

# ***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”***

**September 26, 2010**

**Sermon Text:** Ephesians 6:4

**Scripture Reading:** Judges 6

## **Introduction-**

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.

Ephesians chapters 5 & 6 contain the Lord’s instructions to us regarding the exercise of His authority and the submission to that authority which is to characterize the various relationships of our lives –

- Husbands and wives
- Fathers and children
- Masters and slaves (employers and employees in today’s terms)

Before we are finished with this series on the topic of abuse, we will of course

need to return to Ephesians 5 and deal with the whole matter of headship and submission in the husband/wife relationship. It cannot be denied that the Bible establishes a doctrine of headship in marriage, but sinful, abusive human beings have often distorted this Scripture in their attempt to justify their evil abusive practices. In particular, we want to underscore what biblical headship in marriage, in parenting, and in other relationships of life, such as in the workplace, IS NOT!

***One of the most wicked aspects of the sin of abuse is its very common perversion of the Scriptures to justify power and control over, and abuse of another human being. Like the Pharisees who believed themselves justified by the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus has very harsh rebuke for this evil of claiming that God Himself justifies the abuser’s evils.***

Let NO ONE claim that the Word of God endorses abuse in the name of “headship and submission.”

This week I was listening to a lecture on domestic violence given by a lady named Leslie Vernick. I plan to play it

in the women's study soon. She told about speaking on this topic at a seminary to students studying for the ministry. In response to her comments on sexual abuse in a marriage, one student raised his hand and cited 1 Cor 7 –

1 Corinthians 7:4 ESV

(4) For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

and made the claim that this Scripture justifies a man *forcing* his wife to yield to him whether she wants to or not. *It is a wicked, wicked thing to distort God's Word like this and try to use it to justify sin.*

I have been asked by a number of you this past week to not hurry through this series, but take the time necessary to thoroughly deal with it. I have also been asked to address the subject of *the woman as abuser*, which I will do – that sermon will be entitled “The Abuser as Jezebel” based upon 1 Kings 21, the account of Jezebel and Ahab obtaining Naboth's property. We should also go ahead then and take the time to examine still more tactics so commonly exercised by the abusive man.

Alright then, this morning we want to begin to address the topic of *the effects of abuse upon children*. This entails not only the direct abuse exercised upon children themselves, but also and perhaps even more commonly, the effects of children witnessing their mother being abused. This topic, in some ways more than any other, should motivate us to wise up to the nature and tactics and mentality of abuse.

Matthew 18:5-6 ESV

(5) "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,  
(6) but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

## I. Provoking to Anger

The instruction to fathers here in Ephesians 6 is a “zipped file.” It is packed with implications and meaning. We have often read it, but we probably do not understand it that well. What is it to “provoke a child to wrath”?

We have a parallel in Colossians –

Colossians 3:21 ESV

(21) Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Every father here no doubt must confess that far too many times we have been guilty of this very thing in regard to our children. Rather than instructing them and disciplining them as the Lord instructs and disciplines us, we have exasperated and frustrated them to anger so that they despair of even trying to do right.

But for the abusive man (or woman), this thing is habitual. The abuser is defined by it. What is it like? Inside the inner sanctum of the abuser's home, what is it like to be a child there? What are the effects on the children? This is the thing we want to describe in order to "flesh out" this verse – *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.*

Remember now the mentality and motives of the abusive man. His goal is power and control over his victim(s). His mindset is that he is entitled to this power and control. And his ethic is that he is completely justified in using his weapons of abuse to obtain what he is entitled to. Everything else – all his methods and tactics – flow from these root issues. *Any treatment program will need to address this mentality. There must be a radical change in the entire manner in which the abusive man perceives himself and others. He must be transformed – and that is something that only the Church has the answer to. Therefore, we should be*

*leaders in showing the Sauls of this world how to be transformed into Pauls!*

I am going to be drawing heavily now from 3 books by Lundy Bancroft to paint this portrait of the effect of abuse on children. The books are –

- Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men
- The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics
- When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse

These are all just excellent books. **CAUTION:** Why Does He Do That? in particular contains some raw and ugly words quoted from statements made by abusive men to their victims. For myself, I wanted to feel the full brunt of what the victim does – but if you would like me to black out those parts for you, I will do so. Don't let this keep you from reading the book.

### **A. The Children Know**

Moms and Dads are often very naïve about how much their children know regarding what goes on in the home

and between their parents. The first thing we must face up to is –

***“Children are aware of the abuse that is occurring in their homes.”***

They hear the painful verbal abuse in the other room –

- You stupid %\$#\*&%
- You shut up or you will be sorry!
- Your kids are going to be just as crazy as you are when they grow up!

Like all humans beings, children soon subconsciously learn to read “body language.” They know what hurtful verbal intonation sounds like.

The children know. And therefore, the children ARE being affected by the abuse, and those effects are FAR reaching.

## **B. The Children Feel**

Children feel the pain of abuse, even if they are not the direct target. When they see their mother abused, humiliated, and treated like an object of contempt, they feel very sharp emotional pain. The climate of their home is one of pain and hurt. Like a physically assaulted victim, they are going to be traumatized by all of this and they will try to cope with it in

many different ways, many of which are destructive in themselves.

Listen to Bancroft –

*“Children learn to recognize ominous tones of voice and intimidating body language. They feel sharp pains when they see their mother humiliated or degraded. They are filled with an urgent desire to rescue her, but at the same time can feel paralyzed by fear – **SO THEY ARE LEFT FEELING GUILTY STANDING BY AND NOT INTERVENING. THEIR INNOCENCE CAN SLIP AWAY IN THE PROCESS.***

*If their mother’s partner is physically violent, they may shrink into corners trying to make themselves invisible, praying for someone to come to lead everyone to safety. Or, if they are old enough, they may jump into the fray themselves and try to stop the fighting, hoping to be the peacekeeping force. If they happen not to be where an assault occurs, they still hear the screams and threats, the crashing of thrown objects, or the blows. Or they observe overturned chairs scattered across the kitchen and see their mother crying. The next morning they notice a bruise on Mom or they can tell by the bags under her eyes that she hasn’t slept. **THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT SIGNS OF VIOLENCE THAT IT IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE***

*FOR CHILDREN TO MISS THEM ALL.*

*“Studies have demonstrated that children see and hear much more of the man’s abusive or violent behavior than either parent realizes. And they take it all in. There is a tremendous amount you can do to help your children cope and heal, but FIRST you have to accept that they have been affected.”*

*The critical question therefore is not whether they know you are being mistreated – they do – but how they are being affected by it.” [When Dad Hurts Mom]*

Moms and Dads – neither of you may be a real abuser, but there are still important lessons for us all here, right? When mom and dad do not love one another, when they sin with their words or actions toward one another, be sure that our children know it. *It is vital that parents readily confess such sins not only to one another, but to their children as well.* “Mommy and Daddy have NO RIGHT to speak to one another like that. It is sin. Please forgive us.”

The questions to be asked in respect to the abuser’s home then, include [Bancroft] –

- What meanings and interpretations are they placing on the events that unfold before them?
- What lessons are they learning – and mislearning – about how to treat their loved ones, how to resolve conflict, and how to survive traumatic experiences?

The children know. The children feel. The children are learning.

### **C. Abuse Undermines the Vital Mother-Child Relationship**

One of the most painful and terrible effects of abuse is that it so often effects the alienation of children from their mother. Abuse communicates distorted facts to children about their mother. These distortions tend to distance them from her, to erode their respect for her, and to neutralize her ability to parent them. This is devastating for a child and has widespread consequences.

*“Your partner’s mistreatment of you, whether it occurs daily or intermittently, raises questions for your children about you as well. Is Mommy as bad as he sometimes says she is? Is it ok for us to talk to Mom the way he talks to her? Is mommy going to be able to protect us from his rampages? Does Mommy really care about us? The abusive partner may*

*create confusion for children about whether or not their mother is there for them or not.” [When Dad Hurts Mom]*

***“The abuser considers the children the woman’s domain of responsibility but HIS domain of authority.”***  
[Bancroft]

*“Unfortunately it is next to impossible for children to remain unaware of their father’s core attitude toward their mother. If he is condescending and arrogant, if derision and disgust rumble in his voice and contort his facial expressions when he addresses their mother, the children can’t really miss it. They hear him interrupt you over and over again or see him laugh at you; they sense that he sees you as beneath him, and they observe that he doesn’t consider your feelings or opinions worth listening to.*

*And he is a key role model for them, whether he is their father or not, and they may learn from him how to treat you and each other. If he views you as hysterical, over time they may come to have a similar attitude. If they hear him call you a demeaning name, they may learn to do the same. They may start to express their annoyance toward you with the same condescending ring to their voices that he has. If a mother is chronically facing contemptuous or defiant*

*behavior from her children, the root problem may be in her partner.”*  
[When Dad Hurts Mom]

***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.”***

The abusive man often expends enormous energy in many different ways to undermine the children’s view of their mother. The goal of course, as always, is to alienate the family from one another, especially the children from their mother, so it is easier for him to exercise power and control over everyone.

**APPLICATION FOR THE CHURCH** – We can expect, therefore, that an abusive, power/control seeking individual like Diotrephes (3 John) will energetically work to alienate the flock from the shepherds. Such a person has an entire arsenal of tactics to use in effecting this alienation. No wonder the Scriptures have so much to say to us in this regard –

Hebrews 13:17 ESV  
(17) Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Test the spirits. The Holy Spirit will never work to discredit or demean Christ's appointed shepherds in His church. Never.

#### **D. Conflicted Thinking**

Numbers 23:19 ESV

(19) God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

We have already spent time learning that an abusive person *is so often very, very deceptive*. They come as an angel of light, as a servant of righteousness. They leave people who thought they knew them thinking (if they are exposed) – “no, I just can't believe it!”

This deception has very negative effects upon the abuser's children. Imagine living with the hypocrisy of the thing. And the confusion. Here is a picture of it –

*“I find that the abusive man with children concerns himself particularly with how people view him as a father. He may make himself a prominent presence at sporting events and awards ceremonies, yet be pretty scarce when it is time to change diapers or rise out of bed when a child calls for help in the middle of the night. He may praise his children for*

*the benefit of the neighbor's ears, yet at home always find fault with them, tearing down their self-confidence and self-esteem.*

*What are children to make of their father's popularity? [Imagine that he may be a pastor or popular church leader] One likely outcome is that they will think, ‘No one else seems to notice anything wrong with him, so the problem must be with one of us.’ This impression can be reinforced by the blaming words he yells at you or at them around the house: ‘You pushed me too far, it's your own fault, if you weren't so stupid this wouldn't happen.’*

In contrast, here is truth in Christ lived out by the Apostle Paul -

2 Corinthians 10:11 ESV

(11) Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.

His yes was yes, his no was no. What he was somewhere else, so he was when he was with the Corinthians.

Not so the abusive man. A Jekyll-Hyde scenario almost always points toward abuse. The confusion that results from it in the children, as well as in the victim, has multiple damaging effects on them. Guilt for thinking badly of him while everyone else seems to

adore him. Disintegration of the foundations of their lives – *who are they to trust? What can they believe? Concluding that they must be crazy – that they cannot trust their own perceptions of what they see and hear.* It looks to them that the abuser is one person, but others have an entirely different “take” on him. This erosion of one’s self-confidence will have very negative effects upon them all their lives unless they obtain help and come to an understanding that they are not crazy, that they need not be burdened with guilt, that they can indeed trust their own observations.

Listen further regarding the false guilt that abuse lays upon children and the victim –

*“Abusers shift blame for their actions onto their victim. A critical family dynamic that we observe is that batterers tend to have some success in persuading their family members to take on responsibility for the abuse! Children may blame their mothers for the abuse, mothers may blame children, siblings tend to blame each other, and all family members tend periodically to blame themselves. Family members may accuse each other of having made the batterer angry by challenging him, failing to cater to him adequately, making too much noise, or other actions that displeased him. When a woman*

*attempts to end a relationship to escape abuse, the batterer may tell her that she is the one causing harm to the children because she is breaking up the family. Abuse parents often project responsibility for their abusive behavior onto external factors, including the child.”*

As we think carefully about these devilish schemes, it should not be difficult then for us to understand that a child in such a home is going to live with a load of false guilt and self-blame.

***“If we remain ignorant of the wicked man’s devices, we will be drawn into his manipulative deceptions and participate ourselves in laying the blame upon the victim and/or the children.”***

Amazing, right? Blaming the victim?? Who would do that? WE would!! We are selfish. We want things to go our way. Our common line can be “*I just don’t want any trouble.*” Here is the victim – making these allegations. Why can’t they just be quiet and leave well enough alone? Someone can be a “whistle-blower” and end up being the one condemned. This dynamic adds immeasurably to the suffering of the victim and to the children in an abuser’s home.

## E. Fear

What are the effects on a person – in this case, on children – of living in constant, daily, moment-by-moment fear for years?

1 John 4:18-19 ESV

(18) There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

(19) We love because he first loved us.

*“Most abusers become physically intimidating at some point. This pattern typically involves some degree of physical violence: punching walls, smashing objects, poking or grabbing you, blocking your path, threatening you, driving in a terrifying way with the car. He may also intimidate you in subtler ways, by towering over you during arguments, getting frighteningly loud, turning bright red with rage, or making veiled threats such as, ‘You’re really pushing me too far,’ or ‘You don’t want to find out what I’m capable of.’ Children pick up on the threats, whether implied or explicitly stated, that are communicated by the abusive man’s explosive outbursts and aggressive body language, and your flinching or frightened reactions. The research on children’s exposure to abuse shows*

*that they are aware of much more of their father’s violence than the parents think they are, and can sometimes describe incidents in detail that both Mom and Dad didn’t think the children even saw. THESE EXPERIENCES ARE SCARY FOR CHILDREN. They*

–

- *worry that their mother will get hurt and not be able to look after them,*
- *lie awake in bed staring into the dark or wake up later from nightmares,*
- *that someday the abuser will turn his violent behavior toward them.*

*I have sometimes heard mothers say, ‘Oh, my children know that he would never hurt them, no matter what he does to me,’ but the reality is that they don’t know that and cannot.” [When Dad Hurts Mom]*

Closely related to fear is the whole matter of secrecy. Children are often intimidated by the abuser to keep quiet about what really goes on at home. Secrets can be a good thing – an upcoming surprise party, for example. That is a good secret, but good secrets are only for a short time. A bad secret is something that a person is threatened into keeping forever when in fact the subject of the secret is an evil that needs to be exposed. PUTTING A CHILD IN THE POSITION OF KNOWING ABOUT

AN EVIL BUT BEING MADE TO FEAR TELLING IT, WILL HAVE DAMAGING CONSEQUENCES ON THE CHILD. The child is made to live in fear. False guilt is produced because the child feels he should tell but fears to do so.

A child may be put in the position of witnessing his mother being abused and of wanting to call the police, but failing to do so out of fear of retaliation from the abuser. There can often be a high potential for revenge being taken upon a child who tells. WE MUST NOT BE NAÏVE AND IGNORANT ABOUT THESE TACTICS.

Fear is devastating to a child, and we all know that fear can quickly produce anger, which is another effect of abuse we will need to examine.

*“Underlying the patterns of interaction that we have been discussing is the impact on the children of chronic fear, which can deepen and solidify unhealthy dynamics. Fear may lead family members to react with anger and panic toward anyone who is perceived as upsetting the batterer, whether by misbehaving, standing up to him, or simply attracting too much attention to themselves. Children living with chronic fear may experience blurring of their identities with that of the*

*batterer, as they strive to convince both him and themselves that they share his interests, style, and preferences in order to avoid being endangered by him. [The Batterer as Parent]*

I LOVE the following Scripture in relation to confronting the abuser with Christ’s truth!

Judges 6:28-31 ESV

(28) When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built.

(29) And they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And after they had searched and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

(30) Then the men of the town said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it."

(31) But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down."

I want to put this question to each one of you – *would you contend for Baal! Would you put to death Gideon for opposing the giant?* This is the very trap we will be drawn into if we are not wise.

### **G. Provoking a Child to Wrath Produces Behavioral and Emotional Problems in the Child**

An angry, hurting, frustrated child is going to act out. Many children who have been labeled the “problem child” of the family are simply the product of an abusive environment. Before quickly prescribing medication to a child who has behavioral problems, we need to consider the possibility that there is abuse in the home.

*“Many of our clients distort or exaggerate their children’s behavior, tending to cast them as highly troubled or destructive. Furthermore, the descriptions we receive from the wives of our clients suggest that the behavioral and emotional problems that the children do have may largely be a product of exposure to battering behavior....The presence of emotional deprivation can play a similar role in heightening the effects of other dynamics. Battering in a family shifts the locus of attention from the children to the batterer, which can result in children chronically failing to get their needs met. A sense of emotional*

*scarcity in a family can contribute to children perceiving each other as competitors rather than as allies.”*  
[The Batterer as Parent]

*“Children find violence between their parents [including verbal violence] to be among the most disturbing events involving their parents’ relationship. Children exposed to domestic violence*

- *are more aggressive with their peers, including a tendency to be bullies,*
- *spend less time with friends*
- *worry more about the safety of their friends*
- *are less likely to have a best friend*
- *have lower-quality relationships that do other children*
- *show significantly elevated rates of behavior problems, hyperactivity, anxiety, withdrawal, and learning difficulties*
- *tend to take on the role of attempting protect their mothers*
- *internalize various effects with long-term consequences...being burdened with guilt from believing that they are the cause and that they might cause her to be beaten again*
- *may be unable to eat or sleep*
- *develop negative attitudes toward women*

- *learn wrong methods of conflict resolution*
- *learn how to use power and force to get their own needs met at the expense of someone else. [The Batterer as Parent]*

***“Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her.”***

Still another of the emotional problems that abuse often creates is what we would call traumatic bonding. It is very similar to the bonding that a hostage often develops toward their captors. And this is how it works –

*“[Counselors] must assess the level of bonding between a batterer and his children. Abuse does not necessarily lead to distant, superficial, or overtly fearful relationships. In fact, as the literature on traumatic bonding demonstrates, systematic abuse – particularly of a kind that involves CYCLES of intermittent fear and kindness – can lead to the formation of unusually strong but unhealthy bonds and can foster the victim’s development of POTENT DEPENDENCE ON THE ABUSER.”*

**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.**

*“In traumatic bonding, the person who brings the soothing relief is the same one who perpetrated the abuse. The abuse produces a very powerful longing in the victim for kindness and understanding, and for a relief from fear or terror. Any person who is able to provide soothing treatment at the right moment will tend to be perceived by the victim as a rescuer and is looked upon with gratitude. Thus the abuser can become the rescuer – or so he is perceived. Following an incident of abuse, for example, an abuser may apologize for what happened, express concern for how the victim is feeling, and speak in a calm and warm tone. The typical response in victims of abuse is to feel thankful for the kindness, to be eager to forgive, and to form a belief that the abuser ACTUALLY CARES DEEPLY FOR HIM OR HER. Once this cycle has been repeated a number of times, the victim may come to feel grateful to the abuser just for stopping the abuse each time, even if no real kindness or attentiveness follows.” [The Batterer as Parent]*

As a result – *“the victim is likely to come gradually to confuse love and abuse just as the perpetrator does, though for different reasons; the fact that loving behavior so often closely*

*follows or precedes incidents of mistreatment causes the two to become traumatically linked in the victim's psychology...MANY ABUSERS HAVE STRONG TENDENCIES TO BE KIND TO THE CHILDREN FOLLOWING ASSAULTS ON THEIR MOTHER, SOMETIMES UNUSALLY SO, SO THAT THE CHILDREN'S TRAUMA FROM WITNESSING THE ABUSE OF THEIR MOTHER BECOMES PSYCHOLOGICALLY INTERWOVEN WITH POSITIVE ATTENTION FROM THE BATTERER.*

Don't be duped. We are growing wise to these things.

Do you begin to understand more clearly why a victim – be it a wife or the children – is so reluctant to come forward about the abuse? Or why it is not just an easy matter as it might seem to us to simply “leave the bum!”?

***Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.***

These are just a few of the terrible effects of disobeying Christ's command.

And do not forget – a Diotrephes can effect very many of the same tactics and results in the church unless we are wise to these schemes of the enemy. How many of God's people are traumatically bonded to just such an apparent “servant of righteousness” who hits them in the face, then switches roles to rescuer and savior?