

2016-06-04

Abusive relationship #1: Transfer of guilt

Hi all,

We have a ceiling fan in the middle of our bedroom with 2 pull chains hanging down to switch the fan and light on and off if we don't want to use the wall switch. The 2 chains end with large weights that make it easy to grab the thin chains. Unfortunately they hang down just off the end of the bed, and one morning as I awoke in the pre-dawn darkness to go to the living room for prayer I walked right into those weights, with an impact in the middle of my forehead like being branded with the 666 mark of the beast. It hurt!

I staggered away from the fan but quickly regained momentum and with the first step stubbed my left little toe on the sharp corner of an old DVD player we had sat on the floor a few nights before to be donated later to a thrift store. But like a TV commercial trying to sell me a gadget, 'But wait, there's more!'.

I looked out the kitchen window to see in the pre-dawn light the empty bird feeder and 20 or so birds gathered around that I'm sure were talking among themselves about where breakfast was. Brow-beaten and made to feel guilty by a flock of sparrows staring me down, I put on shorts and went to the truck for the 20 lb (9 kilo) sack of bird seed I'd bought the day before.

As I tossed it over my shoulder I walked too closely around the end of the truck where my shin found the trailer hitch with such force there was immediate blood and a yelp out my mouth, followed by a slap on the shin with exclamation, "Healed in name of Jesus!".

I filled the feeder yet heard no chirps or tweets of 'Thanks John!' from the flock, and walked back into the house, muttering to myself that now I had shed blood for those stupid birds, which made me think how Jesus said in Matthew 6:26 the Father feeds the birds, which meant in my grumpy thinking that morning, that my sacrifice of blood was really the Father's doing, AND THAT prompted me to think to the Father:

"You're supposed to be ordering my steps! Well, you've sure done a bang up job of it this morning!" Just as the horror of what I thought hit me and as the apology formed in my head, He spoke back in gentle rebuke: "You knew where each item was, yet you walked right into each of them. That's not my doing!"

The start of abuse

Over the course of this series I'll list core characteristics of an abuser and/or being in an abusive relationship covering friends, siblings, church, marriage, and work, and within those core traits I'll list dozens more which feed off and flow from those core traits.

The first core trait is: The transfer of blame to another person.

BUT...Just because a person shifts blame away from themselves doesn't make them an abuser, for we've all squirmed in our seats when confronted by someone with our guilt, just as I tried to blame the Father for letting me walk into the dangling weights, stub my toe, and walk into the trailer hitch. That's just human nature to look for blame elsewhere.

But a lifestyle of never taking responsibility when it is clearly one's own fault, while blaming others, of ALWAYS saying things like 'You ruined it for me because...' or 'someone in the company is doing it to me...' or even 'It was just a misunderstanding', reveals an off-balanced view of self, of others, and of life.

Gee, thanks Adam!

The seeds for abuse were sown early in the human race, with Adam putting the blame on Eve and God but leaving himself out of the equation in Genesis 3:12: "The woman which you gave me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." Right Adam - It was God's fault because He made the woman, who ate the fruit, who gave to you - if it wasn't for Him doing that you wouldn't have eaten of the fruit, so it was God's fault, and her fault.

I'm not suggesting Adam was an abuser of Eve, I'm saying the principle of transferring blame to another person is fallen human nature, and if it becomes a lifestyle it is abuse, and once it is a lifestyle other traits of abuse will team with that core trait.

Teaming with blame shifting - narcissism

Once a person shifts blame to someone else, and therefore gets the attention off their own responsibility, they often work to turn the focus of emotions back on them and how they 'feel' because of x person's guilt while making x person feel bad. This behavior kills the moment, and if a pattern, kills a relationship.

In Greek mythology Narcissus was known for his beauty, yet showed arrogant contempt for those who loved him. One day Narcissus was walking in the woods and Echo saw him and fell in love with him. He realized he was being followed and called out repeatedly 'Who's there?', only to have Echo repeat back to him each time, 'Who's there?'

Eventually she revealed herself but he rejected her love, and she was so broken by the rejection she spent the rest of her days calling out until nothing but an echo of her presence remained. The god of revenge, Nemesis, heard what Narcissus had done, and lured him to a pool of water where he saw his own reflection and fell in love with himself. Realizing he could never return his own love adequately, he committed suicide.

Notice what I've underlined, for the blame shifting person and the one who loves them follow this same pattern. Of Echo, notice how she revealed her heart to Narcissus, bared her soul. Notice she was rejected and withered away of a broken heart until nothing but a whisper of her presence remained.

Of him, notice how he rejected her love, was arrogant, showed contempt, was in love with himself, and eventually self-destructed.

The person being abused, the one always being blamed, is heartbroken because the one they love continually rejects their love. Eventually whether it be in a marriage, a sibling, a friend, a church goer in the pew of an abusive church culture, or an employee in a similar abusive culture at work, they become a mere shell of their former selves - often not knowing any longer who they are, empty, void of life due to being rejected, blamed, and hurt - yet the abuser sees none of that. Everything is about them, but they don't realize they are committing suicide in their relationship, in their work, in their church - in their emotions.

Putting the two together: Blame shifting and making it about them

In a marriage, if something goes wrong at work, the abuser will find a way to blame the spouse - maybe they didn't sleep well because of their spouse's snoring, which made them tired at work, which meant at the presentation they couldn't think fast enough on their feet, which meant their presentation was rejected - so when they walk through the door that evening it is the spouse's fault. They are the victim and one hurt.

At work, they are the one wronged because the Assistant put together a sloppy report, refusing to admit they had the responsibility for the final proof reading.

An abusive church culture accuses the person who brings up legitimate issues as the one with the problem, rather than deal with the issue within the church, the staff member, or the policy in question.

With a sibling or friend you are in the wrong because you don't understand how hard it has been for them - as a means of shifting attention away from their actions which contributed to the issue.

The abusive person lives by transferring responsibility to another person, and twisting the confrontation to be about them. If you bring up a legitimate concern or need, rather than acknowledge it, they put the blame on you saying you are the one with the problem, you are the one with the issue, you are the cause. They are committing suicide of the relationship, but can't bring themselves to admit wrong, examine themselves, nor change.

Their teaming of blame shifting with narcissism can make you think you are the crazy one, that you are the one with the problem. They make you feel bad about yourself, don't praise or support you, let alone offer a true spontaneous compliment, and rarely if ever express concern for your well-being.

King Saul was just such a person, but I've run out of room. I'll have more core traits and other examples next week, and as the series progresses suggestions for dealing with an abusive or narcissistic person.

Until then, blessings,

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2016-06-11

Abusive relationship/spiritual abuse #2

Hi all,

A very old couple in old clothes that were fashionable decades ago shuffled into a hamburger place one day and ordered 1 hamburger, 1 order of fries, and 1 cola. A man nearby thought they were cute, but he was alarmed they only ordered 1 meal. Cautiously he approached and in a low voice discreetly offered to pay for another hamburger, fry, and cola. The wife responded sweetly, "That's okay, we share everything."

Seated now at their table, the old man carefully divided the hamburger in half and put half in front of his wife. Then he counted out half the fries and set them in front of his wife, and set the cola in the middle of the table. He then began to eat his half of the hamburger, while she just watched him eat.

Again expressing concern, the man approached and offered to buy another hamburger, fry, and cola, but again the wife responded, "That's okay, we share everything." "But why aren't you eating?" he asked, only to hear her reply, "I'm waiting for the teeth."

Sharing, sharing

That may take the idea of sharing to an extreme, but an emotionally healthy person can share with others - whether that be credit for a job well done, or blame for their part of mistakes. Unhealthy people refuse to admit their share of the blame and instead shift blame to others, unwilling to take responsibility.

The abuser demonstrates their immaturity in many ways, from explosions of anger to retreating within themselves. Their outburst of wrath is disproportionate to the situation, or retreat into their grumpy silent self, ruining a whole event, but they don't care because they are angry at x person or x company or x situation - they would rather ruin the event than grow up and be pleasant to be around.

Last week I shared a core trait, blame shifting, and included other elements; Narcissism and how the narcissist can make you feel like you are the one with the problem, make you feel bad about yourself, doesn't praise or support you, and rarely if ever expresses concern for your well being.

Remember this: Conviction brings us **to** God and is all about Him. Condemnation pushes us **away** from God and is all about us. Don't allow the abuser to make you feel condemnation. Reject their condemnation.

Core principle #1 today: The one loving them knows the good part of their heart, so stays

The abuser isn't an abuser all the time. There are times the sweet and genuine part of them functions, and that is the part the victim of the abuse sees and loves, whether it be spouse, friend, sibling, or co-workers.

In a church it may be that they love the worship even though the pastor is a controlling man who says from the pulpit things like x person who left has demons, or they are now opening themselves to demonic attack because they left their church - control issues like that. But enough people love the teaching or love the worship or they have a good children's church that they stick around in spite of the spiritual abuse.

At work a boss or co-worker doesn't want to fire the person because they know their family is on the edge financially, so they end up covering for them at work, which makes them feel good/boosts their ego that they are 'helping'. The church goer above derives a benefit from the abusive pastor or church culture. In a marriage the benefit may be financial or they have a roof over their head, so they stay in the relationship.

A co-dependent relationship...

...is one in which one person supports or enables another person's poor or dangerous behavior, whether that be simple immaturity and laziness, or an addiction, irresponsibility, or explosive anger, while deriving some sense of good or pleasure within themselves for offering that support.

It is marked by one person's need to rely on others for their identity and/or approval as a person while the other half is the emotional or physical need of the one who loves to help, nurture, and care for them. Thus the relationship is dysfunctional in a swirl of love/hate and peace/war between them, yet each deriving a benefit, twisted as it may be.

The one person sees the potential and keeps hoping that 'this time' the other one will come to their senses, while the object of their love - the abuser, the self-centered blamer - isn't dealing with their internal issues so can only rise so far before they undermine that situation, job, or relationship, and fail.

The Christian wonders how far do I walk in love, and at what point does love turn into enabling?

From the Prodigal Son who had to 'come to himself' at his lowest point, to Galatians 6:1-6 and much more, scripture tells us to walk in love and come to another's aid to the extent they are also willing to do their part to grow and change. If not, they must be allowed to experience the consequences of their actions, like the Prodigal Son who demanded his money and the father sadly let him go his way until he 'came to himself'.

If they are unwilling to change and the Christian continually finds themselves enabling sin, that is when to draw back and allow them to experience the consequences of their actions. In Galatians 6:1-2 Paul says to go to a person 'overtaken in a fault', in Greek, they've committed a trespass against another person, and point that out to them in meekness. As in Matthew 18:15, if they receive you, you've regained your friend.

If they don't receive your efforts the next verses say: "(But) if a man thinks that he is something when he is nothing, he is self-deceived. Each one should test his own actions, then he can have personal satisfaction." Paul goes on to say, "Don't be deceived, God isn't mocked, what a person sows is what they will reap."

The Bible teaches a trespass has 2 elements*: The guilt before God (the vertical), and the injury caused to another (the horizontal). We are to forgive a person, keeping our heart right 'vertically' to God, but there are times forgiveness also allows a person to experience the consequences of the injuries they've brought upon themselves and others if they refuse to admit their guilt. They are forgiven in our heart, but must walk out the consequences unless and until they are ready to heal the injuries they've caused. *Leviticus 6:1-7

We see this in scripture with King Saul and his hatred for David, who did him no wrong, and indeed was only a helper and blessing to him.

The root of King Saul's issues can be traced to a poor self image. Samuel observed in I Samuel 15:17; "When you were little in your own sight weren't you made king over Israel?" We are told in I Samuel 9:1-3 that Saul came from a very wealthy family and that he was head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the whole nation, and he was very handsome - yet he was 'little in his own sight'.

So much so, that when the time came to anoint him as King, he hid himself among the caravans and animals, requiring a word of knowledge from the Lord to Samuel to reveal where he was hiding: "He has hidden himself among the supplies." (10:22)

But at the same time God was his biggest supporter, and kept pouring out His grace and Spirit upon him so that he prophesied to the extent Samuel prophesies in 10:6 "The Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy to them, and you'll be changed into another person."

And that is what happened - but here is core point #2 today: Like King Saul, the abuser has had experiences with God, but they don't change him. To say it another way, the abuser doesn't let God change them.

I'll pick it up there next week for I've run out of room for today, more next week...until then, blessings,
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2016-06-18

Abusive relationship/co-dependent #3

Hi all,

A man received a talking parrot as a gift, but the parrot had a horrible attitude and worse, horrible language. The man tried repeatedly to get the parrot to change his verbally abusive ways, but nothing helped. One day the parrot was particularly abusive and in anger and frustration the man threw the parrot into the freezer, whereupon there came an immediate shriek with pleadings and apologies.

When he opened the door the parrot stepped gently onto his outstretch arm and politely said, "I apologize for my behavior. I have offended you and hurt you and I promise to change my ways, please accept my most sincere and humble apology." Astounded, but before the man could ask what caused the sudden change in his behavior, the parrot continued, "And if I may ask kind sir, what did the chicken do?"

They don't let the Spirit of the Lord change them.

This humorous example shows the lower part of human (parrot) behavior, in that we often don't let things we've experienced change us for the long term until and unless, maybe, something dramatic happens. We may marvel in a singular moment, but letting 'the moment' sink in and actually change us for the long term requires honest introspection.

Additionally, abusers focus on telling others what's wrong with them in part to keep the attention off of them so they don't have to change or adjust or adapt...by outbursts of anger designed to make a person back away so they won't stand up to them, or they shrink into themselves in silent contempt as a defensive mechanism to distance themselves from the other person or a situation. The abuser is often angry at life.

How the abuser stops being an abuser: Revelation followed by hard work

For the abuser, they must first have the revelation they are an abuser in complete unvarnished honesty with themselves, and then couple that with a desire to change that is greater than the desire to maintain life as is.

This is a process leading up to that moment of clarity and transparency, and a process after the revelation. Many times people will pray that God will touch them and make it all go away, but the Word says and real life demonstrates, most of the time He walks with them out of dysfunction and abuse and into functioning normally and healing relationships over time. They must deal with their issues, learn how to control themselves and be honest enough to deal with the most private parts of their heart - something they've not done their whole lives. It is new territory for them, and it means humbling themselves, for in the final analysis, the issue is pride that prevents them from changing. (Often coupled with fear)

For the abused person, they must call it what it is; abuse. They must also be honest about what in them caused them to enter into an abusive relationship, or if the abuse revealed itself later, what in them is causing them to stay - is it their faith? Their sense of failure? Their fear of what will happen to the abuser if they leave? What in the abused is keeping them in the relationship. Unvarnished honesty with themselves is step 1 to getting out the abuse.

Jesus said divorce is given due to the hardness of hearts* in a reference to the Jewish law of divorce** which cites an hypothetical example of a woman married and divorced several times because each time her husband ends up 'hating' her, and each time she is clean before the Lord and free to remarry. (I have a cd/MP3 series on the subject if interested)

I knew a couple with 5 children and the husband regularly beat the wife to the point she was covered in bruises from face to waist, and it was getting more violent. He wouldn't listen to me nor get help, and she refused to leave. He broke their covenant and his vows before God with his hard heart demonstrated by violence against her - and before God and man she most certainly had grounds for divorce. But she refused to even separate for a time. When last I saw them, their 2 barely teenage sons started abusing their girl friends...so sad. *Matthew 19:8; **Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Here are some very practical indicators you are in an abusive relationship:

They gradually cut you off from others - family, friends - closing the circle. They track your whereabouts or always want to know what you are doing, wanting you just for themselves. They 'forgive' you (as it is always your fault) with no sense they need to apologize/repent, they make threats that could range from their own suicide if you leave to threatening your life to taking away your money to ruining you or your reputation in the eyes of your family and friends and/or work.

Do you see that some of these traits are also found in abusive church cultures? They demand you go only to their church. They use guilt but you know you are in good standing if you give or volunteer or attend. They use heaven or hell to manipulate and threaten you. You are the one with the issue, leadership is coated with a non-stick coating so that nothing sticks to them. They are the masters of spin, able to turn around any situation to blame someone else - just like an abusive spouse. Run don't walk to the nearest exit!

But I love them - love the church teaching, love my spouse, love my work

I want to insert here a fact that always has to be in the background in our minds; We will each stand individually before the Lord Jesus to give account of our lives, and at that time there will be no ability to say 'the devil made me do it', or 'my wife made me this way', or 'if dad hadn't died when I was 12 I would have been different', nor even 'I was abused at church' nor 'I experienced spiritual abuse at several churches'.

Successful people in Christ realize 'judgment day' is here and now, at every decision point, because the Spirit of Truth lives within us presenting us with the right decision at each circumstance along life's journey - Those maturing in Christ make the right but often more difficult decision because they want to be right before Him here and now more than they want to be proven right in front of someone else in the here and now.

You can't stand with the abuser on Judgment Day holding their hand explaining to the Lord why he hit you - they will stand alone and explain their actions without wiggle room, without the ability to blame you, or their dad or what happened when they were 9 years old. Judgment day for the maturing is every day, as those maturing are eager to judge themselves and eager to have the Lord expose anything in their heart or life that isn't right so that it may be corrected.

There comes a point where the abused have to let the abuser go, and stand on their own two feet. Often that point comes when the need for self-preservation rises to a level equal to the realization if they continue in the relationship they will be enabling the abuse, or endangering themselves.

I remember praying for a heroin addict - barely out of teen years, in and out of the addiction - and the prophecy the Lord gave me was that He was with them, but walking out of it would be the hardest thing they had ever done, but that He would be there walking with them as they made right decisions. There would be no heavenly 'zap' and you're all better, just that He would be there with them at every decision.

King Saul became abusive to 1 man - David

The abuser often is only abusive to 1 person, and good at keeping that fact secret, whether it be explosive anger or verbal abuse or abuse by neglect, like retreating into self and refusing to talk to their spouse once home. That same person may go to church, may experience the presence of the Lord in worship or learn something from the Word...but remains an abuser once behind closed doors. Like King Saul, they never let the Spirit of God change them for long.

The previous series was about the emotionally ill Christians, and this series has followed in that line of thought, but these can only help insofar as they point out the emotionally ill and abusive traits. For practical help on escaping an abusive relationship or a relationship with an emotionally ill believer, in many cases more in depth professional help will be needed. These series shine the light on the Word and human behavior, but to escape, someone may need to come alongside to help...another subject next week, until then, blessings,

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