

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)

***“Sin Exposed by the Light of
Christ”***

July 25, 2010

Sermon Text: 3 John 1:9-10

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor 11

Introduction-

This morning we are beginning an intermission in our study of the Gospel of John to begin a series which I have been studying and preparing for in the past few months. This series has as its subject a very, very important topic that we simply cannot remain ignorant of. Let me introduce it to you by explaining how I came to it myself.

Last year, I began to ask myself if there might be some way that we as a church could become wiser in respect to the deceptions and schemes of the enemy. That is to say, I was asking the question “Are there some typical, characteristic, common warning signs that will help us more clearly and more readily see the enemy when he comes to us disguised in sheep’s clothing?”

Why was I asking this question? Because over the past years, this church has been assaulted numerous times (as has any true church) by divisive men, by men trying to introduce false doctrine, by men like Diotrophes who craved to be first in the church, and so on. And we expect that there will be more attacks in the future.

Now, at this point, you are probably asking – “Well, we have the Bible. It is sufficient for everything. Why look any *place* else?” And you are absolutely correct – the Bible is completely sufficient to make us wise with God’s wisdom. And in all the reading that I have been doing, inevitably as I discover some more things about the psychology and methods of sin, I find out that sure enough, these very things are indeed in the Bible – *but I had not seen them nor really understood them yet.* This is one of the reasons why it is so important for the Church to have older members who have served Christ for many, many years – because we grow in Christ’s wisdom and understanding as He teaches us through the years – often in the “classroom” of life.

For example – we have already heard this morning that one deed of the flesh is jealousy – that another is sensuality, and so on. *But just what do these sins look like?* Are they always really that easy to recognize? And I can tell you, *they are not*. Sin, by its very nature, is a lie. It is deceptive and dark and crafty. The serpent in Eden did not appear to be such a threat to Eve.

So, when the Bible tells me that I must be on guard myself against the sin of jealousy or coveting or idolatry, I need to spend some serious and prayerful time thinking about just what these kinds of things might look like – how they might even be functioning in my own life and me remain oblivious to them. I need pictures painted! I need illustrations. I need “for examples.” And so do you. This is one of the great purposes of preaching in the church –

- Proclaim the word
- Explain the word
- Illustrate the word
- Apply the word

Nehemiah 8:5-8 ESV

(5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood.

(6) And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting

up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

(7) Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places.

(8) They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

So, as I was thinking more about the nature of sin and in particular the deceptiveness of sin – how it operates behind the scenes, in the darkness, undetected – just as the Bible warns us – I thought of a very common example of the thing. How often have we all read a news report of some person who just “went off” and committed some horrendous crime? There is this typical family in a typical suburban neighborhood. All appears well. and then the father kills his whole family and himself. Or he robs a bank. Or it is revealed that he is a serial killer. What is it that we hear people say in almost every one of these cases –

“I just cannot believe it. He was a very nice man. He

helped people and the whole family seemed so happy. Surely there must be some mistake.”

Right? It is amazing. The deception of sin. The façade. The masquerade. The disguise. The thing is a Jekyll and Hyde. In fact many times the evil person was an upstanding church member.

“Of all the institutions of society, it is the Christian Church, Christ’s Temple indwelt by His Spirit that should be and must be the leader in exposing these things. The Light of Christ must shine so brightly in the Church that the most crafty hypocrisy simply cannot bear up for long without being exposed.”

Now, you see what I mean then about how all of these things are spelled out in the Bible for us, but we so often do not really “get them” until “we live them.” Christ warns us and the Apostles warn us many times about wolves in sheeps’ clothing. But we miss it until the wolf bites us or devours one of us.

It was in the course of reading about these things then that I started to come across the topic of

abuse, and specifically, domestic abuse. And more specifically yet, abusive men/women – their mentality, their tactics, their devices for remaining hidden, their motives, their effects upon others. This became the specific focus of my reading, and I have found it to be a subject that is simultaneously *fascinating/helpful* AND *stressful/ugly/wicked*. It is a topic that – GET A FIRM HOLD ON THIS – at one and the same time compels the Christian to learn more about it AND repels us, tempting us to put it away and forget about it. And therefore I am going to warn you right at the start of this series –

“This [domestic violence and abuse] is a subject that you would rather leave alone. It is a topic that you really do not want to hear about. At the very same time, it is to your peril and the peril of this church if we remain ignorant of the devices and methods of our enemy. Furthermore, we must remember that Christ would have us bear one another’s burdens, and the burden that the victim of abuse bears is not an option to that victim! She does not have the luxury of choosing not to hear anymore about it!”

A Parallel

As I have pressed on in the study of this topic of abuse (and we will be defining it specifically later), it began to strike me over and over again that –

“The psychology, the mindset, the attitudes, and the methods and goals of abusive men, particularly as practiced in their marriages and families, is a crystal clear illustration of the attitudes, methods, and goals of sin. Furthermore, the way that the abusive man functions in his closest relationships (usually in his home) can teach us volumes about how we can expect a wicked man to practice his evil ploys in the church!” And why not? After all, as we will learn, such men’s goals are the same – power and control, self-exaltation.”

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.

NOTE: It is very clear from this verse, right? *We are particularly*

susceptible to being enslaved by the abusive man who comes as an angel of light. Many of our churches today are enslaved to just such men and/or women! Many are severely hindered in their mission because of the presence of men or women who claim the name of Christ but whose religion is a mere mask – who loudly announce that they are seeking Christ’s glory when in fact it is their own glory they lust after.

So this is how the “lights” have been coming on for me in regard to the psychology and tactics and goals and deceptions of abusive men and women who enslave others and exalt themselves – even to the point of abusing them verbally, psychologically, and physically – *striking them in the face!* One of the reasons that this topic is difficult (not relaxing by any means) to study is because the wickedness of the thing incites anger – hopefully it will be a righteous anger. If you can learn about these methods of sin and remain unmoved, something is wrong with you! The Holy Spirit moves His people to a hunger and thirst for righteousness and to the protection of the orphan and widow and the helpless.

Here is the thesis then –

“We can learn about the psychology and tactics of our own sin, and in particular of the enemy’s emissaries sent to enslave and abuse Christ’s people, by studying and learning about the psychology and tactics of abusive men – specifically as they exercise their abuse in their marriages and families behind closed doors where no one else knows and no one else sees.”

NOTE: Listen very carefully to this. In this series, for the sake of simplicity, we are going to be referring to the abusive person as “he” and to the victim of that abuse as “she.” At certain points I will try to vary this to remind us that both men and women are sinners and both sexes can be abusers. *However*, the plain fact is that normally when we consider this subject of abuse in the home, family, and marriage, the abuser is a man.

Here are, then, a number of reasons why we are going to be dealing in detail with this subject – (I have wrestled with selecting a title for this series because it’s purposes are numerous):

1. To better equip Christ’s church to be wise in regard to the attacks

of the enemy (I hope that you will begin to see just how woefully ignorant we can be – and this must be corrected),

2. To do battle with the devil by shining the light of Christ’s truth upon the schemes and deceptions of darkness,

3. To aid us in more clearly seeing the thinking and tactics of sin within ourselves (ie, in identifying the deeds of our own sinful flesh),

4. To enable us to more clearly understand what biblical headship and submission look like (and what they do not look like),

5. To help victims of abusive people get free of that abuse, AND to enable us NOT to make the many typical mistakes pastors, Christians, and churches make in dealing with abusers and their victims,

6. To convict abusive people of their sin and bring them to repentance,

7. To warn young women what abusive men look like and to help young men to identify potentially abusive patterns in themselves.

And HERE is the method we plan to follow –

1. We will identify and study specific Scripture which deals with a certain attitude/mindset and tactic of sin. We will then use examples of abusive men as they carry out their abuse in order to very clearly illustrate what the Scripture is teaching us.

2. We will then identify the opposite attitude or method that characterizes the Christian, as produced in them by the Holy Spirit. That is to say, we will be comparing and contrasting the *deeds of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit*.

This Method is Biblical

We take it for granted, we who have studied and read our Bibles for so long – that we miss it. Namely, *that the Bible describes and contrasts sin with righteousness*. This fact tells us that we are in great need of having holiness described for us (as we entered this world in an unholy condition) and we are likewise in need of having our sin specifically described for us (as we are so prone to being blind to it). Perhaps this is why our confession of faith

instructs us to repent of “particular known sins particularly.”

For example, think of these passages –

- Galatians 5:16-26
- 1 Cor 13 – Love IS, Love does NOT
- Eph 4 – This is a classic example -

Ephesians 4:19-32 ESV

(19) They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

(20) But that is not the way you learned Christ!--

(21) assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,

(22) to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

(23) and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

(24) and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

(25) Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

(26) Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

(27) and give no opportunity to the devil.

(28) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

(29) Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

(30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

(31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

(32) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore, in this series we are going to be following this same method – specifically showing and illustrating the evil we are to put off and be on guard against, and specifically demonstrating righteousness and holiness – which is simply the love of Christ in action.

I. Sin MUST be First

3 John 1:9-10 ESV

(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.

Matthew 20:25-28 ESV

(25) But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

(26) It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

(27) and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,

(28) even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

“Sin in its very essence is the lust for power and control – it craves to be first, pre-eminent even over God.”

Most probably, these are the words of Satan –

Isaiah 14:13-14 ESV

(13) You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;

(14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

Power and control. You see it in the Pharisees battles with Jesus. In the sinner's hatred of the Law of God. In the lie the Serpent told Eve in Eden and in her embracing of that lie – "You will be as God."

Power and control. Let me put this right down in front of us where we can reach it and touch it –

"A batterer [in this case, an abuser who exercises physical abuse as well as other means] is a person who exercises a pattern of coercive control in a partner relationship, punctuated by one or more acts of intimidating physical violence...or credible threat of physical violence. This pattern of control and intimidation may be predominantly psychological, economic, or sexual in nature or may rely primarily on the use of physical violence." [Lundy Bancroft, The Batterer as Parent]

"Power Over shows up as control and dominance...A belief in Power Over resembles a lens through which the believer views the world. Someone who believes in Power Over expects to get what he or she wants through the use of Power Over another....Verbal abuse...is a means of controlling, dominating, and having Power Over another person. The verbal abuser seeks to control and dominate. In a verbally abusive relationship, only the illusion of an authentic relationship exists...Since the abuser needs to have Power Over his partner, he cannot accept her as an equal. In an abusive relationship, the couple does not really plan together- that would require mutuality and equality." [The Verbally Abusive Relationship, by Patricia Evans]

Bancroft reiterates the very same kind of definition of abuse –

"I have simply chosen the word abuser as a shorthand way of saying 'men who chronically make their partners feel mistreated or devalued.'" [Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men]

NOTE: In secular literature, the term "partner" is used as it covers a wide range of intimate

relationships – many of which the Bible rejects as perversions of God’s ordained pattern for marriage. If we were writing about a marriage relationship, we would of course use “husband” and “wife.”

Listen to this account of a man named Glenn, as told to us by Bancroft –

“Glenn was remarkably honest with me about his thought process and his motives, probably because of how justified he felt. He believed in his right to control his partner’s actions; he expected his word to be the last word; and he did not accept defiance. He considered it his right to punish Harriet – in the most severe way he could think of – if she took steps to recover ownership of her life. He talked proudly of how he had ‘allowed’ her various freedoms while they were together, as if he were her parent, and defended his right to remove her privileges when he thought the time had come.”

Bancroft continues –

“An intimate relationship involves a steady flow of decisions to be made, conflicting needs to negotiate, tastes and desires to balance. Who is going to clean up

the mess in the kitchen? How much time should we spend alone together and how much with other friends? Where do our other hobbies and interests fit into our priorities?...What rules will we have for our children? The mindset that an abuser brings to these choices and tensions can make him impossible to get along with. Consider how challenging it is to negotiate or compromise with a man who operates on the following tenets (whether or not he says them aloud) –

- 1. ‘An argument should only last as long as my patience does. Once I’ve had enough, the discussion is over and it’s time for you to shut up.’*
- 2. ‘If the issue we’re struggling over is important to me, I should get what I want. If you don’t back off, you’re wronging me.’*
- 3. ‘I know what is best for you and for our relationship. If you continue disagreeing with me after I’ve made it clear which path is the right one, you are acting stupid.’*
- 4. ‘If my control and authority seem to be slipping, I have the right to take steps to re-*

establish the rule of my will, including abuse if necessary.'

The last item on this list is the one that most distinguishes the abuser from other people: Perhaps any of us can slip into having feelings like the ones in numbers one through three, but the abuser gives himself permission to take action on the basis of his beliefs. With him, the foregoing statements aren't feelings; they are closely held convictions that he uses to guide his actions. That is why they lead to so much bullying behavior."

[Why Does He Do That?]

And here is a great principle that we need to mark carefully –

"Your [ie, the abuser's] problem is not that you lose control of yourself, it's that you take control of your partner. In order to change, you don't need to gain control over yourself, you need to let go of control of her."

[Bancroft]

And so it goes. *Power and Control*.

"The overarching behavioral characteristic of the batterer is the imposition of a pattern of control over his partner. The batterer's control is carried out through a

mixture of criticism, verbal abuse, economic control, isolation, cruelty, and an array of other tactics...We observe that the batterer's imposition of control typically emerges gradually and intensifies during the early years of the relationship...Common points for the onset of this pattern include when the couple first begins living together, when the couple gets married, when the first pregnancy begins, and when the first child is born." [Bancroft, The Batterer as Parent]

Sin craves to control. It demands power. It lusts to be first – to be *worshipped and receive the glory due only to God alone*.

Patricia Evans quotes a woman named Alice Miller in Evans' book The Verbally Abusive Relationship

–

"By uncovering the unconscious rules of the power game and the methods by which it attains legitimacy, we are certainly in a position to bring about basic changes."

What Miller has discovered, whether she is a Christian or not I do not know, is the very thing we

find that we have held in our hand all the time as Christ's people –

John 8:32 ESV

(32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 12:46 ESV

(46) I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Hebrews 2:14-15 ESV

(14) Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

(15) and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Power and control as the heart of sin. Think very, very carefully about this.

Are you willing to let Christ's light of truth shine on you, on all of us? Do you want to know if and how it might be exercising itself in and through you? In what ways might we in our own sinful flesh be trying to dominate and control with Power Over others? Where might we be falling victim to a Diotrophes, duped and

manipulated and controlled by his or her deceptive tactics? And do we really want to become better prepared to help others who are victims of the abuse of sin and evil? This abuse is absolutely prevalent in our society today, and as I hope we will all learn with more and more clarity as this series progresses, it is far, far, far too prevalent *in the visible, professing Christian church!* And WE have been duped by it more often than we know.

Next time, we will plan to examine in greater detail the many specific tactics and strategies sin utilizes to gain and maintain power and control over people. We will also plan to learn that there are even more fundamental attitudes in the very mindset of wicked, abusive people that are characteristic of the psychology of sin – attitudes which only the power of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself can demolish. Attitudes that still linger in our own sinful flesh and against which in the Spirit we must do war.

Until then, let's each one of us take James' sober warning to heart –

James 4:1-10 ESV (1) What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

(2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

(3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

(4) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

(5) Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

(6) But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

(7) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

(8) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

(9) Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

(10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Power and Control. How foolish and sinful it is for mere *creatures* like ourselves to think and act as if we inherently possessed these qualities! Where is true power and real control to be found? The Bible is very clear about it –

Psalms 62:8-11 ESV

(8) Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

(9) Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.

(10) Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

(11) Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God,

No man possesses inherent power, no human being has within himself control over another. All power and authority flows from its fountainhead – God Himself. And therefore it is to be exercised only as He gives it and as He commands.

And consider as well –