
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: ***Is the church of Christ a cult?***

On March 27, 2006 the CNN “**Nancy Grace**” Program was discussing the tragedy of Mary Winkler killing her husband Matthew Winkler. Matthew Winkler was a preacher for the church of Christ. The following transcript was taken from an interview between Nancy Grace (hostess) and Tom Rukala (a Baptist pastor).

RUKALA: Well, the Church of Christ is a relatively new church. It was started about 150 years ago by Alexander Campbell (ph). And it’s, unfortunately, a very legalistic **sect**, and they tend to use methods of intimidation and pressure tactics. They claim that they are the only ones going to heaven, and all other people are condemned to hell.

Later Rukala said this about the church of Christ:

RUKALA: It kind of is **a borderline cult**, unfortunately. I don’t want to make it out to be some kind of Hare Krishna group, but **it has cult-like characteristics** and...

GRACE: In what sense?

RUKALA: Well, in the sense of the exclusivism, the attitude that they are the only ones who know the truth. The tactics that they use are sometimes just -- not only un-biblical but unethical, and they can be very ungracious, unfortunately.

Now, the question we’re asking is this: ***Is this a fair assessment of the church of Christ? Is the church of Christ really a cult?***

DEFINITION OF “CULT”

Walter Martin, an expert on cults and author of the popular book, Kingdom of the Cults, has written this definition of what constitutes a true cult:

... a group of people polarized around someone’s interpretation of the Bible and is characterized by major deviations from orthodox Christianity relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith

(via Spiritual Sword, July 2006, p. 13)

This definition raises two questions:

1) Is the church of Christ a group that is “polarized around someone’s interpretation of the Bible”?

AND

2) Does the church of Christ deviate from orthodox Christianity relative to cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith?

I will focus on this first question this week and the second question next week.

So the first question is: ***Does the church of Christ “polarize itself around someone’s interpretation of the Bible”?*** In other words, is there someone or some hierarchy which determines what is believed and practiced?

The answer to this is ***NO***. On the contrary, it has always been our position to tell people, ***“Don’t take our word for it; study your own Bible for yourself.”***

1 Thessalonians 5:21

²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good.

1 John 4:1

¹ 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.

We have always stressed these points and believe that nothing should be bound upon anyone unless it was first ***“bound in heaven”*** (Mt 16:19).

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

The Baptist pastor, Tom Rukala, asserted that the church of Christ was started 150 years ago by Alexander Campbell.

This is untrue. Everything the church of Christ believes in is plainly taught in the NT.

- Mt 16:18 – is Jesus plain statement that He would build His own church.
- Rom 16:16 – is the plain statement that the “churches of Christ” salute the Roman brethren.

We look to NT scripture for our faith and practice – not to Alexander Campbell.

TRUE CULTS

The Jehovah's Witnesses, however are "*polarized*" around the teachings of very influential leaders:

- Charles T. Russell
- Judge Rutherford

Everything they believe must be endorsed by the writings and teachings of these two leaders – who are considered inspired.

The Mormons are another example of a true cult. They are "*polarized*" around the teachings of very influential leaders:

- Joseph Smith
- Brigham Young

These men were considered inspired and everything taught must harmonize with the writings and teachings of these two leaders.

Unlike many denominations, the churches of Christ have no earthly headquarters. We have no hierarchal structure.

- The Catholic Church – looks to Rome for its instructions.
- The Seventh Day Adventist – looks to the headquarters in Springfield, MO.
- The Southern Baptists – look to the Southern Baptist Convention (wherever it convenes).

No so with the churches of Christ. Our headquarters are in heaven:

Ephesians 1:22-23

²² And He put all things under His feet, and gave **Him to be head over all things to the church,**

²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Our “head” is in heaven and our headquarters are where our “head” is at.

The NT scriptures are clear about authoritarian, hierarchal rulers:

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

²⁶ Yet **it shall not be so among you**; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave —

²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

More about all of this in our next study.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. We invite you to visit our website www.WillOfTheLord.com. There you may download the notes and the audio file of the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on ***Bible Talk***.