

YOU CAN TRUST HIM

By Jerry and Denise Basel

Since starting this ministry at the beginning of 1995, the Lord has given us many important insights to help us bring healing and wholeness to His people. Some of these we already knew would be vital in the process of healing--i.e., the power of extending and receiving forgiveness. There is one area, however, that we did not anticipate would be so significant for so many in the healing process--that being the power of *self-protective defense mechanisms*.

We knew from our training that defense mechanisms would indeed be a reality in the people to whom we would minister, but we tended to view these mechanisms more from a psychological perspective. We did not necessarily see them as areas to overtly address with each counselee. Over this past year, however, we have seen these mechanisms of defense from a *spiritual* perspective, and as we have addressed them in that manner, the Lord has brought forth many significant breakthroughs in our counselees. It is important at this point to explain what we mean by self-protective defense mechanisms. One of the most common defense mechanisms is *denial*. In denial, we consciously or subconsciously refuse to accept the reality of an event or situation. For example, someone who has obvious problems in his marriage says "I have a good marriage. Everything is fine." There are many other mechanisms of self-defense that we utilize, including *minimization*, whereby we decrease the importance or significance of something. An example of this might be someone who had a very painful childhood and when confronted with that fact says, "It wasn't that bad. Many people had it worse than I did." Another mechanism many use is *emotional insulation*, whereby we withdraw to avoid rejection. With this mechanism we may either physically withdraw from situations (i.e. church, social gatherings) or we close off our heart and emotions so we don't feel much. We are thus unable to "rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." *Regression* is another mechanism and is a mental process in which we revert back to a less threatening time or place. This may result in actually feeling and acting like a child whereby you revert to a time or period that was safe. Another mechanism, *displacement*, is where we take out our frustrations on others. An example of this would be one who feels pain or stress over a past or current situation or event and takes out his frustration or anger on someone else. Another mechanism, *projection*, is where we incorrectly blame others for things that are not their fault. For example, we may feel bad about something we said or did and instead of taking responsibility for that action, we project or blame that on someone or something else. This mechanism is often the result of shame, or not feeling good about who we are. Another mechanism, *grandiosity*, is when we avoid feelings by seeing ourselves as invincible. For example, someone functioning from this place may say something like, "I'm a survivor. I can make it." They might also say something like, "I couldn't count on anyone else in the past, but I can always count on myself." *Rationalization* is another mechanism where we verbally defend ourselves or make excuses for our actions. They might say something like, "If you only knew my situation, you would understand why I am the way I am." The last mechanism we'll address here is *intellectualization*, where we seek to find an intellectual

explanation for something in order to avoid feelings. An example of this would be someone who's friend shares that she is feeling depressed and this person responds with words like, "Why would you be depressed? You have so many things to be thankful for?" These and other mechanisms of defense have one thing in common--*they serve to place ourselves, rather than God, in control of our lives*. As a result, we walk in opposition to His perfect will for us, and the fruitfulness He desires for us (Gal. 5:22-23) is not realized. Most importantly, our relationship with Him suffers.

Where do these defense mechanisms come from and how do they originate in us? Looking at it in the broadest perspective, our reliance on our own self-protective defenses originated when Eve listened to the serpent in the Garden and she (and her willing husband) ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3). *In so doing, they chose to trust in their own reasoning instead of the word of God*. Interestingly, their first action following this deception was to *protect themselves*, as they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness and shame (Gen. 3:7).

Our mechanisms of self-defense start early in our lives and may stem from the same issue that plagued Adam and Eve--*an inability to trust*. As children, we are defenseless in our human condition to those responsible for us. Even in the best of families, children may not receive the nurture and affection from their care-givers that is necessary, and the result is a difficulty in trusting others (including God) later in life. In more and more families, children are expected to meet the needs of the parents, while their needs go unmet. Children do not know what to do with the tremendous emotional pain of unmet needs, so, in order to survive, they develop defense mechanisms to protect themselves.

Unfortunately, we do not grow out of these defense mechanisms that we need as children, but instead, we carry them into adulthood and into our relationships. Remember, these defense mechanisms keep us holding on to all the unreleased pain of the past and from dealing with emotions and reality and from developing healthy relationships. What worked so well for us as children, no longer works in our favor as adults.

In the spiritual sense, these defense mechanisms place our trust in our own power rather than trusting in God to be our defense, our protection, and our strength. The self-built "walls of protection" become fortified in us over the years and result in our hearts being separated or detached from God. The Lord is jealous for us and our affections (Ex. 20:5), and asks us to love Him with *all* of our heart (Lk. 10:27), but we cannot fully give to Him and receive from Him until we allow Him to take down these walls. These walls of defense around our hearts may be thought of in a similar manner to the "fortified cities" spoken of in the Old Testament. Moses warned the Israelites that one result of disobedience to God would be the Lord bringing a nation against them (Dt. 28:49), and such a nation would ". . . lay siege to all the cities until *the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down* (Dt. 28:52; italics added). Jeremiah reiterated this prophetic message of warning, stating that ". . . they [a distant nation] will destroy *the fortified cities in which you trust* (Jer. 5:17; italics added). What we have come to learn is that the various mechanisms we use as adults to protect ourselves represent a form of demonic deception.

We are often deceived in believing that we can (and must) take up our own defense. Rather than trust in the Lord, we "lean on our own understanding" (see Pr. 3:5).

Since a deception, by definition, is something we do not see, how can we know when we are trusting in our own self-protective defense mechanisms? The first step is to ask the Lord to show you the quality of the "fruit" in your life (Gal. 5:22-23). Instead of love, joy and peace; are you feeling and exhibiting more hatred, depression or anxiety? Do you demonstrate patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control; or something to the contrary? Do you feel emotionally shut-down and distant, or struggle with intimacy issues? Most of the time our "bad fruit" reveals itself in our relationships with others and with God.

If a "fruit check" reveals less than you (and others) desire, the next step would be to ask the Lord to show you how you might be utilizing defense mechanisms to protect yourself. If you are really serious about this, ask those closest to you to help you in this process. The descriptions of defense mechanisms cited earlier in this article may be helpful.

After you become aware that you are utilizing self-protective mechanisms as your defense, the next step is to acknowledge this deception to God, renounce the former way, and ask and receive His forgiveness. This breaks the power of the enemy in this area and sets in motion the transfer of trust from yourself to God. This, in our experience, often serves as a dramatic first step in the healing process.

Though the fruit from revealing and dealing with these self-defenses is usually very positive, many struggle with choosing this path. Why? Because many equate giving up self-defense mechanisms to being defenseless, and they have learned to "survive" on their own power all their lives. When there was no one else to trust or when everyone else let them down, they always knew they could do it on their own. They toughened up and didn't *need* anyone. To lay all of this down and put their trust in God as their defense is often very fearful. For many, that brings them to another critical question--"What if God won't be there for me if I take down the walls?" This is NOT an easy step. It takes a leap of faith to step onto the path to the Cross, and it *will* involve a walk into pain and brokenness. Though the Lord becomes our defense in this process, He generally allows us to experience rather than bypass that which will allow us to grow more into the likeness of His Son. This path may seem overwhelmingly fearful for some and may indeed require the help of a committed friend or counselor to walk along side, particularly if the past hurts have caused the development of extensive mechanisms of self-defense.

The Lord is seeking "broken and contrite hearts" (Ps. 51:17) that believe that He is good, trustworthy, and has our best interests in mind. He desires us to have a greater level of intimacy with Him and a greater ability for us to give and receive love. He wants to pour out His "kindness, leading us to repentance" (Ro. 2:4), and to break away anything that would block such a gift. Can you choose Him over your fear? Can you trust Him?