

“As an Ex-Mormon, How Do I Find a Church That’s Not a Cult?”

I was raised a Mormon, I now know it is a cult and totally wrong. I am Christian now. I am having difficulty finding a church I can go to as I am afraid of being sucked into another cult.

Many have asked for guidelines regarding what church they should or should not join, as well as how to recognize a cult. The question might be expanded to include a broader spectrum of religious organizations. This range could include churches that are both orthodox and healthy, orthodox but unhealthy, pseudo Christian cults, and finally organizations that claim a completely different religious tradition. The progression might look something like this:

Orthodox & Healthy → Orthodox & Abusive → Cult (Christian) → World Religion (Other religious traditions)

The goal would be to attend churches that are both orthodox in their theology and that are governed by a group of men who model a Christ-like form of servant leadership. There should be a healthy balance between building up believers and sending them out to serve and reach the world. Churches can often become unhealthy when they have a completely inward perspective. Unfortunately, there are churches with orthodox theology that become [abusive](#) due to leadership that is either immature or that chooses to lead in a manipulative and abusive manner. This can happen when a pastor lacks significant oversight by a competent board of elders/deacons or when men who are not good candidates become elders/deacons and hire a young or inexperienced pastor.

The term orthodox basically means to conform to tradition. In

this case we are referring to the tradition or teaching of Christ's apostles as found in the Bible. Some have defined it as what all Christians everywhere have believed. The first seven ecumenical councils of the church established Christianity's theology regarding the nature of God and the person of Christ. These beliefs are a good test for orthodoxy. In general, Christians believe that there is one God who has revealed himself in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit (one essence, three persons). Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man, and has been co-equal with the Father since eternity past. It has also believed that the death of Jesus Christ is the only atonement for sin.

A pseudo-Christian cult usually denies the deity of Christ or his humanity (Gnostics). As you know, Mormonism denies the trinity, claiming that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods with a similar or united purpose. There is much more that could be said about each movement (Mormons, JW's) but you can check our articles on the web for that info. Ron Rhodes defines a cult in one of his books in this manner:

A cult may be defined from both a sociological and a theological perspective. Sociologically speaking, a cult is a religious or semireligious sect or group whose members are controlled or dominated almost entirely by a single individual or organization. A sociological definition of a cult generally includes (but is not limited to) the authoritarian, manipulative, and sometimes communal features of cults. In this type of cult, converts are sometimes cut off from all former associations, including their own families. The Hare Krishnas, The Family ("Children of God"), and Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church are examples of this kind of cult.

Theologically speaking, a cult is a religious group that claims to be Christian but in fact denies one or more of the essential doctrines of historic, orthodox Christianity (as defined in the major historic creeds of Christianity). Such

groups deny or distort essential Christian doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and salvation by grace through faith alone. Cults that fall into this category include the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. [Ron Rhodes, The Culting of America, p. 5)

I hope that you find this helpful.

Don Closson

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“What Do Mormons Mean When They Say Jesus Is Our Big Brother?”

I have two questions. I know that when Mormons say Jesus is our big brother, they take it literally. What do they mean by that? Second, what is the best way to witness to my Mormon friend?

First, Mormons believe that Jesus is our literal brother in the sense that we existed with him prior to our incarnation on earth. They believe that we all (Jesus included) existed prior to our bodily form as spirit children of Elohim and God the Mother. In fact, prior to this spiritual state, Mormons believe that we have existed for eternity past as intelligences. The only difference between Jesus and us is that he has been more faithful and useful to the father. This all makes more sense when you realize that in the Mormon system there is only one form of sentient or intelligent life;

God the father, the Son, the angels, and mankind are all of the same species. It looks something like this:

Intelligences → spirit beings → incarnate (fleshly) beings → god

Mormonism teaches that all of us are on this path of progression toward existing as a god.

Regarding your desire to inform your friend about the Christian faith, another good resource is the book *How Wide the Divide* by Blomberg AND Robinson. It is a dialogue between a professor at Brigham Young University and a seminary professor from Denver Seminary. It is very informative and it provides a good example for how Christians and Mormons can enter into dialogue with one another.

For Him,

Don Closson

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“The Pope’s Inflammatory Remarks about Islam”

How would you access Pope Benedict XVI remarks in his lecture on Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections? and Islamic reaction? What was the essence of his lecture that infuriated the Islamic World?

Thank you for your question regarding the Pope’s comments on Islam and the resulting violent response from the Muslim world.

Not being a Roman Catholic, I do not usually read the Pope's speeches. However, given the worldwide outrage by Muslims, I thought it important to understand what has caused such an intense reaction to his lecture at the University of Regensburg.

The speech was rather academic and mostly focused on the relationship between faith and reason in the Christian tradition. In it, the Pope gave quotes from the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II to a Persian Muslim during the siege of Constantinople in the late 14th century. The exact quote of the Emperor is "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." The Emperor went on to argue that spreading any religion by the sword is by nature unreasonable.

The irony of the situation we find ourselves in today is amazing. We now have Muslims burning churches, threatening to kill the Pope, and destroy the west, because he implied that Mohammed advocated the use of the sword to spread and protect the Muslim faith. It is equivalent to punching someone in the face because they called you pugilistic.

Muslims certainly cannot deny that Mohammed admonished Muslims to pick up their swords for Allah's cause (see my essay [Islam and the Sword](#) at Probe.org). They also cannot ignore the fact that Islam conquered both the Persian and Byzantine Empires via warfare. Had it not been for the victory at Tours by Charles Martel, all of Europe would have fallen to the Islamic invaders.

When anyone in the west speaks against violence done in the name of Allah, Muslims are quick to equate the written word with "aggression" against Islam which then justifies all sorts of violent acts in defense of Islam and its Prophet. I can only hope that the media and our politicians will wake up to the double standard that occurs when words or ideas are

equated with violent acts.

Don Closson

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“What Do You Think About Headcoverings for Christian Women?”

Sue,

I am intrigued by this article “Should a Christian Woman Wear a Headcovering?” by Daniel Botkin (enclosed by mail and also available online [here](#)) about headcoverings, and it makes sense to me, but I would really like your input as a woman.

I read the headcoverings article with a huge smile across my heart. Its an excellent article! . . . And I couldn't agree more.

Before I go further, though, let me first state that Probe does not have an official position on this issue; my answer is about me and my response to this issue. For six years or so I struggled with the plain command of scripture [*1 Cor 11:10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*] and finally gave in. I just could not get around the phrase “because of the angels,” which has absolutely nothing to do with cultural- and time-bound practices. So, about a year ago, I started wearing hats to church. Recently, I purchased a couple of scarves which I also use as a headcovering in worship and for public prayer.

It's been interesting the strong response I've received from men, who absolutely love to see a woman in a hat, even though they usually don't know it's not a fashion statement for me. They just know something strikes them as very, very right about it. What startled me was the effect on ME: I have so enjoyed feeling so feminine! I have also enjoyed experiencing the peace that is the fruit of obedience.

I started out wearing lace doilies or some other kind of headgear when I was in Catholic grade school. In the 60s and 70s, there was a wholesale dropping of the headcovering in almost all Western churches (with the rise of feminist thought, and I think they are related). I never even thought about how quickly 1900 years of church history were overturned in a mere decade until I couldn't come up with a single good reason to disobey scripture.

So there you have it! Thanks for sharing the great article with me!

Sue Bohlin

Hi Sue!!

Your response was such a blessing and encouragement to my wife and me! Thank you so much for taking the time to read it and respond. Because of your response actually, my wife went out and bought a couple of scarves today! ☺ Well thank you for your faithfulness and may the Lord continue to guide you in His word and in His love.

See Also:

- ["Do the Bible's Statements on Head Coverings Apply Today?"](#)
- [Sue Bohlin's Blog Post: "Why I'm the Lady in the Hat"](#)

“You Haven’t Got A Clue About ‘A Course in Miracles’”

With all due respect, you really haven’t got a clue about what [“A Course in Miracles”](#) says. Jesus was way too nice of a fellow to have people like you confuse His Love with hate, fear, and death. That is why He channeled the Course.

By the way FYI, the Jesus of the Course is not the Jesus of the New Testament. This might be a good place for you to start your research on ACIM...:-)

Thanks for your reply to my article on The Course. I appreciate your spiritual astuteness. Perhaps you could help me understand who Jesus is? I must be confused. Could it be that the channel of The Course is an alter ego? That could possibly answer the dilemma.

As I am most assured, you are undoubtedly familiar with The Course’s use of biblical language. The Course refers to the Son frequently (pages 290, 301, 357, 557, 620). In most circles when the term “son” is written Son of God, there is a strong inference of deity and singleness. In other words, there is only one, not many.

Marianne Williamson—I’m sure you are familiar with her—in her book *A Return To Love* uses biblical references to make her points about Jesus and His teaching (page 16 for one). She, along with the author of The Course consistently refer to the Holy Spirit, a clear biblical reference and not found in other religious texts. Therefore, one would rightly make the assumption that the Jesus being referred to in the text is the Jesus of the Bible. Marianne makes at least one reference to the Bible (see page 66) where she references the creation of

Eve. She makes numerous references to biblical material, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the beatitudes, to name only a few.

Now, either the Jesus of the Bible is the primary individual referenced in The Course or Marianne Williamson, as the foremost spokesperson of The Course, along with the author (channeller) of the text is intentionally attempting to deceive the masses. Help me out, I remain confused. You can't have it both ways.

If you can shed further light on the above ideas I would welcome your input. Otherwise, I wish you well on your spiritual journey and peace.

Russ Wise
Christian Information Ministries
(formerly with Probe Ministries)

“Satanism Has Nothing to do with Satan!”

A lot of Russ Wise's article on [Satanism](#) made sense. The only idiot thing he did and every other person on that site did was make a common error due to lack of research. If any of you had researched Satanism properly instead of judging (which made you look very unintelligent) you would have realized that the practice of “Satanism” has absolutely nothing to do with Satan. I have a friend who is Satanic and have studied the religion on my own. In my studies I observed that Satanists don't worship Satan. They believe in the worship of themselves and giving in to desire. I think everyone should do that every now and then, within reason.

Another thing he did wrong was the way he judged teenagers. Almost every teenager is depressed, or has a low self esteem. Teenagers emphasize social acceptance and few get it, and it makes them feel bad. A lot of children don't get the proper attention from parents. Seems they're all Christian to me. A lot of children like vampire movies, which doesn't mean they're satanic. I think that Russ and everyone other Christian should open up their eyes just a little and recognize that not everyone will be Christian. Not everyone will believe God. I'm wiccan, but I was Baptist for 14 years.

I'm responding to your email regarding my piece on Satanism. Let me first say that the piece I wrote was originally limited to space available for a radio transcript. I wish I would have had more space to have elaborated on the topic. I hope to update the article and broaden the information presented so a more comprehensive understanding will be known.

I agree with you that Satanism is primarily a self-centered belief system that indulges the base desires of an individual. However, you must admit that Satanism, as Christianity, is subject to more than one interpretation. I'm sure you have heard of Richard Ramirez, the night-stalker, and self proclaimed Satanist. He without doubt worshipped Satan.

You may not have heard of Sean Sellers, the 17 year-old self-styled Satanist, who killed his mother and father because Satan told him to. I'm not going to hold Satan accountable for Sean's or Richard's actions. However, it is obvious that the influence of a malevolent spirit being is at play here. Likewise, we cannot hold God accountable for every unloving act that His created beings make. As a result of God's love we have free will and will ultimately be held accountable for our actions.

God does not orchestrate our lives as a puppeteer even though He could if He desired. On the other hand Satan, as a created being, cannot as well. But Satan can influence or oppress the

individual in a negative manner, thereby causing one to commit evil acts.

If I can be intuitive for a moment, I suspect that you probably do not believe in Satan as a physical being. If so, could your pre-conceived bias color your view of who Satan is and ultimately his influence on humanity? As a Christian, I believe in Satan and his demons and their desire to confuse and confound mankind spiritually. In other words, to rob men and women of the joy and peace that can only be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now as for my judgmental attitude of teenagers. I wholeheartedly agree with you that teens are often depressed and suffer from low self-esteem. My observations are simply those made by individuals in the field of psychology and law-enforcement. I do not accept your conclusion that I am judgmental in this case. Maybe others!

It is grievous that many teens do not get the attention they need from parents or other adults. I recognize that when teens do not get what they need emotionally, etc. they are susceptible to negative influences. Sean Sellers is a classic example. I'm sure we could name others.

At the risk of running on, let me thank you for your critique. I consider it part of making my comments more reliable and ultimately more helpful for those who seek truth in the spiritual realm.

Best regards to you in your spiritual quest—remember God loves you!

Russ Wise
Christian Information Ministries
(formerly with Probe Ministries)

“Why Are Pagans and Their Religion Evil?”

I really want to understand how modern pagans are seen as evil and how their religion is seen as evil; is everything that's not Christian evil? Is it not everyone's personal choice?

You ask some very good questions. First, you ask why modern pagans and their religion are seen as evil. I think what I would say here is that, from a biblical perspective, modern pagans are not necessarily any more (or less) evil than anyone else. The Bible tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Thus, according to the Bible, all men and women are sinners. We have all thought, said and done things which are displeasing to God and contrary to His perfect moral standards. In this sense, we are all evil and in need of God's forgiveness and grace.

If, as the Bible teaches, Jesus really is the one and only way to God the Father (John 14:6), then all other religions are ultimately false. Of course, it's important to remember that this does NOT mean that everything they teach is false. For example, many non-Christian religions say that we shouldn't lie, steal, commit sexual immorality, or murder. Clearly, Christianity agrees with this and teaches the same thing. Further, Judaism, Unitarianism, and Islam teach that there is only one God. Again, Christianity certainly agrees with this.

In other words, other religions (including various pagan religions) may certainly teach some things that are true and good. But if Christianity is really true, and if Jesus really is the only way to God, then no other religion is ULTIMATELY true (in all that it teaches). In this sense, then, Christians would consider pagan religions “evil.” That is, we would

consider these religions evil because they are leading their adherents astray and away from the only true God and the Savior Jesus Christ. If Christianity is true, then these religions will ultimately hurt (not help) those who follow them.

Finally, many Christians believe that God has given people free-will. God will not force anyone to become a Christian against his/her will. He offers us salvation, forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift, but He will not force it on us. Thus, people do have a choice regarding what religion they will follow. But God will hold everyone accountable for their choices. And those who reject His gracious offer of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ will be held accountable for their sins and suffer the terrible fate of eternal separation from God in hell. Again, passages like Matthew 25:41-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 make this quite clear. This is why Christians believe it is so important to tell people about Jesus and their need for Him. If He really is the only way to God the Father, then it would be very unloving of us not to tell people about this. Most Christians simply want to see their friends, relatives, and co-workers in heaven. They don't want these people to be eternally separated from God, the Ultimate Source of every good and perfect gift.

I hope this helps. If you're interested in reading about the Christian plan of salvation, please visit Bible.org at http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=276.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“You Should Research Reincarnation and the Lost Words of Jesus”

I came into your site because I was interested in what you had to say about reincarnation. I got to looking around and first I do wish to say that it is a wonderful site. I do have some problems with it though. I have been baptized a Baptist. Of course. I used to believe as you do. I have done alot of study on the Bible and other religions. I still believe in Jesus and that he died for my sins. I love the lord with all my heart and soul. But I do not believe that my father would send me to a place of fire and torment. I have the gift of discernment of the spirit. This has been accepted by several churches in my area. I can tell you all about a person after a short time with them and I see spirits, ghosts demons whatever you wish to call them. I can also see into the future somewhat. I do not try to do any of this, it just happens when it happens. This is a gift the lord gave me. Yet you people tell me I am going to hell for it.

I have found several contradictions in the bible myself, a book that I would at one time have died for. I spent a long time asking God to show me the truth. I believe he did. And still is.

I never picked up a bible till I was 24 years old. I went to church when I was younger, but never payed a whole lot of attention, because I did not feel they were teaching the true word of God. I was 6 years old when I realized this. I am very happy that you love the lord so very much. But even Jesus stated that the Bible would be Tampered with and those that

did it would be punished. So why is it so hard to believe that it has happened? You are so ready to believe all the others things that have come true so why not this? Alot of God's word was not even put in the Bible. Do some research yourself on reincarnation and the old church, the older christian belief, and you will find the lost words of Jesus. Did you know that they destroyed the original Bible when they wrote the new King James Version, and then told everybody that it was the original? I believe that you have to worry about being decieved also. Just like the rest of us we must learn the truth for ourselves and stop depending on everyone but God. He says do not trust man, but only him.

Hello _____,

Although (as you yourself realize) we would disagree about the issue of reincarnation, it seems that the more fundamental issue about which we would differ is the Bible – particularly whether or not it is a trustworthy message from God.

You said you found some contradictions in the Bible, but you didn't say what they were. Have you ever attempted to see if there might be good explanations for such alleged Bible difficulties? If not, and if you're interested in exploring this issue, please allow me to recommend the following site: www.tektonics.org. This site has explanations for hundreds of alleged Bible difficulties.

You also said that the Bible was destroyed at the time of the King James translation. I'm afraid your information is incorrect on this point. For instance, we have thousands of New Testament manuscripts going all the way back to the early second century. The King James translation wasn't done until 1611 – hundreds of years after our earliest manuscripts (which we still have). So it's simply not true to say that the Bible was destroyed at this time. If you would like to explore this issue further, please visit Bible.org at http://www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=5. Here you will find

dozens of articles about the Bible by very competent and capable Christian scholars.

Hope these resources prove helpful. Thanks again for writing and God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“I Would Become A Christian Except that It’s Based on Lies and Deception”

Mr. Zukeran:

I read your comparative essay on [Buddhism](#) and Christianity. It was very interesting. However, it is quite obvious to me that you are bias toward Christianity. You raised an interesting point that the Buddha’s writings were written hundreds of years after his death, therefore, are not accurate and somewhat vague. You go on to say that Christianity has a more solid foundation being that there is a recorded history of Jesus during his ministry. There is one important fallacy in your logic that you failed to mention and/or consider that the Jesus you speak of actually existed. And many historians would agree with me that the Gospels were not written until hundreds of years after the so called death of Jesus. I do not write this criticism to offend, but to develop dialogue. My family and my community have deep roots in Christianity and I myself want to be a Christian, but I cannot lie to myself and deny

the knowledge that I have. Unfortunately, I have yet to meet someone who can present Christianity to me in a way that will allow me to embrace it. The reason being it is based on lies and deception.

Thanks for reading my article and your response. I appreciate your honesty regarding the writings of Buddha. I was raised in the Japanese Buddhist tradition and many members of my family are still active members of the Buddhist community. In my studies of Buddhism, that was a question I often wrestled with and would ask the priests at the temple. I came to believe in Christ because of the compelling evidence for Christ. I came to learn He was unique and indeed the divine Son of God.

The four Gospels present an accurate historical record of Christ. Your assertion that the Gospels were written hundreds of years after the death of Christ is incorrect. I believed that claim for many years until I studied the evidence. Presently, due to the evidence we have found, I do not think you will find many historians today agreeing with your assertion. There is strong internal and external evidence that the gospels were written by eye-witnesses in the lifetime of the eye-witnesses.

Here are just a few evidences. We have numerous ancient manuscripts that uphold a first century date. The Chester Beatty Papyri is a group of manuscripts that contains most of the New Testament and is dated 250 A.D. Since it is a copy of almost the entire New Testament, we can safely conclude the original books of the New Testament were written well before, probably in the late first or early second century A.D. The Bodmer Papyri date to 200 A.D. and contain most of the book of John, the last gospel written. Since this is a copy, the original was probably written earlier and since Matthew, Mark and Luke precede John, they are written even earlier. Finally, we have the Rylands Papyri which is a fragment of the book of John which dates 120 A.D. and this fragment was found in Egypt. We can conclude that John was written within the first

century since he wrote from Asia Minor and this copy had made its way from there down to Egypt where it was found. Since Matthew, Mark, and Luke precede John, we can conclude these books were written within the first century A.D. The manuscript evidence alone silences the assertion that the gospels were written centuries after Christ's death.

Then we have quotes from the early Church Fathers. Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church in Corinth in 90 AD and quotes from all four Gospels. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch writes a letter from Rome in 115 A.D. and quotes all four Gospels. Polycarp writes to the Philippians in 120 A.D. and quotes from all the Gospels. I could go on but I will stop here. The fact is, the Church Fathers from the first three centuries were already familiar with the writings of the Apostles and were already quoting them as inspired scripture.

So the assertion that the gospels are written hundreds of years after the death of Christ is a false assertion. For more information, please read my article titled "[The Historical Reliability of the Gospels.](#)"

Sincerely,

Patrick Zukeran

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“Mohammed and David Both Had

Multiple Wives”

Hi Pat,

I bought your [“Evidence and Answers” CD series](#) on Islam and listened to the first one today. I must say that it was very informative and enjoyable. In that particular broadcast, you contrasted Islam with Christianity by pointing out that Mohammed had eleven wives. However, the Bible records that King David, described as a man after God’s own heart, also had numerous wives and concubines. Doesn’t that nullify your argument with Mohammed somewhat?

Great question. First, God’s intent was for men to have one wife so David was out of God’s will there, and the Bible shows He did not have a good home life. David was a man after God’s heart but he was not sinless, he only was deeply committed to God. In Islam a qualification for a prophet is that he is sinless after his call. Muhammad is believed to be sinless; that is why this is a key point. David is not believed to be sinless but sincere; Muhammad is supposed to be sinless. The Koran limits men to four wives but Muhammad took several more. Also, Muhammad’s youngest and most favorite wife Aisha was nine years old when they consummated their marriage. David did not marry a child but married women. Finally, Muhammad took his son-in-law’s wife as one of his wives as well. So the character of Muhammad does not point to a sinless prophet.

Pat Zukeran

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