



ARE THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST A CULT? – PT 4

I CORINTHIANS 3:1-17

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 (LDS, Mormons)
2. The Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA)
3. The Church of Christ, Scientist
(Christian Scientists)
4. Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs)

¹Hoekema, Anthony, The Four Major Cults, Grand Rapids Michigan, Eerdman’s Printing Company, November 1986

DO CHURCHES OF
CHRIST BEAR THE
DISTINCTIVE
CHARACTERISTICS
OR TRAITS OF THE
CULT?

A REVIEW
AND
SUMMARY

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CULT

Hoekema, Anthony, The Four Major Cults, Grand Rapids Michigan, Eerdman's Printing Company, November 1986

Chapter Six – pages 373-403

CHARACTERISTIC	Y/N
An abrupt break with historic Christianity and their confessions ¹	NO
A tendency to major in minors ²	
A tendency to perfectionism	

1. This is moot as one's view of "historic Christianity and their confessions" varies considerably, but as our "creed" is 'No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible', to charge us with this one would have to assert "historic Christianity and their confessions" break from the Scriptures.

THE NICENE CREED

(A.D. 325)

NOTE: The churches of Christ do not accept this as our creed. I cite this only to illustrate the historicity of our faith.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CULT

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Chapter Six – pages 373-403

CHARACTERISTIC	Y/N
An abrupt break with historic Christianity and their confessions ¹	NO
A tendency to major in minors ²	NO
A tendency to perfectionism	YES ³

1. This is moot as the view of “historic Christianity and their confessions” varies considerably, but as our “creed” is ‘No creed but the Bible’, one would have to assert “historic Christianity and their confessions” differ from the Scriptures.
2. Some would assert we over-emphasize water baptism for the forgiveness of sins but, note the Nicene Creed.
3. Matthew 5:48, 19:21; Romans 12:2; Philippians 3:12; Hebrews 12:23; James 1:4; James 3:2; 1 John 4:18

DISTINCTIVE TRAITS OF CULTS

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

Chapter Six – pages 377-388

TRAIT	Y/N?
An Extra-Scriptural Source of Authority	NO
The Denial of Justification by Grace Alone ⁴	YES
The Devaluation of Christ	NO
The Group as the Exclusive Community of the Saved ⁵	NO
The Group's Central Role in Eschatology	NO

4. We indeed deny “justification by grace alone”, as do most Christian churches to some degree, but we do not affirm salvation by works of merit (Ephesians 2:8,9).
5. Some assert we do teach this, but it would be more accurate to say we teach we are *among* the saved.

THE GROUPS CENTRAL ROLE IN ESCHATOLOGY

- *Eschatology* is the “study of the last things” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9).
- It pertains to the Biblical view of the final events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ.
- Essentially, some cults teach the *purpose of their existence* is to usher in the end of the world (as we know it) and prepare the world for Jesus’ return.
- During the nineteenth century there was great religious “awakening” fueled by the popularity of post-millennialism and the belief the protestant reformation was the culmination of the millennium.
- Some early preachers believed their work was an extension of or completion of the work of the reformers.
- Numerous religious groups (some cults) arose with the belief their work was imperative to the culmination of human history and the return of the Lord.

MILLENNIAL VIEWS OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST

- Since we accept the Bible alone as our authority, such passages are widely disputed, there is no “official position” within churches of Christ.
- Early preachers in the United States were predominantly post-millennial, although some were pre- and a-millennial.
 - Pre-millennialism has mostly been discredited among members of the church essentially because it distinguishes the church from the kingdom.
 - Post-millennialism has mostly been discredited among members of the church because it originally held the millennium was a literal 1,000 years; and the belief the march of history would demonstrate the continuous triumph of Christianity over all other religions and culminate in world-wide conversions to Christianity.
 - Today, most members of churches of Christ identify as a-millennial, but a growing trend is preterist, or partial preterist (forms of a-millennialism).
- Earlier preachers *may have viewed* the growth of churches of Christ as a harbinger of the end of the millennium and the return of Christ, however, I am not aware any specific assertions.
- Generally, today most brethren hold the view, **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Mat 24:36 ESV)**

SOME TRAITS NOT MENTIONED IN “THE FOUR MAJOR CULTS”

1. A dynamic, influential spiritual leader who generally asserts or is held to be a prophet (at the least) or divine (at the most) in some sense.
2. A unique and polarized terminology which “re-defines” traditional words or views.
3. It is often a very large, very wealthy, very structured organization.
4. It often recruits and indoctrinates with the use of harmful psychological manipulation (thought reform, brain-washing, etc.)
5. It often preys on the vulnerable in society (races, socio-economically downtrodden, elderly, young, etc.)
6. It often encourages the fear and alienation from all outside their organization.
7. It often demands total separation from former social circles (friends, family).

IT SHOULD BE EVIDENT
CHURCHES OF CHRIST
DO NOT MEET THE
GENERAL
CHARACTERISTICS OR
THE DISTINCTIVE TRAITS
OF THE CULT

IN
CONCLUSION: