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Presentation Transcript
Mental Health and the Bible – Trauma Bond
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June 7, 2018

The title of this presentation is *The Trauma Bond*. It's part of an ongoing series on *Mental Health and the Bible*. In fact, it's the seventeenth in the series.

Sometime ago, we did a presentation on the *Stockholm Syndrome* – the name taken from an event that took place in Stockholm, Sweden. Two gun-toting bank robbers held five people hostage for five days before they were set free by the police. During their captivity, the captives identified with the criminals and saw them as benefactors. After the robbers were jailed, some of the victims protested on their behalf. And ten years after the robbery – when the criminals got out of prison – one of the women victims became engaged to one of the perpetrators. This event dramatically demonstrates a propensity for victims to relate to those who traumatize them. But what is the nature of this bond that forms? Well, that's what we're going to look at today.

I believe this characteristic is at the root of what is called *mind control*, and that all people who practice Christianity need to know how to practice as God intended – in a mentality and spiritually healthy manner – rather than trying to control other people. We are going to examine the bond between perpetrators and their victims today and study how that bond might affect all of us in our practice of Christianity.

Many years ago, there were some people in a congregation and they were terrified of their pastor. He was telling them what they could and could not do. They would say, when I would ask them, “Why don't you just do what you want instead?” they would say, “He's God's minister.” That's a direct quote, by the way.

So let's talk about the elements of coercive control. There's been quite a bit of study done on this because of how much harm it's caused people down through the ages. So the elements of coercive control:

1. A new identity based on group. Have you heard, or ever said, the expression *the one true church*? *Everybody else is deceived*. Well, that automatically drives a wedge between the members of the *one true church* and others.
2. Problems are reduced to one simple explanation. A lack of proper prayer. That's what this minister was saying to his congregation. Another one is all the world's problems will be solved when Jesus returns. You know, down through the ages, there have been many, many false prophets who pointed to a coming kingdom, and would say that all the world's problems will be solved. And isn't that true? Well, actually, no. I believe that a lot of good things are going to happen when Jesus returns, but instead, the Bible says that as long as there are humans, there *will* be trouble. For example, after the thousand years of Christ's reign on the earth, there's going to be a massive rebellion. So that means that some people never understood what was going on. Some people have told, "Well, God's ministers are here now and so is His church, and the church is perfect and so are the people that He selects to lead the flock, so just do what you're told" – since the largest Christian denomination takes that very approach – "so let's study prophecy so we'll know when He's coming back." Here's a quote – not from the Bible, but here's a quote: "When you buy into something that seems to explain everything, you can soon be coaxed into doing almost anything." Who said this? Well, a man named Marc Sageman, who is one of the foremost experts on *jihadism*. The same elements work in Islam as they do in Christianity and they look very similar. Nothing is as simple as mind controllers want to make it, "I know what to do. Follow me." That's the message
3. The third element of coercive control is isolation. Information is limited to group material. Members are isolated from others outside of the group. And they're isolated from mainstream culture. A lady called me up one – that I used to know – and she told me that, if she ever got caught listening to any of the material that our group, or any other group, put out, she'd be disfellowshipped. So there's that mind control thing. It doesn't have to be physically forced. It can be mental. "You can read books, watch TV, go to the movies, but you have to know it's all a deception. The only place you can find real truth is with the organization or whoever – the pastor."
4. The fourth element is approval and perks from powerful people in the organization. I received a call once from one of my former congregants, who told me that their new minister – the one I referenced earlier – had let him change jobs. I could scarcely believe what I was hearing! I knew this man. He was a very clear-thinking guy, I thought. But you know, the Stockholm victims were recounted to the police how kind their captors were – never mind that they threatened to shoot them and strapped explosives to their bodies. They also let them go to the bathroom. So, when you hear stuff like that, it's time to be concerned.

5. The fifth element here is that people are put in, or threatened, with physically or emotionally distressing situations. Are you afraid of those who have influence over you? Well, that's either you or them. Which is it? "If you don't do what I say, you'll never be allowed to do anything in this congregation again." We have a friend that was told that by her pastor, because she wanted to go to church at another church and teach a Sabbath school there. And he didn't want her to do that. I had a man in one of my congregations years ago, who was drawn to cult control. I asked him why he was so nervous around me. And he said, "You have the power to disfellowship." In this case, it was *him*, not me. He grew up in an abusive environment and the only way he knew how to relate to people was from that power differential thing that went on with him. And he was looking to recreate that because that's what he was used to. We all do that. So this kind of mind control produces a relationship that's similar to, and yet different from, healthy human relationships. Instead of love, there's fear. Proximity produces anxiety, instead of security. Anxiety occurs because one knows the perpetrator has the power to control, but sometimes is kind. So never sure which way it's going to be. A state of heightened vigilance is there and there's a lot of ambivalence about what might happen. Instead of equality of personhood, extension of power is there. The congregation exists to meet my needs for control, adulation, ego-stroking, income, etcetera, instead of "My minister is there to help, encourage, equip, and help me be all I be" – and that includes in doing the work of God. Instead of self-mastery, there's mastery by others in this kind of relationship. "My minister says I shouldn't host a home Bible study, because there needs to be a minister there to make sure it's done properly. You know, we lay-members are too stupid to know how to run a small group. We don't have enough of the Holy Spirit." In reality, if someone is lacking in that area, it might be that the minister has not equipped them to use the gift God. How does a person know if they're doing the right thing? Well, you get feedback from others. Have you heard of people who think they can sing really well, but they really can't? That's because they haven't received good feedback about their talents.
6. Here's the sixth thing. Instead of autonomy, there is subservience. You know, we live in a nation where the government is supposed to let us be free people and serve us – do the things for us that we can't do for ourselves – instead of us being dependent on the government and gradually losing the freedom of autonomy that we have. When I was a child, my father never got angry with me. I don't remember him ever raising his voice at me – never spanked me – and yet I wanted to do what he said, as a small child. And when I was a teenager, he let me make a lot of my own decisions, and told me his job was to prepare me to go further in life than he did. *That's* a health relationship – to go further in life than he did. And I think I was well equipped to do that. Let's talk about Jesus' solution – we said, "Freedom in Christ," right? Jesus came and walked the earth, and He was a leader of people. What kind of leader was He? Well, let's read in Luke 22:24: **Luke**

22:24 – *A dispute also arose among them – that’s the disciples – as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.* So that’s *not* the right way to do it. There was a big power struggle among the disciples whilst the whole time they were with Jesus. *And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors”* – we could put that word in quotes, maybe – *but not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become the youngest, and the leaders as the one who serves. For who is the greater? The one who reclines at the table? Or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as One who serves.* So He said that true leadership – godly leadership – is not about controlling people, and because of their own internal weakness and hang-ups, calling you a benefactor because you control them. But a true leader comes and sets an example for people – lives the walk – and serves others, instead of lording it over them. So what could we call that, since most people have a desire to be in control? Well, it’s who you control that matters. The solution is to control self, not others – to *serve* others, not self by controlling them. I read a comment in the commentary called *Opening Up Luke*. It said, “The planet is full of those who want authority over others.” And then they quote the scripture we just read. “The kings of the Gentiles exercise brutal selfish authority and yet are given the more flattering title *benefactors*, as though they existed to help the needy. Jesus taught that the greatest Christian is the servant of all – not that others give controlling leaders the title of benefactor. It’s those who are controlled that identify with their controller – not just the problem of leadership, but also a problem of *following* – hence the term *sheeple* or *sheep-walking*.” Thinking about those two terms, we could say, “It’s time to wake up and to start thinking.” Nobody is ever going to reach their full potential in Christ if they don’t think. Those folks are never going to use their talents or their gifts, because they’re not thinking about how to apply them. Talking to a young woman some time ago – it’s funny how the age of young people increases as I get older – she told me she thought the leadership of her church was controlling, and tried not to think about them much, and just focused on her relationships that she had with friends at church. But I noticed that when the church split, she went with the control-oriented side of that split. So what does that say about her? Well, in that area of life, her eyes were closed. She was a blind follower, I would think. Even if she wasn’t a controller herself, some of her friends might have been and she went with them, or she aligned with certain ministers that were more controlling. Maybe she wanted somebody else to make her decisions

Let’s recount what I’ve said already. We talked about Jesus’ solution, and the first point there was to be servants, not “benefactors.” The second one was to have our eyes open and not closed. And the third one is about Christian autonomy. Ephesians 4:11 tells us:

Ephesians 4:11 – *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers – for what purpose? – to lord it over the other people and consider themselves spiritually superior, and have those people consider them superior as well? No. ...to equip the saints for the work of ministry – for the building up of the body of Christ.*

Wow! To equip people, then send them out as servants – autonomous and not controlled. When you think about all the great spiritual beings in heaven that get sent down here to do God’s work – and they make decisions on site. God trusts those beings because they want to be connected to Him and a part of Him, and they have respect for Him. So it sounds here like it could mean that the ministry is to do the work, but, if you look at the word *equip*, it really means that then it would imply that the job of the ministry is to equip the members to do God’s work – such as having a home Bible study. Read with me in Louw and Nida, *The Domain-Oriented Lexicon*, the definition of *equip*. “To make someone completely adequate, or sufficient, for something; to make adequate; to furnish completely; to cause to be fully qualified; adequacy.” It means to equip – that what the word meant. So that’s what ministers are supposed to do.

Let’s think about spiritual gifts now for a minute. This is a comment from *The Bible Guide*: “Paul lists some gifts that help the church preach and teach God’s word. Apostles are sent by God to pioneer church growth in new areas. Prophets speak God’s word in a direct and challenging way to particular situations. Evangelists share the gospel clearly, so people can understand and come to faith in Christ. Pastors and teachers are able to care for and teach local congregations. There are many kinds of spiritual gifts and there is a different selection in Paul’s letter to the Romans.” (And that’s in Romans 12:6-8.) “But all spiritual gifts have the same purpose – to build up and strengthen God’s people. A gift is to be used in serving others – both inside and outside of the church.”

What’s your gift? Has the ministry of your church equipped you to use it? Have they helped you figure out what it is? Or would they prefer you just to be a seat warmer – to never grow in the maturity of Christ and just sit there and listen week after week?

In Christ’s body – the way He wants it to be – everybody has a vital part. Here’s a scripture that has a lot of meaning to me:

Acts 8:1 – *And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen – that’s the one that Saul approved of – and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church. And entering house after house, he dragged men off, and women, and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Well, who was that? Well, we all know that the apostles – we just read it – were in Jerusalem. And yet, all the other people who were scattered – wherever they went – couldn’t not talk about it. They preached the word. See, it wasn’t just the*

ministry that preached the gospel. Everybody was involved. They were forced to be by circumstance – terrifying circumstance. Everybody was involved one way or another.

Let's think about another aspect of organization. In Mark 4, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a farmer sowing seed. What happens when you sow seed? You've seen farmers with a bag on their side. They reach in and they grab a handful of seed and they cast it out away from them. It scatters. Each of those seeds contains the DNA of the entire plant. For us, what would be our spiritual DNA? Well, it would be the Holy Spirit, would it not? Each one of us contains the whole truth. God's holy. Jesus is holy. God's Spirit/Jesus' Spirit – and we're clearly told in the scriptures that they both come live in us – it's what the Holy Spirit is. So, yeah, God the Father and Jesus Christ are in every last Christian. So each one of them contains the whole church. The full capacity is in all of us. But we need to be *trained* – or *equipped* – to use it to best advantage. And that's the job of the ministry.

Now, I know that might not be the way it is in *your* church, but I'm just telling you what the *biblical* picture was – organized, but not like a corporation or man-made structure – but like a plant. Each seed is good to go on its own. The apostles went to new areas, the evangelists expounded the gospel publicly, but members worked among business associates, friends and relatives. They all used the gifts the victorious Jesus Christ gave to them, so that each one could make a meaningful contribution to that effort. They were all free to do the work that God gave them. There was organization and structure, but not as in a set of blue prints, but like a plant – organic organization.

In the Old Testament, God organized Israel in a hierarchical structure most of the time. Moses or the king – judges excepted, for example. Now God has organized the church in a different way. It's a temple. And where is Christ in that? Well, it says that He's the foundation, supporting and serving everyone else. He's the Chief Cornerstone. He's not at the top. Now, there are other examples where He *is*, but He's all in all. So, He wants us to understand that somebody who is supposed to be in charge of a group of people needs to lead them by moral ascendancy, setting an example by training them to do the work of God, and not holding them back or holding them down – and maybe even hoping that some of them will grow so much that they become superior to him in their abilities and teaching. So very important – quite different from the way most churches are organized today.

My wife and I were watching a mini-series on Netflix called *The Crown*. Winston Churchill was getting quite old by the time Queen Elizabeth was made queen. And there is this huge dog fight in Parliament to try to get rid of him, because they think he's too old. The political shenanigans, and the backstabbing, and the deliberate trickery, and trying to make him seem ineffective was just incredible – not that he didn't play his own part in those things as well. He still was the man of the century, however.

I'd like to wrap up with this thought from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:12.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18 – *Since we have such a hope, we are very bold – not like Moses who put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. To this day, when they read the Old Covenant, the same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. I see this as similar to some of my brothers. They are thinking about God in an Old Testament kind of way and the veil is over their hearts. Then he said in verse 16: But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Not that the hierarchical way of the Old Testament was bad – no, that was from God – but now God has set a new course for us – a new way of doing things in Jesus Christ. He is the Lord. And now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And a bond is formed in God’s people, based on empowerment, equipping, serving, and the love of the Spirit.

Well, that’s it for today. Shortly we’re going to produce another related presentation that goes beyond what the bond *shouldn’t* be like, but what it *should*. And that presentation will be called *Freedom in Christ*. We talked a little bit about that in this presentation, but we’re going to go a lot further with it next time. So be looking for it on liferesource.org or sign up for bi-weekly email that will let you know when it’s up. You can do that on the Website, as well.

So this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.