

Have You Seen What We've Seen? (Observation 7)

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

In this Teaching Email we want to give you some insight into “**cultish subjugation.**” You may be surprised to learn that cultish subjugation exists *within Christianity* as well as outside it — and this type of bondage is escalating rapidly in the number of people who are entangled in it. Don't brush this aside too quickly. When people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit refrain from hearing Him or are still beset by undemolished strongholds which adversely influence their walk in Jesus, they become very susceptible to cultish subjugation as manifested by **personality cults** and/or a **pack mentality**.

A **personality cult** is made up of people whose excessive admiration for a particular person empowers that individual to play a significant part in their life decisions and actions. For instance, religious and political leaders who hunger for public admiration and/or autocratic control actively work toward building and galvanizing a devoted following. These individuals rely on *propaganda* — biased and misleading information designed to manipulate people into a very favorable impression of them. Their propaganda is spread through a variety of ways: •via mass media; •larger-than-life portrayals of themselves; •a call to patriotism or to personal devotion to themselves; •rallies which create an idealized and often “champion of the people” impression. But beware! Behind the charisma and magnetic appeal, their goal is not only admiration and domination. They demand *unquestioning loyalty* to them. We mean UNQUESTIONING!

Mike: During my years of counseling religious leaders in the past, I encountered a number of personality cults which certain clergy had built up around themselves. In each instance the individual had established such a strong personality cult that he couldn't be brought to repentance or removed from his position. On one occasion the “lay” leadership of a congregation asked me for guidance in confronting the ongoing adultery of their clergyman. They had already followed the first two steps of Matthew 18:15-17 — speaking to him one-on-one, and then three others confronting him. Yet he still refused to repent or stop his adulterous affair. So the leaders took the next step, bringing the situation before the congregation. And the result? The congregation had become so deeply enthralled in the personality cult toward the clergyman that they voted to keep him as their pastor, condoning his adultery. The leaders and their families, along with the righteous who refused to be part of this immorality and defiance of God's Word, were forced to flee.

This wasn't an isolated situation. The lay leadership of a faith community in the largest Protestant denomination asked me for guidance. When they privately confronted their clergyman who was committing adultery, the denomination's leadership stepped in and ordered the lay leaders to back down. Their words were, “Who are you to question *a man of God*?” Again, the leadership and their families as well as the rest of the righteous in the congregation left.

In yet another congregation the control and domination of the clergy was so formidable that during each service he made the congregants approach him on their knees to put their tithe in his lap. And the people willingly and adoringly did this without objection!



And lest you doubt that a personality cult within a “church setting” could get any worse, here’s an example which truly shocked and grieved me. One of the leaders of a well-known congregation came to me distraught with guilt. The Jesus-honoring men of character and their families were leaving in droves, and this man knew why. The pastor was not only regularly embezzling from the offerings; something far darker was taking place which he refrained from telling me.

The Holy Spirit wouldn’t let me rest until I pursued this matter thoroughly. How could this one clergyman exercise such control over his flock? The answer came from a number of men who just couldn’t live with their silence and complicity any longer. The pastor was using his teenage daughters to fornicate with the men of the congregation, all the while allaying any concern that they were in sin!

It’s important to note that personality cults often continue because the person the cult is wrapped around incites fear in anyone who might get on their wrong side. The person in control may use ridicule or the threat of ostracism to maintain their dominance. And no one wants to confront this dominant individual because he or she might then *incite the others* who toe the line to slander or exclude the confronter. We call this **“bullying!”** And it takes place in all too many families.

For example, while Mike was growing up he had an aunt who habitually made herself the dominating center of attention. She kept her dominant role through intimidating the other women in his family, and none of them dared to confront her. Nor did any of the men either. They kept silent because her own husband refused to “reel her in.”

Fast forward years later when we came back from Israel. We were staying with Mike’s mom for a time, and she was *still* living intimidated by this aunt. It broke Mike’s heart to see Mom living in the sinister shadow of this overbearing woman, so we prayed for the Spirit’s guidance. Soon afterward his relatives were having a large picnic. Now, Mom had made plans to go on a bus trip that day with her friends. But that morning she was frantically scurrying around the kitchen frustrated. When Mike asked her what she was doing she responded, “I’ve got to make this potato salad for the picnic before I leave on the bus!” Mike knew she wasn’t going to the picnic, so he asked, “Why?” Mom answered with anxiety, “Because I’ll never be able to live with what your Aunt **** will say about me to the others if I don’t!”

Mike took the bowl from Mom, and as only a son who loved his mother could do, told her decisively, “You’re *not* going to make the potato salad. Get ready for your trip and enjoy yourself.” Peace fell over Mom’s face because she finally realized she didn’t have to kowtow to her sister-in-law. And because Mike had loved her enough to step in and lovingly take action, in the years that followed, she always sought out Mike for his guidance on important issues in her life.

Let’s look at another form of cultish subjugation: the ever-increasing number of people both within and outside Christendom who are ensnared in a **pack mentality**. A pack mentality is a relational ugliness in which people are influenced and controlled by the actions or opinions of others. This is also called **“mob mentality”** or **“gang mentality.”** ***If*** you’re *within* the pack, you play along with everyone else, or else you risk ridicule or ostracism. ***If*** you’re *outside* the pack, you’re demeaned or shamed by the rest so that

pack cohesion can be maintained. Pack mentality within families, workplaces, and even in faith communities often has a clear and identifiable pecking order. You just need to pinpoint the person or persons whom the pack fears getting on the wrong side of.

Why is a pack mentality so common? No one has to tell you that we humans have been created to be inherently social. Deep inside, everyone wants to be loved, understood and accepted by others. And a pack mentality is ripe for development if there's *no set of standards* in a group environment, like Matthew 7:12, "***In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.***" The further away a group gets from this key biblical character trait that binds together healthy group relationships, the more of what is known as "**grouphink**" takes control. Everyone just goes along with the others no matter how much harm they cause. Individuals lose their own personal moral compass and cave in to grouphink.

Grouphink, like the personality cult, suppresses personal responsibility. It's more common than you may think. Keep your eye out for this: Propelled by their propaganda on social media, those who are intentionally seeking control and/or acclaim in the political/religious arena purposely develop grouphink among their adherents — and its goal is **blind loyalty** with **no questions asked!**

Mike: I was given a prophetic gift by the Holy Spirit when I became a follower of my Lord Jesus. I was warned by more mature prophets about the backlash I'd face in being used this way by our Lord, "*For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*" (Revelation 19:10). In agreement with the Holy Spirit I requested that I be the shield for Sue from the backlash of my gifting; I wanted to make myself the only target. Over the years, when people have gotten close to me I've often told them of a particular "reward" a person who receives a prophet might expect (Matthew 10:41) — that they too would be bad-mouthed. I mentioned this to them because I wanted to discern if they'd become a "Judas" in response to *grouphink*, whether it took place among my relatives (Mark 6:4) or with other acquaintances. And as a husband, I was really devastated when people got past me to hurt Sue.

I'm in good company in regard to being a recipient of grouphink backlash, because the apostles Paul and John have seen what I've seen of it (2Timothy 4:10; 1Timothy 1:20; 1John 2:19). There's an essential response our Lord Jesus calls us to have in the face of relational betrayal, a response which follows in His steps. When we were being betrayed, our Lord taught us to cry out for His **love, forgiveness** and **compassion**. That's His call for you too in those situations. (Please read: *Do You Mirror Christ-likeness or the Judas Identity?* <<https://restorationministries.org/download/31.lesson31.pdf>>)

Bullying is when someone speaks disparaging to intimidate and have power over another person's feelings.



Grouphink is when everyone just goes along no matter how much harm they cause.

“Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What! Were you all not able to watch with Me [support Me] for one hour?’”
(Matthew 26:40).

Related to our discussion of **grouphink**, a younger Native American friend told us the story behind a hunting rifle he owned. His uncle had been a Marine serving in combat in Vietnam. Coming home on leave to his clan, he spent a lot of time in serious discussions with the men, none of whom had served in the military. The day before he was to go back to a second tour in Vietnam, an assignment he’d volunteered for, he reproached them about their useless conversations that didn’t benefit their people at all. These guys enjoyed their conveniences and sacrificed nothing on behalf of others. Before he left, the saddened Marine gave his treasured hunting rifle to our friend. It was almost as if he knew he wasn’t coming back. He was killed during combat.

Mike: Even within the military you can face **uncaring grouphink**. My flight crew often experienced this when we flew back to our ship after dangerous missions. The shipboard personnel who stayed safely behind could clearly see the stress our faces still showed. But none of the ship’s crew ever cared to ask us about what we’d been through. **Shut up and buck up** is the loud scream of grouphink. So my crew had to be our own mutual encouragement.

It’s not just people who’ve been to war who return to their family and find themselves greatly disheartened by the apparent disinterest or lack of care about what they’ve been through. Many in Christianity have had to face the same response of **self-absorbed grouphink**. Deep dismay permeates anyone who has sacrificed themselves on behalf of others in locations that are away from the grouphink of family, faith family, or even co-workers at a ministry home office. Missionaries who’ve sacrificed on the mission field and then return to their relatives, their home office, or to congregations they have to visit to solicit funding, find themselves disheartened by the grouphink-supported personal self-indulgence and appetite for leisure and recreation that they encounter.

All around us, fire fighters and police as well as many in the medical community on the front lines of this pandemic find themselves saddened and even irate about the lack of concern for the well-being of others that’s evidenced in **demon-directed, nationwide grouphink**. And, if there has been an unhinged leader at the top of a political personality cult, it makes the sacrifice of these frontline workers that much more unbearable. We mention this last observation especially for **grouphinking Evangelical Republicans** who are inconceivably deceived that everything going on is either a hoax or a conspiracy. Please listen up. Fat-cat, multimillionaire religious leaders who verbally condoned an assault on our nation’s capital, and leaders who never risked their life in battle for this nation, have influenced the hearts of too many who call themselves “born again!” By the refusal of the deceived to cooperate for the good of all, we today in this land have suffered 37,469,989 Coronavirus cases and 637,572 deaths. Being “Evangelical” and “Republican” has come to represent those who hate Jesus by their own hatred of anyone who thinks differently than their grouphink.

You who call yourselves “Evangelical Republicans” have crossed the line of Matthew 7:12 and 22:37-40. You’ve repudiated our Lord’s own commands, commands upon which all the Law and the Prophets hang and upon which your faith must be founded. Your very words and deeds publicly defame Jesus because your actions speak against His Spirit (Matthew 12:32).

This is a sobering reality. Without the Spirit of our Lord Jesus you have no **love, forgiveness or compassion**. Where do you think your Christ-denying way of life leaves you, no matter what pandering religious leaders falsely assert? They won’t be your judge. But the One you defame will judge you because “[you] are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:6). In order for you to be brought to repentance, we’d agree that each of you be “handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that [your] spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus” (1Corinthians 5:5).

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

This character trait of treating others the way you want them to treat you is commanded by our Lord Jesus. It’s generally called the “**Golden Rule**,” and it promotes *healthy relational cohesiveness* that’s built on individual responsibility and deep regard for one another (Philippians 2:3,4). It’s within your relationships that the Holy Spirit develops these essential character qualities of Jesus: **love, forgiveness and compassion**. In Observation 5 we wrote that the Holy Spirit is THE indwelling Spirit of truth. His presence within you, **if** you seek to hear Him, will not let you succumb to personality cults or groupthink. Secular studies have shown that just *two people standing together* in opposing either a personality cult or groupthink have an 80% chance to break the bondage. And this emancipation happens even to those *without* the Holy Spirit!

If you do have the Holy Spirit abiding in you, you need to take your stand against personality cults and groupthink. You *will* face backlash if you confront the cult and/or the pack. But know that the cult, the pack and the bullying will continue if you do nothing. So, what are you going to do – silently let it go on, or confront it? Anchor this biblical pattern for yourself so that our Lord will stand with you in your determined actions:

- Start by praying for **rhema** from the Holy Spirit, both through His inspiration in God’s Word and/or through gifts such as prophecy, wisdom and knowledge.
- Next, confirm by two or three others the specific steps you will take to confront the unrighteousness (Ecclesiastes 4:12).
- And, when you do confront the personality cult or pack mentality, you and your fellow witnesses must prepare yourselves in the **love, forgiveness and compassion** of Jesus to face the backlash. That’s so none of you turns cowardly when you need to stand together in righteousness: “*If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all*” (Isaiah 7:9).

If you are to be counted as an authentic brother or sister in Christ, then Jesus must be your LORD and Master! Be firmly anchored in and guided by His indwelling Spirit – continually mindful that you are beloved slave/servants of the One Who purchased you. His Lordship and His indwelling Spirit are the only way you can expect victory in overcoming the demonic forces behind the personality cult and/or groupthink.

Some final reminders for you who are indwelled by the Lord's Spirit and are resolved to confront a personality cult or groupthink.

It's crucial that you recognize that our Lord didn't do away with the commands of God that apply to our relationship with Him or in how we should relate to each other. The laws which apply to the Levitical priesthood and the Temple worship are no longer relevant since Jesus is THE only everlasting High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11,17), and we who love and serve Him as Lord and Savior are the temple of His Spirit (1Corinthians 3:17,6:19).

Do you need to once and for all put a stake in the ground as to Who Jesus really is in your life? Our Lord tells Peter, *"on this rock I will build My church [My collective called-out ones], and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it [My called-out ones]"* (Matthew 16:18). Here **He is speaking of Peter's declaration of Jesus being the Messiah, the Son of the Living God as the rock of Father's revelation to him.** Jesus is the Rock behind the "rock" of the declaration (see Genesis 49:24; Psalm 95:1). Upon that foundational rock of trust in Him, Jesus would build His called-out ones to coordinate together and combat and overcome the forces of Satan.

"[Jesus] is the Head of the body, the church [the called-out ones], Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

"From [Jesus] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16).

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call'" (Acts 2:39; see also John 7:38,39).

It's the presence of the Spirit of our Lord within His collective called-out ones that enables the Kingdom to advance by confronting the demonic forces, including those behind personality cults and groupthink. If you are to fight effectively with the Lord Himself standing with you, you must *mutually* seek His Spirit's **rhema** as to what to do and what to avoid:

"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:18-20).

Our Lord's **love, forgiveness** and **compassion** will enable you to confront and to succeed. Don't deny His power to work through you!

Mike & Sue