

Cyber Truths By E-mail

36. Are You Dancing Around Each Other?

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Restoration Ministries International

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

email: Mikedowg@aol.com

Web: www.Restorationministries.org

Dear Friends,

Do you ever find yourself *dancing around* other people? In other words, are you fearful that if you say something that needs to be said, conflict or hurt feelings may result? Unless you're totally calloused, you find yourself in this apprehension every so often. Generally, your emotional tension in these situations is part of your *concern for the feelings* of others.

There's nothing wrong with this concern unless it turns into *fear* of hurt feelings. Fear will inhibit you from saying what others need to hear from you as God's conduit. Fear is a self-imposed prison that prevents the authentic love of Jesus from emanating out of you. In this psychologically-oriented culture, fear of hurting the feelings of others is keeping many families and extended spiritual families from blossoming with Christ-like love.

We periodically address the relational *prison of co-dependency* in our writings because so many of you are controlled by emotional fear rather than the love of Jesus. (We know this because you've told us it's so!) And, for you grandparents and those who would shepherd our Father's children, you can't afford to do this. Souls are at stake, and you're risking too much by giving in to your fear.

Co-dependency occurs when there is a habitual fear to confront or say something *corrective*. Let's see how fear may be keeping your family and extended spiritual family from developing mutually-supported, biblical character qualities among you. (For a short list of biblical character qualities, see page 5.)

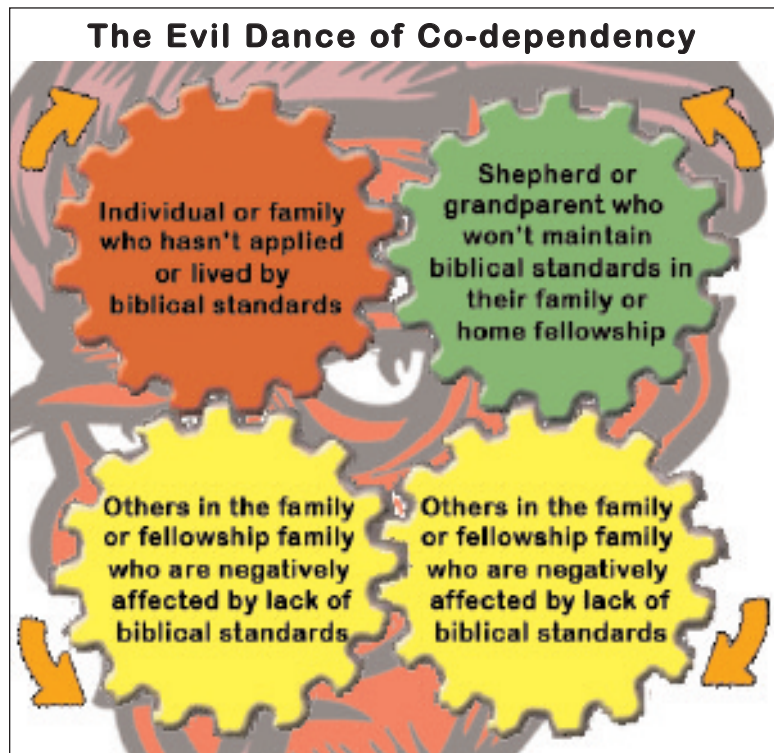
The Evil Dance Of Co-dependency

The dance partners:

Dominant Person. Individual or family who has neither *applied nor lived by* biblical standards. Out of fear, others refuse to confront this person or family. The dominant person feels free to live in sin because those who should speak up don't!

Co-dependent Person. Shepherd (or grandparent) who refuses to *uphold or maintain* biblical standards in their family or home fellowship family. This is the key person who *should* say something but is hindered by fear.

Significant Others. Family or fellowship family members who are negatively affected by the lack of mutually-supported, biblical character qualities in their relationships. They are *trapped in apprehension* because they know that sin is tolerated among them. And, they're frustrated because the shepherd or grandparent who should say something won't.



In order to stop the gears of fear and apprehension from turning, everyone involved must see the importance of *mutually* applying the Bible and *collectively* living by the same righteous standards.

Everyone must work out *together* the same biblical applications so they can *mutually* support each other in living them out.

Failure to do this leaves unnecessary apprehension, and often the dissolution of the relationships.

Don't Let Co-dependency Rule Your Family and Fellowship!

If we shepherds and grandparents are to be true to Jesus, we need to *live* the requirements of God's Word ourselves. His Spirit has empowered each of His own to do this by His grace! And just as important in our Lord's sight, we must also teach these to our family and faith family so that "*things will go well with them as they do what is good and right in the sight of our Lord*" (see Deuteronomy 6:7,8; 12:28; 2 Timothy 4:2-4).

How vital it is for those within families and home fellowship families to *heed* the Spirit and the Word so they can maintain communal righteousness!

In this lawless nation the God-given responsibility of shepherds and grandparents to wisely guide has been made all the harder. We now live within an Atomistic culture. That *individual*-centered influence permeates even Christian families. If you recall, few in an Atomistic society care about the commands of God. *Self* reigns supreme.

Even within Christendom, biblical moral standards have been disregarded by many families for several generations now. Parenting is an uphill struggle for those

still trying to rear children with biblical values. And, in order to raise godly offspring, Christian parents need the support of shepherds and grandparents to re-affirm biblical character qualities (Proverbs 6:23).

It's no surprise that the *world's viewpoint* so conflicts with that of God. Each individual perceives himself as a distinct unit focused on his own rights and happiness. Everything in life is on *his terms*; his humanist education has ingrained this motive deep into his core.

Anyone who has bought into this unbiblical disconnect from others will resist, either actively or passively, your attempts as a shepherd or grandparent to instruct or correct them. And be aware of a diversionary tactic: Even if they don't want to sever their relationship with you or their faith family, they'll choose a *passive* approach. That is, they'll listen and possibly even acknowledge what you have to say, **but they won't change.**

[For more on this, see **Discussing How To Restore The Early Church**, Lesson 3.]

Consider some of the people you may have in your faith family who've been heavily influenced as an Atomistic generation. Some may even have married into your family!

- A number may have spent years sitting in pews where no one confronted them about their sin. They thought that as they sat among the crowd every Sunday, they were okay with God. After all, *He* didn't seem to make any demands on them in their weekly appointment with Him!

This accustomed pattern of *unconfronted attitude and behavior* makes eldering that much more difficult. Your attempts to instill biblical character qualities through role modeling and confronting seem intrusive to them.

Perhaps you're a grandparent who is now under conviction by God to instill in your family what you've neglected to do earlier. You'll find that your efforts are hindered by your prior complacency in which you "*lowered the bar*" of God's character qualities.

- Some were raised by parents who *got annoyed* when they had to correct or instruct their children. Instead of instilling biblical character qualities, the parent vented anger when the child did something the parent didn't like.

Many of these now-adult children are doing the same thing with *their* children—just getting annoyed, rather than modeling and teaching them biblical character qualities. Not only can't they point to the biblical basis for their instruction and correction; most have *no idea* of the character qualities delineated in God's Word! (See 2 Timothy 3:16.)

This is where shepherds and God-fearing grandparents need to do their part in supporting biblical character development. This must become a *deliberate concentrated intent* in the Spirit to help biblical character qualities be collectively lived out in your family and/or faith family.

What Must A Shepherd or Grandparent Do?

First, make sure that YOU understand your responsibilities to our Father if you're to fulfill your role as His shepherd or a Kingdom-minded grandparent. *You've* tasted His compassion and forgiveness in your own life, so the Spirit would have you express that gratefulness by passing along what He's shown you!

You are the key individual who can guide those you love to the narrow gate of the Lord you love! Our Father will accept *no excuses* from you if you shirk His call.

After you understand from His Word your loving responsibilities in the Spirit, then the specifics of walking in obedient trust need to be made clear to those in your care. Only with this foundation can those you are coming alongside understand *their own* responsibilities in the Spirit as willing learners—fully cooperating with you as you help them develop biblical character qualities that bring praise to our Lord.

(This principle also applies to husbands and fathers who are walking in the Spirit as His loving servants. If your wife and children don't clearly recognize your biblical responsibilities, how can they support you as you fulfill them on their behalf?)

A key verse depicts the vital interaction between spiritual shepherd and beloved sheep. Note the deeper meaning of *voluntarily listening* with the confidence that the counsel shared is worth *hearing* and *heeding*:

Fully listen to the ones leading you, with the intent of submitting. They watch on behalf of your souls as men who will give an account.

Confidently let yourselves be persuaded so that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be profitless to you (Hebrews 13:17, paraphrased from the Greek).

Please note the Hebraic understanding of "hearing": to listen and learn with the **intent of obeying**. If you say you *love* God, then you will *obey* His ways because that's how love for Him responds! (Deuteronomy 7:9; John 14:15)

If you are serving others as a shepherd or grandparent who follows Jesus, remind yourself that you are a living representative of a loving and holy Father to both model and teach His ways (see

Genesis 18:19). You are pointing the way through your words as well as your personal lifestyle for others to walk in ever-increasing obedient trust as the Spirit of Christ works in them.

Being a shepherd or grandparent who loves Jesus entails the responsibility to *include* and *exclude*; to *commend* and *correct* for the well-being of all who are fellowship family in Jesus.

[For more on this topic, see Teaching E-mail 31, *Shepherding A Fellowship Family* (October 24, 2007).]

If you fear hurting the feelings of people in the course of serving our Father, you won't represent His *awesome holiness* to others. You'll back away from excluding or correcting those in your faith family when it's necessary for their walk in Jesus and for the well-being of everyone. As we've mentioned, there's a major difference between being *concerned* with the feelings of others, and the *fear* that they might be hurt. One flows from a loving heart, the other from bondage to fear.

You can't fulfill your loving responsibilities to our Father as one who elders with compassion if you're controlled by fear. The overriding presence of fear indicates that you *don't love as Jesus would*. Keep asking the Holy Spirit to help you love more, and to act on that love. Don't be hindered by what others think about you or how they react to your loving obedience to your Lord. Remember the warning: "***Fear of man will prove to be a snare***" (Proverbs 29:25).

How can those for whom you're caring respect you if you're unwilling to confront their sin? "*We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change*" (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

If someone within your family or fellowship family is continuing to violate God's Word, follow the pattern of Matthew 18:15-18: Confront him privately. If he refuses to repent, take along two or three others. If he still refuses to repent, then present the matter to your fellowship family. If he refuses to hear them, then you need to take the next loving step — remove the person from fellowship until he/she repents.

You aren't against that person! On the contrary, you're *for* them but *against their sin* (see 1 Corinthians 5:5). There have always been "***men who never change their ways and have no fear of God***" (Psalms 55:19). Yet throughout Scripture, "fear of God" is foundational to everything else in your relationship with God. [Check this for yourself in your concordance.]

Especially if you're a grandparent or shepherd, make sure you know *in your heart* Whom you serve, and the nature of your service on His behalf. To yield to His Spirit in you and grow into Christ's likeness is not an option for anyone who calls himself "Christian"! Ask yourself:

Are you more concerned about the feelings of someone who is serving their sin nature, or about upholding the holiness of God and the communal righteousness of your fellowship family?

If we older followers of Jesus who love Him haven't been raised with the goal of Kingdom service, then we need to both diligently acquire and teach God's character qualities. Because our heavenly Father *is* restoring the Hebraic foundations, we can trust that He will respond as we cry out to Him in humble dependence.

[For more, see *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church*, Lesson 34; also March/April 2003 Newsletter, *Men Standing In The Gap*.]

Below is a short list of biblical character qualities. Put an "X" to indicate their degree in your own life. How well are you doing as an instrument of the Spirit to help instill these in your faith family or your children or grandchildren? If you don't, how will these biblical character qualities be developed in them?

God's minimum character requirements	<u>Biblical Character Qualities</u>								
↓	Generous	Yielding	Forgiving	Caring	Honest	Trusting	Thankful	Prompt	Humble
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Stingy	Defiant	Bitter	Selfish	Deceptive	Cynical	Grumbling	Late	Proud
<u>Sin Nature Characteristics</u>									

For a more complete list, see *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church*, Lesson 38.

We have a few questions for you to consider and discuss:

- Refer to the above chart. Ask someone close to you to verify if they agree with your results. If you didn't put '100' for your answers, what has hindered you from developing these character qualities? What do you need to do to change? What help from others do you need?

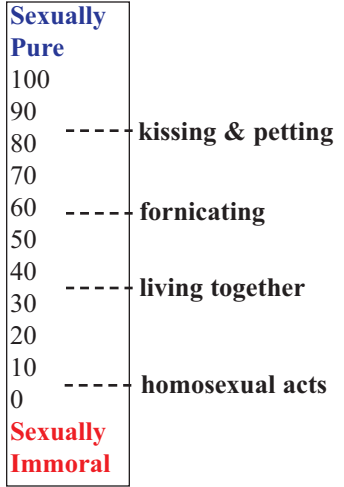
- Did your parents rely on the Bible as the source for the character they wanted to instill in you? Yes or No? If no, describe if and how your parent(s) went about instilling character in you.

- If you're a parent or grandparent, describe the ways in which you're instilling character in your children and/or grandchildren.

- If you're eldering in a home fellowship family, describe how you're instilling biblical character qualities among them.

- At what age should you begin a child's character training? How old do you think a child has to be before you start to correct wrong or unsafe behavior? At what age do these passages of Scripture begin to apply: Prov. 22:6,15; 23:13; 29:15; Eph. 6:4?

• “Family” in western culture has degraded from being *child-raising* to *child-centered* to today’s *child-dominated*. Describe your family’s pattern. Is it scriptural?



• Indicate on the chart to the left your own premarital level of immorality. What level did you condone or excuse for your children? If the bar wasn’t ‘100’ for you or your children, describe how you can help each family member *now* live according to God’s standard.

Concluding Thoughts

So many grandparents and parents we’ve met were themselves raised by parents who *lowered the bar* of biblical character qualities. With each progressive generation the bar has been increasingly lowered.

Many grandparents and parents who fornicated or lived together are finding to their painful horror that their offspring are plunging headlong into immorality and perversion. As they’ve

aged, many grandparents in particular are becoming convicted as they see the tragic effect of disregarding God’s holy standards: the godless, immoral lives of their grandchildren.

A number we’ve heard from are now eager to do all they can to return to God’s ways, to walk in His Spirit, and to once again raise the bar of righteousness for their family. Yet this can be painful for those who realize how grievously they’ve lowered the bar in the past by neither living by His standards themselves nor by raising their children to.

Don’t let regret over the past stop you! Humility is your greatest asset. First, ask God forgiveness for sinning against Him. Receive that forgiveness by His Spirit, purposing to yield to Him in loving obedience. He promises to *forget your confessed sin* and to *not hold you guilty* for it (Psalms 103:12). *Forgive yourself* as well, and walk in His Spirit as one who is forgiven!

Next, ask your children and grandchildren for their forgiveness for having failed to instill God’s character qualities in them according to His Word. Then ask each of them to *help you* as you *help them* grow in Christ-like character.

We now have the opportunity to undo a curse that’s been passed along for generations. It’s our own “days of Elijah” to obey His Spirit while it’s yet “day”. Our God yearns to “*turn the hearts of fathers to children, and the hearts of children to the fathers*” (Malachi 4:5,6), and to turn “*the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (Luke 1:17).

As an Atomistic culture this country is already under a curse with so many children living in defiance of their parents. But it doesn’t have to continue this way! Curses can be broken if we return

wholeheartedly to God in humble repentance. **Repentance** entails *turning away* from wrong, *asking forgiveness* for our sin, and then *doing it God's way*.

Keep in mind that the “spirit of Elijah” is sent whenever God wants to restore His Word to His children as a *way of life*. The Hebraic Restoration is such a move on His part! Notice that our Father, the Father of all fathers, is restoring the hearts of *fathers* to *children*. This isn't referring just to a renewed biological connection, but a spiritual one in which the *loving connectedness* is that of spiritual parent and child.

Paul desired deeply to get across the *spiritual family commitment* he felt for his various children in Jesus: “*you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children*” (1 Thessalonians 2:11; see also 1 Corinthians 4:15; Philippians 2:22).

This is why those who shepherd in Hebraic home fellowships are so critical. They are the “fathers”, the *zakens*, who extend our Father's loving concern for His children. The man who elders in His Spirit is His living vessel of wisdom and compassion to provide biblical direction, counsel and encouragement to those who are less mature in their faith walk.

And, those who are benefiting from a spiritual father's loving care have a responsibility as well: to make your work on their behalf *a joy for you* (Hebrews 13:17). Remember, lasting spiritual fruit comes as your wisdom from the Spirit is integrated with their responsive receptivity. That's where the joy comes in!

Many especially among evangelicals think that *love* only means *obedience to God's commands*. However, the *obedience* factor of their definition of Christianity is only partially accurate. The essential ele-

ment of *love from a circumcised heart* is tragically missing—a *gratefulness* of union with Messiah Jesus who has redeemed us to enjoy true fellowship with Him! (See, for example, Deuteronomy 10:12-16; 1 Corinthians 1:9.)

Due to the pervasive influence of Hellenist thought, most evangelicals *separate* faith from feelings, as if the heart and the mind are independent operators within the soul. That failure to grasp the *interconnection* of our “heart, soul, mind and strength” permeates a large part of Christendom. This disconnect is captured in the familiar evangelistic choo-choo train cars—**faith, fact, and feeling**.



The *Emunah* Behind Biblical Love

Don't mistake the Hebrew word for “faith”, *emunah*, for mere belief or mental assent! Rather, the word is emotionally charged—pregnant with heartfelt conviction about God. The heart and soul *together* enact obedient trust because of the object of that love: God. *Emunah* is faith, fact, and feeling all wrapped up in one. You can't separate the dimensions!



As a result, biblical love is also more than just rote obedience to God's commands. An emotionally charged facet of devoted affection and responsiveness lay behind the subsequent action! “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever trusts in Him*

shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Did God give us Jesus because it was the *right thing to do*, or because His *deep affection* for the mankind He created demanded such a wondrous step of reconciling sacrifice?

As we've shared so often: the foundation of *love* is found in Deuteronomy 6:5: "**Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**" The Hebrew word for love, *ahav* (ah-hahv'), means to be filled with desire and delight and passion for the one you love. You long to be in your loved one's presence. The heart-cry of God throughout the Older Testament is a longing for a *love relationship with His people*.

Jesus repeated this greatest commandment: "**Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second [which is from Leviticus] is like it, **Love your neighbor as yourself.** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). The Greek word *agape* (ah-gah'-pay) is used for love here and its meaning is similar to the Hebrew *ahav*.

This love has both an obedient response as well as an intimate attachment. The intertwining of these aspects is made clear to *all* of God's people: "**to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him**" (Deuteronomy 11:22).

When a man is directed to *love* his wife (Ephesians 5:33), he isn't commanded to "do right by her", but to live with her in responsive and unabashed affection as the one to whom he's deeply devoted.

If your relationship with God through the Spirit of Christ is *emunah* rather than just intellectual belief, you'll find that your love overflows with affection through the Spirit in you. You'll obey His ways because He means so much to you!

On the other hand, if your "faith" is a belief system, you'll live as a religious "cold fish". Your ministry to others will be a *duty*, devoid of the warmth and intimacy that Jesus would reveal through you. You'll treat others as a project rather than a recipient of heartfelt concern. An indicator? You'll quote far more verses at them than you yourself have been changed by!

Paul sums up what matters to our Father: "**In Christ Jesus, the only thing that counts is our faith expressing itself as it works through love**" (Galatians 5:6).

The devoted trust that produces obedience (*emunah*) and the sacrificial (*agape*) love that stays the course are two of our Father's stipulations in the covenant ratified in His Son's blood and sealed by His Spirit. Through your *loving obedient trust* He uses you to affectionately represent Him to others. If you're devoid of either quality, you're unprepared to serve Him in eldering His people as a shepherd Who cares as *He* cares.

The Spirit in you can flame your *emunah* so that you will love with a deep affection that builds up and encourages others in your fellowship family. And, your responsive love for both God and for those in your care will compel you to confront as needed so that fellowship can be fully restored.

If you fear confrontation, discover in which area you're falling short: Is it love, trust, or both?

***Emunah* birthed by the Spirit at work in you impels you to uphold the Word of God out of heartfelt love for Him, and to affectionately love those in whom you're helping develop Christ-like character.**