, and stone, and a son born and first made subject to suffering, then returning to heaven, and again coming with glory, and He is preached as having the everlasting kingdom; so I prove from all the Scriptures." (DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO Chapter 34)

IRENÆUS (120-202AD)...

"In order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess to Him,'" (IRENÆUS AGAINST HERESIES P. 330)

IGNATIUS (30-107AD)...

"For our God Jesus Christ, was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb by Mary, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost." (EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS Chapter 18)

"Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, first did and the taught, as Luke testifies, 'whose praise is in the Gospel through all the Churches.'" (Chapter 15)

"ABSTAIN FROM THE POISON OF HERETICS...They are ashamed of His cross; they deny His passion; and they do not believe His resurrection. They introduce God as being unknown; they suppose Christ to be unbegotten, and as to the Spirit, they do not admit that He exists. Some of them say that the Son is a mere man, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are but the same person, and that the creation is the work of God, not by Christ, but by some other strange power. Be on your guard, therefore, against such persons, that ye admit not of a snare for your own souls. And act so that your life shall be without offense to all men, lest ye become as 'a snare upon a watch-tower, and as a net which is spread out.'" (EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS Chapter 6&7)

Part Two - The Mormon High Christology

and a Christian Research paper by Gordon R Lewis.

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"Are Mormons Christians?" by Stephen E. Robinson (Bookcraft, 1991) (a book review from the Christian Research Journal, Fall 1992, page 33, by Gordon R. Lewis). The Editor-in-Chief of the Christian Research Journal is Elliot Miller.

A Summary Critique

Although a god allegedly told Joseph Smith in his first vision that he should join none of the Christian denominations, Stephen Robinson now wants "to show that the arguments used to exclude Latter-day Saints from the 'Christian' world are flawed" (p. vii). Robinson, chairman of the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, has taught religion at Presbyterian and Methodist-related schools. He may be the only Latter-day Saint (LDS) to earn

tenure in a non-LDS college. Among a host of recent efforts by Mormons to gain acceptance for their church as Christian, Robinson's book is surely the most important and sophisticated.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Crucial to Robinson's argument is his understanding of the nature of Christianity and what a Christian is. In chapter 1 he proposes a generic definition of Christianity that fits all who are usually classed as "Christian": Protestants -- from liberal to evangelical, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox. With such an inclusive definition, Robinson succeeds in showing that LDS may be regarded Christian.

But this approach to legitimizing Mormonism can only succeed if a Christian does not need to believe in one personal, transcendent God, one incarnate Christ, the completed atonement, and one gospel of grace through faith alone. For mere descriptive purposes, historians may classify every group that calls itself Christian as Christian. Jesus Christ, however, did not do this. Jesus taught that "the way" was narrow and that we should not assume that all who call Jesus "Lord" are really Christians (Matt.5:20; 7:13-23).

In defining the one true church, would Robinson be satisfied with a generic definition that includes all churches calling themselves Christian? Not if the LDS is the one true church -- with baptism accompanied with the laying on of hands by those in authority in the "restored priesthood." Robinson's generic pattern of defining terms like "church" or "Christian" is too broad to be useful for purposes of normative Christian doctrine.

Robinson's generic definition of a Christian from Webster's Third New International Dictionary is: "One who believes or professes or is assumed to believe in Jesus Christ and the truth as taught by him; an adherent of Christianity; one who has accepted the Christian religious and moral principles of life; one who has faith in and has pledged allegiance to God thought of as revealed in Christ; one whose life is conformed to the doctrines of Christ" (1). The second most common meaning of "Christian" in Robinson's book is: "A member of a church or group professing Christian doctrine or belief" (1).

Having raised the issue of the nature of Christianity, Robinson fails to interact with the relevant literature. For example, he does not deal with evangelical literature such as J. Gresham Machen's *What Is Christianity?* (Eerdmans, 1950), *What Is Faith?* (Eerdmans, 1948), and *Christianity and Liberalism* (Eerdmans, 1946). Nor does he consider Samuel J. Craig's *Christianity Rightly So Called* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957). These writers show why liberalism -- as represented in Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (Harper & Brothers, 1957), Adolph Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* (Harper & Brothers, 1957), and William Hamilton's *The New Essence of Christianity* (Association Press, 1961) -- cannot be regarded as genuine Christianity.

Robinson's chapter on "The Exclusion by Name-Calling" correctly shows the difficulty of defining a "cult" on psychological and sociological criteria, and points to the need for objective doctrinal criteria for determining what a cult is. He wrongly concludes, however, that "there are simply no objective criteria for distinguishing religions from 'cults'" (29). Such a sweeping generalization is uncharacteristic of responsible scholarship and fails to take account of my proposal in a 1966 publication, *Confronting the Cults*: "The term cult here designates a religious group which claims authorization by Christ and the Bible but neglects or distorts the gospel, the central message of the Savior and the Scriptures."^[1] In this same book, I list seven questions drawn from explicit New Testament statements -- all dealing with what one must believe to be saved -- that enable

one to distinguish authentic Christian faith from inauthentic faiths. Several of these questions are concerned with the person of Christ.

An Issue that “Really Matters” – One’s View of Christ

After attempting to answer many charges and alleged misrepresentations, Robinson thinks he gets down to the core issue in his "Conclusions" (111-14): "Surely by now it will have dawned on the discerning reader that of all the various arguments against Latter-day Saints being considered Christians, not one -- not a single one -- claims that Latter-day Saints don't acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. Consider the enormous implications of this fact. The only issue that really matters is the only issue that is carefully avoided!" (111)

The error in this sweeping statement becomes evident upon examining what Mormons mean when they say "Jesus is Lord." In 1966 my chapter on "The Bible, the Christian and Latter-day Saints" asked: "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ (the anointed Messiah) who was God (John 1:1) and became flesh (1:14)?"[2] All of these beliefs are entailed in the biblical affirmation that Jesus is Lord. Mormons holding official church doctrine do not exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

For Robinson, the fact that Mormons have an exalted view of Christ is sufficient for classifying them as Christians.

In fact, to use the terminology of biblical scholars, the Latter-day Saints have a very high Christology. That is, for the Latter-day Saints Jesus is not merely a good man, a teacher, or even a prophet; he is not merely a human being; he is not the son of Joseph and Mary who later became God's Son. In common with other Bible-oriented Christians, the Latter-day Saints believe that Jesus is the pre-existent Word of the Father who became the literal, physical, genetic Son of God. As the pre-existent Word he was the agent of the Father in the creation of all things. As the glorified Son he is the agent of the Father in the salvation of all humanity. We believe he was conceived of a virgin by the power of the Holy Ghost. We believe he led a sinless life, that he was morally and ethically perfect, that he healed the sick and raised the dead, that he walked on the water and multiplied the loaves and the fishes. We believe he set a perfect example for human beings to imitate and that humans have an obligation to follow his example in all things. Most important of all, we believe that he suffered and died on the cross as a volunteer sacrifice for humanity in order to bring about an atonement through the shedding of his blood. We believe that he was physically resurrected and that he ascended into the heavens, from which he will come at the end of this world to establish his kingdom upon the earth and eventually to judge both the living and the dead (113).

This "high Christology" may be impressive, but it is more like that of the ancient Arians who believed there was a time when the Word was not (a view similar to that of contemporary Jehovah's Witnesses), than the view espoused by historic Christianity. Robinson's Jesus remains a creature with a beginning in time and not the Creator who is worthy of worship as God. Jesus' oneness with God the Father and His distinctness from the Father are best accounted for by the Trinitarian teaching of oneness in essence and distinctness in persons. It is true, as Robinson points out, that affirmations of Jesus' oneness in purpose with God (as opposed to oneness in nature with God) account for some passages on the functional unity of Father and Son (e.g., John 17:11). But this is not the case with other passages, such as John 1:1: "The Word was with God and the Word was God." Only if Jesus was of the same nature and being as God could the same divine attributes apply. Jesus said, "No one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27), and "No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (v. 30).

When Jesus explains that "I and the Father are one" in this context, He teaches more than mere agreement of purpose; He makes clear their oneness in sovereign power. The later creeds did not "invent" the concepts of Christ's divine and human natures, as Robinson argues (86); they found the Bible teaching His human and divine characteristics and integrated that teaching coherently.

If the Christ of a Mormon is not the one true God (John 17:3) who is eternal (John 1:1; Heb. 1:8-12; 5:6; 13:8), the object of worship is a creature and worship itself becomes idolatry. If the Christ of a Mormon is a spirit-child who has been procreated – like countless other spirit children by the flesh-and-bone Father and one of his wives – then he is not uniquely of the same nature as the Father, as the Bible and the historic church teach. If the LDS Christ is our finite brother, not different in kind from us, he is therefore not uniquely Immanuel – "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). The Christ of the Bible is the unique God-man -- incarnate, crucified, and risen once-for-all. Only if He was infinite God in human flesh could His blood have infinite value for the justification of all the billions of people who have ever sinned.

Is a "High" Christology Sufficient?

The first Christians believed that Jesus was Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). They also believed in one God, and Jesus was included in the Godhead. A "high Christology" is not necessarily enough to fit the evidence that He was far more than the first or highest being in creation; He is the God-man.

Robinson claims that the Nicene Creed "not only differs from, but adds new concepts to, the biblical view" (73). He admits that the Bible teaches oneness and threeness, but maintains that "the scriptures themselves do not offer any explanation of how the threeness and the oneness are related" (72).

Here Robinson fails to appreciate the careful reasoning behind the creed. Certainly the Scriptures do not explain how God can be three persons in one being, but they do lead us to the conclusion that He is. Both the Old and New Testaments deny polytheism (the belief in many gods) and teach that there is one God. Thus the Bible's teaching forbids a view of the threeness that leads to more than one God. However, a word study of "one" in Scripture shows that in any one family, nation, or church, we may expect a plurality of persons. Husband and wife are "one" flesh; Israel is "one" nation with many people; the church is "one" body with many personal members. The Bible's teaching on God's oneness excludes polytheism but includes the possibility of diversity in unity. The Bible also makes clear that within the unity of the Godhead are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It further teaches that each of the three is God and each thinks, feels, wills, and relates in personal ways.[3]

Three types of passages need to be accounted for in one's Christology. (1) Some passages speak of the limitations Christ assumed when He took on a human nature in order to purchase man's redemption. From this human perspective Christ could say, "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). (2) Some passages refer to His eternal personal distinctness from the Father as Son (John 3:16), Word (John 1:1), radiance (Heb. 1:3), and so forth. (3) Some passages speak of His essential oneness with the Father in being and attributes (John 10:30). The conclusion that the three persons are one in both purpose and in essence best accounts for the Bible's teaching that there is one divine Being and that the fellowshipping Father, Son, and Spirit subsist as distinguishable personal consciousnesses within that oneness.

A Trinitarian statement such as we have in the Nicene Creed on oneness of being and

threeness of co-equal persons is not something foreign to Scripture, but derived from it. The Trinitarian doctrine most coherently integrates the varied lines of teaching about God's oneness and threeness in Scripture. We ask Mormons to believe the doctrine on _scriptural authority alone._ As B. B. Warfield said, "The formulation of the doctrine, although not made in Scripture, is not opposed to Scripture. When we assemble the...[separate parts of Scripture] into their organic unity, we are not passing from Scripture, but entering more thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture." [4] These "separate parts" of Scripture include the New Testament teaching that (1) there is but one God; (2) the personality of Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh at Bethlehem, and the personality of the Holy Spirit is God manifested at Pentecost. "What we mean by the doctrine of the Trinity is nothing but the formulation in exact language of the conception of God presupposed in the religion of the incarnate Son and outpoured Spirit."

The doctrine that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures -- one truly divine and the other truly human -- is a more coherent account of the biblical data than a Mormon formulation in which he is not essentially God. Similarly, the doctrine that God is one in essence and subsists in three persons -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- is more coherent with the teaching on the oneness and threeness of God than a committee of two separate flesh-and-bone gods. (Although Mormons argue that to be persons the first two needed flesh-and-bone bodies, the third "personage" in this triumvirate, the Holy Ghost, is not flesh and bone.)

New concepts are added to Scripture, not by the creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon, but by Joseph Smith's doctrine of a flesh-and-bone God (see, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Robinson's uncritical acceptance of Joseph Smith's interpretation of an alleged vision makes it impossible for him to accept the Trinitarian teaching of the Bible. Is one young man's interpretation of a poorly substantiated vision a reliable base on which to challenge the Bible's consistent refutation of polytheism and support of one God who is spirit? If God's eternal being includes a flesh-and-bone body, Solomon could not have said, "The heaven, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). The eternal Word added a human nature (made up of a human body and spirit) for purposes of incarnation and redemption in space and time; but remained truly divine. The body is the material aspect of His human nature, the divine nature forever remains spirit. So long as Mormons contradict Scripture by affirming more than one God they are not worshiping the one God whom Christians worship and serve.

It is not anti-Mormon argumentation that excludes the LDS from the Christian faith, but their own disbelief of the biblical teaching about Jesus. The Scriptures grant the right to be called "Christian" to all who receive Jesus (John 1:12) as the eternal (not just pre-existent) Word who was continuously and personally with the one true God (v. 1) and was the one true God (v. 1) who became flesh (v. 14).

Do Christians Affirm Deification?

Generally speaking, Robinson accurately says, "No two denominations, and few individual Christians agree on every detail of Christian doctrine" (57). Given the freedom people have in Christ, diversity of beliefs often appears in details. Robinson correctly reports that Christians "do not agree among themselves upon exactly what the standard is" (58) -- that is, there is no single, complete standard of Christian doctrine for all Christian denominations. Admittedly, "the doctrine of Christians is not always true" (59). Christians affirm inerrancy only of Scripture.

In chapters 6 and 8, Robinson would appear to be arguing that since Christians can believe in doctrines that are neither biblical nor true, Mormons can be Christians! But it is not believing

false, unbiblical doctrines that gives a person the right to be called a redeemed child of God.

Whether true or false, Robinson says, Christians have believed in self-deification. So Mormons should not be excluded from Christianity because of this doctrine. Robinson writes:

Early Christian saints and theologians, later Greek Orthodoxy, modern Protestant evangelists, and even C. S. Lewis have all professed their belief in a doctrine of deification. The scriptures themselves talk of many "gods" and use the term god in a limited sense for beings other than the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost... If scripture can use the term gods for non-ultimate beings; if the early Church could, if Christ himself could, then Latter-day Saints cannot conceivably be accused of being outside the Christian tradition for using the same term in the same way (70).

For Robinson's argument to hold, Mormons must use the term "gods" in the same way as the Christians mentioned. But this is not the case. Robinson states the assumption behind the Mormon concept: "It is indisputable that Latter-day Saints believe... the famous couplet of Lorenzo Snow, fifth President of the LDS church, [which] states: 'As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be'" (60). Mormon apostle and theologian Bruce R. McConkie explains the frame of reference for this affirmation -- the Mormon doctrine of eternal progression:

In the full sense, eternal progression is enjoyed only by those who receive exaltation. Exalted persons gain the fullness of the Father; they have all power, all knowledge, and all wisdom; they gain a fullness of truth, becoming one with the Father... Those who gain exaltation, having thus enjoyed the fullness of eternal progression, become like God.

Both Mormon and Christian writers seem sometimes to confuse being like God in some respects with becoming god. Christians may compare a person with God in holiness, mercy, or love, but they should never affirm that a person is God, or even a god.

If Mormons were using the word "gods" to mean beings with power over others in a non-ultimate sense, as of Satan, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), or of judges, as Jesus (John 10:34) and the Psalmist did (Ps. 82:6), there would be little difficulty. But the couplet of President Snow and the LDS doctrine of eternal progression have God evolving in the past as we are now. This is different than the Bible's references to non-ultimate gods.

Nor is anything comparable to the Mormon doctrine of eternal progression found in the church fathers. A statement from Irenaeus is typical -- it may sound like it supports the Mormon view on the surface, but in reality it does not: "If the Word became a man, it was so men may become gods." In context, Irenaeus (like other church fathers) meant that regenerate sinners can become like God in some respects. We can become holy and loving as God is holy and loving. Irenaeus did not affirm that we can become gods through an eternal progression or evolution. He did not affirm that God was once as we are now.

Athanasius wrote, "He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God." The Mormon view makes Christ a man who became divine; Athanasius teaches that Christ was God who became man once-for-all. "For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, though belonging to The Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all" (emphasis added).[6] For Athanasius all else is temporary, but "He Who remains is God and very Son of God, the sole-begotten Word." [7] We must conclude that the Western church fathers are misunderstood if they are alleged to teach an eternal progression to literal godhood.

If Mormons want to teach early Christian doctrine they will follow Augustine in making a radical distinction between the Creator and the creation. They will affirm with Paul in Romans 1:25 that worship and service of the creature is sin.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church a greater emphasis is placed on deification, but it remains distinct from the Mormon doctrine. The Eastern Orthodox emphasize renewal in the image and likeness of God in sharing His communicable attributes such as knowledge (Col.3:10), righteousness, and true holiness (Eph. 4:24). But an Orthodox writer explains: "This does not mean that human beings are able to become God in his essence. But it does mean that they can become 'gods' by grace even as they remain creatures of a human nature." [8] Thus, Eastern writers deny that humans can become equal with God as He is now. And there is no suggestion that God was ever as we are. There is a difference between being like God in some respects (communicable attributes) and being God by nature.

The Westminster Dictionary of Christianity says that deification is an Eastern Orthodox doctrine that we become like God by participation in divine virtues such as mercy and love or by sharing in divine energies. But we do not participate in God's very essence, which remains totally mysterious and inaccessible. Mormons who claim that we become gods in essence find no support for this in the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification.

Robinson also claims that televangelists Paul Crouch, Robert Tilton, and Kenneth Copeland affirm deification. While it is true that these Word-Faith proponents speak of believers being "in the God class," they do not teach that "as man now is, God once was." In any case, Robinson does not strengthen his case by citing teachers who themselves are considered aberrant or heretical by many Christians.

Did C. S. Lewis support an LDS concept of deification? In *The Weight of Glory*, the imaginative writer uses figurative language to express the radical change in believers from the dullest and most uninteresting persons in this life to "gods" and "goddesses" in glory. [9] He must be understood metaphorically in view of his general defense of theism. Similarly, when in *Mere Christianity* he says we turn permanently into new little Christ's sharing God's power, joy, knowledge, and eternity, [10] he is speaking in terms of our likeness to God being renewed. And in *The Screwtape Letters* his claim that God intends to fill heaven with "little replicas of himself" [11] refers to replicas in certain qualities, not to becoming literal gods. When writing with less literary license Lewis refers to "the immeasurable difference not only between what He [God] is and what all other things are but between the very mode of His existence and theirs." [12]

The "eternal progression" doctrine of Snow and his fellow Mormon prophets is part and parcel of the evolutionary view of human stages and opportunities in eternal life -- from pre-existence through the spirit world, mortal life on earth, and into the heavenly telestial, terrestrial, and celestial kingdoms. At its highest level, the latter involves godhood for those loyal to the church in this life. None of the listed sources in their proper contexts support the doctrine as Mormons hold it. Hence, these sources are not examples of people called "Christian" who affirm self-deification in the Mormon sense.

THE GOOD NEWS OF JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Robinson claims that Mormons teach salvation by grace and not works, and so are well within the spectrum of views that are generally accepted as Christian. How can Mormons claim to

teach salvation by grace alone? Robinson answers: "It is impossible to earn or deserve any of the blessings of God in any sense that leaves the individual un-indebted to God's grace" (105). "We participate in our salvation as we attempt to keep the commandments of God, but we can never earn it ourselves or bring it to pass on our own merits, no matter how well we may think we are doing" (106). Robinson also holds that redemption is not of individual effort; one must be born again and so grace is an essential condition for salvation (106-7). As good as these statements sound, they do not uphold salvation by grace alone.

Bruce R. McConkie explains: "All men are saved by grace alone without any act on their part, meaning that they are resurrected and become immortal because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ." [13] In Mormon theology, all people are raised from the dead and become immortal through grace alone. But not many will be exalted. How can one achieve exaltation? "This is called salvation by grace coupled with obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." [14] Then, after ridiculing the idea of Christ's shed blood as the sole ground of forgiveness, McConkie adds: "Salvation in the kingdom of God is available because of the atoning blood of Christ. But it is received only on the condition of faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end in keeping the commandments of God." [15]

Differences may be acknowledged among Christians on the general issue of grace and works, but there is little excuse for confusion regarding one's legal status before God's law. Justification, an essential element of the Good News, is only mentioned twice by Robinson and is neither defined nor affirmed.

Both grace and works are involved in the Christian experience, it is true, but they are exclusive of each other in relation to a sinner's moral and spiritual standing before God's law. Mormons tend to confuse the forensic (legal) and experiential categories. The divine Judge has found all people who depend on merit for their own acceptance with God falling short. In God's sight, a score of ninety-nine is not a passing grade.

Even the best Mormons are guilty before God, who knows their hearts. All Mormons trusting in their own works are now under the verdict of condemnation (Rom. 3:10-23). The only basis on which God can be just and accept any Mormon as righteous is the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 3:25-26). By adding works to faith, Mormons make justification a matter of merit, not grace. The principles of works and grace are mutually exclusive for acceptance before the moral Judge of the universe. "And if by grace, then it is no longer works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). The four laws of the Mormon gospel (faith, repentance, baptism, and commandment-keeping) involve works from beginning to end.

Justification pardons from the guilt and penalty of one's past and present sins, not just from Adamic guilt. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned" (John 3:18). "I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned" (John 5:24). "I want you to know," Paul wrote, "that through [Jesus] the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified..." (Acts 13:38-39). "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

So long as Latter-day Saints ignore or ridicule justification, it is impossible to assure them that they have the perfect righteousness of Christ that comes from God as a gift (Rom. 10:3-4). Like Paul, Mormons need to consider their own law-keeping as rubbish in contrast to the perfect righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ (Phil. 3:8-9).

Being a Christian begins as sinners repent of their self-justification and trust the atonement of Christ alone for acquittal and a righteous moral status. Belief in Christ's Incarnation, death on the cross for our sins, and resurrection from the dead directs repentant believers personally to trust the living and exalted Christ of whom the gospel speaks.

Individual Mormons and Baptists are Christians if they believe Christianity's central message, the gospel; neither Mormons nor Baptists are Christians if they do not trust the Christ of the biblical gospel. With all this, an LDS leader, recently addressing my class, brought everything down to the test of a religion's fruit. The LDS faith has produced an impressive worldwide movement, but the question of the reliability of the one it trusts remains. In his classic book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen summarizes the heart of the problem:

If the object is not really trustworthy then the faith is a false faith. It is perfectly true that such a false faith will often help a man. Things that are false will accomplish a great many useful things in the world. If I take a counterfeit coin and buy a dinner with it, the dinner is every bit as good as if the coin were a product of the mint. And what a very useful thing a dinner is! But just as I am on my way downtown to buy a dinner for a poor man, an expert tells me that my coin is a counterfeit. The miserable, heartless theorizer! While he is going into his uninteresting, learned details about the primitive history of that coin, a poor man is dying for want of bread. So it is with faith. Faith is so very useful, they tell us, that we must not scrutinize its basis in truth. But the great trouble is, such an avoidance of scrutiny itself involves the destruction of faith. For faith is essentially dogmatic. Despite all you can do, you cannot remove the element of faith from it. Faith is the opinion that some person will do something for you. If that person really will do that thing for you, then the faith is true. If he will not do it, then the faith is false. In the latter case, not all the benefits in the world will make the faith true. Though it has transformed the world from darkness to light, though it has produced thousands of glorious healthy lives, it remains a pathological phenomena. It is false, and sooner or later it is sure to be found out.

Commercial Cults

(1 Timothy 6:8-10 NIV) But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. {9} People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. {10} For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Cults aren't always religious. Destructive cults fall into several different categories, including:

1. Religious
2. Therapy/Self-Awareness
3. Political
4. Commercial
5. New Age
6. Satanic/Ritual Abuse

In this article we will deal with group 4 - Commercial cults. Because of Australian libel laws I am not able to identify and firms on line. I have replaced the names of firms in some extracts with the term "Business X".

Here are some things to watch out for when a less than honest commercial cult approaches you:

- * They are less than direct in naming their organization or their product.
- * If meetings have a "religious fervor" and seem more like a church service than a business meeting. If hype heavily outweighs hard-headedness.
- * If a clearly defined and intrusive hierarchy is part of the deal. Particularly if they are to be unquestioningly obeyed.
- * They start encroaching on your time far more than was originally said.
- * If "little extras" that you need to "be a success" keep on being introduced - (and they often start adding up financially).
- * They tell you not to associate with certain people branding them as "negative", or as "losers". If they warn you about ex-members of the organization take special not and special care.
- * The advice they give over-steps the mark on normal business advice and deals with issues that would normally be regarded as personal.
- * The feeling that you are being surrounded by these people and that your normal friendships are diminishing as a result of involvement with this group. If the group tells you to lie to your friends in order to recruit them, or even to exaggerate your earnings, or if acceptance or rejection of friendship is dependent on purchasing the product or being involved in the business - then leave fast.

* Stand back and ask "What are these people living for?". If the answer is money and the "business" then the business has them - they don't have the business. You will probably end up in the same mess if you join them. Then ask the question about "intensity". Is this a normal intensity to live at or has this group made some sort of a time-consuming life-dominating fetish out of their company?

The Cult Personality

To put it briefly cults create a second-skin personality that slips on over the outside of a person's true self. The cult personality is very conforming and unthinking and has its critical faculties reduced to a minimum. There is a lack of "genuineness" and "realness" in the cult personality which frequently appears "plastic" and "always positive". A normal group has its grumblers, its misfits, it's not so attractive people and they are accepted as part of the group life. When a group is always attractive, positive, smiling etc then something abnormal and unnatural is happening. If people all look, sound and dress the same then they are being conformed and have put their own personality to one side and slipped into the approved "cult personality". As one person has said:

"When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you've ever encountered, and you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you've ever met, and then you learn that that cause of the group is something you never dared hope could be accomplished, and all of this sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true! Don't give up your education, your hopes and ambitions, to follow a rainbow." -- Jenne Mills, former member of the People's Temple and subsequent victim of assassination a year following the November 18, 1978 Jonestown suicide/murders of 911 adults and children.

The Internet has many sites where the perils of belonging to commercial cults are discussed, here is an extract from one of them:

In his book "Fake It 'Til You Make It," Phil Kerns compares Business X to Jim Jones' People's Temple.

Page 57 I remember the telephone call I received from a woman in Salem, Oregon. She was calling me about my book on the Jonestown tragedy. I was new in the [Business X] business, having been in only a week.

"I hope that I am not disturbing you, Mr. Kerns. I got your telephone number from your publisher in Plainsfield, New Jersey. I read your book on the People's Temple, and I just wanted to give you my condolences on the loss of your mother and sister in Jonestown." Towards the end of our telephone conversation, she asked, "Oh, by the way, are you aware of the Business X business?"

"Yes," I replied, but I did not tell her I was in the business.

"You know, every time I go to one of their meetings, it reminds me so much of your book--all the chanting and the way they malign and twist the holy scriptures for gain. I feel that this business is a cult. I think you need to tell the world about this company."

Inside I was chuckling to myself. "This is so far from the truth," I thought. "This is just a soap business--an opportunity."

I dismissed her statements from my mind because I felt they were unfounded and drifting somewhere between "Star Wars" and the "Twilight Zone."

However, today I know better; I wish I had not shunned this woman's notion to abruptly. I hope that if she read this books, she will call back so I may apologize.

Could this organization be classified as a cult? There are, without a doubt, many different characteristics utilized within this integration of salespersons which could lead many individuals to arrive at the same conclusions this lady did.

Now I realized there was more to this business than just soap and spinoffs. There was POWER!

And here are a few more extracts from real live folks on Internet land who think Business X isn't as harmless as it makes out (they are as originally posted):

My wife and I are attempting to cope with our close friends in Business X. Originally the idea was to become financially secure and in doing so provide free time to visit friends such as us. Now all they can talk about are *friends in the business*. Can't knock them for their motive for providing for themselves but it becomes all consuming to the point that anything not associated with Business X is not worth investing time in!

If they buy one more self-help/motivational book/tape I'm going to scream!!

Any suggestions??

Maybe you should see about having them deprogrammed. I understand a lot of what they do to make a faithful sales force is like what the cults (David Koresh, i.e.) do to their initiates. Business X is like their new "religion".

My husband and I tried Business X - it sounded sure fire. But it turned out to be too "cult-ish". The set up for ordering and seminars and training took incredibly too much time - busy normal people with other parts to their lives could not abide such day long affairs every month. Besides, the stuff that was pushed for training emphasized glorifying your up-line, who often was not smarter than you... We didn't make money, despite spending a lot of time. And we did try hard!! The clincher was the pseudo-religious tone, and sometimes outright Christian preaching, of the seminars. We are not Christian, and there is no reason for us to be in such a business if it is not non-sectarian. But Business X folks don't discuss things like that. My advice... try it - you won't like it.

A co-worker of mine has a gung-ho Business X rep for several years. One day we were talking about my collection of Grateful Dead tapes which numbers over 450 (go ahead, take your cheap shots) and she said, "well, I'm catching up to you--I've got 250 Business X tapes. The only difference is, you don't make any money off yours." Well, there are lots of other differences, but I ignored them and asked her to add up how much she had spent on all those tapes, seminars, and various other Business X materials and compare it to her Business X income. The next day she came in rather sullen-looking. After some prying on my part she eventually admitted that she had taken my challenge and discovered that she had lost a great deal of money due to her involvement with Business X. Just how much she wouldn't say, but she allowed as how it was a lot more than the cost of my tape collection.

When Does a Multi-level Marketing Organization Become a Cult?

The quick answer is when the profit motive is superseded by an ideological commitment. When people who are LOSING money don't get out. When it's not a business but a all-encompassing lifestyle. When the business runs you instead of you running it. When those over you in the business take over your personal life. Business is just business. Business is not everything. When a business becomes everything then it's no longer a business but a mammonistic philosophy.

Multi-level marketing does not always equal a cult. There are some firms that use multi-level marketing honestly and well. They are in the minority. There are also some businesses using conventional structures that are extremely exploitative and cult-like in their approach. Use the tests at the start of this article to gauge whether the group you know of is legitimate. Look at their actions, not at their words, their "invasiveness" not at their promises.

Mystical and New Age Cults

(1 John 4:1-3 NIV) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, {3} but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Mystical and new Age cults are ancient and many of their teachings pre-date the Christian era. Christianity had three main competitors among the religions of its day. - Judaism, the Roman "State religion" based on a pantheon of Greco-Roman gods with /Emperor worship thrown in, and "mystery religions" such as the pantheistic Gnosticism that filled Ephesus and Colossae. The mystical and new age cults closely resemble these ancient and complex philosophical formulations which sought salvation through mystical knowledge and religious experiences.

Today Eastern religious terminology e.g avatar, guru etc has been blended in with the primal and the philosophical to create an apparently benign and all-embracing system of worship that does not need a crucified Jesus. Jesus is, at best, an "ascended master". There is no need for an atonement just for a "purification", but the purification is not from sin but from ignorance or from "memory traces". Guilt is avoided at all costs. Our accountability to our Creator is never faced or dealt with.

The Christian Research Institute produced the following list of New Age beliefs and they are a good starting point for us: The Bible verses next to each point are there to help you refute these teachings should you come across them.

- A. All is one (monism). Reality is a seamless garment (Gen.1:1ff.).
- B. All is God (pantheism). God is an all-pervading impersonal Energy, Force or Consciousness (Rom. 1:18-32).
- C. Self-deification/self-salvation. We look within for power, knowledge and healing (Ezek. 28:1-9; Eph. 2:8-10).
- D. Paranormal potential. We can experience ESP, telepathy, spirit-contact (spiritism), etc (Deut. 18:9-14).
- E. Ethical relativism. Moral absolutes can be transcended (Matt.5:17-20; Rom. 13:8-10).
- F. Cosmic evolutionism. The human race is progressing toward a "New Age" of planetary peace and prosperity. (1 Thess. 5:3; Matt.24:3-31).
- G. Religious syncretism.* All religions are really one, and teach the above (A-F). Jesus was just one of many mystical masters. Reincarnation is stressed. (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Heb. 9:27)

People involved in mystical/new age cults are often very gentle searching people who need to see Jesus as real and relevant to them and who are turned off by the harsh dogmatism of so many churches. People in the New Age want to experience love and peace and joy. Thus the

key to bringing them out of the cult is to show them that in Christ there are real, lasting and truly satisfying and logical experiences of love, peace and joy. Most Westerners are still very rational in their approach to life. Even those deeply involved in cults may question the New Age doctrine that everything that happens to you, good or bad, happens because some part of you wants it to happen. The death of a child, senseless violence, world hunger and disease challenge this core notion and much mental energy must be expended to maintain it. Because New Age doctrines are difficult to maintain for many Westerners many cults use heavy indoctrination and "thought blocking" processes. Thought blocking is a way of re-routing the mind and deliberately distracting it from the troublesome thought. For instance if you try very hard not to think of white rabbits you cannot help but think of them. However, if you concentrate on saying Om very loudly it will work - you will not think of white rabbits. You will concentrate on your mantra and eventually forget the troubling thought. This can be quite innocent. As a young man attempting to keep his way pure I found that lustful thoughts could be put out of my head if switched thought tracks and concentrated intently on trying to solve a moderately difficult problem in integral calculus in my head. The required concentration on an "unsexy" thought worked. The problem with cults is they overdo it so that the rational thinking faculties are not sharpened but rather suppressed. Speech controls large portions of the brain so most effective thought blocking techniques seem to involve some repetitive and nonsensical speech pattern. Thought blocking processes are taught to new members so that when they experience doubt or negativity they can chant, speak in tongues, enter a trance, etc. Often these are associated with popular songs so that if they try to leave the cult they will constantly hear music that "triggers" them to think of it again and again.

Mystical and new age cults are often very exacting and legalistic in their requirements. Strict diets may have to be followed, equinoxes, new moons and other astrological events remembered, and sexual abstinence for long periods (even for married couples) may be imposed.

The Colossian church seems to have been troubled by something similar. (Colossians 2:16-23 NIV) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. {17} These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. {18} Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. {19} He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. {20} Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: {21} "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? {22} These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. {23} Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

These few verses are of great help to Christians confused and bombarded by mystical teachings. The things that the New Agers teach are a shadow - and Christ is the substance. When we have Christ we have the real thing. They have only a shadow. Something that resembles the truth but which is in fact dark and empty. Christians must move beyond "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" to a religion based on being "in Christ" who is in God (see article "The Inner Man" for details).

New Agers tend to place Jesus "up there" as a 'master" but not as a flesh and blood historical person who died on the cross and rose from the dead. When the Ephesians were struggling with Gnostic tendencies in the church the apostle John wrote...

(1 John 4:1-3 NIV) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, {3} but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

How can you help people in the New Age? Pray for them that they be brought to enquire about the historical Jesus and the meaning of His existence. Pray that the blindness may be lifted and the bondages of sin broken. Pray that they may have an experience of God in a dream, vision, etc that points them to the cross and salvation. Many New Agers record their dreams and it is a way that God could speak to them and they would listen. And go in their midst gently. Do not judge them, it is very offensive to them. Give them the experience of love, joy and hope that they are seeking.

Spiritual Warfare

Demons are variously caricatured as "naughty spirits" and even portrayed as "sources of wisdom" in some New Age teachings. The Bible however, sees demons as truly evil and deceptive beings arrayed in rebellion against God and whose fate will be eternal torment imprisoned in a lake of fire. This latter view is far closer to the reality experienced by demon-possessed people and those who have dealt with demons in others.

A demon possessed person is often deeply deceived - thus showing the deceptive nature of demons, a demon-possessed person often engages in activities that display a lack of conscience toward others or a delight in the evil and the bizarre. This betrays the evil, amoral and actively wicked attitude of the demonic. A demon-possessed person is often angry at ministers, scornful of Scripture, fearful of communion, mocking at morality and may hold bizarre views of Christ. Christian praise and worship can cause strong negative reactions. This displays the demonic hatred of God and rebellion toward His legitimate authority over this Earth that He made. Those who deal with demons sometimes find that demons are both aware of and terrified of the eternal fate that awaits them. They believe in the lake of fire even if some theologians do not. This article will look at what the Bible says about demons, their fate, and how we can stop them hindering our Christian life.

Let's start with the positive...

Jesus' Triumph over the Demonic Realm

(1 John 3:8 NKJV) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

(1 John 4:4 NKJV) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

(1 John 5:18 NKJV) We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

The book of 1 John was probably written when the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian really began to bite. Satan and his instrument - the pagan Roman Empire seemed to be indefinite ascendancy over the church, God and all the forces of good. 1 John is thus a very radical and bold epistle in its claims to victory in Christ. There are three realities described here:

1. The reality of Christ's mission in particular His incarnation. The reason Jesus Christ was manifested in human form was so that He could tackle Satan on his own turf and destroy all his works. Like a hand-grenade exploding in the Devil's face the incarnation brought the awesome power of the Son of God into proximity with evil so that it might completely destroy it.

2. The reality of Christ in us the hope of glory. He who is in us is He who came to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus overcame the world then, and now, He is in us, and continues to overcome the world.

3. The reality of the indestructibility of our real eternal selves which are based on Christ in us. A person who has been born again has a new self that is created on a new order and a higher plane. It is eternal, imperishable and indestructible, it cannot be defiled. It is sinless and cannot

sin. It is born of God and partakes of the very principles of the nature of God (but on a much different scale). (1 John 3:9 NKJV)

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. This new self battles with the flesh in a life long struggle for dominance (Galatians 5:16-18) so Christians still do sin but this sin is not a part of them that will still be with them in Heaven. There will be no need for Purgatory, the new self has been sinless from the "new birth". This new self cannot be "touched" by the evil one. The person we will be for the next ten million years cannot be affected by sin, defilement or temptation and it has already passed out of the judgment of God (John 5:24, Romans 8:1,2). While Satan can destroy your flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5) he cannot touch the real eternal you. (See article on the Inner Man for more detail)

These three powerful realities mean that even though Satan and his demons are at times quite formidable foes they ultimately cannot harm us. They are defeated rebels whose rebellion will come to nothing in the end. Jesus Christ came to destroy ALL the works of the devil and through His church that task is being completed and will be finally climaxed at the return of Christ. Let's look at how the devil lost the weapons from his armory.

(Hebrews 2:14 NKJV) Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

The incarnation gave Jesus the flesh and blood He needed so that through death He could defeat Satan's ability to wield the power of death, keeping the world in fear and abject slavery.

(Colossians 2:13-15 NKJV) And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, {14} having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. {15} Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

(For further expansion on this verse see the article The Cross In Colossians) These verses in Colossians indicate that the weapon of accusation has been removed. Satan has been disarmed by the forgiveness we have received. He no longer has any basis for accusing us. The Charge sheets are all nailed to the Cross.

Satan's ultimate defeat will be an ignominious vanquishing (Revelation 20:10 NKJV) The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Christian's Power and Authority over the Demonic Realm

The Christian's power and authority over the demonic realm is not based on having more "might" than the demonic realm (I do not know of any Christian with the spiritual might anywhere near that of Satan) but on authority. The distinction is important. Joash became king of Israel when he was 7 years old. Though physically puny and intellectually hardly a match for bad queen Athaliah he had more authority than her or any of his rivals. He was king. Similarly even a "baby Christian" has more authority in the spiritual realm than the biggest baddest demon on the block. As a small child is more important than the largest fiercest lion so God has deemed that even the least Christian outranks the mightiest power and principality. The authority comes

because of their position in the heavenly hierarchy. In God's household we are the "sons" and angels, even the mightiest of them are just servants of God. And sons outrank servants.

(Hebrews 1:14 NKJV) Are they (i.e angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

(1 Corinthians 6:3 NKJV) Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

We have undergone a spiritual transformation as a result of the gospel. In the Old Testament we were "a little lower than the angels", we were like children who, in their minority, have less status than say the butler and are expected to treat the household servants with respect. But with the gospel we have come of age and are now full-fledged sons of God

(John 1:12 NKJV) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(Galatians 3:24-26 NKJV) Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. {25} But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. {26} For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

This transformation means that a huge change in status has occurred so that inhabitants of the Kingdom of God are truly awesome spiritual beings.

(Ephesians 2:6-7 NKJV) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, {7} that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 1:20-21 NKJV) which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

(Matthew 11:11-13 NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We have been raised up with Christ and seated at His right hand in the heavenly realms far above all principalities and power and might and dominion so that Jesus could say of us that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than the mightiest of the Old Testament saints. This is "amazing grace" and is God displaying His kindness for all the world to see.

Wielding Our Weapons

With this in mind let's look the authority we have been given and how we are to wield it. (Luke 9:1 NKJV) Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.

(Luke 10:1, 17-24 NKJV) After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to... Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

{18} And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. {19} "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. {20} "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." {21} In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. {22} "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." {23} Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; {24} "for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

Jesus commissions the twelve and then the seventy to have power of evil. In these verses we discover three things:

1. The power we have over the demonic realm is a gracious gift from Jesus "I give you..." to equip us for ministry (it is in the context of a ministry trip).
2. This power is both offensive. I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and defensive and nothing shall by any means hurt you.
3. That our operating principle is not to be power consciousness but instead humble gratefulness for the grace of God. "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Binding and loosing...

The Apostle Peter

(Matthew 16:18-19 NKJV) "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. {19} "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Christians in general

(Matthew 18:18-20 NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. {19} "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. {20} "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Binding Satan and his demons

(Matthew 12:27-29 NKJV) "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. {28} "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. {29} "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

(Luke 11:19-22 NKJV) "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. {20} "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. {21} "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. {22} "But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.

Thus we see that the power to bind and to loose has been delivered over to God's church (Matthew 16:18-19) and can be exercised by any two or three Christians coming together in agreement before God (Matthew 18:18-20). Because of the authority we have been given on the basis of the completed work of Christ we can come against Satan as "someone stronger" and overpower him, binding his activities (Matthew 12:29), neutralizing his weapons (Luke 11:22) and taking back the things he claims ownership of. (Luke 11:22).

In The Name Of Jesus

(John 14:13-14 NKJV) "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. {14} "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

(John 15:16 NKJV) "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

(Luke 10:17-19 NRSV) The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" {18} He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. {19} See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.

(Acts 16:18 NRSV) {18} She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

The name of Jesus is the delegated authority of the Son of God. In the Gilbert and Sullivan opera "The Pirates of Penzance" the pirates are arrested and the police say "We charge you yield in Queen Victoria's name...". They confront the pirates in the delegated authority of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. When we come against Satan and his demons we can say "We charge you yield in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords". The "name that is above every other name" is the ultimate source of authority. Say the pirates in the opera had answered...we resist in the name of the Pirate King...then there would have been a clash of authority (in fact they said "we love our Queen...it was very sarcastic...") In such a clash of authority it is the "highest name" that wins. A queen outranks a counts who outranks knights of the realm that outrank commoners etc. So it is in the heavenly realms. Such is the privilege of Christians that we are allowed to use "the name that is above every other name" when we challenge demonic authority. We come bearing the highest authority in the Universe. (Philippians 2:8-11 NKJV) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. {9} Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, {11} and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So to use the name of Jesus in prayer is a declaration of authority. Even Jewish exorcists found it had enormous authority until it was challenged (Acts 19:13-18). They were operating on "bluff" they were not converted and had no right to use the authority of Jesus name in exorcism. The basis of praying in Jesus name is , first of all, being converted. Jesus name can be used in two ways 1)In declarative mode "In the name of Jesus I command..." e.g. when Peter healed the lame man at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:6 NKJV) Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.". Secondly it may be used to request things from God eg, in the verses from John's gospel above "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.". The difference between command mode and request mode is that we command lesser beings but command greater ones. So when addressing a demon, a disease or a mountain or a storm we operate in command mode as sons of God proudly bearing the authority of Jesus name. When addressing the Father or Jesus we do not presume on the authority we have been given but we come humbly as expectant children with every right to ask and to receive but always in wonder and awe for we have a majestic God.

Go boldly into the battle armed with the name of Jesus Christ.

Tearing Down Strongholds

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NKJV) For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. {4} For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, {5} 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,

Strongholds are built out of thoughts (Gk. noema). When Satan builds a stronghold in a human heart, a church, a nation or across a whole planet he uses thoughts. Thoughts of fear, hatred, envy, enmity and strife. Thoughts that create jealousy and distrust. Thoughts that turn people against God. Thoughts that entice to pride and rebellion. Greedy thoughts, lustful thoughts, evil and cruel thoughts. Brick by brick, thought by thought, constellating together into a demonic aggregate, a wall that blocks out the light and keeps a world in darkness. Note that they are described as "arguments and every high thing that exalts itself". A spiritual stronghold is often characterized by a form of pride known as hubris that exalts itself against God. Herod in the book of Acts is an example of this when he accepted worship from men and was struck dead by God. (Acts 12:21-23) The Gnostic heresies of Colossae (Colossians 2:8, 18-23) the bizarre "knowledge" of Corinth (1 Corinthians 8:1-3) and the "teaching of The Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6,15) seem also to fit this category. Those with religious delusions are nearly always full of pride and impossible to reason with. That is why Paul calls it a "stronghold". Bible-based apologetics has its place here on demolishing the "lofty arguments" and replacing them with truth. Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees and Sadducees and His teaching on the Sermon On The Mount were real "stronghold busters" (You have heard it said...but I say to you...).

Thoughts control emotions and actions. If your doctrine tells you that you are no good then you will feel worthless. If your doctrine demands perfection you will feel constantly guilty. This will lead to actions based on your thoughts and feelings e.g a life of constant striving. A stronghold can become so intense that the person loses touch with reality. To see this in action we need only look at the severely demon-possessed with their destroyed thought life, shattered emotions, lack of contact with reality and constant fear (Mark 5:1-20). Satan controls us to the extent that he can control our thinking. Yet God has given us weapons against this that are "mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds" so there is no problem with our weapons! Let's learn to use them. The weapons are listed in Eph 6:10-18.

(Ephesians 6:10-18 NKJV) Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. {11} Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {12} For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. {13} Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. {14} Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, {15} and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; {16} above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. {17} And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; {18} praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

The strongholds of Satan are pulled down by people whose lives show moral integrity and faith and who know the word of God and can pray in the Spirit at all times. It is a soldierly combat. For example say Satan has established a stronghold of lustful thoughts in your mind. You need to pull down those lustful concepts about the opposite sex through a thorough study of God's word and knowing what the human body is, and is not, meant for, (see article Your Body Is A Temple Of The Holy Spirit) then you need to fill your mind with things that are noble and lovely and true (Phil 4:8) praying in Jesus name for God to demolish this stronghold in your life. If the stronghold is in your church - say a spirit of parsimony and greed then you may need to teach on generosity and giving prayerfully wielding the sword of the Spirit until the false concepts of stewardship have come tumbling down and the church is renewed in faith. If the stronghold is in your nation you may need to debate publicly, use the media and refute the lies that keep people bound while guarding yourself and your own life from the counter-attacks that will come. As I said earlier our weapons are "mighty in God" they are amazing weapons if wielded rightly. Do not be intimidated the authority of Jesus and the "big guns" of God's weaponry are on our side.

A Tactical Armory

The following table summarizes the ways Satan attacks and the way we should respond to these attacks. I have called it a tactical armory since it tells us which weapon to select for the battle. You may notice that many of the Scriptures for Satan's tactics also contain the remedy for it close by or in the same verse! God is wise.

How Satan Attacks	Scripture References	How We Should Respond
Steal, kill, and destroy.	John 10:10	Take hold of the abundant life in Christ
Pride leading to condemnation.	Timothy 3:6,7	Be wise. Appointing of those in spiritual authority
Accusation.	Rev 12:10,11	The blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony... testifying to what the blood of the Lamb has done for you.
Temptation through misapplied Scriptures that	Luke 4:1-13	Knowing the Scripture so well that you can spot the lie and

seem to validate fleshly desires for physical appetite, specialness to God and power.		counter it with a more appropriate Scripture.
Deceptive false teachings.	1 Timothy 4:1-7	Reject fanciful tales, teach the Scripture, sound doctrine, thankfulness, prayer
False assurance of salvation.	James 2:17-26; Matthew 7:15-28	A godly life of good works based on Jesus teaching is evidence of having true faith.
Ensnarement in the occult, divination, astrology, and the worship of false gods.	Deut 7:25; 18:10-13; 32:7; Lev 19:31; Isaiah 47:13; Acts 19:19; 1 Corinthians 10:14	Destroy all objects associated with it. Complete disassociation from it.
Strongholds made of thoughts that oppose God – especially prideful thoughts and unbelief. These thoughts can control the life and emotions of a person, church or country.	2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-21; Romans 8:4-6; 12:1,2; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:1-4	Biblical apologetics, renewing the mind. Setting the mind on the things of the Spirit Use of our spiritual armor combined with faith, the word of God, prayer in the Spirit and humble submission.

Blinding the minds of unbelievers. Especially those who stubbornly refuse Christ.	Matthew 23:17,19,24,26; Luke 4:18; John 9:39; Romans 10:7-10,25; 2 Corinthians 3:14-17, 4:3,4; Ephesians 4:17-24; 1 John 2:10,11	Turning to Christ. Having a willingness to accept the light and seek it further. Renewal of the mind. Loving your brother in Christ. Good teaching and intercession can “open the eyes of the blind”.
Religious ceremonies that appear “cultural” but are in fact demonic.	1 Corinthians 10:14-22	Awareness of the spiritual realities that under-gird such things. Not participating in them.
Unrestrained Satanic activity. Spiritual wickedness in the heavenly realms. Spiritual “strong men” occupying a person, place or nation.	Matthew 12:27-29; 16:19; 18:18-20; Luke 11:19-22	Binding and loosing in Jesus name which may often have corporate dimension to it.
Disease caused by demons (not all disease is meant).	Matthew 9:32-34; Luke 13:11-16; Matthew 8:16,17; Mark 9:14-29	Healing. Prayer and fasting. Faith. Use of command prayers in the Name of Jesus.
Demon-possession.	Luke 10:17-19; Acts 16:16-18; Mark 5:1-20; 9:14-29 Luke 11:20-26; Acts 5:16, 8:7	Use of the name of Jesus with authority. Command the demons to leave. Sometimes it may help to identify the

		demons. Then the delivered person must live a Holy Spirit filled life. Faith and prayer are necessary and sometimes fasting.
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Conclusion

I hope you are feeling a bit more confident in spiritual warfare by now. Please answer the following revision questions. They will help you learn the material.

1. What was one of the purposes in Christ's coming as a human being? (1 John 3:8 , Hebrews 2:14)
2. What victories did He win? (Eph 4:8; Colossians 2:13-15, John 16:33, 1 John 5:4)
3. What change took place in the heavenly status of believers between the time of John the Baptist and the day of Pentecost? (Mt 11:11-13)
4. Are Christians greater or lesser than angels in authority? (1 Cor 6:3, Heb 2:14, Eph 2:6,7)
5. What is the importance of authority in spiritual warfare? (See section on the power and authority of the Christian)
6. What are strongholds made of? How do we combat them? (2 Cor 10:3-5)
7. What are the two ways of using the name of Jesus? (Acts 3:6; 16:18; John 14:13,14; 15:16)
8. What is meant by binding and loosing? (Matt 12:27-29; 16:19; 18:18-20)
9. Why can the demonic realm "not touch us"? (1 John 4:4, 5:18)

What is the right tactic for combating involvement in the occult? (See diagram above)

Discerning Good from Evil

Spiritual manifestations tend to alarm and puzzle us unless we have some way from sorting out the good from the bad from the indifferent. This is actually a Christianized version of an in-service I took a few years ago when I spoke to the psychiatrist and staff at Townsville General Hospital about demons, exorcism and religious idealization. I'm afraid some medical terms have been left in and it may sound a touch clinical. I was very well received by them and enjoyed the hour or so we had together.

Good Writers

That may help with an understanding of spiritual perspectives - Rev. Dr. Martin Israel (Lecturer Pathology, Royal College of Surgeons) and author of *Summons to Life*, *Precarious Living*, *The Pain That Heals*, *Smoldering Fire* and *The Spirit of Counsel*. Dr. Paul Tournier Swiss-based physician and counselor author of *The Meaning of Persons*, *The Strong and The Weak*, *Guilt and Grace*, *A Place for You*, *Marriage Difficulties*, et. al. and a leading exponent of the "medicine of the person" movement. In North America Dr. John White -Christian Psychiatrist - author of *The Fight*, *Eros Defiled*, *The Shattered Mirror* et.al. On the Australian scene Dr. William Wilkie - Christian psychiatrist author of *Understanding Psychiatry*, *Understanding Stress Breakdown* and Dr. Kath Donovan *Growing Through Stress* present credible combinations of Christian insight and medical practice.

Helpful Bible Passages

The Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness - Mark 1:12,13, Matthew 4:1ff, Luke 4:1 ff
 Jesus and the Gadarene Demoniac - Mark 5:1-20
 The 144,000 - Revelation 7:1-8, 14:1-5
 The Two Witnesses (Prophets) of Revelation - Revelation 11:1-14
 The Psychic Servant Girl - Acts 16:16-21
 The Unpardonable Sin - Matthew 12:30-32, Mark 3:29,30 , Luke 12:8-10
 The Ill and the Demonized - Matthew 4:24
 Exorcism : Matthew 8:16, 12:22 ff. , Acts 19:13ff, Mark 9:17-27
 Authority : Luke 9:16ff, Matthew 10:17
 Not just mental illnesses: Luke 13:11
 Results of demonic influence (Obsessiveness etc.) : I Timothy 4:1ff
 Tests for demonic influence: Matthew 7:16-23, 1 Corinthians 12:3, 1 John 4:1-6

Sorting out the possibilities

(A) If the person has been involved: in the occult or an extreme sect, or in gross sexual promiscuity, in drugs or alcoholism.

(B) And can speak in a voice other than their own or know a language they have not been exposed to.

(C) And find great difficulty in prayer or Bible-reading and react strongly against Christianity.

Then classical demonization is a possibility. Seldom are healthy, normal people obsessed or possessed by the demonic. As a rule of thumb there must be some preexisting instability.

Bizarre conduct is insufficient evidence.

Voices and visions are insufficient evidence.

Violent fits are insufficient evidence.

Intractable guilt is insufficient evidence but frequently accompanies it.

Absence or presence of reaction to treatment/medication is inconclusive.

Real guilt disguised as demonization

The person comes from a religious background. They have not been involved in the occult, speak in voices other than their own, can still pray and read the Bible. However, they hear voices and claim demonization. Generally, it is sexual sin, either premarital sex, adultery or masturbation that haunts them and which they cannot resolve. Often they cannot admit to themselves their character flaw.

Depression and religious ideas

Those from a Christian background can, during bouts of depression, turn to Scriptural passages on judgment, Old Testament prophecies and the book of Revelation being favorites along with "the unpardonable sin". It generally will pass with the depression. It can be very acceptable to guide them to new beliefs consistent with their faith e.g. if a person with depression has the belief "I am utterly worthless...", then it is quite acceptable to guide them to "for you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). Countless other examples are possible.

Schizophrenia

Wilkie (see references at start) sees schizophrenia as a form of minimal brain dysfunction and in the majority of cases I find this argument convincing. Most people with schizophrenia do not speak in other voices, neither are they hostile towards the things of God though they may be confused, sometimes terribly confused in this area. Some seem to be especially sensitive to demons and are preyed upon by them though not actually possessed.

What the cure has to say about the disease

If a patient hearing voices is cured by normal treatments then we can say that no occult subjection was involved. If however, a pastoral interview, with thorough confession, renunciation and a trusting appropriation of salvation, leads to a wonderful liberation then we can say occult subjection was involved (procedure from Dr. Lechler).

When is it God?

Jesus was often accused of being demon possessed (e.g. Matthew 12:30, Mark 3:29) and many great men of God -the prophets and mystics have seen visions and had special revelations, hearing voices. The following are indicators of whether a person's experiences are from God or from an inferior source. As a preliminary note it is best to make these observations over time.

The following is a check list that can help determine whether a person is hearing from God or from "inferior source" such as a demon or a repressed and split-off part of their own personality.

Area	From God	From Inferior Source
Freedom	Increases	Decreases becomes obsessive
Need for control	Gradually lessens	Increases dramatically
Quality of work	High – benefits society	Indifferent, often socially deleterious
Personality	Integrates, Peaceful	Course, Claimant
Social	Increasingly loving	Increasingly divisive
State between visions	Healthy, disciplined	Desperate, addicted to visions
Grandiosity	No	Often
Predictions	Fulfilled	Not fulfilled
Selfishness	Lessens	Distressingly ego-centered
“Correction” they give	Specific-aims to bring healing	Vague, mere condemnation
Integration	Increases	Decreases
Creativity	Often very creative	Exacts conformity
Money	Not important	Frequently demanded
Food	To be enjoyed	Lists of forbidden foods
Marriage	To be enjoyed	Sex seen as sin, often forbidden or perverted
Salvation	Of all who believe	Of the leader and his chosen
Fear and dependency	Decreases	Increases
Magic/superstition/idols	Not allowed	Sometimes used

This is by no means a total treatment of the topic but I hope it has given you "a few things to think about" and a few tools for working out when a person is demoniacally subjected, when they are just having a bad time with their body chemistry and when they might be one of the Lord's more unusual servants.

Evaluating Revivals

The Toronto movement and Brownsville Pensecola have generated an enormous amount of heated discussion amongst Christians. Most of this has been predictable - once the person's personal temperament and prior theological stance is known. And most have made the error of judging the whole from the parts or the general from the particular. One blessing does not equal a revival and neither does one bizarre manifestation equal a cult or heresy.

This article shall attempt to evaluate revival movements by the following 6 biblical criteria:

1. Are the revival **leaders** "workers of righteousness" or "workers of iniquity"? Are they characterized by financial greed or good works? (Matthew 23:25, 1 Thessalonians 2:5) Good doctrine or fables? (1 Timothy 4:1-8) Deep Christian character or selfish ambition? (James 3:14-18) Are they "law-full" or "lawless" ? (Matthew 7:15-23)

2. What are the long term **fruits** in terms of Christian character - especially faithfulness, truth, love, mercy, and righteousness.(Matthew 7:16-20, Galatians 5:22,23, Ephesians 5:9, James 3:14-18)

3. Does the movement as a whole display a love of sound **doctrine**? What is the movement's attitude to Scripture? (2 Peter 3:13-18, 1 Timothy 4:1-8)

4. Does the movement have a clear aim? Is it taking people somewhere? Can the results of the movement be built on by later generations? Is it a "house of straw" or a well-constructed foundation for the future? Is it **built on Christ** i.e. .the historical Jesus of Scripture? (Matthew 7:15-29, 1 Cor 3:10-17)

5. Does the movement have a sound **morality**? Does it manage to avoid the twin dangers of moral licentiousness on one hand or overbearing legalism on the other.(Colossians 2:18-23, Jude 1:4)

6. What is the **attitude** of the movement to the rest of the body of Christ? Is it humble or proud? Is it boastful? Does it separate itself? These tests are probably best applied to the movement as it is affecting your own congregation. It is much more difficult (unless you are very well informed) to judge the movement as a whole and the Bible warns us against such judgments. The "judging" we are not permitted to do is called "krino" in the Greek and it means to judge the person/thing as a whole e.g. "he is absolutely no good". We are permitted to judge particulars which is called "dokimazo" judging "that was a good action", "this person has strong faith" "that person has a wrong doctrine in the area of" etc. For instance I will not say that the "Toronto Blessing" is absolutely no good but I will say that I have many serious concerns about its leadership and its attitude to other Christians. It seems a very mixed (or even mixed up) blessing. More on that later. Here are some common ways that people make mistakes in judging movements of God.

- Believing rumors, unreliable sources and unsubstantiated reports.
- Making judgments based on one powerful personal experience either good or bad. And applying that to the movement as a whole.
- Saying that "If people are getting saved it must be of God". This is definitely a good sign but people have been "accidentally" saved by the emotive preaching of some of the

worst of heretics. God can use anyone for his purposes. We need to look at how those salvations hold up and the long term result. Jesus indicated this when He said of the Pharisees converts that they were "twice as much the sons of Hell" (Matthew 23:15) as even the Pharisees. Conversion was not the goal - loving disciples and mature fruit was. If the fruit of the conversion as a "son of Hell" then the conversion was not of the right type.

- Judging the movement by a single person in that movement. "He's a nice person and he believes in XYZ movement so it must be OK". Good people can occasionally make bad judgments.
- Because a movement is growing rapidly and is "international" it must be good - or must be bad. Both good things like a genuine revival can grow quickly and bad things - like Communism, can sweep across nations. Growth rate is no indicator of truth or falsity.
- Financial blessing - since I believed in X I have prospered financially. Prosperity can come from many sources - God, the Devil (who offered Jesus great prosperity) and from human ingenuity. It is no indicator of divine favor.

None of the above factors are reliable indicators of a genuine spiritual experience or a true revival. Deep repentance, holiness, sound doctrine and deep discipleship that results in changed lives are a far better indicator.

Is the cross preached?

Are basic Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the inspiration of the Scriptures and justification by faith taught and taught as essential?

Is there a clear commitment to righteousness and truth?

Many revival movements are populist expressions of religious sentiment and not genuine works of God. In Asia, where I work, they may be mixed in with tribal deities, local heroes such as the Philippine national leader Jose Rizal or even with the demonic. This mixed up spirituality can spread like a virus, seem to be a "gospel movement" but in the end turn very sour indeed. In the West the Toronto blessing, which has faded since the first writing of this article, was in my opinion a false revival. Most of the churches that went into it eventually were damaged by it. It was unbalanced, overemotional and had too much emphasis on experiences rather than Scripture in the majority of cases that I saw. It did not seem to result in definite moral development or a greater consciousness of righteousness and justice or ethics in daily life. It was not the great work of God that it was made out to be. For more on it read Andrew Stroms' evaluation.

When we examine a revival we need to ask the 6 deep questions about leaders, fruits, doctrine, being built on Christ, morality and attitude mentioned earlier. Lets apply this to the Toronto movement.

Leaders - Rodney Howard Browne was clearly materialistic and said that he was a 'bartender of the Holy Spirit" and that God would slay those who criticized him. This does not seem like sound leadership in the Toronto movement.

Fruits - very patchy, some lives impacted, many made trivial and shallow, some ruined. Overall mildly negative.

Doctrine - almost completely lacking, shallow, blown here are there, insubstantial.

Being built on Christ & the historical Jesus - there was little or no teaching on the historical Christ, his incarnation, life, cross, resurrection, rather it was encountering an undefined spiritual presence. This lack of content about God, this lack of the knowledge of who God is and what He expected from us was a most disturbing part of this movement as I saw it practiced in Australia.

Morality - while repentance was certainly an aspect of many Toronto meetings deep moral development was not. Being drunk in the Spirit was not a state in which one could do much ethical or moral reflection or apply your faith to daily life and business. It has not changed the political landscape or built social institutions - as the genuine revivals under Wesley and Booth and others did.

Attitude - when this article first came out in 1997 I received over a dozen death threats from members of the Toronto movement. The emails were hostile, vitriolic and full of curses. This only confirmed my suspicions. The Toronto blessing saw itself as untouchable, holy, the greatest movement of God. It created "Toronto" and "non-Toronto" churches and significant division in the body of Christ. It openly claimed that God would slay its critics. Such an attitude is neither humble or holy.

Thus I have significant and I believe biblical grounds for being very reserved about the "Toronto blessing" and similar experiential revival movements. In evaluating revivals we must look past the hype and to Christ and the Scriptures.

False Miracles

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 NKJV) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. {9} The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, {10} and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. {11} And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, {12} that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Satan is a great counterfeiter. He devises false teachers and false prophets (2 Peter 2:1) , false apostles with false gospels (2 Cor 11:1-15) and false miracles (2 Thess 2:9). In the end times these will combine into a powerful deception that will even seem to threaten the existence of the church itself. Scripture states seven times that false miracles will mislead many (Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Thess 2:8-12, Rev 13:13,14, 16:14,19:20) and it seems that this will involve a large section of the world's population (the Greek word for many has the connotations of a majority). Those deceived will believe that they are serving God in the name of Jesus when in fact they are "workers of iniquity".. This article is aimed to help make you aware of that deception. It is not an article against miracles, or against Charismatics. It may seem that way and some may choose to use it that way. However, let me state that I believe that God does far more miracles than the Devil. True miracles are in the majority. This is an article calling God's people to exercise discernment in the last days. Take it that way and you will be reading it aright.

An Artist's Impression (based on the Scriptures)

Here is a "artists impression" of what I believe this final deception will be like. It will be breathtakingly spectacular with great wonders happening. Fire will fall from heaven to earth on command. People will be spectacularly and genuinely healed. There will be triumph over the forces of nature and a sense that a new "magical realm" has arrived on earth. It will appear to be a wonder-full breakthrough into the instant and easy life. Many people will talk of Utopia being realized and world peace a certainty. The Beast, an apparently benign dictator will appear to be both militarily and spiritually invulnerable. There will be a centralized rule of law on earth under him. The slogan will be something like "Peace through strength" ... "and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev 13:4) The world will sparkle with magic and dazzle the senses. God and Christianity will seem strangely irrelevant, morals as things of the past. The promise of instant gratification will over-ride everything and people will wonder and be in awe of this marvelous new age, its "promise" and its "freedom". It will suddenly feel OK to be selfish and wonderful to take part in magic. A false prophet will emerge who will at first appear to be saintly, lamb-like, and meek.. "He had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon." (Rev 13:11) He will win the trust of many. When all the world is convinced then he will lead them into worshiping the image of the Beast. People will follow first of all because of the cunning promises, then because of the great signs he performs and lastly out of the sheer power of economic compulsion. Then as blasphemy increases and Christians are persecuted God's judgments will be poured out on the Earth and the "magical kingdom" shown to be a powerless sham. Few will repent. Most will try harder in their magic and harden in their rebellion until on one day they all assemble at a place called Armageddon to do battle with God - and lose.

Now I will go from the picture to consider each of the seven main verses it is based upon they are:

Matthew 7:21-23

Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22

2 Thess 2:8-12

Rev 13:13,14, 16:14 and ,19:20

The Day of Judgment (Matthew 7)

(Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. {22} "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' {23} "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

The word for many in verse 22 is "pollous" 4183. polus, pol-oos'; includ. the forms from the alt. pollos; (sing.) much (in any respect) or (plur.) many; neut. (sing.) as adv. largely; neut. (plur.) as adv. or noun often, mostly, largely:--abundant, + altogether, common, + far (passed, spent), (+ be of a) great (age, deal, -ly, while), long, many, much, oft (-en [-times]), plenteous, sore, straitly. Comp. G4118, G4119. (From Strong's Hebrew Greek Dictionary)

And the word for iniquity or lawlessness in verse 23 is "anomia" 458. anomia, an-om-ee'-ah; from G459; illegality, i.e. violation of law or (gen.) wickedness:--iniquity, X transgression of) the law, unrighteousness.

On "that day", the Day of Judgment, Jesus Himself (v23) will tell- a large number, possibly even a majority, who call Him Lord, that they are "workers of lawlessness"! They will be people who use His name and work miracles, prophesying, casting out demons and doing many wonders. But they will be guilty of "anomia" the utter disregard for God's standards. This is sobering. It is a natural assumption that if we are doing miracles in the name of Jesus we are in God's will. Jesus, Paul and the apostles all did miracles and these miracles were good and advanced the Kingdom of God. The fault does not lie with miracles but with the heart of those who performed them. Perhaps these rejected people have evil hearts full of envy, pride and boastfulness. They certainly have scant regard for true holiness and a God-disciplined life. They seem to be "Christian magicians" using the name and power of God divorced from the character, will and purposes of God.

The Deception of the Church (Matt 24; Mark 13)

The next two almost identical verses concentrate on the end-times deception of the Church:

(Matthew 24:24 NRSV) For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

(Mark 13:22 NRSV) False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

Sectarian leaders posing as "messiahs" and "prophets" and working powerful miracles ("great signs and omens") will attempt to lead astray everyone, including even the people of God. However, God has chosen those who will be His and though imperiled there is the implication

that they will also be preserved. These signs will be powerful enough to deceive all believers unless God Himself preserves them.

Every book in the New Testament with the exception of Philemon warns vigorously against false teachers who will try to deceive God's people. It is a major if not over-riding emphasis of many of the epistles (Colossians, Jude) However, critical assessment of doctrine and teachings is often seen as "negative" or contentious. At times it undoubtedly has been. Discernment is an essential part of our discipleship in Christ (Philippians 1:9-11 NKJV) " And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, {10} that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, {11} being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (See also Col 1:9-10) We need to judge rightly everything that claims to be "spiritual" or "of the Holy Spirit" (1John 4:1-3). This world's standards blind us and confuse us. Right and wrong, good and evil, false and true are getting harder and harder to figure out for the average Christian. With the current animosity towards doctrine, theology and Bible teaching in many areas of today's church people are ill-equipped to deal with what will be a powerful and subtle temptation. The temptations will possibly be as crafty as the ones Satan tried on Christ. These subtle temptations to self-gratification were only rebuffed by spiritual discernment based on a thorough knowledge of the Word of God.

How then can we discern those who will seek to deceive God's church? The first rule of thumb, and perhaps the best, is the test of the two great commandments "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and ...love your neighbour as yourself...". (Matthew 22:37-40). While not intended as a test of who is in and who is out it is the heart and soul of Christianity and sooner or later it is violated or "replaced" (e.g. the emphasis is shifted to power or comfort instead of love) by those who seek to deceive. Apart from this general rule of thumb Scripture gives some more specific tests that help us identify false miracle workers in our midst. They revolve around tests of true doctrine, true lifestyle and true fellowship. The tests are:

- 1) Does the miracle worker testify that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 4:15)
- 2) Does the miracle worker believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? (1 John 4:1-4)
- 3) Does the miracle worker claim to be the Messiah, 'a Christ' or in some way on a par with Jesus Himself? (Matthew 24:23,24; Mark 13:21,22; 2Corinthians 11:13-15)
- 4) Does the miracle worker have a life full of "good fruits" such as love, mercy and faithfulness? Or are they law-less and self pleasing? (Matt 7:15-20)
- 5) False miracle workers regularly display hate towards other Christians/ministries. This may involving "cursing" or threats that God will slay their critics. This is a sure sign that they are not of God and are in fact "in darkness". (1 John 2:8-11; 3:15-18; 4:20,21)
- 6) False teachers are noted for enslaving people to quaint and unnecessary practices with regard to food, marriage, festivals, the Sabbath and even circumcision. (Colossians 2:16-23; 1 Timothy 4:1-7). True miracle workers set people free! (John 8:32-36, Galatians 5:1)
- 7) Does the miracle worker seek followers for themselves or for the Lord? (Acts 20:30)
- 8) Is the miracle worker greedy for financial gain? Or worldly? (Titus 1:11, 2:12; Jude 1:11, James 4:4; 1 John 4:1-6)

9) Does the miracle worker have generally "sound doctrine" or does he preach philosophy, myths and "old wives tales"? (1 Tim 4:1-7, Colossians 2:8-10)

10) Does the miracle worker love other Christians and actively fellowship within the Church? Or has he "broken away" from all forms of external accountability - especially to the Body of Christ? (1 John 2:18,19; 4:6)

(Matthew 7:15,16 NRSV) "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. {16} You will know them by their fruits... The false prophets have false lives. They are greedy, immoral, rebellious, deceptive and divisive. Jude describes them as....(Jude 1:4-19 NRSV) For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ... {8} Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones... {10} But these people slander whatever they do not understand, and they are destroyed by those things that, like irrational animals, they know by instinct. {11} Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion. {12} These are blemishes on your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; {13} wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved forever... {16} These are grumblers and malcontents; they indulge their own lusts; they are bombastic in speech, flattering people to their own advantage...{19} It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.

When so called "miracle-workers":
 have long appeals at the offering and flatter the rich for gain,
 are "bombastic in speech",
 grumble about the standard of their accommodation,
 are worldly,
 slander or treat lightly the things of God,
 and reject any authority over their ministry

Then you have every right to doubt their authenticity. A true miracle worker will display a life of generosity, love and integrity. A true servant will be Christ-like and humble. It is not "a sin against the Holy Spirit" to test them. We are enjoined to test out that which claims to be spiritual (1 John 4:1-4) and "not to believe everyone..". (1 John 4:1). However, the testing we are to conduct is to be positive, we are to test them with the intent to find them genuine. That is what the original Greek implies. It is a friendly thorough examination - not a witch-hunt.

The Deception of the Whole World (2 Thess 2; Rev 13, 16, 19)

(2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 NRSV) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. {9} The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, {10} and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {11} For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, {12} so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.

The power behind false miracles is clearly Satan. The character of these miracles is deception leading to lawlessness. The victims of the deception are those that "refuse to love the truth".

Strangely, even though the delusion is clearly Satanic in origin, Paul attributes its ultimate origin to God "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion...". God does not honor intellectual laziness and ethical slothfulness. Those who are apathetic about truth will fall victim to the forces of evil.

(Revelation 13:11-18 NRSV) Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. {12} It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. {13} It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all; {14} and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; {15} and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. {16} Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, {17} so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. {18} This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six.

(Revelation 16:12-14 NRSV) The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. {13} And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. {14} These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

(Revelation 19:20 NRSV) And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

The false miracles at the end of the age will have one main object - the deception of the whole earth into following an idolatrous system of worship - "it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived;" (Rev 13:14) . The end-times religion will be both idolatrous and magical. Idolatry is the substitution of the creature for the Creator. Magic is any system that claims to give people access to God's power without having to accept God's will. This false religion, led by a false prophet will have enormous power and be able even to call fire to fall from heaven in the presence of all (Rev 13:13). The deception will be enhanced by appearing to have a superficial resemblance to Christianity (Matt 24:24) and may even use the name of Jesus in its magical formulas ... "have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" (Matt 7:22). The "masterminds" will be an "unholy trinity" - the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They will be potent sources of demonic spiritual power which will work false miracles. (Revelation 16:13-14)

The focus of this deception will be the world leaders, the deceiving spirits will "go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle". However, the net is a wide one and will catch everyone who is greedy for economic gain. "Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Rev 13:16-17) . In fact unless God has written your name in the Book of Life you will

fall under this deception. (Revelation 13:8) It will be a multi-faceted assault on the Truth by the forces of evil. Paul describes it as "every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing," (2 Thess 2:10) there will not be a deception missing from Satan's plan -every kind of deception will be there! And prominent among all these deceptions will be "all power, signs, lying wonders" (2 Thess 2:9).

Conclusion

We are confronted with a frightening picture of a powerful and almost totally successful deception. Should we then despair and distrust all miracles? I don't think so. Despair is rarely good counsel. We need to do the opposite. We need to so acquaint people with genuine miracles and true servants of God so that the fakes will be obvious. We need to bring into being a powerful but balanced and informed faith. The Church should now pursue both power and righteousness, both miracles and character, both Word and Spirit, both doctrine and experience, and both love and discernment.

Some weeds will be planted by the Enemy. Not all in the garden called revival will be roses. I hope you take a wiser and more sober approach to miracles in these last days. And yet I also earnestly hope that, you declare the gospel of God "not in words only but in power". Let me leave you with Paul's attitude to the proper use of miracles.

(Romans 15:18-21 NRSV) For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, {19} by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. {20} Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, {21} but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand."

The Occult - What's Wrong With Exploring The "Other Side"?

People are fascinated by the occult - the dark, the mysterious, the X-files, the tarot cards and the Ouija boards. But "the truth is out there..." - is a falsehood! The truth is in Jesus who said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no-one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). Participating in the occult is very dangerous - not just because of what may or may not occur - but because it brings God's anger down on you and your children for up to three or four generations. (Exodus 20:4-5 NKJV) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; {5} you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.

When Israel was about to go into the promised Land Moses gave these warnings against ebbing involved with idols, images or occult practices. (Deuteronomy 7:23-26 NKJV) "But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. {24} "And He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will destroy their name from under heaven; no one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. {25} "You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. {26} "Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing.

Notice the penalty for bringing an object of occult worship into one's house "lest you be doomed to destruction like it... for it is an accursed thing". Idols carry the curse of God on them as do Ouija boards, tarot cards, things used in Satanic rituals, crystal balls, magic books, divination instruments etc. When these things are present in the home, alcoholism, mental illness, chronic diseases and even suicide soon follow.

But you don't have this stuff in your house - you just "get your cards done", have your palm read, read your horoscope etc...(Leviticus 20:6 NKJV) 'And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.' Consulting mediums and spiritists was so serious that it resulted in God's wrath falling in a particularly severe form - banishment forever from Israel.

Here is a catalog of verses about the occult.

The Torah

(Leviticus 19:26-31 NKJV) {26} 'You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. {27} 'You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. {28} 'You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD. {29} 'Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness. {30} 'You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD. {31} 'Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

(Leviticus 20:6 NKJV) 'And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.

(Deuteronomy 7:5 NKJV) "But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.

(Deuteronomy 7:25,26 NKJV) "You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God."Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing.

(Deuteronomy 18:10-14 NKJV) 10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,¹¹ "or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.¹² "For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. ¹³ "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.¹⁴ "For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you

Old Testament History

(2 Kings 17:17 NKJV) And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

(2 Kings 21:6 NKJV) Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

(2 Kings 23:24 NKJV) Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

(2 Chronicles 33:6 NKJV) Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

Old Testament Prophets

(Isaiah 8:19 NKJV) And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?

(Jeremiah 14:14 NKJV) And the LORD said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.

(Jeremiah 27:9 NKJV) 'Therefore do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon."

(Ezekiel 12:24 NKJV) "For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel.

(Ezekiel 13:6-7 NKJV) "They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the LORD!' But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. {7} "Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, 'The LORD says,' but I have not spoken."

(Ezekiel 13:18 NKJV) "and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive?"

(Ezekiel 13:20 NKJV) 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls there like birds. I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds.

(Ezekiel 13:23 NKJV) "Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD." " "

(Malachi 3:5 NKJV) And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien; Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts.

New Testament

(Acts 19:19 NKJV) Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

(Revelation 21:8 NKJV) "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

(Revelation 22:15 NKJV) But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

What Should I Do?

The early church used to have as part of the baptismal formula "I renounce all the works of the devil" and those becoming Christians were required to destroy any idols or charms or magic books that they owned (see Acts 19:19 above for an example). Because the sins of idolatry, witchcraft, and involvement in magic or the occult are "abominations" that is very offensive to God - then they must be confessed and sometimes using a prayer for spiritual cleansing can be a big help. Here is a procedure for dealing with any occult involvement.

1. Do a personal inventory of both your involvement and your families involvement in the occult - could your grandmother tell fortunes, did you have an uncle who was a magician (not tricks - real magic), were your parents members of an organization like "The Spiritualist Church". remember the punishment for these sins goes down the generations and could be affecting you. Confess all these that you know of to God and ask His forgiveness.
2. Burn everything that is associated with the occult -jade Buddhas, temple wind chimes, tarot cards, magic books, demon masks, even the "dark" kind of heavy metal music, things with pentagrams on it (the five pointed occult star), astrology books, love magic , charms, books from cults such as the Jehovah's Witness or Mormons, when in doubt destroy it. Many people are trapped by the value of these items as they can be covered with gold or silver or be "old and rare books" etc. The Ephesian Christians burnt 50,000 drachmas (about 5 million dollars worth) of magic books when they became converted. The Bible tells us (Deut 7:25) that we are not to covet the silver or the gold that is on them – it's tempting but it's dangerous.
3. Set yourself a program of bible reading and prayer and ask God to renew you spiritually and be Lord of your life (John 3:1-17).
4. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you can know the true spiritual power that is from God and serve Him.

Bible Study – Angels

The Spiritual Realm

"Heaven is a wonderful place, full of glory and grace..." so the song goes. What is it like? What sort of beings dwell there? What is happening there now? Let's look at just a few of many possible Scriptures. As we look at each text write down the most prominent characteristics of the spiritual realm as described in that particular passage.

Revelation chapter 4

Hebrews 12:22-24

Isaiah 6: 1-6

Ezekiel 1:1-3:15

What are some things that seem to be in common between these very different passages?

How did reading them make you feel?

What do you think the spiritual realm is like?

Angels

What are they? (Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 22:8,9)

How do we relate to them? (Psalm 8; 1 Corinthians 6:3)

From the references in the first few examples what sorts of angels are there?

What about guardian angels? (Matthew 18:10; Psalm 91:11-13; Daniel 10:13; 20,21)

According to Daniel what is happening in the spiritual realms? (Daniel 10:1-21)

What attitude do angels have toward Jesus? (Revelation 5:8-14; Hebrews 1:4 ff)

What attitude are we to avoid concerning angels? (Colossians 2:16-22; Revelation 22:8,9)

The power of angels (Revelation 7:1; 8:4,5; 9:15; 10:5; Isaiah 37:36)

What are some of the functions of angels:

Genesis 16:7-11

Genesis 24:48

Genesis 31:11

Exodus 14:19,20

Exodus 23:20-23

Numbers 22:22-25

2 Samuel 24;16 ff

1 Kings 19:5ff

Psalms 34: 7

Daniel 5:28

Zechariah 3:1-6

Matthew 28:2

Luke 1:19

Luke 2:23

Luke 22:43

Acts 12:7-11

1 Corinthians 10:10

Matthew 13: 47-50

Revelation 14:14-20

Luke 16:19-31

Revelation 18:1-3

Revelation 20:1-3

Practical Pointers

How has this study changed the way you think about God, Heaven and angels?

Do you feel that "God is on your side" and sending angels to help you?

Did you know that we can ask God to send angels to help us in times of need?
(Matthew 26:53) Point - praying to angels is wrong, praying for God to send them to minister to you (which is their function) is O.K.

Discuss what you have learned tonight, share a point each that has impressed you the break into groups for prayer.

UFOs and the Cults

The suicide of 39 people associated with the "Heaven's Gate" UFO cults has brought cults back into the spotlight. UFO cults are a good example of syncretistic Christianity where Christianity is mixed with and adapted to fit into another philosophy - in this case a belief in extra-terrestrials. UFO's, extra-terrestrials, angels, demons and the Bible have been mixed together since at least 1882 when the book 'Oahspe' came out. Von Daniken's "Chariots of the Gods" was one of the more well known of these UFO-Bible theories though later it was exposed as fraudulent. (Clifford Wilson "Crash Go The Chariots"). Christians and UFO followers both share the outlook there is "something out there that is greater than us". This apparent similarity can be quite deceptive. Where they differ is in their attitudes to the historical person of Jesus Christ the Son of God, come in the flesh. UFO cults trivialize Him while Christians worship Him. The UFO cults have used science-fiction, not Scripture as their explanatory framework. This is added to by the quite idiosyncratic, loud and clamant "revelations" of their leaders. This article will attempt to look at what the Bible says about UFO's and also answer some of the questions emerging out of the Heaven's Gate cult.

Q. Does the Bible mention extra-terrestrial life-forms.?

A. The Bible certainly talks about sentient beings other than humans and there are certainly beings who are wiser and more powerful than we are. But these are spiritual beings not little green men or flying saucers. These spiritual beings seem to fall into classes such as angels (Hebrews 1:13,14), demons (Luke 4:33), living creatures (Rev 19:4), elders (Rev 19:4), ghosts (Deut 18:11, Luke 24:39), departed spirits in Sheol (Deut 18:11, Isaiah 14:9-20) righteous men made perfect and living in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24) and martyrs (Rev 6:9-11). They have different domains but the domains are not mentioned as being other planets, stars or other worlds. They dwell "in the heavens" which seem to be dimensions of reality parallel to our own and which at various times are "opened" so that people can see into them. (Acts 7:56, 10:11) Travel to the heavens is nearly instantaneous and does not need any kind of vehicle. (Acts 1:9-11, Rev 4:1,2; 2Kings 2:11) Many of these beings have wings. (Isaiah 6:1-3, Ezek 1:6) and some have strange "combination bodies" (Ezek 1:10, Rev 4:6-8). Ghosts do not possess bodies but are discarnate entities (Luke 24:39) demons are also discarnate but seek a body to dwell in (Luke 11:24-26). Angels have bodies which can be human in appearance so that they can be mistaken for ordinary men (Genesis 19:1-26, Joshua 5:13-15) or distinctly heavenly. (Daniel 10:5,6 Isaiah 6:1-3). These beings belong to two "kingdoms" - the Kingdom of Light headed by God and the Kingdom of Darkness headed by Satan (Colossians 1:13, Ephesians 5:8). These two kingdoms are at war. (Ephesians 6:10-21) Satan is seeking to take over heaven (Isaiah 14:13-15) while God is seeking to defeat him and the powers of evil (1 John 3:8). The human race is at the center of this contention. It is unique in being made "in the image of God" possessing His likeness and a portion of his authority. (Genesis 1:26-31) There is no suggestion of any other beings being made in the image of God. This image was retained after man sinned but has been damaged in some way. (Psalm 8). The human race is divided into two races depending on which Master they follow (Romans 8:14, Galatians 3:26, 1 John 3:8-10, John 8:44) they are "sons of God" (Christians) or "sons of the Devil" (unbelievers). No other beings possess the central importance of Christians, not even angels (Hebrews 1:13,14). Christians are renewed in the image of him who made them (Colossians 3:10) and have regained the authority lost in Eden, (Ephesians 2:6,7) consequently they will become very powerful and one day they will judge the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3) whose job is to serve Christians (Hebrews 1:13,14) and with Christ shall rule the nations of this world. (Revelation

2:26,27, 19;15). The human race and particularly those who are "born again" is portrayed as the pinnacle and the center of Creation such that our destiny affects all things (Romans 1:18-25; Psalm 8). Thus we need to see ourselves as incredibly important elements in a cosmic struggle whose center-point is the cross. (Col 1:19, 20; 2:13-15) and whose consummation is the return of Jesus Christ to judge the world. (Revelation 19-21).

Q. But aren't spaceships and "chariots of fire" mentioned in the Bible?

A. This is a well worn 'urban legend' that has taken on the status of 'fact' in some circles. Let's look at the two most commonly quoted Scriptures in support of this. Ezekiel 1 deals with "the glory of the Lord" this is not a spaceship but a huge throne attended by mighty supernatural creatures. It is very incompletely described but the basic elements are four mighty angelic beings, some curiously designed wheels that were under the command of the angelic beings and the throne of God. It is a glorious version of a royal entourage with chariot, throne and attendants except these attendants are "ministers of fire". There is no suggestion that it has arrived from another planet. It appears several times in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 3:23, 8:4, 43:2-7) and the impression is given that this "mobile throne" is the center-point of God's Presence on earth at any particular point in time. (Ezek 43:7) The throne is not occupied by a race of extra-terrestrials but by the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The other misquoted reference is 2 Kings 2:11,12 where Elijah is taken up into heaven by "chariots of fire". (2 Kings 2:11-12 NRSV) As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. {12} Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. The description "chariots of fire and horses of fire" fits better with the "glory of the Lord" vision seen in Ezekiel than with a spaceship. The chariot was drawn by angelic horses not propelled by an ion drive! Elijah and Elisha were separated by it while walking along. It was Elijah's transition into the next life after years of fruitful ministry. He did not "come back with a message" it was a one-way trip to glory. He was taken up in a whirlwind to the Presence of God not beamed up to a spaceship of aliens This is no suggestion in Scripture that this was in some way an encounter with "another race" but rather it is portrayed as an encounter with YHWH and those who serve Him.. The 'advanced civilization' is that of Heaven itself!

Q. Why is it wrong to mix Christianity with a belief in extra-terrestrials?

A. This is what is called "syncretism" when Christianity is interpreted through the eyes of another belief system or philosophy or closely allied with it. Buddhism and Christianity are often mixed up in Vietnam, spirit worship and Christianity in the Caribbean and materialism and Christianity in the prosperity cults. These are only a few of the myriads of possible combinations. The tragedy is that when the pagan philosophy fails it takes Christianity with it. For instance say a cargo cult waits by an airstrip for Jesus to come in an airplane bringing great wealth. When the wealth does not materialize not only has the cargo cult/magical provision mentality failed but "Jesus" has failed and Christianity is marred. To marry Christianity with a belief in a spacecraft coming to take you to heaven is to invite disappointment and hurt. Here is a real-life story of one such disappointment.

This particular cult family was convinced that their deceased daughter was a high raised angel in the spirit world and received messages from her daily. This cult family believed that their daughter had instructed them to take all of their money out of their life savings and buy camera equipment. These purchases of camera equipment were to record the celestial event of a huge UFO spiritual space craft landing in Orange County, California. According to the "Channeled"

messages, the family's deceased daughter was supposed to be piloting this angelic space craft, and she wanted her father to photograph her arrival in Orange County, California. Needless to say, that when the appointed hour arrived when the angelic space craft was to appear, nothing happened.(From "Cults and the Oahspe Bible")

Q. What do you think underlies the almost fanatical belief in UFO's we see today?

A. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NKJV) For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. {14} And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. {15} Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into "ministers of righteousness", whose end will be according to their works.

Many of these groups that claim to "see the light" are seeing the counterfeit "angel of light" - Lucifer, otherwise known as Satan or the Devil. Deception is one his strategies and getting thousands of people to believe in extra-terrestrials and to take contact with them extremely seriously is Satan's way of deluding people into "contacting" evil, deceptive and malignant spirits from his realm. UFO's point people away from Christ and the cross to a god of technology and "power". They direct us to look away from our character and its development to having encounters with alien beings and "brain surgery" and instantaneous zaps. However, you cannot shortcut personal growth and a mentality of the quick fix from outer space just contributes to emotional immaturity. The other responses that concern me include idolatrous worship of aliens and "higher intelligences" which are really demons. The Heaven's Gate cult were in awe of the Level Above Human. The other response is that of fear and paranoia, distrust of other people, churches, governments and anyone who does not hold to the UFO theory. When so much paranoia is present, the Devil is not far off.

Q. Is there an ongoing battle between good and evil beings?

A. This earth is temporarily under the control of dark forces which are attempting to throw off God's rule and authority. (1 John 5:19) However, God is ultimately in control and will finally take over completely.(Rev 19:11-21) The Bible calls this period when the earth is subjugated to Satan as 'this present evil age'(Galatians 1:4). Evil spiritual beings who are cruel, greedy and who ruthlessly lust for power are the controlling forces behind many of the key structural principles such as international trade, arms and agriculture (see the word "trade" in Ezek:28:5-16). This view is supported by two key New Testament references.. Firstly before the cross in Satan's temptation of Jesus.(Luke 4:5-8 NRSV) Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. {6} And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. {7} If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." {8} Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"Secondly after the cross in about 90 AD as the apostle John was writing to a persecuted church. (1 John 5:19 NRSV) We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. The controlling level of "intelligence" that is contacted by UFO cults is in fact the demonic realm of dark principalities and powers that control this present evil age. The cross has fatally weakened their power (Col 2:13-15)and set in motion the destruction that will finally and completely dislodge them from their strongholds. The Christian church is God's "resistance movement" on earth. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) When the church has done its job Jesus will return with His heavenly armies to "retake earth"(Jude 1:14,15). This will be fiercely resisted by the devil and all who follow him. But they shall lose. (Revelation 19:11-21).Part of the deception of UFO's is the portrayal of a good earth invaded by bad aliens. This is the opposite of what will happen at the return of Christ. Satan may try to portray the hosts of heaven as "alien invaders" as part of the deception that gathers

the kings of the earth for war against God. (Rev 16:13,14) The war against the "alien invaders" will in fact be a hopelessly unequal war against God! (Revelation 19:11-21). People who do not want God's authority over their lives will be destroyed at this time while those on the side of Jesus Christ and the Creator's legitimate claim to rule this planet will be rewarded. (Matthew 13:41-43 NRSV) The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, {42} and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. {43} Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Q. So why is it all happening now?

A. The Bible speaks of powerful deceptions being let loose in the last days along with many false cults and Messiahs. Here are just a few verses to back this up. (See my article on "False Miracles In The End Times" for more info)

(2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 NRSV) And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. {9} The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, {10} and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {11} For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, {12} so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.

(Matthew 24:24 NRSV) For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

The UFO phenomenon is part of Satan's murderous hall of mirrors. It is not his main delusion but it is a powerful and well crafted one that can be turned to all sorts of ends and could perhaps even provide a false framework for explaining the rapture and the return of Christ. Lies that attack key points of doctrine can be very effective weapons. For example - the lie propagated by the Jewish authorities that Jesus had not risen from the dead but that His body had been stolen by the disciples. (Matthew 28:12-15) It kept many people from believing in the resurrection. (Matt 28:15) Lies are useful to hinder the work of God, to cause people to go astray and to lead them into death and destruction. UFO's are one of the Devil's more effective lies.

Q. What can I do to escape all this?

A. Become a committed Christian. Faith in Jesus Christ makes us a son of God and puts us on the winning side in this conflict. (John 1:9-18 NIV) The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. {10} He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. {11} He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. {12} Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- {13} children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. {14} The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. {15} John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" {16} From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. {17} For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. {18} No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

You need to believe in Jesus. You need to believe that God sent Jesus to earth as the "true light" and that what Jesus says is true in every sense of the word.. Secondly you need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God full of glory, grace and truth. Thirdly you need to receive Jesus. That is to take him into your life as a guest who stays forever. You can do this by praying the following prayer:

" Dear God I would like to become a Christian. I know that I have not lived as you want me to. I know I need you to forgive me for all the sins I have done. I ask that you will please forgive me because of what Jesus did on the cross. I believe He died on that cross to take my sins and that You raised Him from the dead. I want to have eternal life from God so that I can follow Jesus and obey Him forever as my Lord. I want to receive Jesus into my life, become a son of God and live a life full of grace and truth. Please hear this prayer and make me a Christian now. Amen."

Is Jesus God?

He claimed great things about Himself...

Was He Mad?

Was He Bad?

Was He God?

Carefully Read and Think About The Following Bible Verses.....

(John 3:13 NKJV) "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

(John 7:16 NKJV) Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

(John 14:6-10 NKJV) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. {7} "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." {8} Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." {9} Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? {10} "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

What did Jesus claim about:

Where He came from? (John 3:13)

What He taught? (John 7:16)

His role in helping people to know God? (John 14:6)

The similarities between Him and God the Father (John 14:7, 10)

His authority and where it came from? (John 14:10)

These are BIG claims to make! If they are true Jesus is much more than just a good person - He is God. If they are untrue He is either crazy or telling lies on a grand scale. There are only three main choices...

1. They are not true and Jesus knew they were not true - that is He was a liar- He was BAD.
2. They are not true and Jesus did not know they were not true - that is He was deluded and crazy like someone who thinks they are a hamburger - He was MAD.
3. They are TRUE- Jesus was claiming to be God- therefore Jesus is God.

Let's line this up with the facts.....

Jesus was not bad!

When Jesus challenged his ENEMIES to find any sin in Him they could not do so! (John 8:46 NKJV) "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? In fact Jesus was always recognised as being someone who was without sin. Even Judas, Pontius Pilate and the guards that executed Him acknowledged this! (Matthew 27:4,24,54). The Bible records Jesus as being perfectly without sin. (Heb 4:15 NKJV) For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus was not mad!

People who are insane do not give the world's greatest moral teachings such as the Sermon On The Mount (Matthew 5-7) and they are not followed by people for very long. People soon detect when someone is crazy and they will not die with or for a madman like Jesus' disciples did. Mentally ill people with religious delusions are generally distressingly self-centred, loud and clamant and very ineffective in their lives. This is the opposite of Jesus who was loving, humble and lowly. (Matthew 11:28-30) The quality of Jesus' life and teaching that has stood the test of time as the world's best ethical system proves He was not insane - in fact He was very wise.

Jesus is God!

The Bible backs up Jesus' claim that He was God. Lets look at just three Scriptures:

(Col 1:15-20 NKJV) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. {16} For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. {17} And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. {18} And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. {19} For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, {20} and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

(Col 2:9 NKJV) For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

(Rev 5:6,13 NKJV) And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth...And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

From just these three Scriptures we see that:

Jesus is the image of the invisible God.
 All things were created through Him and for Him.
 He is before all things.
 All things "consist" in Him - He is the "glue of the Universe".
 He is above all things.

All the fullness of the Father dwells in Him.
 He has reconciled all things to Himself.
 He is the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.
 He dwells in the middle of God's throne.
 His "eyes" are the seven Spirits of God.
 He is worshipped in Heaven.
 He is praised "in the same breath" as the Father.

These 12 things back up Jesus' claim to be God and indicate that Jesus Christ is God. Jesus is not a mere human and He is not an angel (Hebrews 1:4-14). He is God's Son and the One all heaven worships. Since God says "I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11) then if Jesus is worshipped in Heaven then He must be God.

Check out the following two Scriptures and write out what they say about Jesus' claim to be God.

(John 1:1-3 NKJV) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. {2} He was in the beginning with God. {3} All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

(Heb 1:1-3 NKJV) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, {2} has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; {3} who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

What special name was Jesus called? (John 1:1)

List four things John 1:1-3 says about the Word?

What special name or title does Hebrews call Jesus?

How much power and authority what kinds of power and authority does the Son have?

What do both verses tell us about Jesus' role in Creation?

What do both John and Hebrews tell us about the similarities between the nature and personality of Jesus and the nature and personality of God?

If someone is all-powerful and exactly like God in nature and is worshipped in Heaven - then who are they?

Conclusion

Do you think that Jesus' claims to be God are true or untrue? If untrue why do you think He is either mad or bad? If true - will you now follow Him?