

# ***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)***

***“The Foggy Deception of Sin as Illustrated in the Abusive Man”***

**August 22, 2010**

**Sermon Text:** Luke 3:1-14

**Scripture Reading:** Isaiah 29

## **Introduction-**

Luke 3:1-14 ESV

(1) In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,

(2) during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

(3) And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

(4) As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the

wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

(5) Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,

(6) and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

(7) He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

(8) Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

(9) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

(10) And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" (11) And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."

(12) Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

(13) And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."

(14) Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

In this passage of Scripture, as in many others, we see that there is a false repentance. *The gospel is a gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, just as John the Baptist baptized repentant people in preparation for forgiveness in Christ.* I do not believe we need to prove this point – that there is no true faith in Christ where genuine repentance is lacking.

And yet here came these people to John to be baptized in a baptism that signified a heart humbled, prepared for the Messiah. John was not taken in by them. He called them what they were – a brood of vipers (a den of rattlesnakes). He told them their true condition – that they were in imminent danger – NOT of God's blessing – but of God's wrath. The wrath to come. The Day of the Lord. These people who fancied themselves the Lord's own people because they had Abraham as their father.

John demanded genuine repentance from them – just as the Lord does. *Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.*

1. Real repentance bears visible fruit. It is not mere words nor religious ceremony.

2. Real repentance is very personal. It does not look to ancestry or nationality – it looks at self.

3. Real repentance CORRESPONDS to the nature of one's sin. John commanded the people to bear fruits that were in keeping with repentance. Corresponding to repentance from one's particular sin. John illustrates this correspondence –

- The wealthy man's repentance bears the fruit of sharing that wealth with the poor
- The cheating, abusing tax collector's repentance bears the fruit of honesty in taxation
- The soldier's repentance bears the fruit of cessation from extortion by threat, replaced by a contentment with one's wages and no more.

Let's give a modern day example. If you punish your child, and if you are a wise parent, you will make the punishment fit the crime, right? If your child steals something, you will

not prescribe a mere time out or some other unrelated consequence. No. You will insist that this child's punishment correspond to his sin of stealing. Repayment. Monetary loss, and so on.

So it is with real repentance. When a person truly repents, his repentance will correspond to his sin from which he is repenting. This is a mark of real repentance.

- If the prodigal son, when he came to his senses, decided upon some other remedy for his situation other than returning in humble confession to his father, his repentance would not fit his sin and thus would not be true repentance. But it was real, and therefore it is seen as real in that he returned to his father whom he had sinned against.
- The rich young ruler would not give up his wealth to follow Christ. Yet it was this very wealth that was his idol, and therefore it was the thing real repentance would bear the fruit of forsaking.

*Sin is masterful at mimicking real repentance!!* We will see this illustrated by the false repentance of the abusive person in a few moments.

First, however, consider the same thing in terms of *the two ways or roads* Jesus spoke of – the broad way and the narrow way.

Matthew 7:13-14 ESV

(13) "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

(14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Here is the thesis –

***“The character of the travelers on a road correspond to the road they travel on. Each road is moving its travelers closer and closer to a particular end. Those on the broad way to hell are worldlings, and their character is worldly. Those on the narrow way to heaven are heavenly minded and their character is heavenly.”***

Therefore –

***“When a worldling truly repents, he gets off the broad way and enters the narrow way. His very character changes. His change of highway is evidenced by corresponding fruits of that change.”***

And finally –

*“Each one of us is – at this very moment – on a road. We are moving toward a certain destination. As we travel along it, our characters become more and more conformed to the character of that road. You can see it in the gray-headed around you. No one is static. We are being pressed increasingly into the mold of the broad way, or transformed by the Spirit of Christ into the qualities of the narrow way. When we arrive at the road’s end, we will, each one, be particularly suited for the destination which awaits us there.”*

And therefore, *the road we are on is evidenced by the fruit of our lives. Similarly, real repentance is evidenced by a radical change in the fruit our lives are producing BECAUSE IT NECESSARILY AND INEVITABLY ENTAILS A CHANGE IN OUR WAY.*

Sin is fogged with deception. Sin produces a false repentance but shrouds it in fog so that its real character is not so easily seen. It is vital that we understand how to discern true from false repentance, and we are going to see these things illustrated now in the life, thinking, and actions of the abusive man.

Proverbs 9:4-6 ESV (4) "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, (5)

"Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

(6) Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

### I. The Cyclical Pattern of False Repentance as Evidenced in the Abusive Man

Listen now to Debi Pryde and Robert Needham in their book A Biblical Perspective of What to Do When You Are Abused by Your Husband (2003 Ironwood Publications) –

*“Abusive husbands commonly follow a cycle that is incredibly predictable. Nevertheless, until the classic cycle is pointed out to both the abused wife and the abusing husband, neither usually recognizes the pattern nor realizes how common the cycle is to an abusive situation. Usually it takes the wife several ‘cycles’ before she realizes what is taking place and begins to understand it is not a problem that is getting better nor a problem that will go away without serious intervention. Rather, it will happen again, and again, and again if it is not thoroughly, biblically, and carefully dealt with.*

*Following is a description long recognized as the typical, cyclical pattern of wife abuse:*

1. The Build-Up Phase – Gradual build up of tension, irritability, verbal cruelty, cold silence, and unhappy countenance.

2. Blow Up Phase – Usually the abuser generates a major issue from some small incident (e.g., wife forgot to pick up laundry, leaves a light on, didn't iron a shirt perfectly, etc) verbally assaults his wife, and then reacts to her protests (or silence) with increased anger, culminating in physical violence and/or extremely hurtful verbal attack.

3. Remorse Phase – The abuser 'feels' some remorse (but it is only what the Scriptures call 'worldly sorrow') after mistreating his wife and tries to 'make up' for his cruelty by being exceptionally kind or generous. He will not be able to sustain this kindness.

4. Build – Up Phase – Gradually the abuser's remorse and stated commitment to be kind fades and tensions build and the abuse is repeated.

An abusing husband, with rare exceptions, will 'feel' some kind of remorse after he has mistreated his wife...maybe the next day, maybe immediately, maybe some days later. He may strongly believe he is actually repentant and will never 'lose it'

again. This kind of abuser promises and expresses 'horror' over what he has done until he convinces his wife it will never happen again. Other abusers aren't so anxious to acknowledge they have done anything cruel or unjustified. One way or another, they may ask the wife for forgiveness or lamely hint that they are 'sorry,' but admissions of real guilt are very vague. Most often the abusing husband will never actually admit he was wrong, and if he does, it will be accompanied with reasons he believes his behavior is justified. if he is the type who never accepts personal responsibility or admits fault, he may act as if absolutely nothing of consequence has happened and put on the 'Mr. Nice Guy' front. The wife will initially be uncertain, but as the 'niceness' continues, she will talk herself into believing that the problem is solved.

The abused wife recognizes the 'Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde' personality of her husband, but convinces herself he is himself when he is calm, and being UNLIKE his real self when he is 'stressed' or 'frustrated.' WHAT SHE FAILS TO REALIZE IS THAT HIS BEHAVIOR WHEN ANGRY AND PROVOKED REVEALS THE TRUE CONDITION OF HIS HEART (the real self) and not the other way around. After a period of time (from either a few days, or a month, or more)

*some little incident will occur, and the husband will begin to display the corruption that dominates the hidden heart, and the abuse will be repeated, almost always with increased thoughtlessness, harshness, or violence. He can only maintain the show of niceness for so long. His willpower and resolve are no match for the power of sin that lies hidden in his heart. Inevitably, his true heart attitude will surface again and again with surprising fury.”*

Matthew 12:33-37 ESV

(33) "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

(34) You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

(35) The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

(36) I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,

(37) for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Wow! This pattern is present and will *evidence* itself in EVERY case of false repentance. Numbers of you have experienced the grief of this kind of

thing in your own families. Hoping, hoping, expecting change – yet the cycle of sin continues because there never has been true repentance.

***“Let’s challenge ourselves to think carefully about what real repentance will look like in cases that we are facing in our own lives and experiences. False repentance makes all kinds of promises. It offers all types of change. For a time. But let’s ask ourselves – ‘What is a repentance from this kind of sin that corresponds to that sin – that is fruit in keeping with the character of the sin?’”***

Mark this down very carefully –

***“‘Niceness’ to the victim is almost always a sign of false repentance. It is a bribe offered to dupe and buy off the victim’s insistence upon fruits of real repentance. It is a façade. It is a kind of inappropriate ‘payment’ made, but it is not graciously given. It expects and demands something in return – usually, forgiveness or denial or dropping demands for real consequences. ‘Niceness’ really means nothing. What is required is REAL fruit, REAL repentance that is appropriate and fitting to the nature of the abuse suffered.”***

**WE MUST CEASE FROM BELIEVING THAT GOOD FRUIT IS**

COMING FROM AN EVIL TREE! It is not. It will not. It cannot.

***“There is only one remedy, only one way of deliverance from the cycle of abuse. Real repentance, real faith, real heart-change which can only be effected by Christ. As long as the abuser continues his façade and pretention, he hardens himself even more against the only antidote for sin. And if he continues down the broad way he is on, he will one day come to a turn in that road from which it is impossible to turn back.”***

Here is still another excellent excerpt from Pryde and Needham’s book –

*“**Question:** ‘My husband gave me a concussion by repeatedly banging my head into the wall. I was able to call 911 for help. The officers arrested my husband but he was released on bail a few hours later. Even though I got a restraining order, I didn’t trust him not to break into the house and hurt me so I went to a shelter with my baby. My pastor talked to my husband and subsequently he admitted he was wrong and wants to change. I want to go back home and give my husband another chance, but my pastor wants me to wait until my husband demonstrates a true willingness to submit to counseling and demonstrates he has acquired sufficient knowledge about his sinful anger and how it is*

*conquered. My husband has promised me he will continue counseling if I come home immediately. I believe he is sincere about getting help. Should I continue the separation or go back home?’”*

Now, do not forget that in this series we want to also apply the insights we are learning about abusive men in their marriages and homes to abusive, power-hungry, controlling men in the church family. Here is an entire picture of the church having disciplined a sinful man, or of having to deal with a sinful man – who professes to be a Christian so often. And then the man professes repentance – ever so sincerely. Many, many Christians, like this well-intentioned but very naïve wife – will lobby for a quick return of the sinful man – just because he is being ‘nice’ and appears ‘sincere.’ But we must look for fruits in keeping with repentance and that takes a long time in most cases. Genuine repentance, like genuine faith, is exceedingly rare.

Listen to this very excellent advice Pryde and Needham give to this abuse victim –

*“Because many godly wives who have been abused still long for restoration of their marriage, you must humbly admit that you are the least objective participant in determining your*

husband's sincerity and repentance. Therefore, if separation is advised in order to protect your safety and the safety of your children, or to give your counselor the opportunity to intervene on your behalf, do not agree to live together with your husband until a third party (ie, a competent pastoral counselor), is truly satisfied that your husband has humbly accepted the counseling, has clearly acknowledged his sins, and has demonstrated the fruits of true repentance for a reasonable period of time (Prov 9:7-10). If your husband has not acquired the necessary knowledge and ability to deal biblically with his anger, coming home too soon will put both you and he at risk. If couples come back together too soon, the process of reconciliation is likely to end in failure, discouragement or a refusal to continue with the long-term counseling that is needed.”

This is very good counsel – I would just “tweak” it slightly –

- The man's promise to continue counseling *if his wife will come home immediately*, is a CERTAIN revelation that his repentance is false. Conditional repentance (ie, “if you...then I”) is NO repentance whatsoever. She can be assured with 100% certainty that if she moves home now, he will drop the counseling

and the abuse will continue – perhaps killing her next time.

- Pryde and Needham's counsel was a bit vague as to the spiritual condition of the husband. They spoke of him needing to acquire the necessary knowledge and ability to deal with his anger biblically. This is not direct enough. God's Word is plain – if a person is by character an abusive man, that person is NOT a Christian. No amount of “learning anger management” will change that. His very mindset is what is gone wrong and ONLY Christ can change it!

LET'S NOT PUT TOO MUCH CONFIDENCE IN THE ABILITY OF COUNSELING TO CHANGE A SINNER'S HEART. AND LET'S HUMBLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT, BECAUSE OF THE DECEPTIVENESS OF THE HUMAN HEART, EVEN MOST COUNSELORS ARE NOT COMPETENT TO COUNSEL! (I have changed my position on this matter in the past few years. Just because someone is a Christian and has received some training in counseling, does not mean that they are able to go up against some of the strongest deceptions of the enemy – ie, the abusive man. I do not agree any longer with Jay Adams, for example –



whose major book was Competent to Counsel. Why? Because, as I have been studying this sin of abuse, I have learned many things about it that I never had learned in reading Christian counseling materials. I would rather, given the choice, send an abusive person to Lundy Bancroft (who is not a Christian) than to the average pastor or Christian counselor. This in NO WAY diminishes the adequacy of God's Word. It simply demonstrates that the church's handling of God's Word is so often deficient. There is NOTHING that I have learned in studying secular books on abuse that I have not found in the BIBLE. But very few Christians today truly have a competent understanding of God's Word and therefore they are NOT competent to counsel.

NOTE: Let me make more comment in relation to this book by Pryde and Needham. It is a very good book, but in my opinion has at least one serious error in it. Listen to them again –

**“Question:** *I often feel like I hate my husband when he berates me and pushes me around, but I don't want to divorce him. Will scaring him by threatening to divorce him or separate from him help him know how I feel when he rejects me and make him more serious about changing?”*

**Answer:** *“If you expect God to bless your efforts, you must take every step*

*in redemptive love. Never must the motive of revenge or retribution be allowed a moment's lodging in your heart. Your only goal must be the restoration and biblical restructuring of the marriage. Although separation may be necessary, divorce is NOT an option. You must be jealous to articulate that whenever the subject of separation is brought up. Only what is done in Christ-like love will last and bear good fruit.”*

Now, that is VERY BAD counsel and, I believe very unbiblical counsel. God Himself divorced His covenant people ultimately. He warned in very stern terms, of coming divorce if there was no repentance. It is true that a Christian must not be motivated by a seeking of revenge or of a desire for selfish retribution, but that must also be balanced with the fact that God puts within us a hunger and thirst for righteousness. For a counselor to tell a victim of abuse that divorce is NOT an option for her is really quite terrible. How can it ever be argued that an abusive man is indeed “agreeing to live with his wife” (1 Cor 7) if he at the same time is bashing her head against the wall? Furthermore, usually there are children to be considered. It is not true that growing up in an abusive home is better than growing up in a divorced home.

We do not take the matter of divorce lightly at all. But I believe that a truly biblical and high view of the marriage covenant does indeed recognize the gravity of the breaking of that covenant through abuse.

And there is another issue here. Namely, that most often the abusive person WILL NOT repent and persevere in abuse counseling apart from some severe consequences facing him – prison time or his wife divorcing him are the two most common motivating factors.

## Conclusion

Christ's people have every resource at hand to enable us to recognize true from false repentance. His Word is filled with descriptions of the genuine article and likewise of the counterfeit. We are warned over and over and over again about the deceptiveness of sin and the craftiness of our foe. Our problem is not a lack of resources, it is a lack of taking these things seriously and being diligently on watch.

In his very excellent book, Why Does He Do That? – Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men, Lundy Bancroft (a secular author and counselor) sets out some real truths he has discovered in regard to how to know if a person is really “making progress.” The Bible would put it in

these terms – how to know if a person is truly repentant. I am sure that we could find each one of the factors listed by Bancroft in the Scriptures –

- The abuser says he can change only if you (his victim) change too,
- He says he can change only if you ‘help’ him change, by giving him emotional support, reassurance, and forgiveness, and by spending a lot of time with him. This often means that he wants you to abandon any plans you had to take a break from seeing him.
- He criticizes you (the victim) for not realizing how much he has changed.
- He criticizes the victim for not trusting that his change will last
- He criticizes the victim for considering him capable of behaving abusively (in the future) even though he in fact has done so in the past – as if the victim should know that ‘he would never do something like that,’ even though he has.
- He reminds the victim about the bad things he *would have done* in the past but isn't doing anymore, which amounts to a subtle threat.
- He tells the victim that she is taking too long to make up her mind, that he can't ‘wait forever’ as a way to pressure her not to

take the time she needs to collect herself and to assess how much he is really willing to change.

- He says, 'I'm changing, I'm changing,' but you don't feel it.

Once more, we must give serious and lengthy consideration to these truths. We must be wise in the Body of Christ and apply these things here as well. Anyone who has committed abuse, who then displays a critical attitude toward the victim or toward anyone but themselves *is not repentant*. Can you imagine the prodigal son, upon his return home, in any way even implying that to even the slightest degree, what he had done was caused by someone other than himself? Of course not.

This is why real repentance is so *beautiful*. Like a precious stone, it is exceedingly rare. We do not see it very often in our lives. And this should also lead us to a deeper thanksgiving to Christ for saving us because His salvation ALWAYS entails His provision of the gift of repentance. And so it is that just every so often, the diamond of repentance is found. Let me close by reading you an example of it as expressed in these verses written by *an abusive man* rescued by Christ. It appears in the beginning of Patricia Evans' book, The Verbally Abusive Man – Can He Change.

[Poem Here]

If these verses really do proceed from this man's heart and mind, this is indeed a truly repentant abuser, washed and sanctified by the blood of Christ, who is the only hope of any abuser – of any sinner.