

# No Longer Naked and Ashamed

Discovering that God is not an abuser

Jean Sheldon

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# Preface

This book is about sin as abuse—what it is, how pervasively it strikes us all, and how we can be free from its grasp in our lives. Unlike most authors approaching this topic, I do not profess to be a psychologist or specialist, in any sense, in the area of the behavioral sciences. I greatly respect my colleagues in that field, but it is not within my expertise. Instead, I have relied upon my research, first as a student of ancient Near Eastern languages and religions (including the Hebrew Bible) and secondly, as a teacher of theology and ethics. Perhaps I have tried to make a rather amateur analysis of Biblical texts from a psychological perspective, but I have not attempted to look through a psychologist's eyes, since I am untrained in this area. Help from the area of psychology primarily stems from my personal counseling sessions, experiences, and the testimonials of abuse victims.

As a result of my study, I have concluded that we only half understand sin, its nature, and how deeply we are affected by it. For far too long, we have viewed our skewed reality out of one eye and lack a multi-dimensional perception of it. On the opposite side of our sin-infested reality, we only dimly perceive the rich and beautiful life God intends for us to live. As a result, we are only half alive, partially enjoying relationships, and missing out on the benefits of their full fruition—deeper love and trust.

What follows is a radical approach to sin and salvation, one that is foundationally biblical, but which also came to life through personal pain and suffering, through wrestling with questions that

traditional theories did not answer, and through listening to our world. Its basic thesis is that sin itself is abuse, using a very broad definition of the term. Thus sin is *the misuse of power to the disadvantage of oneself or another person*. It contends that the solution for sin lies not in a formula, change of lifestyle, or even human attempts at self-discipline, as temporarily helpful as these may seem, but rather through a drastic change in a person's thinking, perceptions, and focus regarding God and his ways. Because the solution to sin lies outside of humanity—as an act of divine grace, it offers to the world a vision of a completely new life, free from the dark shadows of lies, lowered perceptions of self-worth, and, most importantly, misconceptions of God.

In attempting to outline the contours of redemption from abuse, I have appealed largely to the ideal divine plan. This may cause discomfort to readers who may wonder how they can reach the ideal. For this reason I would like to point out that God has always been as much involved in the *real* and even messy situations we find ourselves in as he has in the ideal realm. That is why the Bible utilizes words denoting abuse in a positive way and God is ever meeting people on their own turf, rather than on his level of holiness. Nevertheless, without a picture of the ideal (such as the life of Jesus), we lack the motive of the joys and reasons for the life that God intended us to live. Of course, we ourselves cannot heal ourselves from the abuse of sin, but God can. This book is a limited attempt to describe that healing process.

As with any metaphor used to describe sin and salvation, the imagery of abuse is inadequate to deal with all of the ramifications of sin and salvation. The purpose of this book is not so much to write a definitive, last word on what the plan of redemption entails as to describe sin and salvation in such a way as to broaden their dimensions and shed further light on this ever engaging topic.

# Prologue

## The Way It Once Was

If we were suddenly transferred to a perfect planet, free from all pain, sadness, and oppression, what would life be like?

Our world is anything but utopian, yet all of us seem to have hidden perceptions of just such a place. I once asked some of my students to reflect on the book of Revelation as though they'd never read it before. "What in the book is the most similar to your own world?" I asked. "What is easiest for you to relate to and identify with?"

They did not choose the war in chapter 12 (probably because they were of the generation that grew up between Vietnam and Desert Storm). Nor did they choose the wild beasts that resembled those in *Jurassic Park*, a popular movie at the time. Instead, they selected Revelation 21 and 22, chapters depicting a new heaven and a new earth.

Perhaps this secret affinity for a world we have never yet experienced is God's gift to us. It leads us to ask questions we otherwise would avoid. What would a perfect world be like? How would we function in a society where everyone thought of others before themselves, found their greatest joy in doing things for others, and respected others' privacy, boundaries, and freedom? Would we fully appreciate a universe in which every living thing glorified the Creator? What would it be like to have all the time in the world for relationships? Would we know what to do in conversations with friends when such conversations would end only when we run out of things to say? And with all that time for thought and reflection, what

would we ever find to think about for days without end?

Our world is an artificial reality in which deadlines, bosses, time clocks, pay checks, material needs, and the demands of others fill our time and space. In the scales of human competition, external demands always tilt to the disadvantage of internal needs because someone somewhere has dictated for us what shall be. We are not our own. Our individuality and freedom have gradually diminished under the pressure of meeting other people's deadlines, e-mails, appointments, bills, ideas, and perceptions of who we ought to be. We really do not even earn our own rights, but are forced to pay for our food, clothing, housing, water, warmth, entertainment, and sometimes even the air we breathe.

How can we imagine, then, a world where everything is free, where love governs everyone, and where no one tells us what to do? To eat, we only need to go to the nearest tree or bush or grassland. Everything tastes alive, nutritious, and is more satisfying than our favorite dessert. To drink, we can find the nearest stream or river. We are never hot or cold, so we never need a furnace or air conditioner. Without night, we require no artificial lighting.

What would we wear in a place of even temperatures? Can we imagine life without something to cover our nakedness? Yet in the beginning we needed nothing. The first man and woman were naked—and not ashamed. How can we imagine it when some of our worst nightmares portray us going somewhere in public improperly dressed?

Perhaps this strikes the heart of our inability to perceive what our human eyes have not seen. Our vast ignorance of what God originally intended for us stems from our deep-seated nakedness of body, mind, and spiritual being. For thousands of years and millions of generations we have lived ashamed and vulnerable, trying so relentlessly to find the best-yet costume to hide our insecurities and lack of self-worth that we cannot comprehend a man and a woman naked *and* not ashamed.

Yet, the first human beings were covered, not with something we would be able to see, but rather something that would enhance perceptions of reality. That is, the perfect world is not about covering up and hiding God's beautiful creation, but about illuminating it. In that illuminating covering, human beings can be naked and not ashamed.

Why? Because the very essence of a perfect world is love and trustworthiness, and its physical properties shine, enshrouding us in the light of God's character. In our world, we separate the world of matter from the world of the spiritual, but in God's planned universe there is no such separation. Rather, all the elements—the physical, spiritual, psychological, social, emotional, and intellectual—exist together in one perfect whole, so that their individual “parts” are but different lenses through which we examine their essence. So God's love and trustworthiness are light and glory, and thus an illuminated covering.

Our first parents lived in that bubble of love and trust, and thus security, happiness, and peace. As a result, they would not have used the word “naked” to describe themselves. How could they feel exposed when so surrounded by the light of respect, kindness, unselfish care, and intimate affection? While experiencing the love of the Supreme Lover, how could they not respond in kind with love? Faced constantly with an infinite amount of evidence of God's trustworthiness, how could they not trust him and each other? And surrounded by the freedom to do whatever they wanted and whenever they chose to do it, with every need supplied, how could they not revel in the joy of perfection? Internally in control of the self, they knew nothing but the quenching of their thirst in purity.

To live in respect, purity, love, trust, and freedom is not to be naked and ashamed, but to be internally and thus externally clothed. It means to live for the purpose of giving away, not for hoarding to oneself. It means to enjoy the satisfaction of another's joy as greater than our own. It means that self is not the center of the universe, but rather God from whom all blessings flow. Clad with an inner sense of divine worth, we no longer need to manufacture our own value. In our Creator, we find freedom, individuality, respect, love, trust, and self-worth. Surrounded by the light of his love, we can be externally “naked” and not ashamed. What we wear in a perfect world are our internal love and trust that respond to divinity like a light that enshrouds us, so that we never appear crassly nude, starkly exposed, or painfully vulnerable.

Free in themselves, from their descendents' insecurities and fears, our first parents were able to live and enjoy the external world without feeling threatened by it. With their heavenly Parent smiling

at them, they were able to play with the animals, learn about the divine character from nature, and grow in their relationships. Most important of all, they could visit with God face to face with nothing standing in the way.

We live in a world today that is fast losing all perception of this perfect world. Though we long for close, intimate relationships, we are held off from them by our busy schedules, materialistic lifestyles, and personal ambitions. We are satisfied if we can spend the minimum fifteen minutes a day with our growing children that psychologists tell us they need to be “normal.” We hope our spouses will understand that a dinner at a restaurant one night a week is all we can manage with them. We expect our friends to be content with our picture Christmas cards sent through e-mail. We consider ourselves faithful children because our parents get cards and phone calls on birthdays and holidays. And we let God have a few sentences of worried prayer now and then whenever we find ourselves in need of him.

We tuck in relationships at the end of our frenetic schedules out of guilt and duty, not because those we know and love are a central focus of our lives.

In the perfect world God originally made, there were no careers—not even pastors. No one worked for anyone else and yet everyone worked freely for God. Everyone volunteered their involvement in God’s giant community service “project” known as the universe. With free room, board, and other necessities, our first parents had nothing to earn, only the perfect natural world to take care of. The ebb and flow of life was the giving nature of God, flowing out to his creatures, and returning in their responses to his love. Without materialism, unmet needs, greed, and self-gratification, they had all the time they needed to develop intimate, satisfying relationships. The only appointment Adam and Eve had was to spend time with their Creator one day in every seven and to welcome him daily when he came to visit them.

The two most fundamental requirements for healthy relationships are time for interaction and a basic sense of personal value. The first of these is also the foundation of order and natural law. Natural law depends on time because very little in our world is instant. Just as flowers take time to bloom, genuine relationships need time to

develop. Love and trust require time not only to come to birth but also to mature. The mechanism by which all of this takes place is cause and effect.

In a perfect world, personal value is achieved as love gives rise to love, and trustworthiness nets trust. God loves his creatures first and they freely respond to his love by loving him in return. God never needs to tell them what love is or how to love. He never has to command them to love him and one another. Instead, like children in a family, they know what love is from having been loved and can love in natural response to experiencing love. Likewise, their trust is such an automatic response to finding security and value, with never a need to worry or be afraid, that it never occurs to them that they “need to have faith.” Unlike a blind response, faith is the open-faced realization that God can be trusted.

This trust can be seen throughout creation. In an unhurried habitat, no creature with perfect senses ever cries out in pain. In love, nothing ever hurts another but delights in the other’s well-being. No bull—whether bovine or elk—attacks another for a prized potential mate, because all the females are prized and there is a perfect number of females for males. Similarly, all of the animals seem to enjoy the company of the others—whether within the species or from another. Eating a vegetarian diet instead of other animals, larger animals enjoy rubbing noses with the smaller animals we think of as their prey.

Everything in an ideal world responds effortlessly to natural laws. Without external constraint, constriction, or manipulation from a higher species, everything operates according to how it is made. Nothing is forced to fit, put in a situation where it doesn’t belong, or arbitrarily made to function.

Consequently, our first parents could choose freely to operate according to how they were made. They would not have considered taking anything harmful into their bodies. Immersed in the joy and beauty of paradise, they felt no emptiness, loneliness, or intense need for a substance to deaden an emotional ache. Neither did they crave a pill to dull physical pain, because such pain did not exist. Living integrated lives, they appreciated their intellectual, creative, social, and emotional functions and allowed these to be expressed freely in appropriate proportion. They lacked the stiff inhibitions we have

learned from others' disapproval, but nonetheless recognized and respected each other's boundaries.

In this perfect world, everything is studied with an eye for the ultimate conclusion it will bring. Individuals make choices based on long-term satisfaction rather than immediate gratification. No one causes anyone suffering, so there is no need to offset it with pleasures that will only intensify it later. Order, honesty, purity, and care for others serve as the basis for trustworthiness. Without consistency and order, there could be no certainty or trust, and without trust, love is non-existent.

The result of this orderly plan is pure beauty. How can we imagine what it really is when our version of beauty is so sickly, even lifeless? Do we really know the color of green? Have we actually seen the rainbow God originally made? Accustomed as we are to the wailings of a distraught planet, would we be able to hear the strains of music bursting from those who have always known genuine love and trust? Have we ever really been able to engage in the free dance of joy that comes from inner wholeness and self-control? And do we know that we are beautiful in God's eyes, not because of what we add to the outside, but because of what leaps out from within to meet our infinite Lover? All of this is yet to become ours as we come to appreciate the spontaneity, yet orderliness, of God's universe.

The heart of natural law is love. Just as all ecosystems are based on interdependence and everything exists for the sake of something else, so human beings must give of themselves to others to live fully. Just as lakes without outlets become dank swamps, so human beings without freely flowing love regress to selfish inversion. Yet all of it is dependent upon the Supreme Giver. In an ideal society, people do not revolve around their own desires but around the Source of love and his given sense of their worth. They have learned by experience that his love for them is personal, intimate, and without end. Each one is a unique individual who, if lost, would leave an eternal aching void in God's heart. Love gives them the only stimulant they need; they gain excitement when they give someone a special gift and see eyes light up with joy.

It should now be clear that the universe operates like a giant wheel around one great center: God—and God is love. Within his

creation, three great realities exist to help us know, receive, and respond to his love.

- Orderliness (nature, beauty, natural law)
- Value (family, intimacy, relationships)
- Time (Sabbath, abundance, freedom)

Yet these are but structures and cannot substitute for meeting personally with the One who is love himself. If he were to join us for supper out on the patio, what would be our first realization? Of course, if he came dressed in all his majesty and glory, we might scurry for cover, but what if he came as one of us? What would we observe first? We might notice the unselfish kindness that fills his face as he looks at each one of his children who press about him, eager to get close to him and talk with him. It is obvious that he knows each one intimately—there are no secrets—and that he loves them as if there were no other.

The second thing we might observe in him is his humility and self-denying love. He isn't what we expected the Supreme Lover to be—a star performer of loving acts, a glittering jewel of dazzling beauty, a fountain of overpowering compassion. By contrast, God is real, approachable, and even touchable. He doesn't force himself on us but ever so gently draws us to him. As a result of being in his presence, we are faced with a choice—to become our truest selves or to abandon him for a different, false being. If we choose him, we find that we are free, completely free, to be whoever and whatever we really want to be. We are unafraid to be open, vulnerable, and emotionally honest.

The third thing we would sense is the depth of his purity. Here is One who is never other than who he is. We can expect him to be completely honest, vulnerable, and yet humbly dignified all at once. He will never two-time us, act fickle, or seek to expose us in our nakedness. His love is uncontaminated by selfishness or pride.

Finally, in our meeting with him, it might strike us as paradoxical that he—on whom the worlds turn—should be so much like what we, in our most honest moments, would want God to be and yet so different from what we have expected. We have supposed that he would show up in overpowering, controlling majesty and power, but

now we find out that his authority stems from truth and love, not dominating power. Our expectations of him once belonged to artificially contrived façades of external control. Now when we see him as he really is, we find that he has the keys to the internal kingdom of love and trust that he seeks to recreate within us. Even when he comes again to take us to live with him, his majesty and power exhibited then will be but the physical manifestation of his character of love and trustworthiness.

When we see God as he really is, we meet our own freedom to decide. We cannot remain in his presence without an internal response—either of love and trust or rejection and scorn. When one meets the Reality of eternal love, one is faced with an eternal choice. And we will ultimately make it one way or the other.

Adam and Eve were once faced with that choice and their decision has been eternally costly. Our temptation is to blame them for the loss of a perfect world, for which we all have a secret affinity. Yet, is it as simple as just “the wrong choice”?

What has gone wrong with our world? How did the lights grow so dim? How did the green get to be so pale and dead looking? How did we end up with so much brown? What happened to our freedom, our joy, our love, and trust? Where did all the trash come from—our frenetic living, our pressured lifestyles, our feelings of loss of personhood and value, our inability to love and be loved, our lack of truthfulness and trustworthiness? What led us to forsake peace for war, love for lust, mercy for revenge, truth for confusion, and freedom for oppression?

How did we come to be so afraid? And how did we end up so naked and ashamed?

# Section I

## How It All Began

1. The False Reality of Our Shame
2. The Anatomy of a Fall
3. Abuse Is External Control

### *Treasure Hunt for Section Highlights*

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- All sin is abuse.
- Abuse is the misuse of power to our disadvantage or to another's.
- Pride is the misvaluing of another person.
- Pride is the mistaken idea that we can earn our value by our works.
- Pride is a delusional disorder causing us to create a false reality of what we expect of ourselves and others.
- Our true value lies in knowing that we were created by our loving first Parent.
- I am, you are, everyone is of inestimable value.
- God's true worth is not found primarily in his power but in his character.



# Chapter 1

## The False Reality of Our Shame

Our nakedness and shame are no accident, nor are they merely the product of our failure to comply with divine regulations. Rather, we acquired our state through a process of deception that stripped us of our dignity and worth, darkened our understanding, and made us attempt to hide our vulnerability to emotional and physical pain.

As a result of this process, most of us are longing for affirmation that we are just fine the way we are and, though we are naked, we do not need to be ashamed. Perhaps this is why we feel our need for affirmation: we sense that something is not quite right but hope that we are wrong. If others tell us we are OK, we do our best to believe it. Yet there is something wrong with all of us and the purpose of this book is to unmask its reality—abuse—and describe its cure: immersion in divine love and trustworthiness.

Abuse, though, is not everyone's favorite topic. Some languages scarcely contain a proper term for it and some cultures deny its existence. When we do discuss abuse, abusers, and victims, it is generally in the context of a news story over the latest kidnapping, murder, or child molestation. Sometimes we learn about it in features in the media, in college and university classrooms, or in clinical settings. Even in these arenas, the victims are usually "them," not "us." We view abusers as sick and needing treatment, or as deviant

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and needing a social program, or as criminal and deserving of penal justice. In reality, we may only distance ourselves from the problem.

During a seminar, a gentleman suggested that only in the last 20 or 30 years have we heard so much about abuse. “It seems that there is so much more of it than there used to be,” he said. Written on his face were the questions he did not voice: Why are we only hearing about it now? Is it really worse, or is it only worse in our imaginations?

My response was to suggest that abuse has always existed throughout the world, but that only recently have we become keenly aware of it. In saying that, I met him halfway because I already had suggested in the previous session that we are all victims of abuse and we are all abusers. Yet, my partial answer was needed, because 20 or 30 years ago I probably would not have been able to write or publish about the perennial problem of abuse, due to a lack of societal and personal awareness.

The core premise of this book is that all *sin is abuse and that abuse is the misuse of power to the disadvantage of oneself or another person*. We only need to look at the sins outlined in the Bible to answer the question, “Which of them is not the abuse of a person—either of oneself or one’s neighbor?” If we choose a god other than the Supreme Lover, we will gradually lose the capacity to love and thus become abusive in consequence. If we worship and admire a false god, one who is abusive, then we will become like that deity. If we misrepresent God’s character (Third Commandment), we will no doubt do damage to other people’s reputations (Ninth Commandment). If we dishonor our parents, we curtail whatever they gave us of the love of God. If we kill, commit adultery, or steal, we are abusing others by our unfaithfulness and disregard for life or property. Even if we take in substances or foods that injure our minds and bodies, we are abusing ourselves. Can we find one sin in the Bible that is not a form of abuse?

From a sociological or psychological perspective, abuse is limited to the flagrant examples one hears about in the media or reads about in books on the subject. From a biblical perspective, however, sin, and thus abuse, is the pervasive human problem. To suggest that this is not the case is to fly in the face of the Apostle Paul’s clear statement that everyone has sinned and come short of

## The False Reality of Our Shame

God's glorious character.<sup>1</sup> While psychologists and sociologists might not call us abusers, every time we mistreat our neighbor, child, or friend, we abuse them. Any time we engage in damaging lifestyles or rely on self-destructive ways to compensate for our insecurities, we hurt ourselves. Whenever we try to find short-cuts to creating moral children or moral churches or a moral society, bypassing the ways God originally intended, we are merely enabling others to join us in an abusive cycle. If we counted all the times we judged another person, gossiped or spread rumors, showed preferential treatment toward a particular race or culture or gender, or viewed others as inferior or superior to ourselves in terms of their worth, we would delineate just how caught up we are in the terrible web of abuse. Even more subtly, if we examined our picture of God in light of what we know about abuse, we might be surprised at how abusive he appears in our minds (whether sentimentally indulgent or harsh and exacting).

For too long, we have looked at abuse as one form of sin, and sin itself as merely breaking rules. As was touched on earlier, a look at the Ten Commandments should inform us otherwise, since if we honor our parents, or refrain from killing, committing adultery, stealing, or bearing false witness against a neighbor, we are at least avoiding some of the worst abuses against humanity. The problem is, the last commandment indicts us all by telling us that not only should we not kill, steal, or lie, we should not even *want* to. Jesus applied all of the last six commandments to the thoughts and intents of the heart and suggested that even hating one's brother or sister was as evil as murdering him or her. Thus sin, like abuse, is not so much an action as an attitude or way of thinking. John refers to it as lawlessness, that is, an attitude of rebellion.<sup>2</sup> Paul states that the real keeping of the law is love,<sup>3</sup> and further, that anything that does not stem from faith is sin.<sup>4</sup> In the original Greek, the term for "faith" can also be

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:23. The term "glory" in the Bible is the same word for "weight" or "honor" and refers to value. Thus it can refer to God's character. In Exodus 33:18, 19; 34:5-7, God reveals his glory as his character.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 3:4. The KJV rendering—"transgression of the law"—does not adequately reflect the original Greek.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 13:9, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 14:23.

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rendered as “trust;” or it can reflect the Hebrew term which includes “faithfulness” as one of its definitions. By putting Paul’s and John’s statements together, we can define sin, and thus abuse, more completely as a state of “lovelessness” and distrust.<sup>5</sup>

From the biblical descriptions and examples of sin, then, the modern, most appropriate term for sin is abuse. Is this, perhaps, calling sin by its right name? After a class in which I discussed sin as abuse, someone came up to me and said, “You know, I had gotten immune to hearing about sin; but you struck me between the eyes today when you talked about abuse.”

Once we think of sin in terms of abuse, our whole perspective greatly broadens. Sin is no longer only what I do; it is how I think and then act. In fact, my culture (regardless of the one I belong to), my religion, my worldview, my daily life, how I see other people—all are imbedded in abusive ideas, principles, and concepts. The fact that I cannot readily see my abusive nature makes my condition all the more serious. Abuse generates abuse because its victims tend to be far more likely to abuse others. A girl who is the victim of permissive parents will either indulge her children the way she was indulged, or abuse her family because she always expects them to give her what she wants. On the other hand, a boy whose father beats him grows up with this abusive role model of child discipline to follow. In addition, he is more likely to vent his suppressed anger on his son—unless he makes a conscious decision not to emulate his father. We call this the cycle of abuse in which a person acts out in adult life what he or she has experienced in childhood. From looking carefully at the Bible, I have concluded that the cycle of abuse is the cycle of sin and that we are inextricably caught up in its painfully constricting web.

Before going on, let me state the good news, that there is escape from it all. Real, practical help is available for all of us, victims and abusers (for as sinners we are both), to get out of the cycle of abuse. In the Second Commandment, the promise is made that God will show “mercy to thousands, to those who love Me [respond to my love] and keep My commandments [love one another].”<sup>6</sup> And Paul

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<sup>5</sup> Since some words deserve coining to make a point, I have added the word “lovelessness” to my vocabulary.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 20:6, NKJV.

exclaims in Romans, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, without the bad news—that we really are both abusers and victims of abuse—we cannot hope to grasp fully the good news and bask in its release.

To understand how we got into the cycle of abuse, therefore, it is necessary to learn how it all began. Who was the first abuser?

### **Abuse Begins in Heaven**

The biblical book of Revelation suggests that the cycle of abuse began in heaven. “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”<sup>8</sup>

War is an ultimate societal form of abuse. One may try—as many philosophers and ethicists have—to justify war, but there really is no “holy war.”<sup>9</sup> War began with the introduction of sin in the universe and is sin’s by-product. The text suggests that Michael and his angels initiated the war against Satan, but this passage only gives us a portion of the whole story. According to Ezekiel 28:16, the King of Tyre, a prototype of a fallen hero, was “filled with violence” (the

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 7:24, 25a, NRSV.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 12:7-9, NKJV.

<sup>9</sup> The question may be raised, of course, regarding the fact that God seems to have led Israel through the conquest of Canaan. However, in the larger narrative reading (and according to Exodus 23:20-31), God’s original plan was to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan by the forces of nature. After Israel refused to trust God at Kadesh-Barnea, they made it more difficult for him to work for them. The conquest was not God’s ideal plan. The Bible often portrays God as giving in to people’s lack of faith and unwillingness to obey (see Jesus’ statement on divorce in Matthew 19:8). There is also some evidence that the Canaanites had become so wicked that God had eliminate them in order to preserve righteousness (see Genesis 15:16).

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chief element of war) and thus he “sinned.”<sup>10</sup> From putting the evidence together, we can suggest that this “father of abuse” was the creator of war—a war in which the entire universe inevitably became inextricably involved.

Thus abuse began in heaven. And Revelation 12 further states that it would conclusively be carried out on earth through the beast, a formidable political force to which the dragon would give his power, throne, and authority (the dominion the devil promised Jesus<sup>11</sup>). By contrast, the hero in the book is the Lamb, a symbol of non-violent, non-coercive leadership. Indeed, in chapter five the Lamb has been slain, pictured as a casualty of the dragon’s abuse. The entire heart of Revelation 4:1-22:7 centers on the war begun by the dragon and features pairs of symbolic opposites forming the two sides and their respective characteristics. The core values of the Lamb’s side in the war include love, gentleness, openness, and complete freedom to follow or not to follow; in contrast, the beast’s side is characterized by violence, force, tyranny, oppression, deception, and fear. The majority of the world is mesmerized by the beast’s use of power; only a small minority voluntarily follows the Lamb.

In the center of it all stands the only name in this entire section of Revelation: Michael.<sup>12</sup> In Hebrew, the name Michael is a question, meaning: “Who is like God?” In Revelation 13:4, the beast’s worshipers raise a similar question: “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”<sup>13</sup> Thus the beast and Michael stand at the head of the armies fighting in the war. Just as the beast represents the dragon who gives him his authority, so Jesus represents the Father to us who gave him his authority. To the early Christian community,

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<sup>10</sup> NRSV.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 4:8, 9.

<sup>12</sup> This name is used rarely elsewhere in the Bible. See Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9. Some would no doubt regard Satan as a name, but throughout the New Testament (with some exceptions), the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *satan* reflects the presence of the Hebrew article that is usually used in Old Testament passages where the Satan is clearly a title, not a name. The Hebrew term *satan* means “adversary” or “accuser.” In Revelation 12:10, this is the title used for the Satan.

<sup>13</sup> NRSV.

then, Michael would be Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

The central issue, therefore, in the war in heaven is the question, “Who is like God?” The obvious answer within the book of Revelation is the Lamb. No clearer symbolic representation could be found to characterize the nature of the two sides. A lamb is the most non-violent and gentle of all God’s creatures, whereas, the beast is so terribly forceful and fearsome that it defies description. As the war reaches its crisis, the Lamb conquers the beast and the dragon with the power of his love and the revelation of truth.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that they have cost the suffering and even death of those who follow the Lamb, love and truth outlast and endure beyond tyranny, force, deception, and fear.<sup>16</sup>

The Lamb, then, serves as a symbol of a non-abuser; the beast is clearly the ultimate depiction of abuse itself. The message could not be clearer that God is not an abuser, but that the dragon is.

How did the dragon get to this state of abuse? Did God create him to be abusive (and thus we have a moral and theological problem to face) or did he come to be an abuser on his own? Who was this dragon originally?<sup>17</sup>

In the Old Testament, the personifications of evil antedating the dragon are variously called by names such as Leviathan, Tannin,

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<sup>14</sup> This can be inferred from a close reading of Revelation 12.

<sup>15</sup> Note that the sword in the mouth of the Son of Man (Revelation 1:16; cf. Revelation 2:12; 19:15, 21) represents the Word or revelation of God (cf. Ephesians 6:17). The consequent slaying, then, is the rejection of the truth about God, revealed in the Bible.

<sup>16</sup> By looking at various tyrants of the world, we can see that in the end, tyranny self-destructs. Perhaps the most significant example of this has been the internal fall of the Soviet Union.

<sup>17</sup> Many, if not most scholars, view the Satan as an invention of Christianity, and thus late in development. The Satan of the Old Testament has been often assumed to be a member of the divine council. Nevertheless, the Revelation is substantially built on the Old Testament and did not invent the Satan. The long development of an originator of evil (under a number of different names) within Judaism cannot be denied. For a recent attempt to show more fully the development of this figure, see Linda Jean Sheldon, “The Book of Job as Hebrew Theodicy: An Ancient Near Eastern Intertextual Conflict Between Law and Cosmology” (Ph.D. diss., The University of California, Berkeley, and the Graduate Theological Union, 2002), 172-209, 251-281.

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Rahab, or the sea.<sup>18</sup> In the ancient Near East, enemy forces were often referred to as a storm or some ferocious beast; divine enemies were likened to the sea or a dragon-like monster. This seems to be the origin of the dragon of Revelation who is there identified with the Satan—a figure mentioned three times in the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup> The term itself means “adversary” or “accuser.” In Job, this figure plays a prominent role in the sufferings of an innocent man. None of these passages, however, explains the origins of this figure or how he came to play the role that the New Testament applies to him.

### Two Personifications of Abuse

To understand better the personification of abuse, we must turn to two kings in the Old Testament—the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14 and the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28.<sup>20</sup> These figures play metaphorical roles beyond that of earthly kings.<sup>21</sup> Both of them are described as heavenly created beings that fall from their lofty positions. Both bear supernatural features. Thus they both precede the figure later known metaphorically as the dragon, historically called, “Lucifer” by the Christian community. If one puts the two passages together and attempts to provide a synthesis of the step-by-step progression of thought that led to Lucifer’s fall, one can easily see the trajectory from perfection to violence, and finally to imaging (the culmination of making this process the standard or something worthy of emulation and thus replicating it into society). The process occurs this way (see chart at the end of chapter 2):

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Job 7:12; 9:13; 38:8-11; 41:1-34; Isaiah 27:1. Tannin is sometimes translated as “dragon” (NRSV) or “sea monster” (NCV).

<sup>19</sup> Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; 1 Chronicles 21:1, and Zechariah 3:1-2.

<sup>20</sup> The King of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:11-19) and the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14:12-20) have qualities that suggest they are metaphorical and represent an early heavenly rebel.

<sup>21</sup> The fact that neither king is named, whereas other kings in the books are, suggests that these kings may have represented the gods of Babylon and Tyre. (For example, Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon is referred to as “king.” See Knut Leonard Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* [Hildersheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974], 366, 367.) At least they may be understood as supernatural figures.

## The False Reality of Our Shame

pride → externalism → control → supremacy →  
false power → falsification → violence → imaging

By studying these elements in a step-by-step sequence, one can follow the path a person follows in becoming an abuser. The effects of these qualities on the victims of this abuse may be noted as follows:

low self-esteem → artificiality → unhealthy dependence →  
false submission → powerlessness → deception →  
victimization

The final step is that of conformity, and it is on this level that a complete victim—and thus a potential abuser—is created. This is the process of sin and selfishness invented by the originator of evil. And now its effects are felt by everyone in the world.

Psychologists tell us that roughly 30 percent of abuse victims become abusers. If one admits that sin is abuse, the percentage rate, of course, is 99.99... percent, with only one human being in the universe—Jesus Christ—escaping victimization. The truth is that, even in classical cases of victimization, almost every abuser has been abused—either by self-indulgence or external abuse. For example, nearly every pedophile is a victim of pedophilia. A failure to recognize this, has led society to do little for classic abusers, who still think of themselves as victims attempting to protect themselves from their own internal abuse. Until we find a way to treat abusers like victims, starting with their past, they will remain abusers.

We can use this as an analogy for sin in general: each of us is a victim of the selfish actions of others that either wounded us or gave us an excuse (however poor) to copy the behavior. We sinners also tend to think of others as sinners and ourselves as “pretty good.” Until we find a way to treat ourselves as victims of sin—starting with how we got there—and allow God to heal us, we will remain sinners.

The steps we, as victims, must take to find healing involve full recognition of our victim and abuser status, a personal encounter with God and his love, allowing the Holy Spirit to reparent us, making a complete paradigm shift from a pride-based model to one of truth and love, and, finally, coming to forgive our abusers.

## No Longer Naked and Ashamed

For centuries, the originator of abuse has worked hard to convince us that sin is anything but an internal process of victimization involving all our perceptions. By changing all the labels and turning reality inside out, he has gotten our indirect and unconscious allegiance to his principles and methods. By unmasking his rebellion, we may come to see what a terrible loss of freedom, self-worth, and integrity we have suffered. Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”<sup>22</sup> That truth includes the truth about God, about sin, and about us. Like victims of a world-wide infant kidnapping, we have grown up in the wrong family. We assume that the way things are must be the way things should be—despite the pain, oppression, and fear we have experienced. For too long we have suffered from sin, until many of us think we are enjoying a wonderful life. Victims of life’s multiple wounds, we have come to glory in our scars as symbols of our toughness, resilience, and success. Yet we deserve the truth about this false family, this false reality that we have inherited. To this we turn next.

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<sup>22</sup> John 8:32, NRSV.