

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 Sinfulness of Sin Denied by
the Abusive Man”*

October 17, 2010

Sermon Text: Isaiah 59:1-2

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 59

Introduction-

Isaiah 59:1-2 ESV

(1) Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;

(2) but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Sinners minimize their sin. They minimize the sinfulness of sin. They minimize the effects of sin. *They minimize their own responsibility and culpability for their sin.* We see this very thing here in Isaiah 59. Sinful Israel was blaming God –

- His hand is short, He cannot reach us to save us,

- His hearing has grown dull so that he cannot hear us crying to Him

The problem rested in God, you see. That was their thinking.

What was the real problem? *Their own iniquities had separated them from God so that He would not look upon them nor hear them to save them.* Yet they blamed Him, and in that blaming – they minimized the sinfulness of their sin, the effects of their sin, and their own guilt in their sin.

There are many other accounts of the same thing in the Scriptures –

Malachi 2:13-17 ESV (13) And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

(14) But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your

companion and your wife by covenant.

(15) Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

(16) "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

(17) You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

"What's wrong? What have WE done? Why does the Lord not accept our offerings? How have we wearied Him? Where is the God of justice?"

This is the common tactic – to minimize sin, to minimize responsibility for sin and to minimize the effects of sin. "*God does not accept our offerings. He does not hear our prayers. What could be the problem? Surely WE cannot be blamed!*" Their sin was not serious in their eyes, you see. THEY WERE

RECEIVING GOD'S JUSTICE, BUT THEY SAW IT AS INJUSTICE!

NOTE: *Faithlessness, injustice, doing evil – to 'the wife of your youth' is a great sin before God. God hates it. No person who abuses their spouse can expect blessing from the Lord. When God says here, through His prophet Malachi – 'I hate divorce' – note VERY carefully that He is rebuking the abusive man who divorces his wife. This is an act of faithlessness (treachery) and violence!*

This text must not be used to forbid divorce in every case – such as to command an abused woman that she must remain in an abusive marriage no matter what.

Let's look more closely at this matter of the minimization of sin, as illustrated by the tactics of the abusive person. We will also include under this heading the tactic of *blaming others*.

I. The Abuser as Minimizer

We have already seen many times in this study that one of the most devastating effects of abuse upon the victim is *that the victim blames herself for the abuser's actions. She thinks that the fault lies with her. She set him*

off. *She should have....She should not have..., She needs to do better, and so on.* The thing is entirely false of course. NOTHING justifies the abuse of another person.

The abuser, in his power/control, entitlement, justified mindset, *is quite happy for her to believe that she is to blame.* He has many tactics of laying that blame on her and on others. This is a way of minimizing his sin – by minimizing his guilt for it.

“Abuse counselors say of the abusive man, ‘When he looks at himself in the morning and sees his dirty face, he sets about washing the mirror.’ In other words, he becomes upset and accusatory when his partner exhibits the predictable effects of chronic mistreatment, and then he adds insult to injury by ridiculing her for feeling hurt by him. He even uses her emotional injuries as excuses to mistreat her further. If his verbal assaults cause her to lose interest in romance, he snarls at her accusingly and charges her with having an affair. If she is increasingly mistrustful of him because of his mistreatment of her, he says that her lack of trust is causing her to perceive him as abusive, reversing cause and effect in a mind-twisting way. If she is depressed or weepy one morning because he tore her apart verbally the night before, he

says, ‘If you’re going to be such a drag today, why don’t you just go back to bed so I won’t have to look at you.’”

“If your spouse/partner criticizes or puts you down for being badly affected by his mistreatment, that is abuse. Similarly, it’s abuse when he uses the effects of his cruelty as an excuse...Seek help for yourself quickly, as this kind of psychological assault can cause your emotional state to rapidly decline.” [Bancroft, **Why Does He Do That?**]

You can see then in all of this that the abuser is *minimizing* his sin, primarily by casting the blame upon his victim.

Let’s look at still more of the MANY ways the abuser minimizes and blames. These are all from Bancroft’s book – Why Does He Do That? –

- **It’s Never the Right Time or the Right way to bring things up.**

This observation is something that we elders have seen over the years time and time and time again. *The sinner will not argue so much about the sin he or she is confronted with. Instead, as a minimizing/blame-shifting tactic, they will criticize the time or the way in which you confronted them!*

“In any relationship, it makes sense to use some sensitivity in deciding when and how to tackle a difficult relationship issue. There are ways to word a grievance that avoid making it sound like a personal attack, and if you mix in some appreciation you increase the chance that your partner will hear you. But with an abuser, no way to bring up a complaint is the right way. You can wait until the calmest, most relaxing evening, prepare him with plenty of verbal stroking, express your grievance in mild language, but he still won’t be willing to take it in.”

With an abuser, the passage of time does not help. He doesn’t spend the intervening period (if you walk away from an argument, for example) digesting your comments and struggling to face what he did, the way a non-abusive person might. In fact, he does the opposite, appearing to mentally build up his case against your complaint as if he were preparing to go before a judge.” [Bancroft]

To admit guilt, to acknowledge the truthfulness and justice of your complaint, is seen by the abusive mentality as a loss of and threat to his power and control. The victim is NOT entitled to bring her complaint to him. For him to acknowledge his guilt requires humility. It requires that he

confess his sin against her – that he admit to his fault. These notions are totally contrary to his mentality of power and control.

NOTE: Sin, by its very nature, craves power and control. Satan would be “like the Most High God.” Adam and Eve in the Garden craved to be like God. Sin is rebellion *against* God. It is the sinner’s way of insisting that HE be in control and has power, that HE is entitled to that power – not God! *Repentance requires a bowing down before God, an acknowledging that God is God and WE are not! The abusive man fancies himself to be God and he will entertain no rivals. He mocks this –*

Psalms 100:3-4 ESV

(3) Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

(4) Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!

“Controlling men fall on a spectrum of behaviors...So we cannot say that an abuser must show ‘x’ number of traits to be classed as an abuser. Abuse itself comes in degrees. But commonly, an abuser will not listen to the victim’s perspective at all, feels completely justified, and becomes

retaliatory if she stands up for herself.” [Bancroft]

- **He Denies What He Did**

Still another means of minimizing his wickedness and, very often, of displacing the blame from himself to his victim, is the abuser’s common method of simply denying reality. He will insist that the victim is “crazy,” and that the thing she claims never even happened.

By way of review, listen to this statement from Bancroft that we have heard before -

“An abuser is a man who chronically makes his wife/girlfriend feel mistreated or devalued. He may employ psychological, verbal, physical, or sexual means – but all have similar effects on the victim. He will exhibit elements (on a scale) of denial, minimization, and distortion and even justification about his actions. The abuser has an abusive mentality that makes it difficult for him to even imagine being in a respectful and equal relationship with a woman.”

“Some behaviors in a relationship can be matters of judgment; what one person calls a raised voice another might call yelling, and there is room for reasonable people to disagree. But

other actions, such as calling someone a name or pounding a fist on the table, either happened or they didn’t happen. So while a non-abusive partner might argue with you about how you are interpreting his behavior, the abuser denies his actions altogether.” [Bancroft]

THIS TACTIC IS FAR MORE COMMON THAN YOU PROBABLY REALIZE! It is difficult for a non-abusive person to conceive of. It is like anti-semitic racists denying that the holocaust ever happened. The very same mentality, you see.

“One of the prevalent features of life with an angry, controlling person is that he/she frequently tells you what you should think and tries to get you to doubt or devalue your own perceptions and beliefs.” [Bancroft]

This is a method of the devil and his emissaries –

Galatians 1:6-8 ESV (6) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--

(7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

(8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a

gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

blaming of someone besides the abuser himself.

“Chronic mistreatment gets people to doubt themselves. Children of abusive parents know that something is wrong, but they suspect the badness is inside of them. Employees of an abusive boss spend much of their time feeling that they are doing a lousy job, that they should be smarter and work harder. Boys who get bullied feel that they should be stronger or less afraid to fight. When I work with an abused woman, my first goal is to help her to regain trust in herself; to get her to rely on her own perceptions, to listen to her own internal voices...Your abusive partner wants to deny your experience. He wants to pluck your view of reality out of your head and replace it with his.” [Bancroft]

“When an abuser denies an incident immediately after it happens, he can set his victim’s head spinning. Picture a woman who arises in the morning with her stomach still tied in a knot from an ugly blowout the night before. Her husband makes a face at her in the kitchen and says, ‘Why are you so grumpy today?’ She replies, ‘Why do you think? You called me a loser right in front of the children and then you yanked my towel off so they would laugh at me. Am I supposed to come down the stairs whistling a happy tune?’

‘What are you talking about,’ he gasps. ‘You’re a drama junkie. I was clear across the room from you when your towel fell off. You’re going to blame that on me? You’re nuts.’ And he walks off, shaking his head.”

All of this illustrates the tactic of the abuser – *denying reality. Denying that the abuse event ever happened.* Just as Satan denies the historicity of the creation or the existence of God or the incarnation or the cross or the resurrection or the second coming of Christ! Outright denial, designed to get the victim to doubt their perception of reality.

A woman can feel that she is losing her mind – or develop actual psychiatric symptoms – if the obvious realities of her life, including abuse, are denied repeatedly by her partner. The certainty and authority in his voice, with his eyes twisted up to show how baffled he is, leave her questioning herself. ‘Did that really happen? Maybe it didn’t. Maybe I do over-react to innocent things.’ The more serious the incidents he denies, the

And at the heart of all of this deception is *minimization of the abuse and*

more her grip on reality can start to slip. AND IF OUTSIDERS START TO NOTICE HER INSTABILITY, THE ABUSER CAN USE THEIR OBSERVATIONS TO PERSUADE THEM THAT HER REVELATIONS OF ABUSE BY HIM ARE FANTASIES.” [Bancroft]

If you have never been the recipient of such abuse – of this outright, ultra-convincing denial that something you saw with your own eyes – never even happened, then perhaps you either are not awake to the tactic (and it’s time for you to wake up!), or you simply have too much trust in “the goodness of human nature.” You think that no one who is that sincere and convincing could possibly be lying. **BUT THE ABUSER IS LYING!!!** He can be wonderfully convincing!! The abuser’s denial of reality, his denial that abuse ever even happened, is one of his most powerful weapons!

“The victims of this style of abuser ask me: ‘After an incident, it seems like he really believes the abuse didn’t happen. Is he consciously lying? The answer in most cases is YES. Most abusers do NOT have severe memory problems. He probably remembers EXACTLY what he did, especially when only a short time has passed. He denies his actions to close off discussion because HE DOES NOT

WANT TO ANSWER FOR WHAT HE DID, and perhaps he even wants you to feel frustrated and crazy.

However, a small percentage of abusers – perhaps one in 12 – may have psychological conditions such as narcissistic or borderline personality disorder, in which they literally block any bad behavior from consciousness. One of the clues that your abuser may have such a disturbance is if you notice him doing similar things to OTHER people. If his denial and mind-messing are restricted to YOU, or to situations that are related to you, he is probably simply abusive.

Denial and minimization are part of most destructive behavior patterns, whether they be alcohol abuse, gambling, or child abuse. Partner abuse is no exception.” [Bancroft]

“Although all verbal abuse has serious consequences, DENIAL is one of the most insidious categories of verbal abuse because it denies the reality of the victim. A confirmed abuser may use every form of verbal abuse on a regular basis. This very same abuser might very well read this section on the categories of verbal abuse and say that he has never been abusive! That he loves his partner, and that he would NEVER do anything to hurt her. This is denial: [The Verbally Abusive Relationship] -

- *I never said that*
- *You're making that all up*
- *We never had that conversation*
- *You're getting upset about nothing*
- *I don't know where you got that*
- *You've got to be crazy*

It is vital that the partner of the abuser clearly come to realize –

- *He DID say that*
- *She's made NOTHING up*
- *They DID have that conversation*
- *She's upset about SOMETHING*
- *Her experience is REAL*
- *She's NOT crazy*

Only then will the victim begin to recognize abuse for what it is.

We need to trust our perceptions – our hearing, our seeing, our touching. While our senses are not infallible, they are nevertheless given to us by God for our own good. We are, in fact, responsible to use them. The Apostle John validates them in regard to the historicity of Christ and the gospel –

1 John 1:1-3 ESV (1) That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we **looked upon** and have **touched** with our hands, concerning the word of life--

(2) the life was made manifest, and **we have seen it**, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-- (3) **that which we have seen and heard** we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

In contrast, the devil and his emissaries come along and say –

“Indeed, has God said.....?”

- **More Examples of the Abuser's Denial, Minimization, and Victim Blaming**

In still another book written by Lundy Bancroft, there is more material about how the abusive man *minimizes* his sin through denial and blaming –

“Batterers rarely disclose their violence fully, even in the face of considerable evidence. Our clients also deny the effects of their battering on their partners....Even those men who admit to some portions of their violence typically minimize their history of abuse, reporting significantly less violence than their female partners attribute to them and particularly minimizing their threatening behaviors (they may

characterize aggressive violence, for example, as self-defense or may lie about violent events).

In assessment of an alleged or established batterer, minimization can be more effectively misleading than denial. By expressing remorse while simultaneously portraying his victim as provocative and dishonest, a batterer is sometimes able to persuade a professional that the has been wrongly accused or that his efforts to change have not been recognized.

Our clients often characterize their actions as defensive in nature or as being necessary to prevent more serious harm. The most common explanation that clients of ours provide include such claims as that his partner was assaulting him and he injured her when he was warding off her blows; that he was enraged by her frequent assaults against him and ‘finally decided to show her what it’s like’; that she was assaulting one of the children and he stepped in to protect the child, etc.

Child-abusing batterers exhibit similar patterns of denial, minimization, and victim blaming regarding their parenting. Information that we receive from child protective services often contrasts sharply with our clients’ minimization of their violence, threats, or boundary violations toward

children. Many of our clients distort or exaggerate their children’s behavior, tending to cast them as highly troubled or destructive. Furthermore, the descriptions that we received from partners of our clients suggest that the behavioral and emotional problems that the children do have may be largely a product of exposure to battering behavior. [Bancroft, The Batterer as Parent]

- **He Minimizes His Behavior by Comparing Himself to others Who are ‘Worse’ Than Him**

2 Corinthians 10:12 ESV

(12) Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

This is still another masterful deception designed to minimize the abuser’s sin. Listen to it –

*“It is critical to use common-sense – and legal – definitions of what constitutes violence, **NOT** the abuser’s definition. An abuser minimizes his behavior by comparing himself to men who are worse than he is, whom he thinks of as being ‘real’ abusers. If he never threatens his partner, then to*

him threats define real abuse. If he only threatens but never actually hits, then real abusers are those who hit. Any abuser hides behind this mental process –

If he hits her but never punches her with a closed fist...If he punches her but she has never had broken bones or been hospitalized...If he beats her up badly but afterward he apologizes and drives her to the hospital himself...then in the abuser's mind, HIS behavior is never truly violent.

A related mental process reveals itself when a client says to me, as many of them do: 'I'm not like one of those guys who comes home and beats his wife FOR NO REASON. In other words, if he had adequate justification, then it is not violence. The abuser's thinking tends to wend its way inside of the woman too, like a tapeworm. The victims of my clients say things to me, such as –

- *I really pushed him too far*
- *He's never hit me; he just shoves me sometimes;*

These kinds of statements almost certainly come from the abuser's indoctrination of his victim.
[Bancroft]

Nothing is so evil as sin; nothing is evil but sin. As the sufferings of this

present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us, so neither the sufferings of this life nor of that to come are worthy to be compared as evil with the evil of sin. No evil is displeasing to God or destructive to man but the evil of sin. Sin is worse than affliction, than death, than Devil, than Hell. Affliction is not so afflictive, death is not so deadly, the Devil not so devilish, Hell not so hellish as sin is. This will help to fill up the charge against its sinfulness, especially as it is contrary to and against the good of man. [Ralph Venning, The Sinfulness of Sin]

But the sinner minimizes sin to blame others, to blame God, to justify himself. And the abuser is the greatest master of all sinners at this. It is very similar to an interaction I heard once on the news when a newscaster was interviewing a defense attorney. The attorney was very excited that anyone would think his client, or any of his clients, had actually committed the offenses they were charged with. He went on and on saying how innocent people are charged with things they didn't do all the time. Finally, the interviewer said "Well, it is clear to everyone that crimes ARE being committed. Murders, robberies, rapes, thefts...so can you tell me – *just who*

is doing these crimes?” Good question! Abuse is a plague – but to listen to abusers, NONE of them are truly abusive!

Abusers then minimize their evil by insisting that they are not as abusive as the other guy, or that they could have hurt their victim far more than they did – as if they should be commended for that!

- **He Justifies his Hurtful or Frightening acts or says that YOU ‘Made Him do It’**

This form of minimization of the abuser’s culpability is very, very common. He puts the blame on the victim for “making” him, or “provoking” him or “pushing him over the edge.”

“When you tell your abusive partner that his yelling frightens you, for example, and he responds that he has every right to yell ‘because you’re not listening to me,’ THAT is abuse. The abuser uses your behavior as an excuse for his own. He therefore refuses to commit unconditionally to stop using a degrading or intimidating behavior. Instead, he insists on setting up a quid pro quo where he says he’ll stop some form of abuse IF YOU agree to give up something that bothers him,

which will often be something that you have every right to do.”
[Bancroft]

NO ONE can make us do anything. We always have a choice.

- **He Uses ‘Being Sorry’ as a Means of Minimizing the Abuse**

Now, here is something that each one of us must deal with in life – *is this person truly sorry/repentant?* We know that there is indeed such an animal as “false repentance.” People can throw the words “I’m sorry” at us quite readily without being truly sorry at all – at least not for the right reason.

The abuser can play the role of victim. He knows how to play on the sympathy of his victims. But being “sorry,” showing some kind of remorse, even gushing tears and sobs – *is not enough. The entitlement to power and control still remains.*

“When a man feels sorry for his abusive behavior, his regrets collide with his entitlement. The contradictory chatter inside his head sounds something like this –

‘I feel bad that I called her that name; that’s not a good thing to say, especially in front of the children. I lost it, and I want my family to have an

image of me as always being strong and in charge. I don't like for them to see me looking ugly the way I did in that argument; it hurts my self-esteem.

BUT she called me 'irresponsible'! How does she expect me to react when she says something like that? She can't talk to me that way. Now the children are going to think I was the bad guy, when she was the cause of it. If they start siding with her, I'm going to let them know why I was mad. Now she's made me look really bad, that \$%^&!' [Bancroft]*

An abuser's show of emotion after early incidents of abuse can be dramatic: I have had clients who cry, beg their partners for forgiveness, and say 'You deserve so much better, I don't know why you are even with a jerk like me.' His remorse CAN CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS REACHING OUT FOR REAL INTIMACY, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'VE NEVER SEEN HIM LOOKING SO SAD BEFORE. But in a day or two his guilt is vanquished, driven out by his INTERNAL excuse-making skills.

He will most probably even use the continuing damage of his abuse upon his victim as a weapon against her, accusing her of holding a grudge, refusing to forgive, or just not "getting over it."

"We must be wise. We must understand that an abusive person's dramatic remorse shifts the center of attention back to him. It is powerfully manipulative. The victim may soon find herself reassuring him that she won't leave him, that she still loves him, that she doesn't think he's a terrible person. He thus reaps soothing attention as a reward for his abusiveness, and his actions have the effect of keeping the family focused on HIS needs."

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Jer 17:9

A Call to Repentance From Abuse

Listen to Patricia Evans (The Verbally Abusive Relationship) -

"I have also heard from men who want to change even though they do not expect to get their partners back....They realize that they need help to become the men they thought they were – that is, non-abusive. One man went so far as to set up a support group in the form of an online bulletin board for men who are seeking support in changing their behavior. He created the forum Men Ending Verbal Abuse and Control for men seriously trying to change –

www.mevac.proboards.com

But here is a word of warning! We have pointed to it before. As Christians, we know what the abusive person really needs, right? He or she is a sinner in horrible bondage to sin. He needs Christ and the radical work of regeneration that ONLY Christ can effect. He not only needs a heart transplant, he needs a mind and soul transplant. In biblical terms, he needs to have Christ put him to death and then raise him up as a new creation.

The warning? It is radical and traumatic. Far more so than perhaps Evans understands, and yet even she realizes some trauma that will happen when an abusive person comes to see himself for what he really is –

“Finding out that you are a verbal abuser and controller is a bit like falling down the rabbit hole...Your entire reality is shaken to the core. To find out that your relationships are broken, that those around you are frightened of you, that something is horribly wrong with you and the way you view and communicate with the world is a very scary and life-changing event.” [The Verbally Abusive Relationship]