

Are They "Christians?"



What is a "false Christian group"?

For the purposes of this paper, a "false Christian group" is defined as "any group that claims to be Christian (or else claims origin or harmony with Christianity), but whose teaching and behaviors actually contradict the standard, orthodox, Christian doctrine and practice found in the Bible."¹ Many "false Christian groups" deny that they fall under this definition, but it becomes obvious when their beliefs and practices are compared to the Bible and orthodox Christianity. The main popular "false Christian groups" in Blacksburg are **Jehovah's Witnesses** and the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints** (Mormons).

But they are nice people!

Most people representing "false Christian groups" appear neat, polite, dedicated and sincere, and they display a sense of positive values and direction. However, having these characteristics does not make one a Christian. The question is not "Are they nice people?" but rather, "Do they represent authentic Christianity?"



So how do we identify "false Christian groups"?

Identification of false Christian groups involves comparison of their teachings (doctrine), practices and behaviors to the Bible and orthodox Christianity. "Christian orthodoxy" means adherence to the generally accepted, truthful teachings of the Bible over the long history of the Christian church. These fundamental teachings are based on the clear teaching of the Bible, and have been confirmed and clarified in historic creeds (statements of belief). These creeds have been widely accepted by the Christian church as absolute truths essential to the Christian faith. Many resources are available which compare false Christian groups to authentic Christianity. One book, entitled *They're Not Christian??*, concerns the main western groups. This book was written by Bill Perry especially for internationals. If you would like to borrow a copy, contact Jay Lester (HISbburg@msn.com). The following fundamental Christian beliefs are opposed by false Christian groups.

- **The Bible** is the inspired word of God and is the final authority for belief and practice (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). However, false Christian groups rely on other "revelations" that have superseded the Bible; or else their beliefs and practices are based on imaginative and unsupportable interpretations and applications of the Bible.
- **Jesus Christ** is God in human flesh (John 1:1-3, 14), who lived a sinless life on earth (Heb 4:15), died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, rose bodily from the dead (1 Cor 15:3-4), ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9), where he intercedes on behalf of believers (Heb 7:25). Jesus Christ shall bodily return to earth (Acts 1:11) to judge all human beings and to establish his eternal kingdom (2 Cor 5:10, John 5:22, Matt 26:31-34). However, false Christian groups preach another Jesus.
- Concerning **salvation** (being reconciled to God), we are saved by God's grace through faith, not by works (Eph 2:8-9), though genuine faith is accompanied by good works (James 2:17). Our salvation is based entirely on the work of Christ and his righteousness (Rom 3:23-25, 2 Cor 5:21). However, false Christian groups add many human requirements for salvation.

In addition to doctrinal comparison, observation of behaviors may help to identify some false Christian groups. Beware of religious groups that tend to manipulate and control, conceal information, and/or isolate you from family, friends, competing ideas, and interaction with the larger society.

¹ Bill Perry's definition of "cult" in *They're Not Christian??*, (Ephrata, PA: Multi-Language Media, 1998), p. 6. This is one definition of the term "cult." Assuming this definition, groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons are appropriately called "cults" by Christians. However, since many non-Christians associate the term "cult" with only the most extreme groups (usually led by a very strong leader), which tend to use manipulative techniques to recruit, assimilate, control and retain members, I have chosen to use the term "false Christian group" in this paper.