

# OpenTheo

## Cults (Part 1)



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Cults (Part 1)," Steve Gregg distinguishes cults from mainstream Christianity by significant theological differences, including beliefs about the Trinity, divinity of Jesus, and salvation through works. He also notes the sociological characteristics of some cults, including absolute authority of a single leader or institution. However, not all heretical groups with false beliefs are considered cults, and Gregg encourages careful consideration of sociological dynamics before labeling a group as such. He emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus rather than blind submission to religious leaders or denominations.

### Transcript

Okay, now this week and next week, I was asked if I would share about, I was initially asked if I'd share about Mormonism. And then I heard people talking about it as a cults class, and so I wasn't really sure whether I was supposed to talk about cults in general or Mormonism in particular, but it doesn't matter, I'll do both. I'll talk about cults in general, since I believe Mormonism is properly a cult, and then maybe a little bit after I've talked about cults here today, I might get into some discussion about Mormonism, or perhaps next time I'll go into the specifics of Mormonism.

In which case, I will, at least before we're done this week and next week, before we've done both, you should be very much acquainted with the main distinctives of Mormon theology and what's really wrong with it in terms of what the Bible teaches. And not everything that the Mormons teach are worth fighting about. They're very different, fundamentally different from Christianity on many, many issues.

When Christians are dealing with cultists, we need to recognize what things are worth fighting about and what things are not as important. Now, all truth is important, but not all truth is equally important. Some mistakes you can make and still be saved.

You could be wrong about some issues, but if you're right about the foundational issues, you can still be a Christian. And I believe that we should try to bring people closer to the truth on every issue, but some things should take priority over others because the failure

to grasp certain things will cause someone not to be saved. And other issues, I think people are going to get to heaven with a lot of wrong ideas about a lot of issues, smaller issues, less important things.

And so, I want to talk about cults in general first because that is, I think, a category of organizations, we could say, that exist, religious organizations, movements, that Mormonism would be an example of. But it's not alone. There are many, many cults.

In fact, especially since the 70s, cults really multiplied in this country. For a long time, the United States was largely represented by Reformed Protestant Christianity and then eventually a lot of Catholics and Jews immigrated to the United States and so it became more pluralistic. And in the mid-1800s, several cults, I'll define what I mean by a cult in a moment, but several cults arose, some of them in this country, most of them in this country as a matter of fact, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, these all arose in the 1800s, the mid-to-late 1800s.

And in this country, and they professed to be Christian. That's one thing that we're going to limit our definition of cults to mean, groups that profess to be Christian. I'm not going to refer to Hinduism or Islam or Judaism as cults, although they are religions, they are religions contrary to Christianity, but they are not cults as we usually use the term.

And so it would be good for me probably to just begin by defining what the word cult means as I am using it. And I say as I am using it because different people use it different ways. With many words that we could study, we could go right to the Bible and say, well, how does the Bible use this word? We could go to the Greek and the Hebrew and we can give a very solid objective definition.

The problem with the word cult is the Bible doesn't use the word cult. You don't find it in the Bible. And cult is a word that arose somewhere.

It's no doubt, I mean, I can't give you the strict etymology of the word, but I assume it came from the Latin word cultus. Cultus refers to religious practices. And in some respects, the word cult has been used historically not in a negative way.

For example, Christianity was once considered a cult of Judaism. Back when most of the early Christians were Jewish and they still went to the temple and they were still really part of the Jewish system. But they happened to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, whereas most Jews didn't.

And so the Christians had their own meetings and their own authorities, the apostles and so forth, and began to evangelize the other Jews within Judaism and so forth. And so it looked to the early Jewish world in the early days of the church that Christianity was a cult of Judaism. And I guess in one sense, it could be argued that it was, but that would not necessarily be a negative term for cult.

A cult is a separate religious group that has its own practices, but you can define a cult in a variety of ways. I might just start by tweaking your mind a little bit about this. I mean, I said earlier that I believe that Mormonism is a cult.

I also mentioned Jehovah's Witnesses as a cult and Christian science. Now, why do we call these groups cults? Is the Assemblies of God denomination, is that a cult? Are Methodists a cult? I mean, are Roman Catholics, is Roman Catholicism a cult? How about Seventh-day Adventists, is that a cult? Well, you might not know how to answer those questions. You normally don't think of Methodists as a cult, probably, or certainly not the Assemblies of God.

But then when you get to things like, what about Roman Catholics, what about Seventh-day Adventists, it gets a little bit more gray where the line is. Well, I mean, there are Christians who believe that Roman Catholicism is not a cult, and there are some who would call it a cult. Same thing with Seventh-day Adventists.

There are some who would call Seventh-day Adventism a cult, and some who would not. And obviously, the difference between those who would call such and such a thing a cult, and those who would not call it that, is a difference in definition of what a cult is. So, we need to know if we say, well, Mormonism is a cult, or anything else is a cult.

We need to know if that's a fair assessment. You know, what is a cult? What are we going to call a cult? Well, the term has come into common use in Christian circles in the past 150 years to refer to some aberrant or some twisted offshoot of Christianity. Something that basically holds to Christian terminology, generally affirms that the Bible is the Word of God, which, for example, Hinduism doesn't affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, or Islam, or some of these other religions.

The Bible is the Christian book. But a cult, in many cases, at least American Western cults, usually will affirm that the Bible is the Word of God. And so, in saying so, they begin to have the appearance of being Christian.

They usually have some place of prominence for Jesus, just like Christians do. Though it's different in most cases, in the cults. But they are offshoots of Christianity, but they are very different from pure Christianity.

And the question is, in what ways? I mean, most of us would agree that the Roman Catholic Church, its doctrines do not represent pure Christianity. But are they a cult? Or are they just another Christian denomination? Likewise, Seventh-day Adventists. These two groups are very good examples to use as, you know, defining the ambiguity or how hard it is to define whether a group is a cult or not.

It just depends what is a cult. I would define a cult, and so would, I think, most people, with reference to two different factors. One would be the theology.

Most Christians define a cultic group according to theology of the group. Now, to a certain extent, I would too. But I think there's another factor that's more indicative.

But let's talk about this for a moment. Theology means what they believe about God, what their belief system is. We call Jehovah's Witnesses a cult, partly because they deny certain theological things that Christianity has always affirmed, like the Trinity.

And perhaps even more importantly, they deny that Jesus is God incarnate. They believe that he is a created being. They believe that he is the most exalted and the first created being.

They believe he's the chief of the angels, for example. We're talking Jehovah's Witnesses here, and I'm not talking about Mormons at the moment. And because they believe these things about Jesus and about the Trinity, they are recognized as being heretical.

You know, they teach doctrines that simply cannot agree with Christian doctrine. And on the basis of their theological aberration from Orthodox Christianity, most Christians, including myself, would call them a cult. Now, they also believe some other strange things.

Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in hell. They don't believe in blood transfusions. They don't believe in their pacifists.

They don't believe in fighting a war. They don't believe in saluting the flag. Now, some of these issues, they very much differ from most Christians upon, although there's nothing about any of those beliefs I just mentioned that would really make them not Christian.

There are Christians who do and Christians who don't believe in saluting the flag. There are Christians who do and Christians who don't believe in fighting in war. True Christians.

There are Christians who do and Christians who don't have an Orthodox view of what hell is. Okay, there's these issues. Now, the blood transfusions, I don't know that I've ever met true Christians who object to blood transfusions.

But on the other hand, as a Christian, I hardly could object to the Jehovah's Witnesses' view on blood transfusions. What do I care? I mean, to me it's not a religious issue, but to them it is. But what I'm saying is these guys have their own set of doctrines, but not all of them are what define them as a cult to Christian critics.

If the Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in fighting in war, don't believe in saluting the flag, don't believe in hell, many Christians would differ from them on those issues. But those are not the reasons for calling them a cult. You'll find Mennonites.

Mennonites don't believe in fighting in war, and yet no one who's a very knowledgeable Christian would call them a cult. They're just a denomination. And yet it is the beliefs on

the central issue of who God is and how people are saved that the Jehovah's Witnesses really have bad theology on, and it really leads to normal Christian groups calling them a cult.

Now, the difference, for example, between Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists, there are theological differences there, but none of them call the others a cult. For example, Baptists believe one view of eternal security. Presbyterians believe a different view of eternal security, and Methodists don't believe in eternal security at all.

Now, what I mean by that is Baptists believe that if you get saved, even if you fall away and die in unbelief and in sin, you're still saved. That's a Baptist kind of a view. Presbyterians believe that if you get saved really, you never will fall away.

And if you do later fall away and die in that condition, you never were saved in the first place. Methodists believe that you can get saved and really be saved and fall away and really be lost. Now, those are three different views, different theologies, but none of those groups refer to the others as cults.

They all recognize that these differences are not so central to what it means to be a Christian as to eliminate Methodists or Presbyterians or Baptists from being Christians in the sight of the others. But if one of these groups said, we don't believe in the Trinity, or we don't believe that Jesus is God, or we don't believe we're saved by faith, we're saved by works, then, of course, that group would soon be quickly labeled a cult by the others. Because the difference of opinion would hit the core of who God is and how people relate to God, how people get saved, how God redeemed us.

And it is on those core issues that most Christians would agree to refer to certain groups as cults. The Mormons do not agree with Christian doctrine on this. The Mormons believe in many gods, not one.

Now, as such, of course, they reject the Trinity. The Jehovah's Witnesses reject the Trinity but have a different substitute doctrine of their own. The Mormons have their own view.

The Mormons believe there are many, many, many gods. Each of them has a world or a planet of his own. And if you're a good enough Mormon, someday you'll be one of them.

You'll be one of those gods and you'll have a planet of your own. I'll talk more about their specific beliefs later on. But the very idea that there's more than one God, that there's one for each planet, for example, is very different from the biblical view that there's only one God who made all the planets.

He's the God of the whole universe. So, they've got a different God. Their view of Christ is very different also.

They don't believe He is God in the flesh. They believe He's the Son of God, which sounds orthodox enough. But they don't believe He's the only Son of God.

They believe that He had a spirit brother in heaven named Lucifer and that Jesus and Lucifer were both sons of God on equal footing. They believe and teach that Lucifer actually offered to redeem man, but he was passed over in favor of Jesus by God. And this offended Lucifer.

And therefore, he became the enemy of both Jesus and God. This simply doesn't agree with biblical doctrine. Jesus is not the brother of Lucifer.

And Jesus doesn't have any brothers at all. As a matter of fact, in the sense that He is the Son of God, there aren't two or more. So, you've got some basic problems here with Mormonism on those doctrines.

Now, on many other issues, Mormons seem very Christian-like. More even than Jehovah's Witnesses do, because Jehovah's Witnesses have a whole bunch of other strange doctrines. Mormons have a view of salvation that bothers some Christians because they believe you're saved by repentance, faith, and baptism.

And one other thing. What is the other thing? Maybe it's those three things principally. But repentance, faith, and baptism, those are pretty good things.

I mean, the Bible does say those are important things. But most evangelical Christians would say, well, it's faith alone, and therefore, they put too much emphasis on obedience and stuff. But that is why some groups are called cults on a theological basis.

Their theology on issues of who God is and how people are saved differs too much from the way that normal, historic Christianity has understood these things biblically. Now, that's a theological designation for cults. Now, the problem with that way of defining a cult is that really a better word for that kind of problem is called heresy.

In the Bible, we don't read the word cult, but we read the word heresy or heretic. A heretic was a person who divided the body of Christ over some false doctrine. And certainly the founder, Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, and Charles Taze Russell, founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, and the founders of these cults, they definitely divided Christianity over theology.

But in the early church, these would not have been called cults just on that basis. They would have been called heretics. There are heresies that entered the church, and they were called heresies, that never really became cults.

There was a Judaizing heresy that Paul had to deal with. He wrote the book of Galatians to counter it, the idea that you had to not only be a believer in Christ, you also had to get

circumcised and keep the whole law. That was a heresy.

And so Paul wrote books against it. He didn't speak of those who believed that way as a cult, and there's a reason for that, I'll tell you in a moment. There was another heresy called Gnosticism, that taught a whole bunch of strange things, and it crept into Christianity in the second century, and it was labeled as a heresy by the early church.

But again, not so much as a cult, like we call the Jehovah's Witnesses. Even the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses about Jesus, which the doctrine that Jesus is not God, but that he's the creation of God, that doctrine was in the early church as well, not in the apostles' time, but in the third and fourth century. There was a doctrine called Arianism, which taught exactly the same thing the Jehovah's Witnesses teach on this subject.

Arius was a bishop who taught that, and it was called after his name, Arianism. And he was declared to be a heretic, and basically excommunicated from the church, and so forth. But he didn't have a cult, he just had a false doctrine.

And so, we call these other groups cults, not just because they're heretical, not just because they teach heresies, but because of another reason. And that is the second way to define a cult, and I think the most indicative of whether a group is a cult or not. And that is additional to, or maybe even separate from, the theology of a cult.

You could define a group as a cult on the basis of its sociology. Now, sociology means the way that people relate to each other. In particular, cults, the people in cults, relate to a leader or an organization as if it has, or he has, or she has, absolute authority.

And this is what really makes a group a cult. The Mormons are obligated to believe that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, and Brigham Young, his successor, also a prophet of God. And therefore, whatever those men said is true, no matter what.

And although they allow their people to read the Bible, they're only allowed to believe what these men said. And so, if you read in the Bible something different from what these men said, then you have to believe what these men said more than the Bible. Likewise, the Jehovah's Witnesses have the same kind of attitude toward not a man but an organization, the Watchtower Society.

To them, they call the Watchtower Society the prophet of Jehovah. That is, the corporation is the prophet of Jehovah. And you have to believe whatever that corporation says.

When you read the Bible, you have to read it through their lens. If you think the Bible says something different from them, you can't be one of them. You have to go along with their authority on this.

Christian science says they believe in the Bible, but the founder, Mary Baker Eddy, she

interpreted the Bible and wrote the key to science and the Scripture, which is the book the Christian scientists have to use to interpret the Bible for them. This woman is considered to be the only one who can give an inspired understanding of what the Bible means. Now, this is what we sometimes would call a personality cult.

A cult doesn't have to be, strictly speaking, a religious group, such as we think of. I mean, there can be New Age cults that are somewhat religious and somewhat something else. But, for instance, the Grateful Dead is a rock band that has a cult following.

I mean, I don't know if you're acquainted with the Grateful Dead. If you're not, more power to you. But the fact is that there are people of my generation, and believe it or not, people of your generation, who just, they're starry-eyed about the Grateful Dead.

I mean, they can do no wrong. It's like they worship this band. And they follow the band from all around the country, from one concert to another, and they are into the Grateful Dead.

It's a cult following. What a cult does, therefore, is substitute God for some person, or some group, or some institution. And that institution or that person has more authority than God, and has more devotion than God, even though a cult might say they believe in the God of the Bible, and that they believe in Jesus of the Bible.

Yet, in fact, their real devotion is to the organization, or to someone else. In other words, a cult, in this sense, sociologically defined, is a group of people who, although they say they believe in the Bible and Jesus, they really have some higher authority than God in their life. And that authority is usually a person.

David Koresh, Mary Baker Eddy, or a prophet, Joseph Smith, or whatever. And that person is their leader. Now, there's nothing wrong with true Christians having leaders.

The Bible indicates that God established leaders in the churches. The apostles, for example, were leaders in their day. And they established elders in their churches, and they were leaders in the church.

That's not bad. That's not a problem. But when the leader becomes more authoritative than Christ himself, then you have a cult.

In that sense, a Baptist church can become a cult. I mean, that's the thing. A group that professes to be Christian, but somebody other than Christ, is really the head.

That group is what is a cult. Now, a lot of times, some cults, you know, they move into communities, because it's easier for the person who's the head to control everybody if they're all gathered around him. And you can often recognize a cult group by the fact that they are living in a community, although it's dangerous to assume that every group that lives in a community is a cult, because I've known Christians that live in



communities as well.

But in most cases, when people move on to a big compound to follow some teacher or some leader, you've got at least what looks like the beginnings of a cult, if not a full-blown cult. But a cult following occurs when a leader is dynamic to the point that all people who listen to him or follow him think that he can do no wrong, and that whatever he says is gospel truth. In that sense, there are some good people who could be in danger of being cult leaders.

I mean, like Bill Gothard is a very good guy. He's a good Christian man. He's not a cult leader.

At least, he wouldn't want to be one. But I have met people who, as far as they're concerned, Bill Gothard can do no wrong. Whatever he says is true.

And he has something like a cult following that I'm sure he would not approve of. It's not his fault. But because he's a dynamic and impressive teacher, some people just say, I'll follow what he says.

And again, I'm not saying that he's a cult leader. I'm saying that when people begin to check their brains at the door and say, this man's got it all figured out. And there have been people in my past who related to me that way, and I didn't approve of it either.

I mean, whenever someone says, okay, you sound like you've got it figured out. I'll let you think for me instead of me thinking for myself. That's when you've got the sociological dynamics of a cult happening.

And really, the doctrines of a group might be sound. A group might not really be a cult defined theologically. It might be a group that believes in the Trinity, believes in Jesus as the Son of God, or that He is God, believes all the right things, so to speak, but really, in the back of their mind, they really believe you have to be a follower of this leader here to really be right on.

And take the Seventh-day Adventists. I mentioned them earlier in the Roman Catholic Church. These are kind of borderline.

Some people call them cults. Some don't. In the sense of theology, both the Seventh-day Adventists and the Roman Catholic Church have many doctrines that are problematic.

And some people would call them a cult because both Roman Catholicism and Seventh-day Adventism appear to add a great deal to the Gospel. However, both groups do believe in the Trinity, and they have orthodox beliefs about who Jesus is, and so some people don't call them a cult. If you're going to define a cult only on theology, is their theology sound or unsound, you're going to have trouble with some groups like this because you're going to find Seventh-day Adventists and Roman Catholics, they do have

orthodox or acceptable theology on God, on Jesus, on some very important issues.

But both groups do have some things they add to the Gospel. Seventh-day Adventists believe that you have to keep the ceremonial law of keeping kosher and keeping the Sabbath and so forth, and that comes mighty close to resembling the Judaizing heresy that Paul wrote Galatians against. In Galatians, Paul made it very clear, we don't have to keep those laws.

We don't have to keep dietary laws. We don't have to be circumcised. We don't have to keep those rules.

And yet the Seventh-day Adventists teach that you do. I would say if the Seventh-day Adventists be regarded as a cult, it would be largely because they are followers of one leader, whose name was Ellen G. White, and she is regarded to be a prophetess. And again, her writings are esteemed almost at the level of Scripture, and probably by some Seventh-day Adventists, even as highly as Scripture.

But there are some Seventh-day Adventists who do not esteem her writings that highly, and do esteem the Scriptures above them, and I have met certainly, I've met many Seventh-day Adventists that I believe are true Christians, and I have no doubt that they are real Christians, but I think they're in an organization that has some doctrines that need to be improved upon. But then I've met some Pentecostals who I thought were real Christians, but I felt they had some doctrines that needed to be improved upon too. I mean, to have some doctrinal problems doesn't mean you can't be a Christian.

But one of the problems is that in Seventh-day Adventism, there are people who do and there are people who don't place Ellen G. White, the founder, on a pedestal above God himself, practically. And the ones who do, I dare say they're in a cult. The ones who don't do that, even though they're in the same organization, are probably not in a cult, so to speak.

I mean, the cult relationship has to do with the individual's veneration of the leader. Likewise, the Roman Catholic Church, its theology on who God is is pretty straightforward Orthodox Christianity. But they do definitely have different views on how a person is saved, and these different views on how a person is saved has led many Protestants to believe the Roman Catholic Church is a cult.

The Roman Catholic Church does not believe in justification by faith alone. They don't believe in the authority of Scripture alone. They believe in the authority of Scripture and the authority of the Pope and the Church traditions.

They believe that you not only have to have faith in Christ, you also need to keep certain sacraments. And you need to go to a priest to confess your sins, and if you don't do this, you won't be absolved. And sometimes when you confess them, he can tell you to say

this many Hail Marys or do the rosary this many times or go light these candles over here, and then you'll be saved or you'll be forgiven.

And obviously the Bible doesn't teach that any of those things have any value in forgiving sins, and therefore the Catholic Church actually teaches a different doctrine of how God forgives sins, and therefore a different doctrine of salvation. And in that sense, I believe the Roman Catholic Church is heretical, though I do believe that some Roman Catholics could be true Christians. Again, it has to do with the way that the individual relates to the organization because a person who is a Roman Catholic might not be very well taught in the ideas of the organization or might not be very loyal to the organization, but they might be very loyal to Jesus in their own life, in which case I dare say they probably would be saved.

I'll let God be the judge of that. But I would say the Roman Catholic Church is a cult, however, based on the fact that they have the Pope as the ultimate leader. And the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church is that if the Pope, who is infallible, and the College of Bishops have agreed together on a certain interpretation of something, then that is as authoritative to them as the Bible itself.

This may be the way a lot of Protestants think about their group, but they don't say it. The Roman Catholic Church actually says it. They actually say that the traditions established by the Pope and the College of Bishops carry as much authority as the Bible itself.

And this, to my mind, puts them in the same category as any cult that has a man or a group of men or an organization that has more authority than God in the group, even though they call themselves Christian. Now, I've already suggested that it might surprise you, and that is that I've said that in some senses the Seventh-day Adventists are like a cult, and I do believe the Roman Catholic Church is a cult, and yet I said people could be saved in those organizations, which might seem strange because, I mean, then it raises the question, well, could people be saved in the Mormon Church? Could people be saved in Jehovah's Witness organization? And I leave the judgment about every individual case in God's hands. It's not my place to know necessarily that.

I will say this, that these cults have some very bad doctrines that are not biblical, but whether an individual in these organizations can really get to know Jesus and be saved, even though they're in a bad organization, I don't know. There are some pretty bad churches out there that we don't call cults because their official doctrine is decent, but where certain individual pastors might be not even saved, or might be cult leaders of their small group. I talked to a Baptist pastor.

There's about 40 different kinds of Baptists, but this was a missionary Baptist church, and this particular missionary Baptist guy, pastor, he said that he believed that their denomination, not Baptist, but missionary Baptist, were the only people who were saved,

and they believed that conservative Baptists, and Southern Baptists, and General Assembly regular Baptists, and these different kinds of Baptists, they weren't saved. You not only had to be a Baptist, you had to be a missionary Baptist to be saved, and to me, that's cult-like. A cult typically believes that if you're not in their group, you really can't be saved, and the reason is, of course, because in a cult, even though whatever they may say about their doctrine of salvation, their real belief is salvation comes from being in the group, being under the leader.

The leader is the real authority, and he's the one who, if you have allegiance to him, then you're saved. You're okay with God. If you don't, then you're not, and there are people whose, as I said, doctrines are pretty decent, but their sociology, the dynamics of the relationships in their group are cultic, and you need to be careful about that.

Now, let me, before I talk about the Mormon Church, maybe I should just ask, if anyone has any questions about cults in general, anything that has come up. I think my dad mentioned, we have a friend. Witness Lee in the local church? Yeah.

They just call their church the church. They call themselves the church, or sometimes they're called the local church. Now, Witness Lee was a man who was a protegee of another Christian in China named Watchman Nee, and Watchman Nee was a pretty good Christian writer and martyr.

He was tortured in prison. If all the stories that have come out of China are true about him, he had his eyes pulled out, his tongue pulled out, his hands cut off. I mean, the guy was tortured and maimed and eventually killed for his faith.

It's hard to speak evil of a man who goes through that kind of stuff for Christ, and I don't have anything negative to say about Watchman Nee, but one of his young followers, who goes by the name Witness Lee, and Witness Lee came to America and started a church in Anaheim, California, usually referred to as the local church, though the people in it just call it the church. When they come to town, they just talk about, if they were here in Kamiot, they'd call their group the church in Kamiot. And, I mean, whatever town they're in, they're the church in that town.

And they follow the teachings of this guy, Witness Lee. Now, their theology is, in many respects, orthodox. I mean, but in some respects not.

They don't believe in the Trinity, but they do believe Jesus is God. Now, see, that's, you say, well, how can you... They don't believe in the Trinity, but they do believe that Jesus is God. Now, usually, if people don't believe in the Trinity, they don't believe Jesus is God either.

Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, they don't believe in the Trinity. The Mormons don't believe in the Trinity. Christian science doesn't believe in the Trinity.

And they also don't believe Jesus is God. But the difference is that the local church teaches a doctrine that's called modalism, instead of the Trinity. And the Trinity holds that there are three persons in God.

God is one, in essence, but three in person. I don't claim to understand what that means, but that's basically orthodox Christian teaching. Modalism teaches that there's only one person, and he goes through different modes.

That in the Old Testament, he was the Father. In the Gospel time, when Jesus went on earth, he was the Son. And since then, he's the Holy Spirit.

So that one person goes through different modes. The Father became the Son, and then became the Holy Spirit. So there's not three persons in one.

There's just one person, and he's changed at different times. So that's called modalism. Of course, generally regarded as a heresy.

Their views about Jesus being God, they have a very elevated view of Jesus. But they do believe they're the only people who are saved. And they believe that all churches outside their own are Babylon, and are part of the corruption that's going to be under the judgment of God someday.

And so people have to come out of these churches and join their group. And Witness Lee is regarded to be the only apostle living today. Now, I mean, with those kinds of doctrines, what could that be but a cult? Now, there's an organization in California called the Christian Research Institute, Hank Hanegraaff's group.

And it was either them, I think it was their group, or another like them, that got sued by Witness Lee and the local church for calling them a cult. And I don't remember how that turned out. The lawsuit went on for years and years.

And I don't remember what ended up happening. But it can be dangerous calling someone a cult publicly, because it's not a flattering term to refer to. And if they say, well, we're not a cult, and therefore you've slandered us, then they can take you to court.

But the local church is, in every respect, a cult. Witness Lee is the lone apostle. Therefore, everyone has to follow what he teaches, or else not be in the true church.

And, you know, they have all kinds of unusual beliefs. The local church believes in what they call the recovery. They believe that the whole church went into apostasy until Witness Lee came along and recovered the truth.

And everybody in the local church has a number. Like, Witness Lee is number one in the recovery, because he's the first one to come back and get recovered to true Christianity.

And then, well, do they consider him to be number one? Yeah.

Oh, I see. Well, I don't know. Witness Lee might teach that Watchmen he wasn't quite recovered.

I'm not sure. Maybe he's a recovering something. But actually, I'm pretty sure that Witness Lee considers himself number one in the recovery.

I've met people who told me they were number 273 in the recovery and stuff. I mean, that's the number. You know, after it started, people get enjoying the group all over the world at once, and I don't know how they keep the numbers straight.

But anyway, it's just got some strange ideas, some real strange ideas. But the worst of them is this cult-like adherence to Witness Lee. There's an interesting change that's taken place in a group that has always been regarded a cult, and that is the Worldwide Church of God.

I don't know if you ever knew about them. They're not much in the news, and you don't encounter them much anymore. But a man named Herbert W. Armstrong, who himself grew up with a background in Seventh-day Adventism and Jehovah's Witnesses, started his own religion when he became an adult.

He was a radio broadcaster. He started his own church. He called it the Worldwide Church of God.

And it combined some of the worst views of Jehovah's Witnesses with the worst views of Seventh-day Adventists and put them together and came up with one of the worst churches around. And again, he taught that his group was the only ones that were saved and put out two very impressively published magazines, Plain Truth and World Tomorrow Magazine. Plain Truth is a very colorful, glossy, well-produced magazine, well-written and so forth, but it just had all this false doctrine.

You'd see them in airports a lot. I don't know if you've been in airports much, but they used to have stands with these free copies of Plain Truth and of World Tomorrow in airports. And they really spread.

And Herbert W. Armstrong eventually died, and his son, Garnerton Armstrong, took over the group for a while, and then he got out of it. And someone else since then has been ahead of it. But the interesting thing is that back when I was growing up, all books, all Christian books about cults included a chapter about the Worldwide Church of God because its views were cultic and they believed you had to be a follower of their guy to be saved.

And they changed recently. It's really amazing. Like in the past ten years, the official leadership of the Worldwide Church of God has decided that they were wrong.

And now they've come to embrace the Trinity and more orthodox Christianity, in fact, so much so that Christians don't call them a cult anymore. It's the only time I know of in history when an established cultic organization decided to repent of their heresy and just become mainstream Christian. And actually, I get a lot of calls from these people on the radio.

In fact, a pastor from Salem, Oregon, who pastors two Worldwide Church of God congregations, emailed me and said he'd like to talk to me about some things he's going through. There's a guy who called me on the air yesterday from Canada who's from that background. Another guy in Corvallis calls me sometime from there.

And these guys, they're in a kind of an identity crisis because these guys were raised in this organization. And the organization said all the churches are heretical, all the churches are Babylon, and only our group is right, and Trinitarianism is a heresy. And now the church is saying, no, Trinitarianism is true, Jesus really is God.

And the people who are in it are just kind of not knowing what to do. They're not sure what they're supposed to believe. And they had a lot of other views.

They believed like the Jehovah's Witness did, no hell, and certain other issues. And they believe in Sabbath keeping like the Santa Yad Venice. And some of these people in the Worldwide Church of God are reconciled to these views as well, but they haven't really worked through them.

So, I mean, the line gets blurred between what we could call a Christian church and what have to be called a cult. But I believe that the two main ways to define a cult is by their theology. If they really have a different Jesus or a different God or a different salvation than Christianity teaches, then the group rightly should be called a cult.

And secondly, even if they have good theology, if they've got a leader who dominates the minds of the people and he's the real authority in their lives instead of God or the Bible or Jesus, then that's cultic. I should show you a few verses of Scripture about this. I won't show you Scripture on the theological issue because there's too many theological issues and too many Scriptures on them.

But on this second aspect, some of you have Bibles with you. In 1 Corinthians 11, verse 3, Paul said, But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. Now, the statement, the head of the woman is the man, should be translated, the head of the wife is the husband because the word woman and wife are the same word in the Greek.

And the word man and husband are the same word. So, it's not saying that every man is the head of every woman. Like, you know, all these young men are the heads of all you women here.

That's not what it's saying. It's saying that the head of the wife is her husband. But it says the head of every man is Christ, which doesn't leave any room for some mediator in the person of a cult leader between me and Christ.

I answer to Jesus myself. I don't have some leader, some cult leader, that is allowed to, you know, tell me what I have to believe or what I have to do. The Bible teaches that there's one God and one mediator between God and man.

That's in 1 Timothy 2.5. Paul said there's one God and there's one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. There's not some organization or some person or group of persons who mediate between you and God. You have a personal relationship with God through Jesus.

And that's what Christianity teaches. Jesus is the head. There's not people in between.

A lot of people say, well, wait a minute. In the church, in the Bible, the apostles, you know, like they gave, they were like authorities, but they never positioned themselves between man and God. They were teachers.

They were preachers. But they were not lords. Paul himself said this in 2 Corinthians 1.24. 2 Corinthians 1.24. Paul's talking about himself and his fellow apostles.

He says, Now, notice here, Paul's one of the high-ranking apostles in the church. And he says, We don't have a dominion over your faith. You stand by your own faith.

You and God have a thing going just by your own connection to God through faith. You stand by faith yourself. I'm just here to help.

He said, we are helpers for your joy. We don't have dominion over your faith. Now, there is a difference.

There is a cult-like mentality that is sometimes in evangelical groups. And I mentioned before this so-called missionary Baptists who say they're the only ones saved. Back in the 70s, there arose, in some of the charismatic churches especially, something that was called the shepherding movement.

And I was in a charismatic church that got into this, and I heard the tapes and so forth of the leaders of this movement. And it was a movement. And it's still around.

Although most groups that were into it back in the 70s have repudiated and rejected it. Yet, there are some groups even more recently have gotten into it. Churches.

We're not talking about cults here. Although, it becomes cult-like. And that is the view that God has ordained authorities in the church.

And because God has ordained authorities, submitting to those authorities is like



submitting to God Himself. And therefore, the elders of the church, you're supposed to submit to them as if they were God. And if you don't submit to something your elder says to you, then you are in rebellion.

Not against the elder merely, but against God Himself. And they always quoted the verse, Rebellion is the sin of witchcraft, and how dangerous that was. So, basically, this teaching had as its result, I know because I was in a church like this, and I've seen many others besides, had the result that individual Christians never felt like they could really do anything unless their elders approved of it.

And in the worst cases, there were actually churches where you couldn't take your family to the beach on the weekend without seeing if the elder approved of it first. You couldn't get married without the church elders approving of the marriage. I knew one lady who did get married and the elders didn't approve.

And so, everyone including the elders, you know, boycotted the wedding and didn't go. Even though she was married a Christian, which is her right to do, the Bible says, yet because the elders had counseled her against that particular marriage, they didn't want her to marry that guy. They disapproved the wedding and wouldn't come.

She was considered to be in rebellion because she married someone the elders didn't tell her to marry. In this movement, it became very common for elders to tell people in church, Come on over to my house on Saturday and wash my car for me or mow my lawn for me. You know, these people became slaves of the leaders, really, unpaid slaves.

And this became very normal and it was considered that, you know, the true mark of being a spiritual Christian was that you submitted to the elders in all points. And if you began to think for yourself and think maybe the elders were wrong, you began to be accused of having an independent spirit or Jezebel spirit, sometimes the term was used. And there's a whole bunch of sociological baggage that came with this.

And while the shepherding movement had its heyday in the mid-70s, before most of you were born, it continues in some groups to a greater or lesser degree. Such groups talk about covering. They talk about you need to be under the covering of a pastor, under the covering of elders or under the covering of a church.

The Bible never says any such thing as that, not even close. The term covering is never used that way in the Bible. But they speak of it as if when you're under proper submission to the elders, it's like there's an umbrella of protection over you from satanic attack and so forth.

And if you get out from under that covering, then, you know, the devil can do whatever he wants to you and, you know, you're likely to, you know, go to hell or whatever. Now, this terminology and these ideas still exist in some evangelical churches. And to the

degree that people believe those things, they tend to be cult-like in their adherence to a group.

Paul, who was an apostle of higher rank than any living man in the church today, he said, I don't have dominion over your faith. I'm just a helper in your joy. Or Peter, who is also, you know, among the highest-ranking apostles in the early church, is in the church in 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 and following.

The leaders of individual churches in the early days of the church were called elders or bishops. The word elders and bishops were used interchangeably in the Bible. The highest leaders were the apostles.

But not every church had an apostle there because there weren't enough apostles to go around. And so, they had elders in each of the churches that the apostles appointed. And here, Peter writes to these elders.

And he says in verse 1, The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. He said, Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly, nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Now, he tells the elders of the church, these are the leaders in every church, don't be lords over the church. Remember, Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 23, Don't call any man on earth father. Don't call any man on earth lord.

You have one lord. You've got one father. And you answer to him.

And he's talking, of course, about using those terms as religious titles. It's nothing wrong with calling your dad father. But calling your priest father gets into the area of violating what Jesus was talking about there.

So, the Bible really warns against letting any man or group of men stand between you and Jesus. And every cult does this. If a group doesn't do this, I dare say they're not a cult.

They might have heretical doctrine and therefore we might call them a heresy. You know, if you have a Bible study somewhere and the teacher is teaching some really bizarre doctrine, but he's not requiring anyone to follow him. He's not starting an organization where people have to be loyal to him.

He just has some weird ideas. He doesn't have a cult. He's got a heresy.

You know, he's a heretic maybe. But when a group, regardless of whether their theology

is good or bad, when the leader of the group basically demands adherence to his authority and whether you're a good Christian or not depends on whether you're obedient to his authority and you let him do his thinking for you, then that group is a cult. It doesn't matter how good or bad their theology is.

You've got a man or woman in some cases who is the real leader of your spiritual life. Even though they profess to be Christian, they have become the replacement for Jesus in your life. True Christianity is a simple call to following Jesus obediently, faithfully to death, doing what he said and doing it in the company with other believers who are doing the same thing.

A church, a true church in the early New Testament times was simply an assembling or a gathering of disciples of Jesus. Each person was a disciple of Jesus, a follower of his. They gathered together for mutual encouragement.

They gathered together to worship him together and to combine their faith in praying for common issues and so forth. But the leaders of the early church were not bosses. Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew chapter 20, the rulers of the Gentiles exercise authority over them.

But he says, it shall not be so among you. He that will be the chief among you must be the slave of all and the servant of all. And so, in a true church where there's no cult-like dynamics, the leaders there are not bosses.

They're not lords. They are servants. They're providing a service to the congregation.

And that means that if an elder sees someone doing something that he thinks is wrong and he goes and warns them about it, he doesn't replace Jesus. If they say, well, I prayed about this and I don't agree with you on this, he doesn't insist that they have to obey him. He provides warning.

He warns the unruly, the Bible says. He does various things. In fact, let me show you a passage that tells what the proper relationship is between the leaders of a church and the people who are in the church so that it's not cult-like.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, 1 Thessalonians 5, there's several verses there, verses 12 through 15. And those of you who don't have the Bible, just listen. You'll notice something about these verses.

In verse 12, Paul said, And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake and be at peace among yourselves. Now exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all, see that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good, both for yourselves and for all. Now, what's interesting about this passage is he

addresses brethren twice.

In verse 12 he says, We urge you, brethren. And then in verse 14 he says, Now we exhort you, brethren. Now, I believe the implication is there are two groups he addresses.

One is the first group of brethren he talks to and the other is the second. The first group are those who are the ordinary people in the church relating to each other and relating to their leaders. And he says to them, We urge you, brethren.

Recognize those who labor among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Let's be the elders, the preachers, the pastors. He says, Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

Okay. Well, you're supposed to appreciate the work they do. It doesn't say they become your lords.

It just means you appreciate the work they do. You know, they labor in the Word and they do what they do to teach you and to help you along. But then he says in verse 14, Now we exhort you, brethren.

And I believe at this point he's not talking to those who are under the leaders but to the leaders themselves because he says to them, Warn those who are unruly. Comfort the faint-hearted. Uphold the weak.

And be patient with all. Now, notice there's three categories of people that they're supposed to deal with. Those who are unruly, those who are faint-hearted, and those who are weak.

That is, people who need help, people who need intervention, those who need a shepherd to go after them, like a weak sheep or a wounded sheep or one who's wandering off in the wrong way. The leaders are supposed to go after those people and help them back. Support the weak ones.

Encourage the faint-hearted. Warn those who are unruly and who are going the wrong way. That's what the leaders are supposed to do.

They're not supposed to replace Jesus. They're supposed to help those who have special need for assistance. Now, everybody needs some help.

I mean, the church needs to be taught and so the elders teach or whatever the pastors and so forth teach. But as far as giving special attention or special intervention in the lives of people, the good shepherd goes after not the 99 who aren't wandering away but the one who is wandering away. Jesus said, if a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one wanders off, the good shepherd goes after that one and he leaves the 99 because they

don't need his special attention.

When you meet a pastor who wants to be intimately involved in micromanaging everybody's life, you've got a problem there. You've got someone who has an ego problem in all likelihood and is looking for the wrong kind of following. He may not think of it this way, but what he's looking for is a cult following.

So, people who need him to make all their decisions for them, even if they don't need him to. Most Christians don't need their pastor to hold their hand and give them counsel every day. If you're following Jesus, that should be good enough.

There are people, though, who are weak. There are people who are faint-hearted. There are people who are unruly.

They're like sheep that are kind of needing special attention. The shepherd concentrates on them and he doesn't have to concentrate on all the others. But a cult is an area where the leader insists that everyone answers directly to him about their beliefs and about everything.

And that is dangerous. I may have mentioned on a Thursday night, but a lot of you probably weren't there, I was back in 1975. We ran a discipleship school in Santa Cruz, California during the summertime.

And about 25 young people came to that program for three months. And one of them was a girl who had come out, or a lady, she was a college graduate, who had come out from Connecticut. And she had gotten saved in Santa Cruz and come to our school.

And her family was back in Connecticut. She wanted to go back there for Christmas and evangelize her family, who were Catholics. And we were concerned because she was a brand-new Christian.

She didn't know any Christians in Connecticut, and we didn't know any. And so, actually, another brother and I drove across country, actually took her home to her parents, and we stayed in the area long enough to look for a fellowship for her to be part of, just to help her out so she wouldn't be without any fellowship. And we discovered there was a fellowship, you know, about 60 miles from there, that she eventually started going to, and we left.

We didn't know anything about the fellowship except it was a group of Christians. That was fine with us. It was hard to find a group of Christians in Connecticut in those days.

But in the town she lived in, there was a group, a cult, and there were followers of a guy named Julius. And he said that he was Jesus returned. His wife's name was Joanna, and he said she was the Holy Spirit.

And so Julius and Joanna were Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And they had about 250 young hippie-type kids following them and believing that he really was Jesus. And he had 12 apostles in his movement that he'd appointed and so forth.

I actually went to one of his meetings to see what this guy had to say, but they actually threw me out before he got up on stage. It's a funny thing, too. It's a funny thing, too, because I didn't identify myself or what I was saying.

And I specifically went on guest night. Tuesday nights was the night that people were invited to bring guests. So I assumed there were a lot of guests there.

It was a big, full room. And I was just sitting there, and one of the apostles, Julius, came up to me and said, What are you doing here? And I said, I'm a guest. I'm just a guest.

I'm just here to check things out. And he said, What are you really doing here? And I said, Well, just like I said, I'm here to check things out. I want to hear what Julius has to say.

And he said, You're quenching the spirit here. I wasn't doing anything. But there were demonic spirits there, and so I guess the spirits were being quenched.

I didn't know I had that much influence. But anyway, I said, You want me to leave? He said, Yes. So I did leave.

I never got to hear Julius speak. But I didn't have to hear him to know that he was off the wall. But, I mean, that illustrates how... I'm sure you've never heard of the Julius cult.

There's got to be hundreds, if not thousands, of little cults like that all over the place. And you need to know, you need to recognize, when someone comes to you, and, you know, they find out you're a Christian, but that doesn't satisfy them. You may be a Christian, but there's a higher plane.

There's a higher level of dedication required. You have to join this group. You've got to sit under this guy's teaching to really get it right.

That group, even if it's not a known cult, it may not be someone you've ever heard of before, it's a cult. If people say you really need to sit under this teacher, you really need to listen to this guy's tapes. Now, I realize that when you hear a good teacher, you might like to invite people to hear him or pass around his tapes.

I've passed around the tapes of various teachers that I'm impressed with. That's one thing. But to say, you know, you need to sit under this guy's teaching, or else you're just not going to be on the cutting edge of what God's doing today.

You know, I mean, we are the cutting edge group, you know, where you've got to be with us to really be with God. Anything that even begins to smack of that kind of attitude is a

cult, and stay far from it. When I was a teenager, when I first went into the ministry, I was 16, I loved debating cultists.

I many times was in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, and they were in my home. I was in the homes of Mormons, and they were in my home. On many occasions, I had many two- and three- and four-hour discussions with these people.

And I loved it. In fact, I kind of thought in the early days, maybe my specialty will be cults, because I enjoy debating with these people. As it turned out, cults became too numerous.

I mean, back when I was 16, the only cults I had heard of were JWs, Mormons, Christian Science, Worldwide Church of God, and a few others. Then in the 70s, there was this explosion of cults, including Eastern cults and New Age cults, and, you know, Julius-type groups, you know, guys who decided that they could get a bunch of gullible young people to follow them. And I just couldn't keep up with them all.

And it used to be, you know, I used to think, well, I could learn. I could become expert at all the views of all the cults, because it was easy. I mean, I did so fairly much with the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a few others.

But then it got to be that there were hundreds of cults, and I thought, this is too much to keep up with. And then I realized, you know, I don't have to know in advance what all these people teach. It's easy to tell that a group is a cult, and I don't even have to know what their teachings are.

If they're telling me, or they're telling their followers, that if they're saying that they have to be in this group to be okay with God, then they're a cult. I don't even have to know what their other views are. Just that view alone is contrary to what the apostles taught.

Now, someone might say, well, didn't the apostles teach you had to be in the body of Christ and the church? Yes, but the body of Christ is not identified with any organization. The body of Christ is a spiritual thing that is based on the fact that you have the spirit of Christ in you. You're a believer in Christ.

You're a follower of His. He has given you His spirit. You're in His body.

And you're part of a body that's over the whole world. And some of those people in His body, you're going to find some of them in a Baptist church, some in a Methodist church, some are going to be in Christian Missionary Alliance church, some are going to be in Jubilee church, some are going to be in the LACA, some are going to be in all kinds of churches, Pentecostal churches. There's some people in all these groups that are part of the true body of Christ.

But the body of Christ is not a LACA or such and such evangelical church or Bible church

or Baptist church or whatever. The body of Christ isn't an organization like that. The body of Christ is the spiritual fellowship of the family of God who all have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism and one hope of our calling, one God and Father of all, one spirit.

These are the things that all true Christians do have, no matter what organization they're in, or even if they're in no organization at all. A group that meets, as I have known some groups, in fact, before we came from Oregon, we were meeting in a home group for a few years. We were part of the body of Christ.

I mean, we weren't the body of Christ, just our group, and we didn't have some network of groups that we were associated with. But some people think you need to. Some people, and I might as well just clarify this too, because you'll run into this in the church, and this to my mind is a bit cultic, but you find it sometimes in churches, and that is the view that you need to be accountable to some person or group or organization above you, and if you're in a small group that's not associated with some bigger group, then you're not adequately covered, you're not accountable enough, and you're therefore not where you ought to be.

This is a very common view among evangelical churches these days for some reason. It's a very Roman Catholic idea, but evangelicals have a lot of blind spots sometimes, and they don't realize sometimes when they're thinking more like Roman Catholics than like Christians. But the Bible does not teach that some organization called a church is what you have to connect yourself with.

You don't find anywhere in the Bible that people were members of a church. The only way the Bible speaks of people being members of the body of Christ is like limbs, you know, we're members of His body, meaning like arms, legs, and nose and mouth, that's what members are. You're not a member of a church like a club.

You can go to a church, you can be regular in a church, you can go to one church if you wish and no others all your life, that's fine. But you belong to Christ, and you belong to the body of Christ, you don't belong to that church. And here's where Paul made this very, very clear.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning at verse 10, Paul said, Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, that's another name for Peter, or I am of Christ.

Then Paul says, is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not, of course. Now the point here is, when Paul had come to



Corinth, there had been no Christians there. Paul was the first Christian to set foot in Corinth.

He preached there, and a church was started. He baptized the first believers, and then he didn't even baptize the rest of the converts. He had apparently the early converts baptized the later converts.

But when Paul left Corinth, he left a congregation of the body of Christ, a group of Christians. Then he began to hear that there were some divisions happening in them. Some were saying, well, I'm of Paul.

And others were saying, no, I'm a follower of Peter. And some said, I'm a follower of Apollos. And some were objecting to all those options.

No, we're just of Christ. We're Christians. Paul agreed with those who said, I'm of Christ.

Christ died for your sins. Paul didn't. Peter didn't.

Apollos didn't. You were baptized in the name of Christ, not in the name of Paul, or Peter, or Apollos. But you see, what was happening here is what has happened a great deal since Paul's time.

And that is, some teacher comes along who's impressive. And people say, I think he's got it right. I'll be his follower now.

And I'll let him be my guru. And that's not what God approves of. You might appreciate the teachings of Paul.

You might enjoy them more than the teachings of Peter. Or you might like Peter's more than Paul's. Or Apollos' better than either one.

But regardless, these, Paul went on later, a couple chapters later in 1 Corinthians, he said, all these guys, they're just servants. We're just gifts that God has given to the church. The church has us all.

Me, Apollos, and Peter, and I, he said, we all just belong to the church. To the one church. And we're all of Christ.

Now, he said the church needs to all speak the same thing in verse 10. But he doesn't mean we have to speak the same thing on every subject. What he's talking about is some were saying, I'm of Paul.

Some were saying, I'm of Apollos. Some were saying, I'm of Cephas. They're saying different things.

But they all need to say the same thing. Namely, I'm of Christ. I'm a Christian.

Now, they could meet in small groups because he even heard the report about this from those who were in Chloe's household. Probably a house church. No doubt a home church in Chloe's house.

Whoever Chloe was. But it's not a problem that there's this house church, and that house church, and that house church. As long as they're all of Christ, and they're not of this leader, and that leader, and that leader.

As soon as you begin to say, I'm a member of this group that follows this man's teachings, as opposed to this group that follows this man's teachings, you've got something happening that Paul said was divisive and wrong. Frankly, I grew up a Baptist. I haven't been in a Baptist church for years.

I've been in non-denominational churches most of my life now. But even if I were still in a Baptist church, I would not say, I am of Roger Williams, founder of the Baptist Church in America. If I was a Methodist, I wouldn't say, I am of Wesley, who is the founder of the Methodist movement.

I wouldn't say, if I was a Presbyterian, I am of Calvin, who is the founder of Presbyterianism. Or if I was a Lutheran, I wouldn't say, I'm of Luther. But some people do.

You see, sometimes people who are Lutherans, they're loyal to Luther. Presbyterians loyal to Calvin. Methodists loyal to Wesley.

And so forth. And it's the same thing as saying, I am of this or I am of that. See, I could go to a Baptist church or a Methodist church or some other church and fellowship with the saints there, and I'm part of the body of Christ, and some of them are part of the body of Christ, some of them aren't.

You know, some of them aren't really saved, some of them are. But I'm in fellowship with members of the body of Christ. But I'm not of this group.

I'm not of this movement. I'm of Christ. And for someone to say, you have to become a member of this group.

And by the way, a lot of evangelical churches say that. They say you have to join the church, you have to join this church, you've got to pay your tithes to the church, you've got to be regular in attendance at this church, you've got to volunteer in the church, you know, projects and so forth. I can understand why pastors want to say that, but there's nothing in the Bible to support them saying that.

The Bible doesn't talk about joining some little group within the town that's called your church, and there's other groups in town that are churches too, but they're not yours. There's only one church. It's the body of Christ.

And so even this cultic idea of being of some person or of some more narrow movement in order to be okay with God tends to take on some of that cult-like sociology, some of that cult-like dynamic. That doesn't mean you can't be saved in a group like that. It just means that you need to guard your own heart, that you keep your connection with Jesus a direct one, and you don't let a group or a person begin to usurp that position.

And it's very easy to do, especially if you're lazy. If you're a lazy thinker, a lazy Bible reader, you read a little bit of Bible and say, I don't know, that's too confusing for me. Find someone who understands this, I'll just follow him, you know.

Well, the problem is the first person who comes along who says they understand it, they may or may not understand it correctly, but the point is if they sound like they do, those who are lazy, those who are spiritually lazy, just follow that person. But you know what the Bible says in Proverbs? It says the slothful person, well, actually it says the diligent man, the hand of the diligent will bear rule. It says the slothful will be under tribute.

It means if you're lazy, you'll be a slave, you'll be a servant. And what happens is if you aren't vigorously and diligently seeking God yourself, seeking to know the Scriptures by your own personal study, seeking to follow Jesus, seeking to know him yourself, if you're lazy about that, you'll just defer eventually to someone else who's less lazy than you, someone who's done the work. You'll say, hey, it's easier for me to just go along with him.

Why not? I don't have to do the work then. But the problem is then you're under tribute. Then you're a servant.

Then you become enslaved. Because now in order to stay on that guy's team and have him do his thinking for you or her, you've got to go along with their movement. You've got to be part of that.

And it really puts a wedge between you and Jesus. Well, anyone have any other questions? We're about out of time here. I'll talk specifically about Mormon doctrine and what the Bible's answer to Mormon doctrine will be next time.

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