

## WHAT IS A CULT?

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Introduction, Reverend Sun Myung Moon And Unification Church, The Birth Of Cults During The 1960s And 1970s, Calling A Man Father, True Parents True Mother And Mother Of Peace, Moon's Powerful Influence In Washington DC, Moon's Proclamation Of Being The Messiah, Other Moon Absurdities, The Definition Of A Cult, Some Characteristics Of A Cult, Cults In Plain Sight, Roman Catholic Church And Mary Worship, Not All Modern Cults Are Recognized As Cults, Other Entities That Qualify As Cults, First Century Sects, "Sect" Was Not A Negative Word, Modern Strategy Of Framing The Competition As A Very Dangerous Cult, Branded A Cult Leader, Man Worship Within The First Century Church, Apostle Paul's Concern, The Rise Of Denominationalism, Jesus Is The Only Head Of The Church, Suggested Reading List

In a recent online conversation, a certain misguided person falsely accused me of referring to the Unification Church as a cult simply because they have beliefs which are different from my own. For those of you who may not be too familiar with the Unification Church, allow me to take a few moments to provide a bit of background information for you.

After having gathered a large following in the United States during the early 1970s, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon -- who is the founder of the Unification Church -- returned to his native South Korea as a result of legal charges involving alleged tax evasion. However, although some people did not believe that Moon was guilty of the charges, he returned to the United States where he spent thirteen months in prison of an eighteen-month sentence. Despite his earlier problems, in the following decades, Moon's Unification Church spread out all over the world, much like the Children of God cult, which was another byproduct of the late 1960s and the early 1970s. This is born out by the fact that the Unification Church has quite a few websites in different languages.

For those of my readers who may be too young to be aware of it, it was during that same time period -- that is, from the late 1960s into the early 1970s -- that quite a few of the well-known cults came into existence, as an offshoot of the "peace and love" hippie generation. Besides the Unification Church and the Children of God, some of the others included David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, the Heaven's Gate UFO cult, the Reverend Jim Jones and his ultimately suicidal People's Temple cult, and the Raelians, to name just a few. Some of these cults continue to exist to this very day, but they often disguise themselves by changing their names, or by using other subtle tactics.

But returning to the Unification Church, to his followers -- who are commonly referred to as "Moonies" -- Sun Myung Moon was reverently called "Father". As some of you may already know, this practice directly contradicts Jesus' own words regarding calling any man our father upon the Earth, as we can easily determine by the following verse which is found in the Gospel of Matthew:

"And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."

Matthew 23:9, KJV

Personally, I find the practice particularly blasphemous in Moon's case, being as his followers actually believed that he was Jesus Christ in the flesh. Similar to the Children of God cult, Moon's church also places a lot of emphasis on sex and marriage. In fact, it may interest you to know that Moon and his wife -- who were referred to by their followers as "True Parents" -- had a total of sixteen children and thirty grandchildren. With Reverend's Moon's death in 2012 at the age of ninety-two, his wife -- Hak Ja Han -- became the sole leader of the movement. Her followers refer to her as "True Mother" and "Mother of Peace"

Quite frankly, regarding the word "true" in the phrases "True Parents" and "True Mother", I cannot see what possible truth could be found in a man who foolishly and falsely claimed to be the latest manifestation of Jesus Christ. Do you?

One thing that can be said for Sun Myung Moon is that he was very rich, very powerful, and very influential for being a controversial cult leader. Moon founded The Washington Times

newspaper, as well as United Press International and a number of other organizations. Many eyebrows were raised -- and some people embarrassed -- when in June of 2004, The Washington Post reported on a congressional reception that was held in March of that same year, during which Moon was honored due to his work towards achieving global peace. It was what Moon had to say during the ceremony, and how he was treated, which was an embarrassment to some, and raised the ire of others. Here are some excerpts from the 2004 Washington Post article:

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"At the March 23 ceremony in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) wore white gloves and carried a pillow holding an ornate crown that was placed on Moon's head. The Korean-born businessman and religious leader then delivered a long speech saying he was 'sent to Earth . . . to save the world's six billion people . . . Emperors, kings and presidents . . . have declared to all Heaven and Earth that Reverend Sun Myung Moon is none other than humanity's Savior, Messiah, Returning Lord and True Parent.'"

"Moon has claimed to have spoken in 'the spirit world' with all deceased U.S. presidents, Jesus, Moses, Mohammed and others. At the March 23 event, he said: 'The founders of five great religions and many other leaders in the spirit world, including even Communist leaders such as Marx and Lenin . . . and dictators such as Hitler and Stalin, have found strength in my teachings, mended their ways and been reborn as new persons.'"

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As I mentioned earlier, Sun Myung Moon died in 2012 at the age of ninety-two, and is survived by his wife, Hak Ja Han, and ten of his children. I honestly do not know what the current status is of the Unification Church. However, I assume that it is probably still going very strong in some parts of the world.

But returning to the false accusation which was made against me, quite frankly, and to be clear, just because someone has different views and beliefs from my own does NOT necessarily make them a cult member. Furthermore, to even suggest such a

thing is in my view, both silly and immature. For the record, a cult is defined by certain parameters, criteria or markers. The Oxford Dictionary provides a reasonably good definition:

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1. system of religious veneration and devotion directed towards a particular figure or object.
2. a relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or as imposing excessive control over members.
3. a misplaced or excessive admiration for a particular thing.

----- End Quote -----

So as you can see, excessive veneration or worship of the group's leader is regarded as cultic behavior. Embracing views which are generally regarded as being outside of the norm is also a sign of cultic behavior. However, the above definitions are rather limited in scope, in my view. There are in fact additional markers which I believe should be mentioned here. I discuss some of these parameters in my four-part series entitled "Exposing the Tactics of the Enemy", which you will find listed at the end of this same article. For example, the following characteristics are also common with many cults:

1. ostracism -- or separation -- of group members from their families and from society in general.
2. group think with little or no room for individuality being allowed.
3. control of a member's finances and personal possessions.
4. enforcing an "us versus them" mentality; "them" meaning anyone outside of the cult.
5. exclusivity: meaning "We are God's chosen emissaries and the only people who really possess the truth, and who God even recognizes."

6. gross -- and oft times intentional -- misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures, resulting in false doctrines and deep deception.

7. esoteric wisdom or knowledge which is supposedly only known to the cult members and their leaders.

So based on the above characteristics, in my view, yes, the Moonies are clearly a cult. After all, as we have already discussed, they actually believe, and are fully convinced, that their now-deceased founder and leader -- Reverend Sun Myung Moon -- was the latest manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Talk about excessive worship!

Sadly, the previous definition and characteristics are by no means limited to Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church alone. There are in fact quite a few groups -- and even established churches -- which likewise meet these very same parameters, no matter how much they may be respected by a large part of the world.

While it may be offensive to some of my readers, one obvious example which I discuss in the article called "Mary Worship, Christianity and Roman Catholicism", is the Roman Catholic Church's excessive worship of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In my view, this also constitutes a cult. After all, Catholics seem to venerate Mary much more than they do Jesus Christ, even going so far as to refer to her as Co-Mediatrix and Co-Redemptrix, thus making her a partner in our Salvation. Indeed, it is no secret how much the Catholics idolize Mary, which is contrary to the Scriptures. Similar to myself, I am sure that many of you have witnessed this behavior firsthand with street processions, the kissing of statues, and such.

It should come as little surprise to you that Mary worship actually constitutes a cult within an even larger cult. Why do I say this? Because the Roman Catholic Church's excessive worship of the Pope makes it a cult as well, in my view. As we learned earlier, the excessive veneration of any group's leader is in fact cult-like behavior, and we are all quite familiar with how Roman Catholics worship the Pope as if he is God on Earth.

To make matters worse, as some of you will already know, the Pope's words are embraced as truth by Roman Catholics, even

when such words contradict the Holy Scriptures. This too is yet another sign of a cult, and it is extremely dangerous! In fact, blind faith in the words of the Pope has tragically led to millions of people being totally deceived all around the world!

Of course, Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church and the Roman Catholic Church are by no means the only religious entities which clearly display cult-like characteristics. As I noted a moment ago. There are many of them, which many people do not even recognize as being cults, due to the simple fact that they have been around for a rather long time, and they have assimilated into modern society and been accepted.

To reiterate my earlier point, from a Christian perspective, a cult is any group, body or organization which excessively coalesces around a particular individual and venerates them, and which also seriously deviates from the sound doctrines and the pattern of the First Century Church -- as we find outlined in the New Testament -- and which also places that leader's teachings ABOVE the Holy Bible. Thus, based on the Scriptures, the aforementioned parameters, and the Oxford dictionary, it is my personal view that all of the entities which are listed below should be classified as cults, being as every single one of them ticks off at least a few of the qualifying points I shared with you earlier:

1. Children of God aka Family International
2. David Koresh and the Branch Davidians
3. Heaven's Gate
4. Jehovah's Witnesses
5. Jim Jones and the People's Temple
6. Mormons
7. Raelians
8. Roman Catholic Church
9. Seventh Day Adventists

The previous list is merely a small sampling of some of the larger cults which have been, or which still are, prevalent in our modern day. There are many more which I have not even mentioned here. If you disagree with my personal assessment regarding the aforementioned entities, then I encourage you to dig deeper into my other Bill's Bible Basics articles in order to learn how I arrived at these conclusions. I also encourage you to conduct some online research of your own,

and to really dig into the histories of these entities.

During one of my online conversations, it was claimed that early Christianity was viewed as a cult. Well, technically speaking, this is not exactly true. The early followers of Jesus Christ were in fact viewed as a sect. There is a big difference. What do I mean by this? During biblical times, the word "sect" was NOT viewed in a negative context. If you examine the original Koine Greek word which is used in the Scriptures -- that being "hairesis" -- you'll discover that it actually signified a body or party of men who followed a particular set of tenets. That is to say, principles or beliefs.

Furthermore, it might also interest you to know that in the Scriptures, the Nazarenes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were ALL referred to as sects. Not only that, but it was Luke the physician and the Apostle Paul who used the word. Now, does it make any sense to you that they would use a negative word to describe their own Christian brethren, as well as their very own beliefs? I think not. In each of the following four verses, the same Greek word -- "hairesis" -- is used. It is from this same word that we derive the word "heresy":

"Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,"  
Acts 5:17, KJV

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."  
Acts 15:5, KJV

"For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:"  
Acts 24:5, KJV

"Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I [meaning the Apostle Paul ] lived a Pharisee."  
Acts 26:5, KJV

But leave it up to that old deceitful Devil to twist things around as he is prone to do. Thus, sadly, today we discover that the word "sect" has been subtly replaced with the word "cult", which has in fact been assigned a rather negative connotation. As you will know, it is intentionally used to elicit a specific reaction and response from people. It is used by those people who are in control -- such as organized religion -- to demonize people and groups who dare to defy the accepted norm, even when there is absolutely nothing wrong with what they are doing.

As I explain in the three-part series entitled "Are You Just a Baby Huey?: How to Organize Your Own Home Fellowship", if you have ever tried to start your own home-based Christian fellowship -- which is actually fully in accordance with the pattern that was followed by the First Century Church -- you may have been surprised to discover that the first people to complain about your activities were the local churches.

Why do they do this? Well, one of the big reasons is because they don't like the competition, and they are afraid that you might draw church members away from them. And so, they will try to frame you as a dangerous cult, even when you are simply trying to worship the Lord and fellowship with other Christians in the intimacy of your own home. Let that sink in.

My friends, just so you know, I speak from my own personal experiences. As an active witness for the Lord myself, some time ago, I used to engage in Christian fellowship with two of my neighbors. We would sit outside in front of one of the houses and discuss our Christian faith and share things from the Bible. Now and then, a few other people would stand on their balconies and kind of listen in. We weren't trying to hide anything. We were right out there in the open, and just enjoying our fellowship together.

Well, lo and behold, some time later -- I don't recall when now -- my landlord and I were having an exchange of words. I honestly don't remember what about at this point. But to my great surprise, at one point he actually referred to me as a cult leader. To be honest, I was both shocked and offended, because he and I had a good rapport. I would even invite him into my little home on occasion for a cup of coffee so that he could relax from the heat of the day. Well, ever since he



made that mean comment, I have never viewed him exactly the same. His remark may have possibly had something to do with the fact that the place where I live is dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. Who knows.

While we have discussed how the word "sect" was used during the First Century in Israel, there is a related topic which I want to discuss with you before concluding this article. As we learned earlier, one of the signs of cultic behavior is when people begin to coalesce around a particular leader, and also begin to overly venerate them. Some of my readers may not like to hear this, and may possibly even take some offense, but can you think of any modern American political leader where this kind of behavior is on display? I will say no more, because I think the answer is rather obvious.

At any rate, it might interest you to know that man worship is nothing new. It has been around for literally centuries. In fact, this problem even existed within the Church of the First Century as well. Furthermore, as you may know, Apostle Paul was particularly irked by it, and wrote about it, due to the fact that he was one of the Church leaders who was being overly venerated by the Disciples. We find some proof of his concern and frustration in the following Bible verses:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, KJV

"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that

giveth the increase . . . Therefore let no man glory in men . . ."

1 Corinthians 3:3-7, 21, KJV

"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

1 Corinthians 4:6-7, KJV

So as you can see, the Apostle Paul was compelled to rebuke the Corinthian brethren due to their very carnal, foolish behavior. Personally, I am convinced from my study of the Scriptures that it was due to problems such as these that the ugly stain of denominationalism invaded the Church, and it has been with us ever since. Satan certainly knew how to slice and dice and divide the Body of Christ, and he's been doing it ever since, sad to say.

Yes, folks, as I have mentioned before, I am fully convinced that denominationalism is an invention of the Devil. That is why Paul beseeched the brethren that they would be "in the same mind and in the same judgment" in the previous verses, and in other verses which are found in the New Testament as well. The Devil was already beginning to tear the Church apart, even two thousand years ago.

So if there is one important lesson which I hope you learn from this article, it is that we all need to be very careful regarding man worship, and being deceived by the misguided, false doctrines of men. We need to adhere to the Scriptures, and make sure that our beliefs are sound. While it is indeed true that God has raised up a diversity of ministries within the Body of Christ, nevertheless, we need to always remember that Jesus is the only true Head of the Church, as we can determine by the following group of verses:

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."

1 Corinthians 11:3, KJV

"Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,"

Ephesians 1:20-22, KJV

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"

Ephesians 4:15, KJV

"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."

Ephesians 5:23, KJV

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Colossians 1:18, KJV

"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

Colossians 2:10, KJV

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,"

1 Peter 2:7, KJV

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you've found it informative and enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you'd take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were either mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server. To

read these articles, simply click or tap on any link you see below.

Are You Flexible?

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Sol Invictus and the Birth of Christ

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Where Are the First Century Churches?

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