

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Breaking Free from Religious Control



June Hunt



HOPE
for the Heart

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JUNE HUNT



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Dear Friend,

Never will I forget her tears—the tears streaming down her cheeks. But not tears of sadness—rather tears of relief.

This young nurse—lovely, respectful, sincere—attended my home Bible study. As she listened intently, absorbing every morsel of truth, she finally blurted out, “All these years I’ve been living under the law—but not God’s law! Now I’m being set free!”

Mona proceeded to explain, “I worked very hard in high school, and before graduation I received my class ring. But when I wore it to church, I was met with such condemnation, such negativity, such accusations.” Because Mona desired to please the Lord, she never again put on the ring.

Another young woman, Laura, had given her heart to Christ as an adult. Her pastor pronounced, “Wearing jewelry is being a Jezebel.” Laura deeply desired to please the Lord, so she wouldn’t wear jewelry again. The pastor further proclaimed, “Wearing red is worldly.” Laura deeply desired to please the Lord, so she wouldn’t wear red again.

One day Laura came to church with a flower in her hair, but from the pulpit, the preacher rebuked her for looking like a harlot. In fact, all females who wore flowers in their hair—or on their clothing—were guilty ... guilty ... guilty. Wearing a flower was flaunting your sexuality. Laura deeply desired to please the Lord, so she wouldn’t wear a flower

again. Those condemning words hurt her heart—they crushed her spirit.

Personally, I had never heard that wearing red was wrong. “What else was prohibited?” I asked. She said, “Going to a fair or a musical—that’s being in the world.”

These and other similar restrictions raise questions we need to ask: What are man-made laws and what are God-given laws? Is a religious rule a righteous rule or merely a preacher’s preference or a church’s position? Is the religious rule based merely on private interpretation? Is it a cultural command or a correct command based on the whole counsel of God?

When I first taught on the topic of spiritual abuse, I wondered, *Does the Bible anywhere forbid wearing red?* When I did a word study (looking up every single reference to red, scarlet, and crimson, the answer was absolutely not! In fact, the most famous chapter in the Bible extolling the virtues of a righteous woman is Proverbs 31. And in this chapter, look at what this “Proverbs 31 Woman” does: She dresses her household in scarlet (v. 21)!

While any distortion or misapplication of God’s Word is clearly wrong, God’s judgment will fall greatest upon those who abuse their spiritual positions of trust for selfish gain, for sexual control, and for personal power. Ultimately control is the name of their game.

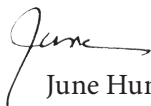
Truth originates with God as revealed through His Word. It does not originate with imperfect human

beings who teach about the truth. Therefore, if you want to be wise about a certain issue, don't just follow a religious leader blindly, like a blind sheep. Don't just look at isolated Scriptures taken out of context but first look thoroughly at what God has already said. Ultimately, when you grasp the whole counsel of God on that subject, you will not fall prey to spiritual predators; neither will you be the victim of spiritual abuse.

Tragically, these victims are too trusting or too unknowing or they feel too powerless to do anything about the past or the present. However, those who have been victims of such abuse are not powerless. They simply need to learn how to appropriate the power of God and to live by His truth.

My prayer regarding this book on spiritual abuse is that through these pages those who are in bondage will find lasting freedom. Isn't it wonderful that Jesus exhorts you to know the truth because "the truth will set you free"!

Yours in the Lord's hope,


June Hunt

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Think about it. Who in our society offends us the most? Isn't it the robbers, the killers, the rapists, the flagrant *law breakers*?

Now think about Jesus. Who in His society offended Him the most? Wasn't it the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, the legalistic *law keepers*? Didn't they upset Him the most?

But why the Pharisees? After all, they went to the temple, paid the tithes, read the Word, kept the Law, prayed the prayers. So why was Jesus offended most by the prominent law keepers?

The answer is clear. Although they were representatives of the house of God, they did not represent the heart of God. Christ called them "*hypocrites*." And He made it plain: They will be rewarded here on earth, but certainly not in heaven.

Jesus said ...

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”

(Matthew 6:5)



DEFINITIONS

They can't believe their eyes when they see the disciples' hands. Dirty, unwashed hands, such a contrast to their own pristine palms.

These religious leaders strive to be the “picture” of perfection, so refined in their priestly garb. These prestigious Pharisees scrutinize the followers of Jesus who lift their food to their mouths with “unclean” hands—ceremonially defiled hands that have not been washed according to their customs.

- ▶ The Pharisees say: Beware—your unclean hands soil any hope of righteousness.
- ▶ Jesus says: No, what stains your righteousness is your *unclean hearts*.

**“What goes into someone's mouth
does not defile them,
but what comes out of their mouth,
that is what defiles them.”
(Matthew 15:11)**

WHAT IS Spiritual Abuse?

The practice of spiritual abuse has persisted ever since the serpent in the Garden of Eden distorted and outright lied about God's words to Adam and Eve. In doing so, he managed to create doubt in their minds regarding the character of God and His relationship to those He had created. The result, of course, was that they found the thought of becoming like God more appealing than remaining dependent on God. That thought led them to trust Satan's words rather than God's words, and their descendants have struggled with this same problem ever since.¹

The serpent said to Eve, *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' ... 'You will not certainly die' ... 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'"* (Genesis 3:1, 4–5). The serpent contradicted God's Word and seduced the first couple into taking the fatal bite!

Though the practice is age-old, the term "spiritual abuse" is relatively new. The following definitions explain how spiritual leaders can misuse their position of authority.

- ▶ **Spiritual abuse** is the mistreatment of a person by someone in a position of spiritual authority, resulting in diminishing that person's spiritual vitality and growth.²

- ▶ **Spiritual abuse** is the use of religious words or acts to manipulate someone for personal gain or to achieve a personal agenda, thereby harming that person's walk with God.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, “... we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

- ▶ **Spiritual abuse** is putting confidence in your position of authority and your perceived right to use those under your influence to accomplish your own personal agenda. However, God alone has the right, the wisdom, and the power to accomplish His plans and purposes for those He has created.

**“To the elders among you,
I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of
Christ's sufferings who also will share in the
glory to be revealed:**

**Be shepherds of God's flock that is
under your care, watching over them—
not because you must, but because you
are willing, as God wants you to be; not
pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;
not lording it over those entrusted to you,
but being examples to the flock.”**

(1 Peter 5:1–3)

QUESTION: “What is at the core of spiritual abuse?”

ANSWER: At the core of spiritual abuse is excessive control of others. Spiritual abuse is acting “spiritual” to benefit oneself by using self-centered efforts to control others.

A – Acting spiritual to

B – Benefit oneself by

U – Using

S – Self-centered

E – Efforts to control others

EXAMPLES

- ▶ The pastor who uses guilt or greed to compel attendance, financial giving, or service
- ▶ The spiritual leader who takes emotional or sexual advantage of a counselee in the name of “comfort or compassion”
- ▶ Religious people who accuse those who disagree with them of being rebellious against God
- ▶ The ministry head who demands absolute, unquestioned obedience no matter what, whether reasonable or not, whether biblical or not

“Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.’” (Luke 22:25)