

# THE PARASITIC SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN COERCIVE PERSUASION & RELIGIOUS ADDICTION

by David Lee Burris

	Education	Advertising	Propaganda	Indoctrination	Thought Reform
Focus of body of knowledge	Many bodies of knowledge, based on scientific findings in various fields.	Body of knowledge concerns product, competitors, how to sell and influence via legal persuasion.	Body of knowledge centers on political persuasion of masses of people.	Body of knowledge is explicitly designed to inculcate organizational values.	Body of knowledge centers on changing people without their knowledge.
Direction & degree of exchange	Two way pupil-teacher exchange encouraged.	Exchange can occur, but communication generally one-sided.	Some exchange occurs, but communication generally one-sided.	Limited exchange occurs; communication is one-sided.	No exchange occurs, communication is one-sided.
Ability to change	Change occurs as science advances; as students & other scholars offer criticism; as students & citizens evaluate programs.	Change made by those who pay for it, based upon the success of ad programs; by consumer law; & in response to consumer complaints.	Change based on changing tides in world politics and on political need to promote the group, nation, or international organization.	Change made through formal channels, via written suggestions to higher-ups.	Change occurs rarely; organization remains fairly rigid; change occurs primarily to improve thought reform effectiveness.
Structure of persuasion	Uses teacher-pupil structure; logical thinking encouraged.	Uses an instructional mode to persuade consumer/buyer.	Takes authoritarian stance to persuade masses.	Takes authoritarian & hierarchical stance.	Takes authoritarian & hierarchical stance; no full awareness on part of learner.
Type of relationship	Instruction is time-limited; consensual.	Consumer/buyer can accept or ignore communication.	Learner support & engrossment expected.	Instruction is contractual; consensual.	Group attempts to retain people forever.
Deceptiveness	Is not deceptive.	Can be deceptive, selecting only positive views.	Can be deceptive; often exaggerated.	Is not deceptive.	Is deceptive.
Breadth of learning	Focuses on learning to learn & learning about reality; broad goal is rounded knowledge for development of the individual.	Has a narrow goal of swaying opinion to promote and sell an idea, object, or program; another goal is to enhance seller & possibly buyer.	Targets large political masses to make them believe a specific view or circumstance is good.	Stress narrow learning for a specific goal; to become something or to train for performance of duties.	Individualized target; hidden agenda (you will be changed one step at a time to become deployable to serve leaders).
Tolerance	Respects differences.	Puts down competition.	Wants to lessen opposition.	Aware of Differences.	No respect for differences.
Methods	Instructional techniques.	Mild to heavy persuasion.	Overt persuasion; sometimes unethical.	Disciplinary techniques.	Improper and unethical techniques.



## 1. Definition

**“Toxic faith” believes that which is not true as though it was true.**

## Toxic faith...

**... means one embraces a falsehood as though it were true.**

**embracing lies**





# **SOURCE: CULT AWARENESS NETWORK:**

## **Coercive Persuasion and Attitude Change**

*Encyclopedia of Sociology Volume 1, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York*

*By Richard J. Ofshe, Ph.D.*

Coercive persuasion and thought reform are alternate names for programs of social influence capable of producing substantial behavior and attitude change through the use of coercive tactics, persuasion, and/or interpersonal and group-based influence manipulations (Schein 1961; Lifton 1961). Such programs have also been labeled "brainwashing" (Hunter 1951), a term more often used in the media than in scientific literature. However identified, these programs are distinguishable from other elaborate attempts to influence behavior and attitudes, to socialize, and to accomplish social control. Their distinguishing features are their totalistic qualities (Lifton 1961), the types of influence procedures they employ, and organization of these procedures into three distinctive subphases of the overall process (Schein 1961; Ofshe and Singer 1986). The key factors that distinguish coercive persuasion from other training & socialization schemes are:

- 1. The reliance on intense interpersonal and psychological attack to destabilize an individual's sense of self to promote compliance**
- 2. The use of an organized peer group**
- 3. Applying interpersonal pressure to promote conformity**
- 4. The manipulation of the totality of the person's social environment to stabilize behavior once modified.**

They shared the utilization of coercive persuasion's key effective-influence mechanisms: a focused attack on the stability of a person's sense of self; reliance on peer group interaction; the development of interpersonal bonds between targets and their controllers and peers; and an ability to control communication among participants. Edgar Schein captured the essential similarity between the types of programs in his definition of the coercive-persuasion phenomenon. Schein noted that for prisoners, what happened was a subjection to "unusually intense and prolonged persuasion" that they could not avoid; thus, "they were coerced into allowing themselves to be persuaded" (Schein 1961, p. 18). The phrase situationally adaptive belief change refers to attitude change that is not stable and is environment dependent. This type of response to the influence pressures of coercive-persuasion programs is perhaps the most surprising of the responses that have been observed. The combination of psychological assault on the self, interpersonal pressure, and the social organization of the environment creates a situation that can only be coped with by adapting and acting so as to present oneself to others in terms of the ideology supported in the environment.

Eliciting the desired verbal and interactive behavior sets up conditions likely to stimulate the development of attitudes consistent with and that function to rationalize new behavior in which the individual is engaging. Models of attitude change, such as the theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger 1957) or Self-Perception Theory (Bern 1972), explain the tendency for consistent attitudes to develop as a consequence of behavior.

The reform experience focuses on genuine vulnerabilities as the method for undermining self-concept: manipulating genuine feelings of guilt about past conduct; inducing the target to make public denunciations of his or her prior life as being unworthy; and carrying this forward through interaction with peers for whom the target develops strong bonds. Involvement developed in these ways prevents the target from maintaining both psychological distance or emotional independence from the experience.

Coercion differs from other influencing factors also present in thought reform, such as content-based persuasive attempts (e.g., presentation of new information, reference to authorities, etc.) or reliance on influence variables operative in all interaction (status relations, demeanor, normal assertiveness differentials, etc.). Coercion is principally utilized to gain behavioral compliance at key points and to ensure participation in activities likely to have influencing effects; that is, to engage the person in the role training activities and in procedures likely to lead to strong emotional responses, to cognitive confusion, or to attributions to self as the source of beliefs promoted during the process.

Robert Lifton labeled the extraordinarily high degree of social control characteristic of organizations that operate reform programs as their totalistic quality (Lifton 1961). This concept refers to the mobilization of the entirety of the person's social, and often physical, environment in support of the manipulative effort. Lifton identified eight themes or properties of reform environments that contribute to their totalistic quality:

1. Control of communication
2. Emotional and behavioral manipulation
3. Demands for absolute conformity to behavior prescriptions derived from the ideology
4. Obsessive demands for confession
5. Agreement that the ideology is faultless
6. Manipulation of language in which clichés substitute for analytic thought
7. Reinterpretation of human experience and emotion in terms of doctrine
8. Classification of those not sharing the ideology as inferior and not worthy of respect

(Lifton, 1961, pp. 419-437, 1987).

Unfreezing is the first step in eliciting behavior and developing a belief system that facilitates the long-term management of a person. It consists of attempting to undercut a person's psychological basis for resisting demands for behavioral compliance to the routines and rituals of the reform program. The goals of unfreezing are to destabilize a person's sense of identity (i.e., to precipitate an identity crisis), to diminish confidence in prior social judgments, and to foster a sense of powerlessness, if not hopelessness. Successful destabilization induces a negative shift in global self evaluations and increases uncertainty about one's values and position in society. It thereby reduces resistance to the new demands for compliance while increasing suggestibility.

Destabilization of identity is accomplished by bringing into play varying sets of manipulative techniques. The first programs to be studied utilized techniques such as repeatedly demonstrating the person's inability to control his or her own fate, the use of degradation ceremonies, attempts to induce reevaluation of the adequacy and/or propriety of prior conduct, and techniques designed to encourage the reemergence of latent feelings of guilt and emotional turmoil (Hinkle and Wolfe 1956; Lifton 1954, 1961; Schein 1956, 1961; Schein, Cooley, and Singer 1960).

The change phase allows the individual an opportunity to escape punishing destabilization procedures by demonstrating that he or she has learned the proffered ideology, can demonstrate an ability to interpret reality in its own terms, and is willing to participate in competition with peers to demonstrate zeal, through displays of commitment. Group structure is often manipulated by making rewards or punishments for an entire peer group contingent on the performance of the weakest person, requiring the group to utilize a vocabulary appropriate to the ideology, making status and privilege changes commensurate with behavioral compliance, subjecting the target to strong criticism and humiliation from peers for lack of progress, and peer monitoring for expressions of reservations or dissent. If progress is unsatisfactory, the individual can again be subjected to the punishing destabilization procedures used during unfreezing to undermine identity, to humiliate, and to provoke feelings of shame and guilt.

Refreezing denotes an attempt to promote and reinforce behavior acceptable to the controlling organization. Satisfactory performance is rewarded with social approval, status gains, and small privileges. Part of the social structure of the environment is the norm of interpreting the target's display of the desired conduct as demonstrating the person's progress in understanding the errors of his or her former life. The combination of reinforcing approved behavior and interpreting its symbolic meaning as demonstrating the emergence of a new individual fosters the development of an environment-specific, supposedly reborn social identity. The person is encouraged to claim this identity and is rewarded for doing so.

One of the essential components of the reform process in general and of long-term refreezing in particular is monitoring and limiting the content of communication among persons in the managed group (Lifton 1961; Schein 1960; Ofshe et al. ] 974). If successfully accomplished, communication control eliminates a person's ability safely to express criticisms or to share private doubts and reservations. The result is to confer on the community the quality of being a spy system of the whole, upon the whole.

The typically observed complex of communication-controlling rules requires people to self-report critical thoughts to authorities or to make doubts known only in approved and readily managed settings (e.g., small groups or private counseling sessions). Admitting "negativity" leads to punishment or indoctrination through procedures sometimes euphemistically termed "education." Individual social isolation is furthered by rules requiring peers to "help" colleagues to progress, by reporting their expressions of doubt. If it is discovered, failure to make a report is punishable, because it reflects on the low level of commitment of the person who did not "help" a colleague to make progress.

Controlling communication effectively blocks individuals from testing the appropriateness of privately held critical perceptions against the views of even their families and most-valued associates. Community norms encourage doubters to interpret lingering reservations as signs of a personal failure to comprehend the truth of the ideology; if involved with religious organizations, to interpret doubt as evidence of sinfulness or the result of demonic influences; if involved with an organization delivering a supposed psychological or medical therapy, as evidence of continuing illness and/or failure to progress in treatment.

Programs of coercive persuasion appear in various forms in contemporary society. They depend on the voluntary initial participation of targets. This is usually accomplished because the target assumes that there is a common goal that unites him or her with the organization or that involvement will confer some benefit (e.g., relief of symptoms, personal growth, spiritual development, etc.). Some religious organizations and social movements utilize them for recruitment purposes. In some instances, reform programs appear to have been operated for the sole purpose of gaining a high degree of control over individuals to facilitate their exploitation (Ofshe 1986; McGuire and Norton 1988; Watkins 1980).

The manipulative techniques of self-styled messiahs, such as People's Temple leader Jim Jones (Reiterman 1982), and influence programs operated by religious organizations, such as the Unification Church (Taylor 1978) and Scientology (Wallis 1977; Bainbridge and Stark 1980), can be analyzed as thought-reform programs. The most controversial recruitment system operated by a religious organization in recent American history was that of the Northern California branch of the Unification Church (Reverend Mr. Moon's organization).

The influence program was built directly from procedures of psychological manipulation that were commonplace in the human-potential movement (Bromley and Shupe 1981). The procedures involved various group-based exercises as well as events designed to elicit from participant's information about their emotional needs and vulnerabilities. Blended into this program was content intended slowly to introduce the newcomer to the group's ideology. Typically, the program's connection with the Unification Church or any religious mission was denied during the early stages of the reform process. The target was monitored around the clock and prevented from communicating with peers who might reinforce doubt and support a desire to leave. The physical setting was an isolated rural facility far from public transportation.

Initial focus on personal failures, guilt-laden memories, and unfulfilled aspirations shifted to the opportunity to realize infantile desires and idealistic goals, by affiliating with the group and its mission to save the world. The person was encouraged to develop strong affective bonds with current members. They showed unflinching interest, affection, and concern, sometimes to the point of spoon-feeding the person's meals and accompanying the individual everywhere, including to the toilet. If the unfreezing and change phases of the program succeeded, the individual was told of the group's affiliation with the Unification Church and assigned to another unit of the organization within which re-freezing procedures could be carried forward.

– CULT AWARENESS NETWORK

**Review: What is “spiritual abuse”?**  
**2 definitions:**

**“misuse of a position of power, leadership, or influence to further the selfish interests of someone other than the individual who needs help.”**

**“the manipulation and exploitation of others by the misuse of spiritual privilege and power.”**

Part II of the series focused on the abuser, but this one focuses on the abused.



There may be many reasons why people become members of an abusive religious structure. However, one main reason, and certainly a common compounding problem, is

## **Religious Addiction**

### **Addiction**

1. Addiction is a **PROCESS** not a state of being.
2. Addiction is a process or method of avoiding pain through substitution
3. Process involves: (a) Experience of emotional pain, (b) Desire to avoid emotional pain, (c) Act out with a substitute behavior that relieves the pain for awhile, and (d) Return of pain... often with the addition of remorse.

**“Addiction to religion occurs when the focus is taken off of God, and emotional priority is given to people or programs. The spiritual addict then uses religious ritual and emotional manipulation as the object or experience to produce a change in mood. The difference is that in true worship, our varied emotions and intellectual response is to the presence of God as facilitated by the forms of worship. In religious addiction, the primary goal is to obtain some type of emotional encounter.”** <Martin, pg. 133-134>



## NOTE

1. While the process of addiction may appear to be a cycle, it tends to be more like a spiral... spiralling toward a destructive end.
2. The destructive cycle comes from the fact that the original emotional pain is not dealt with, and the addict builds a tolerance making it more and more difficult for the substituted behavior to provide the needed relief.

“A cue to religious activity being addictive is that persistent and continued use brings about negative and destructive consequences.” <Martin, 134>

Negative consequences include

- Family disunity
- Church disunity
- Leader upheld rather than God
- Material wealth amassed for personal, not Kingdom, use
- Damaged emotional/spiritual well-being



## Characteristics of the Process of Religious Addiction?

### **#1. High emotional susceptibility.**

Individuals susceptible to the addiction tend to react quickly to feelings. They are not prone to analyze the validity or relevance of their feelings.

## Characteristics of the Process of Religious Addiction?

**#2. Blind Belief.** Individuals susceptible to the addiction may be intelligent, but are unhealthfully trusting.

Often there is the belief that faith is an absence of doubt, rather than trusting (a cognitive, emotional, and volitional process) in what is true and good. (Note Hebrews 5:14)

## Characteristics of the Process of Religious Addiction?

**#3. Black-and-White Thinking.** Addicts tend to categorize ideas, values, preferences and people into COMPLETELY GOOD and COMPLETELY BAD categories.

“If you are not for us, you are against us.”  
“Small differences are BIG.”



## Stages of Religious Addiction

Recalling that addiction is a process (a spiraling degenerative process) what are the major stages?

### **Stage #1. Intoxicating Religious Experience.**

There is a Euphoria at this stage. Much of the rest of the addictive process is a seeking to restore this "honeymoon" period.

Somewhere in this stage, the experience and the feelings take priority over God.

## Stages of Religious Addiction

**Stage #2. Loss of Control.** There is a gradual loss in ability to control when a behavioral pattern is started or stopped.

The family and friends begin to sense problems. There is also a "spiritual deadening" as repeated rituals take precedence while the fruit of the spirit is lacking or shallow.

Usually the person hands more and more power over to a leader. Increasing focus is given to a specific belief, doctrine, or to the personality of the leader.

## Stages of Religious Addiction

**Stage #3. Life Breakdown.** The activities that had been sustaining the addict are now losing their mood altering effects. But the addict is still afraid to withdraw. The reason is, in part, fear of the effects of withdrawal.

The addiction is now having adverse effects at work and at home. Irrational (even immoral or criminal) thoughts may now be attributed to coming from God. Extreme suspicion and secretive behavior becomes evident.

Violation of prior moral codes may now occur while resisting/rejecting outside accountability for behavior.



## Types of Host and Parasite Dynamic

**Commensalism** is a form of symbiosis where only one species is benefiting from the interactions between species & the other is neither helped nor harmed from interaction. Ectosymbiotic commensalistic behavior is found frequently in organisms that attach themselves to larger species in order to move long distances or scavenge food easily.

**Mutualism** is a form of ectosymbiosis where both the host and parasitic species benefit from the interaction. There are many examples of mutualistic ectosymbiosis that occur in nature. Groups of organisms, that is greater than a single pair of a host and parasite, can also form mutualistic ectosymbiotic interactions. Mutualist interactions can be unstable because of the constant battle to maximize one's self-benefits. This is due to the limited benefits offered to both the parasite and the host, with the possible outcome for at least one of the species to die out if the other species begins to take advantage of the other. In the case that the mutualistic behavior persists for enough generations, the dynamic can evolve into parasitism, which is a more stable dynamic due to the increased benefit to the parasite that propagates the behavior. In this case the parasite takes advantage of the previously mutualistic host and parasite dynamic, gaining greater benefits for itself.

**Parasitism** is a form of symbiosis in which one species benefits from the interactions between species while the other organism is actively harmed. This is the most common form of ectosymbiotic interactions.

# Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism

By Robert Jay Lifton, M.D.

## **Milieu Control**

The most basic feature of the thought reform environment, the psychological current upon which all else depends, is the control of human communication. Through this milieu control the totalist environment seeks to establish domain over not only the individual's communication with the outside (all that he sees and hears, reads or writes, experiences, and expresses), but also - in its penetration of his inner life - over what we may speak of as his communication with himself

## **Mystical Manipulation**

The inevitable next step after milieu control is extensive personal manipulation. This manipulation assumes a no-holds-barred character, and uses every possible device at the milieu's command, no matter how bizarre or painful. Initiated from above, it seeks to provoke specific patterns of behavior and emotion in such a way that these will appear to have arisen spontaneously, directed as it is by an ostensibly omniscient group, must assume, for the manipulated, a near-mystical quality.

## **The Demand for Purity**

In the thought reform milieu, as in all situations of ideological totalism, the experiential world is sharply divided into the pure and the impure, into the absolutely good and the absolutely evil. The good and the pure are of course those ideas, feelings, and actions which are consistent with the totalist ideology and policy; anything else is apt to be relegated to the bad and the impure. Nothing human is immune from the flood of stern moral judgments. All "taints" and "poisons" which contribute to the existing state of impurity must be searched out and eliminated.

The philosophical assumption underlying this demand is that absolute purity is attainable, and that anything done to anyone in the name of this purity is ultimately moral. In actual practice, however, no one is really expected to achieve such perfection. Nor can this paradox be dismissed as merely a means of establishing a high standard to which all can aspire. Thought reform bears witness to its more malignant consequences: for by defining and manipulating the criteria of purity, and then by conducting an all-out war upon impurity, the ideological totalists create a **narrow world of guilt and shame**. This is perpetuated by an ethos of continuous reform, a demand that one strive permanently and painfully for something which not only does not exist but is in fact alien to the human condition. The individual thus comes to apply the same totalist polarization of good and evil to his judgments of his own character: he tends to imbue certain aspects of himself with excessive virtue, and condemn even more excessively other personal qualities - all according to their ideological standing. He must also look upon his impurities as originating from outside influences - that is, from the ever-threatening world beyond the closed, totalist ken.

## The Cult of Confession

Closely related to the demand for absolute purity is an obsession with personal confession. There is the demand that one confess to crimes one has not committed, to sinfulness that is artificially induced, in the name of a cure that is arbitrarily imposed. Such demands are made possible not only by the ubiquitous human tendencies toward guilt and shame but also by the need to give expression to these tendencies. In totalist hands, confession becomes a means of exploiting, rather than offering solace for, these vulnerabilities.

Private ownership of the mind and its products - of imagination or memory - becomes highly immoral. The accompanying rationale (or rationalization) is familiar, the milieu has attained such a perfect state of enlightenment that any individual retention of ideas or emotions has become anachronistic.

In this sense, the cult of confession has effects quite the reverse of its ideal of total exposure: rather than eliminating personal secrets, it increases and intensifies them. The totalist milieu makes contact with these inner pressures through its own obsession with the expose and the unmasking process. Each person becomes caught up in a continuous conflict over which secrets to preserve and which to surrender, over ways to reveal lesser secrets in order to protect more important ones; boundaries between the secret and the known, between the public and the private, become blurred.

Finally, the cult of confession makes it virtually impossible to attain a reasonable balance between worth and humility. The enthusiastic and aggressive perpetual confession is means of judging others... "the more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you."

## The "Sacred Science"

The totalist milieu maintains an aura of sacredness around its basic dogma, holding it out as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence. This sacredness is evident in the prohibition (whether or not explicit) against the questioning of basic assumptions, and in the reverence which is demanded for the originators of the Word, the present bearers of the Word, and the Word itself. While thus transcending ordinary concerns of logic, however, the milieu at the same time makes an exaggerated claim of airtight logic, of absolute "scientific" precision. Thus, the ultimate moral vision becomes an ultimate science; and the man who dares to criticize it, or to harbor even unspoken alternative ideas, becomes not only immoral and irreverent, but also "unscientific." .

## Loading the Language

The language of the totalist environment is characterized by the **thought-terminating cliché**. The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed. These become the start and finish of any ideological analysis. Totalist language then, is repetitiously centered on all-encompassing jargon, prematurely abstract, highly categorical, relentlessly judging, and to anyone but its most devoted advocate, deadly dull: in Lionel Trilling's phrase, "the language of nonthought."



To be sure, this kind of language exists to some degree within any cultural or organizational group, and all systems of belief depend upon it. It is in part an expression of unity and exclusiveness: as Edward Sapir put it, "'He talks like us' is equivalent to saying 'He is one of us.'" The loading is much more extreme in ideological totalism, however, since the jargon expresses the claimed certitudes of the sacred science. Also involved is an underlying assumption that language - like all other human products - can be owned and operated by the Movement. No compunctions are felt about manipulating or loading it in any fashion; the only consideration is its usefulness to the cause.

For an individual person, the effect of the language of ideological totalism can be summed up in one word: **constriction**. He is, so to speak, linguistically deprived; and since language is so central to all human experience, his capacities for thinking and feeling are immensely narrowed.

### **Doctrine Over Person**

This sterile language reflects characteristic feature of ideological totalism: the subordination of human experience to the claims of doctrine. This primacy of doctrine over person is evident in the continual shift between experience itself and the highly abstract interpretation of such experience - between genuine feelings and spurious cataloguing of feelings. It has much to do with the peculiar aura of **half-reality** which totalist environment seems, at least to the outsider, to possess.

### **The Dispensing of Existence**

The totalist environment draws a sharp line between those whose right to existence can be recognized, and those who possess no such right. Are not men presumptuous to appoint themselves the dispensers of human existence? Surely this is a flagrant expression of what the Greeks called hubris, of arrogant man making himself God. Yet one underlying assumption makes this arrogance mandatory: the conviction that there is just one path to true existence, just one valid mode of being, and that all others are perforce invalid and false. Totalists thus feel themselves compelled to destroy all possibilities of false existence as a means of furthering the great plan of true existence to which they are committed.

For the individual, the polar emotional conflict is the ultimate existential one of "being versus nothingness." He is likely to be drawn to a conversion experience, which he sees as the only means of attaining a path of existence for the future. The totalist environment - even when it does not resort to physical abuse - thus stimulates in everyone a fear of extinction or annihilation. A person can overcome this fear and find (in Martin Buber's term) "confirmation," not in his individual relationships, but only from the fount of all existence, the totalist Organization. Existence comes to depend upon creed (I believe, therefore I am), upon submission (I obey, therefore I am) and beyond these, upon a sense of total merger with the ideological movement. Ultimately of course one compromises and combines the totalist "confirmation" with independent elements of personal identity; but one is ever made aware that, should he stray too far along this "erroneous path," his right to existence may be withdrawn.

## 4. Results of toxic faith

**Can be disastrous!** Proverbs 14:12

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”



So what we believe really matters:

**The content of faith is important!**

1 Cor. 15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you ... that Christ died for our sins ... 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day....



How do we correct this?

**We must practice Phil. 4:8,9**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things. 9 ~~Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice.~~ And the God of peace will be with you

" Jesus Himself referred to these toxins as 'the leaven of the Pharisees'" (Luke 12:1, NASB). He told us that the Pharisees' brand of religion, which looked good on the outside, was deadly—and contagious."

**THE PARASITIC SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN COERCIVE PERSUASION & RELIGIOUS ADDICTION**

## CO-DEPENDENCY INDICATORS:





- 
- early verbal and/or physical dominance,
  - isolation/imprisonment
  - fear arousal and maintenance
  - guilt induction
  - contingent expressions of "love"
  - enforced loyalty to the aggressor and self-denunciation
  - promotion of powerlessness and helplessness
  - pathological expressions of jealousy
  - hope-instilling behaviors
  - required secrecy

**WHAT CHARACTERIZES Spiritually Abusive Leaders?** While some religious groups are free of abuse, others are occasionally abusive, and still others intensely abusive. The people especially vulnerable to systemic spiritual abuse belong to groups where all the power is at the top and average members are subject to the dictates of those over them. Therefore, the structure of a religious organization is of paramount importance in identifying the probability of spiritual abuse. The apostle Peter reflected the heart of humility vital for every spiritual leader when he said ... “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1–3)

### **Spiritually Abusive Leaders Are ...**

**Authoritarian...** Implying that God communicates with His people only through a hierarchy of power. Claiming to have been called and established by God Himself - Boasting that the leaders speak for God and expecting followers to support and obey them without question. But the Bible says, “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

**Image-Conscious...** Seeking to present an image of perfect righteousness - Misrepresenting their personal history to wrongly portray a special relationship to God - Minimizing or covering up their mistakes and character flaws - Covering up abuse within the church. But the Bible says, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:27).

**Suppressive of Criticism...** Determining all issues at the top level of the organization and demanding compliance by the members - Curtailing individual thinking by saying that such individuality leads to division and doubts about God - Maintaining that those who question or seek to correct anything about the organization are actually challenging God's authority. But the Bible says, "A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool. ... Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 17:10; 12:1).

**Perfectionistic...** Demanding flawless obedience - Condemning failure of any type or magnitude -Promoting pride, elitism, and arrogance. But the Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

**Unbalanced...** Flaunting their distinctiveness to validate their claim of having a "special" relationship with God - Carrying biblical law to the extreme - Majoring on the minor issues. But the Bible says, "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone" (Luke 11:42).

**Coercive...** Using any tactic available to convince followers to disregard their own logic and do what the leaders demand - Demanding submission by claiming that the messages they receive come directly from God - Deluding members by presenting themselves as the only ones who can properly interpret God's Word to the people. But the Bible says, "They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm" (1 Timothy 1:7).

**Intimidating...** Threatening members routinely with punishment or excommunication in order to gain compliance - Holding the possibility of eternal condemnation over the heads of followers in order to force submission - Predicting financial ruin or physical calamity for disobedient members in order to assure obedience. But the Bible says, "Woe to you shepherds ... who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock" (Ezekiel 34:2-3).



**Terrorizing...** Imparting fear, shame, self-doubt, identity confusion, and guilt to members - Blaming problems within the organization on the sinfulness of the congregation - Overemphasizing the problems of followers and presenting strict obedience as the only solution. But the Bible says, “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally” (Ezekiel 34:4).

**Condemning...** Heaping condemnation on outsiders and anyone who leaves the congregation - Teaching that followers will join the ranks of the condemned if they deviate from the teachings of the leaders - Scapegoating individual members for failures within the organization. But the Bible says, “How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:4).

**Discriminating...** Promoting church hierarchy - Responding to people according to their titles and roles - Instructing average members that their needs are less important than the needs of the leaders. But the Bible says, “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets” (Luke 20:46).

**Legalistic...** Communicating that approval and acceptance are based on performance and position within the organization - Burdening the people with excessive demands supposedly given by God directly to the leaders - Expecting members to make extreme sacrifices of money, time, and energy for the sake of the organization. But the Bible says, “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees ... ” (Isaiah 10:1).

**Isolating...** Defining relationships outside the congregation as negative and destructive - Presenting the outside world as a place of egregious sin and temptation without any redeeming qualities - Encouraging members to minimize or discontinue contact with family, friends, and the outside world. But the Bible says, “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).



## TOXICITY MATHEMATICS:

- + They add to God's Word
- They subtract from Deity
- X They multiply with Tenet
- ÷ They divide at loyalty

## *The New Testament Model for Congregational Eldership is Servant Leadership*

### Church Leaders: Be a Servant

Category: *Leader Qualities*

Servanthood requires the right attitudes and ambitions, not merely the right actions. Playing the part eventually shows itself. Leaders must serve from the inside out. Servanthood begins in the heart.

#### The Right Attitude

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:5-8)*

You need a Christ-like attitude to be a servant. Jesus became God in the flesh so He could serve us. -- *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." (Matt. 20:28)*

Jesus willingly submitted to the will of the Father to sacrificially lay down His life .... the ultimate in servanthood.

You need a **humble heart** willing to submit.  
You must rid yourself of pride that can so quickly settle in the hearts of leaders.

Leaders, think on these questions:

- What kind of entitlement issues might you be holding onto that prevent you from truly serving others?
- How much is your self-esteem wrapped up in your status or position as a leader?
- How far are you willing to go in serving the people in your sphere of influence?

#### The Right Ambitions

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Gal. 5:13)*



*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? (Matt. 5:44-46)*

You are there to serve people, not yourself. People matter more than programs, agendas, etc. It's not about getting your way but rather what is for the good of everyone.

You are there to serve people by building them up, expressing appreciation and encouragement. It's not about manipulating them with praise to gain their cooperation but rather genuinely seeking to edify others in all you say and do.

You are there to serve all kinds of people, even the unlovable, highly critical, disloyal... It's not about what makes you feel good or affirmed but rather loving as Christ served.

You need a **grace-filled heart of love** that genuinely cares for and values people. You must rid yourself of personal prejudices and be willing to step out of your comfort zone for others.

Leaders, think on these questions:

- What motivates you as a leader?
- How purposeful are you at acknowledging people in your care?
- How do you treat people that get in your way or seem to oppose you?

## The Right Actions

*Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Lk. 22:25-27)*

*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:2-3)*

A servant is **not stifling** by a need to maintain control but rather open to the contributions of others . . . does not lord it over.

A servant is **not self-serving** but rather selflessly yielding to the opinions of others and not always having to take the credit for what is done . . . does not consider oneself the benefactor.

A servant is **not superior** but rather meek not feeling it beneath themselves to do menial task or that which someone in a "lesser" position might do . . . does not have to act like the greatest or the one who rules.

A servant is **not stingy** but rather giving of their time and resources to people . . . does not give begrudgingly or with thought of return.

Acting this way as a leader does not mean you become a doormat, allowing people to take advantage of you. For the sake of your health and God-given responsibilities (i.e., family, spouse), you may need to set some boundaries. -- *"If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:5)*

Being a servant leader does not mean letting everybody simply "do what is right in their own eyes" as that would only lead to troubles and chaos. Parameters must be provided that work toward the good of the whole and glory to God. We do not serve by seeking to please people but rather God who is the One to whom we are ultimately accountable. - *Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Gal. 1:10)*

Leaders, think on these questions:

- Are you letting others take some initiative, within parameters, or do you feel the need to micro-manage?
- Are you getting others involved in the process or do you feel you know best or need to do it yourself so it is done your way?
- Are you associating and serving alongside of others regardless of their position or status or do you stick with those on par with you?
- Are you truly glad to assist others or do you expect them to do something for you in return?

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## **Servant Leadership is exercising real, godly leadership!**

- It is as Christ did when He used a towel, and influencing, equipping, and empowering people to accomplish God's purpose and plan. It is serving others unselfishly while influencing and empowering them to grow in a Christ-directed, purposeful direction. This was an uncommon trait in Jesus' time, just as it is in ours; do not let it be uncommon for you! Being a leader in the church, or in the home for a husband, is never a force of personality; it is earning that respect because you love and care (1 Kings 3:9; Luke 22:25-28; Matthew 25:21; Mark 9:33-37; John 5:19; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 13:17)

## **Real Biblical leadership for the church is never a force of Will or personality.**

- Leadership embodies the fruit and character of our Lord. It requires being a servant before you attempt to direct others. If a leader just directs and never serves, there is a good chance he is not a real leader; rather, he is a pretender, exercising his agenda—not God's call and Will.



## **Servant Leadership Principles**

- Servant Leaders are not weak--they are meek (strength under control)!

Be willing to challenge the system, ask questions, take risks, and, when necessary, be willing to change.

## **A Profile of a Servant Leader**

- Servant Leaders are not willing to compromise truth or the Word just to be more effective!

## **Servant Leadership Principles**

- Servant Leaders listen to everyone, not just the ones in power or ones who have the influence!

# JAMIES 1

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.