

Understanding and Evangelizing Those in Cults and Other Religions – Part 1 By Phil Layton (notes also available at www.goldcountrybaptist.org)

Virtually every book of the New Testament except Philemon has something to say about false teachers or false prophets (Matt 7:15-23), false gospels (Gal. 1:6-9, see 2 Cor. 11:4), false Christs (Matt. 24:5), false brethren (Gal. 2:4), false doctrines (heresies), etc.

The Biblical Mandate: Jude 3-4, 1 Peter 3:14-16, Romans 10:9-17

The Biblical Manner: Colossians 4:2-6, 2 Timothy 2:14-18, 23-26

The Biblical Motivation: 2 Corinthians 5:9-21

Definition of a Cult: ‘Alan Gomes: “cults grow out of and deviate from a previously established religion.” Seen in this light, a cult of *Christianity*, according to Gomes, would be “a group of people, which claiming to be Christian ... denies (either explicitly or implicitly) one or more of the central doctrines of the Christian faith as taught in the sixty-six books of the Bible.” Likewise, a cult of *Islam* would be, for example, the Nation of Islam, and a cult of *Hinduism* would be the Hare Krishnas ... both derive from parent or host religions, yet both deviate from the doctrinal beliefs of these hosts ...

1. Not every cult is related to Christianity
2. Cults typically deviate from a host religion ...
3. Such cults can be headed by *individual leaders* ... or by *an organization* ...
4. The point of deviation involves essential doctrines (for example, the deity of Christ) as opposed to mere peripheral doctrines (for example, the mode of baptism or style of church government)’ [Ron Rhodes, *Challenge of the Cults*, Zondervan, 2001, p. 22]

A *Christian* cult is “a group, religious in nature, which surrounds a leader or group of teachings which either denies or misinterprets essential biblical doctrine. Most cults have a single leader, or a succession of leaders, who claim to represent God’s voice on earth and who claim authority greater than that of the Bible. The cultic teaching claims to be in harmony with the Bible but denies one or more of the cardinal doctrines presented therein.” [Walter Martin, as cited by Rhodes in above, p. 21]

Those who want to share their Christian faith with followers of cults and other religious groups should bear in mind the following guidelines (below is adapted from Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah’s Witnesses*, pp. 71–76):

“DO’S”...

1. DO remember that followers of cults and world religions are people, just like you — “they want to be treated with respect, they like to think they are right, and they have doubts and insecurities” that they hide from other people — just like you do.
 - The individual members of any particular group are *also* “different from one another: some like to think for themselves, [while] others like to be told what to think; some are good listeners, some are not.”
2. DO gently challenge their false stereotypes of Christians.
 - Be courteous and respectful at all times, even when they are not.”(Many cult representatives, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormon missionaries, expect hostility and disrespect.)

- “Know the Bible and what you believe, and be able to talk about it.” (For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses are taught that non-Witnesses do not know the Bible and are not as well-taught as they are)
 - Give them credit for being sincere and wanting to serve God (when so many other people today couldn’t care less).
3. DO ask questions instead of making accusations. (This way you may be able to avoid being labeled an “opposer” and help them to think for themselves at the same time.)
 - If you’ve taken the time to study problems in the group’s doctrine and history, you’ll have many questions to ask!
 4. DO be ready to give a brief testimony of what Jesus Christ has done for you personally. Followers of non-Christian cults and religions have no such experience of a personal relationship with Christ, and they need to hear it firsthand from someone who has!

“DON’TS”...

1. DON’T assume that the group member really knows the Bible.
 - Instead, often what they really know is their own doctrinal system, some Bible prooftexts, and a rehearsed speech that makes most of them appear to know more than they actually do.
2. DON’T assume that there is only one correct way to witness to a member of this cult or religion.
 - “Since all Christians are different, they should lead from their strengths and speak about what they know when witnessing to [Jehovah’s Witnesses] (or anyone else, for that matter).”
3. DON’T try to force them to admit they’re wrong — or get in over your head.
 - They will almost never admit they’re wrong in front of you, but you *can* admit you don’t know the answer to something and are willing to check it out and get back to them.
4. DON’T just turn them away, because God CAN use YOU!
 - Finally, remember that many followers of cults and world religions are fearful of what would face them if they were to turn from their faith; some (like Jehovah’s Witnesses) have actually been taught that “apostates” face certain destruction. By reaching out to them with kindness and compassion you may be opening a doorway to hope, helping them to see the possibility of life — and salvation — outside their group.

Suggested Print Resources:

Paul Little, *Know What You Believe*; also *Know Why You Believe*
 Rose Publishing, cult pamphlets, CD-ROMs, *Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*
The Facts on Series (John Ankerberg, separate small booklets of 50+ pp for each group)
 Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (About 700 pp. in 1997 revision edited by Hank Hanegraaff, or latest 2003 revision edited by Ravi Zacharias)
 Wayne House, *Charts of Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements* (Zondervan)
 Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with* (titles include *Mormons ... Jehovah’s Witnesses ... Catholics* and other titles dealing with religions, dominations, and cults)