

# Verbal Abuse: A Biblical Perspective

*Kerby Anderson offers a distinctly Christian view of this important topic. Taking a biblical perspective moves this problem from strictly emotional to its full implications for our spiritual lives.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

I would like to address the subject of verbal abuse for two important reasons. First, our behavior is often a great indicator of our worldview. Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” What a person thinks in his or her mind and heart will be reflected in his or her words and actions. Verbal abuse and physical abuse result from a worldview that is clearly not biblical.

Second, I want to deal with verbal abuse because of the incredible need for Christians to address the subject. Ten years ago I did a week of radio programs on this topic, and I have received more e-mails from men and women who read that transcript than any other article. They were grateful that I addressed the subject. Since there are some new books and web sites, I wanted to update the original article.

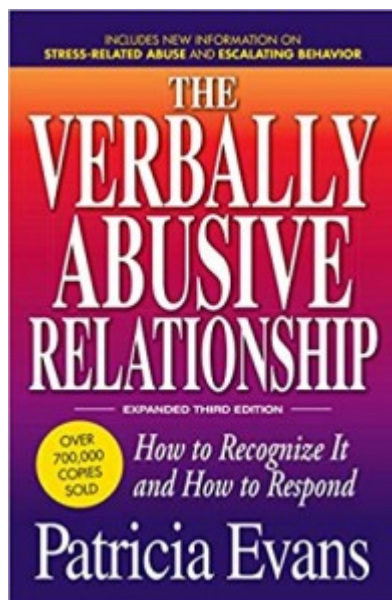


Most of us know someone who has been verbally abused. Perhaps you are involved in a verbally abusive relationship. It is also possible that no one even knows your circumstances. Verbal abuse is a kind of battering which doesn't leave evidence comparable to the bruises of physical battering. You (or your friend) may be suffering in silence and isolation.

I want to tackle this very important issue in an effort to understand this phenomenon and provide answers. First, we

should acknowledge that verbal abuse is often more difficult to see since there are rarely any visible scars unless physical abuse has also taken place. It is often less visible simply because the abuse may always take place in private. The victim of verbal abuse lives in a gradually more confusing realm. In public, the victim is with one person. While in private, the abuser may become a completely different person.

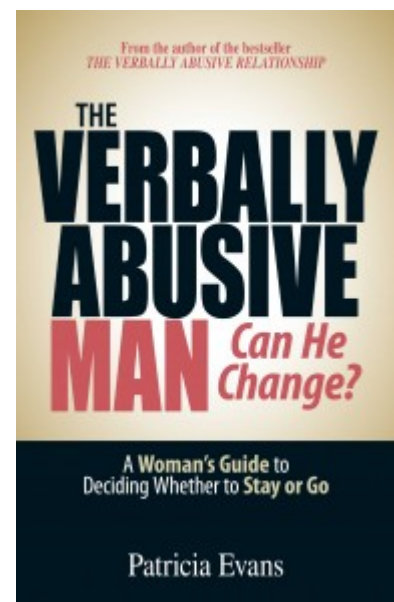
Frequently, the perpetrator of verbal abuse is male and the victim is female, but not always. There are many examples of women who are quite verbally abusive. But for the sake of simplicity of pronouns in this program, I will often identify the abuser as male and the victim as female.



One of the first books to describe verbal abuse in adults was Patricia Evan's book *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.<sup>{1}</sup> She interviewed forty verbally abused women who ranged in age from 21 to 66. Most of the women had left a verbally abusive relationship. We will use some of the characteristics and categories of verbal abuse these women describe in this book.

Years later, she wrote a second book, *The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?*<sup>{2}</sup> In that book she makes the claim the some men can change under certain circumstances. That led to the subtitle of her book, "A Woman's Guide to Deciding Whether to Stay or Go."

Is there hope that some abusers can change? Yes, but the key to healing is for the person being abused to recognize verbal abuse for what it is and to begin to take deliberate steps to stop it and bring healing. Since the abuser is usually in denial, the responsibility for recognizing verbal abuse often rests with the partner.



## Characteristics of Verbal Abuse

What are some of the characteristics of verbal abuse? Here is a list as outlined in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.[\[3\]](#)

1. Verbal abuse is hurtful and usually attacks the nature and abilities of the partner. Over time, the partner may begin to believe that there is something wrong with her or her abilities. She may come to feel that she is the problem, rather than her partner.
2. Verbal abuse may be overt (through angry outbursts and name-calling) or covert (involving very subtle comments, even something that approaches brainwashing). Overt verbal abuse is usually blaming and accusatory, and consequently confusing to the partner. Covert verbal abuse, which is hidden aggression, is even more confusing to the partner. Its aim is to control her without her knowing.
3. Verbal abuse is manipulative and controlling. Even disparaging comments may be voiced in an extremely sincere and concerned way. But the goal is to control and manipulate.
4. Verbal abuse is insidious. The partner's self-esteem gradually diminishes, usually without her realizing it. She

may consciously or unconsciously try to change her behavior so as not to upset the abuser.

5. Verbal abuse is unpredictable. In fact, unpredictability is one of the most significant characteristics of verbal abuse. The partner is stunned, shocked, and thrown off balance by her mate's sarcasm, angry jab, put-down, or hurtful comment.

6. Verbal abuse is not a side issue. It is *the* issue in the relationship. When a couple is having an argument about a real issue, the issue can be resolved. In a verbally abusive relationship, there is no specific conflict. The issue is the abuse, and this issue is not resolved. There is no closure.

7. Verbal abuse expresses a double message. There is incongruence between the way the abuser speaks and her real feelings. For example, she may sound very sincere and honest while she is telling her partner what is wrong with him.

8. Verbal abuse usually escalates, increasing in intensity, frequency, and variety. The verbal abuse may begin with put-downs disguised as jokes. Later other forms might surface. Sometimes the verbal abuse may escalate into physical abuse, starting with "accidental" shoves, pushes, and bumps.

## Categories of Verbal Abuse

What are some of the categories of verbal abuse? Here is a list as outlined in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.[\[4\]](#)

The first category of verbal abuse is *withholding*. A marriage requires intimacy, and intimacy requires empathy. If one partner withholds information and feelings, then the marriage bond weakens. The abuser who refuses to listen to his partner denies her experience and leaves her isolated.

The second is *countering*. This is the dominant response of the verbal abuser who sees his partner as an adversary. He is

constantly countering and correcting everything she says and does. Internally he may even be thinking, "How dare she have a different view!"

Countering is very destructive to a relationship because it prevents the partner from knowing what his mate thinks about anything. Sometimes the verbal abuser will cut off discussion in mid-sentence before he can finish his thought. In many ways, she cannot even allow him to have his own thoughts.

A third category of verbal abuse is *discounting*. This is like taking a one hundred-dollar item and reducing its price to one cent. Discounting denies the reality and experience of the partner and is extremely destructive. It can be a most insidious form of verbal abuse because it denies and distorts the partner's actual perception of the abuse.

Sometimes verbal abuse is disguised as jokes. Although his comments may masquerade as humor, they cut the partner to the quick. The verbal jabs may be delivered crassly or with great skill, but they all have the same effect of diminishing the partner and throwing her off balance.

A fifth form of verbal abuse is *blocking and diverting*. The verbal abuser refuses to communicate, establishes what *can* be discussed, or withholds information. He can prevent any possibility of resolving conflicts by blocking and diverting.

*Accusing and blaming* is another form. A verbal abuser will accuse his partner of some wrongdoing or some breach of the basic agreement of the relationship. This has the effect of diverting the conversation and putting the other partner on the defensive.

Another form of verbal abuse is *judging and criticizing*. The verbal abuser may judge her partner and then express her judgment in a critical way. If he objects, she may tell him that she is just pointing something out to be helpful, but in reality she is expressing her lack of acceptance of him.

These are just a few of the categories of verbal abuse. Next we will look at a number of other forms of verbal abuse.

## Other Forms of Verbal Abuse

*Trivializing* can also be a form of verbal abuse. I discuss this in more detail in [my article](#) on why marriages fail.<sup>{5}</sup> It is an attempt to take something that is said or done and make it insignificant. Often the partner becomes confused and believes she hasn't effectively explained to her mate how important certain things are to her.

*Undermining* is also verbal abuse. The abuser not only withholds emotional support, but also erodes confidence and determination. The abuser often will squelch an idea or suggestion just by a single comment.

*Threatening* is a classic form of verbal abuse. He manipulates his partner by bringing up her biggest fears. This may include threatening to leave or threatening to get a divorce. In some cases, the threat may be to escalate the abuse.

*Name-calling* can also be verbal abuse. Continually calling someone "stupid" because she isn't as intelligent as you or calling her a "klutz" because she is not as coordinated can have a devastating effect on the partner's self esteem.

Verbal abuse may also involve *forgetting*. This may involve both overt and covert manipulation. Everyone forgets things from time to time, but the verbal abuser consistently does so. After the partner collects himself, subsequent to being yelled at, he may confront his mate only to find that she has "forgotten" about the incident. Some abusers consistently forget about the promises they have made which are most important to their partners.

*Ordering* is another classic form of verbal abuse. It denies the equality and autonomy of the partner. When an abuser gives

orders instead of asking, he treats her like a slave or subordinate.

*Denial* is the last category of verbal abuse. Although all forms of verbal abuse have serious consequences, denial can be very insidious because it denies the reality of the partner. In fact, a verbal abuser could read over this list of categories and insist that he is not abusive.

That is why it is so important for the partner to recognize these characteristics and categories since the abuser is usually in denial. Thus, the responsibility for recognizing verbal abuse and doing something about it often rests with the partner.

We have described various characteristics of verbal abuse and have even discussed the various categories of verbal abuse. Finally, I would like to provide a biblical perspective.

## **A Biblical Perspective of Verbal Abuse**

The Bible clearly warns us about the dangers of an angry person. Proverbs 22:24 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man." And Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."

It is not God's will for you (or your friend) to be in a verbally abusive relationship. Those angry and critical words will destroy your confidence and self-esteem. Being submissive in a marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:22) does not mean allowing yourself to be verbally beaten by your partner. 1 Peter 3:1 does teach that wives, by being submissive to their husbands, *may* win them to Christ by their behavior. But it does *not* teach that they must allow themselves to be verbally or physically abused.

Here are some key biblical principles. First, know that God

loves you. The Bible teaches, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

Second, deal with your feelings of guilt. You may be feeling that the problems in your marriage are your fault. "If only I would do better, he wouldn't be so angry with me." The Bible teaches in Psalm 51:6 that "Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place." Even though you may have feelings of guilt, you may not be the guilty party. I would recommend you read [my article](#) on the subject of false guilt.[\[6\]](#)

A related issue is shame. You may feel that something is wrong with you. You may feel that you are a bad person. But God declares you His cherished creation. Psalms 139:14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

A key element in this area of verbal abuse will no doubt be confrontation of the abuser. It's important for you to realize that confrontation is a biblical principle. Jesus taught about this in Matthew 18:15-20. I would recommend that you seek help from a pastor or counselor. But I would also recommend that you gather godly men and women together who can lovingly confront the person who is verbally abusing you. Their goal should be to break through their denial and lovingly restore them with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1).

But whether you confront the abuser or not, I do recommend that you seek out others who can encourage you and support you. If the abuser is willing to confront his sin and get help, that is good. But even if he will not, your hope is in the Lord and in those who should surround you and encourage you.

## Notes

1. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*



- (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1996).
2. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2006).
  3. Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, 81-84.
  4. Ibid., 85-104.
  5. Kerby Anderson, "Why Marriages Fail," Probe, 1998, [probe.org/why-marriages-fail/](http://probe.org/why-marriages-fail/).
  6. Kerby Anderson, "False Guilt," Probe, 1996, [www.probe.org/false-guilt/](http://www.probe.org/false-guilt/).

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## Shame-Based Families, Grace-Based Families

The messages of a shame-based family:

"Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel."

"Everybody has to put their needs aside so we can tiptoe around \_\_\_\_\_ and not make them mad."

"Why did you do that, you dumb b\*tt?"

"If you disappoint me this much, how much more are you disappointing God?"

"Oh please, you're not wearing that, are you?"

"Loser . . . stupid . . . such an embarrassment . . . I hope nobody knows you're my daughter . . . You'll never amount to anything . . . I wish I'd never had you . . . You're so fat. And ugly."

Every message of a shame-based family is an arrow into someone's heart. Left there unacknowledged and not pulled out with truth, it starts generating lies and pain that can last a lifetime.

Lots of people grew up in this kind of family, but we are not sentenced to repeating it into the next generation. We can put on the brakes and steer our families in another direction altogether-the direction of grace.



Grace-based families also have messages:

"You are loved and valued, no matter what you do."

"When we disagree, you never have to worry that I will stop loving you."

"I was wrong and I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

"Did you do your best? You're the only one who can know."

"Let's talk about why you did that. What other choices did you have? What can you learn from this?"

"Can you help me understand what happened, what you were thinking or saying when you \_\_\_\_?"

The underlying message of a shame-based family is, "You are not acceptable and you risk being rejected and abandoned." The underlying message of a grace-based family is, "You are an important and cherished part of this family and you will always be loved and accepted, even if we need to discipline you for wrong choices."

Shame-based families shame out loud through name-calling, deadly comparisons ("Why can't you be like \_\_\_\_?"), and anything that indicates the person is not good enough. Grace-based families affirm out loud with uplifting expressions of belief in each other, appreciation for each other, and affectionate use of each other's names. Each person feels that their name is safe in everyone else's mouths—but most especially mom and dad's.

The focus of shame-based families is on performance, looking good and being good on the outside. It's all external. Not

embarrassing the family is huge. The focus of grace-based families is on the heart, remembering that character is shaped and developed in the family. The child's value—which never changes—is separated from his or her behavior, which is eminently changeable. These families remember that God is not real pleased with our choices sometimes, but He never stops loving us.

Shame-based families specialize in unspoken rules and expectations. They are discovered when one gets broken. Often, one of the unspoken rules is that no one is supposed to notice or mention problems; if you bring a problem into the light by asking, "Hey, what about this?"—YOU become the problem. When one of my friends told her parents that her brother had been molesting her, her father threatened, "Don't you ever talk about this again. It is over." When the abuse continued and she told her youth pastor, her father responded that his daughter was mentally ill, a pathological liar, and not to believe her.

There is often a "can't-win" rule in effect: children are taught never to lie, but they are also not allowed to tell Grandma her cooking tastes awful. Or children are taught that smoking is bad, but if they point out that mom or dad smoke, they are shamed and shut down.

In grace-based families, rules and expectations are clearly spelled out. If an unspoken rule comes to light because someone broke it, it gets talked about without shaming the one who broke a rule they didn't know was in place. If someone notices or mentions a problem, the problem is addressed instead of attacking the one who brought it up. In grace-based families, the *problem* is the problem, rather than the person who identified it.

Shame-based families often use coded messages to communicate, saying one thing while intending that their audience read their minds and respond to the actual message they wanted to

give without coming right out and speaking it. Someone might say, "I have such a headache" and the second person replies, "That's too bad" or "Sorry" and then continues to do whatever they were doing. The first gets upset that the other person didn't offer to get them a pain reliever. The one with the headache used to be me, until a wise mentor responded with, "Would you like an Advil? Healthy people ask for what they need and want. Just ask me if I have one." Whoa. That was a game-changer for me!

The communication in grace-based families tends to be clear and straight. It's about saying what is true and what is actually meant. Scripture calls that "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). And healthy communication does not involve an unnecessary third person, a term called "triangulating." If someone complains about another person, or gives a message for another family member, a wise person redirects them to the one they actually need to communicate with, refusing to be the third person in a two-person communication. Another wise person has said, "If you don't have a dog in that fight, stay out of it." That works!

Shame-based families are preoccupied with fault or blame. They are always looking for where to place or shift the blame when something goes wrong. Then the culprit can be shamed, humiliated, and made to feel so bad they don't do it again.

In grace-based families, the emphasis is on responsibility and accountability. People are responsible for their choices and held accountable for their behavior. Grace-based parents try to remember that all of life is training for a child, and it takes many, many times to learn wise and healthy behavior. So while a child may be disciplined, they are not punished for not getting something right. Instead of being shamed for slamming the door, they may be instructed, "OK, I guess you need practice in closing the door without slamming it. So you'll be practicing 25 times in a row, starting right now." Another way that grace-based families can build responsibility

and accountability is by using natural consequences without anger: “Since you left your bicycle in the driveway again, you will lose the privilege of enjoying it for a week.” And sometimes, discipline without punishment means talking about what happened without shaming, by asking good questions: “So what can you learn from this?” “What can you do differently next time?”

Family is meant to be God’s safety net underneath is, the safe place to fall when we make mistakes and learn painful life lessons. By His grace and through being intentional, shame-based families can become grace-based families as we reflect on how God, the perfect Parent, loves us perfectly and unconditionally-yet teaches us to be responsible as we grow up to maturity.

Note: the grace-based family in the picture are my friends Rick and Abbie Smith with their sons Noah and Jaxten. If you want a blessing, check out their story of grace at [noahsdad.com/story](http://noahsdad.com/story).

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/shame-based\\_families\\_grace-based\\_families](http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/shame-based_families_grace-based_families) on March 8, 2016.

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## **“How Do I Convince My Friends to Be Saved?”**

I have some really good friends who claim that they are Christians but I know for a fact that they aren’t saved and I’m not exactly sure how to talk to them about Christ and getting saved. I also hear some of them who claim to be Christians say that they are glad that their parents don’t go

to church because then they wouldn't be able to sleep in on Sundays. I have brought a couple of them to my church but they acted like they didn't like it. How should I convince them that they should believe in Christ?

My second question is this: I have a friend who always talks about Christ and how he has changed her life. But I know that she hasn't been saved. Do you have to be saved go to heaven?

Having an attitude of trying to convince people to believe in Christ will seldom be successful. There needs to be a sincere desire to seek the truth. Your time would be well spent demonstrating an attractive vision of the Savior through your life and be ready to discuss and answer their eventual questions. Those who are indifferent to Christianity—or even hostile—need to see a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ which faithfully follows 1 Peter 3:15: a life that sanctifies Jesus as Lord of their lives and is always ready to give an answer for the hope that they have and yet do so with gentleness and respect. Evidence and arguments will rarely make an impact unless there is an inquisitiveness first.

And yes, we must be saved to spend eternity in heaven. Be careful however, about being certain in judging someone's salvation. Even the greatest saints still sin and while there should be a pattern of good works to verify someone's salvation, we all go through periods of rebellion. Also, only Christ can judge the true condition of a person's heart.

If a person truly thinks they are saved and seems to at least have a basic understanding of salvation through Christ, we should take them at their word until something incontrovertible happens that leads you to believe they have been living a lie. I'm just asking that you be careful in making these kinds of judgments and that as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18).

Respectfully,

## Don't Judge Me?

The 14-year-old daughter of a friend recently responded to her mother's correction with, "Don't judge me, Mom." The same week, a friend of mine asked my opinion on something, and as I was mentally running it through the grid of "what does God say about this in His word," she said, "Now, don't you go judging me!"

Tolerance and acceptance—the *new* tolerance, which says that every value, belief and behavior should be embraced as equally valid—are the highest values of our culture. Which makes judging the most hideous and unacceptable of sins.

Now, to be fair, there is a lot of ugly judging in the world. Before a friend became a Christ follower, she was on the receiving end of a lot of hateful judging when she would protest at gay rights events, hearing "You're going to hell!" and other ugly epithets. People who didn't know her at all made judgments about her character and her destiny. I have personally received my share of hate mail from strangers accusing me of not being a Christian because I disagree with them on a cherished position.

But if we get pulled over for speeding, and the officer points out that we were going twenty miles over the speed limit, nobody says, "Don't judge me, officer!" He's not judging our character, he's comparing our behavior to the law.

Judging is assuming you have all the facts and making an assessment of condemnation out of ignorance. It's about smugly

believing “I’m right and you’re wrong. You are lesser-than.”

There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems to be familiar with “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus’ call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother’s eye (Matt. 7:5)? That’s about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another’s sin, not to ignore other people’s behavior.

But then there’s the “big daddy” passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. Judging doesn’t mean condemning, though; often it’s a matter of comparing one’s behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of one’s choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

Comparing someone’s beliefs and actions to a standard can be a loving thing to do. A lady working in an after-school program



noticed that one little girl was clearly not doing well on her homework, but she also seemed to not be working very hard at it. The teacher said, "I think your brain is switched off! May I touch your head? I think I can find the switch and turn it back on!" The wide-eyed little one gave permission and the teacher said with a smile, "Oh, here it is! Right under one of your braids! Let's turn your brain back on!" What a lovely, eloquent way to call a child to live up to her potential without shaming or judging her for being lazy or stupid.

Challenging someone to be better than they are can be a gift. One of the best-ever movie lines is in "As Good As It Gets" when Jack Nicholson tells Helen Hunt, "You make me want to be a better man." When parents ask their children at report card time, "Did you do your best? Only you can know," they are giving them a chance to honestly compare their ability to their potential. It honors another to say something like, "I think you'll be happier with yourself if you live out your gifting" rather than shaming them with something like, "What a loser." Now *that's* shaming.

And judging.

And ugly.

And unlike Jesus.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/dont\\_judge\\_me](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/dont_judge_me) on January 28, 2013.

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# Vain Imaginations

Not long ago, I attended a retreat at which a college student, freshly discovering his call to an intercessory prayer ministry, spent hours every night praying by name for everyone on the retreat. The last morning when I ran into him, he said, "Sue! As I was praying for you, I received a word from the Lord for you."

Uh-oh. I'd heard this before. And every time I had taken it to the Lord, asking if there were anything to it, the answer was no.

My defenses up, I smiled and said, "I'm listening." He got a very thoughtful look on his face and said, "I have to get it exactly right. . . OK, the words were, 'Guard against vain imaginations.'"

I thanked him for this and promised to immediately take it to the Lord. I had barely breathed, "Lord, is there anything to this?" when the lightbulb came on in my spirit and I knew EXACTLY what this was about.

Oh yeah. This was from God, all right.

For about a year, my husband and I had been carrying around an open wound on our souls. We had been deeply hurt by several people we had trusted and loved, and it is not exaggeration to call it traumatic. Every single day of that time I had engaged in fantasy conversations in my head with the people who inflicted so much pain—except they weren't really so much conversations as monologues, with me lecturing on how badly they hurt us and how dishonoring their actions were to us and to God. . . yada yada yada.

Vain imaginations. Yep, this word was right on the money.

And God was so incredibly tender and grace-ful to merely

exhort me to “guard against” them. Not, “You bad girl, you’ve been sinning against my sons in your mind. Repent!” Not, “And who are YOU to set yourself up as judge and jury? Look at your own fleshly heart, kiddo!”

Just, guard against them.

So I confessed my sin of indulging in self-vindicating fantasy, and resolved not to go there again. It didn’t take long, of course, before my mind returned to what had become a familiar and comforting indulgence—an emotional “binkie.” I stopped and said, “Well Lord, what am I supposed to do instead?” He didn’t even have to say anything, just wait for me to connect the dots since I already knew. “Oh. I should be praying for them instead, huh?”

Okay. Fleshly sigh.

The biblical pattern for changing behaviors is to replace and displace the old with something new, and eventually the temptation to indulge in vain imaginations about this issue faded with disuse. It still pops up occasionally, but I know what to do with it.

“Vain imaginations” is a good term for a lot of popular mental sin we so easily rationalize: engaging in internal arguments with people who aren’t even there, the lusting that accompanies sexual pornography for men or emotional pornography for women (steamy romance novels). We all spend time thinking about things that are empty, fruitless, and harmful to our spirits.

And we all need to guard against them.

This blog post originally appeared at  
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February 3, 2009.

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# **“Am I Judging When I Recognize Sin in a Friend’s Life?”**

Dear Sue,

My question is about judging. There are several of us friends and we are all Christians but go to different churches. One of our friends was widowed several years ago. After several failed relationships where she became sexually intimate with each of the men, she is now in another relationship with what seems like a nice man. She is also very active in her church and is involved in a discipleship ministry. After she leaves the meetings to prepare for these discipleship events, she leaves town to go stay the weekend with her new friend.

I told one of the other friends that I did not think it was right that she was doing that and that may be why she had problems with her relationships, and that I felt it was wrong that she would be speaking before another group of women on this retreat. My other friend told me I was judging and that only God should do that and no one is without sin and that one sin is no greater than any other sin. I do not interpret the bible that way. I feel that if she is putting herself before others as a leader of God she should be striving to live sin free and be repenting when she does sin. Am I judging when I recognize a sin in another person’s life? I do not want to be a judgmental person and am very confused about this. Please help me to understand and how I should have responded to her.

You are right. There is a huge misunderstanding about judging both outside and inside the church, and it comes from not knowing what the Bible teaches about judging. Everybody seems

to stop with “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1). That is the Lord Jesus’ call not to judge hypocritically. But in John 7:24 He also calls us to judge rightly. And remember the passage about pulling the plank out of our own eye so we can see clearly to remove the speck from our brother’s eye (Matt. 7:5)? That’s about judging as well. The point there is about examining ourselves first before dealing with another’s sin, *not* to ignore other people’s behavior.

But then there’s the “big daddy” passage of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

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*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”*

This passage clearly says that we are to judge those inside the Body of Christ. (News to your other friend, I’m sure!) Judging doesn’t mean condemning, though; in the case of your immoral friend, it would be a matter of comparing her behavior with what is right, and pointing out the dangers of her choices, the way we would want to warn someone in a burning building to get out, or urge someone headed toward a cliff to turn around.

It might sound like, “This is a hard conversation but I need to talk to you because I care about you. You’re making decisions that are not consistent with the Christ-follower and

the woman of God I know you want to be. Sexual immorality is still sin, and sin has consequences, and I don't want you to be hurt. But even more than that, you are dishonoring the Lord by your disobedience to His word. I am concerned that you are continuing in a leadership position while you are engaged in unrepented, continual sin. James 3:1 says that teachers will be judged more strictly, and I am concerned for what that might look like for you down the road. I just want to plead with you to choose chastity and integrity, and make choices that honor both God and yourself."

If she gets defensive and starts pushing back, making comments like, "And you're so perfect yourself?" I would counsel you to not get defensive yourself. Just say something like, "You know, I'm aware that I'm a sinner in need of God's mercy and grace every single day. I would hope that if my eyes were blinded by my own feelings and sin and I were headed toward a cliff, you would love me enough to warn me and challenge me to live consistently with who God says I am."

I'm so glad you wrote. I hope you find this helpful.

Sue

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## **"You Condemn All Other Religions!"**

I agree with there is one true God but in all the pages I have read on this site, I find that you are condemning all the other religions. But in my studies I have seen all religions have the same basis of love, peace, and understanding, and the

belief that how you act on earth determines how you will spend eternity. But it's cocky religious people that spend their weeks living the way they want but then condemning others for living the way they see unfit and breaking the laws they're supposed to live by. Correct me if I'm wrong but doesn't the Catholic Church Bible say "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," and seeing how it also says sex is a sin then doesn't that mean we all have sinned by being born and should not judge? But the religious people of the world constantly judge and they are hypocrites for cramming one religion down other people's throats.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

It is true that various world religions all address concepts like love, peace, and understanding. But that doesn't mean they have the same basic concepts. The various world religions are extremely different in their core beliefs. It's also true that we take the unpopular position that biblical Christianity is the only way to know God in this life, and the only way to live with Him in heaven after death. But the reason we take that position is because Jesus Himself made the claim, outrageous if it's not true, that He is God, that He came from heaven, and that He is the only way to God the Father: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me." That claim is absolutely CRAZY unless He really is God, and He really is the only way to be reconciled to God. Since He said He would be put to death and would come back to life, and then He did, He backed up His claim.

So we believe Him.

It's not just the Catholic Church's Bible that says "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (all versions say that), but it's important to understand the context of Jesus' statement. It doesn't mean we are not to judge at all, it means we are not to point fingers at someone else's sin when we are guilty of the same thing. I'm afraid you have a

misunderstanding about the Bible's statements about sex. God doesn't say sex is a sin. He invented sex and gave it to us as His gift, to be contained within the only safe place for it: marriage. Sex outside of marriage is sin; sex within marriage is His good gift to be enjoyed. Being conceived during sex (which has always been God's good plan) is not what makes us sinners; we are all sinners because we inherited a "bentness" for sin from our first father, Adam. This has nothing to do with sex.

I appreciate that you're bothered by religious people attempting to cram their beliefs down the throats of anyone else. Based on what I know of God's heart from reading all of His words, I think He's bothered by it too. He offers a quality of abundant life on earth, and the promise of life in heaven with Him, but He also says it is our choice to accept His offer or not. Nowhere in the Bible is there any hint that cramming religion is acceptable. That's because God wants to be in a love relationship with us, and force or manipulation are opposites of love.

See \_\_\_\_\_, all of us have a sin problem. We are sinners, and God is a holy God. Our sin keeps us from having a relationship with Him, and God can't allow any sin into heaven when we die. The different world religions have different solutions to the sin problem. Some of them deny that it exists, then they have a real problem explaining events like 9/11. Others suggest that enough good works can outweigh our sins, but they offer no proof that this is true—or even hint at how many is "enough." That's a terrible thing to be wrong about! We believe that because Jesus provided proof that He is God, we can trust what He said about being reconciled to God the Father through Himself as the only way.

I hope this helps. . . and I am sending this with a prayer that you will carefully consider the same question Jesus asked when He was on earth: "Who do you say that I am?"



Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

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## **“You Are Judging Gays”**

I was browsing the web for so information on a term paper and was disappointed in your site. I wish you all would choose to follow Paul in his thinking by following Romans 2:1-2. Please do not judge me because I would like to meet you in Heaven one day! I just hope that a young person that is experiencing mixed feelings about their sexuality does not view your site and feel that they are undeserving of God's love because that is the message that you all seem to be giving. Love me as I love you, unconditionally!

Thank you for your note.

Please define “judging.” The verses you mention in Romans immediately follow a strong indictment of homosexual behavior. Why do you ask us to follow Paul's example when Romans 1 is full of strong language about how sinful homosexual behavior is? Is *that* judging? I don't think so; there is a difference between comparing someone's behavior to God's laws, which are rooted in God's character—and making assumptions about someone's heart issues and motives, which is judging.

If you have found anything on our website that is judgmental of a person's heart—as opposed to agreeing with the scripture about sinful *behavior*—I would appreciate you pointing it out to me. It's interesting, I've had feedback from homosexual strugglers and those who *used* to be strugglers, and they didn't find anything judgmental in our articles. Some of these

people are my friends, because I work with a ministry that helps those who want to stop identifying as gay and receive inner healing for their same gender attraction.

Yet you are concerned that someone reading our articles would feel that we are saying they are undeserving of God's love because they struggle with their sexuality? Please show me how you arrived at that conclusion!

These are not empty words. I really, really want to know what you saw. My concern is that you may have been shaped by the culture's "new tolerance" that says that to disagree with the concept that all sexual expression is equal, and equally fine, *especially* if you ground your position in scripture, is being judgmental. If that's the case, then I respectfully suggest that you do not understand what judging someone really means. If I am speeding and get pulled over by a police officer who says, "You were going 70 in a 45 zone, ma'am," it would be inappropriate and untrue for me to complain, "You're judging me!" He's not saying anything about my heart or my character; he is comparing my behavior to the law.

Having same-gender attraction is not a sin; acting on it is. People in both categories are unconditionally loved by God, but the consequences for one's chosen behavior do not negate His love. God is love, but God is also holy, and that's why He offers cleansing and forgiveness and healing to those who seek Him for it.

I appreciate your time in reading this.

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# **“Is It Judging Others to Call Them Evil?”**

**Is it judging others to call them evil? For example, if someone rapes children, is it OK to say that person is evil unless he/she repents? Or is that judging others?**

There is little to gain by referring to individuals as “evil” whether it is spoken directly to someone or just thought to yourself. Calling someone evil would certainly be considered inflammatory. The concept of evil is sometimes unnecessarily avoided or swept under the rug in our culture. However, calling someone evil rather than referring to their actions as evil is probably not necessary in most cases. Ultimately, sin is sin and everyone is capable of great evil. The example you gave, rape, is certainly evil and the one who commits such an act could properly be referred to as evil. There are no “little sins” in God’s sight, however, so the liar and glutton could also be called evil. So, no, it is not wrong to refer to someone as evil but it will probably prove counter-productive to actually call someone evil. A less inflammatory approach would be better.

If you do a word search for evil, you will find that the Lord Jesus did not hesitate to call some men evil if that’s what they were. But then, He had the right to judge the thoughts and intentions of their hearts, being God and being informed by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the apostle Paul is the only NT writer who calls men evil, and that only occurs twice—and neither time is he referring to specific individuals. The rest of the time the NT writers talk about evil as a force and a chosen behavior, and the evil one (Satan). Given this perspective, we believe it would be wiser to rephrase the judgment of evil as applying to the beliefs and actions rather than calling an individual evil.

# **“How Can You Be Pro-Life and For the Death Penalty? Isn’t That Judging?”**

In my college class, a girl asked the other day, “How can you be for the death penalty if you are pro-life?” She also said the Bible says don’t judge, so how can you use the death penalty (because you would be judging). I was trying to find out the correct way to let her know that you can be pro-life and for the death penalty.

The point of being pro-life is that we put the same high value of all life that God does, from the earliest pre-born baby to the last breath of an elderly, dying person. We derive our high value of life from the fact that every human being is made in the image of God. Thus, when someone takes the life of another in murder, they are treating the person they murdered as less important and valuable than they are. God instituted the death penalty Himself after the flood when He said, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man.” (Gen. 9:6)

The reason the death penalty is pro-life is that it puts the highest possible value on the life of the person murdered by exacting the life of the person who violated that value by murdering. It’s a strong way to say, “It is not OK for one human being to take the life of another. If you murder, you forfeit your own life because the person you killed is so

valuable.”

Concerning judging: yes, the Bible does say don't judge, but it also commands us to judge rightly. So you have to look at the context of commands such as “Judge not, lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7:1), which is about condemning others for doing the very same thing we do. Judging also means “be discerning” and “make a distinction between right and wrong.” Jesus repeatedly taught men to judge rightly, insisting they “judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). He praised a man who “rightly judged” (Luke 7:43). Jesus also said, “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him, and if he refuses to listen, tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:15,17). Obeying such a command is only possible by making a judgment on one who sins. Jesus' apostle Paul later gave God's command to the church: “Do you not judge those who are within the church? . . . Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:12,13).

Also, the Bible tells us that governments (which are the only entities entitled to carry out capital punishment) are instituted by God for maintaining order: “[F]or [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Rom 13:4)

Thus, I would argue that the Bible supports capital punishment, although it is extremely important to make absolutely sure that only the guilty are executed.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin  
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