

A Study of Religions Beliefs
Lesson 6 – The Church of the Highlands and Multisite Churches
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Introduction: What are the beliefs and approaches of popular multisite churches?

- A. Our class has specifically requested that I review a very popular group in our area, *The Church of the Highlands*.
1. As with any class I do not want to misrepresent anyone. However, the nature of this group has been more difficult to reveal due to the *general nature of both their public teaching and written material*. Many beliefs are downplayed.
 2. As an example the core beliefs of this group *can be described as “Pentecostal.”* They believe that miraculous gifts such as *healing and speaking in tongues are practiced today*. Many who attend there would never know this!
 3. There are many examples where their core beliefs and practices are *lightly or subtly mentioned*. Other “Pentecostal” groups are very up front about this!
 4. They powerfully use small groups to connect others based upon personal interests. This could be greater Bible study or something else (ex. Cooking)
- B. The approach that many churches take is to minimize doctrine and make *“unity” on the basis of “community service” and “worship experience.”*
1. Those who stand on the Bible know that the “whole council of God” should be addressed to a local congregation. **(Acts 20:26-28)**
 2. The approach by some mega churches can be described as *“doctrine-light”* that is to make common experience to be emphasized over doctrine.
 3. The “Vineyard movement” is *a predecessor to this approach*. After surveying the community and seeking the “felt needs” of a community then services were designed to meet the current cultural moods. *This will bring great numbers!*
 4. “Dependence on experience rather than Scripture, leading to both a pragmatic (if it works, it must be from God) and a subjective approach (talent and style of musical performance, personal warmth of the speaker, etc..) -- *“experience first, then mold theology to fit the experience,”* seems to be the Vineyard's motto.”

I. What do they believe about water baptism?

- A. **“About Baptism** - Baptism is an important step of obedience that shows others we have personally trusted Jesus for our salvation. Jesus was baptized when He was on the earth, and we do this to follow His example. When Christians are baptized, they are submerged under water to identify with the death and burial of Jesus and raised out of the water to identify with His resurrection. We believe that water baptism is a public declaration of three important things: you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are beginning a changed life in Christ, and you are part of a new family.”
1. They believe that you are saved first and then later baptized at a scheduled service.
 2. Jesus placed baptism as *a foundational doctrine* for all Christians. **(Eph 4:4-6)**

3. Paul indicated that all Christians were brought into fellowship with Christ and His blood *at the point of baptism*. **(Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:26-27)**
- B. We will seek to have *every person find and receive* this one baptism.
 1. Baptism is the final step to find forgiveness of sins. **(Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16)**
 2. We will teach every man these delivered words that one would then naturally seek this baptism! There was no waiting! **(Acts 8:35-36; 16:30-33)**
 3. If there is not *clear, repeated, consistent teaching over time* then many may give in to compromise. This is considered “divisive” to many!

II. What do they believe about performance worship?

- A. Chris Hodge explained in an August 16, 2014 sermon that their assemblies praise God *as instructed in the book of Psalms*. **(Ps 150:1-6)**



1. He then included the Hebrew definition of praise as: “Halal: to shine, hence, to *make a show*, to boast; and thus *to be (clamorously) foolish; to rave; to celebrate*.”
2. Is this view correct when we *carefully examine in context all God has said*?
- B. When we fail to build upon the foundations God has given we can easily *wrest scripture from its intending meaning*. **(2 Pt 3:15-16)**
 1. In the Old Testament we have *examples of all these things*. **(1 Chron 13:8; 2 Chron 5:12-13)**
 2. The use of instruments did have *additional regulations and purposes!*
 3. All praise must be guided by a reverence for God and by His word being understood and reflected in our words. *There is a necessary control!*
 4. Their view of “being led by the spirit” allows emotion to trump discernment.
- C. Christ’s body is to be *built on the work of the apostles and prophets*. **(Eph 2:20)**
 1. They do not recognize *the differences in the Old and New Testament*. **(Col 2:14-17; Heb 8:6-8, 13; 9:9-10)**
 2. When the place and work of the apostles is understood then *we simply stay within the words Jesus delivered*. What then should we do in our assemblies?
- D. Consider some *foundational truths concerning our assemblies*.
 1. Worship was *always based upon understanding and conviction*. Emotion was a by-product of that. **(1 Cor 14:15)**

2. The spirit of the worshipper was to *under control at all times*. (1 Cor 14:32)
3. When we make emotion the focus we can easily use approaches that are *based upon fleshly desires* and not upon the teachings of the Spirit! (Col 2:8, 18-19)
4. All singing in the New Testament *is for a specific purpose*. We speak, teach and exhort from our hearts! This is not entertainment. (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)
5. *Singing involves everyone*, not just the most talented. The pronoun “One another” shows that singing is reciprocal.

III. What do they believe about leadership and accountability of their leadership?

- A. Many make the mistake of *looking at the outward appearances of a group* and fail to look at a group’s foundations. What kind of leadership does a group have?
 1. There is a strong trend today towards multisite churches and in addition to this a central headquarters *that controls many multisite churches*.
 2. Often in these arrangements much of what the leadership does is shrouded in secrecy! Simply asking for how much a “pastor” is paid is nearly impossible!
 3. *How does a group work out problems?* If you are a member of a group and are *not aware of these critical leadership questions* then you need to be asking questions!
 4. Who makes the decisions of leadership? *What is “behind the curtain?”*
- B. The bible *completely provides* for how a local church should be governed and local problems solved.
 1. The only organization God gave is *the local church*. (Acts 14:23; 1 Pt 5:1-2)
 2. Many in history have tried to make *a universal organization for the church*.
 3. When there is a concentration of money and power, regardless of the motives and good men involved, there will be *very predicable consequences over time*.
 4. God gave qualifications for elders (pastors) and deacons. He wanted *churches to follow His instructions!* (1 Tim 3:1-2, 8)
 5. It was elders in a local church that would work through problems and *be accountable to the Lord and to other Christians!*
(Mt 18:15-17; 1 Tim 5:19-20; Acts 11:29-30; 1 Pt 5:1-4)
- C. The “pastor” of the Highlands church, Chris Hodges, is part of a group of called the “Association of Related Churches.”
 1. There were six men that started this in 2000. These men were: Greg Surratt, Rick Bezet, John Siebeling, Stovall Weems, Chris Hodges, Billy Hornsby, Scott Hornsby, and Dino Rizzo.
 2. This group now has financed the planting of over “135 churches in 33 states.” They control millions of dollars and have an undefined relationship with these churches.
 3. When there was a problem with immorality with one of the ARC founders, Dino Rizzo, as his role as “pastor” of the Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, La. the power of the ARC could be seen. They took over control of that church and made changes without consultation of its membership.

https://www.al.com/living/index.ssf/2013/08/after_inappropriate_relationsh.html

4. Consider what Chris Hodges told this church: ““I know you want more than what’s being said here today — but can you be OK that the seven of us (overseers) know?” Hodges asked. “We’re going to take care of them and we’re going to take care of you. Trust me.”
5. Why are these men in charge? Who oversees the overseers? Can an answer as simple as what they are being paid be answered?
6. They will tell us that the Holy Spirit is directly speaking to them and that we should accept that!

D. Consider what they tell their members about questioning the leadership!

1. They are to submit to their leadership and follow without question.

...We willingly submit to our pastor and desire to serve him.

...It takes faith to follow and support our pastor because we don’t know where the wind of Spirit has come from or where it is going, but we are asked to follow a human being who is dependent on the Holy Spirit for direction and success. (P.3)

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2. Those outsiders that raise questions about the church and leadership should be seen as fighting God because they do “not depend on the Holy Spirit.”

Occasionally you may encounter “super-spiritual” people who will come with persuasive words designed to draw us away from the purity and simplicity of our devotion to the Lord, our pastor, and each other. They may seem very religious, but will not depend on the Holy Spirit or submit to our pastor and other leaders. (P.81)

3. God’s people and their leaders are to hold “fast to the head”! (Col 2:8)
4. When things on the surface seem spiritual and exciting please be sure to heed the warnings of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Bible. (Col 2:18-23)
5. Would a genuine disciple of Christ run from an examination of the scriptures when questioned about his beliefs and practices? (1 Pt 3:15; Acts 15:1-2, 4-6)

IV. How do they use small groups?

A. If you become a member of the Highlands church you will be expected to take part in small groups.

... Then, we as the church must admonish new believers. This means we warn them of sin and the need to change. This happens best in the safety of a few people. The deep and confrontational part of Highlands where we learn to take up our cross and get the junk cleaned up out of our lives happens most effectively in a small group setting. It’s there that we get real and honest and get the accountability that we need. Life Groups, in particular, are small groups designed to help people close the door on yesterday. The vision of Highlands is that every member be connected in a small group. (P.7)

1. There have been some who have been taught to “speak in tongues” and to “witness healings” and to have “seen demons cast out.”
2. The groups vary and there are not set experiences from what I understand.

B. In these small groups much good can be done! Because of the ability to connect with others and to overcome a personal issue, they become attached to the group.