

The Psychology and Methods of Sin ***-contrasted with-*** ***The Mindset and Fruits of the Spirit***

“The heart is deceitful above all things...who can know it?” (Jer 17:9)

“Fathers, Do Not Provoke Your Children to Wrath – More Effects of Abuse on Children”

October 3, 2010

Sermon Text: Ephesians 6:4

Scripture Reading: Deut 18

Introduction-

Newark, N.J. - An employee of the Newark PreSchool Council was stabbed to death this morning (Thursday, Sept 30 2010) after she arrived at the school on St. Francis Street, law enforcement officials said today.

Erica Ortiz Fuentes, 36, an employee of the East Ward preschool, was attacked by a man with a knife around 7 a.m. as she arrived at work, authorities said. The man has been taken into custody and authorities will announce his name shortly, according to Thomas Fennelly, Essex County Assistant Prosecutor. Fuentes had a past relationship with her attacker and he was under a restraining order,

according to two law enforcement sources who were not authorized to discuss the investigation. Fuentes had filed previous domestic abuse complaints against him, the sources said.

Newark police surrounded the building this morning and placed the man under arrest. While there were children in the building, they were never in any danger, Fennelly said.

Ephesians 6:4 ESV

(4) Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

I would like all of you to begin, if you haven't already, to take note of how often this kind of story appears in the news. And remember, this is only the extreme type of domestic violence that makes it into the news. There is a vast amount going on all around us that remains unreported and in many ways is every bit as damaging to the victims.

[Note: There is a very good survey attached which is taken from Leslie Vernick's book The Emotionally

Destructive Relationship, along with instructions for completing and interpreting it. It is designed to help identify such relationships].

The 18th chapter of Deuteronomy is just one of many places in the Old Testament Scriptures that speaks of the abominable, wicked practice of parents sacrificing their children to Molech, to Baal – most often spoke of as causing their children to “pass through the fire.” Notice here in Deut 18 that this wickedness is closely connected with Satanic practices of other types – witchcraft, sorcery, divination and so on. Therefore, let me propose this to you –

“Domestic violence, the abuse of women and children, is Satanic in origin. Provoking one’s children to anger is to hand them over to false gods. It is to sacrifice them to the evil one. It is our purpose in studying the effects of abuse upon children, to come to understand this more clearly and to see this evil for what it really is.”

Leviticus 18:21 ESV
(21) You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

Review

An abusive person is a person whose life goal is about power and control over others. He or she have the conviction that they are entitled to that control, and are justified in maintaining it through various means – abusive means. While we all, as sinners, have abused others, not all are abusers. Abuse is rooted in a mentality – a mindset – that sees others as objects possessed, and who exist for the abuser’s self-glory.

Such a mentality is, of course, absolutely contradictory to the mind of Christ.

Philippians 2:1-4 ESV
(1) So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,
(2) complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.
(3) Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
(4) Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.

What are some things that are required in order to be a good parent to a child? What is this *raising up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*? It is, of course, loving Christ ourselves and modeling the love of Christ to our children. It is, as Moses put it –

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 ESV

(4) "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

(5) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

(6) And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

(7) You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

All of this requires, of course, that a parent gives glory to God, not to himself. Godly parenting therefore flies right in the face of the abusive man's goals. Consider some very practical things that are required –

- Focusing on one's children, paying attention to what they are saying and what they are doing,

- Putting the needs of others (one's children and one's spouse) ahead of our own,
- Listening to our children's opinions and (when appropriate) even to their complaints, and to be willing (when appropriate) to effect changes as a result,
- Not being threatened or jealous when we see our children loving others in addition to us,
- To accept the fact that our children are going to grow up and will gradually become independent from us,
- To be willing to be unpopular with our children and make the right decisions in spite of it,
- To admit and accept that our children are individuals, not mirror-images of ourselves

The abusive man simply cannot accept these things. *"The real-life demands of parenthood tend to bump hard against the selfish and domineering characteristics that lie at the core of his problem. The abuser is a person who is highly controlling, who expects his needs to be at the top of the agenda, who thinks he is superior to his partner and often to his children as well, and who thinks he is right about everything. So although abusive men vary in how destructive they are to children, a set of themes always appears to some degree in their parenting. Bringing these areas into*

sharp focus can deepen your insight into your children's emotional struggles –

- *Authoritarianism*
- *Underinvolvement*
- *Neglect and Irresponsibility (Self-centeredness, disrespect, arrogance, manipulateness)*
- *Undermining of the mother*
- *Wanting children to be just like him*
- *Believing he knows it all”*

[Bancroft, When Dad Hurts Mom]

Let's look at some more of the damaging effects the abusive man has upon children.

I. Isolation

We have seen already that one of the common tactics of the abuser is that he isolates his victim in order to maximize his ability to control her. You remember that Diotrephes was exercising this very tactic in the church – and Diotrephes' kind often do the same today –

3 John 1:5-10 ESV

(5) Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are,
(6) who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

(7) For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

(8) Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

(9) I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

(10) So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

The children of the abusive man can often end up suffering isolation as a result of their mother's isolation.

“When an abusive man impedes his partner's social connections, his goal is to make her dependent on him and always available to him. He wants her to always be focusing on meeting HIS needs, free from any distractions – such as having her own life – that might get in the way. And on some level he's afraid that if she has close and healthy contacts with other people, she will find the strength to get free from his bullying and demands...The victim's children can miss important life experiences. They may not get to have a broad range of people in their lives, they may miss out

on chances to have fun, to get exposed to stimulating ideas, or to feel part of their community. The victim and her children can get on each other's nerves if they feel cooped up in the house together, and may start to take their frustrations out on one another, since they have no way of understanding that the abuser is the cause of the restrictions they live with.

Isolation can be the glue that holds all the other aspects of abuse together. It is difficult for women and their children to heal from abuse, and find a way to make it stop, unless they can get help and support. If you are feeling cut off from other people or experiences, one of your highest priorities needs to be to search for ways to reach out and expand your freedom, for your own sake and for your children.” [When Dad Hurts Mom]

There are many ways that an abuser can isolate his victims. Financially, threats, accusations of infidelity, lying about others, lying about the victim to others, living in an isolated area, denial of available transportation, etc. All have the common denominator of power and control.

We know that there are many people that we are to guard our children against. “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord” – “Bad

company corrupts good morals” – and so forth. A wise, Godly husband will discern if someone is a bad influence upon himself, upon his wife and upon his children. He will speak to them about his reasons for concluding this, and in most such situations at least the husband and wife will be in agreement with the decision to avoid such people.

But this is not the scenario in the abuser's home. His goal is to isolate his victims from most everyone. And he does not enter into reasoned, respectful, mutual discussions with his wife about it. He simply commands or threatens and demands that she obey him. In the former case, the result is healthy and nourishing; in the latter it is destructive.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger. Children in the abuser's home will frequently suffer from isolation.

NOTE: I believe I saw two boys this past week from an abusive home. This is what I noticed about them (in a public place) –

- They did not respect their mother (abusers undermine the mother's ability to parent)
- Their speech and behavior was age-inappropriate

The experience of being in a public place appeared to be very strange to them

Many times, such children are not so much children who are simply in need of a “good whuppin” but rather are the product of living in an abusive environment.

Life is not going to go well for those boys. UNLESS – perhaps, a church like this one can come to understand this wickedness of abuse, grow wise to its existence and tactics, and provide help to its victims. Children like these are being sacrificed in the fires of Molech.

Let’s look more fully at another effect of abuse upon children that we have already mentioned – guilt. It is so damaging that it is worth looking at it in more detail.

II. Children Conclude That THEY are to Blame for Their Mother’s Suffering

What is it to live with guilt that is undeserved and false? To be a little child or even a teenager, and then as so often is the case – on into the adult years, *living with the nagging condemnation that YOU are to blame for what happens or happened in the home you are growing up in?* Guilt is crushing –

Psalms 32:3-5 ESV (3) For when I kept silent, my bones wasted

away through my groaning all day long.

(4) For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

(5) I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

David had a recourse – he came to repentance and cried out to the Lord, acknowledging his sin, and then he experienced forgiveness and relief. *But children living in an abusive environment know nothing of this recourse. In addition, their guilt that crushes and consumes their very soul is based upon the lie that the abuser brings to them. Namely, that THEY ARE TO BLAME.*

Listen to this scenario –

“Tracy and Eric are arguing because Tracy needs more help with the endless work of running the house, cooking the meals, and looking after the children, which she is trying to handle on top of working part-time. ‘Or, if you can’t do that, at least clean up your own messes,’ she says in exasperation. Eric shoots back furiously that Tracy is a ‘lazy, nagging (vulgar name),’ and he starts kicking

the children's toys, which were scattered on the living room floor. 'You don't control these kids!' he yells. 'And then you blame me when this house is a mess!'

The children know instantly the signs of Dad's escalation, and the older one, Justin, feels an impulse to run between Mom and Dad but is afraid he will get hurt. As Justin hesitates, Dad suddenly shoves mom down on the couch and storms out of the house. The children stand in shock, staring at Tracy. She sits crying and rubbing her hurt elbow. Then she becomes aware of the children staring at her, and in her humiliation she barks at them, 'Come on kids! Clean up your mess!' It turns out that a couple of the toys are broken from Eric kicking them, and the younger girl and boy begin to cry when they see the pieces."
[Bancroft, When Dad Hurts Mom]

Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.

WHAT IS GOING THROUGH THE MINDS OF THESE CHILDREN AT THIS POINT? What is the result of all of this. It is a type of sacrificing of the children to Baal. It is handing them over to anger and guilt, and it is to make them easy targets for Satan's further attacks.

"The younger children are flooded with guilt, thinking, 'Dad was furious because WE didn't clean up our toys, and he shoved Mom. WE MADE HER GET HURT. These thoughts then translate into the feeling, 'We're bad.' Meanwhile, Justin (the older one), is berating himself bitterly, 'WHY DID I JUST STAND THERE INSTEAD OF GETTING IN DAD'S WAY? WHY DO I HAVE TO BE SUCH A CHICKEN?'

In short, the children feel guilty because they think they caused the abuse, or because they believe they should have prevented the abuse, or both. The connections need not be as logical as they were in Eric and Tracy's story. Children can feel that they are to blame even if the argument had nothing to do with them. They live with a vague sense that somehow it's their fault, perhaps because they misbehaved days earlier or perhaps for no reason at all, simply because children's minds don't grasp cause and effect clearly, especially with respect to traumatic experiences."
[When Dad Hurts Mom]

Did you hear that? Mark it down well!

CHILDREN'S MINDS DON'T GRASP CAUSE AND EFFECT CLEARLY, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES.

Do you understand this? Do you grasp the ramifications of it? This means, moms, dads, adults – *that we are very wrong when we simplistically assume that children understand things like we do.* We can understand (though even adults can have great struggles in these areas as well), we can more readily understand **THIS WAS NOT MY FAULT!** Children often cannot, depending upon their mental and emotional level of maturity. *Fathers and mothers can provoke their children to wrath by functioning as if their children are capable of understanding such things.* **FALSE GUILT CAN THEREFORE BE A VERY COMMON AND DAMAGING TRAP FOR CHILDREN.** They need real help in dealing with it. But in an abusive home, still at the hands of the abuser, this can be very difficult. The victim, normally the mother, *can still have a very significant therapeutic (healing) effect upon her children if she can come to understand all of this.* For example, if Tracy could ever come to grasp this matter of false guilt and blame in her children as a result of witnessing Eric’s abuse of her, she would be able to change what she said to them from –

“Come on kids, (in a barking tone), clean up your mess.”

To - *“Come here kids, let’s talk. It was very wrong of your father to do*

what he did. It is his problem. You did not make him do it. It is not your fault that he hurt Mommy. Come on, let’s pick up your toys and see if we can fix the broken ones. Justin (the older boy), you are still very young. I know you would do everything you could to protect me, but this time you couldn’t. It is not your fault.”

And, of course if Mom is a Christian, she can pray with the children.

Here are still some more results of all of this guilt –

“Some children react to their guilt by becoming exaggeratedly perfect, hoping in that way to prove that they aren’t bad, and trying to avoid any misbehavior that could lead Dad to hurt Mom. (How many girls with eating disorders might come from abusive homes?) In a recent case where I (Bancroft) was the custody evaluator, the father in the family was an emotional abuser who insulted, demeaned, and minutely controlled family members, to the point of requiring them to cook food in water that had already been used, timing them in the shower, and forbidding them to lock their doors when changing clothes. [NOTE: The whole matter of boundary violations such as denying privacy to his victims is a very common tactic of the abusive man. Our homes should be characterized by

a proper decorum of modesty]. *School personnel told me that the older daughter, Gina, was an outstanding student who got along well with everybody and helped other students resolve their conflicts. She was accepted into a prestigious New England college.*

Looking at the surface [beware of appearances!!], Gina's mother might believe that she had not been affected by the abuse (it was an abusive home), unlike her younger sister, who was suicidal. But when I called Gina at her college dorm, she eloquently poured out to me (for 2 hours) the pain her father's dictatorial oppression had cause her. She cried repeatedly and told me that she was seeing the college counseling staff to help her cope."

"Guilt can manifest itself in an opposite form, where the child abandons efforts to prove his or her worthiness and sinks into a self-accepted identity as a 'bad kid,' getting into trouble constantly and perhaps being unkind to other children. This transition often happens as adolescence begins. The 'bad kid' sometimes believes, usually unconsciously, 'If I can attract all the negative attention to myself, maybe that will get Dad to stop hurting Mom.' [Bancroft, When Dad Hurts Mom]

Now, because this load of guilt that children bear is FALSE, they FEEL it, it weighs them down and crushes their spirit – BUT THEY ARE NEVER ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY DID OR ARE DOING WRONG TO CAUSE THE ABUSE. Why? Because *they are not causing it!* But they think that they are! This is one of the common signs of abuse – the victims are always searching, searching, searching for an explanation – but the truth of their situation eludes them. Why? Because the abuser is such a masterful deceiver. He is skilled at making them believe that they are the problem.

Christ is Conqueror over this thing. One day it will never happen again, that the wicked will accuse the righteous –

Revelation 12:10 ESV

(10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

II. Children In an Abusive Home are Conflicted Between the Desire to Talk About Abuse, and the Feeling That they Must NOT Speak About it

We have seen this same thing before – this matter of conflicted feelings. The abuser creates a conflicted environment in his victims. There is a conflict between –

- Love and hate for the abuser
- A sense of guilt but no explanation for it's cause
- A need to feel secure and not feeling secure

Here is still another inner conflict – wanting to talk, but unable to do so. A sense that the thing is a great secret. There is an elephant in the room, but no one is supposed to admit its presence. Listen to it –

“In Betsy McAlister Grove’s book Children Who See Too Much, she tells about a group of 5 year olds at a preschool who witnessed a bloody attack out the window of their bus on the way home one day. The next morning when the children arrived back at school, their teachers waited nervously to see how the children would react to the event and what kinds of questions they would ask. But to their amazement, not a single child said a word about the assault, and they all went about their usual business.

After a couple of hours of this odd silence, the teachers decided to sit the children down and ask them what they had seen on the way home. Instantly, the floodgates opened. Children

poured out their feelings, talking about the incident for a long time. They wanted help understanding how the victim might have felt, they were eager to know whether the perpetrator had been caught and what would happen to him, and they expressed worry that they themselves might be in danger from him. [FEAR]

The adults could easily have misread the children’s initial quiet that morning as meaning that they were not disturbed by the attack or had not really noticed it. They could have also concluded that the children preferred NOT to talk about it, perhaps to avoid the pain of remembering what had happened.” [When Dad Hurts Mom]

This conflict of being profoundly affected, even traumatized, by witnessing abuse, and yet not having the feeling that it is alright to talk about it, can be devastating to a child (and to the adult victim as well). CHURCHES CAN OFTEN BE GUILTY OF UNINTENTIONALLY CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE WHICH SEEMS TO FORBID VICTIMS FROM ASKING FOR HELP. GENERALLY, CHRISTIANS DO NOT WANT TO SPEAK OR HEAR ABOUT THIS TOPIC OF ABUSE.

Even the military has come to learn that soldiers, having been traumatized

by the horrors of war, *must feel free to speak about what they have experienced. The consequences of suffering PTSD and yet not being able to speak of it or obtain help in understanding what such things can do to a person, are profound.*

“Why would children conceal their desire to share their thoughts and feelings when they were in such deep distress? The answer lies in certain assumptions children make, including:

- If the grown-ups aren't saying anything about what happened, that means we aren't supposed to talk about it. YOUR CHILDREN MAY FORM THIS SAME BELIEF IF HOURS OR DAYS HAVE PASSED SINCE THEY SAW DAD DEMEAN YOU OR HIT YOU AND NO ONE HAS MENTIONED IT. They think, ‘Mom and Dad are acting like nothing happened, so that must be what they want us to do too.’*

NOTE: You may not live in an abusive home – but you might unintentionally be creating a non-communicative home in which the scary events of this world are experienced, but no one talks about them. I recall the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated (I was in the 7th grade). We were all glued to the TV, watching the events unfold.

The shooting itself in Dallas. The arrest of Oswald and his subsequent murder. The President's funeral and burial. The blood-stained dress of his wife. And yet, at least in our home, there was not a sense that these things could be spoken of between us kids and our parents. Let alone any discussion of how all these things were making us feel.

To continue –

- The grown-ups can't handle our feelings about the scary event – it's too much for them. Children are aware that adults have their own frailties and they may think that certain subjects are too upsetting for us. Your children may drop hints about their concerns rather than raising them directly, as a way of probing to see if you can deal with their feelings. If your son says to you, ‘Did Daddy scare you last night?’ and you respond with, ‘Oh, don't be silly, he was just a little angry, that's all,’ the boy is going to conclude that he's entering an area that is too sensitive, and he knows to stay away from the topic. On the other hand, if you respond instead by asking, ‘What did you see Daddy do that looked scary? How did that make you feel?’*

you show that you aren't afraid to address his feelings.

- *'Talking about it won't help.' Children may have received messages from adults or from other children that it's best to avoid unpleasant subjects. You may need to give your children explicit invitation to talk about traumatic issues to open the door. If you let them know it's ok to talk, they often will choose to do so.*

QUESTION: Does the Bible only speak about "pleasant things"? Of course not. And yet there is this craving in human beings to only want to have our ears "tickled."

Isaiah 30:9-11 ESV

(9) For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD;

(10) who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions,

(11) leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."

Conclusion

Well, there are still more serious effects of abuse upon children. There are serious and damaging behavioral and emotional effects – and we should probably take the time to learn more about them. **THEY ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF FATHERS (SOMETIMES MOTHERS) PROVOKING THEIR CHILDREN TO ANGER.**

- Running away from home
- Developmental failures
- Obsessiveness
- Violence
- Substance abuse
- Poor peer choices
- Sleeping problems
- Depression
- Insecurity
- Anger and bitterness
- Self-blame
- Embarrassment and shame
- Worry
- Blame
- Craving power
- Fear of conflict of any kind
- Uncertainty about reality and whether their own observations can be trusted.

For now, we leave it at this –

“As Christians, we possess THE single most powerful antidote to abuse and its evil effects upon its

victims. The antidote is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! We have His Word of truth. We know with certainty that a Father who loves His children is working all things together for their good. We know that the frightening events in this world are in His perfect control. We know that there is such a thing as evil and that one day it will be gone forever. We know that the evil one has been already conquered by Christ. We know all these things and more, and we can open up this Book and show our children, and the victims of abuse, that there is Someone who is the real answer to everything they face.