

## Self-Injury

Through my work with those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, I have come across an issue that has only recently been discussed publicly—self-injury. It is an area full of shame for those who struggle with it, and as a result, it has been kept well hidden.

**In recent months, I have been confronted more than usual with terrible and painful situations in the body of Christ.** I have seen Christians destroying other believers, Christians behaving unethically and immorally, Christians vying for power no matter whom they hurt, and Christians lying to and manipulating their own brethren. In thinking about and praying for some of these circumstances, it suddenly occurred to me that I am again facing a situation of self-injury. I am watching a corporate body attack and destroy itself. I am witnessing self-harm with its accompanying dissociation, denying and numbing, so that injury can take place without the immediate sense of pain.

**In working with clients who use self injury to achieve certain ends—trying to make a “bad” person good, finding some level of false peace or gaining some sense of being alive—I have seen clearly that a way marked “death” can never achieve life.** I have felt repulsed by what people do to their bodies (*not* repulsed by the people, but by what they are doing). I have known women who stick pins in their breasts, who cut themselves so extensively that they are reduced to cutting old scar tissue, and who do things we could not put into print.

I have encountered enough that I have struggled with vicarious traumatization as a result—and am trying to find a way to carry the knowledge that someone I care about is deliberately injuring herself, without that knowledge injuring me. When I encounter such practices, I know I am looking at pathology. I am working with a broken and sick life. **Healthy people do not deliberately hurt themselves. In fact, healthy people move away from any unnecessary pain.**

Back to the body of Christ—**those who do things that destroy the body of Christ are also broken and sick spiritually. It is spiritually pathological to injure the body to which you belong.** Like my clients, however, such people often call what they are doing by a different name, and think they are helping a “bad” person be good and believe that they are helping to solve a problem, rather than being one. However, it is never good to lie to or manipulate a fellow believer

no matter what you say your goal is. It is never good to abuse power no matter how helpful you say you are being. Wrongdoing is never the path to right ends. The way of death never leads to life.

**My sense of grief over the body of Christ has grown exponentially in the last decade. Our Lord's grief must be immeasurable!** His body is not following her head. She is doing what she deems right or what she wants for her own comfort to achieve her own ends. Such choices mean she is repeatedly injuring herself. A client who hurts herself faces a great deal of hard work if she is to learn a new way. She must undergo a change of heart, of attitudes, of thinking, and of choices. It is no easy task to learn how to love and respect what you have previously trashed and mutilated.

It is my prayer that we who work with those who self injure—we, who know the brokenness, pain and twisted thinking indicated by such choices will learn from those we seek to help. **Anyone who injures the body to which they are united is sick.** The injury may be violent or relatively small, but to harm oneself *and* believe it is for good is to be very broken indeed. May we work compassionately with our clients, holding the truth out before them, and intervening when necessary so that they may learn to live at peace with their own bodies.

May we also, as members of the body of Christ, never choose to injure that sacred body, already wounded for our sakes, and may we be bold in speaking the truth when such injuries do occur, so that we do not, by our silence, become passive partners in the harm that is done. **May we never be those who, by serving their own ends, inflict further wounds on the body of our precious Savior.**

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