
Editorials

WHAT IS BEHIND THE "ENERGIZER BUNNY" SYNDROME?

Deceivers and deception are not new. It began with Satan in the Garden in the third chapter of Genesis. And we are given ample warning about deception in the New Testament. Leonardo da Vinci said, "Many are those who trade in tricks and simulated miracles, duping the foolish multitude; and if nobody unmasked their subterfuges, they would impose them on everyone."

One thing that baffles observers of cults and false teachers is their followers' resistance to abandoning these teachers and beliefs despite overwhelming evidence of their error. These devoted followers continue like the Energizer Bunny: they just keep going and going and going. It may seem mysterious, but there's really no mystery.

The following seven things give us a framework for understanding the "Energizer Bunny" syndrome within cultism and among those with aberrational beliefs.

1. **Investment.** Investment in a false teacher will skew objectivity and impair discernment. Deception by investment — be it financial, emotional, or otherwise — is powerful. It is difficult to admit that one has committed to something false. Perhaps the devotee has alienated

family or friends. Perhaps he has given away too much financially. There is the tendency to protect oneself and not admit lapses in judgment or stupid moves. Often, when someone calls PFO's office to complain that we have been too harsh on some author or teacher, we already know there has been significant investment by the caller in that teacher or teaching.

2. **Pride.** This point dovetails with the first. When the follower has done things that are difficult to undo he is less likely to accept anything contrary to what he has committed to. Maybe he has paid a large amount to rent a bus and transport friends to a healing meeting. Admitting the error means trying to cancel a contract with the bus company, get a refund, and call off the big day. The more significant the involvement and the deeper the pride and the more difficult the undoing of actions, the less likely people are to break away. Every serious and binding action creates new ropes that secure the person to the error. Perhaps he passed out a slew of books and his only admission to all the heresy in the book is a lame, "Well, I don't agree with *everything* in the book!"

3. **An acquired support system.** It is difficult to stand alone in anything. Once a person acquires a support system, it reinforces their commitment. When everyone is saying the same thing and cheering one another on, a new dynamic takes over and one can easily fall into
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PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

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wanting to please the group and keep the cohesion going. A mob mentality can sweep people along and make them even more impervious to intrusion and truth.

4. Redefining of the evidence. This is taking facts and evidence to the contrary and turning it around into new confirmation. The false teacher is under investigation for money laundering and wire fraud. *Ignore the facts* — this is new proof of spiritual warfare and/or government and satanic persecution. The false teacher sets a date that passes with no fulfillment. *Ignore the facts* — this only means that our commitment is being tried and our faithfulness is being tested. The healing is not taking place. *Ignore the facts* — this means we are to pray harder and have more faith. Turn the evidence around. Even all the negative consequences of these denials are reinter-

preted in twisted ways. Refutation is turned into confirmation with a sleight of hand and mind and, of course, a twisted Scripture.

5. The payoff. The follower believes that he is gaining something special. Perhaps his association with the teacher gives him a vicarious standing before God. Or perhaps he gains influence, power, or control over others. Wanting that above all, he is impervious to truth, even the truth of God's Word. He wants the payoff above everything else, even if it is at great cost to himself.

6. The pain aspects. Giving up false beliefs can be very painful and almost intolerable. Some choose to stay in the error because the struggle to keep those errors is a bit easier and a bit more tolerable than the upset of walking away and making changes.

7. The fear of a vacuum. This point, connected to the point above, simply means that having to build a new

life is hard. It is often easier to tolerate what is familiar than to try to build a new life with new constructs. The fear will be directly related to the number of hours, days, weeks, months, and even years of commitment to things that were false. Endless hours must now be channeled into a new way of living and thinking.

New social structures must be built and new friends acquired. It's hard work! Many things will have to be "put off" so new biblical thoughts and ways can be "put on." Some are not willing to face that. It has been observed that "some would rather stay in hell because they know the names of the streets."

Error and deception bring heavy consequences and a high price. Deception sets up traceable mechanisms that can be examined. The way out is going to have to be biblical and based on solid truth. The truth can set us free. Nothing short of renouncing the error, repenting of certain behaviors (especially leading others astray), and heartfelt commitment to new obedience to Scripture will do.

The new support system must consist of a healthy biblical church and mature believers. This also must involve the warnings to others about the false system no matter how embarrassing or difficult. Energizer bunnies need to be dismantled and given new life in Christ. God is the only one who can give us a "new heart" and give us by His grace a life motivated by truth and truth alone.

—GRF

empire in chaos over family split." The church described the discord as a "lack of shared vision" for the ministry. The younger Schuller held the host position for less than three years.

The church also has experienced serious financial difficulties. Revenue fell 27 percent between 2008 and 2009. Failure to meet its obligations to more than 100 vendors who were owed millions of dollars for work and supplies for the church's pageants also forced the church to cancel its Easter pageant this year. Schuller's church also has sold buildings and 170 acres of land it owned in Orange County, laid off employees, and cut back on the number of television stations airing its *Hour of Power* broadcast.

In June 2009, Schuller turned the leadership of the church over to his eldest daughter, Sheila Schuller Coleman. She will now become the sole lead pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, a role she shared with her father for thirteen months.

Although Schuller officially resigned, he will not be leaving the church entirely. The *Orange County Register* reported that he will assume the newly created position of chairman of the church's consistory, which is said to be the church's board of directors.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.