

Lesson 2

CULTS AND SECTS

INTRODUCTION:

Purposes of study:

- To understand the difference between cults and sects
- To understand the heresy of the major cults
- To prevent deception
- To be prepared to answer and explain to others the heresy of the cults

LESSON OUTLINE

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Warnings from the Scripture*

1. **Matthew 24:4-5:** Jesus answered: *"Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."*
2. **Matthew 24:11:** *"and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."*
3. **Matthew 24:24:** *"For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible."*
4. **1 John 2:18-19:** *"Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."*
5. **Galatians 1:6-9:** *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"*

B. *Definitions*

1. 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 denies one or more of the central doctrines of the Christian faith as taught in the Bible.
2. **Cult:** A religious group that has these distinguishing characteristics.
 - a) A leader claiming he has been called of God and given a special message not found in the Bible.

- b) The message is often set forth in what he calls inspired writings and is usually apocalyptic in nature. These doctrines and/or practices contradict those of the Scriptures.
 - c) His leadership is authoritarian and supported by demanding a legalistic lifestyle.
 - d) The group claims their way alone is the right way.
 - e) They expect persecution from all others.
3. **Sect:** A group that separates itself from the accepted group on some principles of greater strictness, dedication, or way of doing something. Usually the main principle is some aspect of the orthodox faith which is being lost, neglected, are not thought to be done appropriately.
- Examples include the *Quakers, Mennonites, Salvation Army, Plymouth Brethren* and the *Pentecostals*. All of which have now moved to the more respectable classification of denominations.
4. **Denomination:** A sect that has separated from a branch of institutionalized Christianity and has established a reputation of stability and credibility in orthodoxy over time.
5. **A Fundamentalist Fringe Movement:** Doctrinally they are essentially, orthodox, believing in the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the deity of Christ and other cardinal tenets of historic Christianity. In methodology and practice they are generally authoritarian and led by domineering **leaders** who maintain strict control over their followers' personal lives.

II. JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

A. Background

The *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*, more commonly known as *Jehovah's Witnesses*, was founded in the 1880s by *Charles Taze Russell* from Allegheny, Pennsylvania. *Russell* attended *Presbyterian* and *Congregational* churches as a child and found himself unable to accept their teaching about hell. Under *Seventh-day Adventist* influence, *Russell* embraced their teaching that "hell" stood for the grave and that the wicked would ultimately be annihilated, not tortured consciously for eternity.

Also through *Adventist* influence, *Russell* adopted the idea that Christ's Second Coming was an invisible, spiritual "presence" that had already begun, rather than a literal, bodily return to take place in the future. *Russell* also denied the doctrines of the *Trinity* and of Christ's deity. *Russell* died in 1916, believing that *World War 1* was *Armageddon*.

Joseph Rutherford (died 1942), the society's legal counsellor, succeeded *Russell* as head of the movement, and it was under his tenure that they adopted the name "*Jehovah's Witnesses*," from **Isaiah 43:12**. There are presently at least 5 million active *J.W.*'s worldwide. They are known for their massive proselytizing efforts, dedicating about one billion hours per year to witnessing. That is over 200 hours per member per year. *J.W.*'s also distribute enormous amounts of printed literature, more so than any other cult.

B. Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings

1. The **authority of the Bible** is replaced by the interpretation of their leaders to be the final authority. The writings of *Russell* and *Rutherford* take precedence over the Bible. They only use their own *New World Translation* which contains many changes in the wording of key passages.

Answer: The authority of the Scripture is recognized by Jesus Christ Himself in **Luke 4: 4:4 & 8**.

See also. **2 Timothy 3:16** and **2 Peter 3:15-16**

2. The *Trinity* is rejected as unscriptural and the result of pagan influences.

Answer: See *Trinity* in Basic Doctrine notes of Level 1.

3. They wrongly think that wicked scribes removed God's proper name, *Jehovah*, from the Bible. They have restored the name in their *New World Translation* of the Bible.

Answer: The most common name for the Deity is "God," which is a translation of the original *Elohim* (**Genesis 1:1** and many other places). *Elohim* is a plural noun revealing the *Trinity*. There is another name which is particularly assigned to God as His special or proper name, that is, the four letters YHWH (**Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 42:8** and other places).

It has not been removed from the scriptures. The Jews, because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name, do not and will not pronounce it. Therefore, it has been consistently translated LORD (all capital letters) in the English translations. The correct pronunciation is not known and therefore it has been pronounced as Yahweh or Jehovah. YHWH is from the Hebrew verb meaning: to be, to exist, and to become.

4. They deny the **deity** of Jesus Christ, teaching that He was *Michael the Archangel* and was the first created being. Jesus was Jehovah's agent in creating all things after he was created by Jehovah God. Although not God by nature, he is a "*mighty one*" and therefore may be called "*a god*" in a loose sense of the word. They changed their translation in **John 1: 1** to read: "*in the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the Word was "a" god.*"

Answer: In **John 12:39 - 41** it states that Jesus was the one whom Isaiah saw in the temple and **Isaiah 6:5** says this was Jehovah.

In **Revelation 1:17** the Lord Jesus Christ described Himself as "*The first and the Last*" which is the unique title of Jehovah in **Isaiah 44:6** (see **1 Peter 2:8** with **Isaiah 8:13-14**; **Revelation 2:23** with **Jeremiah 17:8-10**).

5. They deny the bodily **resurrection** of Christ, saying that He was raised an invisible spirit and again became an angel.

Answer: **Luke 24:39-43**; **John 20:17, 27**

6. The **Holy Spirit** is not a person or a member of the Godhead, but is Jehovah's active force, which emanates from him to accomplish his will.

Answer: **Acts 5:3-4**

7. They do not believe that man has a **soul** which survives the death of the body. They teach we cease to exist at death but that at the resurrection Jehovah will recreate them from his memory.

Answer: **2 Corinthians 5:3-4**

8. They teach that there are different **classes** of Christians with different destinies. The 144,000 of **Revelation 7 & 14** are those who, along with Christ Jesus, are "*born again*" to exist as spirits. They will reign with Christ in heaven. The rest will live in a paradise on earth with resurrected bodies.

Answer: Unbiblical nonsense.

9. They teach that there is no hell in the traditional understanding.

Those sent there will be annihilated; they will not suffer or be tortured for all eternity.

Answer: 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

10. Jesus Christ's death was as a ransom price to atone for our guilt in Adam. He was raised an invisible spirit creature, forfeiting his right to bodily, earthly life.

Answer: John 20:17, 27, Acts 1:9-11

11. Salvation is accomplished by faith in Christ Jesus plus works, such as taking in spiritual knowledge from their teaching and doing God's kingdom work such as door to door witnessing, being baptized by them and living a moral life.

Answer: Titus 3:5

12. Regarding the **Second Coming** they reject the notion that Christ will return bodily to earth. Rather, his invisible "*presence*," which began in 1914, is engineering events leading to the *Battle of Armageddon* and the beginning of the *Millennium*. The *Watchtower Society* is known for having set several different dates for when *Armageddon* would occur; after each failed prophecy, numerous disillusioned members left the movement.

Answer: Acts 1:10-11

13. They denounce all organized religion and teach that all preachers, except themselves, are frauds and impostors.

Answer: See definition of cult.

14. They discourage marriage and having children because time is so short.

Answer: Genesis 1:28

15. They do not recognize the government of any country, and they refuse to salute to the flag or have any part in war.

Answer: Romans 13:1-7

16. They do not observe **birthdays**, Christmas, Easter, or any other holidays, rejecting them as pagan.

Answer: Luke 2-9-20; Matthew 2:1-2, 9-12; Romans 14:5-6

17. They refuse **blood** transfusions, based on a misunderstanding of **Leviticus 17**.

Answer: Ephesians 5:1-2. The Bible in no way teaches not to give blood. In fact we are asked to show love by sacrificing our life (which includes blood) for others.

III. MORMONISM

A. *Background*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormon Church, was founded by Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805 - 1844), a resident of New York state in the U.S.A. Smith claimed that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him in 1820, informing him that all the churches were wrong and their creeds an abomination.

In 1823 an angel named Moroni allegedly appeared to him, telling him of golden plates that were buried in a nearby hillside. These plates allegedly contained a record of ancient peoples who had migrated from the Near East to America. In 1827 Smith claimed that Moroni directed him to unearth the plates and begin, with supernatural help, 'Translating' the "Reformed Egyptian hieroglyphic" characters inscribed on them. In March 1830, Smith published the resulting "Book of Mormon," and founded his church one month later.

After Joseph Smith died at the hands of an angry mob (1844), Brigham Young (1801 - 77) took over leadership of the group, relocating the "Saints" to Utah. The current Mormon prophet is Gordon B. Hinckley. Today, the Mormon Church boasts a world-wide membership of around 10 million. Mormons actively engage in missionary outreach and literature distribution.

Financially prosperous, they are second only to the Roman Catholic Church in total wealth. Mormons are often known for their emphasis on "Family values" and a clean-cut lifestyle. It is the fastest growing religion in the world.

B. Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings

1. Concerning **God**, *Mormons* believe in an eternal progression of many gods begetting other gods. "God the Father" is one such god, and he is the god over this planet and therefore the god with whom we look to. Therefore *Mormonism* is polytheistic while Christianity is strictly monotheistic. They also believe that God the Father is a man, who attained exaltation to being a god by obedience to the same gospel principles that all *Mormons* strive to obey. God the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as ours.
2. *Mormons* deny the biblical doctrine of the **Trinity**, teaching that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods.
3. Concerning **man**, *Mormons* teach that he is a god "in embryo" and may attain exaltation to godhood as his heavenly father has. God and man are of the same "species," with god being the exalted and glorified state of the man. Before their birth into this present world, all human beings pre-existed in heaven as spiritual progeny of a father and mother god and goddess. They have no memory of their previous existence in the spirit realm.

This pre-existent life was a period of probation. Those who were less faithful, or valiant during this period of probation are born on this earth with black skin. If sufficiently obedient to *Mormon* teaching and certain practices, they will achieve exaltation. Those exalted will inhabit a planet and procreate spirit children, continuing the same cycle.

4. Concerning **Jesus Christ**, *Mormons* teach that he is Lucifer's spirit brother because they were procreated by the same parents in his pre-existent state, before his incarnation. They deny the virgin birth, teaching instead that the human body of Jesus was the product of actual sexual intercourse between God the Father and Mary. They teach that the Father is a man with a physical body. His divinity is not unique since it is the same as that which any man may attain. Thus it is also held that Christ's incarnation is not unique for all the gods, after having first existed as spirits, came to earth to receive bodies before they advanced to being a god.
5. Concerning **Salvation**, *Mormons* deny the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace, teaching instead that we can attain salvation through "repentance, baptism, faith, and good works." Christ's atoning work brings about the resurrection of all mankind, but it cannot pay for all of a person's sins or guarantee exaltation.

While Christ's work is the beginning of salvation, human works are needed to complete the process. Depending on those works, people will achieve one of three levels in heaven: the telestial, the terrestrial, or the celestial. Temple marriage is required for one to attain the celestial kingdom, the highest level.

6. In addition to the *Kings James Version* of the Bible, the *Mormon Church* uses the following sacred books as its main source of authority: the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and the Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price*. It is also believed that the president of the church may receive revelations for the guidance of the church as a whole.

Answer: By adding to the Bible their own additional sacred books, Mormons have placed themselves outside of historic Christianity, which recognizes the Bible alone as the final source of authority.

7. *Mormons* claim to be the only true Church possessing all the divine revelations. They maintain that the entire Christian Church was apostate until 1830, at which time it was restored under the leadership of *Joseph Smith*.
8. *Joseph Smith*, the founder of *Mormonism*, is said to have been ordained to be God's infallible prophet before he was born.
9. *Mormons* believe that the fall of man was a fall upward. If Adam had not eaten the forbidden fruit, he would have had no children. Because he ate the forbidden fruit man is now able to propagate the race.
10. *Mormons* practice baptism for the **dead**. A living *Mormon* can be baptized on behalf of another who has died without being baptized. They also believe in communion with the dead in the privacy of the temple and under the supervision of the priesthood.
11. *Mormons* still hold on to **plural** marriage, also teaching celestial marriages. These being not only for his life but for heaven as well. Many *Mormons* believe that Christ was married to Mary and Martha.
12. *Mormons* believe in a literal *Millennium* during which Christ will reign over the earth from two capitals: Jerusalem and *Independence Missouri*.

IV. UNIFICATION CHURCH

A. *Background*

The founder and current leader of the *Unification Church* is *Sun Myung Moon*. *Moon* claims that in 1936, when he was sixteen, Jesus Christ appeared to him and declared that *Moon* would complete the mission Jesus had only begun. In 1946 *Moon* was arrested by the *North Korean* police and, *Moon* claims, tortured for his faith. Released and then sentenced again to prison, he managed to escape to the south during the *Korean War*. He founded his church in *South Korea* in 1954, which he named the *Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity* (most commonly known as simply the *Unification Church*). In 1957, *Moon* published the *Divine Principle*, which is the main authoritative work setting forth *Unification* theology.

In 1959 the group spread to the *United States*. *Moon* drew his biggest following in *America* in the 1970s, where his movement gained considerable media attention, much of it negative. Controversies swirled around alleged unethical recruitment and fund-raising tactics and *Moon's* authoritarian leadership style. In 1982 *Moon* began serving eighteen months in federal prison on tax-evasion charges.

The *Unification Church* has somewhere between one and two million members, of whom ten to thirty thousand reside in the *United States*. By far the largest concentration of "*Moonies*," as they are commonly called by outsiders, is in *Korea* and *Japan*. The church runs the *Unification Theological Seminary* in *New York* and has considerable business holdings, including the well-known daily newspaper the *Washington Times*.

B. *Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings*

1. Concerning divine revelation, the *Unification Church* teaches that God has revealed his truth to *Moon*, God's source of spiritual truth for this present age. *Moon's* truth is especially found in the *Divine Principle*, which is the '*third testament*' of the Bible; it is considered even more authoritative than the Bible.
2. Concerning sin, *Moon* teaches that God's original plan was for Adam and Eve to mature spiritually and then to procreate a sinless human race. However, Satan thwarted this plan by seducing Eve to have illicit sexual intercourse with him; this led to the spiritual corruption of mankind. Then, when Adam in turn had sex with Eve (before reaching spiritual maturity), this led to mankind's physical corruption.

3. Salvation therefore requires both spiritual and physical redemption. Jesus Christ came to earth to accomplish both elements: He was to marry and produce a sinless race, which would be redeemed both physically and spiritually. However, because the Jews rejected him, Jesus could not accomplish man's total salvation and so was only able to secure spiritual salvation by dying on the cross.

It therefore remains for a second messiah, the "*Lord of the Second Advent*," to provide physical salvation. Most *Unification Church* members identify *Moon* as the *Lord of the Second Advent*. *Moon's* mission is to produce a perfect family. His twelve children are considered sinless. He is to extend this perfection to his followers through their obedience to him, such as having their marriages arranged and blessed by *Moon*.

4. Concerning **Jesus Christ**, *Moon* denies that Jesus is truly God or equal to the Father, though he did attain perfection and is in that sense "*divine*."
5. The biblical doctrine of the **Trinity** is denied.
6. Christ's **resurrection** was not physical, nor does it accomplish our physical redemption. Christ was raised as a spirit, and his resurrection accomplishes the redemption of our spirits.
7. Regarding the afterlife, *Moon* teaches that hell is ruled by Satan and is the place where the spirits of the dead who have rejected God dwells temporarily. Since the *Lord of the Second Advent* will eventually redeem all mankind, hell will be abolished. Ultimately, all human beings will become divine spirits and dwell in heaven with God.

V. NEW AGE MOVEMENT

A. *Background*

The *New Age* movement is defined as "*a loosely structured network of individuals and organizations who share a vision of a new age of enlightenment and harmony (the 'Age of Aquarius') and who subscribe to a common 'worldview.'*" This worldview entails the ideas that all is one (monism), that all is God (pantheism), and that people can experience this oneness with the divine (mysticism).

The *New Age movement (NAM)* is highly diverse and decentralized. There is no person, group of people, or Organization that speaks for it, much less a well-organized, orchestrated conspiracy. Rather, because of their shared core philosophy, *New Agers* cooperate to varying degrees and in varying ways to promote their common interests.

The *NAM* gathers its beliefs from varied sources combining different and often contradictory elements into their beliefs. The *New Age* philosophy has entered into many different areas of life, including health care, such as "*holistic health*," psychology, science, politics (one world government), education and business. Because of the movement's diversity, the number of *New Age* practitioners is impossible to determine. There are more than three thousand publishers of *New Age* and occult books, journals, and magazines.

B. Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings

1. *New Agers* believe that the Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus, contains hidden, secret, meanings only understood by a few of them. They believe that when the Bible is properly understood it supports the *New Age* worldview that all is one, all is God, and man is God.
2. Concerning revelation, they believe the various world's religions and great religious teachers all affirm the *New Age* truths of pantheism, monism, and human divinity. Revelations may also come today from a variety of extra dimensional beings, including disembodied humans such as ascended masters. These revelations are typically "*channelled*" through an individual who becomes controlled by the spiritual entity revealing the information.
3. *New Agers* believe that Jesus Christ is one of many enlightened individuals who have revealed God's truth to humanity. They make a sharp distinction between Jesus and the Christ. "*Jesus*" refers to the literal man Jesus, while '*the Christ*' is often defined as a cosmic, divine entity that indwelt the man Jesus. Some *New Agers* also teach that Jesus went East and attained enlightenment through the teaching of *Eastern gurus*. Thus enlightened, Jesus became a "*way-shower*," much as other holy men such as *Buddha* and *Krishna*.
4. Concerning God, *New Agers* hold to a pantheistic conception. That is, God is all and all is God. God is not seen as personal but is variously described as an impersonal *Force*, or *Cosmic Consciousness*, or *Energy*.

5. In their doctrine of man, *New Agers* affirm human divinity. Since all is God (pantheism) and all is one (monism), it follows that man - like everything else - is part of this divine oneness. Being god, man has unlimited potential and can even create his own reality.
6. Salvation in *New Age* thinking is unnecessary. Since *New Agers* deny the concept of sin, there is no need to be saved from it. It also follows that Jesus Christ could not have atoned for sin. People are not hindered in life by sin but by failing to recognize their own divinity, hence the need for enlightenment, not salvation. *New Agers* typically affirm the doctrine of reincarnation, through which a person is ultimately reunited with God.

VI. MIND SCIENCES

A. *Background*

The "*mind sciences*" comprise several different cults that share a common philosophical outlook on God and the nature of reality. They are called, "*mind sciences*" because they speak of God as "*Divine Mind*," an impersonal principle. *Mind science* groups teach that *Divine Mind* constitutes the whole of reality: the material world either does not exist or is otherwise an aspect of *Divine Mind*. Thus, mind science teaching is pantheistic, that is, God is in all that exists.

We will consider only the three largest groups.

Christian Science (CS) was founded by *Mary Baker Eddy* in 1879. Her views are set forth in her book: *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. "*Metaphysical healing*" was an important part of her teaching and is a crucial component of CS belief. At present there are about 250,000 *Christian Scientists*.

Religious Science (RS), also known as *Science of Mind*, was founded by *Ernest Holmes* in 1927. His main work is entitled: *Science of Mind*. They have about 600,000 members and are the fastest-growing mind science cult.

Unity School of Christianity (USC) was founded by *Charles and Myrtle Fillmore* in the late 1800's. There are about 10,000 members in more than 300 churches world-wide.

B. Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings

1. Concerning revelation.

Unity School of Christianity and Religious Science teaches that truth is found in the "Bibles" of many religions, though it is taught most clearly and fully in their own group. These "Bibles," including the Christian Bible, must be interpreted metaphysically, that is, there is nothing that really exists.

Christian Science differs, claiming that true Christianity can only be understood through *Eddy's, Science and Health*.

2. God is seen as *Divine Mind*, impersonal yet individual. God, "It," is a triple divine *Principles, or Mind: Life, Truth, and Love*. God is "All-in-all." Everything in the universe is a unified Whole, expressed as "all is one."
3. *Christian Science* denies the existence of the material world: it is an illusion, it does not really exist. *Religious Science* and *Unity School of Christianity* affirm the reality of the matter, but say that the material universe is God's Body; he is in everything but greater than everything (pantheism).
4. Jesus was merely a human man, a divine idea, or an idea of God, in bodily form. Jesus was the Son of God but not God the Son (as *Trinitarians* affirm). Jesus was not the Christ: rather, "Christ" refers to "the divine manifestation of God, which comes to the flesh to destroy incarnate error." *Religious Science* specifically affirms that Jesus became the Christ, as all people can become. According to them, the Christ is the *Higher Self* of every individual. All mind science groups teach that Jesus is our Way-shower to salvation, but he cannot save us. Jesus was a master metaphysician who taught the truths of *Divine Science*. His teachings must be interpreted metaphysically.
5. Human Beings are perfect, eternal and without sin (since sin is unreal). They are part of God. *Religious Science* and *Unity School of Christianity* teach that man's body, like all other matter, is a manifestation of *Divine Mind*.
6. Concerning Christ's death and resurrection, since death is an illusion, Christ did not die on the cross. Consequently, bodily resurrection was and is unnecessary.
7. Sin, matter, evil, disease and death are unreal and an illusion; they are merely destructive forms of thought.

8. Man already has ever-lasting salvation; there is no final judgement. "Salvation" is being saved from the error that sin, sickness, and death exists. People must overcome their ignorance and realize that they are already one with God. Additionally, *Christian Science* asserts that there is no way into the kingdom of heaven except through the practice of *Christian Science*.
9. Unique to *United School of Christianity* is the teaching of reincarnation. After bodily death, the soul falls asleep until its next incarnation. Successive rebirths take the form of another human being. Each incarnation is to work out one's "karma" and to progress to the next level of existence, eventually culminating in eternal life.

VII. "JESUS ONLY" CHURCHES

A. *Background*

"Jesus only" churches are so called because they reject the triune baptismal formula (that is, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), baptizing instead only in Jesus' name. They are also called "Oneness" churches because they believe not only that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in substance (which is correct) but also that they are one in person (which is not correct). Thus, Jesus is the Father, Jesus is the Spirit, the Spirit is the Father, etc. This teaching is also known as "modalism" because the one God, who they say is also one person, manifests himself successively in three different "modes."

The churches considered here came out of the *Assemblies of God* (AG) in the early 1900's. In 1916 the AG adopted a doctrinal statement that clearly stipulated *Trinitarian* belief, thus forcing out *Oneness* adherents, who then formed their own denominations and associations. Although there are about ninety different *Oneness* denominations, the *United Pentecostal Church International* (UPCI) is by far the largest, with just over one million members worldwide. They more closely fit the definition of a sect rather than a cult.

B. *Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings*

1. Concerning **Christ**, *Oneness* adherents believe that Jesus is fully God. However, they claim that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit, arguing that in the incarnation "all of God." became incarnate. As noted, this is a reintroduction of the ancient heresy known as modalism.

2. As to Jesus' **Sonship**, they maintain that Jesus is the Son (in any sense of the term - either "*Son of Man*" or "*Son of God*") only in his incarnation. According to them, the term "*Son*" refers strictly to Christ's human nature. Thus, *Oneness* believers deny Christ's eternal, pre-existent Sonship. Before the incarnation, God could be designated as the "*Word*" who is also the Father - but not as Son. At the incarnation, God assumed the role of Son for the purpose of redemption, but this role will have a definite end (that is, at the end of the age).
3. *Oneness* theology denies as illogical and unscriptural the personal distinctions in the Godhead. Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are all one and the same person. Bible verses that appear to reveal distinctions between Jesus and the Father or the Holy Spirit actually reveal distinctions between the divine and human natures of the incarnate Jesus.

Answer: 1 John 4:14; John 14-16-17

4. Concerning **salvation**, *Oneness* writers agree with historic orthodoxy in affirming that one must be "*born again*" in order to be saved. However, contrary to the biblical teaching of justification by faith alone, *Oneness* theology asserts that the new birth takes place through faith, repentance, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Answer: John 1:12; 3-15-16

5. Water baptism, which is indispensable to salvation, must be by immersion and administered in the name of Jesus only.

Answer: The thief on the cross: Luke 23-42-43.

6. Likewise, baptism in the Holy Spirit is essential to salvation and never occurs without the "*initial evidence*" of speaking in tongues.

Answer: Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 12:30

VIII. SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

A. *Background*

A controversy has raged for decades as to whether this religious group is a cult. Authorities on the subject have taken both sides. No one says that the *Seventh-day Adventists* are "cultic" to the same degree as the Mormons or *Jehovah's Witnesses*, for example. However, the history, and even present-day doctrine, of this group could be said to have cultic characteristics.

In many respects, *William Miller*, a licensed *Baptist* minister in the USA, might be labelled the forerunner of *Seventh-day Adventism* even though he himself was not connected with the movement. It was his date setting for the second coming of Christ, which raised the curiosity of Christians and contributed to the widespread prophetic speculation in the 1830's and early 1840's- from this also came the name, "*Adventists*."

When nothing happened on 22 October 1844 a period referred to as "*the Great Disappointment*" set in and others began to make adjustments. One adjustment that came in a vision the very next day was that Christ was not coming to earth on that date but entered the Holy of Holies to "*blot out the sins*" of believers who had died. This was further developed later and eventually became the doctrine of "*investigative judgement*" which gives the movement cultic attributes.

The visionary, *Ellen G. White* seems to be the major force behind the formation of the *Seventh-day Adventists*. She is given credit for solidifying the scattered *Millerites* and *Adventists* into a cohesive denomination. Two months after the *Great Disappointment* the seventeen year old had her first vision. She saw the *Adventists* and the road to heaven and those who doubted the *Adventist* truth were rejected.

Her next vision, two months later, was an expansion on the first vision stating that God closed the door of salvation to sinners on 22 October. Her next vision confirmed the seventh-day Sabbath that *Joseph Bates* was promoting. For the next few years she and the small band of fellow believers were designated the '*sabbatarian and shut door*' *Adventists*.

This was a period of many self-ascribed prophets of which *White* rose above the rest by offering divine confirmation to individuals who needed their positions strengthened. She would sink to the floor in a swoon that extended anywhere from a few minutes to hours. When the vision was ended she was then limp and without strength and had to be assisted to her chair.

At one point, her husband, *James White* a lay *Adventist* preacher, backed away from his strong endorsement of her. The grassroots support for his wife, however, was stronger than he realized, and he was asked to step down from his position and later to apologize for depreciating his wife's visions. From then on *Mrs. White* had virtual full reign in presenting her visionary messages.

B. Summary of Non-Biblical Teachings

1. *Investigative Judgement* - Many *Seventh-day Adventists* could not tell you what this teaching is and many of their pastors do not teach it. However, a significant portion of the denomination's statement of beliefs is devoted to this doctrine.

Article twenty-three of the 1980 revision of this Statement affirms that "in 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2,300 days," Jesus "entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry" and that is "a work of investigative judgement which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin. . . ." and it is continuing today.

As *Ellen White* explained, as names come before the Lord their good and bad deeds, as listed in the "books" spoken of in **Revelation 20:12** are "closely investigated." During this time of judgement "names are accepted, names are rejected." Those rejected are ones who "have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven." Those accepted are "all who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice ... and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God," Only those will have their sins "blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life."

Answer: There is no scripture whatsoever to back this speculation.

2. The death and shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross was sufficient for the forgiveness of sin, but not the blotting out of sin. They explain: "The actual blotting out of sin, could not take place the moment when a sin is forgiven, because subsequent deeds and attitudes may affect the final decision. Instead, the sin remains on the record until the life is complete - in fact, the Scriptures indicate it remains until the judgement." Even after the name of a completed life has gone before the investigative judgement and been accepted, the sin is still not entirely blotted out. That does not happen until Jesus places the sins "upon satan, who, in the execution of the judgement must bear the final penalty" because he is the originator and instigator of sin. The scapegoat, bearing the sins of Israel was sent away, so satan bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused

God's people to commit, will be for a thousand years confined to the earth.

Answer: This doctrine denies the finished work of the death and shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross of *Calvary*. This doctrine more than any other separates *Seventh-day Adventists* from mainline evangelicals.

3. Worshipping on Saturday became an important aspect after a defence was written entitled *The Seventh-day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*, It was later expanded to include warnings that, those who will receive a mark on their forehead for worshipping the beast and his image to be those people who would follow the *Papacy* (the beast) in Sunday worship. He said the Sabbath had been changed to Sunday by the *Roman Catholic Church*. They argue that the basic principles of the *Decalogue* or *Ten Commandments* are unchanged and unchangeable.

Answer: The Church began meeting for worship on the first day of the week soon after the resurrection. **John 20:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10. Hebrews 4** indicates that the spirit of the sabbath is the '*rest*' entered into when a person is born again and ceases from his works to obtain salvation.

4. The belief in "*soul sleep*" is another aspect of *Adventist* doctrine that is often challenged by Bible scholars outside the movement. They teach that the soul as well as the body is in a state of unconsciousness: "*Death is really and truly a sleep, that is deep, that is unconscious, that is unbroken until the awakening at the resurrection,*" writes *Carlyle Haynes*. He argues that the language of the Bible makes clear that it is the whole man which sleeps, not merely a part. No intimation is given that man sleeps only as to his body, and that he is wakeful and conscious as to his soul."

Answer: John 11:11-14; 2Corinthians5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-14

5. Eternal Punishment: They reject the teaching of the Bible as to a conscious and everlasting punishment of non-believers in hell. In *Questions on Doctrine*, first published in 1957, they gave five reasons for their position.
 - a) Because everlasting life is a gift of God (**Romans 6:23**). The wicked do not possess this. They "*shall not see life*" (**John 3:36**); "*no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*" (**1 John 3:15**).

Answer: This is correct. They do not have eternal life, they have eternal death, eternal separation from God.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

Because eternal torment would perpetuate and immortalize sin, suffering, and woe, and contradict, we believe, divine revelation, which envisions the time when these things shall be no more (**Revelation 21:4**).

Answer: The scripture they refer to is in the "*new heaven and new earth*."

Indeed, sinners will have no part in it. Verse 8 declares that their place is in the "*lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*," separated from God and life forever (**Revelation 20:10**).

- b) Because it seems to us to provide a plague spot in the universe of God throughout eternity, and would seem to indicate that it is impossible for God Himself ever to abolish it.

Answer: Silly. "*Nothing is impossible with God*." They are placing their reasoning over God's and in direct opposition to what He has declared to be His plan.

- c) Because in our thinking it would detract from the attribute of love as seen in the character of God, and postulates the concept of a wrath which is never appeased.

Answer: The breadth and length and height and depth of God's Love is expressed and available to all, "*Whoever believes*" (*John 3:16*). But for those who reject Jesus and do not believe, "*shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides (present continuous tense) on him*" forever. This is eternal death, separation from God.

- d) Because the Scriptures teach that the atoning work of Christ is to "*put away sin*" (**Hebrews 9:26**), first from the individual, and ultimately from the universe. The full fruition of Christ's sacrificial, atoning work will be seen not only in a redeemed people but in a restored heaven and earth (**Ephesians 1:14**).

Answer: Yes, their statement is true. But, it does not rule out the fact that the "*lake of fire*" where all the unbelieving sinners, the devil, the beast and false prophet are, "*will be tormented day and night forever and ever*." **Revelation 20:10**

List of References:

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2. Alan W. Gomes. *Truth And Error, Comparative Charts on Cults and Christianity* (Grand Rapids Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1998).