

IHOP Kansas City Is Not a Cult, but Cults Are Rising

Cults are making major news headlines this month. Some accused of cult-status are truly cultish and others are not. But the flood of **cult activity** should urge you to sharpen your cult identifications skills. Most Christian cult followers had no idea what they were getting into until they were already brainwashed adherents to the warped religions.

ABC's *20/20* just exposed the shocking truth about life inside Warren Jeffs' **Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints Church**. The cult leader was convicted and jailed for sexual abuse of young girls, yet his 8,000 followers continue to believe he's a **persecuted prophet**. He's known for ordering married couples to stop having sex and handpicked 15 men to father all of the cult's children. That's clearly a cult.

Meanwhile, Fox News reported earlier this month that members of a Bolivian cult that reveres human skulls have held a rite to close out a Roman Catholic religious festival in honor of the dead. The cult's followers believe the skulls have **miraculous** powers that help them find a job or even help their favorite soccer team win. That's clearly a cult.

Also earlier this month, ABC 7 reported on Scientology controversy in Washington, D.C. L. Ron Hubbard's creation theory highlights a despot named Xenu sending surplus beings to volcanoes on earth. Scientology officials deny **cult status**, but this is clearly a cult. And just earlier this week, Ontario officials began investigating allegations of abuse and polygamy under the leadership of a "**prophet**" named Fred King from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Meanwhile, Fox sent an undercover reporter to investigate the Church of the Endtimes and its cultish qualities. Then there was Angus T. Jones, a star of the comedy

series *Two and a Half Men*. His family expressed concerns that his newfound religion is a cult.

Those are just a few of the “cult” headlines from November. You can find others by searching “cult church” on Google News. But the question is, would you **recognize a Christian cult** if you were in its midst? Would you know you’d entered into a cult before you were effectively brainwashed? How can you discern a Christian cult?

IHOP is Not a Cult

For all the legitimate cult accusations in news headlines this month, there was also one major false accusation among them. False accusations about cults make it more difficult for people to understand what a cult is. So I want to dispell this allegation right now. *The Huffington Post* published an unfortunate article penned by a **radical gay activist** characterizing the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Mo., as a cult. It’s clear from the words on my digital screen that Wayne Besen doesn’t understand the **Holy Spirit** or how He moves. How could he? He’s not saved and he’s been on a witch-hunt for years.

So when an IHOPU student—who was also participating in an outside sex cult—confessed to the murder of a former IHOP U intern, Besen took his opportunity declare his discernment in warning Kansas City about this 13-year-old **prayer movement**. IHOP is not a cult. In fact, in response to the tragedy IHOP Director **Mike Bickle** taught on the seven characteristics of a cult. I’ve heard Mike teach on this in the past, but he dusted off his notes to address the IHOP community earlier this month—a responsible response to the heartbreaking story.

I’d highly recommend heading over to Mike Bickle’s teaching library and listening to the message for yourself. I’ve summarized the points of “How to Recognize Cults: 7 Characteristics” below in order to get the message out to more people. When I first heard Mike’s teaching on **Christian cults**,

it really opened my eyes. I pray this will open your eyes, too.

Seven Characteristics of a Cult

Bickle defines a cult as, “a group that deviates from the doctrines and practices of historic Christianity and has an inordinate loyalty to one leader, whose beliefs are not found in Scripture (as affirmed by historic Christianity). Cult leaders, or false teachers, often believe that they alone possess the truth. If a group displays even one of these seven characteristics, they are a cult or have cultish tendencies.” Here are the seven characteristics of a cult as Bickle outlined them:

1. Oppose critical thinking versus demanding that people think for themselves: Cult members must accept what the cult leader believes without ever challenging their doctrines. They do not want their members to think critically for themselves.

2. Dishonoring the family unit versus insisting on the biblical priority of the family unit: Children are taught to be more loyal to the leaders than to their parents. Women are taught to be more loyal to the leaders than to their husbands, and husbands are taught to accept this as normal behavior.

3. Isolating members and penalizing them for leaving versus helping them to do God’s will: Cults isolate their people from their families, the church and society. They reject any who leave and warn them, saying that they will be judged by God or will lose God’s best if they leave. People are taught to make lifelong commitments to the group. Some groups teach that their members must get permission before joining another ministry.

4. Seeking inappropriate loyalty to their leaders versus loyalty and connecting people to Jesus: Cults seek to connect their members to the cult leader and require loyalty to him instead of to Jesus. Loyalty is defined as not questioning the

leader. It is very dangerous, when the leader cannot be questioned.

5. Crossing biblical boundaries of behavior versus walking in purity and financial integrity: Cults cross biblical boundaries of behavior especially in immorality and finances. False teachers can be detected by their covetousness and immorality (2 Peter 2:3-18).

6. Separation from the church versus a culture of honor towards the church: Cults separate from the wider church and operate with an elite spirit, believing that they alone have a special status with God. They have a polarized mentality of “us versus them.” They criticize the larger body of Christ and often claim to be the only ones truly saved. They view all other ministry and denominations as being in error.

7. Emphasizing special revelations that contradict Scripture versus loyalty to Scripture: Cults emphasize the special revelations of their leader that contradict the Scripture.

Saints, hear me. I’ve been very close to two cults and escaped both before falling into the deception headlong. It’s not always easy to recognize the fruit of cults at the surface. You have to dig down to the roots. Sometimes the cultish behaviors don’t manifest until you are integrated into the community. At that point, it’s harder to escape—but Jesus can set you free if you set your heart to go through the door into true Christianity. Amen.

Jennifer LeClaire *is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including Did the Spirit of God Say That? You can email Jennifer at @ or visit her website here. You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.*