

# SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE

## Power Posturing

Leaders focus on their own authority, constantly reminding others of who they are or what they have done in order to justify the respect and awe they need.

The leaders reference God and the Bible in order to promote their godlike status. The leaders replace Christ or God over the consciences of individuals.

They change the definitions of sin from the Biblical view to promote their version of legalism. And thus, sin is forgotten.

Unhealthy leadership becomes subtly abusive. The leaders carry with them an air of intimidation that prevents anyone from getting close enough to learn anything. Members and outsiders are intimidated or embarrassed into silence by the leaders' behavior.

Leaders frequently disparage those outside the system, to prove that outsiders are lost and damned.

## Performance Preoccupation

The leaders are preoccupied with instilling worthiness in the members through legalism in order to enhance their own authority. Pious clones make the leader appear successful.

The system doesn't foster holiness or understanding of the Bible, it merely accommodates the leaders' interpretation of spirituality and the need for control.

The demand for the leaders' view of perfection distorts the truth of God's Grace and love.

Obedience and submission to the leadership is required but the authority is not from God. Honesty and love among members is missing. Members live in a la-la land; ignorant of reality.

## Unspoken Rules

The requirements are rarely published nor formally stated. People are not aware of the rules until they have broken them.

Questions or disagreements are not allowed. The "can't talk rule" is the most powerful and most important defense the leader has. If a problem was admitted then the system would obviously not be perfect and something would have to be done. Status quo is the order of the day.

Leaders can break the rules but the members can't.

Anyone who speaks about a problem becomes the problem and must be silenced or eliminated.

## Lack of Balance

Scripture is used to manipulate people

People are led to believe that they cannot understand the scripture apart from the leaders' explanation or revelation.

Extreme objectivism - elevating certain views of scripture while ignoring the practicality of other points of scripture. Inability to look at scripture in any other way except the way the leader has dictated.

Extreme subjectivism, deciding what is true based upon feeling, or supposed experiences, rather than on what the Bibles teaches.

## Paranoia

The leaders project their anti-social prejudices into their followers with the suggestion that the group is in danger of persecution. Persecution complex is the way to keep everyone in line.

A self contained system keeps people from growing mentally or socially. People are emotionally and spiritually abused, sometimes physically or sexually abused.

The introverted system protects the leaders from the civil authorities for any illegal activities they may be involved in:

sexual crimes, drug abuse, tax evasion, physical abuse of women or children, polygamy, etc.

## Misplaced Loyalty

Loyalty is not to God or Jesus Christ, but to the system or leader.

Familial loyalty is replaced by loyalty to the system.

Friendships are superficial because loyalty to the system comes first.

People become accustomed to insulating themselves from one another in order to protect themselves from the leaders' disapproval.

The leaders want to be consulted about any important decisions regarding one's social activities or marriage plans. They feel free to voice their opinions, no matter how trivial or intrusive.

## Secrets

Abusive leaders cannot live up to their own rules and neither can their members so it is imperative that they hide reality.

The leaders hide their members and keep them busy doing little or nothing.

The leaders hide themselves and their money.

Abusive leaders aren't public with their beliefs or their locations.

The leaders move about so that it is difficult to find them.

Their decisions are made secretly.

They are deceptive with the government and the public, carefully wording all their correspondence to cultivate an air of complete innocence and altruistic façade.

**Information is adapted from the book,  
The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse  
by David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen**

## HOW DOES SPIRITUAL ABUSE AFFECT PEOPLE?

1. It causes depression, emotional problems and change of personality
2. It alienates people from God
3. It confuses people
4. It is harmful to children; it destroys lives
5. It is harmful to families
6. It leads people astray and to eternal damnation
7. It can cause people to commit suicide or consider suicide

### WHAT IS MIND CONTROL?

1. It is the act of turning one's mind, soul and body over to the control of another human being.
2. It is accomplished through lies, information control, deceit, abuse, scriptural lies, and mentally isolating members
3. It is a form of spiritual rape

### TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

1. Breaking through denial is the hardest part. Are you a victim of spiritual abuse or is someone you love being spiritually abused? A person within an abusive system is often the last one to recognize or acknowledge it. It usually takes a long time for the victim to admit there is a problem. Information from outside the system is necessary. If someone has alerted you to the possibility that you are the victim, look outside your situation to a source of information that is readily available to the public. Check the internet, ask several pastors of local churches, write or call Religion Analysis Service, or Research and Information Services. Has your church ever been referred to as a cult? If so, pay attention and find out why! People don't accuse religions of being cults unless they have good reasons. Ask yourself: What has this system done to improve my life and relationship with God and others? Did this system isolate me from family members who love me? Is this system mentally healthy?

2. Surrender to God, without surrendering to people. Instead of turning against God, as most people automatically do, make it a high priority to find out who God really is, what His Word really says and means. This

is a fact finding mission, not a decision to believe and join something. If you don't like to read and study, contact a resource information center and rent some videos that will quickly explain the core beliefs of different religions and give a Biblical comparison to them.

3. Mental Recovery from guilt, depression, illogical thinking, paranoia, self-hatred, fear of people, fear of God involves a person's identity and self worth. Recognize that it is normal to feel crazy during this period. It is a grieving period, similar to the grief one feels after a divorce or death in the family.

4. Learn Balance by learning to think for one's self and taking responsibility to understand and make decisions.

5. Knowledge of the Bible-find a good trustworthy source of Biblical teaching. Pursue this diligently. Listen to Christian radio. Most secular colleges and universities hold atheistic or pagan viewpoints, avoid them.

6. Discard the Negative-- Go to the clothes closet. Discard everything that makes you depressed or look strange. Then do the same to your mental closet. Get rid of everything that isn't you and start over. God made you to be who you are. So be yourself. But beware of immorality, alcohol or drugs, which are common reactions to grief.

7. Protect one's self from abuse by setting boundaries. Stay away from people who are bossy, critical, invasive, unkind or destructive. Establish a new life in a safe zone. Stay away from people and situations that make you feel panicky or depressed. Forgive everyone who has ever hurt you and then stay away from them.

8. Overcome the desire to control or be controlled—stop being critical of others. God gives everyone the freedom to find Him and receive Him or reject Him. So do the same to others. Love them and let them be.

9. Dealing with grief — forgive God; He never hurt you. People did. Forgive yourself and move forward.

10. What about support groups? Support groups can be helpful but beware of people who don't know anything more about the Bible or emotional counseling than you do. You need input from people who are mentally and spiritually stable and mature.

11. What about your family? Is it still intact? Is your family in the abusive system? Reach out to healthy normal family members.

12. Find new Friends. Overcome fear, learn to trust from a distance

13. Work on Physical Health. Emotional health is affected by physical and spiritual health. So pay attention to your body. Stress from the grieving process takes a large toll on your body. Be aware that cancer and other major health problems can be activated during stress.

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# SPIRITUAL

# ABUSE

# WHAT

# IS IT?

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