

THE COUNSELOR

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CULTS...

The Road to Eternal Death!

Part 1 of 3

Dangers and Characteristics

Your son or daughter has been acting strangely for quite some time now. Your daughter used to be zealous for the Lord. She worshipped God in Spirit and Truth. She memorized scriptures and engaged in awesome discussions with you and her peers on the things of God. She amazed adults with the depth of her understanding and connection with God Almighty. You were blessed to see her like this. You remember being proud of her maturity as a Christian over the years and you believed God would use her mightily in her bright future. Young people are always searching for the answers to life. They are trying to figure things out. They are looking for ways to understand the world and their place in it. They are looking for their calling and purpose in life. We all have a deep yearning to love and to be loved. Young adults are searching for both. They are looking for real solutions to their problems. But now she is a totally different person...this didn't happen overnight, but gradually, over time. She says and does things that don't line up with the way you raised her. Whenever she discusses the Bible, she takes away from or adds to the Word of God, quoting words from a "Prophet" or "Apostle" with such fervor...as if they were from the very mouth of God, and spends countless hours up all night studying the materials from her new found "family", coming out of her room only to eat and use the restroom. She cannot keep up with her schoolwork, so she quits college, because "the end is near." Whenever you question her, she gets

angry, taking offense to your questions...she has now shunned all her biological family members and



all others who do not share her beliefs. She is consumed with religious pride! She has rejected God's Truth and is committed to that "Prophet / Apostle" who obviously opposes the Word of God. She left your home in anger, because you questioned the words of the one she believes in. You sadly

realize what has happened. Your young adult child is deeply involved in a **CULT!** Now you find yourself in shambles, broken hearted and devastated that your precious daughter whom you love, has chosen to follow this cult leader and has disappeared from those who have known and loved her. What happened??? Looking back, you remember that she used to spend a lot of time on the internet and didn't think that much of it, because that's what this generation does, they thrive on the web. That's how they communicate. You also figured she was using the web for her schoolwork. You never suspected that as time went on, your child was developing relationships with members of an "elite group" with a flashy website that had caught her eye while surfing the internet. This group apparently has met a particular **emotional or psychological** need she had and it grew from there. Cults offer plenty of "answers" and "love." Many cults do this by using God's Salvation Plan and End Time warnings as their foundation. They mix truth with error.

(1 John 4:5-7) "They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the **spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**" (emphasis mine).

Dangers

There are about 3,000 to 5,000 cults or cult like groups out there according to the Cult Hotline and Clinic (2009).¹ Cults take in 180,000 new members each year and it is estimated that 5 to 7 million Americans alone have been drawn into cults and cult like groups. (Cult Hotline, 2009).² But the danger of cults is growing. (www.factnet.org/cult_danger_growing.html). Most people think about Jonestown (1978) or David Koresh (1993) when they hear the word "cult", but there are many types of cults today which cause serious problems to those brainwashed by them. There are not enough cult awareness and prevention programs. People don't have a strong enough understanding of the subtle nature of these cults and the dangers they pose. The internet has expanded the cult phenomenon significantly and is a huge tool for luring unsuspecting victims into cults. We have all heard about the cults that make the news with tragic stories of suicide, sexual or financial abuse and other atrocities. These are very serious - but don't underestimate the other cults that can brainwash and steal your child right from under your nose, creating strife, division, and grief in your home.



According to Dr. Paul Martin, cult expert and director of Wellspring Retreat and Resource Center, the cult problem is so prevalent, the chances of a family member joining a cult are greater than a family member catching chicken pox, four times greater than contracting AIDS, 90 times greater than contracting measles, and 45,000 times greater than contracting polio.³



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FACTnet, Inc. quotes Dr. Martin as stating that "25% of the millions of cult members worldwide 'will suffer enduring, irreversible harm that will affect their ability to function adequately in emotional, social, family, and occupational domains,' according to Dr. Martin. For every person who becomes a cult member, many more are impacted; parents, children, other family, and friends suffer personal and often economic loss."⁴ Dr. Martin goes on to say, "Compared to other societal or medical problems, the havoc created by destructive cultism is the most understudied, neglected, and ignored mental health and social problem in the world....If the symptoms exhibited in former cult members were attributed to a virus, it would be considered a worldwide epidemic."⁵

FACTNet, Inc. states "despite the human and societal damage caused by cults, few organizations exist worldwide to address this problem. Most of the work in this area including research, counseling cult members and ex-cult members, prosecuting those guilty of cult related crimes and abuses, and educating others of the dangers of cults, has been done by non-profit organizations or by private individuals, a vast number of whom have been victims themselves."⁶

Characteristics of a Religious Cult

There are many different beliefs among the various cults. The information below is a partial list of the basic cult characteristics



experts have identified as a public service. Go to the webpage <http://www.premrawat-talk.org/forum/uploads/CultCharacteristics.htm> for a more complete list of cult characteristics. The group does not necessarily need to have to have *all* the characteristics in any list to be a destructive cult. However, if a group has more than *half* of the cult characteristics in any of the lists below, then you should be concerned.

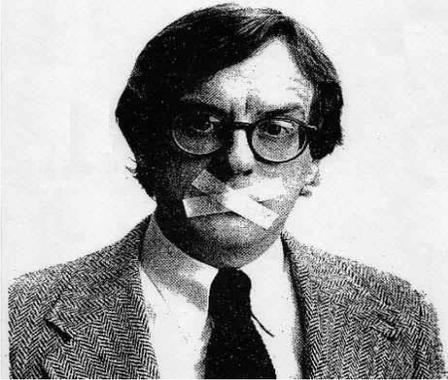
The Cult Group⁷:

Unquestioning commitment - is focused on a living leader whom the members seem to display excessively jealous, unquestioning commitment.

New members - the group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.

Money - the group is preoccupied with making money.

There's only one problem with religions that have all the answers. They don't allow questions.



Questioning, doubt, dissent - are discouraged or even punished.

Mind-numbing techniques - (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues,

denunciation sessions, debilitating work routines) are used to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).

The leadership dictates sometimes in great detail how members - should think, act, and feel (for example: members must get permission from leaders to date, change jobs, get married; leaders may prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, how to discipline children, and so forth).

The group is elitist - claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s), and members (for example: the leader is considered the Messiah or an avatar; the group and/or the leader has a special mission to save humanity).

Us-versus-them - mentality, the group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which causes conflict with the wider society.

The group's leader is not accountable to any authorities - (as are, for example, military commanders and ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream denominations).

The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify means - that members would have considered unethical before joining the group (for example: collecting money for bogus charities).

The leadership induces guilt feelings - in members in order to control them.

Members' subservience to the group - causes them to cut ties with family and friends and to give up personal goals and activities that were of interest before joining the group.

Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group.

Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members. (American Family Foundation)

Cult Group Techniques⁸:

Recruitment:

Deception - Group identity and/or true motives are not revealed.

Emotional Leverage/Love Bombing - Instant friendship, extreme helpfulness, generosity and acceptance. Group recruiters "lovingly" will not take "no" for an answer- invitations impossible to refuse without feeling guilty and/or ungrateful. "Love" "generosity," "encouragement," are used to lower defenses and create an ever increasing sense of obligation, debt, and guilt.

Exploit Personal Crisis - Broken relationships; Death in the family; Loss of job; Move to new location; Loneliness/depression; Guilt/shame; Stress/fear

Crisis Creation - They employ tactics designed to create or deepen confusion, fear, guilt or doubt. i.e. "you aren't serving God the way He intended." Questions areas of faith never before examined or explored and attack other faiths specifically.

All The Answers - Provide simple answers to the confusion, they, themselves, create. Support these answers with material produced or "approved" by the group.

Programming:

Intense Study - Focus is on group doctrine and writings. If the Bible is used at all, referred to one verse at a time to "prove" group teachings.

Opposes Warnings - Recruiters are told that "Satan" will cause relatives and friends to say bad things about the group to try to "steal them away from God." Recruits soon believe group members, alone, are truthful/trustworthy.

Guilt and Fear - Group dwells on members' "sinful nature" (many use public confession). Guilt and fear arising from "failing God." Are magnified to manipulate new member.

Schedule Control and Fatigue - Study and service becomes mandatory. New member becomes too busy to question. Family, friends, jobs and hobbies are squeezed out, further isolating the new members.

Attack Independent Thought - Critical thinking is discouraged as prideful and sinful, blind acceptance is encouraged.

Divine Commission - Leader(s) claim new revelations from God, within past 200 years, years, in which all but their group are rejected by God, They, alone, speak for God.

Absolutism - They insist on total, unquestioning obedience and submission to the group, both actions AND thoughts. Group "love" and acceptance becomes dependent upon obedience and submission. Unconditional love....isn't.

Totalism - "Us against them" thinking. Strengthens group identity. Everyone outside the group lumped under one label.

Retention:

Motive Questioning - When sound evidence against the group is presented, members are taught to question the motivation of the presenter. The verifiable (sound documentation) is ignored because of doubts over the unverifiable (presenter's motives).

Information Control - Group controls what convert may read or hear. They discourage (forbid) contact with ex-members or anything critical of the group.

May say it is the same as pornography making it not only sinful and dangerous but shameful as well. Ex-members feared and avoidance of them becomes a survival "issue."

Isolation, Separation and Alienation - Group becomes substitute family. Members encouraged to drop worldly (non members) friends. May be told to change jobs, quit school, give up sports, hobbies, etc.

Coercion - Disobedience, including even minor disagreement with group doctrine, may result in expulsion and shunning.

Phobias - The idea is planted that anyone who leaves goes into a life of depravity and sin, loses their sanity, dies, or will have children die, etc. Constant rumors of bad things happening to people who leave. No one ever leaves for "legitimate reasons."

Striving for the Unreachable - Group membership and service are essential for salvation "Work your way into God's favor." No matter what you do, it is never enough.

Ten warning signs of a potentially unsafe group/leader. ⁹ (Rick Ross)

1. **Absolute authoritarianism** without meaningful accountability.
2. **No tolerance for questions or critical inquiry.**
3. **No meaningful financial disclosure** regarding budget, expenses such as an independently audited financial statement.
4. **Unreasonable fear** about the outside world, such as impending catastrophe, evil conspiracies and persecutions.
5. **There is no legitimate reason to leave**, former followers are always wrong in leaving, negative or even evil.
6. **Former members** often relate the same stories of abuse and reflect a similar pattern of grievances.

7. **There are records**, books, news articles, or television programs that document the abuses of the group/leader.
8. **Followers feel they** can never be "good enough".
9. **The group/leader** is always right.
10. **The group/leader is the exclusive** means of knowing "truth" or receiving validation, no other process of discovery is really acceptable or credible.

Ten warning signs regarding people involved in/with a potentially unsafe group/leader. ¹⁰ (Rick Ross)

1. **Extreme obsessions** regarding the group/leader resulting in the exclusion of almost every practical consideration.
2. **Individual identity, the group,** the leader and/or God as distinct and separate categories of existence become increasingly blurred. Instead, in the follower's mind these identities become substantially and increasingly fused--as that person's involvement with the group/leader continues and deepens.
3. **Whenever the group/leader is criticized** or questioned it is characterized as "persecution".
4. **Uncharacteristically stilted** and seemingly programmed conversation and mannerisms, cloning of the group/leader in personal behavior.
5. **Dependency upon the group/leader** for problem solving, solutions, and definitions without meaningful reflective thought. A seeming inability to think independently or analyze situations without group/leader involvement.
6. **Hyperactivity centered on the group/leader agenda,** which seems to supersede any personal goals or individual interests
7. **A dramatic loss of spontaneity** and sense of humor.
8. **Increasing isolation from family** and old friends unless they demonstrate an interest in

the group/leader.

9. **Anything the group/leader does** can be justified no matter how harsh or harmful.
10. **Former followers** are at best considered negative or worse evil and under bad influences. They can not be trusted and personal contact is avoided.

Every cult can be defined as a group having all of the following five characteristics ¹¹ (Cult Information Centre)

1. It uses psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain its members.
2. It forms an elitist totalitarian society.
3. Its founder leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, messianic, not accountable and has charisma.
4. It believes 'the end justifies the means' in order to solicit funds and recruit people.
5. Its wealth does not benefit its members or society.

Healthy churches that follow Christ and His teachings stand for the family. The Body of Christ (All Believers) are called to support and strengthen the family. "Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?" (1 Cor. 7:10-16) Churches don't pressure people to join them. They respect their freedom to choose to join or leave at any time. The opposite is true with a cult. The cult rips families apart. It "does not accept questioning,

and has a leader who claims to have an exalted position and to be above reproach." (Cult Hotline and Clinic). The cult uses fear and shame to manipulate its followers. They employ all kinds of



deceptive methods to recruit new members, including twisting the scriptures. (Gal. 1:6-9) "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." There are several differences between a destructive cult and a religion (Cult Hotline and Clinic). The cult group uses deceit in their recruitment while churches provide information up front. Religion usually allows freedom of thought and members are allowed to speak up while cult groups do not. The cult group destroys the family unit while the church promotes it. Churches and religions work within the larger society but the cult isolates its followers. The church is interested in promoting one's growth and development while the cult limits the individual's development. Members in the religious community have guidelines but they are not controlled, cults manipulate and exploit their members with mind control techniques. Churches are open to the general community whereas cults keep non-believers out. Thought before commitment is encouraged and is a big part of the conversion process with religion. Cults push commitment during the recruitment process. Cults threaten legal action; openly slander and pray curses on all those who question, disagree, or criticize them contrary to those of non-cultic beliefs are free to disapprove different aspects of religious faith. Leaders are considered above reproach in cults while clergy are held accountable for their behaviors. Cult leaders do not allow themselves to be questioned whereas churches encourage critical thinking. (Cult Clinic and Hotline).

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All quotations from the Bible are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

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