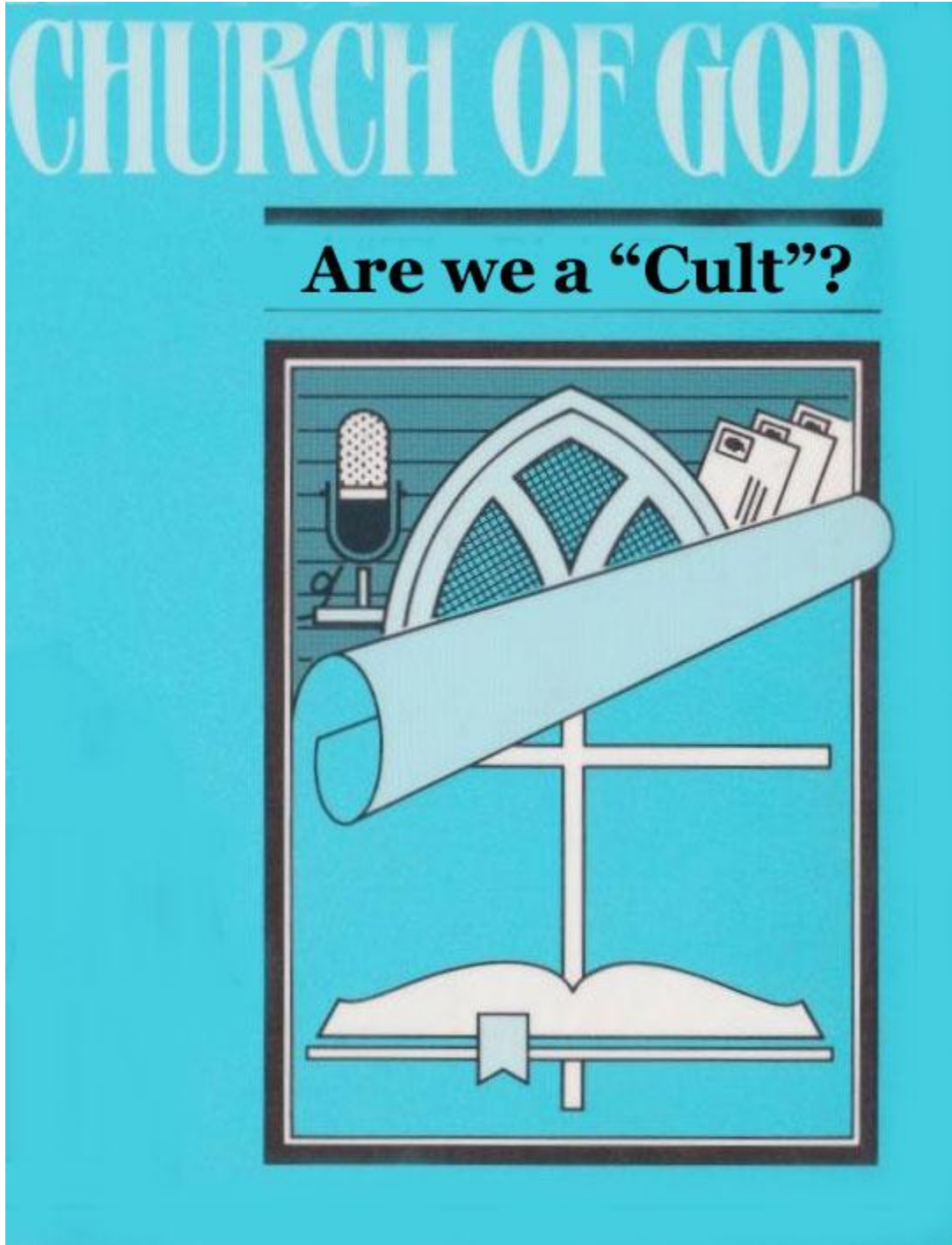


## Are we (The BICOOG) a CULT?



By Peter Salemi

***Many people have come to our site and are all excited about God's truth. They bless us on the work that we do, and say "they will keep in touch." But then, after the initial contact, they are gone, and we don't hear from them anymore, why?***

"You are a cult!" one person screams after they hear our radio broadcast, and calls us. On the godcast1000 website, a person adds their two cents, and posts "this is a cult." One time a person emailed me saying "My brother is all excited about your website and the teachings that you have, but now I convinced him otherwise, and told him you are a cult"! This is one of the reasons why we do not hear back from many people who initially called us all excited about the work of God.

The word "cult" is a very powerful word that is thrown around without using any caution. What does this word mean? Are we a cult?

### **Kingdom of the Cults**

Walter Martin wrote a famous work called "The Kingdom of the Cults." In it he condemns the church of God calling them a "cult." He then does a poor job biblically trying to disprove many of the doctrines that we believe in the church. Fine, he has every right to do that, but since then, one who has these basic beliefs is *automatically* called "a cult." What is a cult?

The general view in dictionaries is that a cult is, "formal religious veneration: worship 2: a system of religious beliefs and ritual; also: its body of adherents" (*Merriam-Webster under "cult"*). Now if this is the case then *all religions* are cults! But the definition has evolved from this. Now I just want to zero in, in this article specifically on Christian groups and their definition of a cult. Especially the way Walter Martin saw it because his book was very "influential" in the thinking that takes place now in Christian circles. The definition of a cult that claims to be Christian according to them is, "For those belonging to the movement, all religious groups claiming to be Christian, *but deemed outside of Christian orthodoxy, were considered 'cults.'* Christian cults are new religious movements *which have a Christian background but are considered to be theologically deviant by members of other Christian churches.* In his influential book *The Kingdom of the Cults* (first published in the United States in 1965) Christian scholar Walter Martin defines Christian cults *as groups that follow the personal interpretation of an individual, rather than the understanding of the Bible accepted by mainstream Christianity.*" (quotes from Cowan, Douglas E. (2003). *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult.* Westport, CT: Praeger; J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York/London: Garland, 1986; revised edition, Garland, 1992). page 5). So Christian Orthodoxy really never has to defend itself when it comes to doctrine. This hierarchy of people who set the doctrines right or wrong, this is the standard of belief, and anyone who strays from it is considered a cult! So the church of God is always on the defense! And defend our doctrines we do, the orthodox Christians however cannot! But we are considered the cult, because we do not live up to their code of standards, their belief system. *Looks like the Pharisees are back in town!*

## “Don’t believe me Believe your Bible”

We continually say this in our broadcasts, to “believe your Bible.” Jesus when confronted with his beliefs always quoted the Bible, and this ran contradictory to the belief system of the day. By the time the church of God was in full swing, God’s church was called the “sect of the Nazarene.” (Acts 24:5; 28:22). Why? Because it did not adhere to the belief system of the day, so they were called a “sect.” Throughout history people in God’s church were called certain names so others would know that they were outside of the mainstream. Albigenses, Bogomils, Paulicians, Donatists, Waldenses etc...Everything but the “church of God.” Why? They did not follow the mainstream doctrines of the Universal Catholic Church.

Nothing has changed today in our modern times. The Church of God, not matter how many times it proves its position from the bible, from history, prophecy etc...it will always be known as a “cult,” “sect,” “Armstrongism” etc...

## Who should you follow?

There are many churches and groups that have someone that they listen to; usually the one who gives the weekly sermons in their establishment. There is Dr. Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Benny Hinn and many others. Though mainstream, none are called a “cult.” Herbert W. Armstrong was no different, nor his son Ted Armstrong, but, they were called a “cult.” The splinter groups that came out of the old Worldwide Church as well, these are also called “cults.” Do we in the church of God follow a man, or Jesus Christ? A follower of Christ is a “Christian.” Peter Said, “Yet if *any man suffer* as a **Christian**, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (1 Peter 4:16). The word Christian is meant, “It is word of Latin formation coined to distinguish *followers of Christ* from Jews and Gentiles (Acts 11:26).” (Robertson Word Pictures, emphasis added). Are we in the BICOG cult or Christian?

I cannot speak for the other splinter groups, even though by the looks of it the Restored and Philadelphia Church of God I believe by their teachings and reverence to Herbert Armstrong are following a man, and not Christ, but what about us? Who do we follow?

When people ask, “what church do you belong to?” How do you answer them? If you say you are a “follower of so and so” you are not a follower of Christ. You should not follow any man, but Christ. The word *Christian* implies one who is a *follower* of Jesus Christ, who patterns his life after the life Christ led. Who believes His teachings and follows His precepts.

The word “church” as it was originally used, meant a *group of people*, no more, no less. It did not mean a holy group or a Christian group merely a *group* of people. That is the meaning of the original Greek word, *ekklesia*. What, then, is *our* creed and whom do *we* follow? Whose group are we and *to whom do we belong*?

The Apostle Paul had this same problem in the Corinthian Church. “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinth 1:12-13). Were you baptized in the name of some man? Do you follow Armstrong,

Salemi, Graham, or Hinn? What did Paul say, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.” (1 Corinth 11:1). We *all together* follow Christ in the church of God. Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). The true and correct name for the church (group of people) that is God’s, which belongs to him-keeps his commands- is “The CHURCH OF GOD.” Its members pattern their lives after His Son who lived perfectly.

The Bible gives us the true NAME of the Church in *Twelve* different places. In five passages where the true NAME of the Church appears, the entire Body of Christ-the Church as a whole-is indicated. Thus, when speaking of the entire Church, including all its individual members on earth, the name is “The CHURCH OF GOD.”

- 1) Acts 20:28, the admonition to elders to “feed The CHURCH OF GOD.”
- 2) 1 Cor. 10:32: “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to The CHURCH OF GOD.”
- 3) 1 Cor. 11:22: “. . . or despise ye THE CHURCH OF GOD, and shame them that have not?”
- 4) Gal. 1: 13: Paul writes, “I persecuted THE CHURCH OF GOD.”
- 5) 1 Cor. 15:9, “I persecuted the CHURCH OF GOD.” Where one specific local congregation is mentioned, it is called “The CHURCH OF GOD,” often in connection with the PLACE of location.
- 6) 1Cor. 1:2: “The CHURCH OF GOD, which is at Corinth.”
- 7) 2 Cor. 1:1: “The CHURCH OF GOD, which is at Corinth.”
- 8) Speaking of a local elder of a local church: “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of THE CHURCH OF GOD?” 1 Tim 3:5
- 9) Here the name applies to the building, or house of meeting. 1 Tim 3: 15: “. . .that thou mayest know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD.” Here it is the Church of the Living God. And, finally, in speaking of the local church congregations collectively, not as one general body so much as all the single organized local churches collectively, the Bible name is THE CHURCH OF GOD.
- 10) I Cor. 11:16 “we have no such custom, neither THE CHURCHES OF GOD.”
- 11) I Thess. 2: 14: “For ye, brethren, became followers of THE CHURCHES OF GOD which IN JUDAEA are in Christ Jesus.”
- 12) 2 Thess. 1:4: “So that we ourselves glory in you in THE CHURCHES OF GOD.”

So if the conversation does come up with friends and acquaintances tell them the TRUTH-do *not be ashamed* of God: Tell them you **are** a member of *God’s Church!* You may say that Mr. so and so is your pastor, but NEVER say you are his follower. You must follow CHRIST, even as HE followed the Father! You are a Christian, a follower of Christ!

Following a man and *his* ways, and ideas will always cause the follower to be greatly disappointed, due to his great expectations of the one he is following. We see this all over the world, with the shortcomings of many people in high positions of power. Past Presidents, Prime Ministers, great religious men, heroes, sport figures and so on. But God never disappoints. He is perfect, Jesus is perfect in every way, and his is the example and the one to follow!

## Doctrines

So what of doctrines? According to Mr. Martin, a cult is a group of people who do not follow the doctrines of Orthodox Christianity. They are ones who follow “*the personal interpretation of an individual, rather than the understanding of the Bible accepted by mainstream Christianity.*”

Let’s put this to the test. The Bible says, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*” (Isaiah 8:20). In Acts it says, “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (17:11). Jesus told his critics, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” (John 5:39). So basically we must substantiate all the doctrines we believe in, from the Bible.

Let’s compare beliefs:

Orthodox Christianity	The Churches of God
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immortality of the Soul-Not in the Bible</li> <li>• Everlasting life in Hell-Not in the Bible</li> <li>• Everlasting life in Heaven-Not in the Bible</li> <li>• God’s law done away-Not in the Bible</li> <li>• The Trinity- Not in the Bible</li> <li>• The Rapture-Not in the Bible</li> <li>• Sunday Worship- Not in the Bible</li> <li>• Christmas- Not in the Bible</li> <li>• Easter- Not in the Bible</li> <li>• The Holy Spirit a Person- Not in the Bible</li> <li>• The Jews are all of Israel- Not in the Bible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “spirit in Man” the mind of Man- In the Bible</li> <li>• Lake of Fire sinners consumed and don’t exist- In the Bible</li> <li>• Resurrection to eternal life- In the Bible</li> <li>• Kingdom of God on Earth- In the Bible</li> <li>• God Law to be kept- In the Bible</li> <li>• God is a Family- In the Bible</li> <li>• Keeping the Sabbath Day- In the Bible</li> <li>• God’s Festivals and Holy Days to be kept- In the Bible</li> <li>• The Holy Spirit the power and mind of God- In the Bible</li> <li>• Israel consists of 12 tribes in which the Jews are only one of the twelve- In the Bible</li> </ul>

\*All of these doctrines we can prove in our booklets you can find them in our Literature section

It makes one wonder, which is the real cult according to Martin, the Orthodox Christians, or the churches of God? Orthodox Christianity is all based on man’s interpretations mixed with pagan beliefs. Whereas the churches of God’s beliefs are based on the Bible, and letting the bible interpret itself. So who is following man, and who is following God?

The BICOG has always proclaimed “to believe your Bible, believe God.” We will continue to preach the doctrines of the Church of God based on the Bible the word of God. If the mainstream continues to call us and others a “cult,” well that is something we cannot stop, but we and God know the truth. Our activity is carrying out Christ’s Great Commission and the CHURCH OF GOD is a great over-all SPIRITUAL ORGANISM in this world and that is the Church to which we belong!