

Would You Choose To Be Deceived?

Since deceived people don't know they are deceived, how would you know if you are?

Jesus Christ warns us to *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them"*, (Matthew 7:15-16a). Jesus Christ also warns us that even mature Christians are at risk of deception, (Matthew 24:24). The Apostle Paul warns us to beware of those who preach *"another Jesus"*, and who are empowered by *"another spirit"* other than the Holy Spirit, and who's gospel is actually bad news, (2 Corinthians 11:4). If you think you cannot be deceived, then you probably already are. What a sobering thought.

Deception is when we believe a lie, about God, about His church, or even about ourselves. Deception misleads us, causes us to follow the wrong course. It uses enticements, and deludes us to accept the false and yet call it "Truth".

Deception is not only just one mis-truth - but a whole collection, and usually ends up being empowered by a spirit of deception. Final deception results in a strong delusion.

God in His grace allows us a way out of deception. We've observed the following pattern:

1. God warns us through Scripture;
2. Conviction of the Holy Spirit follows;
3. God sends someone to speak into our lives; if we harden our hearts then
4. The consequences kick-in (we call it God-pressure);
5. The Holy Spirit again convicts of sin;
6. If we continue in the sin of deception, then we aren't taken into the Promised Land. (Revelation 22:15; Galatians 5:19-20, & others)

We need to know enough about groups and practices which claim to be "Christian" to be certain whether they actually are or not. Claiming the title isn't enough.

Dr. Charles Farah wrote, *"Whenever that Church or a segment of the Church takes a particular teaching or truth of the Bible, and detaches it from its relation to the total truth, pushing it to its logical extreme, it inevitably results in heresy. Heresy is not latent paganism. Heresy is truth distorted, exaggerated to an intolerable extreme. It is truth out of focus, out of balance with the whole."* (From the Pinnacle of the Temple - Faith or Presumption, p41.)

We must never attempt to build a doctrinal basis for action or ministry on an isolated verse, nor to distort it out of its context. That's what cults do. That's why they are cults - believing heresies which true Christians reject on the basis of Bible-based truth. We need the totality of Scripture to get true doctrine. Scripture needs to balance Scripture to avoid presumption and false doctrine.

"Nothing is more rigid or more opposed to the Holy Spirit's blessed moving in our age than bad theology. Bad theology says that miracles cannot occur in our century. Bad theology says no Christian can be tortured by a demon. Bad theology says only lack of faith prevents healing," wrote Dr. Charles Farah. (ibid p57)

Major Signs of a Cult

Wrong Doctrine

- * Adding to the Bible with other books, publications or revelations
- * The Bible is reinterpreted to suit group doctrines
- * Denial of the deity of Jesus Christ
- * Denial of the deity or personality of the Holy Spirit
- * God is reduced to an elevated or evolved man
- * Man is inflated with deity-potential
- * Salvation is received by doing something (works)
- * Repentance of personal sins minimised
- * Belief that there are many ways to God
- * Belief that there is more than one God
- * Belief that they are the only true church
- * Belief that their church is the only source of salvation

Wrong Practices

- * Questioning of doctrines, leaders etc. discouraged
- * One leader or group of leaders always right
- * Compulsory tithing plus other offerings only to that group
- * Individuality eroded & group conformity promoted
- * Denial of the Priesthood of All Believers
- * Information about the group from outsiders discouraged or not permitted
- * Contact with family or friends discouraged
- * Fear & guilt used to control members
- * Group schedules so busy no life outside the group
- * Unquestioning obedience expected

To Avoid being Deceived by a Cult

- * Be familiar with what the Bible actually teaches
- * Have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- * Invite the Holy Spirit to be your companion & guide in all things
- * Be in fellowship with other Christian believers

How to Identify a Cult

1. Is the group reluctant to reveal all its doctrines on request?
2. Is it closed to inside and/or outside criticism?
3. Does it try to promote itself as Christian when major doctrines and practices are not Biblically supported?
4. Have its teachings been publicly questioned or opposed by recognized Bible Scholars?
5. Has it been called a cult? (If so, why?)
6. Have mistakes by past and present leaders been covered up instead of repented of?
7. Do leaders live a lifestyle inconsistent with the Bible or their own message to members?
8. Have its doctrines changed significantly over the years (and if so, why)?
9. Are members prevented or discouraged from reading other religious literature?

10. Do they believe that there are other books or magazines necessary besides the Bible to learn the truth?
11. Does it deny that complete truth can be obtained just by using the Bible?
12. Has the leadership claimed special direction from God not available to others in the organization?
13. Do they believe that all other Christian groups are false?
14. Is all dissent seen as evidence of pride, sin or rebellion?
15. Can the Bible be interpreted correctly only by members of this organisation?
16. Have they misrepresented the Christian churches and their major teachings?
17. Are members required to sever all ties with the past?
18. Does it have an authoritarian structure?
19. Are people regimented by threats or bribes and disciplined to conform?
20. Are members obviously exploited financially?
21. Does it deny the unconditional acceptance of all scripture?
22. Does it deny the nature of Christ as fully God & fully man?
23. Does it deny the Trinity?
24. Does it deny salvation through personal acceptance of Christ's death on the cross as payment for all our sins?

If the answer is "yes" to ten or more questions, it is almost certainly a cult.

What about what we might call "**Pre-cult Spiritually Abusive Churches?**" Can a recognized Christian church fellowship become a cult? The answer is an obvious yes. Is this process preventable? Is it reversible? The answer to both questions is "YES!" How? Such a process will require much prayer and sacrifice, and especially repentance by those leaders who have deviated from the Biblical order. Leaders who don't or won't repent should be removed.

How can we recognize a "Pre-cult Spiritually Abusive Church?" Here are some questions which will assist uncovering such a sickness in the Body of Christ.

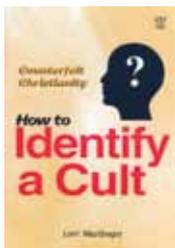
- * Is there pressure or manipulation to give a *minimum* of 10% of your income *only* to that church/fellowship?
- * Are honest questions about doctrines or practises within the group regarded as "*criticism*" by leaders?
- * Is there any *compulsion* to attend several group meetings each week?
- * Is there *guilt* if you miss any?
- * Are there "*inner*" and "*outer*" circles of members, the inner ones being "more spiritual?"
- * Are members of the outer circle required to agree to "*shepherding*," or control/direction by someone in the inner group? (We are not talking of normal discipleship here.)

Look for a genuine Christian church which doesn't put people into bondage, but which equips and sets them free in Christ. The key is to show you how to depend on God, and not the organisation. Ultimately, leaving any group is a decision between God and you, and others should not interfere or manipulate you. Don't become a "Lone Ranger": find a place where you can be blessed with accountability without control, and where there is freedom to grow and mature into all God intends you to be. No one needs "The One True church" but every one of us needs the "One True Jesus Christ".

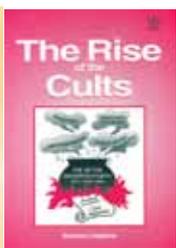
"Have nothing to do with the things of darkness, but rather expose them." (Ephesians 5:11)

"Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'"

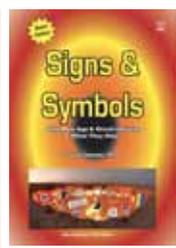
(John 14:6)



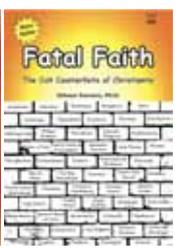
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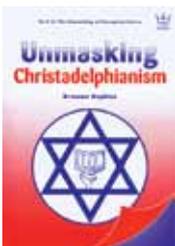
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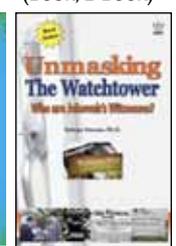
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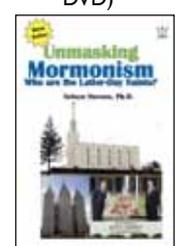
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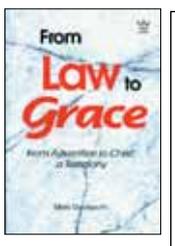
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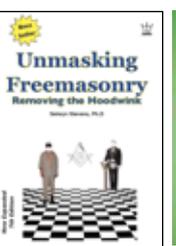
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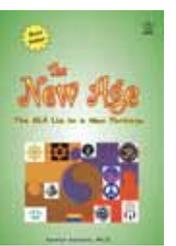
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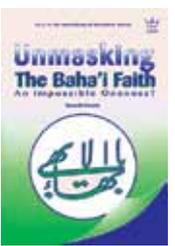
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