

SUPPLEMENT 07

The Church's Response to Abuse is Grounded in Scripture

When Jesus began his ministry, he read from Isaiah 61 and said that he had come to “proclaim release to the captives” and to “set free the oppressed.” It is a clear call of the gospel to care for the oppressed—the victims within our congregations.

“Speak up for those who have no voice; seek justice for those on the verge of destruction.”

PROVERBS 31:8

ENDING A VICTIM'S SUFFERING SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE PRIORITY.

A logical response is to address the sin of the abuser if the abuser is part of the congregation. But this presents a challenge in ministry because the sin that results in abuse is often illegal and confronting the abuser can be very dangerous for the victim.

Thankfully, the Bible provides guidance in this area. Matthew 18 explains how to handle “severe sin” within the church body while Romans 13 provides guidance concerning “severe sin” that is also illegal.

Matthew 18:15-17: *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

Romans 13:1-5: *“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents*

of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience."

We are called to let the governing authorities deal with all things "illegal" as the church simultaneously deals with the sin—always taking care to put the safety of the victim first.

"As pastors we must have the humility to recognize the limits of our own callings, competence, and pastoral jurisdiction... We are called to walk with the Lord's people as they navigate these difficult issues, but we are not called to resolve them, to be legal, investigative, or judicial experts."

BRAD HAMBRICK

For more see: Hambrick, Brad. *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused*. (Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 17-26.

Jesus referred to himself as the "Good Shepherd" who lays down His life for His sheep in **John 10:11**. Jesus then instructed Peter in **John 21:15** to "feed my lambs... take care of my sheep." God's people represent Him, in part, by shepherding one another (**1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4**).
