

## Understanding the Essentials of Cults

What is a cult of Christianity? How do theological cults differ from sociological cults? Are there common doctrinal elements to the cults of Christianity? There are many cults of Christianity, all of which preach a false Gospel in the name of Christ. Many of these groups are “sheep stealers,” gaining a high percentage of their converts from existing Protestant churches. How do we spot them? Minister to them? Protect our people from them? This lecture examines these and other cult related issues.

**Kevin Lewis** is a Professor of Theology and Law at Biola University. He has degrees in Religious Studies (B.A., CSULB), Systematic & Historical Theology (M.Div. & Th.M., Talbot School of Theology), and Law (J.D., Whittier law School). He has taught at Biola University for two decades both in the Theology Department at Talbot School of Theology and in the M.A. Christian Apologetics Program, focusing on the fields of Polemical & Elenctic Theology, Systematic Theology, Christian Apologetics, Theology and Law integration, and Jurisprudence & Public Policy. He is the Founder and President of the Institute for Theology & Law, a practicing attorney and a partner at the Law Office of Lewis & Lewis, and an affiliate attorney with the Pacific Justice Institute. He is an active lecturer and seminar speaker at churches, colleges, and conferences and has appeared on many radio programs and television shows addressing a variety of theological, legal, political, and apologetics topics.

### I. Biblical Introduction to the Cults

#### A. Selected Scriptures

1. Matt. 7:15-23

2. Acts 20:28-31

3. II Cor. 11:3-5, 13-15

4. II Peter 2:1-3

5. II Pet. 3:16-17

B. A Mandate for Christian Teachers

1. II Timothy 4:1-8

2. Titus 1:9-11

## II. **Definition of a Cult**

A. Preferred Theological Definition

A cult of Christianity is a group of people, claiming to be Christian, who embrace a particular doctrinal system taught by an individual leader, group of leaders, or organization, which (system) denies (either explicitly or implicitly) one or more of the central (essential) doctrines of the Christian faith, as taught in the sixty-six books of the Bible.” (Alan Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, 7).

B. Why Prefer a theological approach to cults over a sociological?

C. Key Elements of the Definition Explained

### III. Theological Characteristics of Cults

#### A. Doctrine is the Essential Issue

1. Be careful in applying these characteristics.
2. Not all are equally serious.

#### B. The Common Theological Characteristics of Cults

1. Reduction of the Absolute Authority of Scripture
2. Denial of the Trinity
3. Denial of the Deity of Christ
4. Denial of the Sinfulness of Man
5. Devaluation of Christ's Atoning Work

6. Denial of Salvation by Grace Through Faith

7. Denial of the Bodily Resurrection

8. Redefinition of Biblical Terminology

9. Exclusivistic Belief System

10. Compartmentalization of Conflicting Facts

11. Rejection of the Doctrine of Eternal Conscious Punishment

12. Emphasis on Experience Over Doctrine

13. Emphasis on Direct Revelations and Visions from God

14. Claims of Miracles, Signs, and Wonders

15. Fixation with the End Times

16. Denial of the Priesthood of the Believer

17. Disregard for Sound Hermeneutical Principles

18. Syncretism (& Eclecticism)

19. Involvement in Spiritism/the Occult

20. Tendency to see Scripture as Alluding to Their Cultic Movement

21. Emphasis on Minor Points of Theology