

A Deadly Warning to the Church:

Woe to Spiritual Abusers--Repent

Luke 11:37-54

While Jesus was speaking,

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.” (Luke 11:33-36 ESV)

a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table.

1. **PHARISEES QUESTION JESUS' FORGIVENESS OF SIN OF A PARALYZED MAN:** And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:17-21 ESV)
2. **PHARISEES GRUMBLED ABOUT JESUS EATING WITH SINNERS:** And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Luke 5:29-32 ESV)
3. **PHARISEES QUESTION DISCIPLES OF JESUS:** And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” (Luke 5:33 ESV)
4. **PHARISEES QUESTION JESUS ABOUT SABBATH REGULATIONS:** But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” (Luke 6:1-2 ESV)
5. **PHARISEES PLOT TO TRAP JESUS:** And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. (Luke 6:6-7 ESV)
6. **PHARISEES ARE ANGRY AT JESUS FOR HEALING ON THE SABBATH:** But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. (Luke 6:10-11 ESV)
7. **PHARISEES REBUKE JESUS FOR CONTACT WITH A SINFUL WOMAN:** Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:36-40 ESV)

The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

The LORD said to Moses, “You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall **wash their hands and their feet**. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall **wash with water**, so that they may not die. They shall **wash their hands and their feet**, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.” (Exodus 30:17-21 ESV)

PROFILE 1: Hypocrisy

And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

THE WOES: Examples of the Prophets
(Isaiah 1:2-20 ESV)

- Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken:
“Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.
- The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib,
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”
- Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,
offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly!
- **They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.**
- Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel?
The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.
- From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it,
• but bruises and sores and raw wounds;
• they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.
- Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire;
in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.
- And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard,
like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.
- If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors,
we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.
- Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!
- **“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD;**
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.
- “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?
Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.
- New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
• Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.
- When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.
- **Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;**
cease to do evil, learn to do good;
seek justice, correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.
- “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
- **If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;**
but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

WOE 1: PROCEDURES OVER PEOPLE: “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

“You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, **you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.**

“At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. **And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.** (Deuteronomy 14:22-29 ESV)

Jesus: While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” **And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him.** And he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. (Luke 5:12-16 ESV)

WOE 2: APPLAUSE OVER APPROVAL: Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Jesus: But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. (Luke 5:12-16 ESV) “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1 ESV)

WOE 3: COVER-UPS OVER OPENNESS: Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

Jesus: Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Luke 22:52-53 ESV)

PROFILE 2: Victimization

One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.”

WOE 4: AUTHORITY OVER SERVICE: And he said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20 ESV)

WOE 5: ACCOLADES OVER REPENTANCE: Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

ABEL: Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:4-7 ESV)

ZECHARIAH: Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’” But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah’s father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, “May the LORD see and avenge!” (2 Chronicles 24:20-22 ESV)

WOE 6: WOLVES OVER SHEPHERDS: Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:19-29 ESV)

PROFILE 3: Revenge

As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

- Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. **And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.** (Luke 22:1-2 ESV)
- Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? **When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.**” (Luke 22:52-53 ESV)
- Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, “**We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.**” And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” **But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”** (Luke 23:1-5 ESV)
- But they all cried out together, “**Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas**”—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “**Crucify, crucify him!**” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” **But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed.** So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:18-25 ESV)

Assessment of Spiritually Abusive Leaders and Churches

The Barnabas Ministry¹

After reading each description of a spiritually abusive leader(s), write in the number that best describes your view of how this trait most represents the behavior of a church leader or a church leadership.

- 1) Consistently represents
- 2) Often represents
- 3) Occasionally represents
- 4) Rarely represents
- 5) Never represents
- 6) Unsure

- _____ 1. Abusers can say they are imperfect ("nobody's perfect") and therefore their abuse is excusable.
- _____ 2. Abusers can blame their mistreatment of others on how busy they are doing "God's work."
- _____ 3. Abusers may apologize for "hurts" but never take responsibility or ownership for their part in causing the hurt; they will not call it "sin" or "abuse."
- _____ 4. Abusers may attempt to treat a series of abuses as individual instances, fighting any attempts to view them as systemic, habitual patterns of behavior.
- _____ 5. Abusers will claim that people brought these issues up in the "wrong way" somehow.
- _____ 6. Abusers may claim that those hurt are just too sensitive, not mature enough, didn't understand what was meant, or the like.
- _____ 7. Abusers may make sure there are plenty of people who think they are just wonderful. He can appeal to them and make it look like those who are accusing him of abuse are just "bitter" or "bad apples."
- _____ 8. Abusers often intimidate and bully people, so there is little likelihood that anyone will directly challenge them because they are in a position of authority and can do anything they want to any "uncooperative" people objecting to mistreatment.
- _____ 9. Abusers can claim if people had just come to them and expressed how they felt, they would have been so sorry for the hurts that were caused.
- _____ 10. Abusers may try to associate themselves with the good work of the church, so that holding them accountable for their actions becomes equated with opposing or attacking the work of the church.

¹ The Barnabas Ministry is a resource for recognizing and dealing with spiritually abusive leaders or individuals in a church. These traits are used by the ministry to help identify spiritual abuse. The questionnaire was created by Douglas Lay as a means to help apply these traits to a specific situation. <http://www.barnabasministry.com/recovery-uncovering.html>

- _____ 11. Abusers may appeal to others that they are "under the attack of Satan" when they are simply being held accountable.
- _____ 12. Abusers can act hurt that these allegations have been brought against them; they can "play the victim."
- _____ 13. Abusers may appeal to the good results of the ministry-- growth, expansion, or the like. This is an attempt to suggest that the good outweighs the bad. But both the good and bad fruit count.
- _____ 14. Abusers may cite Jesus' tough talks with the apostles (like his rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16), Nehemiah's pulling out of hair of rebels (Nehemiah 13:25) or other similar stories. The implication here is that abusive treatment is OK and even necessary.
- _____ 15. Abusers may focus on the deep frustration and hurt of abused people and call it "bitterness." This makes them the issue instead of the abuser's behavior and can send the entire church into confusion. The abuser may know that if he can get others to see how "everybody has sinned" then he is more likely to escape consequences for his abusive behavior.
- _____ 16. Abusers may have a group of influential supporters in positions of subordinate leadership that provide favorable treatment. They engage in a quid pro quo (this for that) type of relationship that works something like this: the supporters deflect all concerns raised and even do counter-attacks on questioners as needed, and the top leader in turn persistently endorses the positions of influence of these influential members. When there are no checks and balances but rather favoritism, honest and legitimate questions somehow never make it anywhere.
- _____ 17. Abusers can appeal to the concept of grace and expect forgiveness for what they have done, without ever acknowledging wrongdoing. However, forgiveness demands that the offense be recognized as sin-- if something isn't a sin, there is nothing to forgive. What abusers often mean by "forgiveness" and "grace" is a lack of accountability for what they have done, that past events simply be re-written or expunged from history. If such "grace" and "forgiveness" are not given, abusers or their unwitting defenders will speak about how "we all need to forgive one another and if we can't do that, we're not very Christian."
- _____ 18. Abusers can implicitly or explicitly threaten staff members. Staff members will know that if they raise questions or object to certain behavior, their positions are in jeopardy. Therefore, staff members may defend the top leader or the system out of intimidation or self-interest. This doesn't mean that staff members who defend the top leader are corrupted, but the possibility of being compromised has to be considered.
- _____ 19. Abusers can say if they are disciplined or removed for their actions, then who will lead the church? This is an attempt to frighten or blackmail the church from taking action.
- _____ 20. Abusers may position themselves as the solution to any problems that their behavior has caused. For example, if the church is discouraged by the results of their behavior, they will claim that if they were given "free reign" they could encourage the church and make things better.