



IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A CULT?

- I. (Slide #2) Truths God Teaches And That We Believe And Preach:**
- A. (▶) There Are Three Divine Beings -- God, The Father; God, The Son; And God, The Holy Spirit.

 - B. (▶) They Are Three Distinct Beings Who Are “One” In Nature And Will!

 - C. **(Slide #3)** They Designed Mankind As Free Moral Agents -- Men Are Born With Free Will!

 - D. (▶) The Bible Is The Revealed, Inspired, And Inerrant Word Of God! The New Testament Reveals The Covenant Of Christ For Mankind After He Died On The Cross. It Is The Spiritual Law For Mankind Today.

 - E. **(Slide #4)** When Man Violates God’s Laws, He Becomes A Sinner; He Desperately Needs A Savior!

 - F. (▶) Jesus Christ Is THE ONLY Savior For Sinners -- He, The Perfect, Sinless One, Suffered And Died And Shed His Blood So That He Could Be THE Redeemer For Penitent Sinners!

 - G. **(Slide #5)** Christ Gave His Plan Of Salvation -- Sinners Must Hear The Gospel That He Is The Answer For Sin; Sinners MUST Believe That He Is THE Messiah; They Must Repent Of Their Sins; They Must Confess Faith In Him; They Must Be Baptized [Fully Immersed] In Order To Contact His Blood And To Be Saved From Their Sins; They Must Live A Loving, Faithful Christian Life!

 - H. **(Slide #6)** He Established His Church -- He Immediately Adds The Saved To His Church; Faithful Christians Must Love His Church, Be Loyal To It, And Be Faithful In Heart And In Worship In It!

I. (▶) The New Testament Outlines God-Ordained Worship; Christians Must Worship As God Has Directed In The New Testament.

J. (Slide #7) God Expects Christians To Live Faithfully Until Death!

II. (Slide #8) The World's Reaction To Those Truths:

A. (▶) Many Deny Some Of These Truths:

1. Some reject the Trinity.
 - a. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that there is only ONE divine being -- God the Father or Jehovah.
 - b. Muslims believe in Allah -- he is NOT the God of the Bible!
 - c. Oneness Pentecostals claim that there is only ONE divine being -- Jesus. They teach that he sometimes appears like a Father and at other times like a spirit -- but it is always Jesus.
 - d. Those of the Jewish faith believe a Messiah is coming; they deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah.
2. Calvinism affirms that all babies are born with "Original Sin", are devoid of free will, and can do nothing of their own volition to know the Will of God or to choose to obey It.
3. Many reject the fact that the Bible is the revealed, inspired, and inerrant Word Of God.
4. The teaching that Jesus is the ONLY way, the ONLY Truth, and the ONLY way to life is viewed as arrogant, exclusive, snobbish, and elitist.
5. Baptism as immersion is rejected; sprinkling and pouring are accepted as "baptism."
6. Jesus' proclamation that He has ONE Church is anathema to every denominationalist.
7. People believe that they can worship God in ways that they see fit -- instrumental music is almost universally accepted as acceptable in worship.

B. (▶) Others ATTACK Certain Of These Truths.

1. Jesus is viciously rejected as the Messiah and the ONLY way to Heaven.
2. Calvinists viciously attack the idea of man having to choose to come to faith and to be baptized to be saved as "works salvation!" (Nothing is further

from the truth -- the Bible does not teach and we do not believe “works salvation!” We are saved by the mercy and grace of God that provides a privilege that we can choose to have that salvation. Mk. 16:15; Ac. 2:38 22:16; Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 3:27-29; Col. 2:11-13; and 1 Pet. 3:21.)

3. The idea of salvation in ONE CHURCH is hated and attacked! Eph. 4:4; 1:22,23
4. Advocating that we must worship only as the N.T. authorizes is ridiculed; most people think we can choose whatever way we wish to worship!

C. (▶) Some Viciously Attack With The Epithet -- “CULT!”

1. Some of you probably feel very unfairly accused; that is understandable.
2. (Slide #9) “CULT!”
 - a. (▶) WHY would people make that charge?
 - b. (▶) Some have heard others use that accusation.
 1. When Matthew Winkler was killed by his wife, Nancy Grace invited a Baptist “pastor” on her show; he said the Church of Christ was a cult-like religion.
 2. Some confuse the International Churches of Christ with the New Testament Church and with us.
 - a. On the internet, you might find a statement that “the church of Christ” is a cult.
 - b. They are referring to the International Churches of Christ that were previously known as the Boston Movement which was known in the beginning as the Crossroads Movement.
 1. Their origins were in a congregation of the Churches of Christ.
 2. However, they began the practice of “prayer partners” where a mature member would disciple a new member.
 3. The new members was expected to confess sins to the mature member.
 4. That mature members would use their confessions to manipulate the new members.
 5. Also they pressured the new members to alienate from their families, leave the person they were dating, and give strong guidance into who they should marry.
 6. The “prayer partner” concept was viewed as cultic.
 7. These people are not OF us; they are not in fellowship WITH us!
 - c. (▶) People take a few parts of a definition and jump to the accusation that we are a cult.
 1. That approach is very irrational!

2. Examples:
 - a. (▶) A person in a uniform -- policeman, fireman, doctor, nurse, physical therapist, respiratory therapist, occupational therapist, baseball player, football player, soccer player, basketball player, et.al.
 1. Something the person wears while at work or in an athletic activity.
 2. (Slide #10) A uniform worn by a woman -- Nurse.
 - 3.
 - b. (Slide #11) “Cancer” -- (Slide #12) melanoma; lung or liver cancer.
 1. There are over 100 types of cancer!
 2. The major types -- breast, cervix, lung, colon, prostate, and stomach.
 3. Many hear that word as an immediate death sentence! Some of you have had cancer for several years; still alive!
 4. “Have you ever had cancer?” Some of us would answer, “Yes” but not mean those types of cancer -- skin cancer; melanoma.
- b. (Slide #13) Typical definitions of a “cult:”
 1. **Janja Lalich, Ph.D. & Michael D. Langone, Ph.D.** -- this list was go be published in a book *Take Back Your Life: Recovering from Cults and Abusive Relationships* by Janja Lalich and Madeleine Tobias (Berkeley: Bay Tree Publishing, 2006). Their members are typically manipulated, exploited, and even abused.
 - a. Zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader (whether he is alive or dead) and regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.
 - b. Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
 - c. Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
 - d. The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (who you date, your job, who you marry, where you live, whether or not you have children, etc.)
 - e. The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members.
 - f. The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.
 - g. The leader is not accountable to any authorities. (Contrast that with teachers, military leaders, ministers, etc. -- they are accountable to others.)

- h. The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviors or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before joining the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).
 - i. The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.
 - j. Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.
 - k. The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
 - l. The group is preoccupied with making money.
 - m. Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.
 - n. Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.
 - o. The most loyal members (the "true believers") feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be, and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.
2. <https://carm.org/signs-practices-of-a-cult> -- Social Aspects Of Cult-Like Behavior.
- a. **Submission:**
 - 1. Complete, almost unquestioned trust in the leadership.
 - 2. Leaders are often seen as prophets, apostles, or special individuals with unusual connections to God. This helps a person give themselves over psychologically to trusting someone else for their spiritual welfare.
 - 3. Increased submission to the leadership is rewarded with additional responsibilities and/or roles, and/or praises, increasing the importance of the person within the group.
 - b. **Exclusivity** -- Their group is the only true religious system, or one of the few true remnants of God's people.
 - c. **Persecution complex** -- Us against them mentality. Therefore, when someone (inside or outside of the group) corrects the group in doctrine and/or behavior, it is interpreted as persecution, which then is interpreted as validation.
 - d. **Control** -- Control of members' actions and thinking through repeated indoctrination and/or threats of loss of salvation, or a place to live, or receiving curses from God, etc.
 - e. **Isolation** -- Minimizing contact of church members with those outside the group. This facilitates a further control over the thinking and practices of the members by the leadership.

- f. **Love Bombing** -- Showing great attention and love to a person in the group by others in the group, to help transfer emotional dependence to the group.
 - g. **Special Knowledge:**
 - 1. Instructions and/or knowledge are sometimes said to be received by a leader(s) from God. This leader then informs the members.
 - 2. The Special Knowledge can be received through visions, dreams, or new interpretations of sacred scriptures such as the Bible.
 - h. **Indoctrination** -- The teachings of the group are repeatedly drilled into the members, but the indoctrination usually occurs around Special Knowledge.
 - i. **Salvation** -- Salvation from the judgment of God is maintained through association and/or submission with the group, its authority, and/or its Special Knowledge.
 - j. **Group Think:**
 - a. The group's coherence is maintained by the observance to policies handed down from those in authority.
 - b. There is an internal enforcement of policies by members who reward "proper" behavior, and those who perform properly are rewarded with further inclusion and acceptance by the group
 - k. **Cognitive Dissonance:**
 - 1. Avoidance of critical thinking and/or maintaining logically impossible beliefs and/or beliefs that are inconsistent with other beliefs held by the group.
 - 2. Avoidance of and/or denial of any facts that might contradict the group's belief system.
 - l. **Shunning** -- Those who do not keep in step with group policies are shunned and/or expelled.
 - m. **Gender Roles:**
 - 1. Control of gender roles and definitions.
 - 2. Severe control of gender roles sometimes leads to sexual exploitation.
 - n. **Appearance Standards** -- Often a common appearance is required and maintained. For instance, women might wear prairie dresses, and/or their hair in buns, and/or no makeup, and/or the men might all wear white short-sleeved shirts, and/or without beards, or all wear beards.
3. <http://andynaselli.com/sociological-characteristics-of-cults>
- a. **Authoritarian Leadership:**
 - 1. Authoritarianism involves the acceptance of an authority figure who exercises excessive control on cult members. As prophet or founder, this leader's word is considered ultimate and final.

2. Often this authoritarianism involves legalistic submission to the rules and regulations of the group as established by the cult leader (or, as in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, submission to the Watchtower Society). Cult members are fully expected to submit, even if they do not agree with the requirements. Unquestioning obedience is compulsory.
 - b. **Exclusivism** -- Cults often believe that they alone have the truth. The cult views itself as the single means of salvation on earth; to leave the group is to endanger one's soul.
 - c. **Isolationism** -- The more extreme cults sometimes create fortified boundaries, often precipitating tragic endings (we have already mentioned the tragedies in Waco and Jonestown). Some cults require members to renounce and break off associations with parents and siblings.
 - d. **Opposition to Independent Thinking** -- Some cultic groups discourage members from thinking independently. The "thinking," as it were, has already been done for them by the cult leadership; the proper response is merely to submit.
 - e. **Fear of Being "Disfellowshipped"** -- It is not uncommon in cults that people are urged to remain faithful to avoid being "disfellowshipped," or disbarred, from the group. Again, the Jehovah's Witnesses are a prime example, for a person can be disfellowshipped merely for questioning a Watchtower doctrine.
 - f. **Threats of Satanic Attack** -- Finally, some cults use fear and intimidation to keep members in line. Members may be told that something awful will happen to them should they choose to leave the group. Others may be told that Satan will attack them and may even kill them, for they will have committed the unpardonable sin. Such fear tactics are designed to induce submission. Even when people do muster enough courage to leave the group, they may endure psychological consequences and emotional baggage for years to come.

4. <http://www.equip.org/perspectives/what-are-common-characteristics-of-cults/> -- Characteristics Of Cults
 - a. **Scripture Twisting** -- The first mark of a cult is its manipulation of Scripture. The Bible is twisted to fit the leader or group's interpretation. Private interpretations are forbidden because the leader of the cult is the only one, of course, who is able to understand God's voice properly. Their teachings distort the historic, orthodox claims of Christianity.

- b. **Mental Manipulation** -- Second, many times cults manipulate people's minds. There is little concern for individual thought and development. Education is usually discouraged while the convert is bombarded with the cult's doctrine and literature. Members are called to leave or neglect their old family and life-style for a brand new one.
 - c. **Time Manipulation** -- A third characteristic is the manipulation of time. Since salvation comes exclusively from the teachings of the group, in many cults members spend much of their time working for their organization. Family, school, leisure, sleep, and even food are most often neglected.
 - d. **Manipulating Reality** -- Finally, cults typically manipulate reality. They tend to have an exclusive "us"/"them" mentality in which society and old associates are all out to get them. Anyone outside of the group is suspect.
5. <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/268-characteristics-of-cults>
- a. The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader, and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.
 - b. Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
 - c. Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, or debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
 - d. The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (e.g., members must get permission to date, change jobs, or marry or leaders prescribe what to wear, where to live, whether to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).
 - e. The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s), and its members (e.g., the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).
 - f. The group has a polarized, us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.
 - g. The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders, or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/may/27/cult-s-definition-religion>. 10 warning signs of a potentially unsafe group or leader:
- a. Absolute authoritarianism without meaningful accountability.
 - b. No tolerance for questions or critical inquiry.

- c. No meaningful financial disclosure regarding budget or expenses, such as an independently audited financial statement.
 - d. Unreasonable fear about the outside world, such as impending catastrophe, evil conspiracies and persecutions.
 - e. There is no legitimate reason to leave, former followers are always wrong in leaving, negative or even evil.
 - f. Former members often relate the same stories of abuse and reflect a similar pattern of grievances.
 - g. There are records, books, news articles, or broadcast reports that document the abuses of the group/leader.
 - h. Followers feel they can never be “good enough.”
 - i. The group/leader is always right.
 - j. The group/leader is the exclusive means of knowing “truth” or receiving validation, no other process of discovery is really acceptable or credible.
7. <http://doctrinesoffaith.com/cults-characteristics-of-cults/>
- a. The group has an authoritarian leader who commands control, loyalty, and allegiance from group members.
 - b. The leader claims to have special knowledge or insight that others don't have.
 - c. The cult maintains practices that are different from normal behavior.
 - d. The cult maintains that they are the only ones to have the truth, and that leaving will pose risks.
 - e. The cult separates itself socially from others, and is usually practicing elitism. They may also isolate followers from other people outside the cult.
 - f. Members of the cult feel or profess that they are the subject of persecution from people outside the cult.
 - g. The cult has its own terminology and phrases.
 - h. The cult leaders maintain control over members by using certain forms of mental manipulation. They remind the group that if they stick to the group's beliefs or teachings, they will get special rewards (ie: spiritually).
 - i. The leader or leaders maintain control over the lives of members. (This may include counseling them on their sex lives, marital choices, time spent dedication to the group and even college or other advanced education which may be frowned upon).
 - j. Members are encouraged to contribute money or property to the group. (This may be conveyed to the members in a manner in which they believe that the cult is suffering financially when they are not.)

- k. Recruitment of new members may be done in a deceptive way. (This may be accomplished by members not explicitly sharing the true inner workings of the religious organization with prospective members, including the losses or damage that will result if they leave).
- c. **Summation of the above definitions of cults:**
 - 1. Unquestioning commitment to an authoritative, supreme leader. (That leader is usually accountable to no one!)
 - 2. They affirm that they alone have the truth.
 - 3. There is strong manipulation and control of how people think and how they make decisions.
 - 4. There are attempts to control who they date, who they marry, the kind of job they have, where they live, if they will have children or not, etc.
 - 5. Questions and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
 - 6. Members are isolated from family, friends, and others outside the group.
 - 7. There are attempts to control their time -- family, school, work, sleep, etc. are often neglected.
 - 8. People are encouraged to give their money or property to the group.
 - 9. There is usually little if any openness about budget, expenses, or financials.
 - 10. There is constant pressure to recruit more members; it is usually done using deceptive means.
 - 11. Members are constantly threatened with disbarment, shunning, or alienation from the group.
 - 12. They feel a persecution complex -- it is "US" against "THEM!"
- d. **(Slide #14)** This is a charge that has always been made against Jesus and Christians!
 - 1. "Sect" is used in Scripture in 2 different senses:
 - a. "Faction", "Branch", "Denomination"
 - a. The Jewish religion had factions or denominations.
 - 1. Pharisees -- They believed in the supernatural and in the resurrection.
 - 2. Sadducees -- They denied the supernatural and the resurrection from the dead.
 - a. They only followed the Torah.
 - b. They did not believe in angels or spirits (however, in the Torah, an angel appeared to Hagar; two angels visited Lot in Sodom; an angel stopped Abraham from slaying Isaac; Jacob's ladder had angels; an angel led Israel in the wilderness.
 - 3. Ac. 5:17 "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is **the sect of the Sadducees**), and they were filled with indignation," (the group who did not believe in the supernatural)

4. Ac. 15:5 “But some of **the sect of the Pharisees** who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.’”
 5. Ac. 26:5 “They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to **the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.**”
2. Attacks against Jesus, the Apostles, Christianity, and the Church!
 - a. (▶) Attacks against Jesus:
 1. Mt. 9:34 “But the Pharisees said, ‘He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons.’”
 2. Mt. 11:19 “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”
 - b. (▶) Attacks against Christianity and the Church!
 1. Ananias the High Priest brought a powerful orator, Tertellus, to Caesarea to prosecute Paul before Felix: Ac. 24:5 “For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of **the sect of the Nazarenes.**”
 2. Ac. 24:14 “But this I confess to you, that according to **the Way which they call a sect**, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”
 3. Ac. 28:22 “But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning **this sect**, we know that **it is spoken against everywhere.**”
 - e. (Slide #15) **Some charges made against cults may appear to be made against Christianity:**
 1. It demands loyalty and submission to a supreme leader!
 2. His way is Truth; all else is error!
 3. He tells us how to live!
 4. Christianity may appear to be elitist -- if you are not a Christian, you are lost!
 5. Its mission is to bring sinners to Christ.
 6. Those who walk disorderly are to be disciplined.
 - f. (Slide #16) **Why the Lord’s Church is NOT a cult!**
 1. In a cult, one man or an organization dictates how you think. In the Church, we have free will, we are invited to willingly conform to the Will of Christ!

2. In a cult, the members are not allowed to question or to think critically; in the Church, members are encouraged to study and think; they were praised when they compared what an Apostle taught with Scripture! Ac. 17:11. John says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." I Jn. 4:1. They say, "The Bible says!"
3. In cults, members are involuntary slaves to human leaders who force them into submission; in the Lord's Church Christians submit to Christ by personal choice -- they are slaves by free will!
4. Cults claim special knowledge; Christians say, "The Lord says!"
5. Cultic leaders are not accountable to anyone; in the Church, everyone is accountable to God; ministers are accountable to elders; deacons are accountable to elders; members are accountable to elders; elders are accountable to ministers!
6. In cults members give up their free will; in the Church God's people rejoice in their free will (even to obey God or to reject Him, or to remain in salvation or to walk away from it!)
7. In cults, there is an attempt to alienate members from their parents or mates; in the Lord's Church, the home is a foundational and fundamental place where Christianity is loved and where a Christian models Christianity to non-Christians.
8. Cults often advocate sinful actions in relationship to morality and finances; in the Church Christians are called to live holy lives and to be ethical in all aspects of morality and in their use of finances!
9. Cults excommunicate with spite and rejection; the Church withdraws from sinners in hopes of showing love and bring them back from their sin to be restored to faithful service of the Lord!
10. Some of these ideas com from http://www.mikebickle.org.edgesuite.net/MikeBickleVOD/2012/20121118_How_To_Recognize_Cults_7_Characteristics.pdf

III. (Slide #17) How Do Christians React To Being Accused Of Being A Cult?

A. (►) React Like Jesus Did!

1. I Pet. 2:21-23 "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²²*Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth;* ²³who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;"
2. Teach and show people what we teach and believe!

B. (►) Honor The Lord And His Church!

- C. (▶) Let People See Your Kind, Christian Heart!

- D. (▶) Let People See The Blessedness Of Choice!

- E. (▶) Invite Them To Seek Salvation In Jesus Christ And To Become A Part Of The Lord's Family!