

10 Characteristics of Christian Cults

There have been numerous of offshoots of Christianity that have turned out to be heretical cults. Because of the lack of biblical discernment, many people fall prey to them.

One of the most popular of the cults that have many of the following characteristics is Watchtower, better known as the "Jehovah's Witnesses." Many would also include aberrant religious groups like Scientology (founded by L. Ron Hubbard) as well as many other religious entities too numerous to mention here.

Most recently a new, young, attendee of our church has fallen prey to a cultish offshoot of Christianity. This group she affiliates with has all of the earmarks of a religious cult. The objective I have for this article is to help parents, families and friends identify the signs and/or characteristics of religious cults.

Truly, any group that is truly Christian and biblical would not have to revert to these extreme tactics to recruit and maintain followers (the Holy Spirit and true churches do not engage in the following coercive manipulative practices).

The following are 10 characteristics:

1. They prey on vulnerable youth.

Often, cults have mobile outreach strategies on college and university campuses so they can target scared, insecure, youth who are searching for an identity and a community of friends for emotional stability.

The outreach strategy is mobile or transient because college officials are often alerted to their cultish tactics that do not comport to the traditional campus (religious) clubs (they

have to be on the move so they don't get caught and shut down!).

2. Love bombing.

Love bombing is a term used to describe the effort cults initially make with potential converts by making a strong emotional connection with them. This includes constantly showing them attention, affection, bestowing upon them affirming words and throwing around the words "community" and "love."

The goal, of course, is to get their potential convert to adopt this new group as their primary family identity—hence replacing their biological and any spiritual family or church with which they are affiliated.

3. Social isolation.

After the new initiate converts into their religious community, they are loaded down with numerous activities and religious meetings to ensure they will not have time for any other activities or affiliations.

They are also assigned a mentor or spiritual leader who will discourage them from any outside involvement with a goal of total isolation from all other relationships outside of their new community.

4. Mind control and programming

Between all the long meetings, incessant activities, micro-managing of their social life, social exclusionary tactics and constant indoctrination, the result is a form of mind control and social programming.

5. They claim their religious community (or church) is the only true church.

This is perhaps the greatest initial red flag.

When any church or group—especially those without a historic footprint from the first few centuries of Christianity—claims to be the only true church, it has to demonstrate delusion and deception with the founders of said religious group, since Jesus has been building His true church for more than 2000 years since His resurrection.

6. No regard for church history.

Along with the previous point, religious cults often have a twisted view regarding church history that cannot be backed up by respectable, mainstream historic, Christian scholarship.

7. False doctrine.

Invariably, most cults not only have aberrant mind control practices but also espouse some form of heretical doctrines regarding salvation, the deity of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit, the existence of hell and other primary biblical doctrines.

Many cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is a created being and not God the Son. They believe the Holy Spirit is a force and not the third person of the triune God, that lost souls are annihilated in hell, and that salvation is by good works (witnessing and going door to door to be one of the chosen few that go to heaven).

8. The leader is idolized.

Often the leader of a religious cult—whether deceased or living—is almost worshipped and idolized as a great prophet or saint.

9. Numerous ex-members have shared traumatic stories of abuse.

Common with most religious cults, there are numerous testimonies available on social media, YouTube, and on the printed page with testimonies from ex-members regarding mind

control, social isolation, mental and or spiritual abuse social isolation and other manipulative practices resulting in traumatic experiences.

10. Lack of financial transparency.

Religious cults are wrapped in secrecy regarding their governance, membership records, leadership protocols and financial expenditures.

Many cults rarely divulge how their donations are spent. Most legitimate churches have annual business meetings that show committed members how their monies are spent.

In conclusion, my prayer is that this article results in more discernment for Christ-followers so that many can help their friends and family and folks they happen to meet escape from the bondage of cults and come into the spiritual freedom of the true body of Christ.