



March 26, 2021

### **What is Your Church?**

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We had an encouraging and inspiring pastoral visit throughout Texas these last two weeks. Staying with many brethren in their homes and visiting many others for lunch and dinner was a real boost in being with those of a kindred spirit. Although still a bit weary from many late nights and a lot of driving, we're encouraged at the faithfulness of God's family! We'll be doing this again in April to Tennessee after the spring Holy Days.

Interestingly, while on this visit, I was asked a question that over the years I've on occasion been asked before, "Just exactly what is your church?"

Have you ever considered your answer to this question?

Once I begin to answer and explain, sometimes the response will be, "Oh, you are a cult?"

If not careful, we can be caught off guard by this response.

Have you ever been accused of being a member of a cult? Unfortunately, churches, fellowships, or organizations that follow what the Bible teaches are all too often listed as cults in some cult-watching books and web sites.

So, in all fairness, just what is a cult? There are various definitions that can be found when you do a simple Google search.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives the following Simple Definition of a cult: "a small religious group that is not part of a larger and more accepted religion and that has beliefs regarded by many people as extreme or dangerous."

You can see that with this definition of a cult many who are part of main-stream Christianity might then label many of us as "a cult". We are most all a small group of believers who are not connected with a larger more visible Christian church or organization. We hold beliefs that are at odds with the beliefs of the many of the larger churches in the world. Because we do not reflect the teachings concerning the Trinity, the immortal soul, going to heaven at death or an ever burning Hell, etc. we are often then regarded as extreme and labeled legalistic by some.

Another definition of a cult can be found on the Cult Information Centre. They claim that every cult can be defined as a group having all of the following 5 characteristics:

1. It uses psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain its members
2. It forms an elitist totalitarian society
3. Its founder leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, messianic, not accountable and has charisma
4. It believes 'the end justifies the means' in order to solicit funds recruit people
5. Its wealth does not benefit its members or society

I don't see that any of these descriptors applying to Church of God Ministries (CGM) or any of the fellowships or folks we visited. We empower members to own their beliefs and encourage them to search the scriptures, prove what they believe, and not simply to look to men or organizations to do their thinking. We acknowledge that we are not the great of the world. We acknowledge that we are a part of the body of Christ which is made up of a number of scattered fellowships. CGM teaches truths based on the Scriptures, not on human tradition, emotions, or philosophy. CGM teaches faith in Christ and His sacrifice and that He is the head of His church. CGM does not have one single leader who makes the decisions for the group.

CGM does teach the biblical laws of tithing and giving offerings. That support through tithes, offerings, donations, and contributions makes it possible for Church of God Ministries to fulfill Christ's command to spread His gospel of "Good News" throughout the world. We do this by providing weekly Interactive Fellowship Opportunities to carefully examine and study God's inspired Word; Pre-Recorded Online Messages; Weekly Live Webcasted Worship Services and Congregations; Host an annual Feast of Tabernacles site, Maintain Websites and Social Media Outlets on biblical and doctrinal matters; Support a Ministry to serve His scattered flock; and Assist the Needy. These funds are used to offer our services free of charge. We do sometimes mention that readers are free to give donations if they so desire. Donors to CGM may specify using funds for assisting needy in both the U.S. and/or abroad.

Here is a portion of another article about identifying cults. What is a cult? "Generally, it is a group that is unorthodox, esoteric, and has a devotion to a person, object, or a set of new ideas.

1. New Teaching--has a new theology and doctrine.
2. Only True Teaching--often considers traditional religious systems to be apostate and it alone possesses the complete truth.
3. Strong Leadership--often one individual or small but powerful leadership group holds control

of the group's teachings and practices.

4. Asset Acquisition--often requires tithing and/or property transfer to the religious system.

5. Isolationist--to facilitate control over the members physically, intellectually, financially, and emotionally.

6. Controlling--exercises control over the members. Sometimes this is through fear, threatening loss of salvation if you leave the group. Sometimes through indoctrination.

7. Indoctrination--possesses methods to reinforce the cult's beliefs and standards where opposing views are ridiculed and often misrepresented."

I'd like to comment on some of these statements. CGM promotes valuing and maintaining family relationships and interacting with others to be a light and to care about them. We do not promote withdrawing from family and acquaintances. We promote encouraging members to grow and change with God's help. We promote submission to God and to Christ, not to some person or group in some controlling way or manipulation.

Early Christianity could have been termed a "cult" from the Orthodox Jewish point of view. Jesus himself departed from many of their traditions, teachings and attitudes of the Jewish leaders of His time. Members of the early church placed great emphasis on the founder - Jesus Christ. They were devoted to the teaching of Christ and the apostles and risked their lives to stand up for their beliefs from scripture. They were persecuted by the "recognized religions" of the day.

Christ warned that many false prophets would appear and deceive the many. Therefore we should expect that a church that follows the teaching of Christ and God's word would be significantly smaller than the churches that contain the many but who have rejected the Bible truths and hold to interpretations of men.

"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." (Matthew 24:5) "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many." (v.11) Jesus also said the few would find the way that leads to eternal life. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7:13-14) It is Jesus who predicted that the many would be following the wrong way and the few would be traveling the way of truth. Jesus commented, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Jesus warned that because true disciples would have to go against tradition and make a stand for what they believed, that they would be attacked and criticized by others, and at times even

family members. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:34-37)

The book of Revelation describes an end time visible church-state combine. It will be a great controlling, persecuting and dictatorial system. It will deceive most of mankind who will buy into its teachings and practices and it will persecute the saints, the true disciples of Jesus. "And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth." (Revelation 18:24) It is called "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 17:5; 18:2).

God's people, the Ekklesia (church) must stand firm, resist this system, and come out of and depart from it. (Revelation 18:4) Labeling God's called out saints as being part of a cult is part of the persecution that very likely will come our way...so, what is your church? Some thoughts to consider.

Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

**-Scott Hoefker**

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