

# DECEPTION UNVEILED

## Week 1 – Recognizing Counterfeits

### 1. WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF A CULT?

False groups do not draw their strength from their errors. They draw strength from their ability to counterfeit elements that are present in healthy religious groups but are treated differently.

#### A. IDEALISM

- Cults are often made up of disappointed idealists who have been burned in traditional churches. They believe God has raised them up to accomplish what others have failed to do.
- Their vision is to recover the lost purpose of the church.

#### B. AUTHORITY

- Those who are looking for unambiguous direction, boundaries, and security are drawn to the safety in structure that authoritarian leadership provides.

#### C. ENTHUSIASM

- People who have had a taste of dead orthodoxy will be especially attracted to an enthusiastic spiritual experience.
- Few discoveries are more appealing than finding a group excited about what it has – even if the group is wrong.

#### D. FAMILY

- Within a dangerous group there is often an intense sense of identity and family. Family members are viewed as brothers and sisters, united against the outside world.
  - Their unity is not found in God, however, but in their “father,” mentor, and teacher.

#### E. BIBLICAL EMPHASIS

- Many cults give much attention to Bible study. But their learning is often carefully orchestrated by clever leaders who provide their own interpretation of Scripture.
- Members are warned about reading authors who are outside of their group.

#### F. SACRIFICE

- Former members of cults say that one of the things that was so appealing was that the group asked them for a sense of commitment and belief that cost something.
- One member says, *“It doesn’t start out that you are the only ones who have the truth, but that you are the only ones making sacrifices for the truth. I didn’t want anything cheap. I wanted something that cost me for my commitment.”*

#### G. EXCLUSIVISM

- Cult members often develop the belief that they alone have been entrusted with the truth.
- The opportunity to be a part of a select group of God’s chosen servants is attractive.

#### H. INDOCTRINATION

- An additional mark of many dangerous religious groups is their use of sophisticated methods of recruitment and coercive persuasion.
- Rather than allowing converts to make decisions of faith based on their own sense of good judgment, some groups break down individual thinking by one or more of the following techniques:

- **Isolation** - Recruits are isolated from family, friends, and news media to screen out opposing points of view.
- **Peer-Group Pressure** - Potential converts are subjected to intense persuasion by group members.
- **Love Bombing** - Group members give prospects an overwhelming sense of acceptance, belonging, and significance by “bombing” them with flattery, touching, and hugging.
- **Removal of Privacy** - Recruits are never left alone to collect and discover their own thoughts. Sleep Deprivation and Fatigue. A person’s resistance is broken down by long meetings and extended work hours.
- **Games** - Complex games are played for the purpose of creating a sense of dependence on the rule-giving leader.
- **Mind Control** - Members are conditioned to stop thinking and to accept, without question, the revelations and doctrines of their leader.
- **Confession** - The self-respect of the members is broken down through persuading them to share their innermost secrets with the group.
- **Change of Diet** - Members are provided in adequate nutrition, which breaks down their resistance and makes them vulnerable to suggestions.
- **Fear** - Negative thoughts or doubts about the group or its leader are said to be soul-threatening. Anyone leaving the group is warned about harsh consequences.
- **Chanting and Singing** - Members are subjected to constant repetition, which blocks their rational thought processes.
- **Childlike Dependence** - The leader demands absolute submission to his control.
- **No Questions** - Followers are taught to accept, without question, the revelations and interpretations of their leaders.
- **Dress** - Conformity of dress is encouraged to suppress individuality.
- **Elitism** - Every religious leader outside the group is said to be satanic or, at best, deceived by an evil conspiracy.

*(Adapted from: The Cult Crisis, Citizens Freedom Foundation.)*

## 2. RECOGNIZING A CULT LEADER

### A. PERSONALITY

- Are they marked by reverence and humility, or by brashness and arrogance?
- Are they gentle, or demanding?

#### 2 Corinthians 10:18

*For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

#### 2 Timothy 2:24-26

*And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

### B. RESPECT

- Do they themselves show respect for authorities, including the Lord, parents, government and even Satan?
- Do they show respect and love for other leaders?

### C. GROWTH

- Do they promote personal discernment, growth, and maturity in their followers, or do they foster dependence and submission?

### Acts 17:11

*Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

## **D. RELATIONSHIPS**

- Do they exploit their members financially?
- Is there evidence of sexual faithfulness

### 2 Peter 2:3

*In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

### 2 Peter 2:14

*With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed - an accursed brood!*

## **E. LEADERSHIP**

- Do they sacrifice their own interests for the well-being of their group, or are they carried like kings on the shoulders of their followers?
- Do they draw the attention and allegiance of their followers to Jesus Christ, or do they focus attention on themselves?
- Do they lead by “throwing their weight around,” or by information, encouragement, and example?

### Philippians 2:3-4

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

### 1 Peter 5:2-3

*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*

## **3. PATTERNS OF A CULT**

**A. Dependence on 'GIFTED LEADERS'** - who by claiming to speak for God put themselves above question.

**B. Withdrawal from SOCIETY** - The conviction that “we alone” are making sacrifices worthy of God.

**C. ISOLATION** - Cutting off all outside sources of information and accountability.

**D. Self-JUSTIFICATION** – The belief that outsiders are under the control of Satan.

**E. Loss of FREEDOM** - No individual thoughts or feelings. Choices are increasingly replaced by group thoughts, feelings, and decisions.

**F. RENEGOATIATION** - Adjustment of expectations from what was originally promised to what is received.

**G. FEAR** - Fear of leaving the group under the threat of loss of eternal life and reward.