

Backing Romney, Graham alters stance on Mormons

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [November 14, 2012](#) issue

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association removed language labeling Mormonism a cult from its website after the famed preacher met with Republican nominee Mitt Romney and pledged to help his presidential campaign.

The removal came after a gay rights group reported that the “cult” reference remained online even after Graham all but endorsed Romney, a Mormon, on October 11.

Ken Barun, the BGEA’s chief of staff, confirmed the removal on October 16. “Our primary focus at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has always been promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ,” Barun said in a statement. “We removed the information from the website because we do not wish to participate in a theological debate about something that has become politicized during this campaign.”

Surveys show that most evangelicals do not consider Mormons to be Christian, but most still support Romney’s candidacy. The GOP nominee will need a strong turnout from evangelicals—who constitute a quarter of the electorate—to defeat President Barack Obama on November 6.

Romney met with Graham, who turns 94 on November 7, and his son Franklin in the pioneer evangelist’s North Carolina home in early October. After the meeting Graham said he was impressed by Romney’s business career and his “strong moral convictions.”

According to Romney campaign spokesman Rick Gorka, [Graham told the GOP nominee, “I’ll do all I can to help you.”](#) Romney later held a campaign rally in nearby Asheville.

Meanwhile the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s website continued to call Mormons members of a cult, along with Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientologists, Spiritists and members of the Unification Church.

The features of a cult, according to one website, are acceptance of revelations outside the Bible, a belief in salvation through good works and unorthodox doctrines on the Trinity.

The BGEA's cult reference, which was later removed, was first reported by the New Civil Rights Movement, a gay rights advocacy group.

According to the liberal website Daily Kos, the belief that Mormons are members of a cult is built into the BGEA's website. The site is programmed to call up articles about cults, including one authored by Billy Graham, when readers search for *Mormon*.

"Billy Graham's own website is automated so that Christians who search for the term *Mormon* will get this page result and be informed, straight from Billy Graham himself, that the Mormon Church is in reality a cult," said Daily Kos writer Bruce Wilson.

Franklin Graham has said that "most Christians would not recognize Mormonism" as part of Christianity. However, the younger Graham has congratulated Romney on the GOP platform and said he "cannot vote for a candidate . . . who supports same-sex marriage and advocates abortion." Obama supports abortion rights and has said he personally backs same-sex marriage. —RNS

This article was edited Oct. 31, 2012.