



STATEMENT DC985

ARE SINCERE CULTISTS LOST?

Most Christians have no trouble believing that non-Christians who completely and straightforwardly reject Jesus Christ are lost. However, they do often find it difficult to believe that someone might sincerely believe themselves to be following Jesus Christ and yet -- as in the case of members of heretical pseudo-Christian cults -- be lost. Jesus Himself promised, "seek, and you shall find" (Matt. 7:7); should not those who seek for Christ find Him? And do not many sincere members of the cults truly want to find Christ? They read the Bible more studiously than many and obey Him; they zealously proclaim the message of Christ and they have been taught it. Are they not, therefore, seeking Christ, and will they not then, in accordance with His promise, find Christ? And if so, how can evangelicals regard cultists as lost?

This legitimate question may be answered by keeping the following biblically-based theses or principles in mind. While it may be that an occasional exceptional cultist may, for reasons perhaps unknown to us, actually be saved, our presumption should be that any member of a cult is in darkness and needs to be reached with the light "of the glory of God in the person of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Our only assumption in what follows is that the Bible gives us absolutely reliable information on this and any other subject it addresses.

THESIS #1: Not everyone who acknowledges Jesus as Lord will be saved.

This principle may be derived directly without commentary from Jesus' own words in Matthew 7:21. Thus, we should not fall into the mistake of thinking that if a cultist acknowledges that Jesus is his Lord, then he is saved. Two reasons why a person might be unsaved who acknowledges Jesus as Lord can be imagined. One is that their acknowledgment does not go beyond lip service, as demonstrated by their refusal to obey Him as Lord (Luke 6:46). The other is that what they understand by the meaning of calling Jesus "Lord" is so different from the biblical meaning that their acknowledgment is not what the Bible means by confessing Jesus as Lord. This leads us to our second thesis.

THESIS #2: Many who claim to acknowledge Jesus actually believe in another Jesus, and are either deceiving or deceived.

Again, we have the simple words of Scripture to prove that this is the case, in 2 Corinthians 11:4. Evidently, the apostle's meaning is that many will speak of faith in "Jesus," but their understanding of who and what Jesus is differs so much from reality that in truth they do not have faith in the real Jesus at all. Some of these individuals are no doubt insincere, and Paul warns of "deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13). Yet, Paul also tells the Corinthians that he is concerned that some of them might actually be "led astray" (2 Cor. 11:3b) by such deceivers. Thus, it is possible for sincere people, even people who were a part of the fellowship of true Christians, to be deceived into following "another Jesus." Not that they are not to blame and are perfectly innocent; rather, they are like Eve, who though deceived by the serpent (2 Cor. 11:3a), was guilty of sin and held accountable by God (Gen. 3:1-6, 13-16).

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

THESIS #3: Zeal in religious matters, such as the pursuit of a right standing with God or the winning of others to one's beliefs, does not guarantee or prove that one is or will be saved.

Two texts of Scripture in particular bear on this point. In Romans 10:2 Paul says of his Jewish brethren who rejected Jesus, "they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." Zeal, of course, implies what we call sincerity -- that is, the mental state of believing that what one is promoting is based on truth. The Jews who rejected Jesus were for the most part zealous, and therefore sincere; but they were still lost (9:1-3; 10:1). Their zeal was in particular for a right standing with God; but they sought it on the basis of their own works rather than the righteousness which was available in Christ (10:3-4), and as a result were lost. The second text that bears on this point is Matthew 23:15, which graphically illustrates the truth that zeal in seeking converts does not prove that one's beliefs are correct or that one is saved.

THESIS #4: No human being truly seeks for God unless God's Spirit draws that individual; therefore, those that appear to seek for God but do not come in God's way are not seeking for God at all.

In Romans 3:11 Paul quotes Psalm 14:2 to the effect that "there is none who seeks for God." In context, Paul is speaking of the universal hold that sin has over the human race; and his point is that sin has so perverted our desires that none of us, by our own wishes, is looking for God. This is because "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (Rom. 8:7). Of course, some people do seek for God, otherwise God would not call upon us to seek Him (Isa. 55:6, etc.). But when people seek God, it is only because God has first sought them and drawn them to Him by His grace (Luke 19:10; John 6:44; 15:16). Therefore, when people appear to be "seeking God" -- when they study the Bible, attend meetings, pray, change their lifestyles, attempt to obey the commandments, even speak of their love for God and Christ -- yet worship a false God or honor a false Christ, or follow a false way of salvation, we must conclude that they were not really seeking God. Rather, they may have been seeking spiritual power, or security, or warm relationships, or knowledge, or excitement, or anything other than simply God. And in saying this, we are not claiming that all genuine Christians on the other hand were seeking purely and simply after God. No, our testimony must be that we were following our own divergent path, when God sought us and stopped us in our way, and led us up a new and narrow path leading to salvation in Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:13).

THESIS #5: Any member of a cult who truly desires to know the truth about God and His way of salvation above all else can and will be saved.

Jesus promised that "the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). However, we must come to the true Jesus, and on His terms. Judas came to the true Jesus, but he did not come on Jesus' terms, and was lost (John 17:12). The cost of leaving a cult is great -- the loss of friends, the embarrassment of admitting error, the threat that all who leave the cult are lost. For anyone who puts truth and the One who is truth above these things, however, salvation is available.