

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTIC GROUPS

YOU WERE BOUGHT with a price; do not become slaves of men." So the Apostle Paul implored the church of Corinth (1 Cor. 7:23). The Christians of Corinth had hardly grown beyond spiritual infancy before their church was split by factions. Paul didn't pull punches with them. He diagnosed Corinth's spiritual disease immediately -- they were *following men, not Christ*: "each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided?" (1 Cor. 1:12,13) Even those Corinthians who refused to align themselves behind their favorite teacher, piously proclaiming "I am of Christ", were contributing to the problem by splitting off from their sectarian brethren. Available evidence indicates no church of New Testament times had more problems than Corinth. These corruptions within Christ's church were the inevitable fruit of a bitter root -- the willful breaking up of the body of Christ. Here is Paul's counsel (Eph.4:1-3) which all who claim to witness to the one God, one Lord, one Spirit and one faith of the New Testament are compelled to observe:

**DO NOT BECOME
SLAVES
OF MEN!**

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all **humility and gentleness**, with **patience**, showing **forbearance** to one another IN LOVE, being diligent to preserve the UNITY OF THE SPIRIT in the bond of **peace**.

If we break away from fellowship with those professing Christ we run the dire risk of dividing the body of Christ, or even becoming entangled in a cult. How do you know when you have unwittingly become captive of a cult?

CULT CHARACTERISTIC No. 1: *Pyramid Power Structure*

Most ancient pagan religions vested all authority in an all-powerful priesthood. This pyramid power structure, high priest at the apex, is imitated by many modern cults. Adherents totally depend upon the mediation of a hierarchical figurehead, whether one "prophet" or a collective "governing body": The Mormons (Joseph Smith), the Seventh Day Adventists (Ellen G. White) and Jehovah's Witnesses (C.T. Russell) were all kick-started by latter day "prophets", through whom, it is claimed God revealed his will for this day. The authority of these leaders, absolute while they are alive, often is passed on to a collective leadership whose (derived) authority is still effectively absolute -- you cannot challenge THEM without challenging GOD. The Holy Spirit warned us in advance about such sectarianism, likening those responsible for fragmenting the flock of God to "savage wolves" who "draw away the disciples AFTER THEMSELVES" (Acts 20:29,30).

CULT CHARACTERISTIC No. 2: *Mind Control by Men, not the Spirit*

Cult leaders, pretending to protect the UNITY of their flocks, impose a tight control over the information reaching their "sheep". The One flock, in UNION with ONE shepherd (John 10:16), find themselves kept firmly in the fold by *another* shepherd, wielding his staff like a whip. But the apostles, whom Christ legitimized as leaders of His flock by "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12), did not feel the need to so lord it over Christ's lambs. Even John, threatened by the prophesied "wolves" trying to tear away Christ's flock, appealed not to his own authority, but to the ANOINTING -- that Spirit endowment ALL Christians share -- as the best protection from false teaching:

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know ... these things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have **no need for anyone to teach you**; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (1 John 2:20,26-27).

CULT CHARACTERISTIC No. 3: *Isolating the Sheep*

Cult leaders must control the information reaching their followers if they are to retain power over them. Therefore they must isolate followers from potential critics. Most likely such criticism will first come from family or friends of the new recruit; therefore early in the convert's training he/she will be instructed to minimize association with family or "worldly" friends. Such attempts, of course, will be accompanied by a shower of attention by the new "spiritual family," in order to soften the blow of estrangement from (former) loved ones. Isolation from past influences accomplished, control of converts will yet be but partial if any free flow of information remains unchecked. Therefore recruits will be discouraged from – even made to feel **guilty** about -- reading "spiritual pornography", literature critical of the cult. Any such criticism will be viewed as "persecution". Soon every thought of the believer is captive to the self-appointed prophet of the group. But even the cult's "high priest" is isolated from the full range of the wisdom of God, due to his failure to acknowledge that the SPIRIT WILLs to whom He will give His gifts (1 Cor. 12:11,18).

CULT CHARACTERISTIC No. 4: *Christ is the Way (and We're the Way to the Way)*

"WE have the mind of Christ", said Paul, curtly defying those among the Corinthians who thought to monopolize God's wisdom (1 Cor. 2:16). Generations before, Job had flattened his self-flattering friends with "Truly you are the people, and with you wisdom will die!" (Job 12:2). Solomon's name has become synonymous with wisdom, yet even he was not so arrogant as to think God could only speak through Him. "In abundance of counselors there is deliverance," Solomon claimed, adding "the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel ... without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (Prov. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22). The mind of Christ, Paul claimed, is the possession of ALL who have the Spirit of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12). But while we may greatly profit by the gifts and ministry of other Christians, we must NEVER become **dependent** upon them. If we do, we will forever remain "children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the **trickery of men**, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." Instead we are to "**grow up** in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:14,15).

CULT CHARACTERISTIC No. 5: *Slandering the Saints and Savior*

It is the inevitable claim of the cults that they are *restoring* New Testament Christianity. Since the doctrines of such groups almost always become drastically opposed to the historic doctrines of the church, the *restoration* notion becomes a crowbar for leaders desirous of prying potential converts from "Babylon's" grip. But to believe that YOU have restored TRUE Christianity is automatically to claim all other churches have corrupted Christ's teachings. Therefore one who comes to accept such a claim puts himself on the side of the "accuser of our brethren", Satan himself (Rev. 12:10). "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? (Rom. 8:33) The answer: Every ill-trained enthusiast who spreads the half truths and gross generalizations which are the stock-in-trade of the cult. Satan is THE *Opposer* of Christ, the Devil is THE *Slanderer* of Christ's church. It is interesting that the father of the Restoration Movement, and of the Disciples and Churches of Christ, Alexander Campbell, had no stomach for the prideful arrogant accusations which modern cult leaders rashly spew forth against Christian churches. To the question **Who is a Christian?** Campbell answered:

... everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will ... he that thence infers that none are Christians but the immersed, as greatly errs as he who affirms that none are alive but those of clear and full vision. (*The Millennial Harbinger*, Sept. 1837)

Campbell readily saw what many of his spiritual descendants clearly miss, that if THEY have "restored" the faith, Christ **lied** when he promised "I am with you ALWAYS [Greek, *ALL the days*]" (Matt. 28:20) and lied yet again when He promised that the Spirit of truth would be with the church forever (John 14:16,17). Hear Campbell again:

... if there be no Christians in the Protestant sect ... for many centuries there has been no church of Christ, no Christians in the world; and the promises concerning the *everlasting* kingdom of Messiah have failed, and the *gates of hell have prevailed against his church!* This cannot be; and therefore there are Christians among the sects.

To those who have become prey to religious leaders who match the above description, we plead DO NOT BECOME SLAVES OF MEN! Do not allow your mind to become captive to other humans, no matter their claims and evident sincerity. Christians should be "taking every thought CAPTIVE TO THE OBEDIENCE of CHRIST" (2 Cor. 10:5).

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