



MOUNT HOREB NEWS

PRAYER MINISTRY

Thoughts on Spiritual Addiction and Spiritual Abuse

“And the souls of the wounded cry out...” (Job 24:12)

Ann and I work with people from all walks of life suffering from many different addictions. Over the past few years we have met with pastors, missionaries, and church members who have been “spiritually abused.” Well, you might ask, what is spiritual abuse?

“**Spiritual abuse** occurs when a person in religious authority or a person with a unique spiritual practice misleads and maltreats another person in the name of God or church... Spiritual abuse often refers to an abuser using spiritual or religious rank in taking advantage of the victim's spirituality... by putting the victim in a state of *unquestioning obedience to an abusive authority.*” (emphasis mine) [Wikipedia](#)

Spiritual abuse might include: emotional abuse, shame, submission to authority without any right to disagree or question authority, physical abuse, sexual abuse (yes, sexual abuse occurs in the church), persecution, etc.

We were created with an inner longing for spiritual experience and connection; a longing that is rightly fulfilled through relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. People who do not have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus will search desperately for anything to satisfy their spiritual hunger. They are, in fact, looking for the real thing – Jesus Christ— but are deceived by a substitute. This is painfully evident in the post modern emptiness that so many are experiencing today. The enemy is rushing in to satisfy people as he offers enticing substitutes to a relationship with Jesus which are expressed as “spiritually adulterous” activities within the church. These activities may range from legalistic, rule-bound, dead orthodoxy on one extreme to legalistic, rule-bound, ecstatic experience on the other. It is in the midst of these fabricated rules that “spiritual addictions” and “spiritual abuse” do occur.

Many within the church have become addicted to contrived experiences, believing them to be the real thing. If you were to ask me where the greatest risk of addiction (masquerading as legitimate spiritual activity) lies, I would point to the quest for religious ecstasy and *euphoria*. Most Christians recognize substances like alcohol or cocaine to be addictive, but many fall into the trap of searching for something to mask their pain by getting high on spiritual

experiences. Church becomes not a community for serving God and each other, but the source of a weekly shot in the arm or fix. Unfortunately one can become addicted to the emotional highs and miss Jesus altogether. And like so many fixes, the experience is short lived. Because it is associated with a spiritual quest, this kind of hidden addiction is harder to recognize than most. Unfortunately, God is no where to be found in these counterfeit experiences. The seeker of the spiritual high is rarely satisfied and, like the cocaine addict, moves from experience to experience seeking to find temporary relief from the pain in his heart. This is not to say that many Christians do not have deep, rich, true spiritual experiences when encountering the Lord. So how does one discern if they are from God or not?

Andrew Strom writes, “*What a lot of people don't seem to recognize is the sheer level of 'peer pressure' and 'crowd manipulation' that is going on at many of these events. They end up being led into doing things they feel uncomfortable with, just because 'everybody else' is doing it. They squash down their **discernment**. They ignore the 'little voice' or the 'alarm bells' inside them that are trying to get their attention. And thus, multitudes of Christians are being led astray ...*” [True and False Revival](#)

Because we have failed to discern the spirits inside the doors of the church, many are led down a very destructive path and pay a heavy price for their deception. **Spiritual addiction leaves people open to spiritual abuse.** Spiritual abuse is rampant in the church today because of our acceptance of the enemy's deception and the failure of church leaders to be the watchmen on the walls in discerning that deception. In Rev. 2:4 the Lord says to the church at Ephesus, “*But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*” (over)



Dan and Ann on their 40th wedding anniversary.

Examples of Spiritual Abuse

We Have Encountered

Let me give you some examples of spiritual abuse. One former client went to the altar to ask for prayer for her marriage. Even before she spoke a word, the elder said, "I know what is wrong with you. Your husband is having an affair. In fact, he has had many affairs." This "word" was not true and only caused greater confusion and fear. A "word of knowledge" spoken with impulsivity can mimic fortune-telling, especially when it is delivered with arrogance. Graham Cook, in his book, Prophecy and Responsibility, says *"The word has to be given gently, no matter how harsh it is."* He goes on to say that *in the wrong hands, a gift can suffer misuse and abuse that can lead to strife, division, and confusion.*

Another gentleman I worked with was horribly abused as the leadership in his church rebuked, shamed, and humiliated him and his wife in an unbiblical form of church discipline. Great damage has been done to this couple in the name of Christ. When this young man questioned what was said by his elder, he was told that he should accept the discipline without question.

Yet, another of our spiritually abused clients was told, "Touch not the Lord's anointed" and "You are deceived and have a critical spirit if you do not listen," when he asked questions of those in church leadership. Where is there a biblical basis for such arrogance? Is there compassion and love for a brother in this type of haughty and destructive behavior of one in leadership?

The last example is seen daily in our news papers and that is sexual abuse in the church. I worked with a man who was sexually abused by two priests when he was young. He had been left with scars and wounds so deep that he turned to cocaine. When I asked him if he would be willing to hear from Jesus, he replied, "How can I trust Jesus? Where was He when I was being abused by His priests?"

What Can One Do?

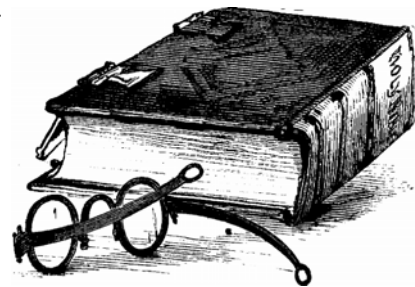
Scripture instructs us, over and over, to test the spirits. Matthew 24:24 reads, *"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible (and it is), even the elect. Again, God tells us, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (1 John 4:1)

Often, because what is going on is in the church, we do not think to ask questions. But we are instructed to be aware, weighing what goes on within the church walls against the teaching found in Scripture. We must discern the spirits. 1 Thess. 5: 21-22 instructs us to, "...examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."

Still some well-known prophets and teachers strongly discourage Christians from obeying Scripture where it talks about applying biblical principles of discernment in order to silence critics of their ministry and teachings. They suggest that critics of their movements and doctrines have a "Jezebel spirit" or a "religious spirit."

Some Basic Keys to Discernment

- **Know your God intimately.** Pray every day that God will show you His Truth. Deepen your walk with the Lord.
- **Know your Bible. Spend time in His Word daily.** One must not surrender to a theology which gives equal or more weight to experience rather than the Word of God. There is **no** substitute for the Word of God. There is no "something more." There is no **new** revelation, only illumination of the Word. One must be careful that his experience does not define his theology, but rather one must allow the Word of God to interpret his experience. It is important to recognize teachings that are either extra-biblical or directly opposed to what the Bible teaches. *"Our lives are built on Scripture, not on prophecy. In event of a clash between a word and the Bible, we must always abandon the prophecy in favor of Scripture, the revealed Word of God. We must be careful that the substance of extra-biblical revelation does not contradict the Bible..."* Graham Cooke
- **Beware of Scripture taken out of context to support a teaching.** Context is everything
- **Develop the "inner witness" of the Holy Spirit.** Be still and quiet before the Lord and listen to the still small voice. He will show you the truth, if you seek His face when you are trying to discern the spirits. *"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons."* (1 Timothy 4:1)
- **Be a lover of truth and speak the truth in love.**
- **Have a pure heart and seek to have the humility of Christ.**



Let me encourage you to seek God's face and test the spirits to see if they are from God. If you begin using these keys to discernment, you will find your relationship with Jesus Christ growing deeper. Those who are in relationship with Jesus are much less likely to allow themselves to become victims of spiritual abuse.

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