

Is Our Church a Cult?

- I. From time to time the Excelsior Springs Church and other churches of like faith have been accused of being cults. Is this accusation true?
 1. **Cult** *n.* - 1. Worship; reverential homage rendered to a divine being or beings. *Obs.* (exc. as in sense 2). 2. a. A particular form or system of religious worship; esp. in reference to its external rites and ceremonies. (Oxford English Dictionary)
 2. According to the primary definition of *cult*, yes, the Excelsior Springs Church is a cult, being a church which reverentially renders homage to the true God by a particular form and system of religious worship dictated by the Bible, the word of God.
- II. But is the Excelsior Springs Church a cult in the sense in which most people think of one?
- III. Let's briefly consider a list of characteristics of a cult and see if the Excelsior Springs Church fits them.
- IV. The following list is from the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) website:
<http://www.icsahome.com/articles/characteristics>.
 1. The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.
 - A. False.
 - B. We do so only to Jesus Christ by believing and practicing His law found in the KJV Bible.
 - C. The church regards the pastor's belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth only when they are in accordance with the word of God.
 2. Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
 - A. False.
 - B. Church members are encouraged to be as the noble Bereans who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (**Act 17:11**), to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (**1Th 5:21**), and to respectfully correct the pastor from the scripture when he is wrong.
 3. Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
 - A. False.
 - B. Chanting (vain repetitions) is forbidden by Jesus Christ (**Mat 6:7**).
 - C. The gift of tongues ceased around 70AD. See video called: [The spirit Behind the Charismatic Movement](#).
 4. The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).
 - A. Somewhat true.
 - B. The pastor preaches what *the Bible* says about how the brethren should think, act, and feel.
 - i. **Pro 16:3** - Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.
 - ii. **Pro 23:19** - Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.
 - iii. **2Co 10:5** - Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

- C. Members don't need to get permission to do things such as date, change jobs, or marry, but they are encouraged to seek counsel before doing so.
 - i. **Pro 15:22** - Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.
 - ii. **Pro 11:14** - Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.
 - D. Members are only required to dress modestly, according to the scripture.
 - i. **1Ti 2:9** - In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;
 - E. Members are instructed from the scripture on how to discipline children.
 - i. **Pro 22:6** - Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.
 - ii. **Pro 22:15** - Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.
 - iii. **Pro 13:24** - He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.
5. The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s), and its members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).
- A. False.
 - B. Jesus Christ is our Messiah and He alone saves sinners by His sovereign grace.
 - C. We do believe that the Excelsior Springs Church is a true church which is in the lineage of the church which Jesus built (**Mat 16:18**) and worships God in Spirit and in truth.
6. The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.
- A. True, to a Biblical extent.
 - B. **Mat 12:30** - He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.
 - C. **2Co 6:14** - Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?
 - D. **2Co 6:17** - Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,
 - E. **1Jn 5:19** - And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.
7. The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).
- A. False.
 - B. The pastor is accountable to God and the church.
 - C. **1Jn 4:1** - Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.
 - D. **Isa 8:20** - To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.
 - E. **Rom 16:17** - Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.
 - F. **Rom 16:18** - For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

- G. **Tit 3:10** - A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;
8. The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviors or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before they joined the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).
 - A. False.
 - B. Such things are wicked and are not tolerated in the Excelsior Springs Church.
 9. The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.
 - A. True, to a Biblical extent.
 - B. The pastor preaches against sin with hopes of making members feel ashamed of their sins so that they will repent and turn from them.
 - C. **Isa 58:1** - Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.
 - D. **2Ti 4:2** - Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
 10. Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and to radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before they joined the group.
 - A. False.
 - B. Members are not required or encouraged to cut ties with family, but are rather required to provide for them when necessary (**1Ti 5:4-8; Mar 7:10-12**).
 - C. Members are encouraged to not remain friends with fools and sinners who will corrupt them.
 - i. **Pro 13:20** - He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.
 - ii. **1Co 15:33** - Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.
 11. The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
 - A. False.
 - B. We want to see God's lost sheep found, converted, and added to the church, but only those whom the Lord sees fit to add.
 - C. **Act 2:47** - ...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.
 - D. **1Co 3:6** - I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.
 - E. We drive more people away with sound doctrine than we bring in.
 - F. We exclude commonly known sinners (**1Co 5**).
 12. The group is preoccupied with making money.
 - A. False
 - B. That statement is laughable if applied to the Excelsior Springs Church.
 13. Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.
 - A. False.
 - B. Members are required to attend church on Sundays.
 - C. Attendance of Wednesday evening Bible studies is encouraged, but not required.
 - D. There are no other regular church activities.
 14. Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.
 - A. False.
 - B. Members are encouraged, but not required to spend time with their brethren of like-faith.
 - C. **Psa 119:63** - I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

15. The most loyal members (the “true believers”) feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.

A. Somewhat true.

B. We believe that the Excelsior Springs Church and every other true and faithful church of Jesus Christ is the kingdom of God on this earth and is the pearl of great price which is the most important thing in our lives.

i. **Mat 13:45** - Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

ii. **Mat 13:46** - Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

iii. **Luk 18:28** - Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.

iv. **Luk 18:29** - And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,

v. **Luk 18:30** - Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

vi. **Luk 9:62** - And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

vii. **Joh 6:68** - Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

viii. **Joh 6:69** - And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

C. We do fear the chastisement of God for abandoning the faith.

i. **Heb 10:23** - Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

ii. **Heb 10:24** - And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

iii. **Heb 10:25** - Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

iv. **Heb 10:26** - For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

v. **Heb 10:27** - But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

vi. **Heb 10:30** - For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

vii. **Heb 10:31** - It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

V. Conclusion: the Excelsior Springs Church is a true church of Jesus Christ, not a cult.

VI. We are in good company, since the true church has always been spoken against as an evil sect.

1. **Act 24:5** - For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

2. **Act 28:22** - But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

3. **Act 24:14** - But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: