

Insights from the Isles (7)



Abuse

Exploit or abuse your family, and end up with a fistful of air;

Common sense tells you it's a stupid way to live.

(Proverbs 11:29 The Message)

Nothing clever, nothing conceived, nothing contrived,

can get the better of God.

(Proverbs 21:29, The Message)

There was a time when new converts were introduced to the Book of Proverbs as their first exposure to Bible teaching. In this decidedly 'heavyweight' Insight, we have singled out several verses related to the theme of abuse. We thought you might find it

refreshing to read them in Eugene Peterson's distinctive paraphrase. As you do so, may the Spirit of the Lord come on you to pray for victims of abuse - and for their abusers. For example:

The numerous young women whose lives are worn out as sex slaves in Thailand (or by the Albanian prostitution rings)

The street children in Brazil

Imprisoned Christian leaders in China

The greatly oppressed Christians of southern Sudan and in other parts of the Islamic world

Vulnerable children, abandoned orphans and old people in impersonal institutions

For believers who feel stifled and controlled in their own churches -

And then for the many women and children who suffer violence and intimidation behind the seeming safety of their own front doors.

Over the years we have encountered many situations where one person is clearly being badly treated by another - often their partner. We have often been amazed at how long it has taken the victim to realise that 'it is not all their fault' and that they do not deserve the treatment being meted out to them. How true it is not only that abused people themselves are liable to take it out on others, but also the strange tramlines of co-dependency whereby 'the abused return to their abuser.'

'Love' and control rotate in complex patterns, making the cycle hard to break. Knowing when to tough it out and trust for change and when to accept that 'enough is enough' is a decision that can only be made with a great deal of wise counsel and the Lord's direct help.

When it really is necessary for a person to take steps to escape from a controlling person's

grip, the danger and the abuse often increase ten-fold. Controllers hate losing face, let alone control!

Sadly, there are parallels for this in church life as well as in families - but that would be another subject in its own right. What we have found in every case is that the heart of the abuser is full of faulty perspectives. In Proverbs 26:12, the beginning of a mini-series on self-deceit and sluggardness, we find the all too familiar sight of men who have convinced themselves that what they are doing is perfectly justified, because the other person is in the wrong for opposing them. Only last week I heard of a man blaming his lovely Christian wife for 'forcing' him into leaving her for another woman. There is little God can do for such people until they are prepared to acknowledge the games they have been playing. Until then they will continue to find excuses for justifying the unjustifiable.

Rather than simply denouncing extreme cases, however, let's bring this whole issue of abuse home to roost by pausing to consider how easily we ourselves demean each other. When I pause to think of the anger and cutting words that I have directed over the years at Ruth or Tim when they have caught me at the 'wrong' time - or the many times I have blatantly interrupted Ros when she was talking, we can see how easy it is to cross the line and to become an abuser oneself.

We can always come up with 'reasons' for justifying our behaviour - but how about confessing it all to the Lord and each other?

Time to get into the Word.

'We justify our actions by appearances; God examines our motives.' (21:2)

'Whoever sows sins reaps weeds,

and bullying anger sputters into nothing.' (22:8)

'People who shrug off deliberate deceptions, saying, "I didn't mean it, I was only joking," are worse than careless campers who walk away from smouldering campfires.' (26:18).

'What a bad person plots against the good, boomerangs;

the plotter gets it in the end.' (21:18)

Haman, in Esther 7:10 is an example of this principle. So too is the fate that befell Daniels' scheming detractors in Daniel 6:24-28. Abusers are *always* schemers who have a cold and calculating side to their personality that flouts conventional morality and twists and turns what people say and do for their own ends. Their insecurity causes them to try to obtain by force what can only be received by grace. Thus they are almost incapable of winning friends except through the barbed tool of flattery.

Although they are experts at dissembling, sooner or later people see through their insincerity. *'The person who is always cooking up some evil soon gets a reputation as prince of rogues.'* (24:8)

No matter how cunningly (your enemy) conceals his malice his evil will eventually be exposed in public. Malice backfires, spite boomerangs. Liars hate their victims, flatterers sabotage trust.' (26:26-28)

The aspirations of good people end in celebration; the ambition of bad people crash.' (10:28). Or as the NIV translates this verse: *'The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing'* - NIV).

This has not been not a cheerful subject to write about, but it is a highly pertinent one.

The good news is that through repentance and forgiveness, all or any can change! Ask the Lord to search your own heart . . . and then bring victims and their abusers alike to the foot of the cross, for the cross is the stopping place, where vicious cycles are first interrupted and then broken.

Here's a positive thought to end with. Just as reformed alcoholics and drug addicts can often be the most effective for reaching fellow sufferers, why should reformed abusers not be equally as powerful in helping others to reach a new degree of graciousness?