

Are the churches of Christ a Cult?

ACTS 24:1-14

An Important Disclaimer

- ▶ I am not a spokesman for the “churches of Christ”; it is not possible.
- ▶ The church of Christ has Jesus alone as its “blessed and only Potentate” with every individual subject to Him. – 1 Timothy 6:15
 - ▶ Local organization is simply comprised of a plurality of elders overseeing a single congregation. (1 Peter 5:1,2)
 - ▶ There is no authority for any man (save Jesus) to speak for His church. (Hebrews 1:1,2)
- ▶ The views expressed here are therefore my own, however I believe them to be in harmony with the Scriptures and with others of “like precious faith”.

Another Important Disclaimer

- ▶ It would not be credible for a member of a church of Christ to deny churches of Christ are a cult based solely upon his own opinions or assertions.
- ▶ Therefore, this lesson relies *heavily* on the work of Anthony Hoekema and particularly on his book “The Four Major Cults”.
- ▶ While this *is* a Bible study it is obligatory to utilize extra-biblical material to address this subject thoroughly and credibly.
- ▶ The purpose of this sermon is to address the question, “Are the churches of Christ a cult?”

The Four Major Cults

- ▶ Written by Anthony Hoekema
- ▶ Professor of Systematic Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- ▶ Bibliography of Four Major Cults, cites *thirty-one pages of references* from the book.
- ▶ This is regarded as “the standard work” on cults in the English Language.

What are the “Four Major Cults”?¹

1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)
2. The Seventh Day Adventist Church
3. The Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Scientists)
4. Jehovah's Witnesses

¹Hoekema, Anthony, The Four Major Cults, Grand Rapids Michigan, Eerdmans' Printing Company, November 1986

General Characteristics of the Cults

- ▶ An abrupt break with historic Christianity and their confessions.
- ▶ A tendency to major in minors.
- ▶ A tendency to perfectionism.

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Distinctive Traits of Cults

- ▶ **An Extra-Scriptural Source of Authority**
- ▶ **The Denial of Justification by Grace Alone**
- ▶ **The Devaluation of Christ**
- ▶ **The Group as the Exclusive Community of the Saved**
- ▶ **The Group's Central Role in Eschatology**

An Extra-Scriptural Source of Authority

Cult	Extra-Biblical Source
Mormons	Prophets of the Church
Seventh Day Adventists	Ellen G. White
Christian Scientist	Mary Baker Eddy
Jehovah's Witnesses	"The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society"

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (17) that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

1 Peter 4:11 NKJV

“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”

Ephesians 2:19-22

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, (21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (NKJV)

The Denial of Justification by Grace Alone

- ▶ Anthony Hoekema is a member of the Presbyterian church. The doctrine of Calvinism does in fact teach that salvation is wholly and completely an act of God. They believe that man cannot contribute to his salvation in any way.
- ▶ However, this is not a tenet of “historic Christianity”. Most “Calvinist churches” today believe in the “free will of man”, thus believing man exercises choice in accepting the salvation wrought by God in Christ Jesus.
- ▶ The means of acceptance varies from church to church, yet they all acknowledge justification is by grace through faith.

ARE WE SAVED BY WORKS?

NO	YES
Works of the Law - Galatians 2:16	Obeying Commands - Psalm 119:1123,172
Works of Our Own Righteousness Romans 10:1-3	Works of God's Righteousness - Acts 10:34,35
Boastful Works - Romans 3:27; 1 Corinthians 1:12-31	Works of Faith – Romans 1:5, 16:26; Galatians 5:26; James 2:22
Works of Iniquity - Matthew 13:14	Perfect Works - James 1:27
Works of Darkness - Romans 13:12	Good Works - Titus 3:1, 5-8, 14

The Devaluation of Christ

- ▶ The Scriptures affirm that Jesus Christ is God – John 1:1; Hebrews 1:1-3; Philippians 2:5
- ▶ The Scriptures affirm that Jesus came in the flesh – John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-11
 - ▶ He is the one and only blessed Potentate – 1 Timothy 6:15
 - ▶ He is the Head of the Church – Ephesians 1:22, 5:23; Colossians 1:18

Next lesson: Distinctive Traits of Cults – Pt 2

- X An Extra-Scriptural Source of Authority
- X The Denial of Justification by Grace Alone
- X The Devaluation of Christ
- ? The Group as the Exclusive Community of the Saved
- ? The Group's Central Role in Eschatology