

Introduction to Biblical Counseling

How to Heal from Religious or Spiritual Abuse

- I. There are at least three basic realms of religious experience. Two of these three realms are mentally, emotionally and spiritually harmful or abusive to one's spirit.

Main Line Christian Groups

A. The realm of spiritual abuse is usually in mainline Christian groups who misuse Scripture to deceive and control people (legalist).

1. Now Biblical religious rules based legalism is one characteristic of this group. Religion, not the relationship with God controls the person's life. It becomes abusive, manipulative and even addictive.
2. One's acceptance in this system is based on outward performance.
 - a. The Apostle Paul attacks that practice directly.
 - 1) Gal. 3:1-3, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ²This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"
 - 2) Colossians 2:18-23, "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God. ²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."
3. Toxic faith leaders view themselves as rulers and lord over their followers and adopt titles like self-acclaimed "apostles."
 - a. Jesus rebuked this practice of lording over people as a means of control.
 - 1) Luke 22:25, "And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'"

4. Toxic faith leaders use God or religion for personal profit, pleasure, power and prestige. It has nothing to do with God but has everything to do with men and women making up a false god or faith that serves self rather than honors God.
5. Unquestioned loyalty and commitment are demanded as illustrated by Diotrephes.
 - a. 3 John 1:10, "Therefore, if I (John) come, I will call to mind his (Diotrephes) deeds which he does, prating (talking excessively and pointlessly) against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church."
6. Scripture is twisted out of context to control people as the Jewish leaders did to control the people.
 - a. Luke 13:15-16, "The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead *it* away to water it? ¹⁶ So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound--think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"
 - b. Luke 11:52, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."
7. Followers are not allowed or encouraged to question leadership.
 - a. John 9:22; 34, "His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He *was* Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. ³⁴ They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out."
8. It is basically a child (member) - parent (pastor) relationship.
 - a. Some "Christians" refer to their pastor as "father" although this is strictly forbidden in Scripture.
 - 1) Matthew 23:9, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven."
9. Religious rules are more important than relationships which can be an automatic set up for rebellion in children. Rules without relationship produce rebellion.
 - a. Matthew 9:10-11, "Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
 - b. Matthew 11:19
 - c. Luke 7:3,4

Cults/Occults

B. Religious abuse is usually defined by non Christians (Islam) or pseudo Christian groups (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses).

1. These groups are cults, sects or even the Occult.
 - a. Key test: Do they believe Jesus is God and came to earth as a man but still fully God?
 - b. 1 John 4:2-3, "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."
2. These, too, twist Scripture or add their own scripture (Koran, Book of Mormon).
 - a. Mormons believe Jesus and Satan are brothers and that Jesus was a man who became a God.
 - b. Scripture claims He was God who became man (Phil. 2:5-11).
 - c. The Koran claims Jesus was a prophet but not God.
3. They are very rule performance based that appeals to people who believe they must perform well to be accepted by others and God.
4. They attract dependant people deeply in need of acceptance and have very low self worth.
 - a. If one does not think they have value or worth, they think they can trust themselves to discern truth, so they go along with the group even if it violates everything they ever thought was true. They already feel isolated or abused but now they want to belong to a group and false leaders know this and play it for all it is worth. They want someone to make them feel important. This is a master strategy of the Mormon cult. Followers believe they are now receiving genuine care. They are flooded with affirmation and "love." All past childhood pain is gone. They now gladly give up their possessions. They don't see their exploitation because their low self sense of worth and value has allowed them to be exploited all their lives. It all just seems normal. (T.F. p. 34-36)
5. Leaders are not intellectually honest with their people as seen in the rewriting of Biblical history.
 - a. Islam states Ishmael, not Isaac, was offered up by Abraham.
 - 1) Genesis 22:3, "So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."
 - 2) This is a claim of those who feel inferior to make themselves superior although it is based on a historic lie.
 - b. The Book of Mormon has gone through many major revisions.

- c. The Bible has over 5,000 fragments dating back to the end of the first century validating the accuracy of our current Greek text.
- 6. The toxic system cannot be questioned nor can their leaders because most cults are a “parent-child” relationship.
- 7. Control is based on fear; primarily the fear of rejection, isolation and abandonment.
 - a. These are fears that made them open to the cult in the first place.
- 8. Unquestioned loyalty is demanded totally contrary to facts, reality or truth.
 - a. One girl was told by the Hare Krishna cult if she was not totally committed she would be reincarnated as a worm. (T.F. p. 28)
- 9. Leaders are wealthy at the expenses of the followers.
 - a. The Mormon and Roman churches are greatly wealthy at followers’ expense.
- 10. Loyalty is to a person, not a relationship based on truth.

Biblical Christianity

C. Biblically based Christianity

- 1. Grace and love are the hallmarks of biblical Christianity.
 - a. John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”
- 2. Leaders are to be viewed as servants, not lords. They can be questioned, evaluated and rebuked if they sin.
 - a. 1 Peter 5:2-3, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;”
 - b. Galatians 2:11-14, “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? (Paul rebukes Peter)
 - c. I Tim. 5:20, “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”
- 3. Followers obey the Word of God out of appreciation for what He has done for them instead

of performing to get God to love them.

- a. Romans 12:1, "I beseech (urge) you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.*"
4. Loyalty is to biblical truth above human loyalty,
 - a. Acts 17:11, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so."
 - b. Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."
 5. Scripture is taught and applied in its context and not used as isolated proof texts.
 - a. 2 Peter 1:20-21, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit."
 6. All doctrine can be challenged and questioned for validity.
 - a. 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."
 - b. Acts 17:11, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so."
 7. Each one's security is based on their relationship with God and their eternal destiny with Him.
 - a. Romans 8:37-39, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - b. 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God."
 8. Relationships among believers are like brother to brother and not parent to child.
 - a. 1 Peter 2:17, "Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."
 - b. Mark 3:33-35, "But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?"
³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My

mother and My brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

D. Mainline Christian groups whether liberal or conservative can take on the characteristics of cults or even the occult.

Painful Responses

II. Painful responses to spiritual and religious abuse.

A. Former members of spiritually abusive groups describe their experiences in terms of being deeply violated.

1. This is an emotional violation that is felt as deeply as a physical violation.

a. One woman who had just left a cult exclaimed, "I feel like I've been raped."

B. Family and friends usually do not understand what the abused person went through.

1. The woman went on to state, "But my family and friends just seem to expect me to get over it and be normal."

C. This lack of understanding and thinking is a form of both denial and ignorance on the part of the family and friends including members of the church. They are sincere but they are responding from a total lack of understanding.

D. This just-get-over-it perspective of family and friends reflects a false heart belief that "because the victim has left the cult his troubles are over and he should move on."

1. Remember, believers in the New Testament who left the idol worshiping religions (cults / occults) still struggled with the draw to return to them if they were triggered by eating meat offered to idols (Rom. 14:14-16).

2. Those who have left abusive marriages are still drawn to return.

3. One daughter who was rescued from the Hare Krishna cult had lost 20 lbs, was filthy, her teeth were yellow, possessed a blank stare and it took five years of counseling to bring her back to reality.

E. A result of this well meaning counsel to just move on with life puts pressure on the victim to forget the past (go into denial) and move on with unhealed wounds and all.

1. However, this approach fails to address the lies that were deeply instilled that needs to be identified, renounced and replaced with truth.

F. Realize after the break from the source of the religious (spiritual) abuse, ex-members are then faced with many extreme personal, emotional and spiritual struggles. Why?

1. One reason is that the cult or the abusive Christian church played such a big part in their social, cultural and religious life.

2. The cult regulated their whole life.
3. To the “victim” these other groups were their normal reality.
4. They are so convinced they are right, no sacrifice is too great, even a relationship with their parents.

G. The depth of the struggle the spiritually abused person will have is in direct proportion to the level of the person’s past commitment to that group, regardless of how long they were actually involved.

1. Physically leaving a spiritually abusive group does not automatically change all the lies and half truths embedded in their core belief system. This will take a lot of time, patience and reprogramming the mind biblically.
2. The apostle Paul recognized this need to reprogram in his letter to the church of Rome.
 - a. Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”
3. It remained a struggle for years as they worked their new transition through.
 - a. CF Rom 14

H. People who were deeply involved in Christian groups or churches which were spiritually abusive (through fear, guilt, intimidation, threats, etc.) go through the same struggle as those who leave a cult or occult, though the intensity and frequency of the lingering spiritual, emotional and psychological damage may not be as intense.

I. People who leave a mainline Christian group which did not honor the Bible or preach the Gospel but stressed works and minimized the work and words of Christ, struggle with similar issues, though not as intensely as a former cult member or non Christian religion (Islam).

1. One reason is that they may have had many truths mixed in with the lies.
2. They may have even twisted the Bible to abuse and control.
3. Their birth families may still be in that system. As a result it may bring a wedge (sword) in their relationship. Jesus warned of this possibility.
 - a. Matt 10:34-39

Struggles to Face

III. What are the areas of struggle faced by those who leave a cult or any other religious group or organization?

A. The hardest struggle they may face is to look within oneself and find the false elements of faith and remove them by renouncing them as lies and then replacing those lies and deceptions with truth. Often the lie *feels* truer than the truth.

1. One may be so self-obsessed, sold on their faith, that it would be very difficult for them to break through their denial and see what is sick at their core and admit how that sickness has damaged their relationships with others and God. (T.F. p. 48)

B. Guilt (a deep source of personal condemnation)

1. Guilt is the number one tool of manipulation used by all spiritually abusive groups. // Guilt is also used in personal relationships like the family or extended family.
2. False guilt is usually promoted and portrayed as genuine guilt.
 - a. True guilt implies, "I am worthy of blame. I've done something wrong." If we have done something wrong, we should feel guilty or convicted!
 - 1) One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).
 - 2) King David after he sinned by taking a census
 - a) 2 Samuel 24:10, "And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'"
 - b. False religions, however, take false guilt (based on lies that you are worthy of blame) and convert it to make it feel like true guilt.
 - 1) ill.: "I feel guilty when I take a shower everyday because I was told it was wasteful to use that water on myself."
 - a) She was pressured to believe a lie about normal personal hygiene.
 - 2) ill: "I feel guilty wearing clothes that did not come from a thrift store because I was told I was selfish and proud to spend money on myself."
 - a) Remember, it is the goal of abusive groups to get as much money out of the victim under the pretense it is for the purpose of "spreading the word" (proselytizing) when in reality it is for power and control and enrichment of the leadership.
 - b) Most cult and spiritually abusive leaders are personally rich.
 - 3) ill.: "I feel guilty for eating a full meal because that money could have been used for the "ministry" of the organization. I am being wasteful."
 - a) Judas used the same logic on Jesus when in reality he was stealing money from

the disciples' money bag.

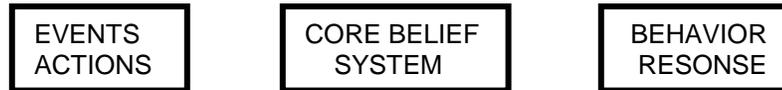
- (1) John 12: 3-6, "Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This, he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it."
- b) The Apostle Paul warned believers about people who would condemn you and put you on a guilt trip based on what you ate or drank.
 - (1) Col. 2:16 " So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths."
 - (2) Col. 2:20-23 "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."
3. Spiritually abused people often are pressured to live in conditions of extreme poverty and sacrifice while the leaders are secretly or openly living a life of luxury.
 - a. ill.: Catholic cathedrals with wealthy priests living in the midst of people in extreme poverty.
4. A major source of false guilt that feels true is the thought in the back of the victim's mind that by leaving the group, they are betraying their "family" (cult, religious group).
 - a. The false religion became their birth family substitute and support group structure.
 - 1) In truth, the Christian family often has to serve in the place of a broken birth family.
 - 2) Psalm 27:10 – "When my father and my mother forsake me (divorce, abandon me), then the Lord will take care of me."
 - 3) Matthew 12:47, 48-50, "Then one said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.' But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers? ... For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.' "

- b. Leaving the group creates a major feeling of disloyalty.
 - 1) The cult stresses loyalty in a person or to a system over truth.
 - 2) ill.: A Mormon woman stated that if she discovered her church was not true, she still would never leave it.
- c. This could be compounded by the fact that their real birth family was or is deeply involved in the cult/church also.
 - 1) ill.: A son, whose family is deeply involved in the Roman Church with all of its traditions, feels a deep sense of guilt and disloyalty in leaving.
 - 2) ill.: Victims who leave a cult like Mormonism will go through a grieving process similar to a death because of all the losses they experience by leaving.
- d. They feel that they are both abandoning the cult family and being abandoned by them.
 - 1) Many times those who leave a spiritually abusive church or cult are abandoned by their birth family.
 - a) ill.: This is experienced by former Catholics who became Christians and left the Roman Catholic Church.
 - b) ill.: When Muslims convert to Christianity, they are not only abandoned but many are killed.
 - 2) In extreme cases they may be persecuted and even killed.
- 5. They also may feel they are abandoning God, at least as they understand God.
 - a. False religions distort the character of God and mold Him into their false belief system.
 - 1) ill.: Israel did this often in the Old Testament.
 - 2) Romans 1:21-23, “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”
 - b. False religions manipulate their followers through a totally unbiblical theology.
 - 1) Col. 2:8, 20-23 – “Beware, lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. Therefore, if you died

with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – do not touch, do not taste (eat meat on Friday), do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

6. Each person must test all feelings of guilt with biblical truth.
 - a. We all need to examine our beliefs with biblical truth and rid them of the dangerous lies that cause us to develop or believe a toxic faith. (T.F. Dr. Dowrett, M.D.)
 - b. This is a new experience for most victims because they are accustomed to being led by their feelings or told what to believe.
 - 1) Mormons confirm their faith by a “burning in their bosom,” not biblical truth.
 - c. We are to test all teachings with truth as revealed in the Bible.
 - 1) The Bereans did this with the Apostle Paul’s teaching.
 - a) Acts 17:11 – “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”
 - d. False teachers are to be tested by the truth of Scripture.
 - 1) I Jn. 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
 - 2) Most Mormon missionaries will acknowledge they don’t or have not read the Bible.
 - e. But cults or toxic Christian groups cannot stand to be tested with truth because their religion is based on feelings and distorted facts. Fear strikes their heart and often it comes out of them in anger.
 - f. There is no love (desire) for the truth that would contradict their feeling-based religion and deception.
 - 1) II Thess. 2:9,10,11
7. The hardest task for the “victim” is to change his core belief system (heart’s innermost being) to line up with truth and reality of Scripture. All behavioral responses to events or actions of others first must go through a core belief

system. It is this system that determines one's response.



- a. Changing one's core belief is a personal growth process. It is not a quick fix overnight.
 - 1) Romans 12:2 – “And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”
 - b. The “victim” will struggle for a long time as they grow in truth.
 - 1) II Peter 3:18 – “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”
 - 2) Col. 2: 6,7 – “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”
 - c. There will be triggers that cause them to think of the cult and be tempted to return. // The mature believers in the church of Rome were instructed to be sensitive to the new believers who left a pagan cult with ritual sacrifices which involved meat (Romans 14).
 - 1) The necessary process of change is described by the Apostle Paul in Rom. 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable will of God.” We were born again in our spirit (John 3:6), not our mind. The mind needs major reprogramming.
8. Leaving a false religious cult is only step one. Now the hard work begins because it often affects every part of the person's life and that includes reestablishing relationships that were severed in the past.
 9. Remember, true guilt and false guilt feels the same. It is only by repeatedly testing those feelings, determining the truth, then choosing to act on the truth that genuine freedom is achieved.
 - a. John 1:14 – “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”
 - b. John 8:31,32 – “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”
 - c. John 14:6 – “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one

comes to the Father except through me.’ ”

- d. John 16:13, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever he hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”
- e. One practical way to begin this process is to change “I feel” statements to “I think” statements. You can’t test feelings but you can thoughts with truth and reality.

C. Identity Confusion (Who am I?)

1. Three major losses were experienced as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden: loss of purpose, loss of worth (value) and loss of identity.
 - a. Every person is now in search of a purpose in their life, personal worth and value and identity (Who am I?).
 - 1) King Solomon is a classic illustration of all three losses as described in the book of Ecclesiastes.
 - a) Ecc. 1:26, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”
 - b. The cult or legalistic church attempts to illegitimately fill those three needs.
 - c. False religions and philosophies major on all three weaknesses and attempt to give you a sense of purpose, worth, identity and acceptance.
2. Most cults develop a group thinking mentality. Members must all think from the same core belief system.
 - a. This “group think” identity process bleeds over from the need to feel worth and value and a sense of purpose which is now the cult’s purpose to give its victims.
 - b. Col 2:8, “Beware, lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”
3. The “group think” process results in all members undergoing a major personality change.
 - a. This will show up in the way they dress (hair, makeup, jewelry).
 - b. They could lose interest in past things they may have enjoyed (friends, hobbies, even their jobs).
 - c. They will talk differently and use a subculture language that is primarily known only to the group.

- d. They may use the same words as orthodox Christianity would use but have very different meanings.
 - 1) Mormons will say they believe Jesus is the Son of God. They believe the heavenly Father had sex and Jesus was born as a man who later became God (as most Mormons hope to become), not God who became man (Phil. 2:6-11). The fifth president of the Mormon church, Lorenzo Snow, developed a couplet expressing this principle that stated, "As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become." Joseph Smith stated in the King Follet Discourse, that we "have got to learn how to become gods ourselves" (Apologetics Resource Center – KC).
- 4. False religion stresses conformity to their system of thinking, acting and speaking.
 - a. In order to conform to the cult system, the members must first abandon their former sense of personal worth, purpose and identity and assume that of the cult or legalistic system.
 - b. The stress on conformity is done to control their adherents with no regard for an eternity separated from God.
 - 1) Matthew 23:15 – "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."
- 5. The stress on extreme conformity may result in young people dropping out of school activities such as sports, drama or music. // One who would like to wear bright colors is put on a guilt trip by being accused of a (lie) so they will conform to the bland dress of the cult in order to lose their personal identity.
- 6. One of the few first tasks of the one leaving the false group is to sort out what part of their present personality is truly theirs and what parts were adopted to conform to the standards of the group.
 - a. What complicates this task is that they may not have known who they really were before joining the cult. // They may not have established who they are themselves.
 - 1) Most cults target people who are followers and are personally dependent, needy and non-thinkers.
 - 2) ill: When I asked Dr. Ralph Porter where he got the members in his evangelical church in Salt Lake City, he said they began to ask questions of Mormon leaders and discovered their teaching did not line up with history, archeology or scripture.
 - b. One of the draws to the cult is that it artificially fills the vacuum of worth, purpose and identity.
- 7. The ex-member's major task is to reprogram the core belief system as to who

they are in Christ. It is a complex process to detoxify the person and restore a pure faith. (T.F. p 46)

- a. As this reprogramming process continues, they will begin to see who God originally made them to be with talents, interests and personality.
 - b. They may need help discerning what their spiritual gift (gifts) is that equips them to minister to others in the body of Christ.
 - 1) Ephesians 4:11-12, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
 - c. God will restore their true identity and then they will seek to reflect their personality in a Christ-like form.
 - 1) Our identity in Christ does not destroy our innate personality. God restores it so we can reflect Christ-likeness in word, action and attitude.
 - a) Galatians 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”
8. The ex-cult member’s task is to first rediscover who God made them to be with their individual gifts and talents.
- a. They will need to undo the cult brain washing and begin to replace lies, myths and deception with truth.
 - b. They must then, conform that personality into the image of Christ in word, action and attitude.
 - 1) Romans 8:29 – “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
 - c. Remember, all the New Testament human authors writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sounded like themselves. Paul wrote and sounded like Paul. So did John, Luke and James.
 - 1) II Peter 1:21 – “for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”
9. The ex-cult member’s task then is to be conformed to Christ in his words, thoughts (core belief systems), and actions.

D. Distrust of Authority

1. Former cult members usually view authority as a tool of abuse.
 - a. Power, control and abuse go hand in hand.
 - b. The abuse was usually handed down by an authority figure, although it may have been carried out by subordinates.
2. Now the “victim” views former cult leaders as dishonest as they experience major inconsistencies or discover their system of lies.
 - a. Many groups use lies to manipulate members.
 - 1) Satan is the originator of these lies.
 - a) John 8:44 – “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”
 - b. They use lies to deceive and control those outside the organization.
 - 1) Romans 1:25 – “who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”
 - c. They may have formal doctrines justifying lying to protect or promote their group.
 - 1) Islam condones lying to non-Muslims that they refer to as infidels (non-believers).
3. Trust that has been violated in the group by leaders will result in distrust of most authority figures. // Pastors, priests, counselors and other professionals can abuse authority.
 - a. (As a result), all authority figures now have the task of building trust. The “victim” has the task of taking a risk and allowing the authority figures to build that trust. Forgiveness is granted but trust is earned.
 - b. Authority figures will be severely tested by the victim in order for them to rebuild the trust.
 - 1) Sexually abused victims keep at arms length and resist efforts of others to touch them appropriately.
 - 2) Only the victim is to determine when touch is safe and no one else.
4. The authority and person of God is extremely distorted. // It may take months or years before God is trusted because much of the abuse may have been in His

name.

- a. Just the mention of the word “father,” “priest,” or “pastor” can send a victim over the edge.
- b. This weakness is to be understood and the victim to be granted a lot of patience and understanding.
 - 1) I Thess. 5:14, “...bear with those who are weak.”

E. Isolation

1. One of the sociological tools cults use is the systematic separation of the member from his friends and his family.
 - a. Isolation is a strong tool to gain power and to have control over the members. Diotrophes is one illustration of this in the New Testament.
 - 1) III John 1:9, 10 – “I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.”
 - b. Abusive husbands create a mini-cult within the home and use the same tool of isolation as a means of exercising power and control.
 - 1) Misogynistic husbands will use this strategy by isolating their wives from their families and friends to get them to be dependent on them.
 - c. One girl was told her parents were demonic and that would hinder her spiritual progress.
2. In the cult, a member’s only deep relationships are to be formed in the organization.
 - a. This creates a strong barrier from leaving the group and a strong incentive to remain in the group. “It is us against them.”
3. Members witness how ex-members are rejected by those who are still inside.
 - a. This strikes a fear in anyone who is tempted to leave. The personal loss would be too great.
 - b. This explains the deep struggle of an ex-member.
 - 1) They lost most of their close relationships with outsiders when they joined the cult.
 - 2) Now they’ve lost all of their relationships with members in the cult.

- 3) This is viewed as a double bind for the victim.
 - a) In a church context, an abused wife is condemned by the church if she leaves the abuser and is abused by her husband if she stays.
4. With the loss of both the outsiders and insiders, they then experience a tremendous sense of isolation.
 - a. Unfortunately, this is one of the reasons cult members will return to the cult and abused wives return to their abusive husbands.
5. Add to this, when they leave, outsiders do not understand what the ex-member experienced. As a result, ex-members experience a great deal of loneliness and need a lot of support.
 - a. A counselor's task is to spend a great deal of time making every effort to understand the ex-member's thoughts, feelings and words before they begin to dispense information.
 - 1) The ex-member was totally controlled. He does not want to turn around and be controlled by a counselor.
 - 2) The ex-member is to determine the speed and direction of the recovery. The counselor should ask permission to make a suggestion for direction. This reinforces to the victim that the counselor respects the client's power and responsibility for his healing under God.
6. Many core beliefs must be addressed and changed as it relates to the presence of God and/or where He was when the abuse occurred.

F. Estrangement from God

1. This is (probably) the most difficult and unexpected feeling which ex-members have to struggle with as they rebuild their lives. // Why?
2. The Bible and "God" were used as instruments of abuse and control.
 - a. The Bible and the mere mention of God are like triggers that take them back to times of horrific pain.
 - 1) Sights, sounds, seasons, weather, temperature, colors, animals, music all played a part in the cult and/or abuse.
 - 2) One sexually abused daughter was told to look at a picture of Christ on the wall while she was being sexually abused in the cult.
 - b. Some ex-members report that Bible reading, prayer and worship can actually be a painful experience.

- 1) It is common for them to cry uncontrollably in worship situations.
3. Ex-members can experience nagging doubts as to whether or not they have walked away from the only true church and in so doing have abandoned God.
 - a. They fear God will punish them for it.
 - b. They may view “normal” trials as punishment for leaving.
 - 1) James 1:1-4, “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ; to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. 2) My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”
4. Their task is to sort out lies from the truth. This must be done both on an intellectual level and on an emotional level. The emotional level will reveal the lies that need to be dealt with on a spiritual warfare level.

G. Emotional Healing

1. Fear and depression are very common with ex-members.
2. Some have likened it to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
 - a. The results of the abuse hit later in life, long after the actual events occurred.
3. Healing from this type of abuse will take time.
 - a. Remember, this is not going to be a quick fix. It will be a process that takes time.
 - b. They must grow through the pain and will need love, support, understanding, prayer and patience in that journey.
4. People can have vibrant Christian lives after they leave a cult or an abusive church experience. // Yes, they will still have mental and emotional scars and flashbacks from time to time.
5. Those working with ex-members must be committed to the long haul in an environment of acceptance, non-judgment and an effort to understand.

H. Summary of issues and needs

1. Guilt
2. Identity Confusion
3. Distrust by God

4. Isolation
5. Emotional Healing

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