

Codependency and Christian Living

On the surface, codependency messages may sound like Christian teaching—

- ◆ “Codependents always put others first before taking care of themselves.” (Aren’t Christians to put others first?)
- ◆ “Codependents give themselves away.” (Shouldn’t Christians do the same?)
- ◆ “Codependents martyr themselves.” (Christianity honors its martyrs.)

These statements have a familiar ring, don’t they? Then how can we distinguish between codependency, which is unhealthy to codependents and their dependents, and mature faith, which is healthy?

Codependency says:

- ◆ I have little or no value
- ◆ Other persons and situations have all the value
- ◆ I must please other people regardless of the cost to my person or values
- ◆ I am to place myself to be used by others without protest
- ◆ I must give myself away
- ◆ If I claim any rights for myself, I am selfish

Jesus taught the value of the individual. He said we are to love others equal to ourselves, not more than. A love of self forms the basis for loving others. The differences between a life of service and codependency take several forms. Motivation differs. Does the individual give his service and himself out of free choice or because he considers himself of no value? Does he seek to “please people”? Does he act out of guilt and fear? Does he act out of a need to be needed (which means he actually uses the other person to meet his own needs; the helpee becomes an object to help the helper achieve his own goals.)

- ◆ Service is to be an active choice. The person acts. Codependents react.
- ◆ Codependent behavior is addictive rather than balanced. Addictions control the person instead of the person being in charge of their life.
- ◆ Codependents have poor sense of boundaries. They help others inappropriately (when it creates dependency on the part of the other person rather than moving that person toward independence.) They have trouble setting limits for themselves and allow other to invade their boundaries.
- ◆ A codependent’s sense of self-worth is tied up in helping others. Christianity says that a person has worth simply because he is a human being God created.
- ◆ Codependents have difficulty living balanced lives. They do for others at the neglect of their own well being and health. Christian faith calls for balanced living and taking care of oneself.
- ◆ Codependent helping is joyless. Christian service brings joy.
- ◆ Codependents are driven by their inner compulsions. Christians are God-directed and can be free from compulsive behaviors.