Let's Talk About It

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September 25, 2002

Campus Rage Begins in the Home

We are all concerned about the violence being perpetrated in our homes, schools, and sometimes on church grounds. It is disturbing to witness a child in a fight with her parents or parents brutally beating their children with a piece of wood. More so are the painful, violent scenes on our school campuses, making them look like war zones. With the new age of cheaper cellular phones, we now have a new weapon assisting in the eruption of violent explosions. Angry perpetrators would use the cell phone to call for reinforcement or for others to do the dirty work for them. This only adds to the long list of "virtual weapons" being used to inflict pain and misery on innocent lives.

VIRTUAL WEAPON
There is one weapon that really causes the greatest pain in our communities, families, and churches. This weapon is the tongue. Usually physical war starts with a tongue battle, even on school grounds. It is when individuals throw uncultured words at each other. Belligerent and vitriolic expletives are released like fiery daggers targeted for each of the participating warriors. David in Psalms 52:2 says it very plainly: "All day long you plot destruction. Your tongue cuts like a sharp razor; you're an expert at telling lies." *New Living Translation*

This power struggle with the tongue is often a competition of who can say meanest, foulest, and most derogatory things. The truth is that none of the individuals wants to lose, so the "virtual war" will be an endless brawl most often ending in a physical, senseless confrontation involving real weapons of rocks, bottles, cutlasses, pieces of wood, and sometimes guns. There is no letting go. No giving up. It is a fight to the end. Where does the seed of violence first begin its germination? Is it in the school, the church, or the home? Read on and let's find out.

RAGE IS KING
We've all heard about "road rage," a problem occurring too often on our streets. Road rage occurs when impatient drivers, perhaps frustrated over personal things in their lives, act in an uncultured manner while driving. Similarly, there is a tidal wave of "family rage" sweeping our country. I call this "family rage" because its birth begins in faulty interpersonal relationships. Rage, whether at home, school, or the church, is a shame-based expression of anger. The "rager" (the one who is in rage) exerts his or her power to survive the episode as "King"--king of rage, king of shaming. A rager is inflexible, always right, unbending, and poisoned with selfishness. To use a theological term, I can also say that ragers are "self-righteous," especially during the moment of rage. To use a psychological term, ragers are dangerously narcissistic. For the purposes of this article, I describe a narcissist as one who creates his own world around him, as if he is the only important citizen. All others are to get out the way if they refuse to cooperate with him. If he has to use pain to force one to cooperate, then so be it.

FAULTY RELATIONSHIPS TO BLAME
Typically, ragers grew up in an environment of "shamed-based relationships." Ragers were typically shamed or punished by their caretakers for expressing emotion when they were young. For example: "Be a man and don't cry," "Nice girls don't get angry" or "I'll give you something to

cry about," or "You are no good child," or "I don't know why you are such a worthless fool." Their parents did more shaming than praising. The students in high school who enjoy causing pain to others, who know no other way to get their point across, but through excessive force or violence, were more than likely raised in homes where parents never praised them, always focused on punishment, and treated them like they were worthless beings. Most of the angry, "warrior-like" students had to learn how to defend themselves before they could even hold a knife and folk properly. Sometimes the first use of the knife was to harm another, even at the tender ages of two, three, and four. Since these persons were mostly shamed than loved, they grow up thinking that shaming others is normal.

To fully deal with the violence and power struggle in our schools, we must first address the issues at home. We must find ways to teach our parents how to love and not to shame. Perhaps we need a "boot camp" for parents and their teenagers who use violence and shaming as a normal way of expression. Next week I will share on this subject.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAME-BASED RELATIONSHIPS
I want to stress the point that it is my opinion that children, teenagers, and adults who think of nonphysical or physical violence as a normal expression of life are coming from shame-based family settings. Sad to say, they really do not know better. However, they can learn to do better.

After much research on the subject, I came across social scientist and pastor, Thomas F. Fischer's "Eight Characteristics of Shame-based Relationships. I will share them with you without any adaptation:

1) High Shame/Low Self-Esteem: Shame-based individuals cannot honor and respect themselves or others. Instead, they're trapped by their self-consciousness, their sense of inadequacy, and their defense mechanisms which shield them from their own hypersensitive self-judgmentalism.

2) Distorted View of Others: With anger too strong and frightening to admit, they tend to project these feelings outside of themselves. They often make themselves victims by characterizing others as angry, blaming, unfair, aggressive, judgmental, controlling or mean. Since the victimization needs must be maintained, the hostile or unfair feelings projected toward others tend to remain unchanged, too.

3) Distorted View of Themselves: Unable consciously or unconsciously to deal with the shame-full awareness that they can and do make mistakes, shame-based individuals will engage in various self-distortions and denials. These may come in many forms.

Perhaps a common manifestation of this tendency toward self-distortion is when they are hard on themselves or when they see themselves as infinitely better than others. Such narcissistic tendencies may move them to "over-report" the good things they do while "under-reporting" their failures.

Others may not recognize their grandiose tendency toward "white lies." Unfortunately, they may not recognize it either. Over time, the grandiose "white lie" can become the "Greatest Fish Story Ever Told." As these shame-based individuals believe and live out their phantasmal grandiose image of themselves, it is no wonder that, in their blind, shame-driven narcissism, they wonder how anyone can do without them.

4) Motivated By Fear: The greater their fears, the greater the need for their mental censors to protect them from their fears. As heightened fears raise the level of hyper-vigilance, their increased hyper-vigilance requires a rapidly increased defensive hyper-response.

5) Black-and-White Thinking: Closely related to fear motivations is the practice of "splitting" or assigning people and their behaviors to rigid categories. Yes/No, Black/White, Either/Or, Safe/Unsafe, Good/Bad are all examples of the rigid categories they create. When they judge others, there is no "gray" area. Nearly always it's "all or nothing," "throw the baby out with the bath water," etc.

6) Enslaved by Hyper-Self-Criticism: Those upon whom this judgmentalism falls may feel intense guilt. As if it were any consolation, shame-based individuals judge themselves even more critically, mercilessly and unfairly than they do others. As they have been taught, they are either good or bad, perfect or failure, saint or sinner, worth of love or unworthy of love, competent or incompetent, etc.

7) Fear of Abandonment: Being abandoned is a fate worst than death. It must be avoided at all costs by behaviors such as people-pleasing, perfectionism, giving in, overextending themselves to find love, putting up rigid boundaries to avoid relationships and thus abandonment.

8) Loneliness: Shame-based loneliness results from the strict detachment which characterized shame-based individuals. This detachment may be seen in their preference for isolation. This isolation can be accomplished in numerous ways including 1) physical withdrawal, 2) emotional withdrawal, or 3) putting on a subtlety-guarded "life of the party" facade.

If you are a pastor, teacher, community worker, or parent, and you know any teenager who is always angry or responds to disappointments and disagreements in violent ways, look a little closer and see which of these eight characteristics are manifested in his or her life.

LOOK WITHIN YOUR OWN HEART
Before I end this article today, I do not want you to close this paper thinking that we are all innocent bystanders who are never violent or mean. Let me share these questions with you I read during a seminar. If you say yes to any of these, you may need some help also. "Do you think that most of the people you know are stupid jerks who can't do anything right? Are you impatient with the people who wait on you in stores and restaurants? Do you argue with nearly everyone you meet at some point in your encounter with them? Do you prefer to watch violent, action movies and television shows, and sometimes secretly wish that you could do the things that the characters are doing? Do you prefer to play with violent action video games, kick the cat, beat the dog, or your children or your spouse, or fantasize about doing those things? Have the people around you told you that you have a very short fuse? Have you ever tried to control your angry or rageful outbursts? Do you feel, in secret, that you are losing your grip on your life?" Dear friend, return next week to this column as I continue to dig deeper into the subject of campus rage and shamed-based relationships. This article is also available at www.soencouragement.org. You can send your questions to P.O. Box –896, or call 393 2818, or email at encouragement@coralwave.com.