

Five Types of Abuse that Distort the Image of God

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is the perversion of “one flesh”. Sexual abuse is the exploitation of a minor for the sexual gratification of another person through sexual contact or interaction. Sexual assault is any non-consensual sexual activity between adults. Sexual abuse includes but is not limited to intercourse, attempted intercourse, oral sex, genital contact, breast contact, intentional sexual touching of buttocks or thighs, simulated intercourse, touching of clothed breasts, sexual kissing, verbally pointing out sexual attributes to a minor or to an adult when it is unwanted, etc.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is a perversion of “have dominion”. Physical abuse is legally defined as any non-accidental injury to a minor by an adult or older caregiver. Domestic abuse can be broadly described as the use of threat or physical violence to control an adult family member. Physical abuse at the hands of parents or spouses, the very ones whose hand should protect us, is the most destructive. Physical abuse includes but is not limited to blows, shakes, burnings, threats, shoving, slaps, hair pulling, punches, kicks, injuring or killing of pets, destruction of personal possessions, assaults with inanimate objects, assaults with lethal weapons, physical assaults that cause injury, stalking, internet stalking, etc.

Neglect

Neglect is a perversion of “cultivate the ground”. Neglect is the failure of a parent or guardian to provide a minor with adequate food, clothing, medical care, protection, supervision, and emotional support. Emotional neglect includes inadequate nurturing and affection, spousal abuse in the child's presence, allowing a child to use drugs or alcohol, refusal or delay in providing needed psychological care as well as the encouragement or permitting of other maladaptive behavior (e.g., chronic delinquency, severe assault) under circumstances where the parent or caregiver has reason to be aware of the existence and seriousness of the problem but does not intervene. Emotional neglect also includes the lack of teaching children about emotions, feelings, and appropriate ways to express these. This may look like telling children what to feel and not to feel; shaming children for expressing feelings; giving the message covertly or overtly that emotions and feelings are not safe to express within the family system. Often these children who have experienced emotional neglect grow up to have difficulty connecting to themselves and others.

Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse is a perversion of “image”. Spiritual abuse is the inappropriate use of the spiritual authority to force a person to do that which is unhealthy and unbiblical. Spiritual abuse includes but is not limited to power posturing, performance preoccupation, unspoken rules, lack of balance, spiritual authority, words, or scripture used to manipulate the other person into doing what the other wants them to do, etc. Some of the most destructive spiritual abuse is subtle and not obviously

heretical. Spiritual abuse is particularly damaging because it poisons the very resources designed by God for our growth. Often times scripture, prayer, preaching, and Christian fellowship are used to perversely harm the victim.

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse is a perversion of “be fruitful”. Verbal abuse is emotional abuse when words are systematically used to belittle, undermine, scapegoat, or maliciously manipulate another person. Verbal abuse can be one of the more damaging forms of abuse because of its subjectivity and often covert nature. The temptation is to minimize verbal abuse because it creates no physical pain and leaves no physical scars. The thought is, “If there are no bruises, it wasn’t abuse.” However, nothing could be further from the truth.