

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Bible Study

For Mature Christians

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This study is aimed at the mature Christian. There is nothing here that tender eyes should not read. More importantly, it contains material that mature Christians SHOULD understand. Let's get to it.

We've been watching large groups of people acting in very strange ways, lately. From the virus to riots, to getting rid of police, to changing school curriculums, to government upheaval.... We've observed a LOT of things unfolding in America that our grandparents never had to think about. Unfortunately, social change impacts the church, today, as it has since Abraham's day. Christians need to understand what is happening, and what our response as Christians must be. We need to remain true to the Gospel, and help others in our fellowship to do so. This approach is NOT new. Paul's letters focused heavily on keeping Christ the center of the Christian fellowship, especially in the face of social change and false teaching.

What we're seeing across America is called "**Mass Formation Psychosis.**" That's a mouthful, and a term that's easy to understand. It is running through our society and has begun affecting Christians. It's up to each of us to strengthen our brothers and sisters in their faith as they become anxious, confused and/or weak in their faith.

Here, we'll define mass formation psychosis; what it is, and is not. We'll look at some examples, and then, the ways God has enabled Christians to remain faithful and not get caught up in it.

Unlike 'group think,' Mass Formation Psychosis is marked by large groups behaving "hysterically." The key is hysteria, which means: "behavior exhibiting overwhelming or unmanageable fear or emotional excess." We'll look at this social phenomenon and how it can actually draw Christian individuals, and Christian organizations, into acting in ways that are not honoring to God.

By contrast, group think is; “thinking or making decisions as a group in a way that discourages creativity or individual responsibility.” In other words, group think is a large number of people just going with the crowd...like a flock of birds or school of fish. There is safety in numbers; blend in and you won't be singled out.

Mass Formation Psychosis actually causes each member of the group to become an activist! They take on the cause and become a strong adherent to it. So, let's define MFP, and start to understand it. Never forget that what affects the society ALSO affects the church!

“Mass Formation Psychosis” has three parts:

- **Mass:** a significant portion, or population...a large amount.
- **Formation:** people ‘form up,’ or become organized around a central issue.
- **Psychosis:** a person loses some contact with reality. Collectively, it means people focus on an event or leader(s) messaging aimed at a defined point...and surrounding facts, realities, etc., are ignored/rejected - (the hysterical part).

MFP In Real Life

MFP literally means; ‘A major portion of a population loses contact with reality. They focus on an event and/or leaders who command their thinking. No amount of rational thinking, facts, etc. outside their focus can be tolerated while they are experiencing the psychosis’ (hysteria).

Example: Dr. Harold Camping was a Bible expositor in the 80s & 90s who had a nationwide radio program. Callers would ask questions and he would provide explanations. Unfortunately, he believed that he could determine the timing of the return of Christ. He was able to influence a very large number of well-meaning Christians to sell off their worldly possessions and stand awaiting the precise moment at which Jesus would take them up to heaven.

These followers were so committed that they evangelized others into the same action, using Camping's teachings. Rational, Godly people tried to teach them the truth about Christ's return, but they stayed their course. It was a massive failure and Camping was shown to be the false teacher that he was.

Example: With the recent global hysteria surrounding Covid 19, many believed that masking and vaccinations were absolutely the only way of controlling the rate of infection. Many believed that those who would not quarantine, get vaccinated or wear masks were – in effect – engaging in criminal assault on those who obeyed the rules. Many businesses refused services to those not showing proof of conformity with the rules. Many confronted, or reported to authorities, the non-conformance of those who did not obey the rules.

Example: Many Christians interpreted forced masking, required vaccinations and economic coercion to be signs of the “end times.” They feared the vaccine was, literally, “the mark of the beast.” Social media exploded with Bible-based articles about the “rapture” being very close, etc. Many Christians fully believed in these explanations and they began panicking.

I’ve only used only a few examples, so I hope you get the picture. A “mass” of people “formed” around a central issue and “lost some contact with reality.” The adherents were so committed to that cause that fact and truth did not change their thinking.

Let’s Look Ahead

We have responsibility as Christians. God formed a covenant with Abraham and called his descendants to be faithful. WE are to be faithful. Paul, writing of Abraham:

Romans 4: 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

When MFP affects the church, we MUST be careful to look through the lens of God’s word. When I began hearing, reading, etc., of the numbers of Christians following the belief that the covid vaccine was the mark of the beast, I was initially accepting of the notion. However, my responsibility to apply the word of God in my life kept me from diving in. I researched the scriptures and, actually, became a bit confused. It was a disorienting time.

So, I turned to two very trusted, Bible teaching Pastors. BOTH gave me the same wisdom: ‘it only looks like the mark of the beast, but it is not. Treat it as a picture of what it will be like.’

This is so important: since I teach in the church, and write these Bible studies, I did NOT want to spread an error! I'm so glad that I sought their counsel. I was straightened out, and the truth was verified to me by the Holy Spirit. I could have led a few astray....God forbid!!

Nobody would have lost their salvation over a mistake like that, but I would have been guilty of a false teaching. I'm so thankful for those two Pastors' wisdom.

What Are We To Conclude?

The scriptures mention sheep over 500 times. The behaviors of people are compared to sheep. Leaders are compared to shepherds. How about a modern example of sheep-like behavior?

I grew up in the great state of Texas. Up until the 70s, the vast grass-covered ranches were black with Angus cattle. Twenty years later, most of the large cattle operations had been replaced by imported beef, and landowners sought ways to make a living. A trend of importing exotic animals from all over the world began and soon, you could be driving down the road viewing herds of giraffes, zebra, or wildebeast.

There is a particular deer from Japan called "Axis Deer." They are about the same size as our whitetail, but their adult coats are spotted, like the whitetail fawn. Also, both males and females grow antlers...big ones. They are a favorite of hunters, so many ranches raise herds of them. As you may guess, there are tons of Axis deer who have escaped ranches and are living wild.

The trouble is that they behave like sheep, in that they move in tight herds. If one takes off, the rest follow. If one panics, they ALL panic!

This is problematic when one decides to cross a busy road. With whitetail, one or two, may run across. In Texas, you may see the one Axis standing on the shoulder, but if he bolts, ten or twenty may follow. The carnage is often incredible.

This is an illustration of what can happen if Christians are not fully anchored in God's word. A false, or errant, teacher can lead those of weak faith or knowledge, in the wrong direction. The sheer mass of those believing the

falsehood motivates their brothers and sisters to come along. The movement of the 'crowd' causes a suspension of reality in their thinking (hysteria).

This is especially prevalent during a time of great confusion; natural disaster, war, epidemic, etc.

Isaiah 53:6 “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way...”

Paul wrote letters to the early churches warning of false teachings, modified versions of the Gospel, and other pagan practices that had crept into their midst:

Ephesians 4: 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Paul further told how the unbelief of the Jews Moses had led out of Egypt caused them to experience many hardships. He explained the consequence of weak faith and falsehood;

1 Corinthians 10: 11 Now these things (hardships) happened to them (the Jews) as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 12 So the one who thinks he is standing firm (you and me!) should be careful not to fall.

Paul urges Christians to live lives worthy of the gift of salvation. We are to be one in the Holy Spirit, and with the Lord...

Ephesians 4: 1 4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4: 11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The timing of this study is particularly important because the past two years have been wrought with radical changes in our society. It's extremely difficult to know whether you are hearing/reading opinion or fact. It's also very easy to simply accept as true anything that comes along that seems to make sense. This is only a precursor to what is yet to come. It will get worse!

2 Thessalonians 2: 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, 10 and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

As Christians, we have a duty to grow in Christ THROUGH GOD'S WORD and exercise discernment and WISDOM. We must stay close to our brothers and sisters in times of social upheaval and confusion. We must help them remain anchored in the Lord.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

God Has Given Us All We Need

As Christians, we have resources available to keep us in line with God's will. Depending on your own spiritual gifts, you may serve your fellowship more in some of these areas than others:

1. Our identity in Jesus Christ:

Galatians 2: 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2. Our assurances from God, the Father:

Malachi 3: 6 "I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. 7 Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and

I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty.

Romans 8: 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

3. The Holy Spirit intercedes, comforts and provides understanding:
Romans 8: 26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. 27 And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

4. The Word of God to us – the Bible:
2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness
Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

5. Mature Christians in our fellowship:
Philemon 1:7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.
Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.

6. Teachers and Preachers of the Word:
Psalms 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Deuteronomy 32:2 May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb.

7. Prayer:
Jeremiah 33: 3 Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.
Matthew 7: 9 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how

much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

As Christians, we have far too many resources at our disposal to follow after pagan thinking like sheep. If I had taught that the Covid vaccine is the mark of the beast, and used scripture to support it, I would HAVE NO EXCUSE! I would be worthy of judgement and embarrassment. I have a duty to stay true to the scriptures.

Had I failed to use the resources supplied to me by God's generous blessings, I would be guilty of breaking this commandment:

Exodus 20: 7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

I would be without excuse! Why? Because God has given me all that I need to stay true to His word and not blunder along using my own strength. You, reading this study, are part of the chain of resources our Christian brothers need in times of distress.

This is part of our daily walk with Jesus. We were not saved just to be a placeholder on the train to glory. The pinnacle of Christian life is not just warming a pew once a week. We were saved to spread the Gospel and to encourage others in their faith.

Mark 16:15 And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

We have no excuse for not doing that. We have no excuse for becoming prey for false teachings that come out of our social ills. We have no excuse for not encouraging and teaching our fellow Christians.

1 Corinthians 15: 58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

One last word about Mass Formation Psychosis. Look around at the numbers of Christian churches who have adopted the sins of their surroundings. I've sat in dozens of churches (funerals, weddings, musical performances, visits with family members, etc.) with crosses on their steeples in which the name of Jesus is the least uttered name of all. How were such churches transformed from the center of Christian teaching and fellowship in their day to the apostate, wayward institutions of today? It started with a mass of people who focused on a leader or movement, and lost touch with reality. No amount of Biblical influence was tolerated.

We drive by them every day. These stately church buildings that once contained dedicated Christians are now full of misguided sheep! May this NEVER happen to a fellowship of which you and I are a part.

Let us keep the word of God central in our lives and the Gospel true and pure in our hearts.

Amen.