

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

Matthew 16:13-18

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

- The following quotation is representative of the what is meant by those who would describe churches of Christ as a “cult”:
- “Today we will take a look at the question, What is a cult? ... Webster’s Dictionary say’s ‘A CULT is a quasi-religious group, often living in a colony, with a charismatic leader who indoctrinates members with unorthodox or extremist views, practices, or beliefs ...’”

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

- The following quotation is representative of the what is meant by those who would describe churches of Christ as a “cult”:  
“Some of those doctrines are: that there is only one true and living God and that the one God is manifest in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that the Bible is the infallible word of God; and that salvation is a gift of God, by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ...  
“Non Christian cults will always deny that Jesus Christ is truly God. They will also claim to be the only true church and add their writings and place them above the Bible in authority ...  
“As the late Dr. Walter Martin said, ‘A text taken from it’s context becomes a pretext, and most often a pretext for error.’”  
(Something To Consider, *Proclaiming The Message Ministries*, P.O. Box 500, Grand River, OH 44045-0500)

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

According to this definition, the church we read about in the New Testament would have been considered a cult!

It had:

- (1) A charismatic leader. Jesus certainly was that (Matthew 21:6-11).
- (2) Unorthodox and extremist views, practices, or beliefs. Some of the beliefs and practices of Jesus and His disciples were viewed in this way by the religious leaders of their day.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

### **Unorthodox and extremist views, practices, or beliefs of Jesus and His disciples.**

- Eating with unwashed hands (Matthew 15:1-14; Mark 7:1-5).
- Letting known sinners touch them (Luke 7:36-50).
- Eating with sinners and Gentiles (Matthew 11:19; Acts 11:2-3).
- They claimed their leader came from heaven and went back to heaven (John 8:23-24)
- They claimed their leader (Jesus) is the Son of God and one with God (John 10:30-36; Romans 1:4).
- They claimed their leader (Jesus) was raised from the dead and will one day raise all men from the dead (John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

- (1) A charismatic leader. Jesus certainly was that (Matthew 21:6-11).
- (2) Unorthodox and extremist views, practices, or beliefs.
- (3) They will also claim to be the only true church.
  - Jesus claimed He would build one church (Matthew 16:18).
  - His apostles taught that He is the head over His body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).
  - And, they taught that just as the church has one head (Christ), Christ has one body (one church) which He saves (Ephesians 4:4; 5:23).

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**Many in the first century spoke against the church. (Acts 28:22).**

- The apostle Paul was accused of being “... a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).
- Easier to attach prejudicial labels than to study and answer arguments.
- Why? Because men love the darkness of error and evil more than they love the light of truth (John 3:19-20). Satan blinds their unbelieving minds (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).
- Could it be that people are throwing around the term “*cult*” without properly defining it?
- By their own definition, Christ a cult leader!!

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

### Why The Accusation?

- You are not being treated any differently from how Jesus and the apostles were treated by unbelievers (cf. John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 3:13-18).
- Christ Himself was verbally persecuted (Matthew 11:19), and “*a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master*” (Matthew 10:24).
- Verbal persecution of Christians has existed since the days of ancient Rome, and will continue to exist until the second coming.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**There are many traits which most cults have in common.**

1. Cults have a single, human leader to whom all devotion is pledged.
2. Cults are isolationist to an extreme degree.
3. Cult proselytizing methods are dishonest, unfair, manipulative, deceptive, invasive, and are designed to prey upon people with weak psychological profiles.
4. Cults practice an extreme and invasive form of financial control over their members.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

5. Cults exercise an extreme and invasive form of control over most other areas of their members’ lives, especially in the areas of dating, marriage, work, and social life.
6. Cults require members to accept and believe doctrines which are based not on evidence, reason, and open thought and discussion, but rather on the unfounded claims of a human being. Often, these doctrines are very bizarre.
7. Cults make it extremely difficult for members to leave the cult, even to the point of threatening violence and stalking.
8. Cults require excessive amounts of their members’ time, often invasively pervading every aspect of their members’ lives to the point that members cannot carry out basic human activities.
9. Cults use psychological, manipulative, mind-control tactics in their affairs, and psychologically intimidate their members in a negative manner.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**Some modern cults are:**

1. Christian Science, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Worldwide Church of God (Herbert Armstrong).
2. Some other extreme examples are the Branch Davidians, who, under David Koresh’s leadership, met their demise in a bloody standoff with U.S. federal agents.
3. Heaven’s Gate, who recently committed mass suicide in the belief that a spaceship in the tail of the Hale-Bop comet would transport them to paradise.
4. The Moonies, who believe that their founder, Sun Yung Moon, and his wife, are the perfect human couple.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**The church of Christ has no single human leader.**

- Rather, it follows Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who performed miracles and rose from the dead to prove that He was more than a human.

**The church of Christ is not isolationist.**

- Though the Bible teaches Christians to be separate from the world in the sense of not joining the world in sin (2 Corinthians 6:17), it also teaches that Christians are to be shining lights to the world (Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:12ff; 1 Peter 3:1ff).

**The church of Christ does not practice dishonest or manipulative preaching techniques.**

- As a gospel preacher I insist on open, honest discussion, based on the Bible, and invite any and all to discuss any biblical topic freely, even if there is disagreement.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**The church of Christ does not control its members' finances.**

- The only teaching of financial contribution to the church is that which is taught in the Bible: members are to freely, generously, and cheerfully give what they deem fit to God in the weekly collection (2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1).

**The church of Christ does not control every area of its members' lives.**

- Though the Bible teaches that Christians are to live godly and avoid sin (1 Peter 4:1-6; Titus 2:11; Ephesians 4:17ff; Colossians 3:1ff) and that it is certainly wiser for Christians to date and marry other Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14), Christians do not act as spies and stalkers to one another.

**The church of Christ does not create bizarre doctrines without evidence and then force members to believe them.**

- Rather, gospel preachers reason soundly, based on textual, historical, logical, archaeological, scientific, and physical evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**The church of Christ does not harass, threaten, or stalk members who leave.**

- Though the unfaithful Christian is not right with God (Hebrews 6:1-8) and is very much missed out of love, and though Christians try to encourage him to return and show him God's love and grace, no one is ever physically or violently prevented from leaving.
- Members are free to quit the church, although there are spiritual consequences for such a decision. (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1; Romans 16:17; cf. 2 Timothy 4:10)

**The church of Christ does not take all of its members' time and prevent them from doing anything else.**

- Christians recognize that people have to work (1 Timothy 5:8), relax, spend time with their families, etc.
- The Bible teaches Christians to attend assemblies. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**Finally, the church of Christ does not use negative, psychological manipulation and mind control to intimidate its members.**

- The manner in which all faithful evangelists preach, is this: the gospel is set forth very straightforwardly in love.
- A choice of action is biblically given, the spiritual consequences of both obedience and disobedience are stated (cf. Romans 6:16-17, and the listener is invited to respond to God (Acts 2:1-38; Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17). If there are any gospel preachers who do otherwise, they are wrong, and need to change.

## IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?!

**It has been amply demonstrated that, according to the standard definition of cults, the church of Christ is emphatically not a cult.**

- Out of nine common defining characteristics of cults, the church of Christ does not even practice one.
- The church of Christ is not a manipulative, harmful, brainwashed, deceptive, man-made organization.
- Rather, it is a group of sincere Christians who are trying their best to serve God, to love their fellow man, and to go to heaven when this life is over.
- Anyone who charges otherwise is ignoring the evidence.