

PROTECTING

ACCEPTING THE RESPONSIBILITY, EMBRACING THE PRIVILEGE

OUR CHILDREN

I have lived with a secret for most of my life, but recently I revealed this secret to members of my family and church. I know many others are living with the same secret and they, like me, are suffering from the damage and pain it causes.

I was born into a pastor's home, the sixth of nine children and the only girl. We, of course, attended church regularly and seemed to be the normal pastor's family.

I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior following an Easter service when I was five-years old. My father was the one who led me to Christ. The secret began when I was about ten-years old. It was then that my father chose to misuse his position of authority over me.

He raped me.

Then he repeatedly raped and molested me whenever he found an opportunity. This abuse continued until I was seventeen or eighteen. I cannot tell you how many times I was raped by my father—but it was something I constantly dreaded. Each day as I came home from school, I would pray, "Oh Lord, help him not to be home," or "Lord, please help him to stop." But the abuse didn't stop. I felt trapped—a prisoner in my own home.

God gave my father many gifts, but he chose to abuse and squander those gifts. He not only failed to meet the responsibility of caring for and protecting those gifts, he chose to steal from them and the great God who had given those gifts to him.

My father stole from me. He took away my innocence, childhood, and trust. He also robbed me of my sense of security and self-worth. He stole the gift of intimacy that God intended to be shared between a husband and a wife. What was created to be an expression of love was perverted into a selfish act of abuse.

My father stole from my husband. My body did not belong to my father. It was not his to take, but he chose to act on his selfish desires, not taking into consideration the damage he was causing.

My father also stole from my children and those I would minister to in my Christian family. Because of my abuse, many of my emotions have been buried in an effort to protect and preserve them from deeper wounds. Because of this, the love and concern I feel for those around me has often been hidden from them. Even though I care a great deal for those around me, my ability to express my feelings to them has been impaired because of the abuse I endured.

I kept my family secret because I felt that it was the best thing to do. What difference would it make if I told? Who would believe me? Who would be hurt if the truth were known? What would happen to our family, to the people in the church, to me, to my father? All these questions were running through my mind. So I kept my secret and told no one until I told my future husband when we became engaged.

We thought the biblical way to handle the situation was to love and forgive. So we forgave my father, even though he never confessed or repented of his sin against me. He even performed our wedding ceremony, and both he and my mother were a part of our lives. During this time, we were very careful, however, to not allow my father to be alone with our children.

Recently, we realized our mistake in the way we dealt with my father's sin and criminal activity. Because I had never told my secret, my brother and his wife allowed their children to spend the night at my parents' home. My father chose to take the opportunity to abuse another victim. He molested their fifteen-year-old, mentally-handicapped daughter. We learned then that my father had been accused of sexual abuse of others, and his pattern of abuse had persisted because his behavior had been excused or overlooked. People who knew of his sin chose to look the other way or decided not to "make waves." They kept their secrets. Meanwhile, more victims were added to his list.

I realized my silence was enabling my father to continue his criminal activities.

I knew my secret must be told.

What is so sad about my story is that I am not the only one with a secret. Studies show that as many as one in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by the age of eighteen. The majority of these abuse victims will be abused by family members or trusted family friends.

It is time to tell the secret.

My father stole from me. He took away my innocence, childhood, and trust.



Silence is Not always Golden

Some Secrets Must Be Told

by Hope Graham*

It is time to acknowledge that this evil not only occurs in the secular world, but is also a reality in churches today. Keeping the secret enables abusers to continue their sinful behavior.

When my secret was revealed to members of our church, several women in our congregation shared similar secrets. One woman had been abused by a pastor to whom she had gone for counseling. One woman who attended a school for missionaries' kids witnessed sexual abuse by dorm parents. Two women told of their abuse by a former deacon in the church.

God will not bless our churches if we do not deal with the sin of these offenders and call for true repentance. The story of Achan's sin and the battle of Ai in the seventh chapter of Joshua is an example of how God withholds His blessing if there is hidden sin in the camp.

Churches are finally starting to address the problem that there are many victims who are hurting and need healing; but too often

churches excuse the offender, enabling him to continue in his abuse of others.

All too often our attempts to remedy the problem amount to putting a band-aid on a gaping wound. We need to address the root of the problem if we want it to stop. We can't just continue to fix-up the broken lives and let the abusers continue their destructive behavior.

Contrary to what some might say, when we correct abusive behavior, we are not being unloving or unforgiving—we are teaching good behavior and self-discipline.

All too often, the church's response to sexual abuse is to tell the victim that he or she needs to forgive and forget the offense, but they excuse the abuser for his criminal behavior. Why the double standard? Why do we not confront the abusers and require them to accept the consequences of their actions? Why do we refuse to admit there are abusers in our churches? It brings shame and reproach to the name of Christ when we keep secrets.

The slogan "What Would Jesus Do?" has become very popular over the past few years. Let's apply it to this situation. If Jesus were to visit our churches, what would He do? Would He ignore and excuse criminal behavior because He would not want the church to suffer the embarrassment of dealing with prominent church members who are involved? Would He confront the victims and tell them that they should just forgive those who have stolen their innocence, childhood, and trust? What would He do?

Scriptures indicate that He confronted religious abusers and expected them to face the consequences of their sinful lifestyle. Jesus was not afraid to confront religious leaders while He walked upon the earth. In Matthew 23, Jesus repeatedly rebuked the Pharisees, calling them blind hypocrites and white-washed sepulchers. They looked good on the outside, but inside they were filled with evil. He confronted them about their pride, selfishness, and sin. He did not ignore or excuse their ungodly behavior.

We live in a day of grace, and Jesus has paid the ultimate sacrifice so we can be forgiven of our sin. He lovingly offers forgiveness. In 1 John 1:9, we are told *If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* However, there are people in our churches today who are claiming that verse as a license to sin. In the book of Jude, we are warned about such men. *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord* (verse 4, NIV). The rest of the chapter goes on to tell of God's condemnation of such behavior.

Others have mistakenly equated God's grace and forgiveness with the removal of all consequences. But we need to remember the examples in God's Word of Moses and David—godly men who sinned and who had been forgiven of their sin yet still faced the consequences of their actions.

God will not bless our churches if we allow immorality and sin to reign. We sing of God's never-changing attributes, but we expect and pray for God's blessing when there is sin in the camp. Can we expect to be victorious in our spiritual battles if we are harboring and protecting criminals?

There is a tremendous need for people to come forth and address this horrendous sin within our churches. We need to educate, confront, and deal with the issue in a biblical manner.

We dare not serve as enablers, otherwise every day that goes by will see more children raped and molested within our churches. ✨

* The name has been changed for protection.

Alarming Statistics

- ♦ Studies show that from 25 to 33 percent of girls and 5 to 15 percent of boys will be sexually abused by the age of 18 (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/sexabuseb.cfm>).
- ♦ The majority of these abuse victims will be abused by family members or trusted family friends. Only a small percentage are abused by strangers (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator/educatorc.cfm>).
- ♦ This means that in all likelihood, out of every ten men you know, and out of every four women you know, at least one has a secret. Some of them may have been abused only once, some may have been abused numerous times by the same abuser, and others may have had several different abusers from the same family.



God's Passion and Compassion for the Abused

Observations from Isaiah 1:17

by John Revell

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

(Isaiah 1:17 NIV)

The tragedy of child abuse needs no magnification, but it is indeed magnified when God's people do not take appropriate action to prevent it, or worse, if they fail to take appropriate action when it is discovered in their midst. It seems that common sense, and a sense of common decency, would move us to address such things; but alas, we are not always sufficiently motivated by these. Consider, however, this well-known passage from Isaiah. While it does not identify the issue of child abuse directly, if we examine the situations surrounding its writing and look at the foundations supporting these commands, we will get a glimpse of the Lord's passion regarding this matter—and hopefully that glimpse will properly motivate us to action.

Relieve the Oppressed, Correct the Oppressor

In the opening of his famous declaration in Isaiah 1:17, the fiery prophet demanded that God's people embrace His standards of justice, but then he continued with three commands that naturally flowed out of God's standards of justice. First, he commanded the leaders and people of Judah to: *encourage the oppressed* (relieve, KJV) or *correct the oppressor* (HCSB).

There is some debate among scholars as to the correct translation of this phrase. Actually, there is good support for either translation, and in fact, both ideas may be satisfied in this command. To relieve the oppressed requires a proper legal response

to the oppressor. And, to correct the oppressor is to relieve the oppressed.

When Isaiah presented this mandate, he could have had at least two different groups of oppressed people in mind. The first group was the poor who had been abused by the rich. He rebuked the leaders of Judah for plundering and crushing the poor (3:14, 15). In their day, the rich were illegally seizing the land of the poor, and when they attempted to respond by taking the rich landowners to court, the corrupt courts and civil leaders sided with the wealthy, leaving the poor with no legal recourse. Consequently, God in His concern and compassion for these victims stood as their advocate and boldly demanded relief from their oppressors.

In addition to the needs of the poor, God also showed a special concern for those who were victims of violent crimes. In verse 15, He accused the worshippers of raising bloodstained hands in prayer and accused some of shedding innocent blood.¹ These references, and others, seem to picture a general condition of widespread violence in the land. Victims suffered at the hands of the ruthless, but because money could buy acquittal, the victims had no legal recourse. However, God was deeply concerned for those who suffered unjustly, so He stood in their defense and demanded relief.

Beyond the picture of general violence was the very specific travesty of child sacrifice to the pagan deity Molech, which had not only become acceptable in the land, but was practiced by their very own King Ahaz. The atrocious act defiled the very heart of God's direct commands, and in His response we see a glimpse of God's deep compassion for those who suffered mercilessly at the

hands of adults who chose to ignore God's timeless commands and principles.

Through Isaiah, He boldly and passionately demanded relief for these innocent victims of violence, and appropriate action toward those who were guilty of oppressing them.

Defend the Helpless

The final two commands of verse 17 further illustrate God's loving concern for those who were supposed to be served by justice. Here, Isaiah commanded the people of Judah to *defend the rights of the fatherless, plead the widow's cause*.

God's focus on these two groups (orphans and widows) demonstrates both His concern for them and their particular plight during the time of Isaiah. According to the standards God instituted when He established the nation of Israel, each individual in Judah was due fair treatment and protection, regardless of sex or age.

Sadly, that protection broke down in the cases of orphans and widows. For generations, neighboring cultures had restricted the focus of their respect and protection to the men of the land. In these male-dominated societies, women and children were dependent upon the men for both food and protection. Apart from the security of a husband and father, widows and orphans were defenseless against the ravages of brutal human predators. In essence, they had no legal voice and were denied individual human rights.

But God knew of this potential neglect and abuse. As He prepared His people for life in Canaan, He was careful to specifically and intentionally address the needs of all who could be victimized, including aliens, women and children, and especially orphans and widows. He commanded the nation to provide for their needs and protect them from injustices.² God's loving design transcended the male-dominated cultures of the day and granted these helpless ones a legal voice when faced with injustices.

Tragically, when Judah rejected God's design and embraced practices of neighboring cultures, God's concern for orphans and widows was ignored. What God warned against had become reality in Judah, and this unprotected group no longer had a legal voice—they were no longer protected and were defenseless under the attacks of the ruthless. They were no longer treated as precious and protected individuals as God viewed them, but rather viewed as disposable objects available to the wicked for personal exploitation.

And so God came to the aid of the victim, demanding protection for these orphans and widows. He called for the leaders and courts of the land to stand in defense of the helpless. And as they did, they would once more reflect the true nature of justice as God intended it to be.

These verses from Isaiah provide a glimpse into the heart and passion of a loving God who cares deeply for the helpless and oppressed. He called His people to return to the principles and application of true justice. He called on the leaders of Judah to relieve those who had been oppressed and to defend those who were legally helpless.

Why God's People Should Be Concerned

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He took them into the wilderness and established a covenant with them in which He would view the people of Israel as "His people" and they would view Him as "their God." In this relationship, God would treat them as His own "treasured possessions," pouring His affection, blessings, and love upon them (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). They, in turn, were to focus their love and obedient faithfulness upon Him (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). In this unique and loving relationship, God identified them as His special, chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6). Their deliverance from slavery and very existence as a nation was a demonstration of the special relationship they shared. The nature of the Jewish people was that they had been lovingly chosen.

Furthermore, in God's instruction to His people He indicated that because of this special and unique relationship, they were to be like Him. God identified Himself as holy, and so He called His people to be like Him in holiness (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2). The Lord identified several areas that He viewed as "detestable," and He expected His chosen ones to view these same things as detestable. God's deliverance from bondage and the establishment

Our Father is still concerned for those who are victims of violence and oppression.

of this special relationship should have moved God's people to eagerly embrace His concerns and values.

Finally, God expected His people to reflect the nature of God to the neighboring nations. When God instructed His people to obey His commands, He told them that the neighboring nations would see their obedience and realize that they belonged to God (Deuteronomy 28:9-10). He also pointed out that if they obeyed and followed Him, other nations would see and respect their wisdom (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). This pointed directly to God, for it was the Lord who gave them wise commands to follow. The people's actions were supposed to send a message to the world about God's greatness and love.

Because of His nature and relationship with Judah, God's people were supposed to reflect His concern in these areas of relief for the oppressed and defense of the helpless. When the world looked at their behavior, it should have viewed a living illustration of God's love and compassion in each of these areas.

So, how does this apply to our responsibilities as Christians in

today’s world? Does God expect us to reflect His priorities in the same manner?

When we look to the New Testament, we find some striking similarities and expectations. It teaches that through the blood of Christ, God has delivered us from cruel bondage to sin (Romans 6:15-18) and established a “new covenant” with us (Luke 22:20). Those who have been miraculously delivered from this slavery to sin are also called *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God* (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

Also, in the same way that Judah was to embrace God’s priorities, we, too, are to embrace His priorities. He instructed us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16) and to love each other because He loved us and because He is love (1 John 4:7-8). God calls His chosen ones to hate what is evil, cling to what is good (Romans 12:9), and to seek first His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33). God still expects His chosen people to share His concerns and embrace His priorities.

Finally, in addition to our status as His chosen people and our responsibility to embrace His priorities, we too are to reflect His nature to the world around us. When the lost observe our behavior, they should see an accurate picture of God’s glorious character (1 Peter 2:12). When they watch us relate to each other, they should learn of the Lord’s love (John 13:34–35; 17:23). When the world views our marriages, it should see a picture of the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

As God’s people, our priorities, actions, and affections should serve as a consistent reflection to the lost of Who He is and what He is like.

God has indeed delivered us from bitter slavery and brought us into a loving relationship with Him. Because of this incomparable love and grace, we should respond by eagerly embracing His concerns and actively reflecting His nature.

Implications

God clearly expects His people today to embrace His desires and reflect His nature. But if God’s people fail to address these issues, we convey a false message and project a false image of God to the lost.

Our Father is still concerned for those who are victims of violence and oppression. He remains opposed to the destruction brought through sexual immorality and perversion. He is just as resolved in His concern for the helpless today as when He indicted Judah for their failure in this regard. But if we fail to call on our people and churches to take an active role in preventing immorality and perversion, how can we justify our passionate claims that we follow the Lord?

God still expects the oppressor to be brought to justice. He does not equate forgiveness with the absolute elimination of consequences. Yet, if we remain silent in our churches, justifying inactivity with an anemic and truncated reference to “forgiveness,” our claims of loving and obeying God ring hollow.

Furthermore, if we remain silent, the watching world falsely concludes from our inactivity that God is not *really* concerned about these issues. They can draw inaccurate, but understandable, conclusions that God is a cold, cruel, distant, and perhaps even powerless being who deserves no one’s worship or allegiance.

On the other hand, when we take an active role in preventing child abuse, when we take appropriate action with those in our churches who are guilty of such evil, when we embrace the victims and actively assist in their healing, then the watching world has the opportunity to view an accurate reflection of God—then they can rightly conclude that we serve a God who is strong, compassionate, caring, just, and fully worthy of all honor and glory. ✨

1 See Isaiah 59:7 and Micah 7:2
2 See Exodus 22:22-24 and Deuteronomy 14:29; 24:17-21

Adapted from *Sinful Silence: When Christians Neglect Their Civic Duty* by Ken Connor and John Revell.

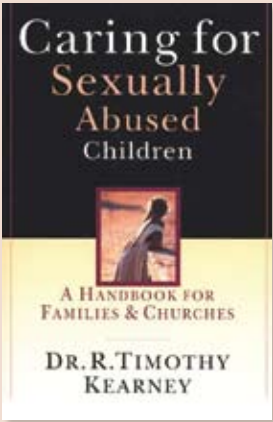
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Hush: Moving from Silence to Healing after Childhood Sexual Abuse
Nicole Braddock Bromley
Moody Publishers, **\$12.99**



Caring for Sexually Abused Children: A Handbook for Families and Churches
R. Timothy Kearney
Intervarsity Press, **\$13.00**



The Tragic Reality



The Perspective of a Former Social Worker

by Janice LaRoy

Several years before coming to work for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention I worked as a Child Protective Services (CPS) worker, and later as an Adult Probation Officer with a specialized sex offender caseload in Texas. Based on my experience as a professional in this realm, I can assure you that child abuse in the form of sexual molestation is very real. I have conducted hundreds of investigations and interviews with victims, child molesters, and numerous mental health counselors over the years. And yes, such child abuse actually exists in our churches—which should not come as a surprise because our churches are made up of fallen human beings who live in a fallen world.

As I reflect on my experiences with CPS and as a probation officer, several thoughts occur to me that should help Southern Baptists address this critical issue.

The Reality

First, we must recognize that the problem is real—not just “out there,” but even in our churches. I faced this reality one day at the probation office when, much to my surprise, a man who had just received felony probation for sexual abuse of a minor walked in—and he was from my own church! He had been a school teacher and very active in the life of the church. Even with all my years of experience, my initial reaction was to not believe this was really true, but it was. Not only did the terms of his probation state he could no longer teach, but it was made clear to him that he could never again have any role at church or in the community that involved working with children.

I wish this were the only case I had encountered involving members of evangelical churches, but it wasn’t.

The Trust Factor

Children are taught to trust their parents, other family members, their teachers, ministers, those in authority over them. Most often children are abused by people they know, people they trust, not usually by some stranger in a dark trench coat.

There are various terms used to describe individuals who sexually abuse children, such as child molester, predator, and perpetrator. Each term represents the image of an individual who attempts to exploit someone else for personal gain using deception to carry out his or her purposes. And these predators use the victims’ trust to gain access to their bodies.

The Bible says children are a gift from God. We are responsible to protect them from being treated as mere possessions to be controlled by the whims of the persons they have been taught to trust.

No Discrimination

Studies clearly show that child molesters are from all walks of life—there are no ethnic, economic, religious, educational, or gender barriers. Both men and women are abusers, and both girls

and boys are victims. Child molestation is an equal opportunity destroyer—given the opportunity, it will destroy children and families from all walks of life.

Recidivism

From my own interviews with perpetrators, victims, and mental health counselors, it is undeniable that many perpetrators have multiple victims and abuse them multiple times. It is clear that when given the opportunity, a significant percentage of those—Christians, as well as non-Christians—with a past record of sexual abuse will repeat that offense. A person who has used his or her position of trust to sexually abuse a child simply should not be allowed to remain in that position of trust.

Churches are obliged before God to help protect our children—we dare not make them easy prey for those whom we know to have a history of sexual abuse.

Accordingly, we must hold the actual “perpetrator” responsible for the behavior he or she has chosen. This is not denying the sincerity of a person’s genuine repentance or withholding forgiveness—perpetrators can and should be forgiven. But they should never be allowed to work with children again in any capacity. That is part of the consequences for their actions. Their lives can still be useful and productive but their activities must be steered to other areas of their giftedness, particularly as it applies to work in the church.

Cooperate Within the System

Sometimes the various government agencies are scorned and demonized, but I worked alongside many fine and dedicated social workers and probation officers. I personally prayed over my jobs and specific cases throughout those years asking for discernment to make good casework decisions for families, but in particular for the innocent children. I knew plenty of other workers who shared my faith and my commitment to families and children.

Consistently, the Department of Human Services’ goal was to either keep families together or restore families whenever possible. Even with the best expertise, sometimes professionals are not able to protect children. The authorities do not expect church staff or other laypeople to have perfect discernment. However, you should follow your state’s laws in reporting child abuse, and greater still, you should go beyond man’s law and follow God’s law in how we are to treat one another.

The Scripture tells us to be wise as serpents. We dare not fool ourselves into thinking that child molestation would never happen in my home, in my child’s school, in my church, or in my community.

Make no mistake, child abuse is a tragic reality—but we can take steps to dramatically reduce the number of incidents and the shattered lives that result, and we have the responsibility to do the best we can to that end. ✨

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Distorting the Grace of God

Reflections from Jude 4

by Dale Ingraham

It is difficult for us to grasp and accept the fact that the evil of child sexual abuse exists in our midst—it is even more difficult to accept the prospect that it is prevalent today—yet that is what the statistics are showing. Consider the following reports:

“It is estimated that one in three girls and one in six boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before they are eighteen years old” (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1993).

“The typical child sex offender molests an average of 117 children, most of who do not report the offence” (National Institute of Mental Health, 1988).

Research indicates that most child sexual abuse takes place in the home, but news reports constantly remind us that such abuse can even be found in churches, and that even some pastors and church leaders have been found guilty of the offense.

This is especially egregious because the violation has taken place at the hands of those who are entrusted with the responsibility to lead and protect the sheep. It is particularly abominable when the protector becomes the predator. It fulfills the warning of Jude 4: *For certain men, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into promiscuity and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.* This verse clearly warns of evil men coming into the church and committing sexual sin—and then using the beautiful gift of God’s grace as an excuse or license to commit one sexual sin after another.

Therefore, we are faced with this question: “How do we as believers deal with this sin?” Here are five essentials steps we must take if we are to ever succeed in confronting and removing this cancer from our churches. We must stop denying the sin, excusing the sin, minimizing the sin, breaking the law, and hurting the victims.

Stop Denying the Sin

Our first response when faced with evidence that members of our church family or leadership are guilty of these horrible offenses often is disbelief and denial. We do not want to believe that such a thing could happen in our midst—so we convince ourselves it never really happened.

Tragically, when we deny the sin, it enables offenders to

continue in their sin and further intimidates victims into not speaking up. They fear no one will believe them.

Consider the example of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15:20. *And Saul said to Samuel, ‘But **I have obeyed** the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites* (NKJV, emphasis added). God had commanded Saul to destroy all the inhabitants and animals, but he chose to disobey. When Samuel confronted him with his disobedience, Saul’s first response was denial. Despite of the fact that Samuel could hear the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen (1 Samuel 15:14), Saul continued to deny his disobedience.

The Lord expects His people to take appropriate action within the church when a member sins (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5). We might be tempted to report that we are fully obeying the Lord, but the cries of the victims of sexual abuse and the emotional heartache of those ravaged by this sin can be heard and seen all around us. When it comes to the issue of sexual abuse, too many pastors and church leaders are living in a state of denial; meanwhile, the sin devastates their churches.

Stop Excusing the Sin

Once believers are confronted with the evidence of this sin and they are no longer able to deny it, they may be tempted to excuse the behavior. This is especially true when the offenders are prominent members, or even leaders in their churches. Their flawed reasoning holds that because the accused leaders have done so much good for the church, they should be excused.

On the other hand, some Christians will overlook the behavior because of the potential consequences of dealing with this sin, such as scandal, embarrassment, loss of revenue, civil lawsuits, and criminal punishment. Some even claim that they are concerned that exposing such sin will bring reproach upon the name of Christ. However, it is this very sin, and the failure to address it biblically, that brings shame to the name of Christ, not exposing it.

Once again let’s look at the example of Saul. When Samuel indicated to Saul that he knew Saul had brought back the animals

and Saul knew he could no longer deny the sin, he chose to excuse the sin by saying: *The troops took sheep and cattle from the plunder* (1 Samuel 15:21). Saul excused his disobedience by blaming others for his sin. When they can no longer deny their sin, many offenders will excuse it by blaming the victims, or others, or their circumstances. In one recent case involving a pastor, the church people were blamed because “they were not praying hard enough for their pastor.” When God confronted Adam with his sin, Adam blamed Eve—and, by implication, God—for his disobedience (Genesis 3:12).

As hard as it is to believe, many offenders who claim to be Christians will blame God for their vile behavior. They say “God made me this way” or “God gave me these desires.”

In each of these, the assumption is that because of various external circumstances, their actions are understandable and excusable—but that reasoning will never stand up before God.

Excusing sexual abuse is neither loving nor forgiving. We must quit making excuses and start holding offenders accountable. 1 Corinthians 5:11-12 teaches that *we are to judge those who are within*.

Stop Minimizing the Sin

When an offender or church is confronted with the evidence of this sin, and when the sin can no longer be denied or excused, the abuser may attempt to minimize his sin and convince others that it is not really as bad as it appears. Abusers will often say things like: “We had an affair” or “We had an incestuous relationship,” as if their abhorrent desires were shared mutually between offender and victim. In their perverted minds, they somehow convince themselves that this is not rape or molestation, but rather a mutual relationship. No! Sexually abusing a child is sin—it is the rape and molestation of children, it is filthy and vile, and the church needs to recognize it as such.

Every week our ministry receives new reports from victims that are harmed by this sin. One such report was from a woman who, as a fifteen-year-old pastor’s daughter, was raped by a guest speaker who was staying in their home. He threatened her, telling her that terrible things would happen to her parents if she told, so she kept her secret. But for years she thought she would go to hell because of what her abuser had done to her. Another victim shared that as a young child she was raped and molested for many years by her father. In her heart-wrenching testimony, she tried to describe her feelings of guilt and pain and how she thought others could smell the dirt on her. It’s odd that victims seem to feel the guilt and the shame while the offenders seem to go on with their lives as if nothing is wrong.

What these criminals are doing to the victims destroys them emotionally, inflicting emotional injury that will last the rest of their lives. It not only devastates the lives of the victims, it does untold harm to the victims’ relationships with their future spouses and children. There is nothing that could ever be presented that should allow an abuser—or the church—to minimize this sin.

Notice that Saul not only tried to deny and excuse his disobedience but also tried to minimize the sinfulness of it by reasoning with Samuel that the animals were saved to sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:15).

Proverbs 21:3 says: *To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice* (NASB).

There is no conscionable way we can minimize this sin, yet because it is so troubling to believe that it is happening in the Body of Christ, many are willing to deny, excuse, and minimize it... whatever it takes to ease their consciences.

Stop Breaking the Law

Churches need to realize and remember that this sin is also a criminal offense—therefore, we have a moral, biblical, and legal obligation to treat it as such.

Consider what God says to the church in Romans 13:3-5: *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil, do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise of the same. For **he is God’s minister** to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake* (NKJV, emphasis added).

When it comes to addressing this sin, churches too often are reluctant to turn the offenders over to the law. They often have a misunderstanding of grace and justice, believing that it is unloving or unforgiving to hold an offender accountable before the law. For some reason, many conclude that somehow justice is wrong.

Proverbs 18:5 says: *It is not good to be partial to the wicked or deprive the innocent of justice*, and Proverbs 17:15 says: *Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both* (NIV).

The Lord is clear in His expectations. Yes, we need to offer offenders love and forgiveness, but we must realize that forgiveness and love do not eliminate the consequences of the sin. The devastation that is heaped upon the victims of this sin is not erased

When they can no longer deny their sin, many offenders will excuse it by blaming the victims, or others, or their circumstances.

merely by a simple “I am sorry,” nor are the legal and personal debts of an offender satisfied with an apology.

We recognize this with other criminal activities such as murder, assault, or theft, but for some reason many are willing to simply overlook this specific criminal behavior. Some may think it is too harsh for offenders to face the consequences of their choices, because they may lose their reputation, social standing, family, or freedom. And when the abuse is brought to light, innocent people are heavily impacted; the family members of the offender, as well as the victims, face shame and loss. While it is true that the process will bring pain to the guilty as well as the innocent (and we must remember to be loving and supportive to all those who are victimized), we are not relieved of our legal obligation—we must hold offenders accountable before God and the law.

Stop Hurting the Victims

One of the things we have personally experienced, and have seen many others go through, is that when victims come forward, they do not find love and support from their church and family members. Many will respond with disbelief or assert that the victim needs to “forgive and forget.” While it is true that we need to be able to forgive, much of the time when victims are told to forgive and forget, what is being said is: “You need to be quiet.” Because the church and the family do not want to be embarrassed, inconvenienced, or forced to deal with a situation that makes them uncomfortable, the easiest thing to do is to pressure the victim to be quiet. This causes unimaginable damage and pain to the victim.

In the book *Invisible Girls*, Dr. Patti Feuereisen states that the most important factor in victims’ healing is telling their story. When we tell a victim of sexual abuse to be quiet or we encourage them to suppress their story, essentially what we are telling them is that they do not matter, and what they have gone through is not serious enough for us to deal with. We devalue them as a person and as a child of God. When we do this, in effect we are reinforcing the abuse that they experienced at the hands of their offenders.

Often victims are told that if they are struggling with the emotional and spiritual wounds of their abuse, it is a sign that they are unforgiving. How ridiculous! We do not accuse someone who has suffered physical abuse of being unforgiving if his broken bones are not healed immediately, but we judge a person who has been ravaged spiritually and emotionally by how quickly or slowly the healing comes.

Luke 17:1-2 says: *He said to His disciples, “Offenses will certainly come, but woe to him through whom they come! 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.”* In light of what Christ says in this passage about offenders, we must remember that our role as the Body of Christ in these situations is to both help and comfort the victims, and firmly confront offenders in a biblically-consistent manner.

Conclusion

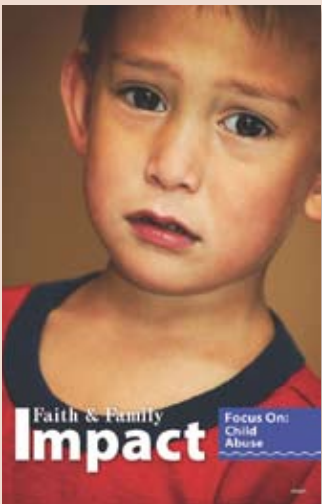
In conclusion, there are a number of things we need to consider when facing the issue of sexual abuse and how we need to deal with it in our church. Although we may never completely eradicate the sin, there are biblical guidelines that need to be followed in an effort to prevent this sin from happening in our churches and homes.

We must realize first and foremost that we need to seek God’s face in our time of need. Second Chronicles 7:14 reminds us: *If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.* We must humble ourselves and admit there is a problem, which means that we no longer deny, excuse, or minimize the sin. We must hold offenders accountable before the law and God. And we must be supportive of the victims and provide love and healing. 🌸

Dale Ingraham is pastor of Curtis Baptist Bible Church in Addison, New York, and co-founder with his wife Faith, a victim herself of childhood sexual abuse, of Speaking the Truth in Love Ministries, established to address the sin of sexual abuse in the Body of Christ. For more about this ministry, go to <http://speakingtruthinlove.org>.

Available from The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Faith & Family Impact is a dynamic resource designed to provide biblically-grounded information and insight on



the issue of Child Abuse. Each four-page publication, sized for easy placement in most church bulletins, can be used as a stand-alone informational handout and includes specific prayer points, action steps, and the plan of salvation.

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Reaping the Fruit of “Life Devalued”

Child Abuse and Neglect

by Richard Land

Are human beings simply specks of cosmic dust blown on the winds of fate? Is there no meaning or purpose to existence? Or, has each human being been created with a purpose and plan for his or her life? Do we possess any more inherent value than anything else God created? Are we just another species within the animal kingdom, or are we made in the image of God?

David, the shepherd-king of Israel, gives the answer in a lyrical and beautiful description of our place in the universe in Psalm 8: “*Lord, our Lord, how magnificent is Your name throughout the earth! You have covered the heavens with Your majesty,*” he marvels. “*When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You set in place, what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?*” he asks, marveling that the Creator of such a vast universe would stoop to lavish His attention on frail human beings.

“*You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet: all the sheep and oxen, as well as animals in the wild, birds of the sky, and fish of the sea passing through the currents of the seas*” (Psalm 8:1, 3-8).

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. Each person is a unique creation of God, of incalculable value to Him, and ultimately accountable to Him (Psalm 139). Each of us has a God-given destiny to fulfill, not only for today but also for all eternity. What difference does it make when a society believes that some lives are more valuable than others? Moral chaos supplants God’s perfect order, and the smallest and most defenseless among us are in mortal danger.

The assault upon innocent children, unborn and born, reflects our culture’s moral confusion and is revealed in crimes of violence—physical, emotional, and sexual—against children.

In a culture engulfed and submerged in moral relativism, children are particularly vulnerable to the depraved sexual appetites of adults. Loving parents who bond with their children will stop at nothing to keep them out of harm’s way, protect them from imminent danger, and rescue them from crisis. Yet the evidence of how America raises her children looks like anything but such loving care.

Child abuse is at epidemic proportions in the United States, at all socioeconomic levels. It is an issue for which *everyone* must take responsibility, both in terms of reporting and adequate supervision of children. And we all need to examine the societal reasons that have turned this country from the child-nurturing society that it once was to the child-neglecting and child-abusing society that it is now in the first part of the twenty-first century.

Children who have been victimized bear emotional scars and are tormented by the fear they will be targeted again. Too often, their psyches damaged, they pass along the ugly legacy of violence against children.

Years ago, Carl F. H. Henry observed that twentieth-century philosophies have succumbed to man-centered rather than God-centered focus and orientation. Man rather than God defines truth and goodness in most contemporary universities: “The greatest overturn of ideas and ideals in the history of human thought...[that] assumes the comprehensive contingency of everything, including God; the total temporality of all things; the radical relativity of all human thought and life; and the absolute autonomy of man.” Obviously, Christianity has become marginalized.

In words that should haunt every thinking Christian, Henry wrote of “a multitude of seething and tormented minds” that “speak now and then of right and wrong, but never of absolutes. They live in a world no longer sure of definitions. Some occasionally churn up the vocabulary of values, but their values take on the sense of mere wants and desires.”

This recalls the account in Romans 1:21-28: *For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds*

were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man.... Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts.... God delivered them over to degrading passions. ...God delivered them over to a worthless mind to do what is morally wrong.

The noted Evangelical philosopher G.K. Chesterton observed that: “The nineteenth century decided to have *no* religious authority. The twentieth century seems disposed to have *any* religious authority”

[*Illustrated London News*, April 26, 1924, emphasis supplied].

To expand upon his insightful line of thought, we might say the twenty-first century appears to have forgotten there ever was such a thing as religious authority or moral absolutes of any kind.

It is paramount that the body of Christ do all it can to protect these little ones, from insuring that the church and all her ministries are

a place of comfort and safety to reaching out to new moms and dads who are—more often than not—suddenly overwhelmed by the challenges of parenthood. A church that allows any child to be harmed through negligence or neglect soils its witness in the community and brings public disrepute to God. We must be ever vigilant in protecting the children within our midst.

Yet the greatest contribution the church can offer to remedy this scourge of abuse and neglect upon innocent children is to reassert boldly the Truth that all human life is precious and should be protected.

In his foreword to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission publication, *Our Southern Baptist Heritage of Life*, my friend Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School, warns of the “correlation between the decline in Bible-based faith and morality and the successful assault on the sanctity of human life.” The trends offer a chilling parallel with the infamous genocides of Hitler. Once the German people rejected the premise that all human life is created by God and is sacred to Him, then it became possible to do virtually anything to at least some human beings. The first victims of the Third Reich’s diminishing of human life were not German Jews, but mentally challenged German boys and girls who were decreed to have *lebensunwertes Leben*—lives unworthy of life.

America is practicing child sacrifice. We are victimizing our unborn babies through abortion and our young children through abuse and neglect because we have forgotten God and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator. The wholesale abortion of approximately one third of our children for more than three decades has brutalized and desensitized our society and has caused the collective societal devaluation of human life itself.

No child deserves to be assaulted, abandoned, or maltreated. The rotten fruit of a culture that allows human life to be devalued renders a vile stench that should sting our nostrils. It is for those of us who know God, having surveyed the tragic landscape of our culture and with our hearts broken over the shattered lives of so many of our nation’s children, to resolve before God that we will do everything within our power to revalue each and every human life and to extend to every child—born and unborn—the protection they deserve—and that is their “unalienable right” as a human being. 🌸

Richard Land is a member of Clearview Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and president of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.





Prudence, Protection, and Church Policies

by Joe Langford

As dreadful and wretched as it seems, it has become common to hear horrific reports of children being harmed or abused by someone with a prior record of this kind of behavior. Even more horrific, some of these accounts have been connected to churches. The reality is no denomination is exempt from the risk of predators seeking to exploit those who are most vulnerable. In fact, some predators specifically choose to use the trusted environment of a church community to satisfy their vile appetites. Because Southern Baptist churches are entirely autonomous and independent of any outside ecclesiastical authorities or hierarchies, each one must take responsibility for protecting their children from such attacks.

As a Southern Baptist, the father of two boys (ages 11 and 13), the teacher of a middle-school Sunday School class, and president of a national background screening company, I have a very unique and personal view on how potentially dangerous this threat is. From that vantage point, I have developed some seasoned ideas to help churches mitigate this risk when they are considering paid and volunteer personnel.

The purpose of this article is to assist churches by: 1) recommending some simple but critical steps in considering a candidate; 2) identifying guidelines that must be followed if an outside company—a consumer reporting agency (CRA)—is used for background checks; and 3) clarifying important differences that exist in the various criminal background screening services available. Also, I've included a sidebar at the end that discusses background screening “packages” designed to help churches decide how much screening to apply in each level of volunteer and staff involvement.

Simple But Critical Steps

A church should always require candidates to fill out and submit an application (with or without a resumé) to gather as much information about candidates as possible, whether they are seeking full-time, part-time, or volunteer positions. After receiving the application, the next step is to *really* review the application. When you are consistent in screening, you avoid any perception of discrimination in the hiring process. This also helps reveal potential problems that might otherwise be missed. Several recommended steps that should be followed for every application are:

a. **Carefully look at all dates** provided on applications for any employment gaps. If a gap exists, candidates should complete the missing information with the understanding that it will be confirmed. For example, if they worked a part-time job for a brief period of time (and did not list it on the application) they need to provide missing data for your confirmation.

b. **Confirm that the educational information** provided is correct. Even if no graduation date is provided, enrollment dates can be verified. This is true for high school, college, and seminary enrollment.

c. **Call all of the employment references** provided. Dates of employment, position(s) held, and salary can usually be confirmed. At times, valuable insight into the performance of the individual may also be gathered. (*For legal requirements when checking employment references, see the next section, “Components of Compliance.”*)

d. **Calling personal references** cited on an application or resumé is also recommended. Although you may expect positive remarks, you should exhaust all opportunities to learn about the candidate and confirm information provided on the application. Think of the horror if the references were contacted after an abuse situation occurred and they stated, “I wish someone would have called me before they allowed that person to work with children.”

In many hiring situations, there is a tendency to rely on first impressions and/or the candidate's familiar personal references—especially if they originate from a long-time, trusted member of the church. The best practice and precaution is to exercise a consistent screening policy and process for all job candidates and volunteers, including careful scrutiny of the application and resumé.

Components of Compliance—Providing Disclosure and Gaining Permission

While it may seem strange to a church, a thorough background check should be performed for *every* candidate—paid or volunteer—to rule out any criminal history. While many components of a thorough background check can be gathered without

using an outside agency, the assistance of a CRA may be necessary to retrieve accurate “hands-on” criminal history records, sexual offender checks, criminal database information, additional residential addresses not disclosed by a candidate, and other vital information. When a CRA is used, there are specific federal (Fair Credit Reporting Act) and state requirements that the employer and CRA must follow. In general, these requirements center on proper disclosure, notification, and responsiveness to disputes.

For more information on the FCRA requirements, go to: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/credempl.pdf> and <http://www.ftc.gov/os/statutes/fcradoc.pdf>.

Also, California requires these steps even if the research is done solely by the employer with no assistance from a third party provider (CRA).

Any reputable CRA will be able to guide the church administration through federal and specific state requirements as well as provide examples of acceptable forms.

Understand What You Are Receiving

There are four commonly used criminal history record search options: a) the national sexual offender database; b) “national criminal databases,” more accurately referred to as a “multi-state criminal databases;” c) “hands-on” county criminal records; and d) state central repository databases.

a. The **National Sexual Offender Public Registry** is a repository for the sexual offenders as supplied by all fifty states. This is a “must search” and the first step any organization with a vulnerable population (children, elderly, and others) should take. Most people can conduct a simple search for themselves on this easy-to-use database. Some CRAs go further using these sexual offender databases as a “pointer file” for researching other avenues for more complete information, such as matching the offender with the official state sexual offender registry and then confirming with a county criminal record check. Searching this database as a “pointer file” is highly recommended because many offenders do not list the county where the sexual offense occurred. The National Sex Offender Public Registry can be accessed through the SBC Executive Committee Web site (www.sbc.net) under “Sex Abuse Prevention,” or directly at www.nsopr.gov.

b. The next step is to search “**national criminal records.**” Usually a CRA would be employed by a church to undertake such searches, since much of the data is not easily accessed by the public. However, there are misconceptions about this database that may bring false security to those using it as their only background check tool. The term “national” implies that the database contains criminal records from every state and every criminal jurisdiction in the country. This is not the case. While there are millions of criminal records maintained in these databases, there are a large number of counties and states that do not sell their data to the database compilers. For example, neither the state of Louisiana nor any of its parishes make their data available for purchase. Therefore, a criminal

conviction in Louisiana would not appear in a search of the “national” criminal database. This situation exists for any jurisdiction that does not allow their criminal records to be sold to third parties. Again, a more accurate term for these criminal databases is “multi-state” instead of “national.”

The benefit from these databases is the fact they cover millions of records from all over the United States, they are instantly available, and are a relatively inexpensive way to increase the effectiveness of the overall criminal search on a candidate. These databases may find criminal records in a county where the candidate neither lived nor worked and excluded the record from their application.

c. **County criminal searches** are conducted by individuals who research the files by going directly (physically or electronically) to the courthouse within that jurisdiction. These records are

No denomination is exempt from the risk of predators seeking to exploit those who are most vulnerable.

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generally considered to be the most current information available and are used by most employers. Conducting a county criminal check in every location the candidate worked or lived provides good due diligence. County criminal record searches can usually be completed within seventy-two hours by a competent CRA.

d. All states maintain **central repository databases** which contain criminal records of each jurisdiction within their state. Many organizations consider using state criminal record information because the scope of coverage is greater than single county searches and more accurate than the national criminal databases. However, state repositories are not as current as county courthouse searches because of the lag time in reporting information from the county level to the state repository. In addition, not all states make their information available for purchase, and of those that do, there are a variety of different access requirements and turnaround times among them. Any reputable CRA will be able to provide the details of each state’s availability and access requirements. From this information organizations/employers are able to make educated decisions on which states to consider when formulating a background screening policy.

Conclusion

Taking these steps will not guarantee the absolute safety of our children—as long as we live in a fallen world, it is unrealistic to hold out for such a guarantee. But as stewards, we have the responsibility to take reasonable and appropriate steps to protect them as best we can.

Perhaps these steps seem involved, complicated, and unnecessary. Some may react that these recommendations are extreme, especially when applied to churches. I would respond that these are standard procedures commonly accepted and followed in the secular world—and I believe we should *at least* meet these basic standards in such areas. If a church asks its insurance provider its opinion on the matter, I suspect it would agree.

Furthermore, when it comes to protecting the lives and safety of our children, aren’t these steps reasonable? If taking these steps can help prevent our children from being exposed to the unimaginable, isn’t it worth the extra effort? ✿

Joe Langford and his wife, Pam, are members of the Church at Viera in Melbourne, Florida, and have two sons ages 10 and 13. He is also the President & CEO of Edge Information Management, Inc., in Melbourne, Florida, a national provider of background screening and drug testing for employers across the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Canada. He currently leads his church’s small-group Bible study for middle school boys throughout the school year and was required to undergo a background check in order to do so. He is and has been a member of Southern Baptist churches throughout his life and felt led to contribute this article as a point of information for the SBC to assist its affiliated churches in establishing and maintaining sound background screening policies to protect their children, members, and visitors.

For more information on taking appropriate steps or utilizing a Consumer Reporting Agency, contact your church’s insurance provider.

Criminal Background Check Packages

The following are criminal background check “packages,” or groupings based on the level of responsibilities and exposure to those who are most vulnerable. They are designed to help identify any criminal or person with an otherwise questionable history before being approved to serve as a volunteer or work on staff. While these packages contain methods and suggestions, it should be noted that these should be considered minimum search packages for each position:

- a. **Volunteers**
 - i. Conduct a search through a national sexual offender database
 - ii. Conduct a search through a multi-state criminal history database
 - iii. Use an “address locator” search to find any addresses (counties or states) not provided by the candidate and conduct state and county searches in these areas
 - iv. Conduct a criminal history search in all state and county addresses provided by the candidate on the application and those from the address locator
- b. **Volunteers who drive for church activities/purposes**
 - i. All searches listed above in “a”
 - ii. Conduct a seven-year driving history search where available (some states are limited to three years)
- c. **Senior pastoral staff**
 - i. All searches listed above in “a” and “b”
 - ii. Media search (looks through various Internet search engines for publications, articles, or documents with information pertaining to that individual)
 - iii. Employment credit report
 - iv. Civil search (to find if there are any civil filings against the individual)

When allowable, FBI fingerprint searches should also be considered as a component within the overall background check. It should be noted that this information is usually obtained through the specific state repository governed by specific state laws limiting or controlling access and making use of a CRA necessary. Because there are lag times and potential gaps from county and state criminal records and the FBI databases, it is advisable that these records be run in conjunction with the criminal history searches outlined above.

When Child Abuse is Experienced, Suspected, or Discovered

by James P. Guenther

When child abuse (physical or sexual) is experienced, suspected, or discovered, the information needs to be shared with someone in a position to protect the child. This is a matter of biblical instruction and legal responsibility. Any suspected or known abuse needs to be reported immediately upon learning of the alleged incident(s).

Reporting to Public Authorities

Child Welfare Information Gateway is a service of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DHHS is the primary child protection agency of the federal government. Its Information Gateway can be accessed at <http://www.childwelfare.gov>. This site provides information about who in your state is required by law to report, how to report, and to whom a report should be made. It also provides information about special rules related to ministerial confidentiality. It even gives a telephone number where one may call for advice on how to proceed.



Some persons must report. Every state has a statute which requires that reasonable suspicion or known instances of child abuse must be reported by certain persons to public authorities. Some states require that *any person* who reasonably suspects child abuse or has knowledge that a child has been abused is required to report it. For those persons who are required by law to report, their failure to report is a crime.

Anyone may report. In addition to those who must report child abuse, any person may report his suspicion or information to law enforcement authorities or state agencies which are charged with the duty to protect children.

Should ministers report? Should a minister of the Gospel report what he learns about child sex abuse, even if the information is confided in him? Under the state statute in some states, a minister may be legally compelled to report. If not legally compelled in the state where he serves, the minister may still conclude that he has a moral duty to report. Some statutes speak specifically to the duty of ministers to report. These reporting statutes may need to be understood in the light of other statutes which describe special rules about the testimony of a minister when it comes to the revelation of information he has gained in his ministerial capacity.

Should a minister feel conflicted about whether to report, due to concerns about the clergy-penitent relationship, several pertinent factors come into play.

- ♦ In some states, clergy-penitent privilege is a professional code of conduct rather than a legal right granted under the appropriate law codes.
- ♦ If the minister learns of any abuse from another source other than the perpetrator of the crime, it is not a confession and is not covered under the privilege.
- ♦ If the perpetrator has told anyone else other than the minister about the abuse, privilege has already been waived.
- ♦ If a minister has a moral objection to sharing information learned in a pastoral counseling session, that minister must weigh the legal and moral responsibility of protecting one of God’s children over against the moral code of ethics of his position.

If one remains uncertain as to what to do, the best thing to do is to call an attorney in your church, town, or state for clarification.

Reporting to Church Authorities

If the abuse involves the church. If suspected or known

child abuse involves the church in any way, it should also be reported to the proper church authorities. Victims and their families will need counseling, support, and other pastoral assistance. It involves the church if the abuse occurred:

- ♦ on church property or in connection with a church activity;
- ♦ by a church member or participant, whether serving as a volunteer or an employee of the church;
- ♦ toward a victim who is a church member or participant in church activities; or
- ♦ when knowledge of or information about the abuse came to a church member, volunteer, or employee as the result of his relationship to the church.



The “proper” church authorities to whom a report should be made might include the pastor, another member of the staff, or a church committee. If the suspected abuser is an employee, for example, it may be that the most appropriate person to report the matter to is the chairman of the personnel committee of the church. If the suspected abuser is a Sunday School teacher, or bus driver or some other volunteer or church member, the pastor may be the most appropriate person to whom to report.

If the abuse involves a minister of the church. If the suspected abuser is a member of the ministerial staff, the pastor must be told. If the suspected abuser is the pastor, the most appropriate church leader to whom a report should be made may be the chairman of the deacons and/or the chairman of the personnel committee.

While it is vitally important to the victim that reports be made, it is also important to the church and to its witness. Failure to report a crime ends up hurting all parties involved. Believers have a special responsibility to take the right road—the road of obedience both to biblical teaching and the law.

Making a report to a church leader by itself does not mitigate one’s responsibility to report suspected or known child abuse to the appropriate legal authorities. Child abuse of any kind is not only sin; it is a crime.

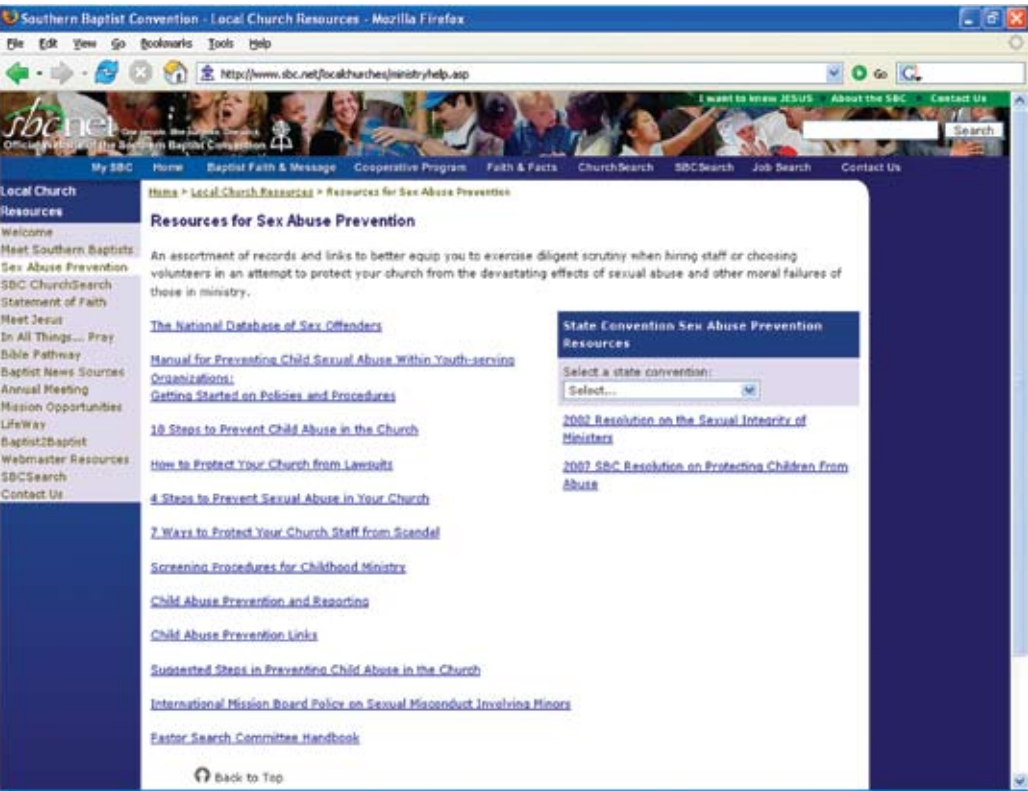
Reporting to the Victim’s Parents

It would normally be appropriate to report suspicions or information of abuse to the victim’s parents, especially if the parents are members of the church or participants in the activities of the church. If the suspicion or information indicates the abuser may be a member of the family, reporting to the parents might not be the best thing to do. That’s when you need to turn over what you know or suspect to public authorities and church authorities.



If, due to your position, the law requires you to report to public authorities, you are not excused from reporting through appropriate legal channels simply because you reported to someone else (for example, to the pastor, a church committee, or the victim’s family). Even if you are not legally required to report to public authorities to meet your legal obligation, you must ask yourself if you have a personal moral duty to protect any child about whom you have personal knowledge or cause to suspect has been abused. If you answer affirmatively, then you have a moral responsibility to report what you have witnessed or have good reason to suspect. A child’s physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing hangs in the balance. ✿

James P. Guenther is a member of First Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and serves as General Counsel for the Southern Baptist Convention



Logon at: www.sbc.net/localchurches/ministryhelp.asp

Helpful Resources

In addition to the sex abuse prevention resources posted on the Executive Committee's www.sbc.net, many Baptist state conventions have posted resources on their Web sites as well. State conventions have offered or are offering the following types of helps to their affiliated churches.

Most state conventions have designated a state convention employee or an office of convention ministry to assist individuals or churches who desire to develop policies, find resources, or take other appropriate steps to safeguard the children under their care.

cross-referencing their Web-based resources with the resources posted on www.sbc.net/localchurches/ministryhelp.asp, the sex abuse prevention link on the Executive Committee's www.sbc.net. With these cross-referenced resources, local churches should be more fully equipped to create safe environments for the preschoolers, children, and teenagers entrusted to their care by their parents.

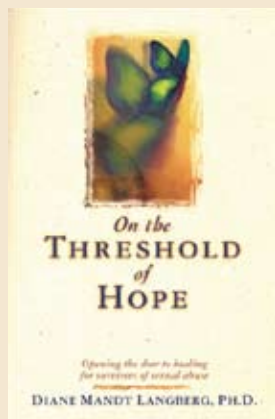
To find the resources your state convention may already provide, feel free to check your state convention Web site or call your state convention office staff. ✨

Many state conventions have conducted training seminars with churches and/or associations to help highlight steps to safeguard children. These have included presentations on risk management by insurance carriers, conferences led by certified counselors in the area of sex abuse and prevention, training events conducted by age-graded specialists, and breakout sessions at church-health conferences. Several states have upcoming training events already scheduled on their 2008-2009 calendar. Others stand ready to provide additional training at the associational level or local church level upon request.

Several state conventions have entered into contractual agreements with companies that specialize in candidate screening. These companies charge nominal fees to do background checks through multiple venues to assure, as much as is possible, that prospective staff and volunteers have no criminal record in their past. Churches in these states receive discounts when they make use of these contracted vendors.

More and more of our affiliated state conventions are

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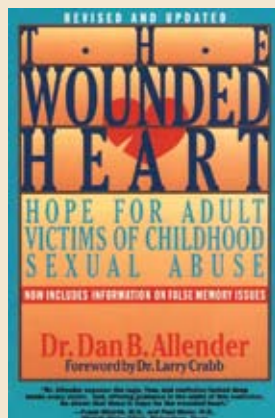
On the Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Hope and Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Diane Langberg
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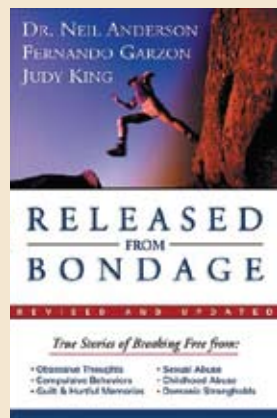
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Tell The Southern Baptist Story

Meet Southern Baptists

You become a Southern Baptist by joining with a Southern Baptist church, one in thousands scattered across the globe. Baptists are people who share a common faith in Jesus Christ. Typically, church membership is a matter of willing, free, and personal choice. Baptists have prepared a statement of generally held convictions called *The Baptist Faith and Message*. It serves as a guide to understanding what they are. Copies are available at Southern Baptist churches. It is a brief, pointed summary.

Basic Beliefs

The Scriptures

The Bible is the inspired and divinely dictated Word of God. It is the authoritative and final revelation of God's will for man. It is the source of all Christian doctrine and the basis of all Christian life and conduct. It is the standard by which all Christians are to be judged.

The Church

A church is a local assembly of believers who are united by a common faith in Jesus Christ and who are committed to the practice of the Christian life. The church is the body of Christ on earth, and it is the means by which Christ's kingdom is advanced in the world.

God

God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the creator of all things and the sustainer of all life. He is the source of all grace and the giver of all salvation.

God the Father

God the Father is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of all grace and the giver of all salvation. He is the one who calls us to Himself and who gives us the gift of His Son.

God the Son

God the Son is the only-begotten Son of the Father. He is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. He is the one who died for our sins and who rose again for our justification.

God the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who dwells in the hearts of believers. He is the one who convicts us of sin and who gives us the witness of His love.

Man

Man is created in the image of God. He is a fallen creature who is in need of redemption. He is the one who is called to repentance and who is given the gift of eternal life.

We Thought You'd Like to Know

Every denomination is eager to present its beliefs and convictions to the world. It is the duty of every denomination to do so. The Southern Baptist Convention is no exception. It is a body of churches that share a common faith in Jesus Christ and who are committed to the practice of the Christian life. The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. It is a body of churches that are committed to the practice of the Christian life and who are committed to the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world.

Position Statements

Profession of Faith

The Southern Baptist Convention professes the following: We believe in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe in the authority and inspiration of the Bible. We believe in the church as the body of Christ on earth. We believe in the practice of the Christian life. We believe in the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world.

Position Statements

The Southern Baptist Convention holds the following position statements: We believe in the authority and inspiration of the Bible. We believe in the church as the body of Christ on earth. We believe in the practice of the Christian life. We believe in the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world.

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The Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look

Through this brochure you will learn more about the Southern Baptist Convention. It is a body of churches that share a common faith in Jesus Christ and who are committed to the practice of the Christian life. The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. It is a body of churches that are committed to the practice of the Christian life and who are committed to the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world.

Why a Denomination?

Some have asked why there are so many denominations. The answer is simple. Each denomination is a body of churches that share a common faith in Jesus Christ and who are committed to the practice of the Christian life. Each denomination is a body of churches that are committed to the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world.

Why a Convention?

A convention is a meeting of churches that share a common faith in Jesus Christ and who are committed to the practice of the Christian life. A convention is a meeting of churches that are committed to the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world.

Meet Southern Baptists is designed to introduce newcomers to the common convictions and far-reaching ministries of Southern Baptists. The front page provides summary statements from *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Inside, readers can get a glimpse of the evangelistic efforts of the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board. The back page lists the agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention.

We Thought You'd Like to Know offers a summary of prevalent Southern Baptist positions on key cultural and theological issues. The front page provides positions statements that reflect the actions of the Convention and its entities. The inside surveys our rich heritage of commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture. The back page gives *quick facts* about the Convention and its entities.

The Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look is a wonderful resource to help your church members better understand the organization, structure, and activity of the SBC on local, state, and national levels, as well as how autonomous local SBC churches partner together in ministry and mission.

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