

## Abuse and Manipulation

Abuse - verbal, marital, physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual or any type of abuse is NOT God's plan for you

We are noting that an increasing number of people who come to Engrafted Word Fellowship are looking for teaching or assistance in dealing with untenable abuse situations. Some of them are in marriage where a spouse is unfaithful and verbally and financially abusive. Others are in churches that are steeped in legalism and operate more like cults, and the person's whole social, financial and spiritual world is tied to the group is subject to severe consequences for questioning some things that are not right. The first thing we ask them and would ask you visiting this section on our site is: **Are you physically safe?**

**If you are in physical danger, or have been hit, threatened with violence, physically detained against your will, or your property has been subject to violence (someone is breaking or throwing things), then it is wisdom to both get to safety, and call 911, especially in the case of physical violence.** We realize that there are many situations which could fall under the word "abuse," and we don't know your specific individual circumstances.

If you are in a situation where you are not safe, please get to safety. For situations of domestic violence, and even some workplace violence, you can also phone the national domestic abuse helpline: 1-800-799-7233

This article does not single out any one church, marital situation or ministry, but opens the conversation with a composite of situations that people have brought up, or other ministries have shared with us, in the course of many years of ministry. We want to address the issues of both domestic and spiritual abuse, and this page is just to begin the conversation.

At the bottom of this page, we'll provide some resources and reading in the area of abuse. If you suspect you are dealing with any type of spousal or marital abuse or you want to learn more about how situations of abuse or people that are abusive can seem to have much good in them, then we suggest you educate yourself. It is okay to seek outside sources of information. In fact, something central to abusive spouses and abusive churches is that your access to information is often controlled, sometimes without you being aware of it. You may be told to avoid certain people for reasons that sound good, but that is part of what happens, in that you no longer have free access to viewpoints which contradict with the abusive person or leader's viewpoint. Yes, someone can be BOTH very loving, charismatic and liked by all publicly, dynamic and helpful to others, but still be abusive, angry, punitive and controlling. An abusive spouse or leader can even claim to be the victim of division, slander, and can make the other person (the member or spouse who is being abused) look like the problem. We recommend the (secular) book by Lundy Bancroft, [this is a link to the author's website] **WHY DOES HE DO THAT?** We mean the original book by that title. He has two books including one recently published in 2015. We are referring to the earlier book by the title WHY DOES HE DO THAT?

Here is a link to the book on [Amazon.com](#) **WHY DOES HE DO THAT?** is helpful if you or someone you know is dealing with a situation that seems very wrong, sometimes

abusive, but sometimes you or the person subject to that type of abuse feels like it must be your fault and you're the one that's crazy or wrong. This was written specifically for marital relationships or similar relationships, but much of the discussion applies for other types of abuse, including abusive leaders in the church. Lundy Bancroft worked in the area of helping abusive men recover, and he talks about the thinking/mindset of people who mistreat their spouses. We find this thinking is pervasive in the same areas where churches abuse their members, and we believe that it will open your eyes if you have been dealing with this kind of thing.

*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

1 Timothy 2:1-6

[This entire page on our website is "in process" and unfinished] That being stated, we've decided to begin to open the conversation so that you can know:

If you suspect you are in a church or relationship that is controlling, please know that it is the "means" or method of control that is destructive and can be manipulative and influential, not so much the believe system. How you are led to "buy in" to what is believed, and how that leaves you in a situation where your access to information and freedom of choice are disabled is what makes that relationship or church situation "high demand," and many would say like a "cult."

We always tend to think of "cults" as something out there where unsuspecting gullible people follow a leader who has problems. Studies done on high demand groups indicate the opposite, that intelligent people from all walks of life, join groups because of idealism, but when they get "hooked" into staying, they are progressively led through teaching, experience and manipulation, to give up their freedoms and see the leader or leadership as another class of people. In the case of Christian groups, you come to believe that your leader is God's representative to you and that he can hear from God better than you can. You come to doubt yourself, and feel guilty when leadership points out any issues they see. On the one hand, you see things are wrong. On the other hand, your need to appear loyal and stay connected keeps you

trapped in a situation. Techniques like shunning (marking), ignoring you, sending someone to love on you and encourage you to "talk" with leadership, spying on you,

pressuring you to repent, pointing out things that they see as your "sin," labeling you as "divisive" or "usurper," all work together to keep you trapped. Not only that, you have seen what happens to other people who the leadership identifies as "problem people." It cannot hurt to identify and educate yourself as to what techniques and tactics are used in high demand groups, and some resources are provided at the bottom of this article.

Here are some things to think about as you are sorting this out:

1. You are not crazy
2. You are not evil because you want some help and/or want to question or discuss something which has gone on for a while, or is excessive and is not loving, godly behavior. The same goes if you want to help someone. It is okay to seek help outside the relationship(s) church that are in question. In fact, to see things objectively, you will want to go outside the system where you are being hurt, damaged or abused. Otherwise the information you receive will be controlled or limited by the person or church which is abusive to you. They will want you to see your own questioning and thinking for yourself as problematic.
3. God wants you to see the truth, even if it is something where those being abusive, mistreating yourself or others, would not want to come into the light. Even if others say that your thinking is off, it may be that you are seeing things truthfully, but you have been made to question yourself because questioning anyone else has not been permitted. I heard a lecture by Margaret Singer, that "no complaints to management are allowed," Many abusive systems function that way. They may invite you to question or "have a bible study," but, in effect, if you are not returned to accepting their point of view quickly, you are identified as a problem person to be corrected.
4. If you are observing a double-standard regarding leadership, where sin against you is permitted but speaking out about it is labeled as "touching God's anointed," or some other words that accuse you of wrongdoing, that truly is an unbiblical double-standard and bondage you are under. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your LORD and savior, and have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, then you are as anointed, and the doctrine about "touching" includes you not being touched, as well.
5. It is okay to seek outside help to get proper godly discernment, even just to have someone bounce things off of to get your bearings. In an abusive system, people are in fear, and they can and do throw other people under the bus. If you feel you have no one to talk to, go outside to seek help. In the case of an abused spouse, go to a hotline or call center or websites supporting recovery. In the case of spiritual abuse, there are online spiritual abuse support groups and other resources for recovering. Read Jana Lalich's book: [Take Back Your Life](#) and Jeff Van Vonderen's Book [The Subtle Power Of Spiritual Abuse](#)
6. There are people who are controlling, narcissistic (self centered and self aggrandizing) who see themselves above and superior to you, and no matter how much they "sell" you on the thinking that they care greatly for you, watch the actions of the THE WAY THEY TREAT YOU long term. It is speaking volumes of truth you want to open your ears to hear, and open your eyes to see. Even if they do many gracious and giving and caring actions, this does not justify or permit abuse. Examples of abuse would be angry rages, demeaning you, fiery pulpit sermons aimed at individuals (where everyone knows who is being accused or condemned), meetings where you are made to feel guilty or called "on your sin," in many cases which is not sin, but just behavior change your leader wants. Even believers can do loving things and then do abusive things. Ongoing verbal or other types of abuse by other believers is not something you have to sit under, enable or endure. Railings and a leader's loss of self control under the name of "godly correction," are not loving treatment or correction. Name calling, foul language, demeaning and degrading references and hateful speech is abuse, no matter the label put on it, or no matter how much you have been made to feel you deserve it, is abuse.
7. The fact that these people can be loving, gracious even incredibly generous and do some kind and caring acts does not make the verbal, emotional, spiritual, or any other type of abuse okay. It is good for you to discern what is going on and it is okay

to get yourself to a place of safety.

8. You do not need to take on any guilt or condemnation because you don't continue to be grateful for someone who is both abusive and does good things, too.

Sometimes those who enable abuse will try to guilt you into compliance or not taking issue. People surrounding them will see the kind acts, and reinforce the feeling in you that "something is wrong with me," But what is wrong is where abuse can continue, but people are guilt tripped and manipulated into thinking it is their fault.

9. Read the some of the resources suggested, and take in these authors' perspectives as you understand your own situation in light of your relationship with God.

10. It is okay to see the truth. God wants us to see things as they are, and then with the hope He provides for us, but that does not mean that you need to pretend that people doing evil and harm are doing good and that they have your best interest in mind. Abuse and control are not necessary to a healthy Christian life.

11. Abuse is crazy making, because it gets you to doubt yourself. God gave you a mind, and the ability to discern. A phrase I've been using to help people "get" what abuse is like is this question:

If "leadership" (or an abusive spouse) walks you up to a black wall and tells you that the color of the wall is white, what color is it? Many people in abusive situations have to think for a moment. An abusive leader yells at them or "corrects" some sin, but the sin has been defined and identified by the abusive person, and it often is not sin, but behavior modification the leader wants to happen. But many people in abusive situations have learned to agree with their leader (or spouse's) point of view, because they have somewhere given in to the notion that the leader sees better than they do. They also stop any thinking that would allow themselves to see that leaders are acting selfishly in their own interests to control or quiet objections.

Words like "you are in self pity" or "you have to die to self" or "you're in bitterness" or "you're touching God's anointed" actually stop you from thinking, because your focus is immediately drawn to you not wanting to be on the outs with God. You can and often do have perfectly legitimate concerns and questions you start to raise, and the group or even your own internal dialogue self polices you to stop that line of questioning. Perhaps a leader seems to be financially doing quite well, while the group is living at the public assistance poverty level, you want to question it. Someone or even your own thinking says "don't touch God's anointed" and you stop what normal people everywhere else would question. Perhaps you are the wife of a husband in a Christian marriage where you have been taught to "submit," but your husband is subject to excessive rages and regular mistreatment with some types of people he frequently labels as enemies and problem people. You do not realize that he has been the one who has labeled their behaviors for you, and he has shaped and distorted how he sees those people. So you comply with him every time he gives you another reason to "don't talk with that person or communicate with that person"

Much of the abuse discussion we will cover is more subtle and harder to discern, but our heart is to bring to light, especially when abuse is being done "in the name of God," and it is the kind of abuse that's crazy making because you are being put in a place where you have lots of conflicting thoughts as to what is really going on, whether it is your fault, whether you are not submitting or obeying enough, whether it is just "self" or flesh. There is a biblical dying to self which does not include

subjugating who you really are. Abusive groups and people want to make you their subjects. While selling you on the idea of freedom, you are being brought into bondage:

Religious or spiritual abuse is an especially difficult situation.

- Are you subject to the group's way of understanding some scriptures?
- Are scriptures used to control your behavior, which seem like bondage instead of liberty of Christ?
- Is there a double standard in that things you are taught you have to do seems not to apply to "inner circle" of the group or leader teaching them? (this could be the same in abusive marriage - where the spouse gets to do whatever and not be accountable, but the abused spouse is corrected often and made to comply)
- Does everyone unquestioningly agree or side with the leader's interpretation of scripture and discernment about you and your behavior, and does it seem like this is random and based on whether people comply and are passive?
- Is it a "Simon Says" group, where the only acceptable answers are what Simon [or whatever the leader's name is] says is really the only acceptable answer. No one is allowed to disagree with Simon. Are you allowed to disagree and state it openly? What if Simon is wrong?
- Are people regularly ignored or shunned or labeled as "in error" or "out of order" or "usurping" as an excuse to reject and emotionally and socially pressure them into silence or compliance (or being made to leave by being so mistreated)?
- Is there a huge difference between the public face of the ministry and what is taught and the unwritten rules that are practiced?
- Is there any "spying" or "reporting to leadership"?
- Are people overworked?
- Do people live in fear of being labeled disloyal?
- Does the leader have undiagnosed, or known but hidden mental illness?
- Has the leader been on psychiatric medications within the last year and/or is he/she currently on them?
- Is the leader having memory problems where do not remember or do not take responsibility for the harm they inflict on the people around them?
- Do other people protect their public persona, so that if you have concerns or speak of the mistreatment, you are seen as the one with the problem? Are they surrounded by people who protect their image for them? (i.e. enabling/supportive spouse who will not admit abuse the spouse has witnessed)
- Are there are lot of multiple "exits" or shunnings or excommunications or threats to that extent, often blamed on those who leave?
- Are people labeled divisive or matriarchal or patriarchal or disobedient or haughty (or other names)? When someone is labeled that way, do you "not think" anything but that person is what they are labeled. Most people do not question the truth or accuracy of these labels, later finding out that this was just a way for the leader to get you to not listen to or hear that person.



- Are the numbers of people leaving high, as in too many to be coincidence, or explained away by persecution?
- Does the group or minister claim "we're the only ones who...." or "I'm the only one who..." In other words, are you taught to think that there is something that can only be found there and that this group or person has unique knowledge or ability, or it is so rare?
- Have you been made to think that this is the only (or one of the few) church where you can get this essential information or helpful teaching? That is not biblical. God did not put "the truth" in only one church or minister. In fact, being "sold" on the idea that this is one of the only or few places you can get this kind of teaching is part of the process of manipulating you to stay and put up with the abuse.
- Is there a constant marketing or selling of the church, ministry or leader, where people are subject to continuous PR, advertising, marketing and being "sold" on the person and their unique gifts, talents, insights and why you "need" them, even if the outward verbiage is about you being led to God and helped with your relationship with God. Is dependency or idolatry created and perpetuated in actual practice?
- If "leadership" brought you up to a black colored wall and told you it was a white colored wall, would you begin to question yourself or your own sanity, or would you be able to trust God gave you discernment and a brain, and clearly see that the wall was black? Some people in abusive situations have their reality twisted by the social pressure, the investment they've put in to living in legalism, and their fear of possible consequences. They later become perpetrators of an abusive system where many are controlled by the fear of being seen as disloyal and the possible consequences.
- Are you subject to a system where you are only permitted to speak positively about the group to which you belong, but not question problems or issues?
- How are you or others treated when they openly disagree with the leader?
- Who ministers to the leader? Who observes the leader's sin life? (In the case of an abusive marriage, who is helping your spouse see where s/he is "out of order"?)
- Does the leader surround herself or himself with "yes" people, so that if someone really wanted to help her or him overcome a blind spot or error, that no one can get to the place of sharing honest feedback without being labeled "evil" and a "division maker"?
- Are people allowed to be strong without that being labeled as a problem? Or are those close to the leader functionally made to be passives?
- Does the leader or "inner circle" group have problems with rage outbursts, anger, failing to keep her/his word, lying, misappropriation or use of finances or any other issue that would not be tolerated in other members or by any balanced reading of the Bible?
- Is there an inordinate focus on image?
- Are you made to feel "less than" or guilty for not performing to expectations of silence, group social pressure behavior, hours volunteered..etc?
- Are you made to constantly focus on "sin," even if the church professes to teach grace. Think about the last few weeks, how often have you felt

"guilty" or that you may be on the "outs" with God because you are not compliant, submissive, or "dying to self" enough? Maybe you have been taught some twisting of scripture which encourages you to subjugate the real self of who God made you to be.

Domestic or relationship abuse is often subtle as well, and it is not confined to marriage relationships. It may be long term or come on so slowly, that you have become so used to it, you did not realize what was up other than some times you knew something was incredibly wrong:

- Does a spouse (or other person in authority) have perfectionistic and legalistic rules where you always come up short and are frequently called on the carpet?
- Does your spouse (or church) continue to make demands using the "submit" card or the "obey" card or threaten you with calling you a "matriarch" or "Jezebel" (and use your fear of being labeled as "out of order" or any of the above labels, like "unsubmissive" or "usurping authority"] to get his way or manhandle you into things in an inequitable relationship?
- Are you subject to name calling, being degraded verbally, told it is your fault when a spouse mistreats you?
- Does your spouse blame you for his/her angry outbursts and loss of self control?
- Are you subject to threats of being excommunicated, fired, financially abandoned, "the relationship being ended," having things taken away? Is this used as a tool to control you and gain compliant behavior? This can be as subtle as being told stories of other persons who were not compliant and what was done to them
- Does the person say or act as if their anger outbursts toward you are your fault and you deserve it when you did little or nothing to provoke their wrath?
- Is the person paranoid or jealous or do they perceive you as "against" them when you have been FOR them, even sacrificially so?
- Has their language, tone of voice or actions ever been cruel or sadistic, even once?
- Does the person threaten you, subtly, indicating that if you proceed along the line you are going that they will get angry with you? (especially when you have been witness to over-the-top anger, this is a form of control).
- An abusive spouse (or religious leader) can also control you by talking about "those types of people" (i.e. people who don't give enough to the ministry, people who are non-compliant, people who are haughty and intellectual) It can make you fear having thoughts which contradict the leader. This is a subtle but very effective form of mind control. It makes you associate thinking and assessing things for yourself as something that will be dangerous, so you want to avoid it. But God gave you a brain to think. If the wall is black, you can clearly see it that way. But an abusive person makes it unsafe for you to see things as they are.
- Does the person have undiagnosed, or known but hidden mental illness?

- Are they on medications which they are coming off/on but do not remember or do not take responsibility for the harm they inflict on the people around them?
- Do other people protect their public persona, so that if you have concerns or speak of the mistreatment, you are seen as the one with the problem?
- Are they enabled in this by a person or people who "cover" for them, explain or minimize their behavior and encourage you to "forgive" or list all the good things they did and make you feel like you are in the wrong for crying "ouch" when they hurt you?
- Do they control your access to communication and/or other people or resources (books, funds, car, phone, ability to work)?
- [more on this later]

In the Christian life, where one is supposed to prefer others before ourselves and where we are encouraged to submit to one another or a spouse. But there is such a thing as people taking advantage of your desire to please God, and using religious scripture as leverage to force you into compliance with their needs or demands. When we are in an environment where we are subject to legalism, where we are in idolatry of someone who is narcissistic, where we have grown up in self-blame or have been caught in a performance mindset, we may be doing what we believe is pleasing and honoring to God, but what is in effect allowing a person or group who is abusive, selfish, predatory or controlling to continue to mistreat us or others.

There is persecution in the Christian life, but Jesus did not subject himself to abuse for abuse's sake. There were many times he could have let the crowd mob him, stone him or throw him off a cliff. He went to the cross at the time appointed, but it is not in agreement with God's word to think that new covenant believers have to be subject to voluntary (where we have a choice) suffering for suffering's sake, for no one's benefit.

It does not benefit the bully for those who are being bullied to sit there and get beat up in the name of Christ. It may appear to feed an ego need, but it just really means perpetuating harm, which is not God's kind of love, for everyone. There is enough real persecution and difficulty in a fallen world that we don't need to be spiritualizing another person's sinful behavior and redefining and reframing something redemptive in it that does not exist. You do not need "abuse" to teach you a lesson. Methods of mind control and thought reform are not required to live as a Christian. Coercion is not necessary. Manhandling and manipulation are not needed.

There are many scriptures which demonstrate this and we'll elaborate at a future date, but we wanted to draw a line in the sand to take a stand against the choice to remain subject to voluntary, optional suffering of abuse and also take a stand against the abusive and controlling behavior which comes when doctrine or the application of doctrine is twisted or distorted to serve the purposes of people who desire to control you and to have power over you in an ungodly fashion. Abuse is far from the Spirit of God and the love of God.



Are there those who falsely "cry abuse?" who are not really being abused? There are plenty of controls in place in most organizations to screen that kind of thing out, so much so that real abuse goes neglected, and people who are hurting and rejected and who seek help from their leadership are often punished for seeking the help. It is more likely that you have been trained to turn a deaf ear or a blind eye to real abuse, than being given false abuse accounts. If someone overcomes the tremendous pressure to stay silent, and actually comes to trust you to talk about it, it is best to not accuse the person. Someone sent us an article today about what not to do when someone comes to talk to you about abuse. It is in the resource section below.

When people start blaming the person seeking help, something is very wrong with this picture. [It is not a sin to get outside help.](#) You may have been made to feel that even seeking help within the religious system you are in has made you the subject of further mistreatment. Again, you are not crazy, nor are you a bad Christian. Let's say you did actually do something bad, it does not make being subjected to repeated railings, threats, shunning, having your motives questioned negatively, being labeled as a "problem person," or slander is somehow okay, because you do not act perfectly 100% of the time. Often abusive behavior has nothing to do with you other than the person who is abusive has selected, and has repeatedly gotten away with, you being the target. They may have a lot of good sounding logic to support it, but it is not about you being to blame for ungodly choices being made by a person choosing to sin against you. Believers should not be doing that to other believers.

Stephen Martin has also graciously permitted us to post his book, THE HERESY OF MIND CONTROL, which is a Christian perspective on the nature of how some groups "control" their members by earning their loyalty, selling them on how unique and needed they are, and how believers get roped into churches and ministries that act like cults. Apparently these things that Stephen has brought to light can be applicable to a one-on-one ministry or work relationship, a marriage, a church, a denomination or even a nation. One thing we would like to say is that we are ministry that believes deliverance is something Jesus teaches us and that it is for today, and here is an area that we differ with this book. Many people do not understand deliverance, and our guess is that they have seen the misapplication of deliverance used to label and condemn people. We are not in agreement with deliverance as a means of condemnation or labeling of people or abdicating responsibility. We also have seen people hurt by deliverance ministers who label and condemn. But we remind you, it is not the tool in our hands that is the problem, it is when the person holding the tool is using it at cross purposes to the loving and liberating purposes for which it was given, that we run into trouble. So as you read through this book, again subject what you learn to scripture and your own working out of your own understanding. Things like "thought stopping words" [i.e. "you're in unforgiveness!"] are frequently employed to silence those who would speak out or seek help regarding real wrongs being done.

We also recommend the [CRY FOR JUSTICE](#) website for those who are dealing with marital abuse but also are in legalistic church systems where it seems like there is a straining at gnats and swallowing camels, in the sense that they will punish or "correct" what seems very minor while allowing a spouse to be subject to continued brutality in

the name of submission, obedience, winning people to Christ or having God chasten you. We realize that either of these resources may not completely fit for you, but encourage you read what these authors have to say and hold them up to the light of what the word of God actually says (not necessarily how the religious group you are part of has taught you to think about them). Hopefully they do not censor you from considering what outside people say, and you are allowed to think for yourself and consider things in the light of scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit. If you want to reject the Bancroft book because you are not open to non-Christian resources, then please visit the [www.cryingoutforjustice.com](http://www.cryingoutforjustice.com) website, as this resource is written by Christians, including a Pastor who has been helping people in abusive situations.

### THE HERESY OF MIND CONTROL e-BOOK

At a minimum, please read THE HERESY OF MIND CONTROL, which is a Christian book, and the original WHY DOES HE DO THAT? Book by Lundy Bancroft about the means used and the mindset of those who abuse. We will list other resources. There is also another Christian book called [THE SUBTLE POWER OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE](#) by Jeff Van Vonderen. It was written in 1991, and we have the older version, but it was also updated in 2005

One issue is that people often run from the frying pan of marital and church abuse, and then into the secular world of recovery and therapy circles, and at the root, many of these people who are writing these books accurately discern abusive situations, but the therapy and recovery methods they mix with Christian scripture are often mixed with a therapy model that comes from a psychological philosophy source that opposes Christianity and true belief that Jesus Christ is the only door to God, and that salvation is in Jesus alone. We will elaborate more on this because there are many genuinely helpful people and there is much good information in the psychology/therapy world. Yes, there are some people who see Christianity, itself, as abusive, but not everyone. For now, just use these books as discernment as you do go back to the word of God. Know that the therapies suggested or recovery groups suggested may expose you to atheism or ecumenism in such a way that you may be supported in recognizing or overcoming abuse, but they may see "Jesus is the only way" as part of the abuse. If you can separate out and take the good, and not feel you have to have black and white thinking about the help you seek, then in every case more information and more education is helpful.

The body of Christ should be doing a better job at discerning abuse as ungodly, and then helping people in these situations, and we don't want you to fall through the cracks. We want to encourage you.

Whether you are a minister who is learning how to better care for people or whether you are a person in one of the situations described above or something like it, it is our heart to connect you with resources that will help you to walk through this with your faith intact, grounded and rooted in God's love. As fellow members of the body of Christ, we love you and we care about you. We are not the answer to your every need, God is. But insofar as is possible with the resources we have available, and while we ourselves are

still learning, it is our heart to be the body of Christ and encourage you in your relationship with Him.