

Cults!

Cults are everywhere. Some are mainstream and widely accepted. Others are isolationist and hide from examination at great expense. They are growing and flourishing. Some cause great suffering while others appear very helpful and beneficial. Which ever group it is, the ultimate end is their destruction when the Lord returns to claim His own.

What is a cult?

- A. 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 possess the complete truth.
 3. Strong Leadership - often an 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 lose 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.
 8. Apocalyptic - to give the members a future focus and philosophical purpose in avoiding the apocalypse or being delivered through it.
 9. Experience - various practices including meditation, repetition of words and/or phrases, and 'spiritual' enlightenment with God are used as confirmation of their truth.
 - i. Deprivation - sleep and food deprivation which weakens the will of the subject.
 - ii. This is uncommon, though practiced by more severe cults
 10. Persecution - predictions of being persecuted and often combined with claiming any opposing views demonstrated against them as a form of persecution.
- B. Many have a non-verifiable belief systems
 1. For example, they would teach something that cannot be verified.
 - i. A space ship behind Hale-Bop comet
 - ii. Or, that God, an alien, or angel appeared to the leader and gave him a revelation
 - iii. The members are seeded angels from another world, etc.
 2. Often, the philosophy makes sense only if you adopt the full set of values and definitions that it teaches.
 - i. With this kind of belief, truth becomes unverifiable, internalized, and easily manipulated through the philosophical systems of its inventor.
- C. The Leader of a Cult:
 1. Often charismatic who is considered very special for varying reasons:
 - i. The leader has received special revelation from God.
 - ii. The leader claims to be the incarnation of a deity, angel, or special messenger.
 - iii. The leader claims to be appointed by God for a mission
 - iv. The leader claims to have special abilities
 2. The leader is often above reproach and is not to be denied or contradicted.
- D. Cult ethos
 1. Usually seek to do good works, otherwise no one would join them.
 2. They are usually moral and possess a good standard of ethical teaching.
 3. Many times the Bible is used or additional "scriptures" are penned.
 - i. The Bible, when used, is always distorted with private interpretations.
 4. Many Cults recruit Jesus as one of their own and redefine him accordingly
- E. Cult groups vary greatly.
 1. From the aesthetic to the promiscuous.
 2. From esoteric knowledge to very simple teachings.
 3. From the rich and power to the poor and weak.

Who is vulnerable to joining a cult?

- A. Everyone is vulnerable.
 1. Rich, poor, educated, non-educated, old, young, previously religious, atheistic, etc.
- B. General Profile of cult member (some or all of the following)
 1. Disenchanted with conventional religious establishments.
 2. Intellectually confused over religious and/or philosophical issues
 3. Sometimes disenchanted with society as a whole
 4. Has a need for encouragement and support
 5. Emotionally needful
 6. Needs a sense of purpose.
 7. Financially needful

Recruitment techniques

- A. They find a need and fill it. One of the ways they do this is called
 1. "Love Bombing" - Constant positive affection in word and deed.
 - i. Sometimes there is a lot of physical contact like hugging, pats on the back, and touching.

- ii. Cult group members will lend emotional support to someone in need.
- iii. Help them in various ways...whatever is needed.
 - a. The person then becomes indebted to the cult.
- iv. Compliment them, reassure them, and make them the center of attention.
- B. Many Cults use the influence of the Bible and/or mention Jesus as being one of their own; thereby adding validity to their system.
 - 1. Scripture twisting
 - i. Those that use the Bible take verses out of context
 - ii. Then mix their misinterpreted verses with their aberrant philosophy.
- C. Gradualism
 - 1. Slow altering of thinking processes and belief system through repeated teaching
 - i. People usually accept cult doctrines one point at a time.
 - ii. New beliefs are reinforced by other cult members.

Why would someone join?

- A. The cult satisfies various needs:
 - 1. Psychological - Someone could have a weak personality, easily lead.
 - 2. Emotional - Someone could have recently suffered an emotional trauma
 - 3. Intellectual - Someone has questions that this group answers.
- B. The cult gives them, Approval, Acceptance, Purpose, and a Sense of Belonging.
- C. The cult is appealing for some reason. It could be . . .
 - 1. Moral rigidity and purity
 - 2. Financial security
 - 3. Promises of exaltation, redemption, higher consciousness, or a host of other rewards.

How are they kept in the cult?

- A. Dependence:
 - 1. People often want to stay because the cult meets their psychological, intellectual, and spiritual needs.
- B. Isolation:
 - 1. Outside contacts are reduced and more and more of the life of the member is built around the cult.
 - 2. It then becomes very easy to control and shape the member.
- C. Cognitive Reconstruction (Brainwashing):
 - 1. Once the person is indoctrinated, their thinking processes are reconstructed to be consistent with the cult and to be submissive to its leaders.
 - 2. This facilitates control by the cult leader(s).
- D. Substitution:
 - 1. The Cult and cult leaders often take the place of mother, father, priest, teacher, and healer.
 - 2. Often the member takes on the characteristics of a dependent child seeking to win the approval of the leader and or group.
- E. Indebtedness
 - 1. The member becomes indebted to the group emotionally, financially, etc.
- F. Guilt
 - 1. The person is told that to leave is to betray the leader, God, the group, etc.
 - 2. The person is told that leave would mean to reject the love and help the group has given.
- G. Threat:
 - 1. Threat of destruction by God for turning from the truth.
 - 2. Sometimes physical threat is used, though not often.
 - 3. Threat of missing the apocalypse, or being judged on judgment day, etc.

How do you get them out?

- A. The best thing is to try not to let them get trapped in the first place.
- B. If you are a Christian, then pray.
- C. But, to get a person out of a cult takes
 - 1. Time, energy, and support.
- D. Teach them the truth.
 - 1. Give them a true replacement for their aberrant belief system
 - 2. Show the cult group's philosophic inconsistencies
 - 3. Study the group and learn its history seeking clues and information.
- E. Try and get them physically away from the cult group.
- F. Give them the support they need emotionally.
- G. Alleviate the threat that if they leave the group they are doomed or in danger.
- H. Generally, don't attack the leader of the group...that comes later.
- I. Converts often feel a loyalty and respect for the founder of the group.
- J. Confront them when needed.

Hopefully, this basic outline will give you information to see how Cults work and how to avoid them. If you have someone who is lost in a cult, you need to pray and ask the Lord to remove them and give you the insight and tools needed. It can be a long and arduous task and very often ends in failure. This is not an easy ministry.