

Addressing Abuse in the Church 1



MEETING DATES

1. February 11
2. February 18
3. February 25
4. March 3
5. March 10
6. March 17

RESOURCES

* Addressing Abuse, PCA Paper 2022 <https://www.pcaac.org/aic-report-abuse/>

Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* (1820s)

Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (2008)

Lindsey Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (2014)

Chris Moles, ed., *Caring for Families Caught in Domestic Abuse* (2015)

Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God* (2015); *Redeeming Power* (2020)

Scot McKnight, *A Church Called Tov* (2020)

Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit* (2022)

COURSE OVERVIEW

To examine the issue of abuse found inside the church so that the church can repent, protect, and give glory to God.

EACH CLASS' SCHEDULE

1. A Case Study in Small Groups

*By discussing how we would deal with **hypothetical situations**, I hope the church can be prepared if we are ever confronted with a real situation of abuse.*

2. A Bible Study

*By examining **Scripture**, I hope that the church will see that the issue of abuse is real, it has been around since sin entered creation, and that God has something to say about it.*

- a. 2/11 – Westminster Larger Catechism 151 – some sins are more heinous than others
- b. 2/18 – Lord's Prayer – Forgiveness and Relational Restoration
- c. 2/25 – Fifth Commandment – “Honor your Father and Mother”
- d. 3/3 – Sixth Commandment – “Murder”
- e. 3/10 – Seventh Commandment – “Adultery”
- f. 3/17 – Ninth Commandment – “False Witness”

3. A Topical Study

*By discussing some **applicable topics**, I hope the church can be prepared to protect, confront, and guard against these sins, and receive the immeasurable riches of God's grace available to us. We will cover such issues as Domestic Abuse, Spiritual Abuse, and Sexual Abuse.*

INTRODUCTION

[No Small Group Case Study this week]

“A quick glance through a social media feed reveals that the church is in the crosshairs like never before. People feel quite free to vent their frustrations about the church for all the world to see. As a result, it is understandable why some church leaders have adopted an overall posture of defensiveness. They might feel that it's time to defend their fellow pastors and elders. It's time to circle the wagons and stand up for the integrity of the office. It's time to show people that the church has good leaders doing the best job they can.

“Given this situation, you can see why churches may not be able to hear the legitimate cries of spiritual abuse coming from their people. Such cries are lost in a white noise of critique and pushed aside as yet another instance of unjustified church bashing from those affected by an ungrateful, overly sensitive, and therapeutic culture. No doubt, some will receive this book in precisely that manner. In some people's minds, it is yet another example of unduly airing the church's dirty laundry. The last thing we need, they might argue, is another anti-church book to stoke the fires of discontent.” (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 17).

“I am saying the problem is neither religion nor irreligion; the problem is that *human heart* in possession of a misdirected passion – a passion for power, land, rights, honour, wealth, or (yes) religion” (John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History* (2021), 405).

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: “Abuse is the treatment of any person that is callous, often cruel, for selfish reasons, and that has deeply detrimental effects on the person physically and/or sexually, emotionally, and spiritually. The image of God in the victim of such treatment is completely denied” (PCA Report 239).

“Persistent maltreatment that causes lasting damage” (PCA Report 20).

- Real, sometimes measurable, **damage** done to the victim.
 - **Persistent** maltreatment.
-

“There's a difference between an argument that gets out of hand once and a pattern of marital violence. Using words like "abuse" gives us the ability to distinguish between systemic evil in a marriage or other relationship where there is the exploitation of a spouse versus just the common experience of two sinners living together. (PCA Report 75).

- In this essence, abuse is a misuse of **power**.

“The word abuse appears in the English Standard Version five times, two of which can be interpreted according to the subject matter of this report. The two are the crimes of Gibea who abused the Levite's concubine (Jud. 19:25), and where Paul says that abusive people will abound in the last days (2 Tim. 3:2). However, the most common word Scripture uses for abuse is “oppression,” appearing 116 times in the ESV. The Hebrew word for oppression is **הָנָה** (*‘anah*) which means “affliction” or “humiliation”... to “squeeze”, “press,” or “crush.” The English word “oppress” means “to crush or burden by the abuse of power or authority.” This is the essence of abuse. An abuser uses superior size, strength, and/or authority to crush a victim... Examples of this usage are when Sarah mistreats Hagar, Laban charges Jacob not to oppress his daughters, the oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians, and the command in Exodus 22:21-23 not to oppress orphans and widows. The biblical definition, therefore, is “to afflict by mistreatment.” Oppression is also the word that the *Larger Catechism* uses for abuse, appearing in LC 136 and LC 142. **This report will use the terms “abuse” and “oppression” interchangeably to refer to the biblical and confessional understanding outlined below** (PCA Report 20, 76, 20).

- **Motivation**, even if not conscious, is one in which the abuser does not see value in the victim.

BIBLE STUDY

J.G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (20th century)

WLC 150. Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?

All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

“Every sin, even the least, being against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God, and against His righteous law, deserves His wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come; and cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ” (WLC 152).

- James 2:10-11; Exod. 20:1-2; Hab. 1:13; Lev. 10:3; 11:44-45. Every sin is committed against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God.
 - 1 John 3:4; Rom. 7:12. Every sin is a violation of God's righteous law.
-

- Eph. 5:6; Gal. 3:10. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse.
- Lam. 3:39; Deut. 28:15-19; Matt. 25:41. All sin deserves not only temporal but eternal punishment.
- Heb. 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18-19. No sin can be canceled except by the blood of Christ.

How does the world deal with the difference in degrees of sin?

WLC 151. What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?

Sins receive their aggravations,

1. *From the persons offending: if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others.*

- Jer. 2:8. Sin is aggravated when committed by those who have a special responsibility for exemplary and godly living.
- Job 32:7, 9; Eccl. 4:13. Persons of riper age have a greater responsibility; hence when they commit sin it is more serious than the same sin committed by younger persons.
- 1 Kings 11:4, 9. Sin is aggravated when committed by persons who have had greater experience, and more blessings of God's grace than others.
- 2 Sam. 12:14; 1 Cor. 5:1. When those who make a public profession of the Christian faith commit sin, it is more serious than the same sin when committed by persons who make no such profession.
- James 4:17; Luke 12:47-48. Greater privileges involve greater responsibility, hence aggravate the sins committed by such persons.
- Jer. 5:4-5. Persons who occupy places of prominence in society are under an added obligation to do right, and when they commit sin their prominence constitutes an aggravation.
- 2 Sam. 12:7-9; Ezek. 8:11-12. Persons who hold office in church or state have an added responsibility for godly living, and when they are involved in wrongdoing their official position aggravates their sin.
- Rom. 2:17-24. Those who are, or claim to be, guides to others are under an added obligation to live righteously themselves, and when they sin it is
- Gal. 2:11-14. Those whose example is likely to be followed by others, when they are involved in wrongdoing, are guilty of aggravated sin.

2. *From the parties offended: if immediately against God, His attributes, and worship; against Christ, and His grace; the Holy Spirit, His witness, and workings; against superiors, men of eminency, and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto; against any of the saints, particularly weak brethren, the souls of them or any other, and the common good of all or many.*

- Matt. 21:38-39. An example of the wickedness of a sin increased by reason of the position of the person injured by the sin.
 - 1 Sam. 2:25; Acts 5:4; Ps. 51:4; Rom. 2:4; Mal. 1:8, 14. The guilt of a sin is increased when it is committed directly against God and his attributes and worship.
 - Heb. 2:2-3; 12:25. Those who sin against the Lord Jesus Christ and his grace are guilty of aggravated transgression.
-

- Heb. 10:29; 6:4-6; Matt. 12:31-32; Eph. 4:30. Those who sin against the Holy Spirit and his witness and workings are guilty of sin of aggravated seriousness.
- Jude 8; Num. 12:8-9; Isa. 3:5. It is especially offensive to God when offenses are committed against persons who should be specially honored and respected for any reason.
- Prov. 30:17; 2 Cor. 12:15; Ps. 55:12-15. To sin against those to whom we are closely related, or especially obligated, is to be guilty of aggravated sin.
- Zeph. 2:8-11; Matt. 18:6; 1 Cor. 6:8; Rev. 17:6. Any offense against Christian people is an aggravated offense in God's sight.
- 1 Cor. 8:11-12; Rom. 14:13, 15, 21. It is our duty to be especially considerate concerning weak brethren, and therefore any offense which injures them is an aggravated sin against God.
- 1 Peter 3:7. "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life."
- Ezek. 13:19; 1 Cor. 8:12; Rev. 18:12-13; Matt. 23:15. Any offense which imperils the souls of others, or works against their salvation, is especially
- 1 Thess. 2:15-16; Josh. 22:20. A sin which involves others, or which interferes with the true welfare of all or many, is an aggravated transgression.

3. *From the nature and quality of the offense: if it be against the express letter of the law, break many commandments, contain in it many sins: if not only conceived in the heart, but break forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation: if against means, mercies, judgments, light of nature, conviction of conscience, public or private admonition, censures of the church, civil punishments; and our prayers, purposes, promises, vows, covenants, and engagements to God or men: if done deliberately, willfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastingly, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, continuance, or relapsing after repentance.*

- Prov. 6:30-33. The seriousness of a sin depends, in part, on the nature and quality of the offense committed.
 - Ezra 9:10-12; 1 Kings 11:9-10. Offenses against the express letter of God's law are especially heinous, since they violate a direct command of God.
 - Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:10; Prov. 5:8-12; Josh. 7:21. An offense which involves breaking several of the commandments, or committing many sins, is especially displeasing to God.
 - James 1:14-15; Matt. 5:22; Mic. 2:1. When sin not only is conceived in the heart, but breaks forth into words and actions, it is of aggravated seriousness.
 - Matt. 18:7; Rom. 2:23-24. A sin which scandalizes others is an aggravated offense in God's sight.
 - 2 Sam. 12:7-10. A sin which admits of no reparation is especially heinous in God's sight.
 - Matt. 11:21-24; John 15:22. Sins are aggravated when committed in spite of means used by God which should restrain sin.
 - Isa. 1:3; Deut. 32:6. Sins committed in spite of God's special mercies are aggravated transgressions.
 - Amos 4:8-11; Jer. 5:3. To sin against God's judgments is to commit aggravated sin.
 - Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 11:14-15. It is especially sinful to do what nature, even apart from Scripture, shows to be wrong.
 - Rom. 13:2; Dan. 5:22; Titus 3:10-11. Those who sin in spite of the conviction of their own conscience commit aggravated transgression.
 - Prov. 29:1. Sin is aggravated by being committed in spite of warning or reproof.
-

- Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17. Sin is aggravated by being committed in spite of the censures of church discipline.
 - Prov. 27:22; 23:35. Those who disregard civil penalties become guilty of aggravated transgression.
 - Ps. 78:34-37; Jer. 2:20; 42:5-6, 20-21; Eccl. 5:4 6; Prov. 2:17; 20:25; Lev. 26:25; Ezek. 17:18-19. Sins committed in spite of our own promises, vows, covenants, etc., are aggravated transgressions.
 - Ps. 36:4; Jer. 6:16; Num. 15:30; Exod. 21:24. Deliberate, willful, and presumptuous sinning.
 - Jer. 3:3; Prov. 7:13. Impudent sinning.
 - Ps. 52:1. Boastful sinning.
 - 3 John 10. Malicious sinning.
 - Num. 14:22; Zech. 7:11-12; Prov. 2:14; Isa. 57:17. The wickedness of a person's sin is increased by stubbornness, persistence, delight, and various other characteristics.
4. *From circumstances of time and place: if on the Lord's day, or other times of divine worship; or immediately before or after these, or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages: if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.*
- 2 Kings 5:26; Jer. 7:10; Isa. 28:10. Sins aggravated by circumstances of time and place.
 - Ezek. 23:37-39; Isa. 58:3-5; Num. 25:6-7. Sins aggravated by being committed on the Lord's Day, or other times of divine worship.
 - 1 Cor. 11:20-21; Jer. 7:8-10; Prov. 7:14-15; John 13:27, 30. The guilt of sins increased by their being committed immediately before or after divine worship.
 - Ezra 9:13-14. Sin aggravated by commission directly after experiencing God's chastisements.
 - 2 Sam. 16:22; 1 Sam. 2:22-24. Sin rendered more heinous by reason of its being committed publicly, or in such a manner as to scandalize others.

STUDY OF DOMESTIC ABUSE (1 OF 2)

1. What it is?
2. How to Spot It?
3. What to do when you Suspect it?
4. How to Shepherd the Participants?

What Is It?

Domestic Abuse: "Domestic abuse can be defined as a form of oppression in which one spouse controls and dominates the other through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors" (PCA Report 75).

"Statistically, there is no difference between the general and Christian population." (Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, 254).

“When a woman bravely acknowledges abuse, complementarian theology should drive her pastor (and other men in the church as well) to confront her husband with his sin. Not only is he sinning in the general sense of harming a neighbor. The abusive husband is committing the gospel-denying sin of disgracing his cross-shaped role of sacrificial love. Marriage to his victim does not excuse the sin. It compounds it” (Rebecca McLaughlin, “Complementarians Should Be Toughest on Abuse,” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/complementarians-should-be-toughest-on-abuse>).

Psalm 55:12-13

¹² For it is not an enemy who taunts me—
then I could bear it;
it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—
then I could hide from him.
¹³ But it is you, a man, my equal,
my companion, my familiar friend.

Psalm 9:9

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.

HOMEWORK

- Commit to praying regularly (daily?) for those suffering abuse in the church. May **abusers** be caught so that they can be held accountable for their sins, brought to repentance, and to be restored fully. May **victims** be protected, given grace upon grace (John 1:16) to stand firm in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13), and the strength and wisdom to make difficult decisions. May the **church** persevere in protecting the flock, to not grow weary or defensive, and to ask hard questions for the sake of the Name of Christ.
- Read Sections 2 and 3 of the PCA Report: “Domestic Abuse” and “Women Who Abuse”
- To ask a question, ask for prayer, or comment about the class anonymously, use this QR code:

