

The Lure of a Counterfeit . . .

Why are people so fascinated with cults? What is their lure? What is their hook? If the apostle Paul was distressed by the Greeks' fascination with the newest religious fads (Acts 17:16, 21), he would be dismayed over the potpourri of false gospels flourishing today. Many seekers of truth are ensnared by Christian counterfeits . . . drawn and deluded by doctrines of deceit.

*"While Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. . . . Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new."
(Acts 17:16, 21)*

Q: "What is the most effective thing I can do to help pull someone out of a cult?"

Plant a seed of doubt in the mind of the cult member, which, in time, can grow into bigger and bigger doubts. This can help the person become more objective and see errors in the cult's teaching. God's Spirit can cultivate the smallest seed to convict the cult member that something is terribly wrong.

*"For everything there is a season . . . a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted."
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)*

Q: "Are all cults basically the same?"¹

Yes and no. Cults exhibit similar psychological patterns . . .

- **Closed-mindedness** . . . not interested in a rational evaluation of the facts
- **Blind obedience to authority** . . . the dogma of leader or founder is supreme
- **Controlled living** . . . details of daily life are dictated by the leader
- **Contempt for outsiders** . . . intolerance for any belief system other than their own

*"False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."
(2 Peter 2:1)*

What Is a Cult?

A cult VARIES from orthodox Christian doctrine on one or more of these points.

Virgin Birth

Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. (Matthew 1:18)

Atonement

Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ can pay the penalty for personal sin. (Romans 5:8-9)

Resurrection

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in bodily form and was seen on earth by many. (1 Corinthians 15:3-6)

Incarnation

Jesus Christ, who is God, took on human form and was fully God and fully man. (John 1:1-3, 14)

Eschatology

After Jesus Christ visibly returns to earth during the end times, a final judgment is a certainty, sending the unrighteous to eternal punishment and the righteous to eternal life. (Hebrews 9:27-28; Matthew 25:46)

Scripture

The Bible is wholly inspired by God, is without error in the original writings and revelation, and is the only authority for righteous living. (Proverbs 30:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:16)

Manipulation by Cult Leaders

Characteristic of all cult leaders is the belief that they alone have the one true message from God.²

- They *present* themselves as infallible authorities, requiring absolute loyalty.
- They *persuade* through their strong, charismatic personalities.
- They *prohibit* individual freedom, expecting unquestioned obedience.
- They *promote* themselves as divine or as God's sole agent on earth.
- They *possess* "new truth" from God, while perverting biblical truth.
- They *provide* simplistic answers for complex problems.

Key Verse to Memorize

*"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."
(2 Timothy 2:15)*

Key Passage to Read and Reread

John 1:1-18

Post Cult Plan for Family and Friends

Don't be surprised if one who leaves a cult experiences one or more of the following:

Anger and depression

Look for ways to help them and others . . . in time possibly helping other cult members escape involvement. (Galatians 6:2)

Distrust

Change their focus by helping them understand the nature of cults and thus narrow their distrust to leaders who distort truth and use mind control. (Proverbs 16:16)

Instability

Don't demand that they adopt your values. Instead of coercing (as cults do), give them information. Then let them decide in their own time. (Proverbs 16:23)

Fear

Share with them that each of us experiences some form of fear, but God promises to keep us safe. (Proverbs 29:25)

Loneliness

Discourage visits or calls to cultic friends. Be available to listen, interact, and befriend. Encourage interaction with others. (Ecclesiastes 4:10)

*"If they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!"
(Ecclesiastes 4:10)*

Pointers from Paul

The apostle Paul, with his sensitive yet persuasive presentation of Jesus Christ, gave us the model for cult evangelism when he confronted those who were spiritually misguided on the streets of ancient Greece.

- Paul *had a heart of conviction*. (Acts 17:16–18)
- Paul *made himself available*. (Acts 17:19–21)
- Paul *treated them with respect*. (Acts 17:22)
- Paul *planted seeds of doubt*. (Acts 17:23)
- Paul *presented the gospel*. (Acts 17:24–34)

*“I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is the power of God
for salvation to everyone who believes.”
(Romans 1:16)*

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1. See Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. and expanded ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1985), 26–28. For further information, see Dave Breese, *The Marks of the Cults: The Warning Signs of False Teachings* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998).
2. See Steven Hassan, *Combating Cult Mind Control* (Rochester, VT: Park Street, 1988); Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961); Margaret Thaler Singer, *Cults in Our Midst* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995); Madeleine Landau Tobias and Lalich Janja, *Captive Hearts Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships* (Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 1994).



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