

## "BOLD LOVE" -- GOD'S JUSTICE OR UNGODLY REVENGE?

Dan Allender's *Bold Love* is a sequel to his earlier popular book, *The Wounded Heart*. Like its predecessor, *Bold Love* contains some valid biblical principles, but these are intertwined with the erroneous teachings of psychology. Herein lies the danger. Sorting through it all is no easy chore!

A generally sound biblical principle underlies the concept of "bold love." Sometimes, in loving concern for another person, it is necessary to confront that person's sin (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5). "Bold love" bears superficial similarities to the nouthetic counseling approach of Dr. Jay Adams. That approach, which *does not* incorporate the errors of psychology, also advocates a biblical confrontation of sin. However, nouthetic counseling is grounded in the sufficiency of Scripture and repudiates the teachings of modern psychology and the "recovery" movement. It is *those being counseled* who are confronted with their sin. In Allender's system, it is these counselees *who do the confronting*.

Sometimes it is right and biblical to confront another person's sin in order to restore him. However--and this is a major *however*--the specific combination of Allender's teachings is lethal. *Wounded Heart* is a book that focuses on teaching counselees to see themselves as victims. Even though there is some emphasis on repentance for one's own sin, the author also encourages "memory retrieval," an unbiblical practice that can--and all too often does--have disastrous consequences. The "memories" that are "retrieved" *may be false!* Frequently such "recovered memories" involve very serious abuse at the hands of parents during early childhood. *Bold Love* then encourages this person, who now sees himself as a *victim*, to take certain actions aimed at the restoration of the perpetrator. This may well include severing of relationship if the accused (usually a parent) refuses to repent. It is biblical to restore another person who is caught in sin, but one must presuppose that there is *real* sin. Today's psychological counseling frequently accuses and condemns parents without evidence and without any sort of fair trial. (We should remember Who else was accused and condemned without a fair trial: Jesus Christ!) The person being "restored" with "bold love" may in fact be innocent of the charges. Furthermore, we dare not underestimate the power of sin here. The person attempting "bold love" may act out of ungodly, vengeful motives and do tremendous damage in the lives of others. The dangers here multiply in view of the fact that Allender does not stress the role of the *church*, the ordained officers and the church body as a whole, in restoring

individuals caught in sin. "Bold love" is primarily an *individual* matter, without biblical church involvement.

At both ends of the book, the author acknowledges that there is danger inherent in his approach. One concern initially expressed is:

"...the fear of promoting a response to sin that may release people to bash others in the name of loving confrontation."  
(p. 18)

This expression of concern is followed immediately by an example of how one of his own personal friends was cruelly assaulted in the name of "bold love"! (p. 19) Yet "bold love," the author insists, "is not reckless or cruel" (p. 19).

In the epilogue, this clear and present danger is reiterated:

"I am most concerned about our potential to disguise meanness and revenge deceitfully under the cloak of bold love."  
(p. 311)

These concerns are valid, but they are far more serious than the author is willing to acknowledge. Dangers escalate when we consider Allender's basic commitment to psychotherapy.

### **Commitment to Psychological Counseling**

Despite the author's use of some biblical terms, and his numerous Scripture references, a fundamental commitment to psychology underlies the entire work.

At certain points, Allender does express some limited reservations about the modern "recovery" movement with its extreme emphasis on self:

"It might be argued that the self-help mega-industry is today's 'vanity fair,' offering pilgrims one answer or another to ills that will be healed only in heaven. This is a sticky issue, full of acrimony, accusation, and counter-accusation."  
(p. 289)

"Vanity fair" is indeed an excellent term. Allender believes it is possible to "recover" from past abuse *and at the same time* to grow in godliness. Sometimes he seems to acknowledge defects in the psychological approach:

"Theoretically, we do not have to choose one course over the other--that is, working to recover from shame and past wounds or growing in holiness and wisdom. Practically, however, shame and past wounds are more deeply felt than the tug of holiness or the horror of sin. An unreflective consumption of the 'recovery' entrees seems to lead to a riveting focus on one's current situation rather than promoting a passionate desire to know and enjoy God through all eternity." (p. 290)

The focus of "recovery," however, is not merely on one's *current* situation, but is rather heavily concentrated on one's *past* situation. Sometimes that past situation is grounded in "memories" retrieved with the encouragement of a therapist, rather than in reality!

On the same page, Allender also points out that:

"...any approach that cheapens sacrifice and service as basically neurotic and offers a sophisticated justification for self-serving pursuit of pleasure is a violation of the true route to joy." (p. 290)

This is *exactly* what the "recovery" approach does offer, even in modern *Christian* psychology. It "cheapens sacrifice and service," distorting the denial of self that our faith demands. Sometimes the error here is blatant, sometimes subtle, but it is there.

Nevertheless, this admission of self-focus does not prevent the author from insisting that:

"People who are confused, empty, addicted, and full of shame certainly should not avoid a journey of reflection to gain a greater grasp of their inner world." (p. 290)

Allender attempts to walk on both sides of the fence at the same time. There is some biblical warrant for self-examination in the light of God's revealed scriptural standards, but this is far removed from the "journey of reflection" advocated by Allender and so many others. Even though Allender speaks about sin and repentance, in contrast to other authors, there is nonetheless an unbiblical focus on one's own past hurts (real or imagined).

Allender's commitment to the psychological approach is at times too explicit to ignore:

"Physical abuse must be prosecuted, and the sentence should include joining a *therapy group* for violent offenders."  
(p. 279, emphasis added)

"I believe an adulterer should be under the careful and passionate eyes of a mature group of believers and involved with a *therapist* who is as keenly aware of the horrors of depravity as he is of the wonders of dignity."  
(p. 279, emphasis added)

Regarding the drunkard, the sexual abuser, and the criminal:  
"There are too many *treatment centers and therapists* who are capable of providing excellent care for a spouse or friend to feel helpless or alone." (p. 279, emphasis added)

Summing this up, Allender sees psychotherapy as the primary solution to violence, adultery, other sexual sin, drunkenness, and criminal activities. In other words, *sin* has been transformed into *sickness* for which "therapy" or "treatment" is indicated. In spite of his professed emphasis on sin, Allender has not divorced himself from the erroneous medical model.

### **What is Bold Love?**

A few brief definitions are in order before we examine the details of what Allender is teaching. Early in the book he offers this definition:

"Bold love is courageously setting aside our personal agenda to move humbly into the world of others with their well-being in view, willing to risk further pain in our souls, in order to be an aroma of life to some and an aroma of death to others." (p. 19)

It is true that believers are an "aroma of life" to those being saved, and an "aroma of death" to those who are perishing. However, the specific purpose of confronting another person's sin is *to restore him*. This is explicitly in view where the individual is a believer (Galatians 6:1). If he is an unbeliever, the *gospel* is to be presented; if he comes to Christ, there is radical restoration (2 Corinthians 5:17)! The approaches are quite different. As we will see, Allender ignores the crucial role of the *church* in restoring a *believer*.

To his credit, Allender does urge consideration of motives and timing before rushing in to apply "bold love" to another

person's sin (p. 20). He also rightly stresses the experience of God's forgiveness for one's own sin first:

"The energy of life that comes from being forgiven leads to a boldness to pursue and free the offender who is encumbered by destructive, deadening hatred and lust." (p. 109)

The element of spiritual battle is one that the author recognizes. He calls "bold love...a weapon fit for spiritual battle" (p. 132). He notes that our love is not to be passive, but rather moves boldly into another life "to open the door to their repentance" (p. 132). *Again, this assumes that real sin has occurred for which repentance is required!*

Allender says that it is possible to face abuse in the present because of the glorious eternal future we are assured in Christ (citing Romans 8:18). It is Jesus Christ Himself, "the warring lamb of God," who we are to emulate. He is the "model of bold love" (p. 133). *These exhortations are valid assuming that there is real abuse.* Sometimes there is, sometimes there isn't.

"Bold love" also involves overcoming evil with good as outlined in Romans 12:

"Bold love is the tenacious, irrepressible energy to do good in order to surprise and conquer evil." (p. 185)

"Bold love involves feeding those who have done us harm.... The art of love is not merely in feeding your enemy, but in feeding your enemy what he desperately needs. What a person needs may be utterly foreign to what he wants." (p. 208)

However, determining what another person really needs is a task that requires spiritual maturity, prayer, knowledge of Scripture, and knowledge of that person. God intends His *church* to be involved in that process.

The author assumes that his "bold love" is contrary to much of the self-help teaching of modern society:

"Bold love is not a reasonable idea that some self-help guru is likely to promote or use to attract a large audience. It is the intrusion of the naked, scandalous gospel into human relationships." (p. 207)

But Allender does attract large audiences. Promoting the sufficiency of Scripture, however, attracts only small audiences.

The size of one's audience does not determine truth. However, the way of Jesus Christ is narrow and He informed us that few will find it. We must carefully examine any teaching that sweeps through society, and then through the church, attracting large audiences. Considering Allender's overall approach, it *could* appeal to a combination of blame-shifting and sinful pride to *first see oneself as a victim* and then move on to "boldly love" the perpetrator. No wonder that God provided for His *church* to be involved in the restoration process.

Allender does not anticipate a joyful response from the one who is "boldly loved," but rather:

"In many cases, bold love will unnerve, offend, hurt, disturb, and compel the one who is loved to deal with the internal disease that is robbing him and others of joy." (p. 208)

Confrontation of sin certainly does not always meet with a cooperative response. The other may, as noted in Matthew 18, "refuse to listen." However, a person may well be unnerved, offended, hurt, and disturbed by a *false accusation*. The author does not adequately caution his readers about making certain of the *accuracy* of their accusations against others, prior to initiating "bold love." Furthermore, Allender reads a great deal into the command to "do good" to one's enemy by giving him something to eat and drink. Following that command does not always *necessarily* involve making bold judgments about the nature of that person's sin and how it should be handled.

While some valid biblical principles are surely involved in the general concept of "bold love," the dangers are far too serious to ignore.

### **Justice, Vengeance, and Revenge**

One of the gravest dangers in *Bold Love* emerges in the author's view of *revenge*. Some truth about God's justice is stated, but it is mixed with teaching about revenge that is highly misleading at best, and potentially very damaging to personal relationships. Just prior to beginning his chapter concerning revenge, even Allender warns that:

"...we need to look closely at something that keeps our hearts from desiring restoration--the even stronger desire for revenge." (p. 182)

He acknowledges here that the desire for revenge *prevents* us from seeking restoration of another person. A similar warning is issued a few pages earlier:

"The desire for change in another that is essentially for my pleasure, convenience, or vindication will lead away from restoration and will not deepen my love for beauty or hunger for heaven." (p. 173)

Godly motives, to be sure, are crucial in confronting the sin of another person. Sometimes Allender is reasonably biblical, but other times his teachings could all too easily encourage ungodly attitudes and actions. He raises the concern that his definition of love might well sound too much like hatred or vengeance, nevertheless:

"What may appear to be unloving--in fact, cruel--may be a passionate wounding that is designed to heal (Proverbs 20:30)." (p. 185)

He notes also that the reverse may occur, when hatred is disguised by outwardly "loving" actions. While it is true that appearances may be deceiving in such cases, alarms sound when we read the following:

"Revenge is a wondrous and lovely passion that ought to be embraced as a trusted friend who offers the strength of his arm in order to take the journey. I would go so far as to say that without the desire for revenge, we will lack the necessary energy to end well our long journey of life." (p. 186)

Revenge is not a "wondrous and lovely passion"! Yet Allender also states:

"It is effete and self-righteous to pretend that you are above the desire for revenge. Many Christians feel guilt at the discovery of such a desire in their hearts, and they assume the desire is dangerous.... The truth is, however, that the desire for revenge is far from being merely a fallen human emotion; it is a reflection of the purest longing for justice." (p. 197)

It may indeed be self-righteous to *pretend* to be above any desire for revenge, but that does not mean that such a desire isn't dangerous or sinful! The author underestimates human sin here. Sometimes when *sinful* man reflects the image of God, the result is

particularly heinous. God's pure desire for justice and righteousness is reflected as man's evil desire to seek vengeance for all the wrong reasons. Man was created to *worship*, also, but as a sinner he worships many idolatrous false gods. Often in sinful man we find counterfeit imitations of the pure image-bearing qualities that would exist apart from sin. Theologian John Murray, speaking of man as the image of God, puts it well when he says:

"The higher is our conception of man in his intrinsic essence, the greater must be the gravity of his offense in rebellion and enmity against God. If we think of depravity as enmity against God, the more aggravated must be that enmity when it is man in the image of God who vents it. And the more total must be that depravity when a being of such character is the subject of it. In a word, the greater the potentiality for sin, the more aggravated and virulent will be its exercise. Man conceived of as in the image of God, so far from toning down the doctrine of total depravity, points rather to its gravity, intensity, and irreversibility. Finally, it is the fact that man is in the image of God that constitutes the unspeakable horror of eternal perdition."<sup>1</sup>

The human desire for revenge may well be diametrically opposed to God's pure justice!

Allender admits that human vengeance *may* "involve utterly impure motives" and thus be wrong, but he also states that "if vengeance is inherently perverse, then God is wrong for claiming it as His domain" (p. 186). He notes the error of assuming that justice and mercy are always opposed to one another (p. 186). Certainly *God's* justice and mercy co-exist in perfect harmony, but Allender's general reasoning is faulty. Man is the image of God and is called to imitate Him. Sometimes that includes the administration of justice, as indicated in Genesis 9:6 and Romans 13:4. However, there are certain actions and attitudes that are reserved to God alone. God may rightly exalt Himself and demand worship; *man* may never do so. When man does administer justice, he is to do so as a rightly appointed agent of God, as a government official, a parent, or an ordained church leader. (Of these three roles, *only* the government is specifically authorized to *avenge*.) He is not to seek vengeance purely on his own individual initiative. There are serious dangers in Allender's approach. One such danger is the confusion of key terms: revenge, vengeance, and justice. We will examine the biblical use

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, *Collected Writings, Volume 2*, p. 38-39.



of these words and compare with Allender's teachings as we proceed.

Allender attempts to make a distinction between revenge that is "legitimate" and that which is "illegitimate":

**Illegitimate Revenge:** "The key to illicit revenge is making someone pay--now!--for a real or perceived crime without any desire for reconciliation. Illegitimate revenge is assessing and executing final judgment today without working to see beauty restored in the one who perpetrated the harm."  
(p. 187)

"Vengeance sought today shifts the offense from the one who committed the sin to the one who is handling the sin with even greater sin." (p. 195)

**Legitimate Revenge:** "Revenge involves a desire for justice.... It is as inherent to the human soul as a desire for loveliness." (p. 187)

"I am given the opportunity to put a dent in evil today."  
(p. 197, citing Romans 9:20-21)

But is anything truly *godly* "inherent to the human soul," in view of man's total depravity? The gravity of man's sin cannot be ignored or underestimated here.

Revenge in *general* is:

"...in part, a desire to see someone pay for the wrongs that have been done to us...a symbol of what is ultimately required of us all--our life as payment for sin." (p. 187)

But where in Scripture are we required to desire that another person "pay for the wrongs...done to us"? We can and must forego that desire, knowing as believers that we are not required to make payment for our own sins, because Christ has fully satisfied God's justice. We also can and must trust that *God* will ultimately bring about His justice. Allender acknowledges that our own forgiveness should compel us to seek the restoration of those who sin against us (p. 191), yet his teaching is confused and inconsistent. He mixes up justice, revenge, and vengeance. His inconsistency can be seen when we compare the previous quotation with this one:

"An enemy is anyone who intentionally or unwittingly harms you for their gain. Intentional harm involves a conscious commitment to make the other person pay and usually is clothed in the language of justice or love." (p. 214)

Does Allender--or doesn't he--believe it is right to *require payment* from someone who has sinned against you? He wavers in his answer.

Allender considers "the heartbeat of biblical revenge" to be rooted in the destruction of evil and giving birth to good (p. 189). The key is restoration rather than merely "getting even" (p. 187). The goal of restitution, or requiring payment for the sin, is restoration (p. 190). At the same time, however:

"Vengeance, in its final form, is a clearing away of evil so that beauty may flourish unencumbered by the weeds of sin." (p. 191)

This *final* vengeance, of course, is God's work at the close of history. But Allender believes that we can expect to share in the avenging of evil, and that we ought to anticipate that participation *now*:

"...we are clearly told in the Bible to not repay evil for evil because vengeance is God's prerogative and not ours. Although that fact cannot be disputed or ignored, it seems to lead many to assume that we are not part of God's ultimate plan for vengeance nor free to anticipate its arrival." (p. 192)

Allender goes on to raise a key question: "Are we actually to practice a form of revenge that anticipates the final day?" (p. 192). He is on shaky ground when he clearly answers *yes*. He speaks of Christians getting in line to kick Satan in the face, and states that:

"The day will come when revenge is fully possible, and our heart is to yearn for that moment." (p. 194)

Let's look momentarily at Revelation 6:10, where martyred saints await God's final justice:

"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

Even in glory, where God's people are no longer able to sin, these saints await the action of God. At this point, apart from sin, a pure longing for execution of justice is possible. But again, these saints are in a glorified state, and we are at the end of time. There is no justification here for us, still sinful as we are, to actively seek revenge. The biblical references concerning revenge regularly emphasize God's absolute prerogative. For example: Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 32:35, 41, 43; Isaiah 1:24, 34:8, 35:4, 47:3, 61:2; Jeremiah 5:9 & 29, 9:9; Ezekiel 25:12-15; Psalm 79:10; Micah 5:15; Nahum 1:2. It is God who avenges the evil done toward those who belong to Him, His people. He is holy, righteous, and just. On occasion in Scripture, a godly person prays to God to bring about vengeance upon his enemies: Lamentations 3:30, Jeremiah 15:15, Psalm 149:7.

It is right to desire that God's perfect justice will ultimately prevail. There are times when, as believers, we desire justice on behalf of the poor, oppressed, and afflicted persons in our sinful world. There are children who are abused, others being aborted; we must act for their protection. It is right to desire that God's name and God's honor be protected. But we are required to act *without sin* and to leave *vengeance* to God alone. The teachings of *Bold Love* venture into forbidden, dangerous territory and too easily foster sinful revenge, in spite of Allender's distinctions and warnings. Part of the problem, too, is in the focus of psychological counseling on past childhood hurts. This focus is one which encourages a self-centered, ungodly revenge rather than a godly seeking of justice for *others* who currently are oppressed and cannot defend themselves. And again, far too many accusations against parents, in today's psychological culture, are based on "recovered memories" rather than according to factual evidence and biblical standards of testimony. This can hardly be overemphasized.

**Romans 12:9-21** cannot, of course, be ignored. Allender deals with it at length, explaining that *final* revenge is left to God for two key reasons:

"First, it implies that I am to step out of God's way, because I am not as good at executing final revenge as He is.... We naturally tend to limit the extent of our desire for vengeance on the basis of an innate knowledge that we deserve the same. Consequently, final vengeance taken today is anemic and puny." (p. 192)

"A second reason why we are to 'leave room' is our inability to see who will and who will not trust in the death and resurrection of Christ." (p. 195)

We finite humans are not even *able* to execute the type of final vengeance that God will one day pour out on His enemies. But Allender's reasoning is unbiblical when he states that our own sinfulness works to restrain the execution of sufficient revenge. This reflects a seriously weakened understanding of sin in the human heart. Sinful human revenge is often far out of proportion to the perceived crime, and often based on faulty standards not grounded in Scripture. The second reason above is far more accurate. Christ has fully satisfied God's justice on the cross, and we do not know, in the case of an *unbeliever* who has sinned against us, whether he is ultimately included in that atoning work.

**Imprecatory Psalms.** Allender raises an interesting question when he asks how we are to pray these prayers (psalms) *against* those who have hurt us (p. 198). First, he asks *who* is the ultimate target:

"Who do we want to destroy--the private in the army of evil or the mastermind of the entire war?" (p. 199)

But rather than focusing on that mastermind, Allender takes us back to the "private in the army of evil" when he says:

"The psalmist, then, can teach us what it means to pray against the one we desire to see trapped, bent over, and blotted out from life forever.... It is appropriate to pray for a specific person to be broken, humbled, and brought low in order to see their evil destroyed." (p. 199)

"Repentance will catch the sinner in his foolishness, break the back of arrogance, and blot out the path of death. It is what the psalmist prayed for in wishing harm on his enemy." (p. 200)

Not so fast! Allender reads his psychological ideas onto the pages of Scripture. First, we must *again* emphasize that the author advocates this type of "prayer" in situations where therapeutically "recovered memories" form the primarily (or only) basis for accusation. Before praying for a specific person to be "broken, humbled, and brought low," it is wise to be certain that the grievous sin is *real*, not a product of erroneous psychotherapeutic techniques.

Furthermore, these particular psalms were written at a time when the writer's physical life was endangered. These psalms do not come from the pen of a person in therapy who suddenly "remembers" that he was abused at an early age, or even a person who actually did suffer serious sin at the hands of a parent. The tone of these psalms is indeed puzzling to the believer, who has been taught to love his enemies. Meredith Kline, Old Testament professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, helps us understand the concept of *intrusion ethics* found in Scripture. He points out that the ethical pattern of the Old Testament includes "anticipations of God's judgment curse on the reprobate and of His saving grace in blessing His elect."<sup>2</sup> The imprecatory psalms are best understood in terms of concern for God's honor, not the welfare of man:

"The Psalmist expresses hatred of others and prays for their destruction not in a bitter spirit of personal vindictiveness but out of concern for the honor of God's name, which had been despised, and from love of God's kingdom, which had been opposed in that enmity displayed by the objects of the imprecations toward the Psalmist as one who represented that kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

Remember, specifically, that it was David who authored these particular Psalms. God had made an eternal covenant with David (2 Samuel 7), promising to bring the Messiah into the world through his line of descendants. Had David's enemies prevailed, the line to Christ would have been destroyed. Good reason to pray! There is no justification here for praying such imprecatory prayers against one's parents, *even if* they have truly sinned against us.

**Requiring justice of another believer.** Allender asks what it means to require justice, or restitution, from another Christian, and whether it is legitimate to do so (p. 188). First, he notes that not all professions of faith are genuine:

"A person who has made a confession of faith but shows no heart for repentance or love does not bear the marks of a believer." (p. 188, citing Matthew 7:21-23)

There are indeed persons who enter the church but are unbelievers. They may come to saving faith later, or they may eventually leave; in the latter case, Scripture calls these persons "apostates."

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Kline, p. 160.

Repentance is one evidence of saving faith. But *again*, suppose a parent is *falsely accused* of child abuse years in the past, and thus *rightly refuses to repent because he is innocent*? Allender makes no allowance for such a scenario. The person who is falsely accused faces a serious trial, and like other believers facing trials, is required to respond righteously. (Surely not an easy battle, particularly when the accuser is your own child!)

Allender goes on to give his reasons for believing that it is right to require justice from another Christian:

"...the desire for restitution or justice is still legitimate. The desire for justice is derived from our hunger for order, righteousness, and beauty. It is the yearning to see true beauty and life restored to the person who is entrapped by the ugly weeds of his arrogance and harm." (p. 189)

Willingness to make restitution, where that can be done, is surely evidence that genuine repentance has occurred. But is the offended person given license to *demand* it? Furthermore, the most critical omission on this issue is Allender's failure to stress the necessary *church involvement* where sin has occurred in the body of Christ (Matthew 18:15-20). Many offenses can be settled one-to-one, privately. Others require the involvement of one or two others. Repeated refusal to listen may necessitate the entire church body becoming involved in the restoration process. Eventually, the person may have to be functionally treated as an unbeliever. (This does *not*, however, mean that *all contact* is cut off. More later when we discuss Allender's "excommunication" teaching.) We must proceed with caution, prayer, and God's truth when confronting another person's sin!

**Confronting your own sin first.** Based on Matthew 7:1-5, this is basically a good emphasis. Interesting, Allender says that:

"Our first warning is not to judge unless we are willing to be measured by the same criterion." (p. 201)

This warning should be applied to the "recovered memory" syndrome. The person who accuses another, based solely on retrieved "memories" rather than fact, ought to soberly consider whether he would be willing to answer accusations based on the same criterion. Probably not!

Allender goes on to cite the biblical warning about removing the "log" from one's own eye before seeking to remove the "speck"

for another's eye (p. 201). He cautions against assuming that you are *always* the one at fault, and against the assumption that it is impossible to love another until the log has wholly disappeared (p. 201-202). We would never become involved in the sins of others if we waited for total *perfection* in ourselves.

The emphasis here on one's own sin is certainly biblical, reminding us that we are confronted with a *mixture* of truth and error that requires much untangling.

**Revenge and vengeance in the New Testament.** The NT Greek for *vengeance* or *revenge* is *ekdikesis*, with the related verb *to avenge* being *ekdikeyo* and noun *avenger* being *ekdikos*. The concept here is one that cannot be separated from the idea of *punishment*, in addition to legal justice. It is *God* who is ultimately the rightful avenger (1 Thessalonians 1:8 & 4:6, Revelation 6:10 & 19:2, Hebrews 10:30, Romans 12:19); man may *only* take that role when specifically appointed by God (Romans 13:4, 2 Corinthians 7:5 & 10:6, 1 Peter 2:14). There are different connotations, depending on whether *God's justice* is in view or *man's own revenge*. One Greek lexicon offers this definition for *revenge*:

"...to repay harm with harm, on the assumption that the initial harm was unjustified and that retribution is therefore called for."<sup>4</sup>

The term may also mean "to give justice to someone who has been wrong," as in Luke 18:3, 7,<sup>5</sup> or "to punish, on the basis of what is rightly deserved."<sup>6</sup> But note carefully that God alone may repay "harm with harm," except as He designated agents to do so. Allender acknowledges this, but confuses the issue with his dangerous teachings about *personal, individual* attempts to bring about justice...or revenge. Closely related are his teachings concerning hatred.

### **Hatred: Who, When, and Why?**

Allender speaks of hatred in two key contexts. He believes that man's hatred of *God* prevents love. Later, he focuses on what he believes to be a righteous hatred of both sin *and* the sinner.

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<sup>4</sup> Louw & Nida, p. 497 (article 39.33).

<sup>5</sup> Louw & Nida, p. 557 (article 56.35).

<sup>6</sup> Louw & Nida, p. 490 (article 38.8).

**Hatred of God.** Allender believes that "love is derailed when our heart is turned against God" (p. 46). Freud comes on-stage to haunt us:

"...our anger toward God is suppressed, denied, and redefined." (p. 46)

"Hatred of God and others is usually labeled as something more palatable to our human sensibilities. For that reason (and many others), the good news of the gospel seems mildly pleasant, and often irrelevant." (p. 65)

"Hatred can be reshaped as confusion, hurt, indifference, irritation, anger, or contempt." (p. 50)

While Allender rightly notes the issue of serving a false god (an idol) he continues to incorporate a Freudian view that clouds the issue and masks responsibility:

"...when I am serving another master, I may also ignore, deny, or suppress my hatred so that I am not aware of the raw rebellion pulsating through my veins." (p. 51)

Allender is convinced that even Christians may hate God:

"...could a regenerate heart have even love for God crowded out by self-interest, fear of others, anger, rebellion, and hatred? I believe that it is not only possible, but the very reason why most of us love so poorly." (p. 46)

The Christian, says Allender, may not feel his hatred for God (p. 50). Rather than crediting Freud for his view that hatred of God is suppressed, *even by believers*, he cites Romans 1:18. But that verse explicitly refers to *unbelievers* who suppress the truth about the very existence of God. Another Scripture referenced is Romans 7:22-23:

"Paul makes a clear distinction between his inner being, which delights in the law of God, and his members, which wage against truth and entrap him in the enslavement of sin."  
(p. 47)

Believers do continue to sin while on this earth. Their sanctification is a progressive work of God's grace, empowered by His indwelling Spirit. But all too often, psychologists quote Romans 7 apart from the context of Romans 6 and 8. Looking closely at Romans 8, particularly verses 7-8, it is clearly the



*unbeliever* who is hostile toward God, not the *Christian*. The contrast could not be more explicit. Romans 7:22-23 *does not say* that the believer *hates God*, only that he struggles with sin. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the "I" in Romans 7 is Paul *before* his conversion to Christianity. The transition from Judaism to Christianity is a key issue in the book of Romans, one not to be overlooked here. With this in mind, it is all the more critical to closely consider context.

Part of the confusion arises from Allender's definition of sin. He *defines* sin as a hatred of God (p. 53) that includes foolish attempts at self-sufficiency:

"Sin, or hatred of God, is a defiant movement, sometimes unwitting and other times quite conscious, which refuses to depend on God for His direction and strength." (p. 53)

"...all foolishness, demandingness, and arrogance is, at core, hatred of God." (p. 55)

Note again Allender's belief that such sinful rebellion may be at the *unconscious* level. This emphasis is reiterated:

Sometimes..."our opposition to God is not a conscious act of rebellion, but an unwitting resolve to take care of our pain in our own strength." (p. 53)

It is sinful to trust in man (self or others) rather than to trust in the Lord. However, Allender's focus on the *unconscious*, and on "taking care of our own pain," is one that muddies the waters concerning personal responsibility before God.

It is Allender's limited definition of sin ("hatred of God") that enables the conclusions drawn concerning Romans 7. Of course, hatred of God is sinful, but the concept of sin is broader. Sin is a moral evil, seated in the heart of man, that is always related to God and His law. Scripture defines sin as *lawlessness* (1 John 3:4). The believer may break God's law at times, and he may struggle with his attitude toward God, but as a regenerate person his heart is fundamentally inclined toward love of God. Allender does acknowledge that the Christian is not God's enemy and that his "hatred of God" is a temporary state followed at some point by conviction and repentance (p. 51, 55). However, he fails to give full recognition to the *radical* difference between believer and unbeliever. That distinction will become even more critical when we examine Allender's categorization of sinners and his recommendations for implementing "bold love."

There are two key contexts where Allender believes that "hatred of God" is easily incited. The first of these is the "anguish of choice," which "often exposes our fury at God" (p. 57). Although people fight for their autonomy, this author believes that making choices is generally an unpleasant chore (p. 56):

"No wonder people flock to authoritarian and persuasive leaders--they relieve the anguish of choice--or to approaches of sanctification that lay out the rules for recovery and the stages for sanctification." (p. 57)

According to Allender, God hasn't made it any easier. In His Word He:

"...tells me to live righteously, but that only seems to help clarify a few major decision points in life.... God's requirements seem so demanding in light of the resources He offers for knowing what to do and how to do it. The burden of choice seems unfair." (p. 58)

This is flatly *wrong!* God has provided, in His Word, *everything* pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4). His righteous law is far more specific and adequate than Allender admits. Perhaps he would do well to study Psalm 119, where the psalmist so often thanks God for His righteous commandments. There is indeed *some* need to think and apply His Word to specific situations, but it's not so vague as this author would have it.

Allender is also in error here about the heart of man. The Bible does not present the "anguish of choice" as the fundamental problem of man. Go back to the Garden a moment. The first man and woman had a simple *command*, not an anguished "choice." They disobeyed that *command*, wrongly seeking autonomy and independence. There was a "choice" only in the sense of their *ability*, at that point, to either obey or disobey. Scripture defines sin as *lawlessness*, as noted earlier. Man *disobeys* God's law; that is his sin. Apart from regeneration, he is both *unable* and *unwilling* to obey God. Having to make choices is not the key problem!

The other context eliciting "hatred of God," according to Allender, is one of injustice:

"It is the daily horrors of living in an uncertain and unjust world that fuel our hatred toward God and deepen our passionate desire to take life into our own hands." (p. 64)

"The unfairness of life really does cause my feet to slip and my foothold to be lost for a time." (p. 61)

Allender sees two potential responses to injustice:

"It is possible to face injustice and suffering and work for its demise as a response to the gospel...or injustice can be fought as a screaming protest to God's silent inactivity." (p. 63)

He rightly notes here that "the law of love is not mitigated by the abuser's failure, irrespective of the damage perpetrated" (p. 61).

The prophet Habakkuk is cited, along with Psalm 73:1-5 and Job. These are certainly excellent passages for serious study, in order to respond in a godly manner to life's injustices. These biblical writers demonstrate a fundamental reverence for God, even in their passionate questioning. Allender also notes the pouring out of Jeremiah's heart in Jeremiah 20:7-8, stating that:

"The cold or hot heart that wrestles with God is far more pleasing to Him than the one that slowly cools toward Him in tepid pretense." (p. 52)

Some *caution* is clearly needed here. Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Job and Asaph the psalmist all remain reverent as well as passionate. They waited on the Lord and His answer. They continued their faithful ministries, despite their intense wrestling in prayer. Certainly the believer may be honest with God and pour out his heart, but *anger toward God* is sin. It isn't entirely clear where Allender draws the line between *hatred* of God and *anger* toward Him.

In addition, Allender's own wrestling with God takes on tones of profanity that are simply unacceptable in a Christian counselor's writing. After describing a particularly tragic story he had read in the newspaper, he describes his reaction:

"I read the story and I screamed. My tears were angry and cruel. I audibly shouted, 'Good job, God. Damn you.'" (p. 62)

The tears are understandable. Compassion for the victims is appropriate and biblical. But that last phrase...is never a godly

response. Allender would have better reserved this one for private repentance, instead of public disclosure.

There are two primary problems with the "hatred of God" teachings that Allender puts forth. One is the failure to distinguish *clearly* between believer and unbeliever. The other is his incorporation of Freudian concepts so that sin is relegated to the level of the "unconscious." This Freudianism poses grave concerns where an adult child accuses a parent. The parent is placed in a "catch 22" situation. If he denies the charges, he can too easily be accused of *unconscious* "hatred of God." Freud's twisted theories about the inner man do enormous damage and need to be *eliminated* from our interpersonal relationships.

**Hatred of Sin and the Sinner.** Allender may catch us off guard with his teaching in this area:

"We often hear the biblical-sounding phrase, 'God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.' The dilemma is that sin cannot be abstracted from the sinner. Without the blood of Christ, what is sent to hell--the sin or the sinner?" (p. 148)

Allender directs this hatred first toward *self*:

"We are to join God in His hatred of both the sinner and the sin, beginning with the sinner with whom we are best acquainted--ourselves." (p. 149)

Even the *Christian*, according to this author, is sometimes *hated* by God:

"If He hates the internal working of sin, not just the external manifestation of sin, then in a sense, He hates me because I am, at times, haughty and arrogant." (p. 150)

Allender equates this *hatred* of the believer with God's *discipline*:

"Discipline, though it often feels like a judgment that exiles and abandons us, is a labor of love that beautifies the heart through the disruptive touch of a severe mercy." (p. 150)

Learning to hate sin and the sinner, he teaches, will strengthen our appreciation of God's grace:

"Our hatred of evil in others will deepen our hatred of what is ugly within us and, in turn, deepen our wonder of a God who forgives much." (p. 151)

Now...to untangle this combination of truth and error!

There is certainly theological truth in the statement that sin cannot be abstracted from the sinner. Does God love the reprobate, the person who ultimately is sent to eternal destruction? Even well educated theologians argue over this one. There is a sense in which God loves the reprobate, at least for now, but in eternity...it would be difficult to claim that He does.

We can commend Allender for daring to differ with the popular self-love, self-esteem teachings running rampant through the church today. Scripture does sometimes speak of us *loathing ourselves* for our sin. Nowhere are we commanded to love ourselves, contrary to the teachings of most modern psychologists.

But can we agree that *God actually hates the Christian* when he sins? Does His discipline equal *hatred*? Hardly. Scripture affirms that God demonstrated His *love* by sending Christ to die for us *while we were yet sinners* (Romans 5:8)! Hebrews 12 informs us that God's discipline is grounded in His *love*, that He disciplines those He *loves*. Allender must redefine the term "hatred" in order to defend his views, but nowhere does he offer a clear definition. Thus his teachings are highly confusing.

Is it true that hating the sin in others will deepen our hatred of *our own* sin? Not necessarily. Rather, such "hatred" may work to blind us to our own sin. Romans 2:1ff warns against the attempt to escape God's judgment by judging others for sins that we practice in our own lives. Allender underestimates the deceitfulness of sin here.

To his credit, Allender focuses often on the need to examine one's own sin before confronting sin in others. At the same time, his counsel to *hate both sin and sinner* is potentially disastrous. Scripture exhorts us to *love* those who persecute us (Matthew 4:43-48), to *hate evil* and cling to what is good (Romans 12:9). The danger in Allender's teaching escalates when we again reflect on the *combination* of teachings that he offers. His focus is on adult sons and daughters who have supposedly been abused by parents. His counsel to *hate the sinner* becomes license to *hate the parent* who perpetrated abuse. If "recovered memories" form

the basis for such hatred, the "hated sinner" may in fact be innocent. *Beware!*

### **The "Labels" of "Love"**

We are now ready to examine Allender's method of "overcoming evil with good." He begins with "labels" designed to facilitate "bold love." Based on certain key nouns found in Proverbs, Allender has designed a system for categorizing other sinners, particularly those who have abused you. He explains why:

"The premise is that different kinds of 'good gifts' are required to impact different kinds of people with truth and life. There are dangers involved in any labeling of persons, but there is some legitimacy for dividing humanity into these three categories." (p. 229)

This is highly questionable. We will soon be looking more closely at the specific categories, and the underlying Hebrew words. For now, however, the question must be raised as to whether Scripture actually allows us to *divide all of humanity* into these three categories: the evil person, the fool, and the simple-minded or "normal sinner."

Allender notes that various types of labeling are used for different purposes. Demographics is one such system. Another involves "psychological categories," which "at first glance, do a better job of guiding our understanding of human motivation" (p. 230). However, Allender acknowledges key limitations here:

"But psychological information usually misses another dimension that is crucial in the process of categorization, and that is what a person does with God." (p. 230)

Indeed it does, since the major systems of psychology are grounded in atheism! An individual's relationship with God certainly *is* important. *But are we qualified to make judgments of another person's relationship with God--judgments that may lead to actions with dire consequences, such as terminating all contact with close family members?*

Allender acknowledges that "all categories are imprecise and fuzzy" (p. 230), that there is overlap as well as imprecision in labeling (p. 231). He should have hesitated right there, but instead, he forges ahead and assumes that his particular categories will enable us to make *critical judgments about the hearts of other people*:

"A label simply cannot tell us what someone will do, *although it may help us assess something about their heart.*"  
(p. 231, emphasis added)

Labels are considered useful because "they help us to reflect on the *central, core passions that drive divergent human behavior.*" (p. 231, emphasis added)

In Scripture, such discerning of the inner man is reserved to *God*, using His Spirit and Word (Jeremiah 17:10; Hebrews 4:12-13), *not the psychologist* or other persons!

Allender does provide a few cautions about categorization. For example, many develop stereotypes in order to avoid the "diversity and complexity of human existence" (p. 231). This use of labels is admitted to be destructive, but would Allender recognize or acknowledge similar dangers inherent in his own system? Another danger noted is that definitions may be too clear, too rigid, locking others in to a lifetime identity and brushing aside the complexity of life (p. 232). Allender urges the reader to remain open to revision after placing a label on another person, knowing that perception may be distorted by one's own sin (p. 232).

These cautions are valid, yet Allender moves on, unfortunately, to promote his system of categories. Each of his three labels involves very serious charges against others. Scripture (particularly Proverbs) does use these terms, but there is tremendous overlap, and there are *other* additional terms utilized (the sluggard, the mocker, and others). Scripture recognizes far more human complexity than does Allender. Even more dangerous, however, are the actions he recommends, based on the application of these labels.

**Definitions: The Evil Person.** The first "label" Allender applies is that of "evil." A quick survey of Proverbs shows us that the term *evil*, or *wicked*, is frequently contrasted with *righteous* or *upright*. The author admits a couple of difficulties in clearly defining evil. One problem is the fact that *all* of us are capable of evil actions (p. 233), and furthermore, evil is so very common (p. 234). However, Allender says that evil people:

"...are driven by a self-interest that is so heartless, conscious, and cruel that it delights in stealing from others the lifeblood of their soul." (p. 233)

Additional defining phrases demonstrate Allender's basic thesis that the evil person lacks empathy, passion, and feeling for others:

"profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness" (p. 234)

"unmoved by the inner world of the other...unfeeling"  
(p. 234)

"no respect for boundaries" (p. 234)

"unaffected by exposure, so is consequently shameless"  
(p. 234)

"seems to delight in stripping away purpose, individuality,  
and vitality" (p. 234)

"sees the other as nothing more than a service to itself"  
(p. 235)

"devoid of conscience...seared conscience" (p. 237)

"does not succumb to the normal give and take of loneliness  
and fear of rejection" (p. 237)

"uses arrogance and mockery to escape being shamed" (p. 238)

Avoiding emotional involvement with others, and at the same time taking control over others, the "evil" person thus achieves a great deal of power, with seemingly absolute freedom, particularly from pain (p. 237).

The *mockery* of an evil man may involve "biting sarcasm" or "vicious cynicism," or perhaps be more subtle (p. 238). Furthermore:

"Mockery is any heartless accusation that lacks tenderness and a desire for reconciliation. Evil uses its ability to wound and destroy to terrify those under its control." (p. 240)

The "evil" person, furthermore, is one who uses trust in order to *destroy* the other person's ability to trust; he strips away hope and keeps others in bondage (p. 241). He expects "unearned devotion that borders on worship--a form of sacrifice that requires the loss of one's will, mind, and soul" (p. 240). According to Allender, "evil has a keen smell for false gods" (p. 244). The "evil" person is able "to cut through our defense to the fragile, lonely parts of our heart" (p. 239). He recognizes a fearful heart and knows just how the other can most effectively be shamed (p. 244).

Arrogance is yet another key characteristic of the "evil" individual:



"It is more than self-sufficiency; it is the boastful claim that one's life is a byproduct of a personal fiat to be powerful and successful. An arrogant person, at core, hates God (Psalm 74:10)." (p. 238)

"An arrogant heart is hardened to its own sin and blinds the hearts of those it controls." (p. 239)

Freud is ever present to confuse the ugly picture that has just been painted. Evil, says Allender, is not always so obvious but rather it is:

"...deceitfully subtle...it often portrays itself as helpful, open, kind, generous, long-suffering." (p. 240)

We do know from Scripture that our arch enemy, the devil, is a master of deceit--and that his messengers also disguise themselves as angels of light. However, there is extreme need for caution here. Allender advises some rather radical measures, such as cutting off the relationship and *exposing* the person's wicked ways, once the label "evil" has been placed on another individual. This is true even when that "evil" person is a parent or other relative. It's biblical to confront sin, but it must be done according to *biblical* procedures (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5). Those biblical procedures do not involve making the distinctions that Allender makes, nor do they line up with Allender's plan of attack. For example, the author advises that you *not* attempt to talk to the evil person about his sin, while Scripture specifically says to go to the one who has sinned against you and rebuke him privately (Luke 17:3; Matthew 18:15).

Still another concern emerges when we consider Allender's assessment of the "evil" person's most probable response to rebuke:

"When the victim protests and exposes the abuse, he will accuse the victim of being too sensitive, emotional, troubled, or unreasonable. He portrays himself as the real victim, cruelly misunderstood and falsely accused." (p. 236)

The Bible lays out procedures for involving *others*, first one or two, and eventually the entire church body (Matthew 18:15-20). The victim is not *alone* with the situation. Additionally, the "memory retrieval" therapy promoted by Allender can encourage *accusations that really are false!* The accused parent, understandably upset by such accusations, is now labeled an "evil"

person. Allender's system doesn't adequately provide for this possibility.

The *response of the victim* is a criteria for application of the "evil" label:

"If one is in a relationship with an evil person for long, the signs of death will begin to show--anemia (a loss of self, vitality, and strength), despair (a loss of desire and hope), and disorientation (a loss of direction and purpose)." (p. 240)

This statement only further confuses the issue and places responsibility where it shouldn't be placed. Such "signs of death" reflect the condition of the person's heart, his *response* to life (including relationships). It is unjust to utilize these "signs" to place the very serious label "evil" on another individual. This amounts to judging the heart of one person according to "signs" that are present in *another* person. That is dangerous business!

What does Scripture tell us about the "evil" person? As indicated earlier, Proverbs often contrasts the evil/wicked man with the righteous/upright. The frequently used Hebrew word *resha*, translated "wicked," is indicative of guilt before God. The character of the wicked is set in contrast to the holy, righteous character of God. This person does indeed entrap and plot against others, threatening their communities and bringing sorrow to their families. The question here is not whether the evil person exists, or even whether Allender has accurately described him. Allender has indeed given us some accurate, scriptural definitions, although the focus is slanted toward human relationships rather than emphasizing the person's separation from God and his unregenerate state. The question is whether we humans can discern the *heart* of another so as to label him "evil," and then proceed to sever a relationship or take other drastic actions that are not clearly taught by Scripture. Combined with his general focus on victimization, and his "memory retrieval" techniques, this teaching is likely to inflict huge, unnecessary damage on individuals and families--people who already have sufficient struggles with sin.

**Definitions: The Fool.** This second category, according to Allender's labeling, is "what the book of Proverbs calls a fool--angry, arrogant, and self-centered" (p. 255).

The *anger* of the fool is a key feature, directed either toward self or others (p. 273). (Anger toward self is questionable!) It is "far more severe than appropriate" (p. 258), it's a "hot anger" that "comes quickly and fades as quickly" (p. 259), along with being repetitive, such that people are kept away and the "inner ache" of the fool is subdued (p. 259).

The *arrogance* of the fool is revealed in the love of his own voice:

"What seems to thrill the soul of the fool more than drugs, sex, food, or any other quick-filling addiction is the sound of his own voice." (p. 262, citing Proverbs 12:15 and 18:2)

Hatred of discipline accompanies this arrogance (p. 264, citing Proverbs 15:5). The fool dislikes the painful path to growth, instead demanding quick relief and falling for "counterfeit solutions" (p. 263). His outbursts of rage may be followed by all sorts of frenzied activities, such as:

"...demanding sex that night, secretly going out to buy a pornographic magazine, bingeing on food, drinking too much alcohol, or furiously reading his Bible." (p. 269)

(Note how *reading his Bible* is casually lumped with several sinful activities [although sex is appropriate within marriage]. We don't have time to dwell on this, but it is alarming!) Through his various "counterfeit solutions," the fool tries to avoid the tragic consequences of the Fall, attempting to gain what cannot be gained in this life (p. 262, 265). The fool is particularly reluctant to endure the cost of building relationships:

"The primary crucible the fool avoids is integrity in relationships. Relationships require enormous struggle and passion to cultivate a crop worthy to be called tasty. We will not have healthy relationships unless we have a commitment to personal holiness." (p. 265)

The fool's relationship to God is warped. According to Allender:

"When the fool says, 'There is no God' (Psalm 14:1, 53:1), he is not saying that God does not exist, but that God does not matter.... The fool sees God as an interloper who meddles in the rightful business of life. Consequently, the fool either ignores God or compartmentalizes God and then sanitizes Him to be as he desires. Dealing with God in this way leaves an

untouched emptiness in the fool's heart that can never be filled as long as he lives in rebellion." (p. 261)

It's true that, according to Romans 1, God's existence is clearly revealed to all in His creation, such that no man is without excuse. However, some unregenerate persons do actively deny the existence God, not wanting to face His just wrath. Others worship false gods (idols), the creation instead of the Creator. Allender has psychologized the seriousness of the matter by focusing his analysis on the *emptiness* of the person's heart.

One quite excellent point is made amidst the confusion. Noting that "knowledge is always personal and relational" (p. 266), Allender traces all true knowledge back to *relationship with God*:

"Ultimately, all knowledge is connected to a covenantal relationship with God. I cannot truly know any fact about the created world without being drawn into a deeper relationship with the Creator whose being is interwoven in every multiplication table, zoological classification, or psychological observation." (p. 266)

It is unfortunate that Allender fails to follow through consistently the implications of this statement. If he did so, he would necessarily exclude the erroneous, speculative teachings of unregenerate men from his counseling theories! Instead, he offers several Freudian twists to his definition of the "fool":

"Foolishness can be present in a person who does not look as obviously angry and arrogant." (p. 256; again, such statements require us to make judgments about the *heart* of another person, judgments reserved to the Spirit of God alone)

"It takes a wise heart to discern the motivational energy behind appearances." (p. 258; again, we humans *must not* make such judgments!)

"...the fool uses self-centered arrogance to hide his enormous fragility." (p. 260)

In addition to the unbiblical judgments we are called to make, this last statement blurs the fool's responsibility before God for his sinful rebellion. Proverbs has much to say about the fool, but never does Scripture says that the fool "hides his enormous fragility." Allender wrongly goes beyond the Bible here. An even

greater reliance on Freud comes to light when the author sees the fool as a *victim* of past abuse:

"Many fools have experienced profoundly disturbing, abusive pasts. The vast majority have likely been emotionally, physically, and/or sexually abused." (p. 282)

Allender acknowledges that the fool isn't *merely* a victim. Nevertheless, he introduces unproved, speculative psychological theories about the nature of man and what motivates his behavior. Some of Allender's descriptions align with Scripture, but his comment about the fool's abusive past *is nowhere to be found in God's Word*.

A key concern is the line Allender draws between the fool and the evil man. He considers the characteristics of the fool to be "not essentially different from the qualities that line the heart of an evil person," but the difference is rather one of *degree* (p. 256). He explains further that the evil person has traveled further down the road of foolishness:

"In many respects, an evil person is simply a more severe fool who has progressed to a level of foolishness that is deeply severed from human emotion (empathy and shame) and human involvement (devouring destruction)." (p. 257)

Allender noted the absence of human empathy and passion in the evil man. Similarly, although the fool "may be very warm and sympathetic" (p. 257), it is short-lived:

"Once something is required, the fool will deaden his own inner world and cut off the connection with the other through anger." (p. 258)

However, Allender believes that the fool, in contrast to the evil man, is not so completely hardened to exposure of his sin (p. 260). Another contrast he sees is in the relational goals of the two:

"Evil wants to enslave and destroy; foolishness desires to be adored and obeyed." (p. 258)

The object of hatred is yet another distinction the author proposes:

"While the evil person hates anything that is human and reflects the beauty and glory of God, the fool hates anything that exposes the ugliness of his heart." (p. 264)

These contrasts are difficult to defend from the Scriptures. The wicked man would *also* hate exposure of his sinful heart, and might equally desire the adoration of others. He, too, might use anger to cut off another person.

There is a tremendous overlap between the concepts of evil and foolishness in the Bible. Both categories describe unregenerate persons, as contrasted with the regenerate. Evil is set against righteousness, and foolishness against wisdom. Yet we can surely say that the fool is unrighteous, and that the evil man is unwise. The fool finds pleasure in *evil* conduct (Proverbs 10:23), detests turning from *evil* (Proverbs 13:19), and mocks at guilt (Proverbs 14:9). All of the three Hebrew words underlying the English "fool" (kasal, ewil, nabal) denote moral corruption and deficiency. Although "fool" and "evil" are not absolute synonyms, the evil man is a fool, and the fool is an evil man. Both defy God in their attitudes and actions.

In Allender's system of labels, this overlap is no minor point. The seriousness of the matter will be more evident when we look closely at the specific actions the author recommends for each category. What he advises for the evil man differs from what he recommends in response to the fool. Both differ from his counsel in dealing with a "normal sinner," to which we now turn.

**Definitions: The "Simpleton" or "Normal Sinner."** Again Allender borrows a term from Proverbs, the "simpleton." However, he takes a big leap by calling this individual a "normal sinner." Since every person is a sinner, regenerate or unregenerate, the phrase "normal sinner" only compounds the fuzziness in this author's system of labels. One glaring problem with the categories is the failure to make a distinction between Christian and unbeliever. The fool and evil man are most certainly unbelievers, but what about the "normal sinner"? Allender doesn't clarify. The Scriptures that use the term "simpleton" indicate moral corruption, though perhaps to a lesser degree than the fool or evil person. Allender would do well to bring in New Testament terms, rather than to categorize all of humanity according to only three Old Testament terms. It isn't that the wisdom literature is outdated, or that the descriptions of Proverbs are irrelevant, but rather that we must read this literature in light of the coming of Christ. Furthermore, there seems to be no place in the author's labeling package for the upright, the righteous, the prudent, and

the wise man. These are no doubt regenerate individuals, but this side of heaven, they are nevertheless persons who continue to sin at times. Allender's system is at best incomplete, besides being too rigid and failing to account for the overlap in Scripture.

The basic description for this third category is as follows:

"Normal sinners are people who are still capable of evil, and at times, indistinguishable from fools. Normal sinners include decent human beings who have rarely thought about the realities of living in a fallen world." (p. 286)

"The biggest struggles of a normal sinner are with envy, naiveté, and poor judgment." (p. 287)

Let's look briefly at these three areas and compare with Scripture.

Allender first discusses envy, correctly noting it to be "one of the major causes of conflict and disorder in relationships (James 3:16, 4:1-3)" (p. 287). He believes it to be fueled by a person's demand and hunger for *more*, for immediate satisfaction or at least relief (p. 287-289). The envy may be relational or spiritual (p. 291). Here is what he says about the so-called "normal sinner" or "simple" person:

"The simpleton is almost always inclined to judge the greenness of the next hill as more desirable than the color of the one he currently sits upon." (p. 287)

"...a simpleton's envy dulls deep concern for others because it either compels him to rejoice that he is not suffering or look with possessive desire at someone who is happy." (p. 291)

Envy is a common sin, to be sure. However, the Scriptures speaking about the "simple" person focus on poor judgment, lack of knowledge, and being easily enticed to sin. Many of Allender's descriptions, in his three categories, do come from biblical passages that refer to the wicked, the fool, and the simple. Here he has conveniently added a quality that fits his psychology. Like Crabb, who wrote the forward to *Bold Love*, he emphasizes human *longing* in a manner that masks the element of sin. Scripture teaches that our "old man" is being *corrupted* by deceitful desires (see Ephesians 4:22-24). This author appears more concerned with the *emptiness* of the human heart, rather than the *sin* of the heart, claiming that there are many places to seek

a cure for that emptiness (p. 291). It isn't wrong for Allender to write about the problems that arise from sinful human envy, but his system of classification is rather arbitrary, fitting his own psychological presuppositions and serving his own agenda concerning how his counselees should respond to the sins of others. Envy undoubtedly also arises in the lives of the wicked and the fool. Sinful anger may emerge on occasion even in a godly person. Allender acknowledges the overlap, yet still boxes people in to these categories and expects us to respond to others based on the labels we assign to them.

Poor judgment, or naiveté, is a second quality found in the "simple" person. Citing Proverbs 14:15, Allender says that:

"The simpleton closes his eyes to internal and external signs that might alert him to danger, either by limiting his perspective or focusing so narrowly on one area of interest that little other information ever enters." (p. 292)

Unfortunately, however, most of the analysis in this area is psychological rather than biblical. The author says that a person is "not born naive" but rather makes a "choice to live in denial" (p. 292). Yet Scripture states that we are born in sin, and that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child (Proverbs 22:15).

"Denial-based" naiveté is defined by Allender as an attempt to create a "safe, reasonably controllable world" rather than earnestly desiring our eternal home in heaven (p. 292, 294). The "focused naive" are "driven, compulsive performers who serve a task or ideal so completely that it buffers them from the disturbing realities of life" (p. 292). The end result of naiveté, according to Allender, is trouble and helplessness when others attempt to control the naive person's life (p. 293). Naiveté is contrasted with wisdom, which the author defines as "a keen grasp of the human condition in light of eternal truths" (p. 293).

The emphasis here on denial is again a reflection of Freudian-based psychology. Scripture doesn't define naiveté in terms of compulsive performance or attempts to create a world that rivals heaven. The focus in God's Word is on being enticed to *sin*. Allender also misses the boat in his definition of wisdom. The wise person, certainly, has a biblical understanding of the human heart, but he *also--and more importantly--knows God and His decrees. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*



Finally, Allender notes "a third character flaw of the normal sinner" as "the propensity to wander into danger," citing Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12 (p. 294). He specifically defines that "danger" as the development of relationships with the other two categories--the evil person and the fool (p. 295). The "normal sinner" lacks the *intuition* to discern the hearts of these folks:

"Personal radar is based on the ability to intuit, feel, and assess the patterns of behavior that make up a potentially dangerous storm front." (p. 295)

"Deduction is the highly simple (but talking about it is anything but simple) process of forming big conclusions from small pieces of information." (p. 296)

"Deduction is dangerous because it is perilously close to making judgments" and thus it "scares many Christians" and "requires enormous courage." (p. 297)

It is highly presumptuous to assert, as Allender does here, that we are to judge the hearts of others on the basis of our own intuition and feelings! As humans, we may only look at the outer man, and we must do so strictly on the basis of God's standards, revealed in His Word. We are *not* to form "*big* conclusions" about others based on "*small* pieces of information"! We must at times evaluate the *behavior* of others, and respond in accordance with Scripture. But Allender's judgments of the *hearts* of others are truly *dangerous* and unbiblical. The Christian has key knowledge, in general, about the sin resident in the heart of man, and is to act accordingly--placing his trust in *God* rather than man. Allender, however, takes us much further in his labeling system.

The path of the "simple," Allender notes, is one that leads in time "to foolishness and all sorts of addictive enslavements," unless the person is drawn toward wisdom and righteousness (p. 298). The wise individual is open to rebuke, in contrast to the "simple" person, who falls into all sorts of traps (p. 297, citing Proverbs 9:9, 15:31, 18:15, 19:20, 21:11).

What does Scripture actually teach about the "simple"? Again we encounter overlap, although this person is perhaps characterized more by immaturity and ignorance than the wicked or the fool. Yet Scripture at times implies something beyond mere ignorance. The "simple" is said to love his simple ways, as the mocker delights in mockery and the fool hates knowledge (Proverbs 1:22). The waywardness of the simpleton will kill him, according to Proverbs 1:32. He inherits *folly* (Proverbs 14:18), much like

the fool. Clearly, there is moral corruption and not *merely* immaturity and/or ignorance. This person is wide open for all sorts of enticement to engage in sin.

**How to respond...to the evil, the fool, and the "normal sinner."** Allender outlines a plan of action for *each* of his three categories--a *different* plan. He is mindful of the common fear of rejection that may prevent the proper response to the sin of an evil individual:

"We all fear (to some degree) being cast out of another garden--be it a tightly knit family or an authoritarian church--yet to defy evil results in sure banishment."  
(p. 242)

He advocates a response filled with love for truth and beauty, rather than vengeance:

"When a victim is full of a frenzied and vulgar desire for vengeance, an evil person can easily continue his deadly dance. But a hatred that despises evil and clings to truth and beauty infuriates evil and draws forth its most compelling assaults of shame (Romans 12:9)." (p. 242)

The author believes that "some remnant of desire for beauty and justice" resides in even the most reprobate heart; therefore:

"If we know what to expect from evil, then we will be better disposed to fight it with the weapons of God in order to claim the evil heart for the God who can redeem even the most despicable of souls." (p. 243)

To be sure, God is able to save "even the most despicable of souls," and He does exactly that. Allender misuses the term "reprobate," however, as that word refers to someone who is *eternally lost*. He also weakens the biblical view of man's total depravity; *no good thing* resides in the flesh.

Yet despite this weak view of depravity, Allender takes a rather harsh approach to the person who has been designated "evil." He warns against attempts at rational discussion, preferring an exposure gained through tough consequences:

"Evil can never be overthrown through rational, reasonable argumentation.... Evil will never stop long enough to consider its destructiveness unless it is held accountable,

under strong, clear, and unwavering consequences of righteousness." (p. 243)

"Evil must be caught in the act. Discussing evil with an evil person is rarely useful.... In order to stop evil in its tracks, parameters must be set in the moment of transgression. A parameter (or boundary) is any line in human relations that honors separateness and respects individual dignity." (p. 245)

The offended person must exhibit both strength and kindness, enforcing consequences when a violation occurs but never resorting to a "cold, detached hatred" (p. 246). But beware...it is "not uncommon," says Allender, to see a "slight change in the evil person," change designed to deceive the victim and design new strategies for attack (p. 247). Allender's recommendation:

"It is best to use this lull in the battle to further enrage evil so it will know the battle is not over until righteousness reigns." (p. 247)

This is hardly consistent with our Lord's teachings about forgiveness, but we'll hold the critique until the complete picture is painted. Allender warns about the "frightening new world" that seems "alien and awful" to the person who attempts to break a bondage with an evil man (p. 249). He also outlines areas to be addressed if and when the evil individual offers repentance. These include specifics about the damage to the relationship, "a perspective on forgiveness and hope," parameters and consequences for evil behavior, conditions for reconciliation, and a "negotiated agreement about what will occur now to begin the process of change" (p. 249).

The most drastic response to evil is what Allender calls "excommunication." This is a most unfortunate choice of words, since that term is normally used to describe the final step in church discipline, wherein a fellow believer is to be treated functionally as an unbeliever. The "evil" man described in Scripture *is not a believer* and thus not subject to church discipline. So, we must bear in mind Allender's unique definition, which is basically cutting off the relationship. (Even church discipline doesn't go to this extreme! We continue to minister to unbelievers!) The Scriptures used to support his teachings are 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15. Both of these, *directly contrary to Allender's system of labeling*, are within the church and involve professing believers. Neither passage affirms what he teaches on this matter.

Allender calls his concept "the grace of excommunication" (p. 252). He warns that this action is *not* to be taken merely for relief of one's own pain, or to "decree the offender beyond hope" (p. 252). Rather, "it removes the immediate opportunity for sin and opens the door to loneliness and shame" (p. 252). Supposedly, such "loneliness and shame" may drive the offender to repentance.

Several strong warnings accompany Allender's teaching about "excommunication." He urges significant time, prayer, and counsel with more mature believers (p. 252). Even then, "no one can tell with certainty when this gift should be offered" (p. 252), so guidelines are at best imprecise. In addition, excommunication "should not occur rashly in a moment of anger" (p. 252). The process won't be easy:

"A major battle will likely occur with doubt and guilt. The choice to separate yourself from another should never be done with arrogant certainty that a right choice has been made." (p. 253)

Family and friends may continue their own relationships with the person you have "excommunicated," and may fail to affirm your actions:

"Without doubt, the evil person has spread vicious, uncontested lies about you to those who know you. You will be called judgmental, holier-than-thou, arrogant, unbiblical, cruel, heartless." (p. 253)

In view of all this, "the task of loving an evil person requires (as it does in all cases) supernatural intervention" (p. 254).

*Is this procedure biblical??* First of all, we're talking about an *unregenerate* person when we discuss Allender's first category, *evil*. This individual is not a church member to whom all the steps of Matthew 18 apply, not is he a *brother* to be restored in the sense of Galatians 6. There are some limitations on what can be done. However, *the* most important action is in the presentation of the gospel. In addition, the believer is to respond righteously, so that God is honored. Certainly the Christian is not to be drawn into participation in the sin of an unbeliever, and there is a time to *flee* temptation. Generally, however, Scripture does not advocate the total cutting off of contact with an unbeliever.

One of the most serious dangers with this teaching on "excommunication" is its conjunction with Allender's view of victimization. One potential consequence of his teaching is that relationships with parents are severed. In addition, those parents may be removed from the lives of their grandchildren. This is a serious step even if there really was grievous abuse. But combined with counseling techniques -- "memory retrieval" specifically -- such as Allender uses, the results are potentially disastrous for families. Relationships may be terminated on the basis of false accusations.

The "fool," on the other hand, is less likely to endure such consequences. According to Allender, "he is not sufficiently evil to excommunicate, nor sufficiently broken to hope for change" (p. 268). Therefore, discerning between an "evil" person and a "fool" has enormous implications--namely, the survival of key family relationships. Allender is playing with fire, and a lot of people are being burned as a result. His position is *not* backed by Scripture, which presents too much overlap of evil and foolishness to warrant such a radical difference in response.

In the case of an "evil" person, Allender recommends exposure without first attempting discussion. Here a similar procedure is recommended for the fool, at least initially:

"The fool must be caught so far out in the open, so obviously violating the relationship, that he is forced to take a momentary break in his strategy in order to pull up his pants after the exposure." (p. 270)

"The fool cannot be required to offer love, nor to repent, but he can be made to feel the piercing exposure of shame when his heart-crushing arrogance bears down on those in his way. Getting out of the way of foolish wrath involves insightful preparation, clear boundaries, and courageous consequences." (p. 271)

"Exposure with a mood that is matter-of-fact, strong, and benevolent." (p. 274)

The *purpose* of this exposure, says Allender, is:

"...to intensify the battle between the options of continuing in foolishness or facing his naked, shameful, hateful arrogance." (p. 275)

Thus the emphasis of exposure is on the fool's freedom of choice (p. 275). This emphasis is grounded in certain basic assumptions about the *heart* of the fool:

"On one level, the fool hates with a passion anyone who attempts to take away his freedom, but despises even more anyone who puts him in a position to choose." (p. 275)

Where does the author get this? Not from Scripture! The arrogance of the fool, plus his hatred of wisdom and discipline, do not imply that the fool dislikes making choices. On the contrary, he presumes that he is *autonomous*, independent of God's commandments. It is the wise, godly person who loves the decrees of the Lord. Allender's analysis is one that arises from ungodly psychological theories, not the Bible.

We return to Allender's confused view of revenge when he speaks of preparing consequences for the fool. Those consequences are to *surprise* the fool, violating his expectations (p. 277), "block his usual path to control" (p. 276), cause him pain (p. 277), yet "have a measure of tenderness and strength that touches both the realities of dignity and depravity" (p. 276). At the same time, Allender warns us that:

"Consequences will, unfortunately, often involve elements of taking revenge now.... The key to differentiating between loving consequences and ungodly revenge is the degree to which restoration is desired." (p. 278)

This involves the examination of one's own heart and motives. Certainly such examination is biblical. However, this author too quickly crosses the line between *restoring* another person and usurping *God's* role in taking vengeance. He opens the door to sinful revenge under the guise of "bold love," as he himself admits in a couple of places. This is dangerous, particularly in a context where "memory retrieval" may be the sole basis for determining that another person *needs* restoration.

Allender also recommends a willingness to *talk* with the fool, in "dialogue that addresses both the dignity and the depravity of a fool's heart" (p. 281). (The fool is *unregenerate*, so there is no "dignity" to address. Allender waters down total depravity again.) Here his procedure departs from his counsel concerning the wicked man. But not without qualification:

"A third good gift for the fool is a willingness to talk. But don't be naive. Repentance usually must begin with

words, but talk is cheap. I don't know how to reconcile the tension." (p. 280)

"...words that attempt to persuade, teach, exhort, or even encourage will be used against the one seeking restoration unless repentance has begun." (p. 281)

Talk isn't "cheap" according to Scripture, which has much to say concerning our speech to one another! There are many passages concerning rebuke, admonition, exhortation, teaching, and such. Scripture does address the *fruits* of repentance, but our response to the sins of others is primarily *verbal* in nature, following scriptural teachings. That verbal response does not wait until repentance has begun, but rather may be used by God to bring about such repentance.

Words to the fool, according to Allender, include the following:

"...an acknowledgment of our condition (sinful, downfallen, and desperate), our desire (gracious restoration), our intentions (for worship), and the absurdity of our pursuit of false protectors and gods in the light of the passionate Father heart of God." (p. 280)

This may sound good at first glance, but the author warns against attempting any serious discussion *prior to* or *in the place of* exposure and consequences. Allender expects that it will be the "fool" himself who initiates any discussion, "when he is paralyzed by the cumulative weight of the other's tenderness and strength" (p. 281). Scripture places responsibility on the one who is sinned against to initiate discussion. Actually, there is a mutual, overlapping responsibility to begin the process of reconciliation. But where the one who sinned--the "fool" in this instance--does *not* take that first step, then the person who is sinned against has the obligation to do so.

Finally, Allender says that "discussion with the fool will also include prayer," as the person asks God "to destroy the strongholds of arrogance and unbelief that deter his growth in love" (p. 283). We can agree on the importance of prayer, but must emphasize the critical necessity to present the gospel. Hopefully, the "fool" will pray to receive Christ and thus no longer be biblically defined as a fool. Only then can he pray effectively about the strongholds of *sin* in his life.

Allender notes the encounters of our Lord with both the rich young ruler and the Samaritan woman at the well, as examples of exposing folly (p. 272, 274). He believes we ought to imitate Christ in this type of exposure. This may sound reasonable, since we are being conformed to His image. However, remember that Jesus, being God incarnate, had perfect knowledge about the *hearts* of these two people, knowledge we lack in our own relationships. The encounter with the woman, furthermore, is one that gave proof of His claim to be the promised Messiah. While we are to demonstrate the qualities of Christ in our lives, we must be careful about imitation of His earthly ministry, because *sometimes* His deity is a factor and we *must not* imitate Him precisely. We cannot die for another person's sins, claim to be the Messiah, or expose the hearts of others exactly as He did.

Response to the "normal sinner" differs significantly from these measures. Instead of exposure, excommunication, and serious consequences, Allender recommends "covering over sin and instruction through word and life--that is, modeling in speech and deed a path of brokenness and bold witness for the gospel" (p. 299). Where was his "bold witness for the gospel" to the wicked and the fool, both descriptions of unsaved persons? And where does Scripture say we are *not* to model through "word and life" to the *entire world*, inclusive of wicked men and fools?

Allender believes that our *first* response to another's sin is to *presume* that this person is "simple" rather than evil or foolish (p. 299). However, it is never clear where he draws the line between Christian and unbeliever--if he draws it at all. Scripture leaves no doubt that both "fool" and "wicked" reference unbelievers. The "normal sinner" or "simple" class, as defined by Allender, doesn't fit biblical descriptions clearly, and he never clarifies whether this person is a believer or unbeliever. Perhaps he could be either! *This is no minor issue.* Scripture differentiates between Christian and non-Christian, and our responses differ *greatly*. Paul emphasizes these differences in 1 Corinthians 5; we make certain judgments and exercise discipline *within* the church body, but we *do not* make similar judgments concerning the world (unbelievers).

*Covering over sin* is Allender's focus of attention in responding to the "simple" man. It involves:

"...the choice consciously and purposely to turn our eyes away from the transgression, without ignoring or denying the damage...the choice to believe the best in the other...."  
(p. 300)



"...a conscious choice to wait, prayerfully and patiently, for the right moment to deal with an observable pattern of sin, using specifics of harm to help clarify a path of relating that may be destructive." (p. 301)

Such covering over sin "is never based on denial or fear" (p. 300). According to Allender, it involves sufficient time in a relationship to "recognize a specific action as part of a destructive pattern" (p. 301), then "waiting for the right opportunity for interaction about a pattern of sin" (p. 302). Then, "it is imperative to expose our heart to God as an offering for His service" (p. 301).

Allender believes that "covering over sin" is the right response "unless we are called by God to deal with it directly" (p. 302). Determining whether one is "called by God" involves such considerations as age, position, and depth of relationship (p. 303), but Allender warns that there are "no absolute, irrefutable answers to the issue of calling" except..."don't confront if you love to confront" (p. 304). Even if you believe that indeed you are "called" to confront:

"The calling to confront should be resisted and ignored until the burden is unbearable and God's voice is clear." (p. 304)

"It is at the point that the heart feels it has no right to utter a word of counsel, that oddly enough, it is most likely not to offer the dribble of advice, but the broken communion of life-giving bread." (p. 307)

There is an *apparent* emphasis here on humility, and certainly, a humble heart is imperative to biblical confrontation. Meanwhile, however, Allender holds himself--and his psychologically based counsel--up for the world to hear and heed. Clear and sufficient guidelines for confrontation are found *in Scripture*, not in *Bold Love* or any other book of psychological counsel. The Bible anticipates confrontation within the context of the church. Jesus said that *if your brother sins against you*, go to him privately and talk to him. Nothing about age, position, "calling," depth of relationship, or whether you "love to confront." Simply...*if your brother sins against you* (see Matthew 18:15, Luke 17:3). Then...*if he listens, you have won your brother...if he repents, forgive him.* God's counsel is sufficient, without the psychological complications that Allender introduces.

There are three areas that Allender believes should be addressed with a "simple" person, who he says is "open to instruction, if it is sufficiently persuasive" (p. 305). (It isn't necessarily the persuasiveness of the instruction, however, *but rather the working of the Holy Spirit in the other person's heart*, that determines the results!!) Those three areas are as follows:

**Relationships.** "Where is the simple person living out the gospel or denying it by the way he conducts his relationships?" (p. 308)

**Life's purpose.** What is his part in God's kingdom? (p. 308)

**Wrestling with God.** "God desires intimacy, and relationship with God does not come without a struggle.... A simple person must be encouraged to see the Christian life as a war, not only with the world, the devil, and the flesh, but with God Himself." (p. 309)

Perhaps, from this perspective, we can assume that Allender sees the "simple" person or "normal sinner" as *regenerate*. If so, the biblical instructions for church discipline apply to confronting his sin. (But Proverbs, as we examined, doesn't necessarily view the "simple" man as regenerate. The moral corruption involved is too serious to make this assumption.)

Relationships with God and others are important, as is understanding one's purpose in life--which in broad terms is to honor and serve God. Allender is right to note the presence of a war in the Christian life, but he is dangerously unbiblical about the nature of that war. The world, the devil, and the flesh are involved, but *never* does Scripture speak in terms of a *Christian* being at war with God Himself! The classic New Testament passage here is in Ephesians 6, where Paul explains that we battle spiritual powers of *wickedness* in the heavenlies. We respond by putting on the *full armor of God*. But a war *with* God? The unbeliever may be at war with God, but *not the Christian*! We'll look next at the nature of our battle, now that we have examined Allender's faulty system for the classification of other people.

## **The Nature and Weapons of Our Warfare**

Allender's initial statement on this subject, early in *Bold Love*, is one that sounds good:

"We are to be armed for battle with a *higher purpose than present enjoyment, a determined confidence that God is good no matter what happens, and the passion of a love bold enough to take on the real enemy.*" (p. 11)

But who or what is the "real enemy"? The author is concerned about the tendency to deny that we are engaged in a war (p. 88), or to see the battle in terms of externals (poverty, immorality, prejudice) or "isms" (secular humanism) (p. 90). He is also concerned about removing the battle to a sphere beyond the struggles of normal, everyday life, as happens in deliverance ministries (p. 91). Contrary to all of these, Allender sees the battle in terms of sin (p. 88).

The emphasis on sin is a good one, in contrast to "the-devil-made-me-do-it" attitude, yet it is critical to recognize the cosmic level of the battle (back to Ephesians 6) and the fact that sin is the foundation for secular humanism, prejudice, immorality, and other such "externals." But the main problem occurs in Allender's psychologized view of sin. As might be expected from *The Wounded Heart*, his emphasis is on abuse, and there is more focus on human relationships than on the primary rupture between God and man. He states that the devil works primarily in the context of relationships. For example:

"The battle is usually hidden, but it is made up of apparently insignificant and occasionally severe wounds." (p. 92)

"The typical agent of war will be those who share the name of Christ, who direct their missiles against those who are on the same side." (p. 93)

"The Evil One seems to do his greatest damage through subtle or overt assaults against the dignity and beauty of the soul. The primary method is through any form of abuse that involves either a desire to destroy and/or a desire to use." (p. 93)

Note the heavy emphasis on *wounds* and *abuse* at the hands of others. Although believers do sometimes hurt one another, the basic expectation that other Christians will do the *most damage* is both unjust and absurd, and certainly not affirmed by Scripture.

Two fundamental areas of *abuse* capture Allender's attention: murder/anger plus vengeance, and adultery/lust.

**Murder/Anger.** It isn't actual *murder*, but the "emotional assaults" endured by all in "countless daily encounters," that is the core of Allender's teaching:

"Sometimes, even a small word coated with irritation, contempt, haughtiness, or anger can sink deep into our souls and set off a profound series of chain reactions." (p. 95)

The usual human response to disappointment and sorrow, says Allender, is "murderous rage" (p. 96, citing James 4:2). Looking behind that response, he sees a "passionate desire for more" (p. 96). Specifically:

"...at the core, mankind longs for the ultimate 'more'--a perfect relationship with the One whose bright presence dispels all darkness, sin, disease, and sorrow and who draws us to dine with Him forever." (p. 95)

*Believers* long for the glorious reality of heaven, but this statement can hardly be made of *unbelievers*, who flee from the presence of God. Jesus did correlate murder and anger, establishing a far higher standard than that observed by the self-righteous religious leaders of the day. However, he didn't explain it (and thus dilute responsibility) in terms of an underlying "desire for more." Also, Allender's emphasis here is on day to day irritations at the hands of others. These do occur, but the focus is on what we endure *from others* rather than on learning to *respond* righteously (see 1 Peter!).

**Vengeance.** This is not a new subject, but one covered in depth earlier. However, in contrast to his full chapter on revenge, earlier in the book Allender equates vengeance with *murder*:

"Murder is the desire to take vengeance *now*. It is a passion to be like God and bring judgment down on those who have stood in our way to gain satisfaction." (p. 96)

Allender believes that *all of us* retain this type of murderous, vengeful desire, at least a "remnant of murderous anger that potently intrudes into the day-to-day interactions of our best relationships" (p. 96-97). (Remember how he considers revenge a "wondrous passion" that gives us the energy to end life well?) We do, of course, continue to struggle with sin this side of heaven. But Allender clouds responsibility when he traces that sin back to childhood hurts inflicted by others:

"In most cases, the energy of murder goes back further than the present even to memories of past harm that are unresolved." (p. 96)

"...no parent can keep his or her anger entirely hidden from the soul of the child. The result will be to some degree a fragmentation of the child's sense of self." (p. 98)

This view *does not* square with scriptural standards of responsibility! Instead, it reflects Allender's fundamental commitment to a psychological view of man as a *victim* rather than a *sinner*.

**Adultery/Lust.** The Bible has much to say about adultery and lust. So does Allender, but what he offers is a psychologized view that tends to excuse the sinner by "explaining" his actions:

"The second form of harm comes from those whose lust to avoid emptiness and find satisfaction causes them to use other people as food for their empty souls. The lust is adulterous in that it is a desire to find satisfaction illegitimately, apart from God and His righteous path." (p. 100)

Allender distinguishes *destructive lust* from *legitimate desire* by teaching that the former destroys the fullness in another person while seeking to fill the emptiness in one's own heart (p. 101). It is a desire to *use* and *possess* another (p. 102). He sees it as an attempt to push one's way back into the Garden of Eden (p. 103). Additional psychologized explanations follow. One of these explains lust as a "desire for union" wherein a person is "both very full of one's self and simultaneously lost in the warmth and strength of another" (p. 103). Moving further away from the Bible, he says that:

"Sexual immorality, or adulterous lust, provides a tragic counterfeit of a loss of self that also enhances the self.... The current 'disease' labeled 'codependency' provides an excellent paradigm of nonsexual lust." (p. 104)

Additional psycho-babble distorts biblical truth about the one who is sinned against:

"The effect of being used, violated, and discarded is a loss of a sense of boundaries. It is as if one's sense of self merges with the other in a sick union, and it is difficult to discern what is right and wrong, good and bad, legitimate and illegitimate." (p. 107)

The believer, however, need not be left in such a state of disarray about "what is right and wrong, good and bad." He has God's Word! Note Allender's repeated emphasis on maintaining a "sense of self." Notice, too, his assumption about cause and effect; the adulterer is caused to sin by the emptiness in his heart. All of these psychological explanations muddy the clear waters of biblical truth about sinful lusts, whether sexual or otherwise.

**Sanctification and Struggles With Sin.** Allender is correct to note the believer's ongoing inner battle with sin:

"Your enemy, your old self, is a dearly beloved friend you really don't want to kill...it's grueling to face the dark, cold reality that we have to battle against our own vicious and destructive thoughts, emotions, and actions...deep down we really enjoy our sin." (p. 128-129)

He also notes that the war is within the *same* heart, rather than "two separate natures doing battle in a helpless body" (p. 48). As people bought at a price, by the blood of Christ, we are not free to pursue our own agenda, but rather are called to godly battle (p. 145). Allender warns that "it is possible...to live for apparently noble purposes without bearing the offense of the cross" (p. 144). Our glorious eternal hope frees us to fight courageously in that spiritual battle, to set aside personal passions or "addictions" in favor of God's heavenly agenda (p. 139, 175). Allender acknowledges that much popular counsel ignores the deeper issues of the heart by encouraging people to grieve over the past and take better care of self (p. 174). Indeed this is true!

Certainly there is some truth in Allender's statements, but error emerges at other points. Thus the need to carefully discern. One problem concerns his view of the primary motivations of the human heart:

"The two central passions of the heart are a desire for connection that does not consume or destroy the other (is not dependent and weak) and a hunger for impact that leads to greater beauty and justice." (p. 212)

"The false routes chosen to satisfy the hunger for connection and impact are legion. They are seen in every addiction, manipulation, and denial." (p. 209)

"God made us to worship Him. At all times we are beings who will worship something. That is how we have been created." However..."our bent is toward serving other gods." (p. 209)

The first two statements are remarkably similar to the erroneous "security/significance" foundation of Larry Crabb's system. Scriptural support is lacking. The fundamental *desires* or *passions* of the human heart are presumed to be legitimate. Only the *means of fulfilling those passions* are recognized as sinful. But Scripture sees the passions and desires of sinful man as *sinful* (Ephesians 4:22-24). The third statement is affirmed in Romans 1. The propensity for serving false gods *is* a key issue in understanding what drives human behavior. As for "connection," the psychological view fails to adequately recognize man's fundamental need for *reconciliation with God*, not merely "connection." Apart from the Holy Spirit's intervention, this genuine *need* is not recognized by sinful man but is distorted. "Impact" may well reflect the sinful pride behind the fall of man. The person who has experienced regeneration is reconciled with God and thus has an *eternal* connection with God that cannot be severed. He also has the joy of serving God, and there is no greater "impact" than that.

Allender's understanding of the impact of salvation is one that confuses sanctification. Some of what he says does hold true. For example, he affirms the progressive nature of sanctification. The believer is not *instantly* sanctified. He has the indwelling Holy Spirit and the reign of sin in his life is broken, but he does not *immediately* have the capability of doing *all* that God requires of him (p. 137).

However, Allender's view of the "new creation in Christ" is a fuzzy one. He acknowledges, rightly, the believer's "new inclination to pursue God and to give to others," even though the "perceptions and struggles of the past" are not completely eradicated (p. 49). But he fails to perceive the truly radical nature of the change that *has* occurred. Referencing 2 Corinthians 5:17, he says:

"The passage is not a statement about our new internal constitution, but a picture of our newly created opportunity to stand in a radically different relationship to God and those who are still in the kingdom of darkness." (p. 49)

Yes, there is a "radically different relationship to God" and also to unbeliever. But there is also a *radically new internal constitution*, contrary to Allender's teaching.

The nature of the antithesis between believer and unbeliever is further masked by Allender's general description of human nature:

"...we are a mysterious mixture of life and death, good and evil, and love and hatred...the deepest, strongest, most central part of me that will last through eternity is of God, goodness, and love." (p. 48)

We are not such a "mixture." And it isn't merely a "part of me" that will enter heaven, but rather *all* of me, in a glorified, resurrected state!

**A Battle With God?** Perhaps the most serious error in the arena of spiritual battle is Allender's belief that "it is ultimately God against whom we struggle" (p. 129). This is true in the life of an *unbeliever*, but only an *unbeliever*, not a *Christian*! Allender implies that this type of war occurs even in believers:

"What is the effect of salvation? He simply has put a small, deeply disturbing fire in the fabric of my being that cannot be extinguished or modulated.... I both love and hate Him for making His home in the sinews of my soul.... Why does he not make me pay? It would be so much easier if I could just suffer a few years in penance." (p. 85)

Easier? Really? Such comments reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel and of God's wrath against sin. The "love/hate" attitude does not describe a truly regenerated heart. Where is this in Scripture? It isn't!

Using the account of Jacob's wrestling with God, Allender states that:

"Anyone who seeks truth--irresistibly drawn to the One who is truth--will inevitably be arm to arm, flesh to flesh in mortal conflict with the Blessor whose exercise of power will never contradict His kindness." (p. 78)

But is this true--that seeking truth leads to *war with God*? Allender has to read this *into* the account of Jacob. Even worse is Allender's interpretation of the progress of that battle:

"He (God) lets me be His equal. He restrains Himself and draws out the battle.... The same is true when I fight with



God; the battle ends and I am a broken winner, a glorious loser, a man whose name and destiny is changed, though I will never again be able to run and deceive as I once did."  
(p. 79)

It is presumptuous to claim, on the basis of Jacob's wrestling match, that God "lets me be His equal." God elected Jacob and rejected Esau on the basis of His sovereign choice, but we cannot say that Jacob was ever God's *equal*. The fall of Satan was grounded in his desire to be just that: *God's equal!*

The one glimmer of truth in this "battle with God" is the statement that "He *seems* like an enemy when His discipline begins to grind off our arrogance in order to perfect His beauty" (p. 118, emphasis added). Yes, discipline is painful and not always welcome initially. But the emphasis here had better be on what *seems*, very temporarily, to be the case. The Christian's basic orientation is certainly not one of war with his Savior!

**God battles for us.** Scripture does portray God as our Divine Warrior. Allender correctly notes that "God's people have been at war with the Enemy since the Fall (Genesis 3)" (p. 115). The Old Testament demonstrates God's power in battle, protecting Israel from her human enemies. There is "holy war," often involving extremes of violence.

We no longer drive out human enemies through violent force. The battle is now spiritual, and evangelism replaces warfare (p. 127). Allender is right to remind us of the spiritual war involved in evangelism:

"...when we share the gospel with a stranger or friend, we are not just involved in a quiet clash of ideas with another rational human being" but "someone who is on Satan's side."  
(p. 128)

He also brings in the weapon of prayer, which the believer may use "against an abuser...to pray for his repentance" (p. 131). It is true that prayer is a spiritual weapon, but we must be very careful here to pray *for* those who sin against us, rather than *against* them.

## **What is Love?**

Although he makes the astonishing statement (in view of 1 Corinthians 13!) that love is "never defined" in Scripture (p. 32), Allender offers definitions at various points:

"Love, as a reflection of the glory of God, is the ground of being, the reason for existing, and the core of the gospel." (p. 13)

Love..."is found in the person Jesus Christ and incarnated with definition and meaning by His death and resurrection.... Love is a sacrifice for the undeserving that opens the door to restoration of relationship with the Father, with others, and with ourselves." (p. 32)

The author also views love as "the central measuring rod by which my life will be judged" (p. 31). He believes that Jesus, in summarizing the whole law by His command to love, placed love "above tradition and the sacrificial system" (p. 31).

Allender summarizes the whole premise of *Bold Love* in terms of love, forgiveness, and grace:

"I will not live with purpose and joy unless I love; I will not be able to love unless I forgive; and I will not forgive unless my hatred is continually melted by the searing truth and grace of the gospel." (p. 30)

However, love is "nearly impossible in our daily existence," and indeed it is not possible for long apart from forgiveness (p. 28). Allender believes that even though we often want to love, we are "suspicious and cynical toward love as a seducer and betrayer" (p. 26). Love is "constantly derailed by sin" and efforts to love frequently "flounder on the shoals of self-centeredness" (p. 39).

Common misconceptions about love abound. Many consider love to be a "natural human sentiment," but Allender notes that real sacrificial, other-centered love is quite rare (p. 34). Many people also believe, wrongly, that we already love one another quite well, but the truth is that we do not (p. 36). Love is too often perceived "as something saccharine and frilly, best described as 'unconditional acceptance'" (p. 183-184), but this shallow definition doesn't stand up to biblical criteria.

So far, we can discern a lot of truth in what Allender has to say about love (except that it most certainly is defined in Scripture!) Love is intimately related to forgiveness and sacrifice. Sin certainly does block love, and as sinners, we do not by nature know how to love according to God's standards. "Unconditional acceptance" is indeed an inadequate definition.

God's acceptance of the sinner is grounded in *conditions* which He Himself met through the atonement.

But let's look at what Allender says about loving others. Scripture places great emphasis on our love for one another in the body of Christ, plus the love we demonstrate even for those who persecute us. Here is the core of "*bold love*." We need to consider not only the content of Allender's definitions, but the applications made on the basis of his teachings taken as a whole.

First, the author correctly notes the necessity of God's intervention in order to make human love a possibility:

"How...does God intervene in the human personality to remove the block to love and destroy the power of evil that hates love? The answer is found in an understanding of God's relentless, intrusive, incarnate involvement and His patient, forbearing forgiveness. The essence of Christian love is God's tenacious loyalty to redeem His people from the just penalty for sin." (p. 37)

God is love, and there is no more powerful demonstration of that love than that found in the gospel. God has redeemed His people from the penalty and power of sin, doing what no human could possibly do for himself. We love only because *He first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

In arguing against love as "saccharine and frilly...unconditional acceptance," Allender says that he is "walking a very thin line" because love, often, "is a covering over of the offense with long-suffering patience" (p. 184). He argues for a love that pardons the offense yet "does not ignore the ugliness and arrogance that blights beauty" (p. 184). He also promotes an honesty that works for the good of the other person. That honesty may at times involve rebuke, but Allender cautions wisely that at other times "it would crush a broken reed" (p. 184). Love, he says, "embraces another for the great work of redemption" (p. 185). It does not violate the beauty of the other person, or diminish his responsibility (p. 212). It works to increase the desire for true love and honor, but to decrease the pursuit of false paths to satisfaction (p. 210).

Love is both tender and strong, empathetically feeling "the offender's sin and ugliness" (p. 212):

"Tenderness is a response of mercy that can see through the pain to the parts of the human heart that were designed for more." (p. 212)

"Strength involves a willingness to bleed in the midst of unpleasant, undesired conflict." (p. 213)

Either strength or tenderness, in isolation from the other, is dangerous. Strength by itself can be harsh, while tenderness alone can be sentimental and fail to help another, to radically pull the roots of betrayal (p. 213). Allender's goal here is to overcome evil with good, taking the enemy by surprise so as to crumble his defenses:

"Love anticipates what may be intended and is willing to ponder, pray, and explore the depths of the enemy's heart for the purpose of determining what kind of meal to prepare the enemy (Proverbs 20:5)." (p. 215)

"Goodness exposes the nakedness and hunger of the enemy, and offers clothing and food. Goodness, in other words, shames the enemy and then offers the opportunity for restoration." (p. 218)

Christ's example (1 Peter 2:23) is cited as our example to follow:

"His silence was a quiet, mime-like indictment of their charade. His words were not harsh, but He thoroughly exposed the sham of their accusations. Our words of blessing are meant to arouse legitimate longing, expose emptiness, and deflate the enemy's attempts to shame and intimidate." (p. 223)

The response of Jesus to both Judas and Peter is noted, with radically different results:

"Shame always elicits change. The result will either be an intensification of the evil or a melting of the heart to face the damage done." (p. 219)

Prayer for wisdom is needed as a key element in our response to another person's sin:

"We are to pray for God to work in our enemies' lives, to restrain evil, to deepen consciousness of harm, to destroy their arrogance so that life and grace might flourish." (p. 221)

Blessing one's enemy isn't merely being "nice," nor does it mean openly inviting the offender to engage in further sin (p. 222-223).

There is certainly much truth in what Allender has to say about the love we demonstrate for others. Love does involve, at times, rebuke of sin and restoration of the offender. But there are three key concerns we must not miss.

One is his assumption that we may "explore the depths of the enemy's heart" (p. 215) so as "to expose the heart of the one doing harm" (p. 224). No, we may not. Only the Spirit of God Himself has this privilege (Jeremiah 17:10; Hebrews 4:12-13). We may only examine the outward appearance, the behavior of another in accordance with the standards of God's Word.

The second concern is Allender's intention to "arouse legitimate longing." His methods assume that the passions of the human heart are legitimate and not sinful, but Scripture recognizes sin inherent even in the desires themselves (Ephesians 4:22-24).

The final concern is repetitious, but it bears much repeating and emphasis. Allender's "bold love" teaching is combined with his emphasis on seeing oneself as a victim of past hurts, particularly wounds received in the past from parents. Such presumed "hurts" are often only "remembered" in the course of psychotherapy, or rather, *imagined* in the course of such counseling. It is dangerous to presume to examine the *heart* of another person, in any event, but it is *disastrous* to do so only on the basis of "recovered memories." The "enemy" you attempt to "love" may be innocent of the specific charges! His protests of innocence may be genuine. Allender does not even allow for the *possibility* of such false accusations.

### **More About Love: God's Grace**

In this area, most of what Allender has to say is an excellent reminder of the cost of our salvation, and how that great price should motivate us to respond to the sins of others. There ought to be *even more* emphasis on God's grace, to prevent the tragic applications of Allender's overall teachings.

Citing Nehemiah 9:15-22, Allender notes a recurring pattern in God's relationship with man, a pattern present from the beginning of time. First, God generously provides for man. Next,

man arrogantly perverts God's gifts. Finally, God disciplines but then compassionately restores (p. 38). However, God's forgiveness is offered only at *great cost* to Himself, and *no cost* to the recipient (p. 39). But "no price could be higher for arrogant people to pay" (p. 39). Indeed, man is humbled by the recognition that he *cannot* possibly earn his own salvation. Yet redemptive love for others must be grounded in the knowledge of God's gracious, forgiving love for you:

"The extent to which someone truly loves will be positively correlated to the degree the person is stunned and silenced by the wonder that his huge debt has been canceled." (p. 43)

Even believers, immersed in the daily concerns of life, are not always fully aware of the price paid for their redemption:

"...few Christians are that overwhelmed by the power of the gospel to save our souls from hell, because the unpleasant consequences of living in a fallen world feel too much like a hell in which God refuses to intervene." (p. 43)

But it is important that we "be silenced by the gravity of our condition," and yet stunned when God responds in tender love rather than the wrath we deserve (p. 66):

"His unnerving goodness stuns us. He simply does not respond to my hatred as I fear He will, as I have experienced in countless other relationships before, and as I know He should!" (p. 75)

"Silence, in its life-changing power, comes to those who see the darkness of their own hearts in light of the holy standards of God." (p. 74)

God is experienced as "all we feared, but infinitely more kind than we could have ever imagined" (p. 75).

Allender is correct to stress the importance of *both* holiness and mercy, rather than a heavy dose of one or the other (p. 74). We are silenced when we view the darkness of our own hearts in the light of God's holy standards (p. 74). True enough--note Isaiah's encounter with God in Isaiah 6; he was undone! Today, as Allender rightly states, "we have heard so much about God's love that His wrath seems alien and exaggerated" (p. 81). But God really *is* angry with sin, and His merciful, forgiving love is only meaningful against the background and reality of that wrath. Allender cites a helpful comment from John Calvin:

"For in a manner which cannot be expressed, God, at the very time when He loved us, was hostile to us until reconciled in Christ." (p. 81)

Yes. God loved us even while we remained His enemies, even when His anger burned against our sin. He provided for the removal of His own wrath. We should indeed be stunned by such incredible love! The cross goes against all that humanity might normally expect, seeming "foolish" by mortal standards:

"The scandal of the Cross is that it is so foolish. God, the infinite Creator, becomes a perfect sacrifice for the sake of a twisted human soul. He not only dies, but does so as a public spectacle of shame." (p. 84)

Romans 3:24-25 affirms the public nature of Christ's humiliation for the sake of our salvation. It is strange, yet refreshing, to hear a *psychologist* speak in these terms. *But all the more important to remain discerning...* because these important truths are mixed with errors.<sup>7</sup>

Allender goes on to speak about our response to the sins of others, in the light of being stunned and silenced by God's grace. He says that the heart so silenced:

"...is not immune from the effects of others' sin.... The key is that the silence that dawns in light of seeing your own sin does not discount the damage of others' sin." (p. 70)

Instead, the sins of others are *temporarily* placed in the background (p. 70).

Allender does rightly note that Paul silences our excuses in Romans 1-3. We may think that if all the facts were known, we'd be found innocent, but Scripture states otherwise (p. 70)!

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<sup>7</sup> One such error, that doesn't fit neatly into the discussion of "bold love," is Allender's quotation of the unorthodox modern theologian Moltmann, who in *The Crucified God* said that "the Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father." Allender concludes that "the Godhead was at war with Itself." Never does Scripture speak of any internal war within the Godhead! God the Father, out of His love, sent Christ the Son, who willingly obeyed and perfectly fulfilled His mission. As Allender says elsewhere (p. 121), the cross was "the most glorious interplay of justice and mercy, worked out in perfect harmony by all members of the Godhead."

Generally, this analysis is biblical. The danger, again, is found in the author's promotion of "memory retrieval." It is important that we deal with what we know to be the *real* sins of others, not sins based solely on "recovered" memories with no accompanying evidence or witnesses.

## **Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Right from the beginning of *Bold Love*, Allender emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. He states that his book is about forgiving love. He believes that during this life, God:

"...quietly stirs up a hunger for purity that is stronger than lust; and He empowers us to pursue other people, even ones who mistreat us, in the strength of forgiveness and restorative grace." (p. 9)

However, forgiveness is often difficult. It seems illogical, infuriating, and too costly (p. 14). But it is essential to love:

"Love cannot last long or live out its eternal purpose in human relationships without a foundation of forgiveness--the forgiveness from God for our failure to love with a pure, other-centered heart, and forgiveness when the recipient of our love spurns our gift or uses our soul in an unloving fashion." (p. 41)

Forgiveness becomes increasingly necessary, says Allender, "to the degree the damage of living in a fallen world is faced" (p. 88). Even where grievous abuse has been endured, "a life of love, joy, and purpose will not occur without forgiveness that permeates every fiber of our relationships" (p. 108).

Specifically concerning "bold love," Allender believes that "the past can be remembered for the well-being of the abuser" (p. 16). Explaining more fully what it means to forgive, he says:

"Forgiving love does not merely get one through tough times or give purpose to the daily grind of life. *Forgiving love is the inconceivable, unexplainable pursuit of the offender by the offended for the sake of restored relationship with God, self, and others.*" (p. 29)

"Forgiving someone who hurts us requires humility, imagination, and courage. We need the kind of humility that rises out of a deep understanding of our sin and a redemptive



imagination that honestly faces where a person is and longs for where he might be." (p. 206)

We can agree, in general, about the importance of seeking to restore those who have sinned against us. This is indeed a valid, biblical reason for not totally disregarding the past. But again, it is critical to be accurate about the events of the past. *"Memory retrieval" therapy rarely shows the necessary concern for such accuracy.*

Allender promises to challenge "many cherished notions about love and forgiveness" (p. 15). One of these is the popular teaching of *self-forgiveness* (even though Allender taught this very thing in *The Wounded Heart*):

"Self-affirmation designed to develop self-forgiveness and self-expression will only aggravate the problem." (p. 17)

We can commend the author for rejecting the unbiblical doctrine of self-forgiveness. This idea, never mentioned or implied anywhere in Scripture, is all too often taken for granted as if it were truth. We can also applaud Allender for rejecting for self-serving distortion of forgiveness taught so often by psychologists:

"The choice to forgive must have a greater power than merely removing negative consequences from our soul." (p. 164)

It is good to see an author reject some of the popular errors being taught as truth. Still, we must examine further and approach Allender's teachings with great caution.

Another "cherished notion" to be challenged is the "forgive-and-forget" mentality, which Allender believes is only practiced "through radical denial, deception, or pretense" (p. 16). He believes that:

"We have been bludgeoned with many twisted versions of 'forgive and forget' and 'turn the other cheek' that God never intended." (p. 157)

Allender, however, insists that "we are not called to wipe away our memories or pretend the past is not a big deal" (p. 160). He notes that "God is hurt by sin, and it draws forth passionate anger" (p. 160). The "forgive-forget" concept arises from such passages as Jeremiah 31:34 and Psalm 25:7, but Allender claims (based on 2 Corinthians 5:10) that "God does remember sin" (p.

159). His "forgetfulness" is merely a metaphor, not to be taken literally (p. 159).

Let's unpack this and look very closely at definitions. God *does promise* to "remember our sins no more." However, "remember no more" is not the equivalent of a memory loss. God is omniscient! The term *remember* here means more than the ability to recall. When God says He will "remember no more," He promises to remove our sin. He will no longer count it against us; His justice has been fully satisfied by Christ, and we are clothed in His righteousness, justified before God and seen by Him as holy and blameless.

The human equivalent of God's "remember no more" is a specific *promise* made to the individual who has sinned against us. It is not the inability to recall the event, nor is it a pious pretense. It is a promise that the event will not be brought up again: to the person who sinned, to third parties, or to oneself. When that promise is kept, in time the memory fades in intensity although the person may not have "forgotten" in the absolute sense, so as not to be *able* to recall if reminded.

Another "common misunderstanding" that Allender addresses is the belief that "forgiving another occurs once and for all--once done, always done" (p. 157). He states that:

"It is naive to believe forgiving another for any one failure or for a lifetime of harm is ever entirely finished.... To forgive another is always an ongoing, deepening, quickening process, rather than a once-for-all event." (p. 158)

Allender is *wrong*. The promise to "remember no more" is indeed a one-time event. It is particularly ludicrous to claim that *one failure* requires an ongoing process of forgiveness! Allender even views *God's* forgiveness, contrary to Scripture, as a process:

"God is continually, literally, second-by-second covering our sin under His Son's blood and forgiving us our sins." (p. 42)

Such teachings are not in Scripture. In fact, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the finality of the atonement. Christ's work on our behalf has been accomplished *once and for all* (Hebrews 1:3, 9:12, 25-28), contrary to Allender. And we are called to forgive others *as God in Christ has forgiven us* (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32).

An additional "misconception" is that "forgiving another releases all hurt, anger, and desire for vengeance" (p. 158). Christians often believe that the *proof* of real forgiveness lies in the absence of hurt and anger (p. 158). Sometimes, Allender agrees, this does occur, and he recognizes that "a person who feels life-dominating hurt and anger is rarely forgiving" (p. 159). He goes on to suggest that if no real emotion is experienced when there is hurt, there is no real heart involvement:

"It must be assumed that the presence of hurt and anger is not the final proof of a lack of forgiveness. In fact, an absence of strong feeling would imply a lack of heart involvement." (p. 160)

All of this contrasts, generally, with the feeling emphasis of most modern psychological approaches to forgiveness. The promise to "remember no more" can and must be made even when contrary to emotions. However, continuing hurt and anger may well be evidence that the promise to "remember no more" has not been kept. A forgiving *spirit* does not coexist with ongoing anger and hurt. Continued anger, hurt, and bitterness may be evidence of a failure to understand God's forgiveness in Christ; it could, perhaps, even reveal that salvation has not taken place at all.

The conditionality of forgiveness is yet another aspect of the matter that Allender discusses. He considers "withholding forgiveness from an unrepentant person while pursuing reconciliation" to be a "key to biblical restoration" (p. 181). Therefore, "we need to learn more about how to recognize genuine change" (p. 180). Reconciliation, too, is withheld; it is:

"...not to be extended to someone who has not repented. *Forgiveness involves a heart that cancels the debt but does not lend new money until repentance occurs.*" (p. 162)

Thus there is a *cost* to both the offended person and to the offender:

"The cost for the offender is repentance. *Biblical forgiveness is never unconditional and one-sided.* It is not letting others go off scot-free, 'forgiven,' and enabled to do harm again without any consequence.... Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness is conditional." (p. 162)

But this analysis has problems. The Scripture does say that if your brother sins against you, rebuke him; if he repents,

forgive him (Luke 17:3-4, cited by Allender). There is an element of conditionality in granting forgiveness, in making the promise to "remember no more." At the same time, Scripture also *commands* the Christian to *forgive from his heart* (Matthew 6:14-15). Furthermore, the repentance required in Luke 17:3-4 does not involve making judgments about genuine change. Rather, it is based solely on the *word* of the other person. This is particularly clear when we consider the Lord's command to forgive up to *seven times a day* if the other person says that he repents (Luke 17:4). There is no way to "recognize genuine change" under such circumstances! We are to take our brother at his word. Allender again promotes unbiblical judgments of the heart of another person.

**Reconciliation.** Allender sees reconciliation as "the driving motive behind forgiveness" (p. 161). The forgiving party longs for the relationship with the offender to be restored (p. 163). However, the author warns that:

"Many misunderstand reconciliation as a requirement for peace at any cost, and many cannot imagine ever wanting a relationship with a person who has not changed." (p. 161)

But biblical forgiveness is not the mere cancellation of a debt:

"Forgiveness is far more than a business transaction; it is the sacrifice of a heartbroken Father who weeps over the loss of His child and longs to see the child restored to life and love and goodness." (p. 163)

Allender, unfortunately, offers psychological explanations as to why people often do not desire reconciliation:

"Many people refuse to acknowledge their desire for reconciliation with someone who hurt them, because of a terror of hope." (p. 166)

He explains further that people are reluctant to enter into the sorrow of hoping for something that quite likely will never be enjoyed (p. 167). Personal *pain*, rather than *sin*, is thus the driving force behind the sinful failure to be reconciled.

The consequence of denying hope, according to Allender, is "to lose the hunger for heaven and the joy of one's own salvation" (p. 167), as well as a hardening of the heart, leading to a denial of emotions and myopic self-interest (p. 172). His answer is to increase our own disappointment and longing for "more":

"What can be done to increase our perspective? The answer, in part, is to enter deeply into our hunger for more and the disappointment of incompleteness. Hunger and disappointment serve as internal witnesses against all efforts to make any part of our existence into a real piece of heaven." (p. 169)

Allender's answer also involves "a hatred of evil" that "deepens our passion for repentance" (p. 171). But his focus is fundamentally wrong. He zeroes in on the "longings" and desires of the sinful human heart, rather than appealing to the believer's *love for God* and gratitude for eternal salvation. This is no minor difference! Allender's psychological focus is *self-centered*, whereas biblical exhortations concerning forgiveness and reconciliation are *God-centered*.

We can agree that restoration and reconciliation are desirable biblical goals in the face of another person's sin. Unfortunately, the "memory retrieval" advocated in *The Wounded Heart*, combined with the counsel Allender provides in *Bold Love*, more often result in exactly the opposite. In fact, this entire paper is written at the request of a brokenhearted Christian man who is separated from both daughter and grandchildren as the result of *Bold Love* and its teachings. And he isn't alone!

### **The Role of the Church**

One of the most critical errors in *Bold Love* is the author's failure to appreciate the God-given role of the church in restoring believers who are caught in sin. Allender believes that:

"...even the church as an institution is the source of much pain and evil...we have all experienced the hardness of a dysfunctional church family at some point in our Christian life." (p. 126)

Although Christians do sin against one another at times, this is a harsh and overly general statement. It is a highly subjective evaluation, not a statement backed by statistics. Is it really true that we have *all* had this type of experience in our church families? The personal experiences of Allender and his counseling clients does not necessarily indicate that *all* Christians would evaluate their churches in such a negative light.

A key example is found when Allender speaks of a woman who approaches her pastor following a series of hurts inflicted by

others in her church. He warns her about bitterness, counseling her to forgive and forget the incidents. However:

"She wanted her pastor to take seriously the deep struggles in her marriage and family. Instead, her pastor told her that forgiveness always involves putting the event in the past and pressing on, forgetting what lies behind." (p. 29)

The pastor's counsel here is not wrong per se. However, there are others involved who are also under his pastoral care, and there are Scriptures such as Matthew 18:15-20 that apply to the situation. The pastor, in this instance, does need to become more involved and not simply brush off the incidents with a few quick words.

But is this how *all pastors in all churches* respond? Allender's portrait of the church and its leaders is highly slanted. Psychological counsel outside the church body is *not* the solution, as Allender and so many others would have it. The church needs to become involved in accordance with biblical standards. Not all churches neglect to do so!

The "excommunication" recommended by Allender is a most serious error when we consider the biblical role of the *church*, both its ordained officers and its people as a whole. Scripture views *church* discipline as a process involving, if necessary (when a person refuses to listen), the entire membership of a church. Paul's seemingly harsh words in 1 Corinthians 5, seeking the ultimate restoration of an individual sinner, were written to the *church* at Corinth, not to one person. Allender's counsel, on the contrary, bypasses the church and counsels an *individual* to make those judgments and "excommunicate" another, even a *parent*. This is one of the greatest dangers of *Bold Love* and can hardly be overemphasized.

## **Closing Comments**

Allender says that "we are to be as clever and cunning as the Devil and as good-hearted and -intentioned as God" in applying "bold love" (p. 152). He recommends a "craftiness" designed "to cut through the defenses and open the enemy's door" (p. 154). Similarly, he advocates "shrewd sacrifice," a type of giving specifically "designed for an enemy, not a friend...to expose the heart of the one doing harm" (p. 224). This is what he considers a "good deed" to another, even to one's parents. An interesting example is offered in the book of a counseling client, John:

"He was not a bond-servant of Christ. He was enmeshed in a wicked family.... His great calling in life was to keep the family balanced and stable. He was the 'helper'--the supportive, reasoned voice that calmed the waters after one of his father's tornado rages." (p. 146)

John's father, in this case, was abusive toward John's wife. We can agree that John, according to Scripture, is to "leave and cleave," loving and protecting his wife. But Allender introduces a *hatred* of John's father onto the scene:

"John began to see his father as more than someone with an anger problem...as wickedly committed to destroying all those who stood in the path he perceived would lead to self-fulfillment...*an arrogant man whom God hates...a man John was to hate as well--and hate to such a degree that his cancer would be destroyed, so that he might live.*"  
(p. 151, emphasis added)

But sinful man is not to *hate* those who sin against him. Restoration of another, and confrontation of sin, are biblical concepts. But Allender adds serious confusion to the issue--confusion that is destroying families--when he promotes actual *hatred* of one's parents. The resulting problems are multiplied to tragic proportions when combined with the "recovered memory" techniques he teaches and practices. Accusations are made, and relationships terminated, solely on the basis of events suddenly "remembered" during therapy. This violates principles of both Scripture and our legal system.

Perhaps this father-to-daughter letter, printed in a recent newsletter of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, is the best way to close:

"I'm taking a seminar this weekend. It's about living life more fully and being more effective as a human being. I did this because I am trying to build a new life. I hope you and the girls will be a part of it.

Your recent letter was warm, welcome, and I was pleased with the spirit of your offer to forgive me. And I must make this crystal clear. The memories you believe you recovered in therapy are bogus. I did not sexually abuse you at age three or any other age.

I pray that someday you will realize we are both victims of a health care system that has gone crazy--confusing superstition and science.

Until that day, I remain your loving Father. Please give my love to the kids.

Dad"<sup>8</sup>

More specifically, Christians today are confusing the superstitious, ungodly speculations of psychologists with biblical truth. Where there is real sin, let us love and restore one another. But where there is not, "bold love" has no place.

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<sup>8</sup> FMS Foundation Newsletter, Volume 4, No. 6. The FMS Foundation is located at 3401 Market Street, Suite 130, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3315. Many members have identified themselves as Christians.



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