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Is the Church of Christ a Cult?

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- We live in a time when people can say whatever they want, often without consequences.
  - Equally concerning is that far too many will heed whatever someone says without verifying its accuracy.
  - Such is the case with our subject for this lesson.

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Is the Church of Christ a Cult?

# WHAT IS A CULT?

- When you hear the word, “cult”, what comes to your mind?
- Extremist groups that form at the direction of a dynamic leader who brings a strange and new doctrine that amasses a following.
- In recent times:
  - David Koresh (Branch Davidians - 1993)
  - Jim Jones (Jonestown, Gyana - 1978)
  - “Heaven’s Gate” (San Diego – 1987)
  - Sun Myung Moon (Moonies – 1950s to present)

# WHAT IS A CULT?

- When you hear the word, “cult”, what comes to your mind?
- Religious groups that exercise extreme control, many claiming to follow Jesus (but typically denying His deity)
  - “International Church of Christ”
  - Jehovah’s Witnesses
  - Mormons
- NOTE: These groups do more than just teach error.

# WHAT IS A CULT?

- Defined – 1. A religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader.  
2. The followers of such a religion or sect.  
3. A system or community of religious worship and ritual. ([American Heritage Dictionary](#))



# WHAT IS A CULT?

- Tenets of a cult include:
  1. **Authoritarian control** – individuals surrender to their leader or organization
  2. **Extremist beliefs** – dogmatic & extreme views. Often members are not permitted to question these beliefs
  3. **Isolation from society** – communes, separatists
  4. **Veneration of a single individual**

# WHAT IS A CULT?

- Other tenets often mentioned:
  1. Financial control
  2. Deceptive methods to proselytize
  3. Extreme methods of discipline to keeps its members in-line
  4. Psychological and manipulative tactics to maintain control



# WHAT IS A CULT?

- These are the types of things I think of when I hear the word, “cult”.
- It is a highly charged word with a very negative connotation
- So WHY are we called a “cult”?

## Why are we called a “cult”?

- NOTE: Not all who disagree with our teachings would use this language, but some do or they might say we engage in “cult-like” actions because of our strict adherence to Biblical principles.

# Why are we called a “cult”?

- FIRST – consider: When the expression is used, it is with the implication that every “church of Christ” is part of a denomination.  
Many tie all “churches of Christ” together.
- I wholeheartedly reject this:
- There were no denominations in Bible times and unity of belief was taught  
(**1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 4:17**)
- Congregations were independent and autonomous –  
**Acts 14:23, 20:28, Philippians 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, etc.**

## Why are we called a “cult”?

- Is the church of Christ a denomination?  
I wholeheartedly reject this:
- Christ is our only head and we will answer only to Him based upon His word  
(**Ephesians 1:22-23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Galatians 3:27-28, etc.**)
- With each congregation being independent, we ought to be examined individually based upon what we teach and do.

## Why are we called a cult?

- NOTE: I am using the term, “we” to address this perceived denominational view. “We” would be included in the group so-called a “cult”.

In reality, what “we” believe and teach **MUST** be rooted in scripture or it is false (**1 Peter 4:11**).

“We” continually study God’s word and are striving to follow His teachings and pattern **EVEN** if it is contrary to what the majority believes and teaches.

## Why are we called a cult?

- NOTE: I am using the term, “we” to address this perceived denominational view.

What “we” believe is NOT a manmade credal statement, but established on Biblical teachings “we” are willing to defend  
(**Colossians 3:17**)



# Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that what we believe matters
  - **1 Corinthians 1:10** – speak the same thing
- **1 Corinthians 4:17** – Paul taught the same thing everywhere he went.
- **2 John 9-11** – if one does not abide in “the doctrine of Christ” he is to be rejected

# Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that what we believe matters
  - Denominationalism teaches that as long as they agree on a few key principles (where did they get the list?), that we are liberty to differ on matters of procedure.
- But “we” are not granted that liberty!

# Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that the gospel plan of salvation includes baptism.
  - **Acts 2:38, 22:16, Galatians 3:27, etc.** What are these passages saying?
- Baptism does NOT nullify “faith” but demonstrates that we believe God’s promise – **1 Peter 3:20-21**
- There is NOTHING meritorious (earned) in being baptized

# Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that the gospel plan of salvation includes baptism
  - Denominationalism teaches that if you add anything to faith (belief), it becomes works based salvation.
- BUT, what about repentance, confessing Him as Lord (**Romans 10:9-10**), the “sinner’s prayer” (where?)?
- What about **James 2:14-18ff**?

## Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that the denominational structure of the church is unscriptural?
- The Bible is clear that Jesus built ONE church –  
**Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:4, cf. Matthew 16:18**
- Denominationalism is foreign to the NT pattern of the church!
- Many different churches is a different gospel –  
**Galatians 1:6-9**

## Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that the gospel IS exclusive
- IT DOES matter what we believe, and that includes what “we” teach, how “we” worship, how the church is organized, etc.
- That IS how division is prevented –  
**cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10, 4:6**



# Why are we called a cult?

What are some of these teachings that prompt the charge of “cult”?

- “We” teach that the gospel IS exclusive
- Denominationalism teaches exclusivity on certain key doctrines
  - 1) The Bible is the inerrant word of God
  - 2) Jesus is the Son of God (deity) – some demand the “trinity”
  - 3) We are saved by “grace alone, through faith alone”
- WHY should we stop there? **Ephesians 5:11, Matthew 7:21-23, 1 Peter 4:11, etc.**

## The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

NOTE: MOST do not use this terminology.

- BUT when it is used, it is a **prejudicial term** designed to scare people away from even considering what “we” teach!
- To justify this, many will redefine what a cult is by adding descriptions to the hard-fast definition that is so often associated with the term.

The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Redefining “cult”

- Some appeal to anyone who teaches doctrines different than, “those doctrines (that) appeal to the teachings of the Bible and historic Christianity.”

([https://www.bibleanswer.com/coc\\_cult.htm](https://www.bibleanswer.com/coc_cult.htm) )

# The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Redefining “cult”

- Billy Graham noted 3 warning signs that a church is actually a cult.

1) They claim that only they have translated it correctly,

2) They deny Jesus as Son of God and “claim we must work to save ourselves”,

3) "Third, what do they believe about other Christians? Do they claim that they, and they alone, have the truth — or do they rejoice that God is also at work elsewhere?"

([www.Christianpost.com](http://www.Christianpost.com)), August 10, 2016 (by Michal Gryboski).

# The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Concerning prejudice

- Jesus and Paul were maligned
- If you study the gospels you will find that Jesus:
  - 1) Was a charismatic leader
  - 2) Who taught differently and condemned the popular religious views (**Matt. 7:29**)
  - 3) He amassed an exclusive following
  - 4) He taught that we put Him first (**Luke 14:26-33**)
  - 5) He established a “new religion”  
(**Matt. 16:18, 5-7**)

# The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Concerning prejudice

- Jesus and Paul were maligned
- He was maligned by the “majority leaders” of Judaism of that day – **Matthew 9:3, 12:24, 11:19, etc.**
- Paul was also maligned for following Christ and abandoning the Pharisees – **Acts 24:5, 17:18** – called a “babbler” by Athenian philosophers, **2 Peter 3:16** – his teachings were twisted



The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Concerning prejudice

- Jesus taught that if we follow Him WE will be maligned
- To His apostles - **Matthew 10:24-25, John 15:18-21**
- We are told by Peter (the apostle) that men will speak evil of us – **1 Peter 2:11-12, 3:15-16, 4:3-4, 12-16, etc.**

The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Concerning prejudice

- So, HOW should we respond to the accusation?
  1. Ask questions. Do they really know what they are talking about?
  2. Are they willing to investigate – **1 John 4:1**
  3. Invite them to study the Bible with you

# The REAL reason we are called a “cult”

## Concerning prejudice

- Final thought:

IF you do not like being unjustly labeled, be careful before you attach labels to those you disagree with.

ALWAYS ask:

- 1) Is it truthful?
- 2) Is it helpful?
- 3) Is it kind?

**James 1:19.**

Let the truth speak for itself – **Hebrews 4:12**

## In Conclusion:

We are NOT a cult!

We are NOT a man-made religion seeking to manipulate and deceive people to become a part of us.

We are simply striving to stand true to “the whole counsel of God” **(cf. Acts 20:27)**, EVEN if it is unpopular and uncomfortable.

Souls are at stake!

If you have questions, let's open God's word and talk about it!

Will you search the scriptures to verify the truth? (**Acts 17:11**)



Let us pray!

