

It's Hard to Believe Abuse Could Happen in the Church
TTAHTD #12 | 2 Peter 2:1-14
May 2, 2021

Scripture Reading | 2 Peter 2:1-3, 13-14

¹ There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved ways, and the way of truth will be maligned because of them. ³ They will exploit you in their greed with made-up stories. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep...¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. They consider it a pleasure to carouse in broad daylight. They are spots and blemishes, delighting in their deceptions while they feast with you. ¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery that never stop looking for sin. They seduce unstable people and have hearts trained in greed. Children under a curse!

Pre-Sermon Remarks

First: trigger warning

Second: why talk about this subject? Why address this?

1. Unavoidable, with prominent names like Jerry Falwell Jr., Jean Vanier, Ravi Zacharias, Bill Hybels, and others. It's not just a catholic church problem. Christian summer camps.
2. Abuse-proof our church as best as we possibly can
3. Help all of us find hope and healing in Jesus

PRAYER

Introduction | Abuse is a Problem

Abuse has always been a problem in the world | there is no golden era, current authoritarian govts
Abuse has long been a problem in our society | we are reckoning with centuries of abuse in USA

- Racial abuse, sexual abuse #metoo, riots against government abuse
- Not just a bunch of "snowflakes" or oversensitive whiners

Abuse has long been a problem in the church

- **Matthew 7** ¹⁵ "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.
- **Luke 17** ¹ He said to his disciples, "Offenses (temptations) will certainly come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to stumble.

All abuse is horrible, but abuse in the church is particularly heinous because the church is supposed to be the place where people find healing. Spiritual abuse cuts people off from the very thing that is supposed to be the source of their healing and wholeness: connection to God.

- As followers of Jesus, we must take church abuse the most seriously

Defining Abuse

Abuse ≠ hurt

1. Good hurt | Psalm 141:5, Proverbs 21:6, Luke 17:3, 1 Timothy 5:20
 - **Psalm 141** ⁵ Let the righteous one strike me—it is an act of faithful love; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let me not refuse it.
 - **Proverbs 21** ⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.
 - **Luke 17** ³ Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.
 - **1 Timothy 5** ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.
2. Bad but non-abusive hurt | Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 11
 - **Romans 14** Different opinions, quarreling over days and food, judging each other
 - **1 Corinthians 11** Communion, pushing and shoving to the front, gluttony

Abuse has to do with a misuse of power

Diane Langberg Power can be a source of blessing, but when it is abused, untold damage to the body and name of Christ, often in the name of Christ, is done. For the sake of that body and that wonderful name, I believe we need to wrestle with the issue of power and understand how it can be used for healing or harm, for good or evil...Power is inherent in being human. Even the most vulnerable among us have power. How we use it or withhold it determines our impact on others.

- Physical strength, economic power, political power, strong personality, strong leadership

Recognizing Abuse

*Context of 2 Peter: stick to the reliable truth, be on guard against false teachers

2 Peter 2 ¹ There were indeed false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will bring in destructive heresies,

- Heresy = αἵρεσις | Most commonly translated as a “sect” or “faction” or “party”
 - Paul says “I belonged to the Pharisee party”

● Maybe a bit less about specific ideas and more about gathering a group/faction even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved ways, and the way of truth will be maligned because of them. ³ They will exploit you in their greed

● Exploit = less common Greek word, to travel and trade (James 4:13) | *taken for a ride* with made-up stories...Bold, arrogant people! They are not afraid to slander the glorious ones; ¹¹ however, angels, who are greater in might and power, do not bring a slanderous charge against them before the Lord. ¹² But these people, like irrational animals—creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed—slander what they do not understand, and in their destruction they too will be destroyed. ¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. They consider it a pleasure to carouse in broad daylight. They are spots and blemishes, delighting in their deceptions while they feast with you. ¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery that never stop looking for sin. They seduce unstable people and have hearts trained in greed.

- Unstable people = unsteady souls, people who are more “wobbly”

Children under a curse! ¹⁵ They have gone astray by abandoning the straight path and have followed the path of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of wickedness ¹⁶ but received a rebuke for his lawlessness: A speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. ¹⁷ These people are springs without water, mists driven by a storm. The gloom of darkness has been reserved for them. ¹⁸ For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery, people who have barely escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them.

Abuse is using power to get...

...financial gain | v3 exploit in greed, v13 feasting, v14 hearts trained in greed, v15 wages of wickedness

...sexual pleasure | v2 depraved ways/sensuality, v13 carouse in broad daylight, v14 eyes full of adultery, v18 fleshly desires and debauchery

...more power | v1 heresy/sect/faction, v10 bold and arrogant, v19 promise freedom

Abuse plays out at three levels:

1. Individual | an abusive person harming others
2. Institutional | an abusive organization locked in a harmful dance
 - a. False teachers: "they" and "these people." Group: "many" and "people"
 - b. **Chuck DeGroat** Sadly, in recent years we've witnessed too many instances of charismatic Christian leaders gaining a massive following, both within the church and on social media, only to be exposed as manipulative, abusive, and dictatorial. Jerrold Post argues that a mutually reinforcing relationship exists between leader and follower. The leader relies on the adoration and respect of his followers; the follower is attracted to the omnipotence and charisma of the leader. The leader uses polarizing rhetoric that identifies an outside enemy, bringing together leader and followers on a grandiose mission. The followers feed off the leader's certainty in order to fill their own empty senses of self.
3. Invisible | abusive spiritual forces, rebellious spirits

False Hopes

- Get rid of all power | flatten the structure, power to the people
 - Problem: literally impossible. People will always grasp for more power.
- Only giving yourself power | self-protection, self-direction
 - Problem: your heart is tricky and deceptive
 - **Diane Langberg** Most humans intend to use their power for good. They want to earn more money, grow the church, protect good programs, or preserve a good reputation. Adam and Eve told themselves they were pursuing a greater likeness to God. They seemed blind to the fact that they were pursuing a seemingly good goal through utterly ungodly means. We do the same thing...We say we are using our power to seek likeness to God when in fact what we are doing looks nothing like him. It is not difficult to be seduced into such thinking.

Andy Crouch Sometimes, admittedly, it can seem that the whole history of power is one long story of perversion and betrayal. In fact, if I were not a follower of Jesus Christ I might believe that was the deepest truth about power. I might follow Nietzsche, Foucault and all their...disciples into the abyss of cynicisms, seeing every human story as a power play. I have come to believe, though, that the only way to understand power's abuse is to begin with its proper use. When we begin with the best kinds of power, we learn some important truths about power that we would never learn even from the most penetrating critique. Most of all, we learn something that criticism will never teach us: what to hope for. Hope is stronger than fear. If power is dangerous—and it is—our hearts will be most prepared to resist its dangers if they have been shaped by hope.

True Hope in Jesus

1. Jesus came in vulnerability
2. Jesus protected the vulnerable
3. Jesus died at the hands of the powerful
4. Jesus rose and ascended in power

Safeguarding the Church

Pursuit of Jesus

- Protects us from being abused | *but they're such a good XYZ*, does it look like Jesus?
- Protects us from misusing our power | all our power is derivative, it all belongs to Jesus

Practice of transparency

- Remember Jesus' warning about the way that wolves look like sheep
- **Chuck DeGroat** The nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "Appear to be what thou art, tear off thy masks. The church was never meant to be a masquerade. Stand out in thy true colors." I suspect the "Prince of Preachers" didn't own a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, but he hints at an important dynamic—hiddenness...You ask why churches are breeding grounds for abuse and coverups, and I'll offer an epidemic of hiding. It's as old as Genesis 3, so we shouldn't be surprised.

Protection of the vulnerable

- Starting point is listening, not judging

Patience until the end | Remember Peter's warning, they will get what they deserve