

Narcissism: A Spiritual Perspective

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For the spiritual person seeking to live in Christ alone, the term “self love” is much to be preferred over the label “narcissism.” The primary reason is this is the term the Bible uses! *God* prefers it! Technically speaking, one could view the humanly observed and derived label “narcissism” as the fruit, flower, leaves and stem of the plant while the sin of “self love” is the root, the internal structure and nutrient flow throughout the entire plant. Men have simply studied the sin of self love from their human, temporal perspective, called it narcissism and written down the pattern(s) they’ve seen in people who practice the particular, usual streams of this disorder. Some of what they say (from their surface and mid range perspective) is indeed very accurate but it is not written from God’s perspective who sees the fruit, the stem and the root from all possible (and even from “impossible”) angles. The term “self love” does not suffer from these human limitations. So with this caveat in view, let us simply use the terms “self love” and “narcissism” as virtually synonymous though this is technically inaccurate at certain points.

Narcissism is not a static condition and needs to be understood as a spectrum. No two narcissists are exactly in the same place and there are at least two scales on which to evaluate them. One is the extremity of their activities. Some narcissists are merely self-focused and are relatively harmless whereas others are completely consumed with sick perversions that truly devastate their victims. The second scale is the severity of their practice of deception and inner delusions. Some are mildly delusional whereas as others are completely separated from all reality. And there are all points in between.

The Narcissistic False Self

One survivor of narcissism (“recovered” may not be exactly the correct term) is Sam Vaknin (a “recovered” narcissist, researcher and author.) From his own experience and his extensive research (as one of the first definers of the terms being used), he espouses the idea of a “false self” built by the child to protect him or herself in abusive situations. What is this false self? What would it do to or for a person (from a spiritual perspective)?

The false self is essentially a defense mechanism that takes on a “life” of its own. It is built of things that the child is not: it is essentially a “super man” persona that no real person can ever live up to in real, normal life. Its greatest spiritual weakness, however, is that it is a fiction, a lie. “No lie is of the truth.” (1 Jn. 2:21) This false self is built up in response to either abuse or exaltation wherein the child is extremely reduced, often in extreme or severe situations, from being an individual to a mere possession. The false self can thus be any series or fragments of contradictions and inconsistencies and, until these contradictions and inconsistencies become apparent, noticeably damaging (to oneself and/or to others) or self-defeating, this extremely unhealthy coping strategy can go on virtually unnoticed or at least unchallenged for years, even decades. (For a more thorough treatment of the original idea of the false self, see Sam Vaknin’s book, “Malignant Self-Love.” Also note that there are much more detailed and thorough discussions of narcissism available from many other perspectives.)

- Consider repentance. Repentance is the recognition of one’s need for a savior combined with a genuine sorrow for one’s sins. Sorrow comes from pain – and pain particularly cannot be experienced by the false self (or else it would not be the “super man” persona.) Thus one who is living in their false self cannot

effectually be brought to repentance. Only one who is able to return to their true self, in whatever diminished or incomplete capacity, will feel the pain and sorrow (grief) over sins that leads one to repentance. All the false self can do is know (intellectually) that one should feel remorse over sin but it will not actually feel remorse.

- Consider one's relationship to the Father. Since the false self is the defense mechanism brought out to protect one from one's parents or authority figures of one form or another, when one approaches the heavenly Father, the ultimate Authority, this false self will be what one presents to God even when one knows (in one's true self) that God is not like one's abusers. But this defense mechanism is a lie built of the flesh nature and, as such, cannot be accepted by God. Only the true self can be given salvation and become a fit habitation for the Holy Spirit of God.

- Consider faith. When the false self is created, it is built on lies. It is built primarily on the lie that God will not or cannot protect the child. Self must preserve itself, even by deception if necessary. This is not meant as a condemnation upon the child because most children, especially in desperate situations, are not equipped to know how to withstand demonic deception in the midst of an intensely abusive situation (whether physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual and whether abusive or exaltive) wherein someone who is supposed to be protecting or nurturing that child is actually attacking or damaging them. Rather, this is meant to expose where the demonic will despicably attack even a child in distress so as to make a means whereby they can gain even further access and control over that child at a later age. Further, the false self, being a mere defense mechanism and not a genuine personality, can neither receive nor respond to the faith that God gives. The false self is, in varying degrees, an effective shield between the child and the abuser but it is an exceedingly effective shield between the true self and God as well.

- Consider love. Because God cannot receive the false self (and the demonic is often quite careful to preserve this false self in secrecy even from the person who relies on and extensively utilizes this false self), the false self is not able to love anyone. Love, genuine, self-sacrificing agape love – a thing learned by being in contact and interaction with God (1 Jn. 4:8, etc.) – is simply not available to the mere defense mechanism built on lies. Only the true self that God created can be saved and be taught by God to love but this true self, with all its pain and sorrow, is too often squelched and repressed. And since, as true followers of Christ, love is to be the basis of all our relationships (Jn. 13:34-35), this aspect alone impacts *everyone* the narcissist will ever meet or interact with but it is most devastating to those whom the narcissist “loves” in the ways he or she thinks is truly love but which, in reality (especially spiritual reality), is not and is, at the least, tainted if not saturated with demonic power and deception. In certain varieties of narcissism, the false self never interacts in total honesty with anyone but instead becomes a social chameleon able to wear a completely

different identity depending on who they are talking to and how much narcissistic supply they can stealthily take from that person.

- Consider holiness. “Without holiness...no one will see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14) The false self is built on lies and it is maintained with lies. The false self is both a symptom of and an attempted remedy for the fracturing or fragmentation of the soul. It is a drawing from the wrong source (deception) and it will always come up short, dry and empty. Because the soul is drawing upon the dry well of deception, through the false self it will always be seeking other sources (people) to abuse and thereby drain for narcissistic supply. The demonic, who has manipulated or even trained the false self to be able to do this, is probably also absorbing whatever energy they seek (draining spiritual life from both the host and the victims.) Only the true self can draw from the Spirit of God and only the true self who finds all of its supply from the grace (mercy, favor and power) of God can overflow with the rivers of living water from the depths of one’s being. (Jn. 7:38) Any attempts at holiness by the false self can only be religious or ascetic exercises in frustration because there is no connection between the false self and God. Only the true self contains the faculties wherein the soul receives and utilizes the power of God to actually be healed, changed and empowered to live in true righteousness and holiness.

- Consider obedience. In truth, holiness is simply obedience to God but there is a particular aspect of the false self that specifically interferes with routine, regular obedience to God and deserves consideration. The false self, being a “super man” persona, is often invulnerable, impervious especially to pain, invincible – and because it is built by children in the sub-rational regions of their existence, the contradictions to reality often remain unchecked. But when one has these attitudes of invulnerability, one feels and believes (at least sub-rationally) that they are beyond the reach of God’s justice or judgment and the consequences of one’s sins – no matter how painful or damaging in real life – these simply don’t impact the false self even as they make the true self (however it is still functional) miserable, which, in turns often causes repression of the true self and the internal vicious cycle continues. The invulnerability also aids in preventing any accurate recognition of the false self or of the overall pattern of internal inconsistency that attends the narcissism disorder. The false self then is completely immune to the notion of God’s impending judgment as well as to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit who was sent to lead us into all truth (Jn. 16:13) and who will, as we follow, lead us into our divinely given right and privilege to be sons of God. (Rom. 8:14) As a result of the false being separate from the Spirit, the most the false self can manufacture is a façade or form of godliness or some merely legalistic or religious form of “Christianity.” (see 2 Tim. 3:5, 2 Cor. 3:6) Thus, disobedience to the leading of the Spirit of God is inherently built into the very fabric and existence of the false self because it has only one goal and agenda – to shield the self from reality even when reality is no longer the debilitating events of abuse or exaltation but is only sub-rationally perceived or triggered.

- Consider truth. The false self is only lies. There is no valuation of truth in the false self and even the true self has a vested interest in preserving the false self. The lines between truth and error, between truth and deception, becomes blurred and, over time, unknowable. Spiritual truth, because it must be seen through spiritual eyes (Mt. 13:11, etc.), is completely unavailable to the false self because it is a mere façade, it has no spiritual eyes. The false self is only and merely a defense mechanism and is not a true person or even personality – spiritual eyes are given only by the Creator-God to His human creations and these are not something manufactured by a desperate child’s damaged psyche nor is it given to that damaged child’s defense mechanism(s). Only the true self, and only after being born again from above (Jn. 3:3, 5, 1 Pet. 1:23), possesses the spiritual faculties that can be opened and become functional in the spiritual realms. Any spiritual truths embraced by the false self (however accurately or inaccurately, however completely or incompletely) can only be theoretical to the false self because there is no divine power available to the false self to actually experience the changes these truths point toward. This reliance upon a fleshly façade is precisely why some narcissists are also consummate hypocrites – their false self, being superior, perhaps even sinless and perfect, could not possibly be guilty of the things others or even one’s own conscience accuses them of. As a result, it is everyone else around them who must be guilty. Yet it is still true and it always will remain true that only the true self, and this only after experiencing repentance and regeneration, can experientially begin to enter into the kingdom of God.

This “disorder” “coincidentally” impacts every major aspect of genuine spirituality in Christ. This “disease,” according to all major secular sources who deal with it, is considered incurable and the victims are advised to simply and, as completely as is possible, abandon the narcissist who abuses them. Statistics are woefully incomplete but a significant number of professed “Christians” (but who show little or none of the real fruit of God’s Spirit – Gal. 5:22-23) are also narcissists, there possibly being more “Christian” narcissists than there are “secular” ones. Narcissism (as defined by the mental health field, especially as a “disease” that primarily afflicts pseudo-“Christians”) may indeed be one clear instance of God giving people over to strong delusion because those people did not love the truth and receive His salvation but instead opted to retain their own false “savior” they made for themselves from out of their own traumatized childhood psyches. (see 2 Ths. 2:10-12) At the least, narcissism has demonic connections that can only be dealt with through spiritual warfare such as is described in books like Jesse Penn-Lewis’ “War On the Saints.” (see especially Chapter 6, “The Counterfeit of the Man Himself”)

It must also be clearly understood that Sam Vaknin’s philosophy is as secular, anti-God, as it gets. Vaknin offers no real hope for a full recovery – but Jesus does. Vaknin’s pictures and ideas hold much truth but the only real and possible cure for someone who is in bondage to this kind of malignant self love (the Biblical term for narcissism) is Jesus. The false self (as far as the idea coincides with Biblical truth and spiritual reality), because it is built in the flesh with deception, must die. It must be crucified in Christ along with every other aspect of the flesh. (Gal. 5:24) The true self must declare its complete independence from both the false self and the demonic and fully embrace the complete authority of Christ over the life of the true self.

Then will begin the war between the Spirit of God (who comes to dwell within the human spirit) and the flesh (who has long partaken of demonic energies and deceptions.) Only the Spirit of God, who is the Word of God, is “piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12), and it is God’s Spirit that the true self must submit to in all matters pertaining to life and godliness. In this war, all lies must be rejected and all truths must be embraced in cooperation with only the Spirit of truth. All behaviors learned and practiced in the false self must be rejected and one must learn to walk before God only in spirit and in truth. (Jn. 4:24)

This will not be an easy transition and many will not be able to do this because they really don’t love truth – this is why this “disorder” and “disease” has come upon them. But God is both infinitely faithful and merciful and offers even to those who have come under this strong delusion a way out. No one needs to be dismissed from the wedding feast of the Lamb (Mt. 22:11-13) – only those who refuse to embrace Christ and God and instead cling to their flesh and preferred deceptions will be forever removed to the lake of fire wherein all *liars* will remain for eternity. (Rev. 21:8) One does not have to forever remain a fractured and broken “Humpty Dumpty” – the King can rebuild even a fractured soul. But the road to that rebuild will certainly be a most difficult path and few there will be who will endure it so as to find real hope, peace, rest and ultimately eternal life.

It has been rightly said that it is impossible for someone to be both a narcissist and a true follower of Christ at the same time. One will either love one’s self or one will love Christ – one simply cannot love both.

Paul wrote,

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts...” (2 Tim. 3:2-6)

It should be sobering indeed to anyone who is or is associated with a narcissist how many of these characteristics directly apply to the narcissistic personality. And it should be sobering to note that these narcissists as described by Paul are those take advantage of weak-willed, sinful women. And the narcissist knows, somewhere inside his existence, that he (or at least the demonic within him) that he has wormed his way into the woman’s life and heart and he knows he gained control over a weak-willed woman who was loaded down with sins and swayed by various evil desires, that is, she was only partly formed and immature in the faith with various historical flesh issues (like the vast majority of women in Christen-dumb these days!). Thus they are jealous and protective of their property (their wife) because they know how easy it is for some other guy to come along and be a better worm than they are! This is why many narcissists fear to let their little woman talk to any other man about anything, especially spiritual matters!

The spiritually healthy husband and man, on the other hand, does not fear letting his wife talk to other men. The spiritually healthy wife is and has been and proven herself to be faithful to her husband, often long before the engagement! But even deeper than that, both the spiritually

healthy wife and husband are pledged to and in love with Christ and God. Though the religious narcissist may fear that his weak-willed, sin-burdened little woman might be drawn away from his own peculiar doctrines and teachings, the spiritually healthy husband in Christ doesn't need to fear that his wife will be lured away from truth because she hungers for truth and righteousness above all else. The spiritually healthy husband wants, even longs for and demands that she be drawn away from any form of deception or error and instead be drawn to Christ! Both the spiritual healthy wife and husband have the underlying intent to follow only God no matter where He leads them (individually and corporately) and no matter what the cost, even if that means one has to forsake the other because they have forsaken Christ. Narcissists do not show that they have that underlying intention or desire in any observable quantity.

When narcissists are confronted, it will be almost impossible for them to believe that those confronting them are not worming their way in, as they did, to take control of their little woman. When someone comes to speak light and truth and brings genuine godly love, these are all foreign concepts to the narcissist because they are filled with self-love. Some narcissists are indeed very influential, smooth talking persons whose only aim is to gain something for themselves through personal validation and this is how they worm their way into the heart and life of women who are themselves damaged and vulnerable. (2 Tim. 3:6) even as the demonic within them deceive the false self into thinking that he is really rescuing his victim!

God still says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20)

The preceding has been presented as "food" for thought and prayer for anyone who finds themselves in similar situations.

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