

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)

“Worship Me, or Else!”

August 1, 2010

Sermon Text: Daniel 3

Scripture Reading: Daniel 3

Introduction-

“I would never in my wildest nightmares dream that my husband would ever abuse me, but he did. I took our two-month old son and fled after the 4th time my husband struck me. My husband is a Christian, but his rage at things was unreal and it doesn’t take much to end a human life when one is in an uncontrollable rage. I received counsel that it was my duty to stay and suffer for Jesus’ sake...I stayed with him then, misapplying Scriptures of how I was to act. I accepted what he did or didn’t do and just tried to work on me, doing what was right.”

“I was beaten and emotionally abused by my ex-husband. I left for six months, but when he saw a counselor and promised reform, I returned. I

was not beaten after the return, but I found that my 4-year old daughter was – and sexually abused by him as well. The pastor I spoke to, the counselor I saw, the family doctor – all Christians – preferred to believe that I was lying, or at least to blame for the trouble. Even his divorce lawyer (another Christian) condemned my soul to hell because of my hardhearted refusal to try still another reconciliation.

“Even now, seven years later, no one believes the story. And at this moment he has my daughter, thanks to a court order and gross misunderstanding of a letter she wrote to [a nationally known counselor]...My daughter, now 11, is reduced to the almost suicidal state I was in. She desperately wants out.”

“I did not leave until after his third murder attempt on me and still I believed in a reconciliation. I kept thinking that if I would do right things, he wouldn’t get angry. He never even admitted abuse. Our marriage was so ‘perfect’ on the outside that few people believed that I had been abused.”

“It’s been 4 months since my husband was removed from our home by police,

and most people who know about it just pass judgment on me. You don't know what it's like to wake up at 3 AM with your husband standing over you, not talking, not doing anything, just staring at you. You don't know how guilty you feel or just plain confused when people you love don't help or won't get involved. You don't know my fears as a mother of three boys, of beginning to lose the respect of my sons. I can still hear my husband screaming at me, 'you're a Christian and God wants us together. You leave me and nothing will go right in your life forever.' [Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home; by James and Phyllis Alsdurf]

Do those examples excite your interest in learning more about the psychology and methods of sin – particularly in relation to its evil desire for power and control over others? I hope that they do. Because it is my opinion that evangelical, conservative Christianity – our religion – has plenty of “dirty laundry” that needs exposure and cleaning. Evil men (and sometimes women) creep into our love feasts unnoticed –

Jude 1:12-19 ESV

(12) These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds,

swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;

(13) wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

(14) It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,

(15) to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

(16) These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

(17) But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(18) They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."

(19) It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

Why should we be surprised at this, if the same thing happens in our day? That evil, deceptive, cunning men who

desire power and control and self-glory come into Christ's church disguised as sheep, appearing even as servants of righteousness (2 Cor 11) to carry out their abuse of Christ's flock. *"It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."*

Power and Control. We introduced this essential quality of sin last time as we began this new series on The Psychology and Methods of Sin. Remember our thesis and method? Let me repeat –

"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."

"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."

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

Remember that we mentioned Diotrephes as a plain example?

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.

NOTE: Incidentally, let me make note of just one false notion that wicked, abusive men make use of to perpetrate their façade and masquerade

of being righteous, godly, fine, upstanding Christians and fathers and husbands. It is this – *“If you cannot say something nice about someone, you must not say anything at all.”* Now, let me challenge you to think carefully about this. What did the Apostle John just do in regard to Diotrefes? What did the Apostle Paul do in respect to Alexander the coppersmith and others? Named them and their evil deeds. So this widely-held idea is absolutely unscriptural. Truth is not always “nice” but it is necessary.

Alright then, last time we left off considering the origin of true power – we saw that the only One with inherent power is God. Creatures do not possess power in themselves and we must humbly acknowledge this. Any position of authority is established by God and accountable to Him to use that authority as He commands. And in respect to power and control, let me suggest to you that a created being NEVER actually possesses these. It was in the name of the Lord Jesus that the Apostles were able to heal people or raise the dead. Only Christ had power go out of Himself to raise the dead and heal, to create from nothing, to speak and it was so. Yet it is the very mindset of abusive, power-hungry, controlling men that they indeed possess this power by virtue of who they are in themselves. Thus, as

we will see later in more detail, such men are incredibly justified in everything they do to force others to their will, and they regard themselves as absolutely entitled to virtual worship from others. Remember these two key words –

- justification (not gospel justification)
- entitlement

And we also left off by saying that we planned to learn more about the various strategies and methods that sin utilizes to gain and maintain power and control over others. And for this purpose, we turn to this 3rd chapter of Daniel, which we have already heard read. Here is an abusive man demanding to have power and control over others, and implementing the tools of his trade to effect that submission.

I. Worship Me, or Else!

Daniel 3:1-6 ESV

(1) King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.
(2) Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all

the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

(3) Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

(4) And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,

(5) that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

(6) And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

Here is the perfect example of the thing in play. Nebuchadnezzar is abusing his people for his own self-glory. He is exercising power and control over others. He has concluded that he is entitled. That he is justified in doing anything to the people in order to obtain his desire to be adored. And, as is always the case when an abusive man is practicing his trade, there is an instrument of compulsion

present. In this case, a fiery furnace into which anyone who refuses to bow down will be immediately thrown.

“An abusive, power-seeking, controlling person is a threatening person. He or she wields their favorite weapons to compel, through fear and force, submission.”

In contrast, consider true power as it exists in Christ. Does the Lord need to threaten someone in order to effect His power in them? Think, for example, of creation. Or of the resurrection of Lazarus. Was there some kind of threat of consequence that was required in order to compel submission to that power? NO! Of course not. Certainly the Bible shows us that God does threaten! Christ spoke often of hell and of outer darkness and of dying in sin and of the coming judgment. But think very carefully about this. Did He do so for the purpose of forcing men to submit to Him and to worship Him? No. He simply warns out of His kindness, out of truth – He announces what is a fact. Therefore –

“True power and control as possessed by Christ are simply announced and exercised. Christ does not need to obtain the creature’s submission by threat and fear before He can exercise His power and control! He simply speaks, with His inherently powerful Word, and the thing is

done! But this is not so with wicked, abusive men. Because they really possess no true power nor control, they must obtain submission of their victims through threats and fear before they can control them.”

NOTE: This should tell us that we must be very careful when we find ourselves prone to raging and threatening. It most often is a sign that we are attempting to exercise power and control that has not been granted to us. Parents over children. Husbands over wives. Employers over employees.

Think of it then –

“King Nebuchadnezzar, though he was the world’s most powerful king at the time, could not force anyone to bow down to his image simply by speaking the command. He needed to threaten and he needed an instrument of that threat – the fiery furnace. His lack of true power was made evident by his use of this wicked threat. And so it is with the wicked man today.

Consider Diotrephes once more –

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.

So the wicked, power and control hungry man always has his favorite fiery furnace weapon – and there is an arsenal of them. Let’s take a look at them. Learn them well. See them in yourself. Don’t let an abusive person enslave you through them. Husbands, parents – don’t use them in your homes. And let’s not use them in the church either.

By way of review, let’s first listen again to the descriptions and definitions of abuse that we heard last time –

“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]

Power and control belong to the Lord. They are inherent ONLY in Him. It is wicked for you or for me to pretend that we possess any of it in ourselves and then attempt to exercise it over others with the idea that somehow we are entitled to their submission and worship – that we are justified in forcing their subjection to us.

QUESTION: In our prayer time after the meal today, let’s spend a bit of the time thinking together about how these principles relate, for example, to the authority of parents in regard to their children. Don’t parents have power and control over their children? Aren’t parents to “threaten” their children with consequences of rebellion and disobedience?

II. The Arsenal of Abuse

Christ instructs us to love one another. This is the law of Christ – that we love God and that we love one another and thereby fulfill the first and second tables of the Law of God. Therefore God’s Word teaches us things like this –

Ephesians 4:1-3 ESV

- (1) I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
- (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
- (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

But the abusive, controlling, power-craving man does not walk with all humility. He is not characterized by gentleness or patience or forbearance, nor does he seek the unity of the Spirit. No, he must be first, and if he is a religious hypocrite, he will conduct his

deceptive manipulations and abuse behind the façade of a profession of Christ [something he is a master at maintaining]. And those who are the victims of his abuse are often confused, self-blaming, and disoriented because they often do not recognize the weapons he uses and the purposes for which he uses them. We hope to begin to correct his ignorance in ourselves *now*, so listen carefully.

1. Weapon #1 – Secrecy

Sin is of the darkness, not of the light. Sin operates in the shadows, behind closed doors. Sin thrives where there is a lack of the light of truth. Sin therefore, loves *secrecy*.

Listen to Patricia Evans describe it – and let the light shine!

“The first pattern which the partner [of an abuser] may recognize in verbal abuse is that the interactions which upset, hurt, or confuse her rarely if ever occur in public.”

Did you get it? Let me repeat it! Do you understand what this means? It means that unless you are the victim, you have never truly seen the abuser’s real character and methods. You think that you know him, but you do not! Let’s listen further –

“Verbal abuse, like physical abuse, often occurs behind closed doors. Even if there is a house full of people, the verbal abuse may occur when others have left the room and the partner is alone with the abuser. Secrecy is a key to the abuser’s Power Over. Secrecy also intensifies the partner’s confusion. The abuse may occur when a child is present. If it occurs in public, it is disguised so that others think it is in some way justified, or its meaning is known only to the partner. Going ‘public’ is usually a sign of escalation and/or impending physical abuse.

“Nan, married to Ned, a successful executive, shared this insight. ‘I was wondering why I felt unhappy around Ned, because friends said that I was married to such a nice guy, and how lucky I was. Then, as I thought about it, I realized that Ned never acted the same when they were around. I was really stunned when I realized that he must know what he’s doing or he wouldn’t keep it secret.’

“Many of the women I interviewed were told by friends or relatives that their mates were really nice guys. In one case, the abuse was so severe and threatening it was described to the partner as a prisoner-of-war experience by two therapists. Following her divorce, this woman’s family still could not accept the reality

of her experience. To them the abuser was 'a really nice guy.' The abuser had never acted the same way around them as he had when he was alone with his partner." [The Verbally Abusive Relationship, Patricia Evans]

We are planning to deal in much more detail later on in this series with this whole matter of secrecy – specifically the deception and manipulation of the abusive, power/control seeking man. It is a topic at the same time fascinating and repulsive as we see the truth of Romans 3 “fleshed out” for us

Romans 3:13-16 ESV

(13) "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips."

(14) "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

(15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

(16) in their paths are ruin and misery,

Have you ever considered the impact upon a wife or a child, for example, of secrecy? Of seeing things or experiencing things in the home, but being told in threatening tones that they must never, ever speak to anyone about these things? Or, in some sense even worse, of living in that darkness and confusion, and being so

disoriented by it all that you come to think that you are the one to blame for it somehow? Many, many, many people – even people who sit in pews on Sunday mornings – are living in that very kind of darkness, and we need to be aware of it and wise to it.

Think of the devil’s tactics. He is the prince of darkness and therefore we should not be at all surprised if he uses secrecy as one of his most effective weapons. Sins and plots and evil are done in the darkness, in secret –

2 Kings 17:9 ESV

(9) And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city.

Psalms 64:1-5 ESV

(1) To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy.

(2) Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the throng of evildoers,

(3) who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows,

(4) shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear.

(5) They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly, thinking, "Who can see them?"

Christ on the other hand – *is the Light of the world! He is the light of truth. He exposes, and the darkness flees before Him –*

Psalms 90:8 ESV

(8) You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

Do you understand, Christian, that there are no secrets from Him who sees into the most secret recesses of our minds and hearts? And do you understand the glory of this? That when Christ justifies us, when He forgives us our trespasses, when He gives us adoption as sons – *He does it, knowing everything there is to know about us! There will never, never, never be anything in us to surprise Him! Never!*

An Illustration

You do not know the wicked, deceptive, Power Over, controlling, abusive man in most cases. Because secrecy is one of his most basic weapons – it is “standard issue” to the abuser. Wherever his victims are, he abuses them in secret – whether it be in the home, in the marriage, or in the

church. Wherever his arena of abuse is, be sure there is deception and secrecy operating. *And be sure, therefore, that many – most – people who know him are entirely duped by him.*

When I was a college student, I took a class in cytology – not psychology, but cytology. It is the study of the cell. In that class we made some sections of plants and so on with an instrument called a microtome. This sliced the sample very, very thinly so that it could be put under a microscope. But before you sliced, you had to treat the sample of tissue with various staining chemicals and then even embed it in paraffin. Only then could you put it under the microscope and take a look.

And one of the things that the professor reminded us of is that biologists need to realize that what they are looking at, the thing they see through the lens – *is not exactly the thing as it was in life.* For one thing, it is flat – 2-dimensional – but a living cell is 3-dimensional, as are all of the various organs in the cell. And scientists then often have to determine if what they are looking at is some feature that has been produced by their preparation of the sample or whether it is as it was in the living cell.

And so it is with the deceptions of the evil one and his representatives. We

must “test the spirits” through the lens of the truth of Christ’s Word if we are going to see clearly. Any other lens will only give false results. We must understand that the moment we inject ourselves into the abusive man’s world, what we see is going to be the product of our presence – which is to say, the abusive man will “morph” into the “nice guy” we think that we know. And this is why the women we quoted at the beginning this morning found themselves so devastated – hardly anyone would believe them when they told what their husband truly was. We must look through Christ’s microscope because only He sees all!

Conclusion

The power-seeking, control-demanding qualities of sin lead abusive men, like King Nebuchadnezzar, to demand submission that he or she is convinced he is entitled to and justified in demanding. This abuse will be carried out in a marriage, in a family, or even in a church. Abusive men will not listen to their victim’s perspective at all, feel absolutely justified, and becomes retaliatory if the victim begins to stand up for herself...An abuser is a man who chronically makes his wife or 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 of 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.” [Bancroft]

And this very same man may well be known as a fine, upstanding model of a Christian man – because of his weapon of secrecy and deception. We close with an illustration –

“Abuse is inherently divisive; family members blame each other for the abuser’s behavior because it is unsafe to blame him. If an incident of abuse began with an argument over one child’s misbehavior, then an older sibling might say, ‘Daddy screamed at Mom and made her cry because he was mad that you were making so much noise. You should have listened to me when I told you to quiet down.’

Tom contributes further to divisiveness through his favoritism. He treats Randy like a buddy and fixes his dirt bike, while ignoring Alex except when showing her off in public. Favoritism is rampant in the parenting of abusive men. They may favor boys over girls because of their own negative attitudes toward females. They favor children whom they see as siding with them and are rejecting of those who are

sympathetic or protective of the mother. Children experience powerful emotional rewards from the abuser for distancing themselves from their mother and from any siblings who are allied with her.

My clients exhibit a range of other divisive tactics, including openly shaming children – especially boys – for being close to their mother, telling family members lies about each other, and making children feel like members of a special and superior club when they are part of his team. Finally, they use collective punishment, requiring all the children to pay a price for one child’s behavior, which can be devastating in its ability to turn children against each other.

Why does an abuser sow divisions in these ways? One reason is that his power is decreased if the family remains unified. I have had a number of clients whose partners and children have consistently support each other, and the client is always bitter about it, griping, ‘She’s brainwashed the children to be on her side.’ Many abusers take steps to avoid this outcome, using the principle of ‘divide and conquer.’ If people in the family are busy fighting with each other, attention is diverted from the man’s cruelty or control.” [Bancroft]

The secret deceptions, plots and darkness of sin! It really is true –

Jeremiah 17:9-10 ESV

(9) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

(10) "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."