

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 Abusive Man as a Servant of Righteousness – Exposing the Deceptions of Abuse”

September 19, 2010

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 11:1-21

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 14

Introduction-

In the years leading up to WWII, Adolf Hitler came to be viewed as a kind of savior of the German people. In fact, he was one of the greatest abusers and users of people in all history. But during the era of his popularity, the large portion of the German people served him and even loved him. They thought him a kind of servant of righteousness. Unless, of course, you happened to be a Jew. Most people ignored the reports that Jews were being slaughtered. They were deceived and, to one degree or another, we might say they preferred to be deceived. It was more comfortable than the truth.

And so it is today. Our enemy is, as he has always been, a masterful liar. He is master of the disguise. And one of his favorite disguises is that of *an angel of light, a servant of righteousness*. A wolf, in other words, dressed up as a sheep.

Let's listen to the thing once again in this very important 11th chapter of 2 Corinthians –

2 Corinthians 11:1-21 ESV

(1) I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!

(2) For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

(3) But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

(5) Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.

(6) Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

(7) Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?

(8) I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.

(9) And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.

(10) As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.

(11) And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

(12) And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.

(13) For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

(14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

(15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

(16) I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.

(17) What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool.

(18) Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.

(19) For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!

(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.

(21) To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of--I am speaking as a fool--I also dare to boast of that.

I. A Righteous Disguise of Light

You've seen it all the time in movies and literature. The villain turns out to be a trusted, apparently respectable person, someone even close to the victim. You start to have misgivings about them at some point, but the

victim doesn't see it. Disguise. Deception. Façade. This is the power of the kingdom of darkness.

And so we have it exposed here by the Apostle Paul. We have referred to this chapter a number of times in this series on the Psychology of Sin as illustrated in the abusive man, because it is a classic section of Scripture on this topic. Christ's kingdom is constantly attacked by enemies in disguise. *The enemy is among us*, and God's Word warns us of this over and over and over again. It also instructs us regarding how to root out these secret agents of unrighteousness.

Let's note then some of the primary points in these first 15 verses –

1. Paul, as any true shepherd of the flock, is jealous for his people.

NOTHING causes more anguish in a shepherd of Christ's church than seeing the sheep threatened and taken in by a wolf. Therefore, *the wolf in sheep's clothing is going to hate the shepherd of the flock intensely*. And for this reason, the true, evil nature of the wolf will be seen earlier on by the shepherd than by the sheep.

2. The enemy in disguise will always come with a distortion of the pure, simple, gospel of Christ.

He proclaims "another Jesus." He is animated by "another Spirit." And

very often, in their blindness, the sheep will "put up with it readily enough." (vs 4) This is why it is so VITAL that every single Christian NOT remain in spiritual infancy. Each one of us needs to grow up to maturity in Christ and quickly, so that we are not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4). *Fundamentally, THIS is the ultimate way to expose the wolf – by shining the light of God's Word on him and his message.*

Isaiah 8:20 ESV

(20) To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

3. The enemy in disguise will slander and accuse the true servants of Christ.

(vss 5-9) It is always the wolf's goal to alienate the sheep from the shepherd so that they can be used and devoured.

4. The Disguise is Always a Disguise!

The wolf never comes openly as a wolf. Here (vss 13-15) Paul tells us that such men come claiming to be –

- Apostles
- Workmen of Christ
- Servants of righteousness

God knows. God sees. Such men will end in hell.

5. These Wolves are ALWAYS Abusive. They abuse and use the people of Christ. A wolf's intentions for the sheep are NEVER good! These enemies, these false servants of Christ, enslave, devour, take advantage, exalt themselves, even "*strike you in the face.*" This is why we can illustrate them so well by taking examples from the abusive man. These are the common weapons of abuse – whether it be in the home, in the church, or in the workplace.

6. And here is the frightening part –

“For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 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.”

Which is to say, the deceptions of the abuser often WORK!

*“There is something in us, something in our sinful flesh, that is drawn to the powerful, to the controlling, to the abusing man. Deceived as to his true nature by his disguise, we seem to view him as someone to follow, someone who knows better than us what is good for us, someone who can even tell us what we are thinking and what our motives are. All the more reason that we **GROW UP** in Christ's wisdom so that we can approve what*

God approves and reject what God rejects.”

7. The true servant of Christ is not outwardly impressive; he is hated and persecuted; he does not exalt himself. He appears, in worldly measurement – weak and foolish. Unimpressive. Humble – yet foolish people interpret this humility as weakness.

“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (12:10).

Now, I want to illustrate all of this for you by describing the deceptiveness of the abusive man. It is one thing to read that wicked people, abusive people, are deceptive. But this is not enough. I want you to see very clearly just what these disguises look like. Here is where his power lies – in the deception, in the façade, in the mask. Of all the evil tactics of abuse, it is this deception that victimizes perhaps more than anything else. It will take us some time to examine the masks and deceptive devices the abuser wears and uses.

II. A Look Under the Mask

First, let's acknowledge something with great humility –

“We have been deceived by the wicked man.”

Do you believe that? Or do you think that somehow you are so wise and knowledgeable that no one could ever pull the wool over your eyes? Humble yourself. We need to confess that abusive men have indeed attacked this church over the years and every one of them came in disguise. *And we were taken in.* Listen to this challenge from the Alsdurfs (Battered Into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home) –

“Like any sin, wife abuse is no respecter of persons. It is not just ‘out there’ in society; it flourishes within the confines of the body of Christ. By not acknowledging the problem, the church continues to suffer from a festering internal wound. And when it goes unchallenged, marital conflict of this magnitude prevents healthy family relationships and blocks effective ministry on every level. The church’s silence on the subject – when it has been so vocal on issues such as prayer in the schools, homosexuality and abortion – is tacit permission for abuse to continue. [ie, we “put up with it if he hits us in the face”]

A woman from the Midwest, now leading a support group for abused women, noted that when she first told her pastor about being abused by her

husband, the pastor said, ‘I’ll never again bring this up.’ I felt the message he gave me was ‘Please don’t bring this up. I don’t want to deal with it.’ Later, the pastor didn’t even recall my having told him about the abuse. It scared him and he didn’t listen.’ That woman subsequently left the marriage, that church and the evangelical denomination to which she had belonged since her youth. ‘Part of the problem was that I didn’t feel the church was going to support me. I felt that I couldn’t be a good Christian and get out of my home environment. It kept me in a sick, abusive marriage for 21 years.’

How can the church communicate its willingness to support the battered woman and her husband? By talking about this taboo subject in prayers, sermons, and Sunday school lessons. One former victim, now heading a task force for battered women in her rural area, tells pastors in the ministerial associations she addresses to pray at the end of each service for ‘homes where there is violence, homes where women and children are abused.’ It gets the church familiar with the words ‘battered woman’ so they aren’t so afraid of them. And it lets the battered woman in the congregation know that the pastor is aware of the problem. She’ll think, ‘He does care about me. I can go talk to him.’”

So there is the first thing. By acknowledging that this evil exists, that *it most likely exists to one degree or another IN EVERY CHURCH*, we are beginning to come out from under the spell of the disguise and deception of the abusive man.

A. Too Good to be True

Listen to the Alsdurfs again –

“The church must have the compassion to look for the telltale signs of abuse among churchgoers. For example, several women advised pastors to be wary of couples who are ‘too good to be true.’ Chances are that they simply AREN’T true! One wife said: ‘I knew that if I didn’t treat him well and act real happy in public, I’d get it at home.’ Frequent church hopping, intermittent attendance and inappropriate outbursts of anger by the husband can be signals.

This is one reason why the church so often is shocked when some notable “celebrity” minister or musician is exposed as a fraud. Many, many, many Christian leaders are indeed “too good to be true.” Many, many, many “model Christian households” in the church are “too good to be true.”

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.

“Martha and her husband, Daniel, were key laypeople in First Presbyterian Church of Birch Grove, a picturesque bedroom community to which large numbers of men and women retreat after a long working day in the nearby industrial city. She worked in the denominational headquarters as an office manager, and he held the elected position of Sunday School superintendent in their local church. Together they sang in the choir, and their home served as a comfortable location for many church executive meetings. They were any pastor’s dream couple – attractive, talented, relatively affluent, hardworking people who wanted to contribute to the weekly routine of church life. But Martha and Daniel had a secret; he was an abusive husband and she was a battered wife.

The abuse started when Martha was 3 months pregnant with their first child. They had gone out for a social evening at a friend’s home. In the car on the way home Daniel accused Martha of talking to some of the men at the party. Caught by surprise, Martha retorted that they were longtime friends of all

these couples and that during the course of the evening she had talked to everyone who was present. When they got home, he called her a foul name and hit her across the face.

Martha and Daniel lived the lie for years; eventually they had 4 young children and resided in a large, two-story house in an enviable neighborhood, but Martha's salary alone could not support food, rent for an apartment, and the children's music and sports activities, let alone money for church projects. She felt trapped, alone and afraid.

Sometimes life was good and Martha was lulled into believing that Daniel had changed. He was often repentant after an abusive episode, and in the early years of their marriage she clung to the hope that someday he would be less abusive and that she would be a better wife. Years passed and the children entered high school. Then an incident occurred that caused Martha to call the police, fearing that Daniel was going to kill her.

They had gone several weeks without speaking to each other, and she broke the silence one evening as she stood at the sink, he at the stove, both preparing the supper meal. Her voice and her words about the vegetables threw him into a rage. Daniel grabbed her and started pounding her head into

the kitchen cupboard, making an effort not to bruise her face so as to call forth the sympathy of others. [Thus revealing that in fact Daniel was NOT in an uncontrolled "rage" at all!] As Martha told the story, tears streamed down her face, but then she smiled a little, 'My head made so much noise banging those cupboards that Carla, our teenage daughter, came downstairs.' Once Carla entered the kitchen, the banging stopped.

It was difficult for Martha to recount exactly what happened in the aftermath of this violent outburst. But the police were called, an arrest was made, and Daniel was escorted temporarily from their home.

[Now, at this point in the story, I want you to do a couple of things. **FIRST**, imagine that the same thing happened, but instead of physically assaulting Martha, Daniel used abusive words, raining them down on her. **DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT BOTH SCENARIOS ARE EQUALLY VICIOUS, AND THAT IN FACT THE VERBAL VERSION MAY BE THE MOST DAMAGING?** **SECOND**, seriously and honestly ask yourself what you would do if Martha were in **THIS** church, that you had known her and Daniel for years, that they had been a "model Christian family" – by all appearances?]

To Martha's astonishment, the pastor for whom she worked did not believe her story, despite the fact that Daniel was in jail for the weekend. In a nutshell, Daniel was simply too nice a man – a fine Christian man at that – to ever harm anyone, especially his wife. Martha disclosed the story to no one else.

Her life was now surrounded by a new lie: she and Daniel had irreconcilable differences and were going to seek a divorce. Her denominational employer was fearful of what people might think about a divorced woman as office manager; her local pastor was fearful of what the congregation might think about a divorced Sunday school superintendent. No one seemed to be fearful for the safety of Martha and her children.

The healing process was slow, much slower than Martha had hoped. While the children were supportive, even they did not understand the full extend of Martha's pain or its long history. It was too difficult to tell them; in fact, she wanted them to harbor predominantly pleasant childhood memories, memories where the abuse was still hidden. It was important to Martha that they remember their childhood as one characterized by the words "happy Christian family". For Martha, though, such a family existed only in her dreams.

Daniel and Martha were indeed a couple "too good to be true." Daniel was an abusive man who appeared as "a servant of righteousness." And, as we saw last time in regard to Galatians 5 and the deeds of the flesh, Daniel inevitably, in various ways, would have held to – and taught – a false gospel, AND he would have been guilty to one degree or another of immorality. The deeds of the flesh come in "a package."

The deception of the abusive man.

B. Keep it Secret, Keep it Safe

Deception requires continual energy to maintain. The secret must be kept, the truth must be suppressed and hidden. Sometimes it is hidden in a different manner than in the case of Daniel and Martha -

"Another sign to look for are very 'private' couples, those who keep to themselves and rarely socialize or interact individually with church friends or even relatives." [Alsdurfs]

Secrecy then is at the very essence of deception. The truth is covered over. The abuser lives a lie.

C. Promoting the Mystery

2 Corinthians 1:17-18 ESV (17)
Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time?

(18) As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No.

In contrast to the truth and definitiveness of Christ (as spoken of by Paul), still another deceptive tactic of the abusive man is that he keeps everyone, especially his victims, guessing about him. Listen to Bancroft – *listen carefully* –

“He’s two different people. I feel like I’m living with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.”

“Everyone else thinks he’s great. I don’t know what it is about me that sets him off.”

“The abusive man wants to be a mystery. To get away with his behavior and to avoid having to face his problem, he needs to convince everyone around him – and himself – that his behavior makes no sense. He needs his wife/victim to focus on everything except the real causes of his behavior. To see the abuser as he really is, it is necessary to strip away

layer after layer of confusion, mixed messages, and deception. Like anyone with a serious problem, abusers work hard to keep their true selves hidden.

As we clear away the abusive man’s smoke screen...you will find that abusiveness turns out to be far less mysterious than it appears at first. Inside the abuser’s mind, there is a world of beliefs, perceptions, and responses that fits together in a surprisingly logical way. His behavior does make sense. Underneath the façade of irrationality and explosiveness there is a human being with a comprehensible problem. But he doesn’t want you to figure him out.

The abuser creates confusion because he has to. He can’t control and intimidate you, he can’t recruit people around him to take his side, he can’t keep escaping the consequences of his actions, unless he can throw everyone off the track.” [Why Does He Do That? Lundy Bancroft]

THIS IS VITAL for us to get hold of! By playing the “Jekyll/Hyde” game, the abuser keeps us doubting about his true nature. At one minute, and in even most settings – here is Daniel – the apparently godly, fine, model Christian. At another minute, he is viciously assaulting his wife. So, who is Daniel – the victim in particular struggles with this question. If he is

the nice, fine, Christian – then the victim must be the one to blame.

Through this “mystery” and confusion as to who the abuser really is, he keeps people off guard and confused. You see it there in 2 Corinthians, right? At one minute these false apostles are hitting and enslaving and abusing the Corinthians. Then, at another minute – they are angels of light, servants of righteousness. Thus, the victims are kept from coming to an accurate and true realization that in fact *these men are wolves*.

You have it in Jesus’ rebuke of the hypocrites – a passage we have often referred to in this series –

Matthew 23:25-28 ESV

(25) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

(26) You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (27) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

(28) So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you

are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Who were they, really? The people were kept confused. These men outwardly looked godly and holy, but Jesus exposed them for what they really were. They were no mystery to him. *The abuser always turns out to be Mr. Hyde*. We need to understand this. When a person appears as a fine Christian, but at various times his or her fangs come out, so that you never really know who he is or what he is going to do – you have the mystery of abuse going on. This is not merely a person losing their temper on occasion. This is calculated and purposeful. The mystery and confusion are used by the abuser to prevent us from realizing who he really is and what he is really doing. Understand this, and the mystery begins to clear away.

D. The Deception of Twisting Things into Their Opposites

The abusive man, at home or in his church, *rewrites facts and history to suit his own purposes*. At Corinth, the false apostles made themselves out to be “truth-tellers” and convinced the Corinthians to disbelieve Paul, a true Apostle. They took Paul’s delay in coming and twisted it into a supposed example of the untrustworthiness of his word. They took Paul’s genuine humility (working to support himself,

for example) and twisted it into a sign of inferiority.

The abusive man re-writes truth to his benefit, *and then he believes it*. He tells these perversions of fact with all sincerity. Listen to Bancroft once again –

“The abuser’s highly entitled perceptual system causes him to mentally reverse aggression and self-defense. When his victim attempts to defend herself against the abuser’s attack, he defines her actions as violence toward him. When he then injures her further, he claimed he was merely defending himself against her abuse.

When I challenge my clients to stop bullying their partners, they twist my words around just as they do their partners. They accuse me of having said things that have little connection to my actual words. An abuser says, ‘You’re saying I should lie down and let her walk all over me’ because I told him that intimidating his partner is unacceptable no matter how angry he is. He then says, ‘So you’re telling us that our partners can do anything they want to us, and we aren’t allowed to lift a finger to defend ourselves’ because...I told her he has no excuse for calling her a disgusting name. He says, ‘Your approach is that whatever she does is okay, because she’s a

woman, but because I’m the man, there’s much stricter rules for me’ because I pointed out his double standards and insisted that he should live by the same rules he applies to her.” [Why Does He Do That?]

These are the kinds of deceptive tactics abusive men, either in the home, in the workplace, in the church – use to maintain their façade. To keep us wondering and deceived. To prevent us from coming to see them for who they really are – servants of unrighteousness, evil angels of darkness.

Let’s close with just one more look at the thing –

E. He is a Great Public Relations Man

The victim of an abusive man will wonder and wonder and wonder what is wrong *with her*, the victim, instead of realizing something is wrong with the abuser. One of the main reasons for this is that the abuser is so often a master at public relations and he maintains a wonderful public persona. No one else seems to have a problem with him, so it must be the victim – that is the thinking. Worse yet, it is also the thinking of the public! That the problem is the victim! It is a terrible, awful thing.

Let's let Bancroft lay it out for us –

“Most abusive men put on a charming face for their communities, creating a sharp split between their public image and their private treatment of women and children. He may be –

- *Enraged at home but calm and smiling outside*
- *Selfish and self-centered with you but generous and supportive with others*
- *Domineering at home but willing to negotiate and compromise outside*
- *Highly negative about females while on his own turf but a vocal supporter of equality when anyone else is listening*
- *Assaultive toward his partner or children but nonviolent and non-threatening with everyone else*
- *Entitled at home but critical of other men who disrespect or assault women*

The pain of this contrast can eat away at a woman [or any of his victims]. In the morning her partner cuts her to the quick by calling her a ‘brainless fat cow,’ but a few hours later she sees him laughing with the people next door and helping them fix their car. Later the neighbor says to her, ‘Your husband is so nice. You’re lucky to be with him – a lot of men wouldn’t do what he does.’ [Remember, if a person

seems too good to be true, they probably aren’t!] She responds with a mumbled ‘Yeah,’ feeling confused and tongue-tied. Back at home, she asks herself over and over again, ‘Why me?’”

Do abusive men have split personalities? Not really. They are drawn by power and control, and part of how they get it is by looking good in public. The abusive man’s charm makes his partner reluctant to reach out for support or assistance because she feels that people will find her revelations hard to believe or will blame her. If friends overhear him say something abusive, or police arrest him for an assault, his previous people-pleasing lays the groundwork to get him off the hook. The observers think, He’s such a nice guy, he’s just not the type to be abusive. She must have really hurt him.

*One of the most important challenges facing a counselor [or pastor, or church] of an abusive man, is to resist being drawn in by the man’s charming persona. As they sit chatting and joking in their group (therapy) meeting, cruelty and selfishness seem faraway. I find myself wondering the same thing the neighbors do: Could this guy really get that mean? And even after he admits to what he does, it’s still hard to believe. **THIS CONTRAST IS A KEY REASON WHY***

ABUSERS CAN GET AWAY WITH WHAT THEY DO.

because the abusers let their guard down with me, belying their denial.”

Among my clients I have had:

- *Doctors*
- *Successful businessmen*
- *About 12 college professors*
- *Lawyers*
- *A mellow-sounding radio personality*
- *Clergymen*
- *Professional athletes*

One of my violent clients had spent every Thanksgiving for the past 10 years volunteering at his local soup kitchen. Another was a publicly visible staff member of a major international human rights organization. The cruelty and destructiveness that these men were capable of would have stunned their communities had they known.

Although these men usually keep their abusive side well hidden outside of the home, there is one situation in which it slips out; when someone confronts them about their abusiveness and sticks up for the abused woman, which happens to be my job. Suddenly, the attitudes and tactics they normally reserve for home come pouring out. The vast majority of women who say that they are being abused are telling the truth. I know this to be true,

So, there it is. Just in part. The deception of the abusive man. Angel of light, servant of righteousness – it seems. But in reality, a man who sees himself entitled to absolute power and control, justified to even enslave and strike his victims in the face to keep them under that power.

May Christ increasingly make this church a place where victims of such men are set free, and where the deceptions and facades of such wicked men come crashing down by the power of the Word of Christ.