

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)

“They Want You to Make Much of Them”

August 29, 2010

Sermon Text: Galatians 4:12-20

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor 11

Introduction-

James and Phyllis Alsdurf, in their book “Battered Into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home,” speak of one common reason even a severely abused wife stays with her abuser –

“The victim as missionary – Of the many battered women Constance Doran has counseled, the majority are ‘warm, intelligent women, very nurturing, empathetic and often devout Christians’ who see themselves as entirely responsible for their husbands’ emotional and spiritual well-being. Doran contends that these women have ‘rescue fantasies of saving their mate from violent impulses, much as a missionary may dream of converting savage tribe.’

Those fantasies [and note the term “fantasy” means – a false hope] motivate them to repeatedly endure their husbands’ violence. Such women are caregivers [not a positive thing to be] who interpret violent acts as evidence that their husbands need their help. [This “rescuing” and “caregiving” fantasy can operate in other relationships as well – never for the good].

“She takes pleasure in her dream [note – it is a dream] of being his rescuer,’ Doran noted. ‘Her ability to endure his violence is not seen as helplessness or masochism, but rather as evidence of her moral strength. She is the nurturing mother – he is the naughty child whose violence is merely another sign of his immaturity and consequently his need for her.” [NOTE: This very same kind of skewed, unbiblical thinking often infects Christians’ thinking when they are trying to ‘rescue’ the perishing. It is actually a very selfish motivation – not true, biblical love for the sinner].

“Out of 21 domestic violence cases Doran handled during one two-year period, she saw this missionary syndrome at work in 17 of the

situations. 'It keeps women locked into an abusive relationship,' Doran said. 'They feel that if they just hang in there long enough and turn the other cheek one more time, then he will change. And women are particularly ENCOURAGED to do this in the Christian community.'

Reports we have received from battered women certainly bolster Doran's findings. Seventy percent of our sample of nearly 100 women agreed that it was their responsibility to save their husbands from themselves. A Florida woman, still married to an abusive Christian man, said: 'I don't think physical abuse is any worse than what the disciples went through. There's a lot of torment in the Psalms; Job went through a lot. My reward will be in heaven. If I stand faithful, my children will follow me.' But she was troubled by the fact that her young son already mirrors his father's abusive actions. 'I hope it's normal,' she said.

A woman from the Midwest said that when she survived an attempted strangling early in her marriage, she thought, 'I am incredible! If I can make it through this, I can make it through anything.' My parents told me to see what I could do to change; they had no concern for my safety. I felt betrayed, but I started believing it. I felt called to be a missionary to my

husband, to the child I had married.' Finally, seeking a divorce after 29 years of marriage, she wants younger women to know that they should not put up with such treatment. 'I was going to school, I was a wife, I was a mother. I even did workshops for churches on how to handle problems!! I could deceive myself and let everyone know that this was my calling and it was a joy.'

But when she became seriously ill, her whole life changed. 'I had to start taking care of myself. I couldn't be Supermom and Superwife. Here was the indispensable missionary – how could I get sick? But it was a relief to disengage from that role. When I finally said to myself, 'I am crazy! I have been a fool to live this way,' it was a relief.''"

Do I have your attention now? RESCUING AND CARETAKING ARE NOT BIBLICAL PRACTICES!! THEY ARE MOTIVATED BY SELF. THEY DO NOT RESCUE NOR CARE FOR ANYONE, INCLUDING THE SINFUL, ABUSIVE PERSON! They are GROSS distortions of the love of God. They take people to hell, not to heaven.

[NOTE: Rescue the Perishing is certainly not one of the better hymns of the church. Listen for instance to this third stanza –

Down in the human heart,
Crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can
restore;
Touched by a loving heart,
Wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken
Will vibrate once more.

That sounds very much like a denial of total depravity because it is attributing a grain of ability – a kind of dormant goodness as in Darth Vader – that simply needs to be awakened BY US! (Luke Skywalker is a very excellent portrait of an abused person with the missionary-rescuer mentality). This could be the theme song of the abused Christian wife who sees herself as missionary to her abuser. Goodness does not lie dormant in the sinner. Only evil].

Alright then, let's go to Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, the 4th chapter, where we find him describing the methods and motives of abusive men – wolves in sheep's clothing – who were ravaging the churches of Galatia with their false gospel. Our goal is to learn even more about the Psychology of Sin as illustrated by the abusive man, *and how to properly and biblically respond to such people.*

I. They Want to be Made Much Of

Abusive, savage wolves had invaded the churches of the Galatian region after the Apostle Paul had preached the gospel there. This letter to those churches is Paul's admonishment – a very strong admonishment – to these “foolish Galatians” who had allowed themselves to be “bewitched” (embujado) by these abusers. Remember that the very same thing had happened at Corinth –

2 Corinthians 11:20 ESV

(20) For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

This verse is a wonderfully compact description of the abuser/victim dynamic.

Well, so it was in the churches of Galatia –

Galatians 4:12-20 ESV

(12) Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.

(13) You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,

(14) and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

(15) What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

(16) Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

(17) **They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.**

(18) It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you,

(19) my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

(20) I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Let's set the context of these verses and then move in for a closer look.

1. Paul had preached the gospel. *"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."* 6:14a

2. False teachers, abusive and self-serving men, had come in behind Paul with the motive of enslaving these Galatian believers to themselves. Their instrument of bondage was a different gospel that added the requirement of circumcision to faith.

Probably along with that circumcision would come many other rites of Judaism as well. "Salvation is only for the Jews" was the message.

3. Paul then demonstrates the validity and message of the true gospel that he preaches in contrast with this false one. He does this by –

a. Showing that he received the gospel from Jesus Christ, by revelation, not from men or even from God through men like the other apostles.

b. Showing that his gospel and the gospel preached by the other apostles was the very same message.

c. Recounting how, when Peter strayed from the purity of the true gospel, Paul rebuked him strongly and in the presence of all who were present.

d. Asking the Galatians to think back to when he preached the gospel to them and they received the Spirit. "How did this happen?," he asks them. By works of the law, or by hearing with faith? They knew the answer. Simply by hearing with faith.

e. By showing from the Old Testament that God never intended to bring the inheritance (salvation and all of its blessings) to Abraham through the Law, but through Promise. All

Christians, says Paul, are Jews spiritually by faith. True Israel, the Israel of God, is the people of God who have been made sons of God through faith in Christ. Under the Old Covenant, the Jews were only slaves to sin. And therefore He asks the Galatians, “having been set free in Christ, why are you turning your backs on grace to enter into slavery once more?”

f. The dynamic of the Old Covenant was *the flesh*. This is why it produced only slaves. But the New Covenant dynamic is the Holy Spirit. And thus, Paul’s famous description of “the deeds of the flesh” vs “the fruit of the Spirit.”

g. Paul ends with some practical admonitions, he summarizes the gospel with “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

The Abusers

Alright then, it is in the midst of this demonstration of the true gospel that Paul writes concerning these false teachers –

Galatians 4:17 ESV
(17) They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to

shut you out, that you may make much of them.

Paul is cluing these clueless Galatians – and us – into the methods and motives of the abusive man who comes into the church to enslave Christ’s people. Let’s look at it more closely – the thing is VERY consistent and such abusive men use the very same tactics today. Expect it!

1. **First, they are flatterers.** “*They make much of you.*” Over the years, we have heard this theme repeatedly. People will come – “Oh, this is the most wonderful church! That was the greatest sermon!” If they are sincere and trying to encourage us, that is great. But I have come to give really no weight to such comments at all. “Ok, well, we will see if you stay here what you are really made of.” It is dangerous to allow flattery to puff us up because this is one of THE most common traits of the wolf. Deception through flattery. “They make much of you.”

2. **But for no good purpose.** Their motive is “no good.” At the heart of their flattery is a wicked motive.

Psalms 5:9 ESV
(9) For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open

grave; they flatter with their tongue.

Psalms 12:2 ESV

(2) Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

3. **They want to shut you out.** Here, the Apostle identifies their motive. Through flattery and deception, the abusive man or woman desires to “shut out” his victims. What does this mean? It means, taking the sons of God in Christ and making them slaves so that they don’t live in the house of God, but outside of it – where the slaves live. It means cutting Christ’s people off from the blessings of the inheritance which they have in Christ.

Now, of course this is not absolutely done in regard to a real Christian. But it can be done *in the mind of the deceived person*. He can come to view himself once more as a slave if he believes the false gospel of the abusive man.

The false teacher, the abusive man, hates the freedom we have in Christ. He introduces his own “gospel,” therefore to shut us out from that freedom so that we can then be made his slaves. He becomes, you might say, our “priest” through whom we must go and whose dictates we must

obey if we are to get set right with God.

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” 5:1

4. Now, the ultimate goal of the abusive man – *“that you may make much of them.”* In other words, the abuser’s end goal is *to be as God. To be worshipped and praised.*

This is why we in the church of Jesus Christ MUST BE wise to the abusive man’s tactics. Such a person is very, very often drawn to the church because he or she craves the worship that is being offered there to Christ – for himself. Literal worship happens in the church. What better place for a wolf to operate his evil instruments of deception so that this worship is re-directed to him!

Just as the abused wife with the “missionary/rescuer” mentality sees her suffering as some noble thing which earns her more merit and approval from God, so it can happen in the church. The wicked, abusive man’s abusive religion appeals to this kind of thinking in us and if we do not take care, we can actually end up promoting this kind of abusive climate in our own church!

REVIEW: Power, Control, Entitlement, Justification. Do you remember these essential elements of abuse? Power and Control are the abusive man's goal. He desires, just as Paul has told the Galatians, to have dominion and control over them. Why? Because the abusive man has a profound sense of entitlement to this power and control. It is his by virtue of who he is. And therefore, he is justified in exercising his various methods of abuse – deception, physical and verbal attacks – to enforce his demand for what is his – power and control. Thus, his victims become enslaved to him.

“Of all people, Christians must take the lead in opposing the abusive man, refusing to submit to him, being wise to his schemes and deceptions. We have tasted true freedom! We dare not let anyone rob us of it.”

Galatians 5:1-4 ESV

(1) For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

(2) Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

(3) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

(4) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the

law; you have fallen away from grace.

II. A Closer Look at the Effects of Abuse on Victims

In the household of the abusive man (and it could happen in the church where such a man comes to power as well), there is enslavement – not freedom. There is misery – not joy. There is deception – not truth. If we are to wake up to the seriousness of the sin of abuse, then we must get our minds around its effects. I cannot imagine any Christian who, once they have learned about the terrible effects abuse has on its victims, would ever again be apathetic to it.

Alright then, let's paint an ugly portrait – look at it well. I take the following from Patricia Evans' book – The Verbally Abusive Relationship-

1. Abuse Undermines the Victim's Perceptions

In keeping with the tactic of deception, by its very nature, abuse (particularly verbal abuse) discounts the victim's own thoughts and observations, and shapes her into tolerating abuse without realizing she is doing so. She also loses self-esteem without realizing it. She is blamed by the abuser and becomes the scapegoat.

2. Verbal abuse is damaging to the human spirit. Over time, it strips the joy and vitality out of the victim's life. A woman, for example, who was once vibrant and alive with a smile on her face, is transformed into a ghost of what she was.

3. The victim unconsciously (many of her reactions are unconscious due to the deceptive methods of the abuser) learns to live in a constant "on guard" condition. The attack can come at any time – even when, perhaps *especially when*, everything seems great.

4. The victim becomes very unsure of her ability to communicate clearly, overly worried about how she is coming across to others.

5. She becomes excessively concerned that something is wrong with her. But she can never find out what it is.

6. She develops an excessive and unbalanced inclination to soul-searching and reviewing incidents of abuse, hoping that she can determine what went wrong.

7. Needless to say, her self-confidence erodes away. She cannot even trust herself to interpret what she sees and hears, so often has the abuser reinterpreted her reality to his benefit. The victim, consequently, eventually

becomes reluctant to come to any conclusions of her own.

8. An internal "critical voice" becomes louder and louder within her. Self-doubt grows.

9. She comes to see that she should be happier, but she cannot find that happiness.

10. The victim experiences an increasing anxiety that she is in fact, crazy. It is, in fact, one of the most common tactics of the abusive man – crazy-making. With all sorts of wicked, lying tactics, he makes other people and his victim herself believe that she is the problem because she is mentally ill.

11. A realization grows in her that her life is passing as time is passing and she is missing out on it. She has a desire to escape or run away.

12. A constant hoping belief that one day, in the future, everything will be great. She does not live in the now, but in the then.

13. A distrust of any future relationships.

ALL OF THESE EFFECTS CAN ALSO OCCUR IN THE CONTEXT OF ABUSE WITHIN THE CHURCH. THESE EFFECTS QUITE CLEARLY

ILLUSTRATE SOME OF THE THOUGHTS PAUL HAD WHEN HE WROTE TO THE GALATIANS – “DO NOT SUBMIT AGAIN TO A YOKE OF SLAVERY.”

That is not all he had in mind of course. He was also warning them about the danger of apostasy – of having “tasted” of Christ and then ultimately embracing justification by law/works.

Let’s listen in to a typical interchange between an abuser and his victim –

“Lea has been married to Luke for 12 years. They have a 6-month old child. She is an award-winning artist. He is a successful businessman. Luke is leaving on a business trip.

Luke suggests to Lea, ‘I can leave the Dodge (the new car) with you and take the Ford (old car) when I go to the airport. There’s no use leaving the Dodge in the lot where it could get damaged.’ Lea agrees. She cleans out the old car and they exchange keys. She drives the new car that week.

A couple of weeks pass. Luke is nearly ready to leave on another business trip. Lea thinks about cleaning out the old Ford again and asks, ‘Are you taking the Ford?’ Luke turns to her with a look of great astonishment and

asks incredulously, “What ever makes you think I’d be taking the Ford?”

Lea is surprised, but tries to answer. ‘Last time you...’. She is immediately interrupted by Luke, who says in a drawn-out emphatic way, ‘If you want...to drive...the Dodge...all... you have...to do...is ask.’

The interruption throws Lea off balance. [A definite sign of abuse]. She is still trying to explain and, at the same time, a part of her mind is sorting through the previous interaction and agreement, and another part of her is filled with a feeling of striving and effort to answer Luke’s question about why she thought he’d be taking the Ford. Lea says, ‘Luke, I’m trying to answer you...’.

She is cut off again with the same sentence, ‘If you want...,’ as if she hadn’t been heard. Lea feels as if there is a brick wall between them. [Another sign of abuse]. She starts over in her thinking and realizes she doesn’t want to drive the new Dodge. Luke had give her instructions about how to take care of it, where to park it, and so forth. Not wanting the responsibility or the possibility of another upset, she says, ‘I’ll drive my car if you think it’ll be OK to leave the Dodge out in the airport lot.’

Luke looks at her with complete incredulity and says, ‘Really, the lots are perfectly safe. They are patrolled, you know.’

At this point, Lea had wanted to remind Luke that he’d originally said he didn’t want to leave the car in the lot for a week, but she stopped herself. He hadn’t seemed to remember the previous discussion, and she wondered if she had not heard what she had thought she’d heard.

Lea felt distressed, but thought she probably shouldn’t be. After all, if Luke had no memory of their first conversation about the car, she should accept that. ‘Maybe I am too sensitive,’ she thought. Later she had a strong feeling that she just wanted to run away. Life seemed so hard.

This type of interaction NEVER occurred when anyone else was around.

This last fact, in itself, demonstrates that the abuser knows precisely what he is doing. He knows that it is abusive. He knows that it would hurt his “greatest guy in the world” image – so he makes sure it is only he and his victim when he lays these abusive tactics on her.

Notice then the deception. The re-inventing of past facts. The intentional

“crazy-making” tactic. The victim senses something is very wrong, but the abuser’s deception and lies keep her off balance and confused. So much so that she things largely that the conflict was her fault.

What is the right way to respond to such an abuser? Well, assuming that the victim can do so safely, the proper response is truth! Something like this-

“Stop it! That is abusive, power and control seeking behavior. Stop it!”

But in order to do this, the victim must come to understand that this is abuse, what its motives are, and what other ways abuse evidences itself. The victim – the people of Christ – must come to see the horrible damage that this wickedness does to the freedom Christ has given to us. And we must be courageous enough to follow Christ in freedom rather than submitting ourselves to the abuser’s yoke of bondage.

Conclusion

The abusive, enslaving, false teachers in Galatia whom Paul was opposing, were far more (as I hope you now understand) than mere messengers of false facts about Christ. They were men driven by a lust for power and control over others. The sheep for whom Christ died were nothing to

them, except as objects to be used up for the wolf's own glorification.

“Sheldon, a man required to enter Lundy Bancroft’s program for abusive men, had violated a restraining order. He was now attempting to get custody of their 3-year old daughter, Ashley. He said, ‘I don’t consider Kelly (his wife) to be Ashley’s mother. She’s just a vessel, just a channel that Ashley came through to get into this world.’

Sheldon had reduced Kelly to an inanimate object in his mind. When he spoke of her, he twisted his face up in a disgusted expression of contempt. At the same time, he never sounded upset; he considered Kelly too far beneath him to raise his ire. His tone of condescension indicated how certain he was of his superiority to Kelly.

As memorable as Sheldon’s smug derision was, it was only a few notches worse than the common thinking of many abusive men. The abuser tends to see his partner [or, in the church, the flock], as less intelligent, less competent, less logical, and even less sensitive than he is. He will tell me, for example, that she isn’t the compassionate person he is. He often has difficulty conceiving of her as a human being. This tendency in abusers is known as

OBJECTIFICATION
or
DEPERSONALIZATION.

Most abusers verbally attack their partners in degrading, revolting ways with words that assault the victims humanity, reducing her to a non-living object or a degraded sexual body part. Objectification is a critical reason why an abuser tends to get worse over time. As his conscience adapts to one level of cruelty – or violence – he builds up to the next. By depersonalizing his partner, the abuser protects himself from the natural human emotions of guilt and empathy, so that he can sleep at night with a clear conscience. [This kind of thing certainly was in play, for example, in the holocaust of WWII].

The abuser distances himself so far from his victim’s humanity that her feelings no longer count, or simply cease to exist, so that after a few years the abuser can reach a point where they feel no more guilt over degrading or threatening their partners than you or I would feel after angrily kicking a stone in the driveway.” [Why Does He Do That, by Bancroft]

Such is the ugliness of abuse. Such is the ugliness of sin.

Galatians 4:28-31 ESV

(28) Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

(29) But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

(30) But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

(31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.