

What is a cult?

Christians believe that these cult groups are teaching things that are contrary to the Bible, and therefore that they are not true Christians.

How can I find out about the Bible, and what Christians believe?

If you want to explore Christian beliefs, you could visit a local church and ask them to explain to you about the bible. Why not join a Bible study group run by a local church, such as the Alpha course, the Visa course, or the Christianity Explored course? You can find out more about courses from:

www.uk.alphacourse.org

www.christianityexplored.com

www.friendsinternational.org.uk

If you are a student, you could contact the Christian Union in your college or university, who will be happy to meet with you and talk about the Christian faith.

If you want more details of what different cults believe and teach, see :

www.carm.org

www.reachouttrust.org

What is a cult? How is it different from the Christian church?

In order to answer the question of what a cult is, we first need to know a little bit about the history of the Christian church.

The Christian church has its origins in First Century Palestine. We can read about this in the Bible. The book of Acts in the Bible tells us how the early church started. From here, Christianity spread throughout the Roman empire and then the rest of the world. There was originally only one church, but over the course of time, the Christian church has been sub-divided into different groups or denominations. Some of these groups have very similar beliefs, based on the Bible, but others now teach things that are very different from what the Bible says. These groups that distort the Bible are called cults. The word cult is used to indicate that the group has separated itself from the main religion it claims to represent.

Many of these cults consider themselves to be Christian, and although some of their teachings began with Christian teachings, there are some very important differences. Most of these groups grew from the teachings of a person who grew up in the Christian church, but left to form their own religion with their own ideas, and therefore their teachings

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go against what the main Christian churches teach. The most well known ones are:

- Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower Society)
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon church
- The Unification Church, also called Moonies (because they follow the teaching of Rev Sun Myung Moon, a Korean American)
- The International Church of Christ

All these groups are active in the UK, though they are quite small. Their activities can seem at first very similar to those of the Christian church; however, most Christians and others are very suspicious of these groups. Aside from the names of the groups, it can be hard to determine whether or not they are Christian. This is because it can be hard to find out what they actually believe – often they conceal some of their teaching so they can appeal to rational thinking people. Many of their members are kind, friendly and intelligent.

But if these people are kind, and believe in God and Jesus, why do we call them cults?

- Cults teach some things which are clearly contrary to the Bible.

- Some cults change the bible to fit what they teach.
- Often cults have a view of Jesus very different to the Bible, for example they may teach that Jesus was not God.
- The books used by cults often conflict with the Bible; but the cults consider these books to be more important and reliable than the Bible.
- The origins of cults are often connected to people whose lives were not consistent with Christian living.
- Cults teach that only their members can go to heaven, and that all other churches and groups are wrong.
- Cult members place a lot of emphasis on recruiting new members. Sometimes they believe this will help them get to heaven.
- Some cults don't allow people to leave, or do not allow people to have contact with their family.
- Cults don't allow people to question their teaching, and this is how many of their members are deceived. When new people join, they are taught not to question the teaching, no matter how strange it is. By contrast, Christians do not discourage people from asking questions, because Christians believe that the Bible and Christian teaching stands up to questions and scrutiny.