

CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUALLY ABUSIVE SYSTEMS

- 1) **POWER-POSTURING** simply means that the leaders spend a lot of time focused on their own authority and reminding others of it, as well. This is necessary because their spiritual authority isn't real-based on genuine Godly character-it is postured.
- 2) **PERFORMANCE PREOCCUPATION.** These systems are preoccupied with the performance of their members, and their authority is legislated. *Obedience and Submission* are two important words often used.
- 3) **UNSPOKEN RULES.** In abusive spiritual systems, people's lives are controlled from the outside in by rules, spoken and unspoken. Because these rules are not said out loud, you don't find out that they are there until you break them. The most powerful of all unspoken rules is the "can't talk" rule, which means if you speak about the problem out loud, *you are the problem*. This rule blames the person who talks, and the ensuing punishments pressure questioners into silence.
- 4) **LACK OF BALANCE IN LIVING OUT THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.** This characteristic describes either extreme objectivism or extreme subjectivism in their approaches to life. They see spiritual authority based exclusively on level of education and intellectual capacity or totally contingent on the leaders' receiving the members' truth through the Lord's spiritual revelations.
- 5) **PARANOIA.** In a place where authority is grasped and legislated, not simply demonstrated, persecution sensitivity builds a case for keeping everything within the system. This mentality builds a strong wall around the abusive system, isolates the abusers from scrutiny and accountability, and makes it more difficult for people to leave-- because they will then be outsiders too.
- 6) **MISPLACED LOYALTY** is fostered and even demanded. Here following authority is legislated by a system where disloyalty to or disagreement with the leadership is construed as the same thing as disobeying God.
- 7) **SECRETIVE.** When you see people in a religious system being secretive--watch out. People don't hide what is appropriate; they hide what is inappropriate.

When these characteristics exist in a church or Christian family system, the result will be spiritual abuse. It will be a closed system, with rigid boundaries that prevent people from leaving. There will be the perception of a lot of evil on the outside, to keep people in, and there will be a lot of power postured on the inside to compel you to perform. There will also be tired, wounded people who feel that they are either unspiritual or crazy. And they will have major problems relating to God from the heart.