

# Escaping Satan's Funhouse: Believing the Truth in the Care of Disordered Souls

*Pastor Paul W. Dare*

## **God's Mirror vs. Satan's Mirror**

**I**N BO GIERTZ'S CLASSIC PASTORAL NOVEL, "The Hammer of God," old Johannes lay convicted and terrified on his death bed. With too much time to think, all he could recall was his sin. He knew hell was his lot. With clarity and truth, the hammer of God's law had done its work.

Into this room of death came young Pastor Savonius, who was ignorant of what he could not be ignorant of: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without this balm for the conscience, he spoke to Johannes the worst thing a person could possibly say, "God is good." He might as well have kicked poor Johannes out of the bed and stolen his pillow. It was because God is good — so very, very good — holy even, that Johannes knew he was doomed. He sinned and justly deserved God's wrath. There was no arguing with Johannes. What he thought was sin was in fact, sin. He believed God's holy and just law condemned him. Indeed, it did. With the judgment of a "good" God against him, hell was his lot.

The hammer of God's law had done its work. It continues to work on the consciences of men. It holds up a mirror for us to see our sin and the con-

sequence of our sin with clarity and truth. Indeed, it is just as we sing in the hymn, *Salvation Unto Us has Come* (LSB 555), “*The law is but a mirror bright, to bring the inbred sin to light, that lurks within our nature.*”

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther, with his customary verve, wrote of the law:

Now this is the thunderbolt of God, by means of which he destroys both the open sinner and the false saint and allows no one to be right but drives the whole lot of them into terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks: My word is a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces” [Jer. 23:29]. This is not “active contrition,” a contrived remorse, but “passive contrition,” true affliction of the heart, suffering, and the pain of death....But where the law exercises such an office alone, without the addition of the gospel, there is [nothing else but] death and hell, and the human creature must despair, like Saul and Judas.<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully, in Giertz’s writing, the gospel brought life to Johannes’ deathbed. A woman named Katrina came to the house with the word of life. She spoke words of consolation to Johannes, reminding him that, while he was a great sinner, “Jesus is a greater Savior.” She spoke of the atonement and faith in the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Pastor Savonius, ignorant of the gospel though he was, spoke words of absolution according to his office and thus imparted the very

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, R Kolb and T Wengert, eds., *Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Article 3 (Concerning Repentance). *The Book of Concord*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 312-213.

forgiveness won for Johannes at the cross. Johannes found peace in Jesus. But before that happened, the law powerfully wrought upon his soul the alien work of God.

For the purposes of this paper, I would draw your attention to two truths of God’s law. First, with clarity, it shows us the truth and consequence of our sin. It is a mirror that does not lie. Second, it convicts us of that very same sin. The guilt and terror we experience from the law is a sign of a healthy conscience; one that is ready to receive the great gift of peace with God found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified for us and our salvation.

In Lutheran circles, this would be considered classic “law and gospel” ministry. Unfortunately, there are many stricken consciences and terrified souls that are not a result of the mirror of God’s law. Rather, they are a victim of what I will call “Satan’s mirror.” The evil foe, as he works his crafty malice, mimics our God. He too has a mirror, and he desires you to gaze into it. But there is neither clarity nor truth in it. Instead, it is a mirror much like you would find in an old-fashioned carnival funhouse. You remember: you stood in front of the warped mirror and your head looked like a hot air balloon while your midsection looked like a stick. Your feet were that of a clown while your knees looked like basketballs. In this mirror you recognized a reflection of yourself, but at the same time you laughed because you knew that the vision was a harmless, silly lie.

But what happens if the enemy’s warped mirror is held in front of you time and time again? Or you are led into a funhouse and someone locks the door behind you? Wherever you turn you see a distorted, or perhaps

better said, a *disordered* view of yourself. What would happen if you then came to believe what you saw in Satan's funhouse not as a silly lie, but in fact, the truth about yourself? In the matter of the conscience, *what if the guilt and terror you experience comes not from God's mirror of truth, but rather from a lie in Satan's mirror?*

Let's take this a step further. When a **pastor** is the object of Satan's mirror of lies, how is he able to go about the ministry to which he is called? What happens when you, as a pastor, are stuck in this funhouse because a soul you are called to care for has led you inside of their funhouse and locked the door behind you? And most importantly, for the sake of your soul and those you are called to care for, how do you get out? This paper is called, "Escaping Satan's Fun House: Believing the Truth in the Care of Disordered Souls."

### **Personality Disorders, the Parish and the Pastor**

At this point, I fully realize that there may be many people reading this paper who have no idea what I am talking about. Do not despair. Many people have never had Satan's mirror consistently and confidently held up to them by another individual. In short, ***they have never been the object of another's personality disorder***, where Satan's mirror is held up in the cruelest of ways. When the caretaker of a disordered soul gazes into this mirror day after day, it can provoke within him confusion, doubt, anger, sadness, fear, guilt, self-justification, vengeance, terror and worst of all, shame. Spiritually speaking, the person with the disorder is most often considered the person in

need of care, however, it is often the caretaker who becomes unwell and needs care. Why is this? The simple answer is this: according to his calling and caring heart, *the pastor continually tries to care for the soul that attacks his own*. The attack is often a result of the disordered soul relentlessly holding up a warped mirror to the shepherd. This mirror will display the pastor as an uncaring villain, an unreasonable man, a clueless idiot, but even worse, an unworthy shepherd who needs to depart from his flock.

Before going any farther, it is necessary to define "a personality disorder." The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, defines a personality disorder as "an enduring pattern of inner experiences and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture." First, allow me to draw your attention to the words "enduring pattern." The behavior of some disordered persons is enduring in that it is not easily changed. What is more, there is a pattern. The behavior is not that of a person who just "had a bad day," but the disordered behavior is keenly observable in that it is repeated. The second part of the definition I wish to highlight is "behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture." In other words, the observable behavior is irrational or "odd." Some disordered persons may operate normally in many areas of life, but run into significant problems when met with areas of life where there are common "expectations" placed upon them.

This creates a problem for a low-expectation place like the church. In a congregation, "all are welcome" — as low an expectation as one could

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have. Because of this, at first, a person with a personality disorder will often go unnoticed; or, if they are noticed, they will go unchallenged. Eventually, however, if they seek or if they are asked to serve in an area of leadership, trouble will invariably arise because expectations are now placed upon them. In most instances, the church is ill-equipped to handle it.

Robert Kruger, in his pastoral book, “The Proper Care of Snakes: Managing Personality Disorders in the Congregational Setting,” makes the point that there is good reason to think some personality disorders are more present in the congregation than in the general public. He further suggests why they are not properly handled. Among the reasons he lists are:

- ◇ Congregations seek to be accepting and welcoming places. It is considered rude or even “un-christian” to be confrontational about another’s behavior.
- ◇ Congregations are volunteer organizations, as such they have limited authority or means to address inappropriate behavior.
- ◇ Congregations are eager to survive, especially when they are not growing. Therefore, they are fearful of “offending” regular members.
- ◇ Because it is difficult to find individuals willing to accept leadership positions, individuals with personality disorders often find an opportunity in the congregations to exercise power and influence, which they are unable to do in other areas of their life.

From personal experience and from conversations with other pastors, I

believe Rev. Kruger to be correct in all his points. If a pastor has not yet encountered a disordered soul, he almost certainly soon will; and if he does not prepare his congregation’s leadership, a hellish period will follow for the pastor and the congregation.

This paper focuses on a unique time in a congregation’s life when it is troubled by a personality disordered soul, mainly, when the pastor is the object of the person’s disorder — when, for some reason, the disordered soul has identified the pastor as the source of consternation, discontent, or even evil in his/her life. What follows are some general characteristics of a disordered soul followed by examples of that soul’s actions and their impact upon pastors. Each scenario is a real experience a pastor has endured in the care of a disordered soul.<sup>2</sup> As you read, pay careful attention to what fills the pastor’s soul as Satan’s mirror is held up for him to gaze into.

**1. People who have a personality disorder seemingly do not perceive how their words or actions affect others. Or, they actually may perceive how their actions affect others and simply not care.** Perhaps the most prominent trait of a person with a personality disorder is an unnerving lack of empathy for others. In one case, the individual questioned nearly everything the pastor said or did, no matter how insignificant it was. When he once preached on how Jesus’ blood tears down walls of sin, he was accused on the way out of church of being against President

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<sup>2</sup> I am one of the pastors listed below, but for reasons of confidentiality, I do not indicate which incidents I personally experienced.

Trump's border wall. The soul went on to accuse the pastor of being uncaring by not allowing her to tell the congregation of the international trouble that she perceived was coming to their church. Because her criticism was so persistent, this pastor would wonder and worry with a pit in his stomach every Sunday when he got up, "Is she going to be there this Sunday? It was always in the back of my mind."

In another case, the disordered soul began leaving messages on a pastor's home answering machine that were disparaging to the pastor's character. Messages came with such regularity that the pastor taught his children to sing hymns every time the phone rang so, in the event the caller was the disordered soul, the critical voice could be drowned out. When the call from the disordered soul was not answered, this individual would then drive past the church and parsonage to see if the pastor was really there. The pastor was left in fear.

He said of the experience, *"Every time the phone rings, you jump. Every time a car goes through the driveway, you jump. If the doorbell rings you cringe. You dread checking the mail. All of this is happening even though you have done nothing wrong but you feel like you have. I started to question, why am I feeling so crappy about myself when this is being done to me? I was feeling guilty though I wasn't sure why. I constantly self-justified myself as the good person being attacked by the bad person."* This pastor also confessed that if this had happened early in his ministry he would have left his calling behind.

In both cases, the pastors wondered, "How can this person not

understand how their actions are hurting me?" In fact, the person with the disorder may not understand. In each instance, after attacking their respective pastors, the disordered individuals conducted themselves as if nothing ever happened at all. This left the pastors bewildered and questioning what they were experiencing. More than that, the pastors felt as though they were walking on eggshells, watching every word and action for fear of setting the disordered soul off.

**2. Some people with a personality disorder may often they see themselves as "saviors" who are always right. As a result, they often believe they can solve everyone else's problems, all the while being completely oblivious to their own, obvious problems.** One pastor was confronted with a disordered soul who was filing for bankruptcy while at the very same time insisting that he run the church's stewardship program. Later, this same individual insisted on leading a marriage course at church while having extreme marital difficulty himself. While the response of the pastor was to simply say "no," he did so with extreme caution. Past experience with this individual taught him he would be demonized for doing so. The disordered soul seemingly had no idea why his requests were inappropriate because he seemed to have no insight into his own behavior. This extreme level of unrecognized hypocrisy was befuddling and frustrating to the pastor. It was the pastor's desire to call the soul to repentance; however, this soul believed he had no need of it. In fact, to the disordered soul, it was the pastor who needed to repent for denying him leadership roles, and he



expressed this to the pastor repeatedly.

Notice in this example how the pastor was put in a no-win situation. This is so often the case: the pastor becomes the villain who says “no.” When this develops into a pattern with a disordered soul, the pastor’s resolve can understandably wear down. He may want to be left alone. He often faces the temptation to give in to the irrational requests just to have some peace and maybe even be favored for a while. One pastor said, “I used to hope that the person just wanted to be heard, so I would listen politely no matter how outrageous or insulting his words would be.

“It didn’t work.”

Another component of a disordered soul’s perception of themselves as a savior is they frequently believe they are above authority or reproof. They see themselves as the protector of the church at all costs. One pastor was accused of playing “fast and loose” with his church’s money in front of his church council during a budget meeting. The pastor was not present for the accusation, and no context was provided to the council members. When pressed about why he said this, the disordered soul recalled a conversation from a decade previous when the pastor said he supported an expenditure of money for the children’s Christmas program. In this soul’s mind, the pastor’s remote comment was applied to the current situation, and the soul believed he needed to save the church from the pastor’s careless, excessive spending. When confronted with his words by another pastor and elders, he refused to admit it was slander. After he was pressed on this matter for a month, with en-

couragement to repent and be reconciled, he claimed he was a victim of a conspiracy, “it is a free country,” and that he was entitled to his opinion. No matter how kindly, reasonably, biblically, and consistently he was approached, he believed he was right. In his mind, he did not sin.

As this was the culmination of a pattern of behavior that targeted the pastor over the course of years, the pastor would feel nervous on Sunday mornings. He would scan the sanctuary to see if the soul was present. He said, “*Once I saw him, there would always be a pit in my stomach. If there was a way to avoid him, I would. But after this incident it was either him or me. The man is an obnoxious bully and a jerk. I decided I would not do anything with church administration with him present. If that was not acceptable to the church leadership, I was ready to ask them for three months to find a new call.*”

This “savior” complex also helps explain why the disordered soul may target the pastor. The pastor, who is often seen as having the ultimate authority in the congregation, is consequently seen as a threat.

**3. Some people with a personality disorder often do not listen to reason.** Personality-disordered souls are often not responsive to what many people would call “common sense.” A disordered organist came to her pastor, refusing to play Christmas hymns during the Christmas season because “we always do that.” When told that she must, she became angry. She accused the pastor of being stuck in the mud and not in tune to the congregation. The pastor was left perplexed, wondering, “I can’t

believe I just had an argument about playing 'O Come All Ye Faithful' on Christmas. What's next?" More than that, if a pastor desires to address this biblically, what verse applies to this example?

Another pastor had a disordered soul insert herself into the evangelism team to move the church toward taking action against ISIS. When the pastor stated, "This is not evangelism," he became regularly accosted as an uncaring, naïve individual. No matter how ludicrous those words sound, the pastors interviewed for this paper admit that the words get into your heart and mind. They admit to spending personal time alone evaluating if the accusations lobbed against them might be true and why they were being attacked. Could it be their fault? When this happens, it becomes an experience in Satan's funhouse.

**4. One of the most harmful and scariest traits of a disordered soul is that he may appear completely normal for a period of time.** In some aspects of life, he functions as a healthy individual. In fact, the disordered person may even be kind. One pastor received a gift card from the soul that was accosting him. He wondered if perhaps things were getting better. *Maybe she is seeing that I do care and I am not an awful person as he was told.* A week later this same pastor received a message from the disordered soul stating he should be ready for a call from her therapist because she told her therapist that "her pastor was the cause of all her problems." Thus, an evil mind game is played. During the peaceful times, the pastor may falsely believe that "things are getting better." What is worse, he may

question or doubt his initial thoughts and reactions, thinking, "Maybe I am overreacting or imagining how bad things are." But when Satan's mirror is held up to him again, he is left confused and in a constant state of being "on guard." *Am I actually the cause of her problems?*

Because the disordered soul is capable of behaving "normally" for stretches of time, and may function effectively and responsibly in other aspects of life, many lay people don't recognize the serious disorder. The pastor often worries that no one is going to believe him if he tells people what is going on. One pastor said, "If it wasn't for email documentation of the disordered soul's words, I would have needed to leave the congregation. No one would believe me. In fact some people didn't believe me even with documentation." This same pastor was worried the situation would destroy his reputation within the congregation and destroy his ability to minister there.

**5. Finally, it can be said that the disordered soul is often not in touch with reality.** One pastor experienced accusations from a disordered soul who outrageously claimed that "[the pastor] gives me dirty looks from the front of the church." This same disordered soul also claimed he saw people talking and believed that he knew the content of conversations. Naturally, they were talking about him.

#### **A Pastor Cares for the Soul that Attacks His Own**

It may be easy for someone on the outside to dismiss this due to its insanity. It really is much like looking into the funhouse mirror: what you

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see is just plain silly. However, when you are caught in it and made to look time and time again, the picture it shows becomes consuming. Satan's lies take root: lies like, *I am a bad, uncaring, unworthy pastor*. It is my hope that those examples are sufficient for those who have not had Satan's mirror held up to them to begin to understand the experience of those who have. Please remember that what is written are merely examples of a *constant pattern of behavior*.

The unique dimension to all of this is that the pastor is keenly aware of his divine call to care for the soul, even as it attacks his own. This is where Satan really gets crafty. The pastor who is being accosted has a desire to get away from the disordered individual. One pastor admitted to dreaming of his church without this person by just about any means necessary. Such thoughts, however, are followed by the worst guilt: *This is the soul that I am called to care for and I just want him to go away. I am a bad pastor. I am unworthy of this call. I am all the things this person says that I am*. So then, the pastor may fall into the trap of desperately trying to figure out what will help the emotionally ill person. He thinks, "I must fix him." He finds himself in his office replaying conversations wondering what he could have said differently. Or he constantly ponders, *If I could just figure out what they are thinking, I could apply the appropriate word to them and they will be fine – and maybe, me too*.

Another lie the pastor may believe is "If I am kind enough to them, they will change and be kind to me." In this way, the pastor can soothe his conscience that he is, indeed, "trying to be a good pastor." In fact, this can

easily lead to self-justification: "I am trying to be a good pastor and this individual is just being cruel. This person doesn't know how good he has it with me as his pastor. I am caring for him and he returns my care with harm. Well, God will one day send him to hell." After that thought, the guilt comes back and the cycle repeats.

Contrast the pastor seeking to care for the soul who attacks his own to the secular world. There are many books and videos to help people deal with those in their lives who are suffering from a personality disorder. There are some practical pieces of information available. However, if on such a website, you scroll down to the comment section of these help guides, you will find countless responses saying, "don't listen (to the help guide)!" "Run away as fast as you can." "Cut off all contact." "Take whatever legal steps you need to take to escape." "These people are demon-possessed." "They will never change." "Save yourself." The faithful shepherd has no such option.

### **Satan Moves in for the Kill**

While the pastor is paralyzed in guilt, dark circling thoughts, the fear of man and self justification, Satan moves in for the kill with two of his favorite tools: the word of God and the church. When tempting Jesus in the wilderness, Satan famously used God's word against him. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (Matt 4:6). Satan attacks the undershepherds in the same way. We often confess the



words of 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." When it comes to the matter of being attacked by a disordered soul, initially, the truth is that the pastor probably did not sin. However, with these words of Scripture echoing in his head, the pastor consistently works to find his sin in the situation so that he may repent and the conflict can be resolved. The result is more guilt and confusion. Unfortunately, this guilt is a lie built on a lie by the father of all lies.

Making matters worse, Satan ushers in the well-intentioned church to help resolve conflict. Since every Christian knows that it takes two to tango — that if you say you have not sinned you deceive yourself — then clearly both parties must repent and reconcile. In Ted Kober's book, *Confession and Forgiveness: Professing Faith as Ambassadors of Reconciliation*, he lays out the beauty of reconciliation that flows from the blood Jesus shed for the sins of the world on Calvary. Step by step, he demonstrates the joy that comes when two sinners confess their sins against one another and receive forgiveness from one another. However, *there is no mention of special cases that involve conflict caused by mental illness* in this book. In fact, recognizing personality disorders does not seem to be part of training for synod reconcilers, though some may possess this training from other sources. I have yet to find any of our Synod reconcilers who have received training in recognizing personality disorders. This is not to say that they don't exist. But even where theological training is sound, the presence of an antagonist's mental illness (personality disorder) is likely to remain undetected and the practice of rec-

onciliation is likely to be misapplied. The result is incredibly damaging to the struggling conscience of a pastor. Perhaps reconcilers can be invited to consider carefully the special circumstances required when either the pastor or the parishioner is struggling with mental illness. Unfortunately, while the theology of Kober's book is sound, the misapplication of said theology can be incredibly destructive to the pastor's already-battered conscience. When the pastor is told that if he says he has no sin he deceives himself, he is already blaming himself for things that are not his fault. This is infuriating and emotionally-exhausting.

Following the normal course of the reconciliation process, the pastor is instructed to explain what is happening. This is often difficult to explain and painful to do. The pastor must then confess his failing while having no idea what it is. As you think on the examples provided in this paper, did these situations develop because the pastor committed a grievous sin? What should the pastor confess? In these specific instances, the reconciliation process can be compared to that of an abusive relationship. A marital reconciler would not ask a battered woman, who may already blame herself for her abuse, to confess to *her abuser* the sins that must have led to her injuries. It would be cruel to do so. Yet, when a personality disorder is not recognized, this is the principle the church applies to a pastor (as do other well-meaning Christians). In the midst of his pain, there is nothing more crushing to a hurting pastor than a fellow pastor assigning blame. To this point, a pastor recounted an instance when a disordered soul called every district and synod official she could find to complain about her pastor. One of-

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protected.*

ficial took the bait and made calls so that the pastor, who clearly must be part of the problem, could humble himself. It is hard to get out of bed in the morning after that. Ministry ends.

What is even more difficult for some Christians to understand is that reconciliation should not be the immediate goal in a situation like this. Again, in an abusive situation, the first goal of a counselor or even a friend is not to reconcile, but to protect. The accosted pastor needs to be protected. Sadly, this often does not happen. One pastor experienced several of his members approach him, hoping to foster reconciliation between the pastor and the disordered soul. In an effort to provide encouragement, they told him “forgiveness is a choice.” They, however, did not view the situation rightly. This only led to greater despair on the part of the pastor, who decided, “Now I am an unforgiving person, and I have let more people at church down.”

Sadly, even if the disordered soul leaves a church, the reflection of the funhouse mirror lives in the pastor. In one congregation, the person with the disordered soul no longer attends worship. She has been absent for two years, yet she remains a member of the congregation. Her pastor, though wounded, still sends out a birthday note to her, as he does for every member of his flock. When asked what it is like to write the note, he said, “Every time I write the letter, all the emotions of being hurt come back even though she has been gone for two years. I send a birthday card *because I still am her pastor. And so I send it to appease my guilt. Maybe I am a masochist. My guilt is that I am not God and I can’t fix her, but I want to.*” Another pastor

who was accosted with phone calls said, “*To this day, I rarely answer the phone; because if they leave a message, I have their words recorded so I can have a witness if need be.*” Still another pastor admitted, “*I am glad they are gone. I truly feel horrible saying that. Also, I am terrible at forgiving. It’s not like I want bad things to happen to them, but I don’t want them around me either.*” One pastor half-jokingly (half not) said that he was experiencing PTSD while being interviewed for this paper.

It is likely fair to say that when a pastor first encounters a personality disordered soul, he may have no idea with whom and what he is dealing. After initial experiences with a personality-disordered soul, the pastor may consider the person to be “difficult” or “not easy to work with.” However, over time, a pattern of behavior develops; often this behavior is subtle. Eventually, it becomes clear there is something terribly wrong, and the pastor is injured through this relationship. You may know when you are dealing with a disordered soul and being led into the funhouse *by the toxic and exhausting effect the other soul has on your own.* The pastor can be consumed with confusion, anger, self doubt, guilt, and fear. His good conscience before God is destroyed. He finds himself in a situation not unlike Johannes on his deathbed. Only it is not just condemnation for his own sin that he fears, but the judgment and continuing condemnation of man. He is covered in shame.

### **Care of the Pastor’s Soul**

So now the question is: what do we do? How can a pastor escape Satan’s funhouse for the sake of his

conscience and his calling? There are two orders of business that must happen simultaneously. One without the other will not result in the necessary healing. One, the affected pastor must have a trusted fellow pastor who can bring God's gifts of healing. Two, the prophet needs his hands lifted up by his elders. The latter will be addressed in a later section. Again, one without the other will not accomplish what is needed for the pastor to be whole and fulfill his calling.

We will begin with healing the pastor's conscience. The pastor, wounded as he is, very often wants validation. *Am I good pastor? Should I continue to be a pastor?* For this, he seeks out friends who will assure him that the other party is crazy and that he is OK. If they are Lutheran friends, they may even buy him a beer. This is fine as far as it goes. The truth can be so distorted in the pastor's mind that he needs clarity and support from friends. But for care for his soul and healing of his conscience, he must seek a pastor who will rightly handle God's word of truth according to his calling. The injured pastor must have Satan's mirror removed and replaced with truth and clarity of God's law and the healing balm of the gospel.

Most likely, the pastor has sinned — just not in the way that he believes. While he is wounded, his sin is found in looking for validation in his goodness and not the divine call he has received from God. The latter is as certain as God himself. The former is as certain as the weather. For every instance in which the pastor justifies himself by pointing to his goodness, there are countless instances where he has failed. This self-justification is an endless argument within him-

self against the voice that condemns him. Indeed, when the pastor forgets his calling from God, his ministry changes from that of law and gospel to “healer of the personality disorder.” Since he cannot bring this healing, he will experience failure and perhaps come to believe he is one. The caring pastor must gently call him to repent and turn to what is certain and, thus, is from God. He is a pastor not by the approval or disapproval of man. He is a pastor not by his success or failure. He is a pastor by the grace of God as issued in his divine call from Christ's church. Here is his firm foundation. In this truth, Satan's mirror begins to become irrelevant and the pastor takes his first steps out of the funhouse.

The pastor providing care will then need to address the temptation the injured pastor has fallen into. Luther addresses it plainly in the explanation to the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer:

We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into **false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice**. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory (emphasis mine).

It is not the feeling of being a “bad person and unworthy pastor” that is the problem per se. If it were, the other pastor would just need to build this pastor up by stating all of his good qualities and successes in the ministry. Instead, the caring pastor will reveal that it is his “false belief” that has brought about despair, great shame and vice. In short, it is a matter of falling into temptation. This is the result of Satan's mirror

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and the weakness of our flesh. The caring pastor will lovingly name Satan's mirror and the pastor's sin, directing him to the comfort of God who took our every sin to himself on the cross and thus crushed the head of the foe. But what is his sin? In a word, the sin is idolatry: idolatry of the disordered soul's words, accusations and reality that control his life and cover him in shame.

This overwhelming fear of man that lives in the pastor's heart must be addressed by his pastor. It is this fear that directly leads to shame. In his book, "When People are Big and God is Small," Edward Welch explains,

All experiences of the fear of man have one common trait: people are big. They have grown to idolatrous proportions in our lives. They control us. Since there is no room in our hearts to worship both God and people, whenever people are big, God is not. Therefore, the first task in escaping the snare of the fear of man, is to know that God is awesome and glorious, not other people.<sup>3</sup>

While I would want to end his final sentence by saying the first task is restoring God to his proper place in the heart, Welch's point is well taken. The wounded pastor needs help to see how the words and actions of the disordered individual have taken control of his soul, which has been bought by the blood of Christ. The pastor's soul belongs to Jesus, that he may fear, love and trust in him. While the pastor is absolutely a victim of sin against him, the basic premise of Welch's book is that the

fear of God must replace the fear of man. Like most sanctification, this is a process that takes place over time.

The pastor providing care then has at his disposal the greatest resource of all: Jesus. It is a wondrous miracle that old Johannes found peace. He fretted and feared. He was certain of his doom, and no reasoning could save him. But a short conversation on the Lamb of God who took his sins away changed everything. It is much like when the apostle Paul sounded like he needed to be checked into a mental facility as he openly lamented how the things he wanted to do he did not and the things he did not want to do he kept doing (Rom 7:14-25). In his despair he cried out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul answered his own question by simply saying, "Jesus Christ." And just like that he moved on as though nothing had happened all. At his disposal the caring pastor has the power of God unto salvation, the gospel. He has Jesus.

Absolution. The Lord's Supper. The good news that, though he be a great sinner, Jesus is a greater Savior. In Christ, the pastor is righteous in God's sight. He is clothed in Christ's robe of righteousness that covers all his sin and shame. His every shortcoming and sin has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. The pastor's pastor, his father confessor, brings Jesus to bear again and again and again . . . grace upon grace until Satan's mirror becomes as irrelevant in his heart as Christ's cross has already made it. God becomes big and man becomes small.

The caring pastor will need to take the wounded pastor into the Psalms and prayer. The psalms of lament will prove to be helpful. Though it is a corporate psalm, Psalm 44 ac-

<sup>3</sup> Edward T. Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure Codependency and the Fear of Man*. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1997) 95.

curately expresses the heart of the wounded pastor and ever turns him to his redeemer:

All day long my disgrace is before me,  
and shame has covered my face  
at the sound of the taunter and reviler,  
at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

All this has come upon us,  
though we have not forgotten you,  
and we have not been false to your covenant.

Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

For our soul is bowed down to the dust;

our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up; come to our help!

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!" (Ps 44:15-17, 23-26)

Psalm 27, with elements of lament and thanksgiving, also orders the pastor's prayer in a pleasing manner to the Lord. As the Spirit works through this word it will breathe new life into the pastor's heart.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;

though war arise against me, Yet I will be confident. One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

### **The Proper Care of Snakes**

The title of Kruger's book alludes to a fable of the rattlesnake and the boy. There was a boy at the top of a mountain who came across a rattlesnake. The snake said, "I am cold and dying, please take me down the mountain." But the boy objected, "You are a rattlesnake. You will bite me, and I will die." But the snake said, "I will not bite. Please take me down the mountain." So the boy carefully picked up the snake and wrapped him in his coat to keep him warm. He brought the snake to the bottom of the mountain and lovingly laid him on the ground. Upon doing so, the snake bit the boy. The boy objected saying, "Why did you do that Mr. Snake? You promised not to do that. Now I will die." The snake replied, "But you knew that I was a snake when you picked me up." So the fable ends.

The interpretation could be that if you see a snake, kill it. Or, it could be that if you are handling a snake,



*you can't  
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people the  
same way.*

know how to do so: you don't hold a snake the same way you would hold a puppy. For pastors, the lesson is, *don't be surprised that you can't care for all people the same way.* If you do, invariably this leads to shock and hurt when your loving care elicits a poisonous bite. The pastor must understand that the snake is not surprised. "Don't you know what I am?"

### **Holding Up the Prophet's Hands**

So how does a pastor care for the soul that attacks his own? Operating within his calling and within the church, the pastor must meet with his elders. This is absolutely necessary. They need to be told the entire truth. If they are not already fluent, they then must be carefully trained in the matter and steps of church discipline. My wife once quipped that church discipline is like the church defibrillator: you don't ever want to use it but when the time comes, you better know how.

In addition, the elders need to know how to handle attacks against their pastor. They need to be reminded that no one should, "entertain an accusation against an elder, except on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (1 Tim 5:19). For here is the reality, as the pastor is the one being attacked, he needs his elders to fulfill their vocation. *For the sake of the ministry of the word, they must defend the minister of the word.* It is time to hold up the prophet's hands.

Upon hearing that their pastor is being attacked, some elders are ready to go to their shed and find the nearest pitchfork and metal rake. In their weekend honey-do-list vocation, they have proved to be effective tools. However, this is not what is meant by "protection" and not what is needed

in Christ's church. Instead, Jesus said, "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name" (Luke 24:47). It must be the elected elders of the church, ideally, along with the circuit visitor, who address the disordered soul and request repentance. If the pastor is there, the elders will likely be looked at as his henchmen. What is more, if the affected pastor is present, according to his flesh and his compromised emotions, he will be tempted to lash out, break down, or give up and give in. Any church discipline to the disordered soul needs to come as a decision of the board of elders. The pastor should not bear unilateral responsibility for the decision. Indeed, he cannot.

In the experience of the pastors mentioned in this paper, no matter how kind or gentle the elders were, no matter how forthright they were, not one of the disordered souls responded in immediate repentance. They did not respond to reason. They did not respond to the word with anything other than rebellion. There are no magic words or methods to create the desired outcome. In each case, the disordered souls conducted themselves as they had all along — like two-year-old children, consistently and irrationally testing the limits. In one case, the disordered soul nodded off to sleep while the elders were confronting her, or at least she pretended to do so. In another instance, she stormed out of the room saying that "she was done with church forever and it was all their fault," though later that same day, she volunteered to lead a youth event as though nothing had happened. In another case mentioned above, a man pretended the elders never spoke to him. Later, he rebelled against the simple

request to apologize to the pastor and maintained that rebellion for a month while leveling even more accusations against the pastor from the recesses of his warped imagination. Repeatedly, they tested the limits much like a toddler. This may seem a victory for the disordered soul and the hardened heart. However, an important first step was made to protect the pastor *and* care for the disordered soul. What occurred through the meetings was that a wall was beginning to be built around Satan's funhouse so that no one else could enter. In addition, a hedge of protection was being erected around the pastor.

In each case, it took many weeks of work. Some elders wanted to give up after a couple fruitless and unreasonable meetings with the disordered soul. However, when the elders stood unified and firm, the disordered soul eventually came to see that the pastor was off limits. It required time, an inordinate amount of emotional energy from the elders, along with courage and faithfulness. They were tested time and time again. They needed to live the words of Jesus from Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." With their honesty they kept a good conscience before God to be as innocent as doves. At the same time in their resolve and wisdom, reacting unemotionally to the disordered soul's outrageous actions, they were shrewd as snakes. In doing so, they helped the pastor be the same. Eventually in each case, the disordered soul ceased its sinful behavior toward the pastor. *Without the action of the elders, the care for the soul of the pastor as spoken above, will mean close to nothing. It would*

*be the equivalent of leaving a person to be abused while telling them God loves them.*

Two disordered souls actually repented of their sin to the measure that they were capable — which would not be considered "normal" in the general population. In another case, where the pastor was the object of a disordered soul, she was not able to change her behavior sufficiently. She needed to find a new LCMS congregation, and she did so. It is important to understand that the alternate reality a disordered soul has developed of a pastor may never change. In other words, the pastor, no matter the evidence presented to the contrary, will always be a villain in the disordered soul's mind. The disordered soul is unlikely to seek psychological evaluation or care. In fact, many continue to believe that their behavior and feelings are entirely appropriate and do not require care. For those who do seek care, the prognosis is often poor as they often leave therapy prematurely. However, while the aforementioned soul needed to leave, she has served at her new church without a major incident over several years, while continuing to receive God's word and sacrament.

In a different case, the disordered soul has remained a member of the church and receives word and sacrament ministry each week. She greets the pastor warmly but does not participate in church leadership activities. The pastor considers this situation "workable," and is happy that he is fulfilling his call while she is receiving God's gifts. While none of the pastors are meeting with the disordered soul, make no mistake, this is pastoral care. The foundation is laid for the person to remain in the

parish and receive God's gifts. The pastor is protected to fulfill his calling to the flock. With the help and support of the elders, he is handling these "snakes" (according to the illustration above) with proper care.

While the process begins as church discipline, the end result is different. Repentance, reconciliation and an open heaven come to mind for a traditional church discipline process. However, sometimes discipline in a church can simply mean *disciplined behavior*. Recall, a disordered soul may never give up his distorted reality concerning the pastor. *However, he can change his behavior and be held accountable.* He must know from the elders that his behavior is unacceptable and there are consequences to continuing. Once this happens, the pastor can, in a limited way, care for soul of the disordered individual according to his calling.

As it was with the care for his own soul, the first thing the pastor must be reminded of is his call. My pastor counseled me upon entering the ministry that pastors are merely "God's errand boys." We bring God's gifts to God's people. The pastor needs to be reminded that, though we care, our calling is not to cure a personality disorder. We can't; no, our job is to preach Christ crucified. Our job is to apply God's law to sinners, proclaim his gospel to sinners, offer the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. In the stead and by the command our Lord Jesus Christ, we absolve sins. Once we step outside of this arena — God's design for Christ's church — it is a short walk to the funhouse. This happens when we engage the disordered soul on the basis of the disorder, not their standing before God. We head toward the funhouse when

the disordered reality becomes our reality rather than the truth: God has made us as shepherds of every soul in our parish, but the way we care for each one is not the same.

This is a crucial truth for the affected pastor to understand. One pastor said that he felt terribly guilty for the discipline applied to the disordered soul. Comfort came to him when he understood that he was still caring for disordered soul, but now in a way that was helpful to both of them. The point is that if a pastor is able to recognize that the attacking individual has some of the features of personality disorder, *he may need to change his definition of how the disordered soul can be cared for and what a God-pleasing resolution looks like.* The pastor offers God's word, godly counsel and the sacraments. He cannot expect that even his best personal efforts will result in remedying the disordered soul's problem. He is not cruel to, or failing, the disordered soul. The pastor must be reminded of this because it is surely helpful to no one if the pastor begins to adopt irrational and dark beliefs about himself or his ability to effect change in the disordered soul.

Finally, I strongly recommend that impacted pastors see a licensed therapist. When I was in the funhouse, it led to a period of anxiety, depression and a couple of panic attacks. I recall in the midst of such an attack debating with myself whether or not I should wake up my wife to tell her I was dying. When I spoke to her, she told me that on a different evening I was repeatedly mumbling the word "fixated" in my sleep, knowing that I was the "fixated" object of another person's disorder. Also, when I was in the house with my family, I wasn't really home. Many times, my wife or

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my children had to say my name or “dad” a couple times before I knew someone was speaking to me. When I suffered, my family suffered with me, which only made me feel worse. I experienced a year of light-headedness and other physical symptoms of anxiety. Eventually, a trip to the therapist seemed in order. I figured that it couldn't hurt and I knew I desperately wanted to get better.

These sessions revealed much about myself, and I learned a lot about people suffering from disorders as well. To have a compassionate ear of a person *who actually understood* what I was talking about was vital to returning to health. It took a good while for me to believe that I wasn't the problem, and that someone could actually attack another person like I was being attacked. My therapist had experienced other people in my shoes and had seen them come out the other side. This was comforting beyond the words that I can express. I recall being terrified that I would feel terrible forever. At the end of my sessions, saying “thank you” to him simply did not seem adequate.

### Final Words

Sadly, if you have ever entered the funhouse and exited, the images seen within do not quickly fade. It is essential for a pastor to continue his devotional life and find an understanding, faithful pastor nearby. God's word and a faithful servant of the word will ensure that the door to the funhouse is locked.

For pastors who have never entered, familiarizing themselves with various personality disorders is a good idea. There is a tremendous list of disorders and suggestions on how to care for people in “The Proper Care

of Snakes,” which has been cited a few times in this paper. This will help the pastor to know with which kind of “snake” he is dealing. It is not within the pastor's purview to formally diagnose a personality disorder; however, familiarity with behavioral characteristics and patterns can be immensely helpful when trying to make sense of situations like the ones described.

In addition, a brief training for a board of elders that such disorders exist and an overview of their characteristics is valuable in this day and age. If a pastor should ever find himself with someone leading him toward the funhouse, he must document every interaction. Outside of the provision of confidential spiritual care, he should never speak to an angry, abusive, disordered soul alone. He may invite the disordered soul to bring an advocate to the conversation as well. Also, the pastor should seek consultation when stymied and ask for assistance to educate his lay leadership about the special circumstances and difficulties that are emerging. Turning to wise brother pastors and to seasoned mental health professionals who may be available will also be helpful. At a minimum, the pastor should not be alone with his frustration, disappointment, and feelings of guilt, failure or anger.

A question for a pastor wiser than myself might be, “Is it faithful to excommunicate a person with a personality disorder?” Their lack of repentance may warrant it. According to the letter of the law it could be the right thing to do. On the other hand, we are dealing with a disorder in which the person may not have a full complement of resources; a situation of which God is fully aware.

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In writing this paper it is my hope that my fellow *Seelsorgers* recognize when they are working with or are in conflict with someone who may have a personality disorder. In doing so, I pray that they take the proper care so that they are not bit with the poison of guilt or led into an evil funhouse where they will be clothed with shame. However, if you have entered Satan's funhouse, know that there is a way out. You are not alone. It will take time, a pastor, faithful elders and an abundant helping of God's word of grace and truth. May the fear of our Savior Jesus fill your heart and mind as you fulfill Christ's call to his Church, caring for every soul given to you. ❖

*The Rev. Paul W. Dare is Senior Pastor  
of Zion Lutheran Church  
in Alexandria, MN  
pastordare@hclutheranchurch.org*

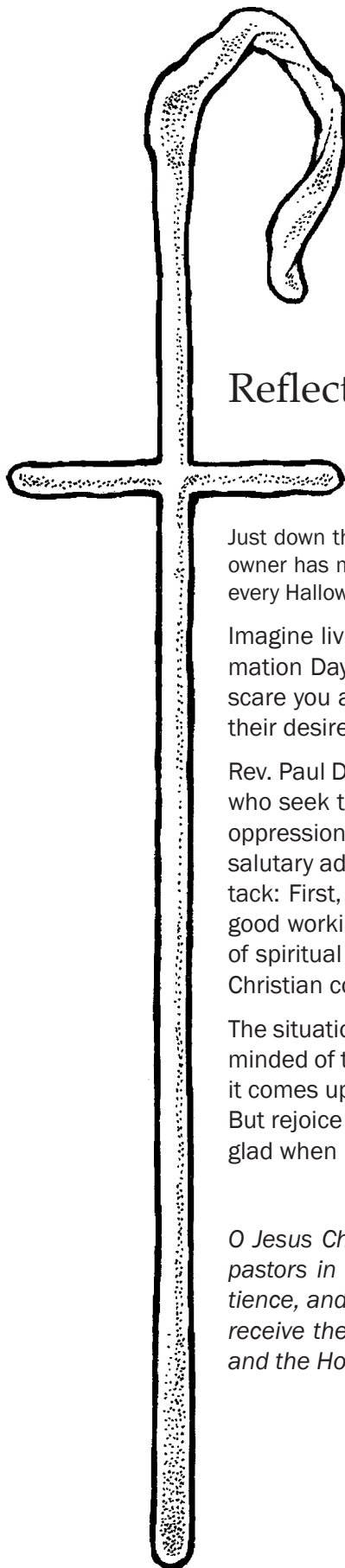
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## Reflection

Just down the road from my house are a number of old semi-trailers stacked together. The owner has made them into a haunted house where he makes a killing on admission prices every Halloween. I haven't given him a dime and I don't plan on it.

Imagine living in a haunted house as such. Every day a Halloween but never Reformation Day. You are the object, the desire of workers of fright inside. They want to scare you and scar you with the ferocity of their frightful acts. You are the object of their desire to harm.

Rev. Paul Dare writes a revealing essay on the struggle to give pastoral care to those who seek to do the pastor harm. The lines between mental disorders and demonic oppression are sometimes blurred, making the struggle even greater. Rev. Dare gives salutary advice on surviving in the ministry while suffering the burden of spiritual attack: First, familiarize yourself with various personality disorders. Second, foster a good working relationship with your Board of Elders and educate them on the topic of spiritual attack. Third, receive counsel from a brother pastor and/or professional Christian counselor so you may be upheld by the word of God and prayer.

The situations that faithful pastors face span a vast array of chaos. May we all be reminded of the words of St. Peter, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." (1 Pet 4:12-13)

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*O Jesus Christ, perfect shepherd of our souls, mercifully grant your grace to help pastors in the frailty of their need as they stand in your stead. Give wisdom, patience, and steadfastness of care to all your under-shepherds, that all people might receive the consolation of your perfect love; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.*

*Pastor Matt Wurm*