

**A Powerful Word:**  
***On Defining and Responding Justly to Abuse***

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**Prolegomena**

Two Key Questions

    Definition

    Justice in response

Why this topic and why now?

    Ubiquity

    Importance

    My process

What is at stake?

    Genuine care for victims

    Honoring the Lord and his word

What has been good about the renewed interest?

    Attention to a very real, enduring human problem

    Steps taken to protect susceptible persons

    Attention/resources for victims

What concerns should we have about current approaches?

*Sui generis*

    The expert trap

        Trauma-informed therapy; Subject area experts

    Redefining justice

        Unhelpful slogans: “believe all victims/women,” “hurt people hurt people”

    The elusive solution

What this seminar is not

    Care & counsel training

**Overview**

Week 1 – Prolegomena

    Definition & History

        The prevailing model

        Abuse through the ages

        Two Key Myths

Week 2 – Power and Control

    Power-over and Power-under

    A Biblical Theology of Power & Control

    David & Bathsheba

Week 3 – The Duluth Model

Origins

Critical Theory

Power and Control Wheel / Equality Wheel

Week 4 – A Biblical Definition

Selfish compulsion to the pronounced detriment of another

Selfishness Wheel / Loving Leadership Wheel

Week 5 – Justice

Definition

Components

Week 6 – Wrap-up, Q & A

Duty of Protection, Duty of Resistance

## Week 1 – Definition & History

### The Prevailing Model

“We begin with a general definition from Darby Strickland:

Abuse occurs in a marriage when one spouse pursues their own self-interests by seeking to control and dominate the other through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors . . . I like to use the term *oppression*, since it provides a framework for this behavior that is addressed in Scripture and captures the domination that it involves. No matter what form the oppression takes, its intended outcome is the same: to punish and wound a victim so that an oppressor gets their world the way they want it. An oppressor’s behavior says, “Serve me or suffer the consequences!”<sup>1</sup>

Strickland’s definition includes the synonyms *control*, *dominate*, *coercive*, *controlling*, *oppression*, and *domination* as well as the implied idea of an *ultimatum* (“serve me or suffer”). We will find these themes recurring throughout the definitions to follow. She also links those terms to the concept of selfishness (“their own self-interests,” “their world the way they want it”).

Chris Moles captures a similar definition much more succinctly: “The heart of the matter is pride that seeks to control.”<sup>2</sup> And later, “Abusive men desire control above everything else. They attempt to dominate and control their partner, and the circumstances enlisting support from any means possible. I cannot overstate this point enough: abusive men want to control and will go to extraordinary lengths to gain and maintain control over their partners.”<sup>3</sup> Moles’s assessment is

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<sup>1</sup> Darby Strickland, *Is It Abuse?*, 24.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men Who Use Control and Violence in the Home* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2015), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 37.

remarkable for its clarity in designating the motivating desire of the abuser repeatedly and with emphasis: *control*” (36-37).

“Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb also emphasize dynamics of power and control in their discussion of domestic violence: “A pattern of coercive, controlling or abusive behavior that is used by one individual to gain or maintain power and control over another individual in the context of an intimate relationship.”<sup>4</sup> Brad Hambrick presents a similar perspective: “The very heart of abuse is centered in the love and misuse of power.”<sup>5</sup>” (38)

## Abuse Through the Ages

“The historical roots of the English verb *abuse* date back six centuries, having descended through Old French (*abuse-r*), pointing to the Latin (*abusa-re, abut-i*), with the connotation of improper use (use up, misuse, disuse).<sup>6</sup> One might have anticipated such a definition from considering the constituent parts of the word: the prefix “ab-” meaning “off, away, from” denoting disjunction and separation, and the verb “use” meaning “employ for a purpose.”<sup>7</sup> So, it is relatively simple to understand how the combined form connotes usage disjointed from intended purpose, or improper use.

The specific sense of *mistreatment, ill-use, or violation* that is attached to the word today traces back at least to the mid-fifteenth century. A good example is found in the 1611 KJV, in Judges 19:25: “But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.” Abuse is also used to describe verbal mistreatment as far back as the early-seventeenth century by Bianca in *Othello*: “I am no strumpet, but of life as honest, as you that thus abuse me.”<sup>8</sup>

Of course, abuse is not the only term that has been used to describe severe mistreatment. *Oppression* is a synonym, relating to the improper use of authority, or the “exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, harsh, or wrongful manner; unjust or cruel treatment of subjects, inferiors, etc.; the imposition of unreasonable or unjust burdens.”<sup>9</sup> Chaucer used the term to describe the rape

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<sup>4</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *OED*, 1:59. The use of *abuse* as a noun is of slightly more recent vintage, with the earliest dates in the sixteenth century. Note that the various meanings of *abuse, oppression, and tyranny* described in this section are all sourced from the *OED*.

<sup>7</sup> *OED*, 1:7.

<sup>8</sup> Act V, Scene I in William Shakespeare, “Othello,” in *The Works of William Shakespeare* (San Diego: Canterbury Classics, 2014), 936.

<sup>9</sup> *OED*, 10:870–71.

of a woman as far back as 1385: “The horrible dede of hir o4ppressyon.”<sup>10</sup> The idea of *selfish compulsion* is present here, as the oppressor exercises authority or power over another and against her will. While *abuse* is rarely used in most modern English translations of the Bible, various forms of *oppress* and *oppression* are far more common<sup>11</sup> (7).

Abuse & Justice in the early church, at the Reformation, and with the Puritans (10-35)

## Two Key Myths

1. False accusations are incredibly rare (therefore believe all accusations)
2. The church has a massive abuse problem (& the world is doing better than the church as regards abuse)

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<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, “Legend of Good Women,” quoted in *OED*, 10:871. The line is elsewhere rendered as “The horrible deed of her oppressioun.” Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Legend of Lucretia,” in *The Legend of Good Women*, Medieval and Classical Literature Library, December 1996, <http://mcllibrary.org/GoodWomen/lucretia.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Representatively, the use of *abuse* (as both noun and verb) in a sampling of popular versions is as follows: CSB (6x), NIV (14x), ESV (4x), NASB (15x), NLT (11x), and NET (13x). Interestingly, the most prolific version appears to be *The Message*, with 55 occurrences. The use of *oppress* and *oppression* is as follows: CSB (145x), NIV (125x), ESV (125x), NASB (133x), NLT (128x), and NET (170x). However, the least prolific version appears to be *The Message*, with 46 occurrences. All data from searches performed at Bible Gateway, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

## Week 2 – Power and Control

### On Group Identities & Power Differentials

“The curriculum described in this book is based on the theory that violence is used to control people’s behavior. This curriculum is designed to be used within a community using its institutions to diminish the power of batterers over their victims and to explore with each abusive man the intent and course of his violence and the possibilities for change through seeking a different kind of relationship with women.

Often a fine line separates those of us who teach the class from the court mandated to attend. We’ve all been socialized in a culture that values power, a culture in which the thinking that we challenge in the groups is present in every aspect of our daily lives. Our schools, churches, and places of work are all structured hierarchically. All of us have engaged in at least some of the tactics batterers use to control their partners.<sup>12</sup>” (46)

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“One of the fair criticisms of my choosing the role of a submitted wife over and against returning to Syracuse to serve as an English professor is that in doing so, I am showing my support of biblical patriarchy. Guilty as charged. But let’s be clear; I do not support biblical patriarchy because of the belief that men are good. I embrace biblical patriarchy because men are *not* good (Jer 17:9). Because men are not good, I am grateful to encourage and stand behind a godly redeemed man who defends and protects the church and his family against ravaging wolves.”<sup>13</sup>

### Hegemony, Power Differentials, and why they matter

**Hegemony**—“refers to the control of the ideology of a society. The dominant group maintains power by imposing their ideology on everyone...it enables domination to occur with the consent

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<sup>12</sup> Pence and Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter*, 1. They repeat and develop the idea that “This curriculum is based on the premise that the purpose of using physical abuse in relationships is to control the thoughts, feelings, or actions of another person” (69). Further, “When we as a society decide that women have certain subservient roles and men have certain privileged roles, then we also give men the message that they can enforce those roles with whatever tools are at their disposal . . . The historic oppression and continued subjugation of women in most cultures occurs because men have defined almost every facet of their societies, thereby perpetuating a sexist belief system and institutionalizing male privilege” (147).

<sup>13</sup> Rosaria Butterfield, “Leading with Who You Are: The Misunderstood Calling of the Submitted Wife,” *Eikon* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 89.

of the minoritized group...the minoritized group accepts their lower position in society because they come to accept the rationalizations for it...in ways that serve dominant group interests.”<sup>14</sup>

**Power Differentials**—the recognition of disparities of power between 2 parties. That power may take many forms: physical, economic, social, etc. The working assumption is that those with power ‘privilege’ their own group/values to the disadvantage of others.

Holcombs “The core of a healthy relationship focuses on equality. Once a power imbalance has occurred in a relationship, it opens the door for abusive behavior”<sup>15</sup> (158)

Marx

Liberation Theologies (feminist, black, latin, queer, etc)

Oppressor-oppressed paradigm (and privilege)

How do Group Identities influence these matters?

## **A Biblical Theology of Power & Control**

Are power and control good, neutral, or evil?

Prov 20:29, “The glory of young men is their strength”; Deut 31:6, “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you”; 1 Sam 2:10, “The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed”; 1 Chr 19:13, “Be strong, and let us use our strength for our people and for the cities of our God, and may the LORD do what seems good to him”; Ps 29:11, “May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!”; Luke 2:52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man”; Mark 12:30, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”; Eph 6:10, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”; 1 Pet 4:11, “whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies”; 1 Cor 16:13, “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”

The Constantine conundrum

*en hoc signo vinces*

*Creation*

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<sup>14</sup> Sensoy and DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 224

<sup>15</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 42.

## Sovereignty & Providence

**Gen 1:26-28** Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

**Ps 8:6** You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under his feet

**Ps 115:16** The heavens are the LORD’s heavens,  
but the earth he has given to the children of man.

## Stewardship v Dominion?

“Richard P. Belcher Jr. makes an important application of this command: “Of course, human beings rule creation under God’s authority. Practically, this means that it is appropriate for human beings to use creation for their benefit.”<sup>16</sup> John Murray appeals to Jesus’s instruction in Mark 2:27 to make a similar point:

In the sense in which Jesus spoke of the sabbath as made for man and not man for the sabbath, so we may say that the earth and its resources were made for man and not man for them; he was to exercise dominion over them, they were not to rule over him. The earth and its resources were to be brought into the service of his well-being, enjoyment, and pleasure.<sup>17</sup>

His argument is (sometimes unknowingly) opposed by many Christians today who teach that power is never to be exercised for personal benefit, but only for the good of others” (52)

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<sup>16</sup> Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Genesis: The Beginning of God’s Plan of Salvation*, Focus on the Bible (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 56–57. Calvin argues that Gen 1:30 points not just to basic provision, but to abundance. “God certainly did not intend that man should be slenderly and sparingly sustained; but rather, by these words, he promises a liberal abundance, which should leave nothing wanting to a sweet and pleasant life.” John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King, Geneva Series Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 100.

<sup>17</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 37.

On Hierarchies (e.g., Gen 1-2)  
God – Man (M-W) – Creation

*Fall*

**Gen 3:1-7**

Serpentine questioning (*who's to say?*)

Undermining hierarchy

Curse

Woman—

Man—

Pagan flattening

Peter Jones, *The Other Worldview: Exposing Christianity's Greatest Threat* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2015): One-ism (v. Two-ism)

C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Scribner, 1996): “I’m afraid there’s no niche in the world for people that won’t be either Pagan or Christian” (312).

Abuse, tyranny, and oppression (**Gen 3:16**)

Gen 4 – Cain

Gen 11—Babel

Gen 12—Abram & Sarai

Gen 16—Hagar & Sarai

Gen 19—Lot & his daughters (vice-versa)

Gen 20—Abram & Sarai redux

Gen 34—Dinah & Shechem Hamorson

Gen 37—Joseph & his brothers

Gen 38—Judah & Tamar

Gen 39—Joseph & Potiphar’s wife

*Redemption*

Jesus refused illegitimate power (Luke 4:1-13; Matt 26:53)



Foot-washing (John 13:1-20)

Powerful liberation

Demons (Mark 1:25)

Natural forces (Mark 4:41)

John 10:17-18

Sin and death (Rom 8:1-11)

Gift-giving (Eph 4:8-16; Acts 1:8)

Exalted (Phil 2:9-11)

### *Consummation*

Reign of Christ and his people (Rev 22:5)

“As Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley note, “Therefore, in the new creation, God’s children will exercise a dominion similar to that granted to man in the first creation, but with far greater glory, for they shall reign in union with God the Son incarnate.”<sup>18</sup> (64)

### **Power-over and Power-under**

Honeysett “The key principle, however, is this: power must be exercised wholly for the benefit of others and not for the benefit of the leader. Christian leadership, modelled on Jesus’s leadership, is self-giving, not self-serving.<sup>19</sup>”

Denhollanders “The cross stands in stark opposition to the behavior of an abuser, providing the ultimate example of each of these concepts that abuse destroys. In the incarnation, at the cross, the Son sets aside his divine prerogatives—the strong becomes weak. God himself enters into human brokenness and accomplishes on behalf of mankind what humans neither deserve nor can accomplish by themselves. The one who is owed obedience as creator enters into creation to render that which is due him. At the cross, God acts for others—to overcome evil, uphold justice, free the enslaved, and restore creation. God himself perfectly identifies with the victim because he himself has willingly subjected himself to injustice. The cross is the ultimate repudiation of the idea that power is to be wielded for the benefit and pleasure of those who possess it. In the cross, victims have the framework and foundation for beginning to properly define and understand concepts

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<sup>18</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *Man and Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 1166.

<sup>19</sup> Marcus Honeysett, *Powerful Leaders? How Church Leadership Goes Wrong and How to Prevent It* (London: InterVarsity, 2022), 22.

which were twisted, subverted and manipulated during their abuse, and begin to heal the damage which was done.<sup>20</sup>”

Goggin and Strobel “The way from above is power for love . . . . By contrast, the way from below is power for the sake of being powerful, for the sake of control.”<sup>21</sup>

Langberg “Any power that you and I hold is God’s and has been given to us by him for the sole purpose of glorifying him and blessing others.”<sup>22</sup>

Moles “The bottom line is that we are different . . . . The heart of pride longs for power over, but the heart of Christ calls for power under . . . . I use power as a means of promoting and helping others . . . . Power under places our priorities, motives, and expectations beneath those we love and serve, giving us little time or motivation to abuse.”<sup>23</sup>”

## Did David rape Bathsheba?

### 3 Common Arguments

#### Power Differentials

Did David’s relative power over Bathsheba render her resistance impossible?

Did it render her blameless?

Deut 22:23-27

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<sup>20</sup> Jacob Denhollander and Rachael Denhollander, “Justice: The Foundation of a Christian Approach to Abuse,” *Fathom Magazine*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.fathommag.com/stories/justice-the-foundation-of-a-christian-approach-to-abuse?>

<sup>21</sup> Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb: Searching for Jesus’ Path of Power in a Church That Has Abandoned It*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2021), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, 10–11. She even goes so far as to make vulnerability (lack of power and control) a prerequisite of love: “The capacity to love makes everyone vulnerable . . . even God. By creating us in such a fashion, he opened himself up to failure and injury. And injured he has been!” (26). Unless she has the *communicatio idiomatum* in view, Langberg appears to be denying the sovereignty and impassibility of God.

<sup>23</sup> Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 73.

Terminology

“Took”

Nathan’s rebuke

Theft and killing

## Week 3 – The Duluth Model

**Reflection:** “He Gets Us”? (instead, see Jamie Bambrick, “He Saves Us,” [https://twitter.com/j\\_bambrick](https://twitter.com/j_bambrick))

**John 13:1–20** Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

Who did Jesus wash?

HGU:

Bible:

Why did he wash them?

HGU:

Bible:

Should Christians wash feet?

HGU:

Bible:

What is love?

HGU:

Bible:



## Origins

### 3 Waves of Feminism

- 1) 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Seneca Falls, Susan B. Anthony, Margaret Sanger  
Temperance/prohibition, women's suffrage, birth control
- 2) 1960s-70s: Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem; Roe v. Wade, the ERA  
No-fault divorce, workforce participation, Title IX, abortion
- 3) 1990s-Present: Kimberlé Crenshaw, Judith Butler, #metoo  
Wage gap, gender as construct, intersectionality, abortion

### Legal Changes

#### Criminalizing domestic abuse

1976—PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence: first success w/immediate restraining orders

Within 5 yrs, more than 30 other states had similar legislation

“Safety was to this social movement what liberation was to the larger women’s movement.”<sup>24</sup>

“Our strategy was inspired by the assumption that to make wife beating a crime would profoundly alter the premise of male dominance in marriage.”<sup>25</sup>

### 1980 Duluth Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP)

#### The Duluth Model—coordinated community response

“The Duluth project should be seen as a system of networks, agreements, processes and applied principles created by the local shelter movement, criminal justice agencies, and human service programs that were developed in a small northern Minnesota city over a fifteen year period.”<sup>26</sup>

“Even four decades later, the early values of the DAIP remain largely unchanged. They currently list five on the “About Us” page of their website:<sup>27</sup>

We listen to battered women: Our work involves active engagement with women who have experienced violence so that our efforts are guided by their realities and concerns.

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<sup>24</sup> Pence, “Advocacy on Behalf of Battered Women,” 4. Paymar and Barnes broaden that topic a bit: “the Duluth Model prioritizes victim safety and autonomy.” Michael Paymar and Graham Barnes, “Countering Confusion about the Duluth Model,” Battered Women’s Justice Project, accessed November 15, 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20150319081107/http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/files/Countering\\_Confusion\\_Duluth\\_Model.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20150319081107/http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/files/Countering_Confusion_Duluth_Model.pdf), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen Pence, “Advocacy on Behalf of Battered Women,” in *Sourcebook of Violence against Women*, ed. Claire M. Renzetti, Jeffrey L. Edleson, and Raquel Kennedy Bergen (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ellen Pence and Martha McMahon, “A Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence,” in *The Multi-Agency Approach to Domestic Violence: New Opportunities, Old Challenges?*, ed. Nicola Harwin, Gill Hauge, and Ellen Malos (Bristol, UK: Whiting & Birch: 1999), 150.

<sup>27</sup> Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, “About Us,” accessed January 2, 2023, <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/about-us/>.

We educate to promote liberation: An educational process of dialogue and critical thinking is key to our efforts to assist women in understanding and confronting the violence directed against them, and to our efforts to challenge and support men who commit to ending battering.

We advocate for institutional and social change: We examine the practices and policies of social and governmental agencies that intervene in the lives of battered women, and address systemic problems by engaging with institutional practitioners and leaders in the development of creative and effective solutions.

We struggle against all forms of oppression. Women are not defined by a single identity, but live in the intersection of their race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation. Our work must also challenge all systems of oppression that create a climate of supremacy and intolerance that facilitates violence and exploitation in women's lives.

We promote non-violence and peace: Every step we take, every interaction we have with others, is an opportunity to advance non-violence, continually working toward and building a culture and a future of peace . . .

## **Feminism**

The philosophical commitments that undergird the DM are feminist. “Whether the particular planners are aware of it or not, programs for batterers are situated in a political and historical context of the feminist anti-violence movement.”<sup>28</sup> More specifically, the founders of the DAIP believed that American society had been structured in such a way that it unfairly benefits men. “We have to establish that these belief ‘systems’ operate for the benefit of men, at the expense of women. The men must come to see that these beliefs maintain a system that is unfair and destructive to both men and women.”<sup>29</sup> However, individual men are not to blame: “We do not see men’s violence against women as stemming from individual pathology, but rather from a socially reinforced sense of entitlement.”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, rather than focus on a given man’s reasoning for using violence, they seek to locate his beliefs within this broader cultural narrative. “Violence perpetuated by individual men against individual women is understood to be informed and licensed by a patriarchal society that renders more social power to men than to women.”<sup>31</sup> Further, “When we as a society decide that women

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<sup>28</sup> Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model* (New York: Springer, 1993), 172. While feminism as a movement predates Critical Theory, it has become an active participant in and contributor to it, especially beginning in the 1980s. Pluckrose and Lindsay discuss the various “feminisms.” Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020), 135–58.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Miller, “Discussing the Duluth Curriculum: Creating a Process of Change for Men Who Batter,” *Violence against Women* 16, no. 9 (August 2010): 1019.

<sup>30</sup> Paymar and Barnes, “Countering Confusion about the Duluth Model.”

have certain subservient roles and men have certain privileged roles, then we also give men the message that they can enforce those roles with whatever tools are at their disposal.”<sup>32</sup> That is, the societal dominance of men justifies their violence against women, and this is a long-standing problem. “The historic oppression and continued subjugation of women in most cultures occurs because men have defined almost every facet of their societies, thereby perpetuating a sexist belief system and institutionalizing male privilege.”<sup>33</sup> (135-6).

### *Power Differentials*

Necessary v Sufficient conditions

Necessary	$x \rightarrow y$
Sufficient	$(v +) w + x \rightarrow y$

### **Critical Theory**

“Well-known Critical Race Theorist, Robyn DiAngelo, utilizes similar categorization in her handout on “Basic Tenets of Anti-racist Education”:

1. Racism exists today, in both traditional and modern forms.
2. All members of this society have been socialized to participate in it.
3. All white people benefit from racism, *regardless of intentions*; intentions are irrelevant.
4. No one here chose to be socialized into racism (so no one is “bad”). But no one is neutral—to not act against racism is to support racism.<sup>34</sup>

Substitute “patriarchy” for “racism,” and “men” for “white people,” and the construct is essentially transferable to the DM framework. Tineke Ritmeester demonstrates as much: “From this profeminist perspective, sexism is defined as ‘power and prejudice based on sex.’ It defines violence more broadly as ‘any act that causes the victim to do something she doesn’t want to do, prevents her from doing something she wants to do, or causes her to be afraid.’”<sup>35</sup> The redefinition of sexism to

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<sup>31</sup> Tineke Ritmeester, “Batterers’ Programs, Battered Women’s Movement, and Issues of Accountability,” by Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model* (New York: Springer, 1991), 171.

<sup>32</sup> Pence and Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter*, 147.

<sup>33</sup> Pence and Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter*, 147. Crenshaw writes against historical rape laws that dared to inquire into whether there was evidence of the woman’s resistance or whether she was promiscuous. “Legal rules thus functioned to legitimize a good woman/bad woman dichotomy in which women who lead sexually autonomous lives were usually least likely to be vindicated if they were raped.” Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1266. One especially notes the power of the Critical Theory construct in shaping how a problem is understood and how justice is defined.

<sup>34</sup> Robin DiAngelo, “Basic Tenets of Anti-racist Education,” Robin DiAngelo, last modified 2012, <https://robindiangelo.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Anti-racism-handout-1-page-2016.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Tineke Ritmeester, “Batterers’ Programs, Battered Women’s Movement, and Issues of Accountability,” by Pence and Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter*, 170–71. The addition of power to the formula follows the pioneering move of Patricia Bidol-Padva in redefining racism as prejudice plus power. Patricia Bidol-Padva, *Developing New Perspectives on Race: An Innovative Multi-Media Social Studies Curriculum in Race Relations for the Secondary Level* (Detroit: New Detroit, 1970).

include the category of power is the same maneuver that Critical Race Theory (CRT) advocates have attempted with racism.<sup>36</sup>” (138)

Augustine—ordo amoris (right v sinful partiality)

**Galatians 6:10** So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

“Any attempt to impose your will on another is an act of violence.”<sup>37</sup>

Group Identity (including oppression and privilege)

### 3 Significant Problems

#### 1) Suspicion of Authority

“Male privilege’ . . . a term that refers generally to the special rights or status granted to men but denied to women in a society on the bases of their sex. This position is problematic because it’s oppressive.”<sup>38</sup>

The Problem of Advocacy—“Advocacy can become a way to identify with the oppressed, just as the DM organizers indicated. Such desires are not necessarily wrong. However, when wedded to a CT-derived understanding of authority, power and control, oppression, and the like, advocacy tends to assume a position of superiority (I care about this topic more than you), omnicompetence (I understand this topic better than you), and inquisitorial zeal (I will be eternally vigilant [especially online] and will feel free to pass judgment on situations from a distance). As a pastor, I have witnessed far more unhelpful advocacy in the local church than helpful. The biblical category of *busybody* exists for a reason. Such a person unhelpfully involves herself in matters that are not properly her responsibility, inserting herself with the ostensible desire to help, yet doing so illegitimately and thereby failing to fulfill the responsibilities she *has* been given by God (1 Thess 5:13; 2 Tim 3:11)” (161).

“The problem arises when advocacy is presented as an unqualified or unbounded command, such as: “God calls us to confront oppression but also to provide protection and care for the vulnerable. We see Jesus doing these things. He identifies with the powerless, takes up their cause, and stands against those who do harm to the vulnerable.”<sup>39</sup> There is truth to these statements, but there is at

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<sup>36</sup> Delgado and Stefanie trace the roots of CRT back to radical feminism, and especially to “feminism’s insight into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination.” Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanie, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University, 2017), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Gandhi, quoted in Pence and Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter*, 96.

<sup>38</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Is It My Fault*, 47.



least potential overstatement in two respects. First, in Scripture, calls to confront oppression and to protect the vulnerable are not generic or comprehensive. They are not even programmatic. That kind of thinking is characteristic of a CT worldview. Though it may sound terribly unspiritual, Christians cannot live their lives constantly dedicated to those two tasks. They are part of our responsibilities, but not the entirety. More to the point, Jesus himself did not demonstrate such a perspective. There were many injustices he did not address, many sick he did not heal, many hungry he did not feed. Such categories are a legitimate part of Christian responsibility and witness, but not its totality. Our providential vocations define the scope of our responsibilities.” (161-2).

## 2) Short-circuiting Process

“Believe all victims”?

“It helps to keep in mind it is not your responsibility to know or prove that a child has been abused. A report is not an accusation, but rather a request to investigate a situation.”<sup>40</sup>

Catherine Lhamon, Office of Civil Rights (Obama and Biden)

As Teresa R. Manning has summarized,

Her OCR also launched investigations of colleges and universities that had been deemed insufficiently zealous in their enforcement of Title IX. The same Dear Colleague letter lowered the burden of proof, discouraged cross-examination, and encouraged a single-investigation process whereby the Title IX coordinators at colleges and universities were called to act as police, judge, and jury—all changes that tended toward more frequent findings of fault.<sup>41</sup>

The program appears to be premised on assigning guilt to the oppressor class (men) in such a way that the traditional processes of justice can and should be disregarded, again all with the admirable goal of protecting women (166).

3) Gnostic Tendencies—“oppressor groups are blinded by their privilege and members of oppressed groups have special access to truth that should not be challenged.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Darby Strickland, quoted in Brad Hambrick, ed., *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused* (Nashville: B&H, 2019), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Strickland, quoted in Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Teresa R. Manning, “Repeal Title IX,” *First Things* 329 (January 202): 32. Under the Trump administration, Secretary of Education Besty DeVos rescinded this letter in 2017. However, Lhamon has been restored to her former office under the Biden administration and is pursuing the reimplementation of her previous standards, as well as broadening sex discrimination to include disagreement with homosexuality and transgenderism. Manning, “Repeal Title IX,” 33.

<sup>42</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, *Engaging Critical Theory*, 16. This is the reality expressed by Baucham’s terminology of “ethnic gnosticism.” Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem, 2021), 91–92.

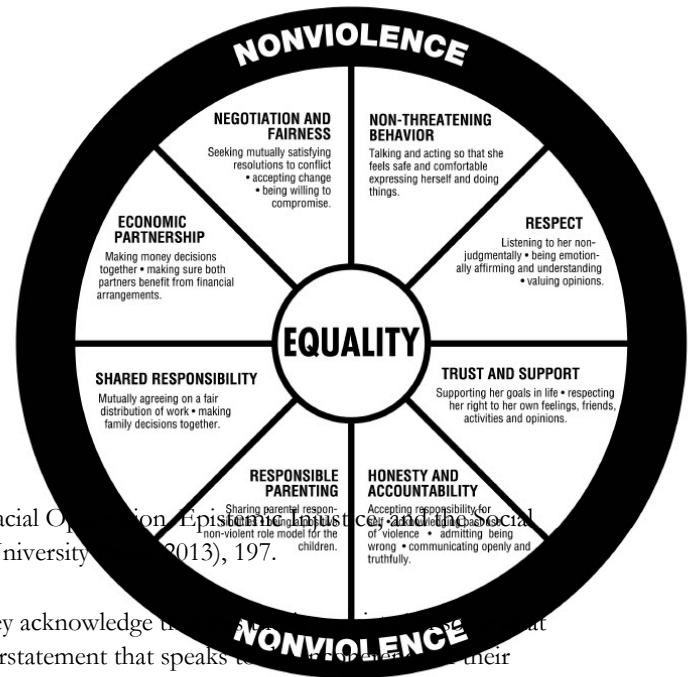
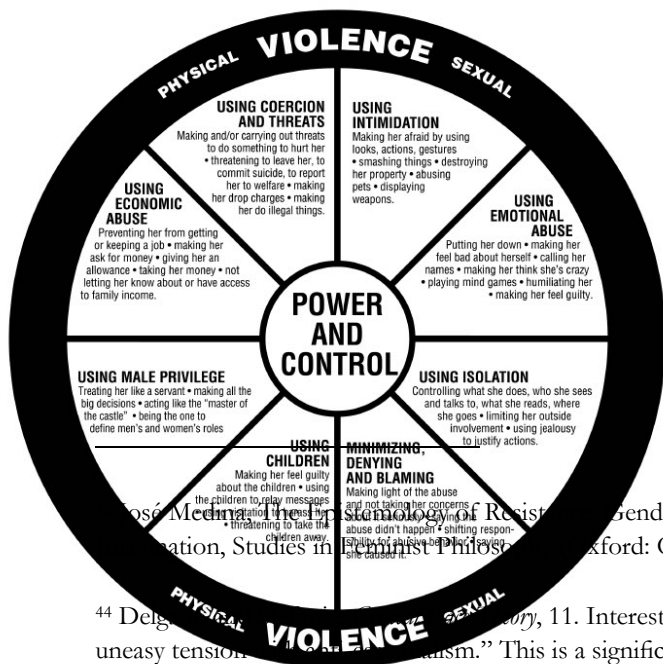
“This is a version of standpoint theory, which asserts “a cognitive asymmetry between the standpoint of the oppressed and the standpoint of the privileged *that gives as an advantage to the former over the latter.*”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Richard Delgado writes that CRT operates with a “voice-of-color thesis”: “Minority status . . . brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism.”<sup>44</sup> That is, persons who occupy the ethnic minority in America are competent and, just as importantly, ethnic majority persons<sup>45</sup> do not possess that same competence” (167).

“When applied to questions of justice, this means that anyone who claims that theocrats, racists, Islamophobes, bigots, exploiters, or sexists have hurt them must not be merely heard, but taken authoritatively. Lived experiences must, in turn, become the foundations on which we rebuild everything from public policy and school curriculum to theological systems and church ministry. Questioning the narratives of the oppressed and the policies or theologies derived from them makes *you* the oppressor.”<sup>46</sup>

### Power and Control Wheel / Equality Wheel

Power and Control

Equality



<sup>44</sup> Delgado, *Voices of Resistance*, 11. Interestingly, they acknowledge the “uneasy tension between the voice of the oppressed and the voice of the oppressor.” This is a significant understatement that speaks to the power dynamics in their system.

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the group assignment included not only the ethnic majority, but of the skin tone of whiteness. White Americans tends to subsume many different ethnicities which are not recognized as true diversity in our culture. The only diversity recognized is non-whiteness.

<sup>46</sup> Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020], 139.



## Week 4 – A Biblical Definition

### Definition

Selfish compulsion to the pronounced detriment of another

“More specifically, I will argue that the Bible provides us with a conceptual framework for defining abuse. Abuse is the label we give to the behavior of a person which can be characterized as *selfish compulsion to the pronounced detriment of another*. Each facet of this framework is important.

Abuse is *selfish*: it is aimed at achieving the abuser’s wrongly desired ends.

James 4:1-3

Jealousy and abuse (Gen 30:1; 37:11; Num 12:1-9; 16:3; Matt 27:18; Acts 17:5; etc)

Bavinck: “The organizing principle of sin is self-glorification, self-divination; stated more broadly: self-love or egocentricity”<sup>47</sup> (82).

Abuse is *compulsion*: the abuser uses words, physical force, or other actions in a highly compelling and authoritative manner that overrides the agency of the abused to some extent.

P & C (necessary vs. sufficient)

Covid

The right of “command” (coercion) & the nature of authority

Faith, egalitarianism, and abuse

“Compulsion is the *sine qua non* of abuse”<sup>48</sup> (97).

Abuse is *pronounced*: it is mistreatment at a high level, whether in its duration, intensity, or both.

On trauma and objectivity

On agency (Exodus 6:9)

Abuse is *detrimental*: it causes objective harm or injury to those who endure it.

What is harm?

The challenge of verbal/emotional/spiritual/psychological

Recent state law changes

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<sup>47</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, vol. 2, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 105.

<sup>48</sup> Threatened compulsion, therefore, is somewhat of a gray area. Several considerations pertain. First, does the potential abuser possess the authority and/or ability to follow through on the threat? For example, a 3-year-old threatening to “beat you up” poses no actual threat, but a 13-year-old with a gun is a threat. Second, does the potential victim have reason to believe the threat would be effectively realized? Third, are there any legitimate means for resisting the threat?

Abuse affects *another*: the abuser seeks to achieve his ends by taking something from others.<sup>49</sup> Others bear the cost of his project of oppression” (5).

Depersonalization and abuse

### Elements of Abuse

*Abuser*—person(s) perpetrating the abusive treatment

Hphp? (adjective vs. verb)

*Victim*—person(s) receiving the abusive treatment

Question of ID

Survivors?

Accusers?

Culpability

*Motive*—reasons for the behavior

Active hearts

Illegitimate in *aim* or *extent*

*Means*—overriding agency

Power differential

*Effects*—outcomes

Abused, abuser, loved ones

*Witnesses*—not an element, per se, but vital for justice

Escaping *he said-she said*

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<sup>49</sup> I utilize the pronoun “his” here because most serious abuse cases involve a man as the abuser. Sometimes the victim is also a man (as in some cases of physical and sexual abuse), sometimes women abuse other women, and sometimes a man is abused by a woman, so the principles I develop will be applicable to both sexes regardless of their roles in a situation, unless otherwise noted. Nonetheless, I will generally utilize masculine referents for the abuser and feminine for the accuser or victim, due to this sad pattern.

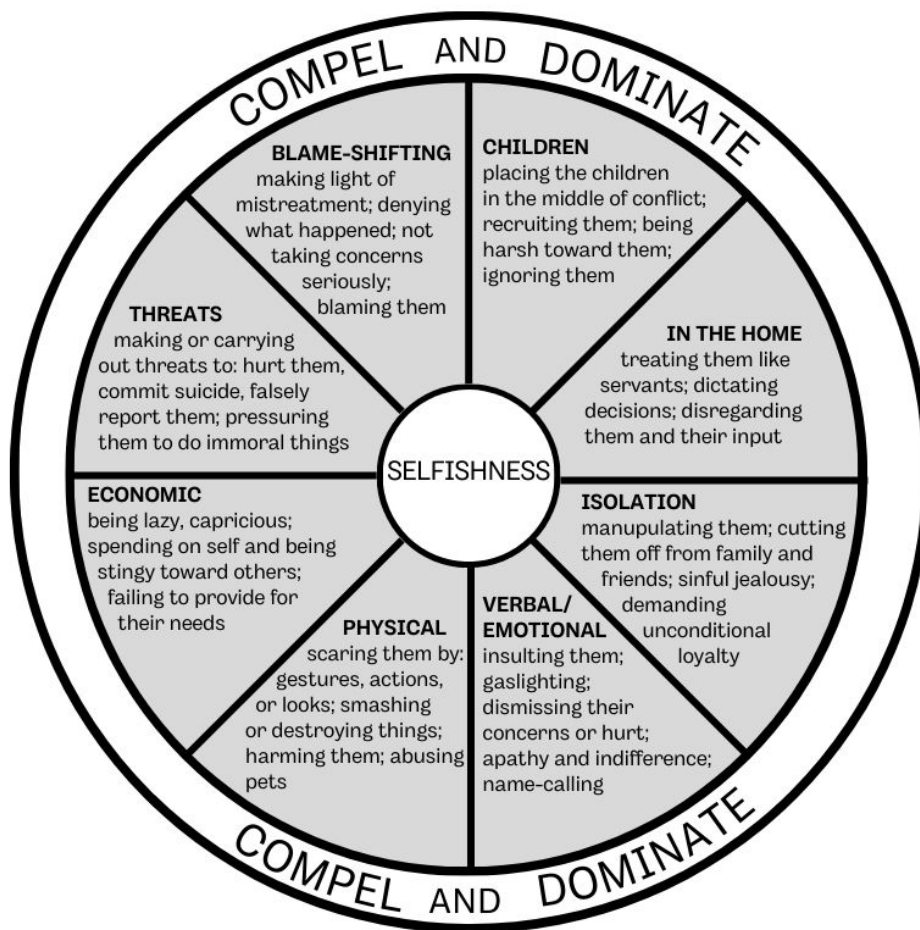
Table 1. Dynamics of abuse in selected biblical narratives (p. 79)

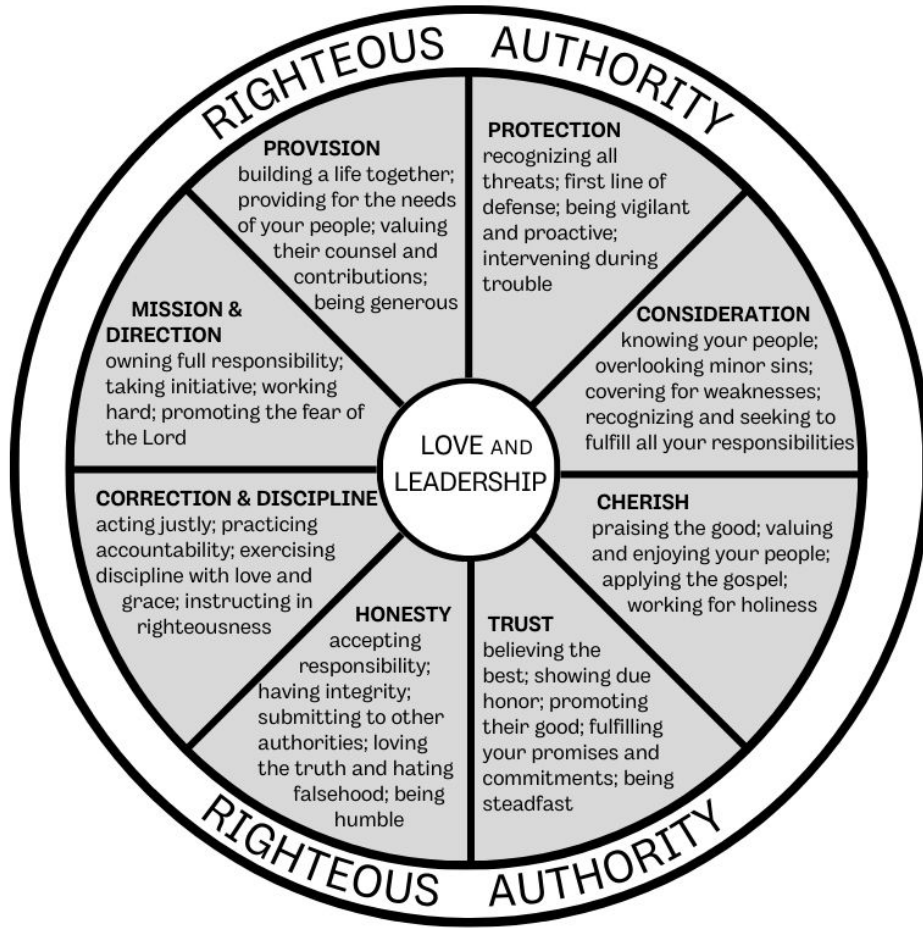
<b>Text</b>	<b>Parties</b>	<b>Sin</b>	<b>Primary Motive(s)</b>	<b>Explicit?</b>	<b>Means</b>
Gen 4: 1–16	Cain → Abel	Murder	Jealousy? Anger?	No	“rose up and killed him”
Gen 34: 1–4	Shechem → Dinah	Rape	“saw her” = lust?	No	“seized her and lay with her and humiliated her”
Gen 34: 5–26	Simeon and Levi → all males	Murder	Indignant, angry	Yes	Tricked into circumcision, slain by swords
Gen 34: 27–29	Brothers → all males	Plunder	Revenge?	No	They raided the city and took everything
Gen 37: 12–26	Brothers → Joseph	Sold to slavery	Jealous	Yes	Stripped, threw into a pit, sold off
Gen 39: 1–20	Potiphar's wife → Joseph	Tempt sexually, slander	Lust (handsome, cast her eyes on)	Yes	Daily temptation, sexual advances, then slander
Gen 19: 4–11	Lot → Daughters	Prostituted	To protect his guests	Yes	Offered his daughters for rape
Gen 19: 30–38	Daughters → Lot	Abetting drunkenness, incest	To preserve the family line	Yes	Made their father drunk & committed incest
Exod 1: 8–22	Pharoah → Israel	Tyranny, Enslaved	Fear of being overthrown	Yes	Placed into forced labor
Exod 5: 6–19	Pharoah → Israel	Genocide	Fear of being overthrown	Yes	Attempted to murder all newborn sons
	Pharoah → Israel	Oppressed	Punish/dissuade	Yes	Bricks without straw
Judg 19	Levite → concubine	Prostituted, murdered	Self-preservation	Yes	Offered her to be raped (& murdered)
2 Sam 13	Ammon → Tamar	Incestuous rape	Lust (beautiful, tormented by her)	Yes	Tricked, then overpowered and violated

Acts 6: 11–14; 7:1–60	Jewish leaders → Stephen	Suborn perjury, Murder	Losing debates, Enraged	Yes	Stoned by the Jewish council
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Other stories could certainly be added

### Selfishness Wheel / Loving Leadership Wheel







## Week 5 – Justice

### Definition

**Psalms 89:14** Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

**Deuteronomy 32:4** The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

**Ezekiel 18:5-9** If a man is righteous and does what is just and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully—he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD.

**Proverbs 28:5** Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.

Justinian defined justice as “the settled and permanent intention of rendering to each man his rights.”<sup>50</sup> The idea of conformity to a standard, or uprightness and straightness, is at the heart of justice.<sup>51</sup> As Stephen Wellum notes: “At its heart, justice and righteousness means ‘a strict adherence to law,’ and it always carries a legal or forensic sense.”<sup>52</sup> The *OED* identifies two principal categories of definition: “the quality of being just” and “judicial administration of law or equity.”<sup>53</sup> Thus we

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<sup>50</sup> Caesar Flavius Justinian, *The Institutes of Justinian*, trans. J. B. Moyle, 5th ed. (Oxford, 1913), I.i, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5983/5983-h/5983-h.htm>; C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 94.

<sup>51</sup> J. B. Payne, “Justice,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall et al., 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 635.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Wellum, “Thinking Biblically and Theologically about Justice,” *Christ Over All*, July 17, 2023, <https://christoverall.com/article/longform/thinking-biblically-and-theologically-about-justice/>. The phrase “strict adherence to the law” is found in Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2005), 74. Berkhof utilized the phrase in discussing the righteousness of God in its “relative” capacity, that is, in relation to his creatures. “It is to this righteousness that the phrase ‘justice’ more particularly applies. Justice manifests itself especially in giving every man his due, in treating him according to his deserts. The inherent righteousness of God is naturally basic to the righteousness which He reveals in dealing with His creatures” (75).

<sup>53</sup> The *OED* also identifies a third category of “an administrator of justice,” which is a person fulfilling a role related to the second category above (8:326).

find twin threads: (a) personal character—justice manifest in right behavior from right motives; and, (b) legal/authoritative process—justice manifest in impartial treatment.<sup>54</sup>

Aquinas, for example, provides a standard definition: justice is “the perpetual and constant will to render to each one his right,” or, more expansively, “justice is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will.”<sup>55</sup> So justice is as justice does in its treatment of our fellow man, and it is so in its constancy. Further, justice is very much an interpersonal phenomenon: “Legal justice . . . stands foremost among all the moral virtues, for as much as the common good transcends the individual good of one person.”<sup>56</sup> As Ambrose of Milan observed, “How great a thing justice is can be gathered from the fact that there is no place, nor person, nor time, with which it has nothing to do. It must even be preserved in all dealings with enemies.”<sup>57</sup>

### John Rawls

Perhaps the most influential person for the modern change in understanding justice is the Episcopalian layman and philosopher, John Rawls (1921–2002).<sup>58</sup> Rawls’s seminal work, first published in 1971, offered a widely influential vision of social justice. Rawls framed the issue as “justice as fairness.” He utilized the concept of “original position . . . the appropriate initial status quo which insures that the fundamental agreements reached in it are fair.”<sup>59</sup> He thus challenged persons to define a just society without knowing what position they might be born into under such a society. Consequently, he championed a version of redistribution of goods in an effort to ensure that the disadvantaged might gain access to those things necessary to secure their rights.

Later, he modified his original teaching to rule out arguments from comprehensive worldviews (save his own), including religion and natural law, allowing only for versions of religions that he deemed to be “reasonable”—quite literally, open to reason and thus unwilling to seek to impose morality on others (ironically). Fairness is judged by the standard of “public reason,” that is, what all reasonable citizens could agree to as justification. “Since justification is addressed to others, it proceeds from what is, or can be, held in common; and so we begin from shared fundamental ideas

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<sup>54</sup> Deuteronomy 16 demonstrates the conjunction, as the Lord commanded his people to identify and “appoint judges and officers” who will “judge the people with righteous judgment” (v. 18). They are not to “pervert justice . . . show partiality . . . [or] accept a bribe” (v. 19). Instead, “justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (v. 20). Just men were to be appointed to administrate justly.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, Q 58, A 1, arg. 1 (17:535). Similarly in David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 79: “What is justice? The short answer is, ‘To render to each his or her due.’”

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, Q 58, A 12 (17:551).

<sup>57</sup> Ambrose, *Off.* 1.29.139 (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, 10:23–24).

<sup>58</sup> Leif Wenar, “John Rawls,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, rev. April 12, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rawls/>.

<sup>59</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 15.

implicit in the public political culture in the hope of developing from them a political conception that can gain free and reasoned agreement in judgment.”<sup>60</sup> As Robert P. George summarizes,

Thus, citizens are constrained from appealing to and acting upon beliefs drawn from their most fundamental moral understandings and commitments precisely at the most fundamental political level, namely, the level of constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice. And they are so constrained on grounds entirely separate from the putative falsity, unreasonableness, or unsoundness of those understandings and commitments or the beliefs drawn therefrom.<sup>61</sup> (172).

## Components

### Duly Constituted Authorities

**Deut 16:18-20** You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

**Exod 18:21-23** Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.

Jurisdiction—*for whom and for what am I responsible?*

Counselor as free-agent? What is an ‘expert’?

Strickland demonstrates this disposition in her advice to a counselor. “Before you have the victim share her story of abuse, seek to assess whether her church has experience with caring for the oppressed. You want to be aware of the church’s strengths and weaknesses so that you can both guide the victim wisely and assist the church with responding well.” She then lists a series of questions that the church must answer before she will allow her counselee to share her story. She also advises that if the counselor believes that the church does not have experience (or if the counselor is unsure), “then anticipate that you will have to educate the church about abuse.”<sup>62</sup> The unwritten assumption is that the counselor is

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<sup>60</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 100–1.

<sup>61</sup> Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001], 47–48.

<sup>62</sup> Darby Strickland, *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2020), 205.

authorized by God to sit in judgment over the church in this manner and therefore to function as the ultimate authority in determining the best path forward (183).

#### Third-Party Investigations

Pro: Expertise, Independence

Con: Authority, Agendas

Two-edged Accountability (Juvenal: *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*)

#### What of Advocacy?

Advocate vs. Friend

“The modern online public sphere, a place of rapid conclusions, rigid ideological prisms, and arguments of 280 characters, favors neither nuance nor ambiguity.”<sup>63</sup>

#### Impartiality

God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34; 2 Chr 19:7; 1 Pet 1:17)

Lady Justice & the blindfold

**Exod 23:1-3** You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.

**Lev 19:15** You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

#### *The Prejudice of CT*

“A recent blog post by Nate Brooks for the Biblical Counseling Coalition demonstrates this perspective. In arguing against the efficacy of the Presbyterian court of appeals for addressing abuse, he critiques the assumption “that (in the case of complementarian denominations) an entirely male court of appeals is going to give a woman that they do not know a fair hearing when the accused is someone who has been their partner in ministry for years or decades. If clear-eyed impartiality and justice go hand in hand, the deck is rather stacked against the likelihood of justice being done in that kind of court of appeals.”<sup>64</sup> Strickland argues likewise, when advising a counselor on helping her counselee to report domestic abuse to her pastors: “When it comes time for you to meet, you will want to make sure that there is a female presence in the room. The victim has already been harmed by a man who is in authority over her; be sensitive to this. It will be challenging for her to face several male leaders alone.”<sup>65</sup> These are both rather cynical perspectives which seem to discount the biblical teaching on the role of authorities in justice. It is a DEI approach to justice, demanding intersectional representation in authoritative roles for the potential of justice to be achieved. Not only is this an unbiblical

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<sup>63</sup> Anne Applebaum, “The New Puritans,” *Atlantic* 328, no. 3 (October 2021): 62.

<sup>64</sup> Nate Brooks, “When Good Doctrine Enables Abuse,” *Biblical Counseling Coalition (blog)*, January 23, 2003, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/01/27/when-good-doctrine-enables-abuse/>.

<sup>65</sup> Strickland, *Is It Abuse?*, 207.

assumption, but it also produces the very divisiveness that the gospel is meant to overcome” (190).

### Presumption of Innocence

Requirement for 2-3 witnesses<sup>66</sup> = presumption of innocence

**Blackstone** “It is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer.”<sup>67</sup>

**Proverbs 18:13** If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

**Proverbs 18:17** The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

**John 5:31** “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true”<sup>68</sup>

### Due Process

**John 7:51** Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?

**Proverbs 14:15** The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.

**Proverbs 16:11** A just balance and scales are the LORD’S; all the weights in the bag are his work.

“A well-known example of due process in Scripture is found in Matthew 18:15–20. The situation is interpersonal sin: “if your brother sins against you.” In such a scenario, the sinned-against person approaches the sinner privately, before escalating the matter to include others, eventually culminating in the excommunication of the unrepentant sinner. The standard of two or more witnesses is required for that judgment, as well as the time and patience necessary to work through the various steps—time and patience that provide the sinner with ample opportunity to repent and be restored.

But Matthew 18 does not apply to every situation of sin or conflict. It does not, for example, apply to well-known and public actions which involve wrongdoing against a group. When Peter withdrew from the Gentile Christians in Antioch over “fearing the circumcision party” (Gal 2:13), Paul did not approach him privately. He rebuked him publicly (“I opposed him to his face,” Gal 2:11) because his act had been public and affected the entire group.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, when a Christian

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<sup>66</sup> Deut 17:6; 19:15; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19.

<sup>67</sup> William Blackstone, *Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England*, vol. 4, *Of Public Wrongs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765–1769), 352. Quoted in Alexander Volokh, “n Guilty Men,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 146, no. 1 (November 1997): 174. There is an argument to be made that the 10:1 ratio comes from Abram’s intercession with the Lord for Sodom in Gen 18 (esp. v. 32), which is another line of evidence for the principle.

<sup>68</sup> Greg Morse, “Thou Shalt Not Slander,” *Desiring God (blog)*, May 6, 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/thou-shalt-not-slander>.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner notes, “A public rebuke in this instance was warranted because Peter’s sin was committed in the public sphere, and it had public consequences in that others followed his example. Therefore, a public reprimand was necessary, given the widespread impact of Peter’s sin.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 139.

writes a book or article with theological error or heresy, Matthew 18 does not describe the process of confrontation or rebuke. That kind of public danger requires a public rebuttal.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Paul advises Titus to deploy an abbreviated process of discipline with a divisive person. “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10–11).<sup>71</sup> So Scripture does recognize various kinds of due processes, all the while affirming consistent standards of justice (witnesses, due authorization, etc.)” (195-6)

CITIES OF REFUGE (Deut 19; Num 35:6-34; Exod 21:12-13; Josh 20:1-9)

Evident wrongdoing

Safety and process for the supposed wrongdoer

Authorities and adjudication

Just outcomes

**Luke 23:18-25** Jesus delivered to be crucified (23 - “their voices prevailed”) *after* he was declared to be innocent (22 - “I have found in him no guilt deserving death”).

Witnesses

“In Bible times, courtroom justice was rather uncomplicated. There were no lawyers, fingerprints were not used as evidence, nor were there detectives like Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot.

Everything could depend on what the witnesses said. Naboth was killed because two witnesses had accused him unanimously of blaspheming God and the king (1 Kings 21:13). Unanimity among (false) witnesses played a role also in the trial of Jesus (Matt. 26:60–61) and that of Stephen (Acts 7:13–14).

So witnesses could hold decisive sway over life and death. At the testimony of two or three (unanimous) witnesses, a defendant could be sentenced to death (Deut. 17:6:19:15). In view of the seriousness of their role, it is no wonder that the ninth commandment warns against the lying witness. For such a witness functioned as an accuser against his neighbor and could even be held responsible for his death. His worlds could be fatal”<sup>72</sup> (202-3).

Witnesses had “skin in the game” re: executing penalties (Deut 13:9; 17:7; John 8:7; Acts 7:58)

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<sup>70</sup> D. A. Carson, “Editorial on Abusing Matthew 18,” *Themelios* 36, no. 1 (April 2011): 1–3.

<sup>71</sup> The heightened danger to the church represented by the divisive person required a more expeditious process of discipline. Similarly, situations of abuse often present heightened danger as well, and therefore may require similar redress.

<sup>72</sup> Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 314.

**Leviticus 5:1** If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity

“The standard of two *or* three witnesses testifies to the need for the witnesses themselves to be evaluated. If the “witness” is some form of material evidence, then the less clear or certain that evidence is, the more necessary a third witness becomes.<sup>73</sup> Further, if the two witnesses are a married couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Smith, then the need for a third witness is also likely to be greater. That is, the flexibility inherent in the phrase “two or three” points to the evaluation required of witnesses.

The character of the witness(es) matters and is part of what must be evaluated when weighing their testimony. The word of a known liar, for example, is essentially worthless. But anyone who has a reputation for truthfulness and trustworthiness should be regarded. A child, on the other hand, should be treated as such. Children are prone to exaggeration and dramatic license with their tales and are also more open to suggestion from outsiders.<sup>74</sup> This does not mean that their stories should be disbelieved, but that they should not receive the same weight as a responsible adult, all other things being equal (which they rarely are)<sup>75</sup> (205)

“There is one final category of witnesses that should be noted, especially in light of the discussions above. Anonymous accusers fail to meet the standards of justice, in large part because they are not able to be identified and thus to be held accountable. Therefore, all anonymous accusations must be rejected out of hand.<sup>76</sup> Further, those who are exposed to those accusations must take special care to reject the accusations that the anonymous accuser makes. Proverbs 18:8 warns, “The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.” Online comments, emails and texts, and the like can all have a negative effect on those who hear or read them, failing to recognize that they have been prejudiced by those with a sinful agenda<sup>77</sup> (206)

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<sup>73</sup> Toby Sumpter, “Nine Principles of Biblical Justice,” *Having Two Legs*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.tobyjsumpter.com/nine-principles-of-biblical-justice/>.

<sup>74</sup> See the history highlighted in Lee Coleman, “False Accusations of Sexual Abuse: Psychiatry’s Latest Reign of Error,” *Journal of Mind and Behavior* 1, no. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 1999): 545–56.

<sup>75</sup> See also, African Code, “The Canons of the CCXVII Blessed Fathers Who Assembled at Carthage, Commonly Called The Code of Canons of the African Church” (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup>, 14:505).

<sup>76</sup> This is not to say that there may not be some degree of confidentiality afforded to an accuser, especially as regards the public. However, those authorized to decide the outcome of a situation must know who the accuser is, and, ordinarily, the accused has a right to face his accuser as well.

<sup>77</sup> Pastorally, this is a source of significant concern for me, and not just when it comes to abuse. Many persons can end up in an online wormhole of information on topics of concern, thus stoking their fears, confirming their prejudices, and hardening the sense that outrages are being committed and “something must be done about x.” In the meantime, biblical standards of justice are disregarded entirely, fear and anxiety are stoked to fever pitch, and an impenetrable fog

## Handling Accusations

First difficulty? Recognizing accusations (Prov 11:3; 12:17, 23; 16:28; 18:8; 23:9; 26:20, 22)

“Counselors especially need to heed these warnings. A counselor is, almost by definition, a person who wants to help others with their difficulties. The counselor must rely on the counselee as the primary (and often, sole) source of information. Further, the counselor should ordinarily employ a welcoming disposition toward the counselee as he seeks to understand what has brought the counselee to meet with him. However, almost every counseling situation will involve some manner of alleged wrongdoing against another person, and the counselor often has no means of verifying the validity of the alleged wrongdoing.

Biblically, this ought to present the counselor with several dilemmas. First, does he meet the criteria of one who is duly authorized to be involved in this situation, as discussed above? The biblical circle of righteous involvement in the conflicts of others tends to be smaller than we imagine. Second, does he do well to listen to the allegations without challenging the counselee to, for example, seek to resolve interpersonal conflict directly a la Matthew 5:23–24 and 18:15? Third, how much validity should he attach to any allegation that he cannot otherwise verify? It will not do for a Christian counselor to treat the counseling room as a space that lies outside of the claims of biblical speech ethics, biblical conflict resolution, and biblical authority structures. Yet such is easily done” (208)

What is the proper response to accusations of abuse?

**Kilpatrick** “The only and best response to an adult who is disclosing physical or sexual abuse is to listen with compassion, validate the story, and offer support.”<sup>78</sup>

**Vernick** “First, asking for details or trying to verify the victim’s story to make sure it’s truthful is not your place. There will be a time for that if and when a police report is made. You are not the investigator. You are the pastor or ministry leader. The shepherd who is to comfort and protect the sheep who’s just got bit and abused by a wolf.”<sup>79</sup>

**Hambrick** “First, you can *believe the victim*. “Innocence until proven guilty” is the appropriate legal standard, but you are a ministry leader, not a judge or investigator. We take the posture of 1 Corinthians 13:7, “love believes all things,” until there is evidence to the contrary.”<sup>80</sup>

“Accusations of abuse must be treated with the utmost seriousness. Much is at stake, and the Bible lays out thorough processes for evaluating such claims. It also commands various authorities

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of righteous vengeance descends. Correspondingly, the very real responsibilities and problems of daily life are often pushed to the side in order to focus on *x*. Sometimes, *x* provides a welcome respite from the mundane, and a sense of accomplishing something grand and worthy. The results of such are almost universally destructive.

<sup>78</sup> Kilpatrick, quoted in Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*, 42.

<sup>79</sup> Vernick, quoted in Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*, 41.

<sup>80</sup> Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*, 87.



to recognize their responsibilities for addressing abuse (e.g., Deut 19:17). But it will not do to soft-pedal biblical principles in an attempt to ensure that abuse is addressed and abusers are brought to justice. If we do so, we may find ourselves abusing innocent parties that have been wrongly accused.<sup>81</sup> Thaddeus J. Williams has analyzed the vision of justice behind such a sentiment (which he terms “Social Justice B”) and warns, “Scripture puts strong standards of evidence for accusations of injustice. It never encourages to take people’s word for it if they claim to be victims of oppression. The Bible is far too realistic about the human potential for deception to let justice rest on such a shaky foundation.”<sup>82</sup>

When it comes to weighing accusations of wrongdoing, the testimony of Scripture is clear: “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established” (Deut 19:15; cf. Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Heb 10:28)” (210-11).

“So, the command to believe all accusations cannot stand. But our choices are not between simply believing or disbelieving accusations. Rather, the biblical paradigm is to receive such accusations as what they are: allegations of wrongdoing. In cases of alleged oppression, the allegations are extremely serious and every effort should be taken to address them appropriately. If the accuser has been abused, then we are indeed dealing with a victim, even as we need to follow due process to establish that fact. The accuser should be treated with care and justice. Evidence should be presented. The character of the various parties should be weighed. The means and motives of the various parties should also be evaluated (as possible). Engagement with civil authorities may be pursued in accordance with the appropriate legal statutes. In addition, ecclesial authorities also bear responsibility before God to discern the truth, to confront wrongdoers, and to protect innocent victims. In order to fulfill these God-given responsibilities, those in authority must pursue the truth, righteously and vigorously” (215)

#### False Accusations

**Deuteronomy 19:15-21** A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire

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<sup>81</sup> Many stories could be presented, but one recent account is instructive. A Loudoun County, Virginia, high school English teacher was arrested in November 2018 for sexual assault of a 17-year-old male student. A mug shot and press release were issued announcing her arrest and she was fired from her job. Proof of the crime was never offered, and when a competent attorney challenged the arrest, all charges were dropped. She sued, and after four-and-a-half years she won \$5 million from the police and the sheriff. Ashe Schow, “Virginia Teacher Awarded \$5 Million After False Accusation of Sexual Assault,” *Daily Wire*, February 27, 2023, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/virginia-teacher-awarded-5-million-after-false-accusation-of-sexual-assault>

<sup>82</sup> Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 157.

diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Others: 1 Kings 21:1-16; Psalm 5:6; Prov 6:16-19; Matt 5:11-12; Mark 14:55-60; 15:3-5; John 8:44; Rom 3:8

#### JEALOUSY ORDEAL (Accusations w/o other evidence)

“In the ancient world the judicial impasse resulting from lack of evidence or conflicting testimony might be resolved by an appeal to the gods. One could make such appeal by oath, exposing oneself to the oath-deity’s curse on false witnesses. Dread of the curse would deter the guilty from taking the oath and his silence would betray and condemn him. Insofar as an oath contemplates direct revelation of the divine verdict in an external act of judgment, it falls into the category of trial by ordeal.

A more spectacular form of this judicial procedure went beyond mere verbal description of the oath-curse or even the symbolic dramatization of the curse that frequently accompanies the oath. It prescribed a physical ordeal, pitting the oath-taker against some element which the deity would employ to punish the perjurer.<sup>83</sup>

The jealousy ordeal of Numbers 5:11–21 is perhaps the most pertinent biblical example” (220)

“There is a lesson for us in this ordeal: if someone is not caught in a sinful act—and no further evidence is available—then the perpetrator is not subject to human justice.<sup>84</sup> Many acts of injustice go unpunished in this age, to our obvious consternation. Yet if we apprehend the magnitude of the justice to come at the end of the age, including the disjunction between what Christians deserve and what we will receive in and through Christ, we must take the greatest

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<sup>83</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 171.

<sup>84</sup> Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas detail a fascinating example of a more modern attempt to resolve a situation of disputed responsibility in colonial Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. Given that 1 in 6 colonial marriages produced a child within 6 months, there was an obvious and significant problem with fornication. In response, the legislature passed a law for “reputed fathers,” seeking to prevent bastardization.

The law stipulated that midwives should ask unwed mothers during labor to name the father. Legislators believed that women, facing the travails of childbirth, would not lie about such an important fact, so the man named became the ‘reputed father’ with an obligation to pay support. With ‘trust the woman’ as official policy, Middlesex County in Massachusetts had only a single case of abortion in 50 years, but 96 cases of men cited as the father for purposes of child support. (Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas, *The Story of Abortion in America: A Street-Level History 1652–2022* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023], 50)

comfort in the certainty of That Day.<sup>85</sup> Justice is coming surely. Part of the saints' joy in eternity is in rejoicing at the Lord's justice in punishing his enemies (Rev 6:9–11; 14:7). Scripture repeatedly presents these truths as a source of considerable consolation" (221)

"When a pastor, or other authority figure, faces a he-said, she-said scenario, it is certainly appropriate to charge both parties to fear the Lord and to tell the truth. It is appropriate to remind them of the scriptural witness regarding God's omnipresence and omniscience, to remind them of the fearsome terror of judgment day, and to charge them again to tell the truth" (223)

"It may also be appropriate to ask both parties to take an oath before God, inviting the Lord to bring his discipline upon each if he or she is lying.<sup>86</sup> That is the clear pattern in Numbers 5. How were they to deal with suspicion of a serious breach of God's law with no conclusive proof? "The answer is that they were to take it to the Lord and leave judgment in his hands."<sup>87</sup> Given the limits of human justice and the comprehensiveness of the Lord's justice, one certainly will not find a better solution in this age"<sup>88</sup> (224)

#### Accountability and Consequences

**Proverbs 21:15** When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers (cf. Rom 13:1–7).

#### Disparaging the Church

"If one trope recurs in modern Christian works on abuse, it is that the church has done very poorly in caring for victims of abuse. Hambrick writes, "Historically, the church has been more

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<sup>85</sup> Psalm 10 expresses the cry of the oppressed seeking justice, and hope in the Lord for comfort, endurance, and deliverance.

<sup>86</sup> Proverbs 18:17 is well known: "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him." Less known is verse 18: "The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders." The lot was used, in part, to settle matters when the available evidence was insufficient to resolve the issue otherwise. Again, one sees the wisdom of placing ultimate justice into the Lord's hands. See also Deut 17:19, 24, 26.

<sup>87</sup> Duguid, *Numbers*, 73.

<sup>88</sup> The passages cited above testify to this practice, as does 2 Chronicles 6:22–23: "If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house, then hear from heaven and act and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness." The Lord is always the primary party in the affairs of men, and a Christian conception of justice ought to integrate his presence in meaningful ways. Exodus 22:7–13 demonstrates a similar practice when money or goods entrusted by one party to another for safekeeping had been damaged or lost. The trustee must either make recompense or swear an oath that he did no wrong.

skilled in applying the gospel to sin than suffering.”<sup>89</sup> As does Ruth Everhart: “But where is the church? Instead of exposing wrongdoing and calling for justice, it is too often the culprit. Even worse, it’s the place where culpability hides.”<sup>90</sup> Mary DeMuth does as well: “Sexual predators are wolves. But so often we have seen wolves protected, sheep slaughtered, and money within the structure of churches preserved. This should not be.”<sup>91</sup> And Chuck DeGroat is even more damning:

The long, sordid history of the church testifies to our arrogant love of power, position, wealth, prestige, success, and privilege . . . . But given changing ecclesial dynamics and a growing social movement that takes clergy narcissism and abuse seriously, the church and its servants may be in a season of needed humiliation and reckoning.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, Langberg condemns the church’s corruptions:

Contemplate the church’s many deceptions regarding those seen as less than in various ways . . . . We believe our denomination or our church has the only correct doctrine. We believe our race is superior and needs to be protected above others at all costs. We believe only one gender, one race, one group is capable of holding power . . . . Virulent deceptions that destroy lives and entire nations are clung to as truth. If you doubt this, hang out on “Christian” social media for a week.<sup>93</sup>

Fitzpatrick also writes that, “violence within the Christian community is as prevalent as it is without . . . and possibly worse because Christian women notoriously under-report.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the Holcombs argue that “many churches are woefully unprepared to deal with domestic violence.”<sup>95</sup>

Kruger offers a similar perspective:

Most churches and Christian ministries don’t have a sufficient accountability structure for the leaders they hire . . . most elder boards or leadership boards are not composed of the type of leaders who will stand up to narcissistic bully pastors . . . most elder boards quickly succumb to the pressures of an aggressive senior pastor.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hambrick, *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*, 6. Frankly, I find this statement to be so demonstrably false and historically ignorant that it is laughable. Christian care for the suffering has been one of the hallmarks of the church from its infancy and has been a major factor in the spread of Christianity worldwide.

<sup>90</sup> Ruth Everhart, *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church’s Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 4.

<sup>91</sup> Mary DeMuth, *We Too: How the Church Can Respond Redemptively to the Sexual Abuse Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2019), 15.

<sup>92</sup> Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 25.

<sup>93</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, 37.

<sup>94</sup> Elyse Fitzpatrick, foreword to *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence*, by Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 12.

<sup>95</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 27.

He calls out churches that hold to an unbiblical standard of leadership: “The problem is that more and more churches seem to prefer only the latter [bold pastors rather than gentle]. If they have a model of leadership, it’s Jesus flipping over tables rather than holding the little children.”<sup>97</sup> Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer pick up the same theme: “For some reason, church leadership at times seems to attract unempathetic, selfish narcissists . . . far too many churches have narcissists in leadership. And they are predominately male.”<sup>98</sup>

To read the list is discouraging, but it also raises many questions, and especially: *are these critiques just?* That is, are these complaints demonstrably true or are they merely a very effective rhetorical device? Beyond that, how might these authors possess such comprehensive knowledge? The claims here are so grandiose and so sweeping that they beggar belief. It is probably true that we are more aware of abuse than ever before (due to communication technologies and the human appetite for bad news), but we also tend to generalize quite unhelpfully from limited data and to imagine that problems are much larger than they actually are.<sup>99</sup> Further, CT has a vested interest in stoking these fires because they serve the narrative that power is corrupt, that institutions are corrupt, and that all “chains of oppression” (i.e., existing authorities) must be thrown off in order to deliver us to their promised liberation.

It does not help that none of these authors actually cite any data to support their damning claims. Given the number of churches and the number of Christians in America, it is certain that there is abuse occurring. Simon G. Brauer has estimated the number of churches in the US at 384,000 as of 2012.<sup>100</sup> The 2020 Census of American Religion found that 70 percent of Americans identify as Christian.<sup>101</sup> Given a total population of roughly 330 million,<sup>102</sup> that places the number of self-identifying Christians at 231 million. It is likely that every reader of this paper will be aware of a

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<sup>96</sup> Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 53–54.

<sup>98</sup> Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture that Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020), 25–26.

<sup>99</sup> Kevin DeYoung recently wrote about the same phenomena and reached similar conclusions: “There are nearly 400,000 churches in America, so there will always be plenty of bad examples to go around, and the bigger the denomination or movement the quicker the numbers will multiply. But before we denounce most leaders as Pharisees and large swaths of the church as complicit in the evil deeds of darkness, let’s make sure we are not trafficking in well-meaning, but unhelpful, myths.” Kevin DeYoung, “Is the Church Failing at Being the Church?” *Clearly Reformed*, February 17, 2023, <https://clearlyreformed.org/is-the-church-failing-at-being-the-church/>.

<sup>100</sup> Simon G. Brauer, “How Many Congregations Are There? Updating a Survey-Based Estimate,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 2 (2017): 438–48.

<sup>101</sup> Public Religion Research Institute, “The 2020 Census of American Religion,” July 8, 2021, <https://www.prrri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>.

<sup>102</sup> United States Census Bureau, “QuickFacts,” accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/POP010220>.

number of high-profile abuse cases in those churches, but given the sheer number of persons involved, the question remains: does the church have a major problem with abuse? Is it fair to lay widespread blame and failure at “the church’s” feet?<sup>103</sup> One of the surprising responses to the Guidestone Report on Abuse in the SBC last year came from demographer Lyman Stone who, without in any way minimizing the wrongs of abuse, indicated his surprise at the low number of current abuse cases given the demographic composition of the SBC. He argued that while the report may show the need for reforms in responding to allegations, it does not show an endemic problem of sexual abuse”<sup>104</sup> (229-33).

### Can Abusers Change?

“In a significant way, how one answers the question posed here reveals one’s theology of abuse. The perspective of Scripture is clear:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9–11)

Abuse is a heinous sin. The level of selfishness that is required to treat another person in a truly abusive manner is significant. But it is also a sin which can receive the atonement provided by the blood of Jesus Christ. It is a sin that can be confessed and forsaken, and the abuser can grow in humility and love for others. . .

Abusers can change, through faith and repentance in Christ. Given the high levels of selfishness and manipulation that abuse represents, great caution and patience must be exercised in assessing

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<sup>103</sup> The well-known *Houston Chronicle* report on abuse in the SBC found more than 700 alleged victims over 21 years, among the SBC’s approximately 47,000 churches. By way of comparison, a recent Department of Education report has found over 15,000 cases annually (Department of Education, “Civil Rights Data Collection: Sexual Violence in K–12 Schools,” October 2020, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/sexual-violence.pdf>) among the roughly 99,000 public schools in the US (National Center for Education Statistics, “Fast Facts,” accessed June 11, 2023, <https://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=84>). Total enrollment at public schools is roughly 55 million (National Center for Education Statistics, “Enrollment Trends,” accessed June 11, 2023, <https://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=65>), while the SBC claims roughly 15 million members (Carol Pipes, “SBC: Giving Increases While Baptisms Continue Decline,” *Baptist Press*, May 23, 2019, <http://www.bpnews.net/52962/sbc-giving-increases-while-baptisms-continue-decline>).

<sup>104</sup> Megan Basham interviewed Stone and reports:

Stone added that he was shocked that Guidepost investigators only found two current cases, given how many exist in the general population. “I mean, if I had been betting beforehand, I would have bet for a couple of hundred,” he said. “Because if you’re talking about 100,000 to 150,000 people who are disproportionately men, just your baseline rate of sex offenders tells you, you should have gotten a couple thousand sex offenders in there just by random chance.” (Megan Basham, “Southern Baptist’s #MeToo Moment,” *Daily Wire*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/southern-baptists-metoo-moment>)

The “100,000 to 150,000 people” category comes from his guess at an average of 2–3 staff per SBC church. Stone is a Lutheran, so he is not a partisan in this matter.

such claims. Patience and process must be deployed. And given the danger that abuse inflicts on its victims, the same caution and patience must be exercised when pursuing reconciliation. By properly recognizing and understanding the dynamics of abuse, we can account for its sinfulness more fully, we can be more discerning in catching its evidence, and we can apply the gospel more skillfully so that those who want to change can do so, by the grace of God” (234-5).

## Week 6 – Wrap-up, Q&A

### Proverbs 28:5 Redux

**Christensen** Non-Christians can only feign outrage over injustices without giving an account for why they ought to be outraged.<sup>105</sup>

### Duty of Protection

**Psalm 72** Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son!

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!

Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness!

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy,  
and crush the oppressor!

May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!

In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more!

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!

May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust!

May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute;

may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!

May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!

For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.

Long may he live; may gold of Sheba be given to him!

May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all the day!

May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave;  
may its fruit be like Lebanon;

and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field!

May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun!

May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory!

Amen and Amen!

The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

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<sup>105</sup> Scott Christensen, *What About Evil? A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2020), 69.



**“A duty of protection.** One of the obvious tasks of authorities in God’s world is to protect those under them from harm. Sometimes this is made explicit, as in Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians elders:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert. (Acts 20:28–31a)

There is a consistent thread of responsibility throughout Scripture for the spiritual leaders of God’s people to protect them, or to face the Lord’s condemnation (Ezek 34:1–11; cf. 1 Pet 5:1–5). The command to protect is also explicit for civil authorities such as kings: “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov 31:8–9; cf. 16:12; 29:4; 14; Jer 21:12; 22:3). In this way, these authorities follow the example of the Lord himself who takes special notice of the poor and oppressed and is himself their Protector (Prov 22:22–23).

Sometimes, however, the command is implicit, though obvious. When Abram commands Sarai to pass herself off as his sister—twice! (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18)—the obvious and correct critique the reader carries for him stems from his failure to protect his wife, choosing instead to expose her to danger in order to protect himself. When Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:1–19), the same critique applies, though this time it is directed against the Lord. Could he possibly order a father to kill his child? In both instances, it is obvious that it is the duty of the husband and father to protect his wife and child from harm, not expose them to it. One of great failings of the abuser is at this very point: he is a danger to those under him, harming them, instead of being a danger to those outside who would seek to harm his beloved.<sup>106</sup>

Ultimately, the duty of authorities to be mindful of those entrusted to them and to protect them from harm—especially those most susceptible to it (e.g., the widow, orphan, and foreigner: Prov 14:31; Isa 3:14; Jas 1:27; Heb 10:34)—reflects our Heavenly Father. He is everywhere commended in Scripture as the defender of the oppressed (Deut 10:17–19; Ps 9:7–10; 14:6; 103:5–6; 146:5–7; Isa 25:4; Matt 9:35–36). Therefore, those in positions of responsibility must know for whom they are responsible, and then they must be diligent in the duties of care and protection for them.<sup>107</sup> We carry

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Clary speaks to the necessity of masculine strength in this regard:

If God has designed and equipped men for the task of being the leaders, providers, and protectors of society, then emasculating and feminizing them will not only weaken them, but also society as a whole. Evil men will use their masculine strength to tyrannize, and godly men will lack the strength to resist. The strength of tyrants and bullies in the world can only be stopped by the greater strength of masculine virtue. Men who deny their masculinity and embrace passivity are not capable of protecting others. Evil men will exploit their error. (D. Michael Clary, *God’s Good Design: A Biblical, Theological, and Practical Guide to Human Sexuality* [Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion, 2023], 70)

<sup>107</sup> Theodore Roosevelt demonstrated this disposition, as recorded in a personal letter: “One feels a little shy about talking of the deepest things, and therefore it is difficult for me to say all I feel about the attitude that should be taken by the husband to the wife, by the son to the mother. Brutality by a man to a woman, by a grown person to a little child, by

an obligation of care, first for those closest to us (e.g., 1 Tim 5:8; Gal 6:10), then for those that the Lord providentially places in our paths (e.g., Luke 10:25–37; 16:19–31). The further away we are from a problem geographically, relationally, or in other providential factors, the less our responsibility for it.<sup>108</sup>

This duty of protection also speaks to the issue of agency for those entrusted to our care.<sup>109</sup> As discussed above, persons in inferior/weaker positions are more susceptible to be abused. It is not the case that inferiority/weakness is itself abusive, but that position does make them more susceptible. Further, some persons have a heightened susceptibility to abuse due to relative immaturity (e.g., young children, those with certain developmental disabilities) or to decay and diminishment (e.g., persons with debilitating illnesses, dementia, etc.). Therefore, it is especially incumbent upon those in positions of authority to be mindful and solicitous of such persons. Their susceptibility to abuse is part of the burden entrusted to the authority by the Lord, who is their ultimate Protector (Ps 68:5).

Thus, if one has a duty to perform a given task, then one is culpable for the failure to do so. Selfishness, laziness, and other forms of disengagement are the main obstacles for most authorities. One may be morally blameworthy (Zech 10:3; 11:1–17), and perhaps even criminally culpable, for the failure to protect someone assigned to one’s care. One positive fruit of the heightened awareness of abuse in recent years is that more people seem to be aware of this responsibility to protect those entrusted to them. Inasmuch as this awareness is producing self-evaluation and a new or renewed dedication to the task, it is all to the good.<sup>110</sup>

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anything strong toward anything good and helpless, makes my blood literally boil.” Theodore Roosevelt to Hamlin Garland, July 19, 1903, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o185403>.

<sup>108</sup> This is a necessary recognition of our finitude. We are all limited in time, money, and energies. The neediness of this world is vast, and, with modern communication technologies, we can be more superficially aware of problems in the world than at any previous time in history. I believe this largely accounts for the widely recognized phenomenon of continuous, short-lived outrage on social media over the scandal of the moment. It is far better to be diligent and faithful in the lives of the actual persons the Lord has placed us with than to cut ourselves off from them as we dedicate our lives to persons and causes that we cannot possibly know enough about to handle justly, wisely, and well. Anecdotally, I have observed that often those who are most animated about large-scale problems “out there” are the least faithful in the everyday, mundane problem “in here” within their own families, churches, and other vocations. Advocacy and activism for great causes can sometimes be a way for persons who are failing in their personal lives to try to achieve success or recognition from others.

<sup>109</sup> Numbers 30 speaks to the duty of a father with his daughter, and a husband with his wife, vis-à-vis her vows to the Lord. The authority may either supervene or allow the vow to stand.

<sup>110</sup> As with any similar situation, heightened awareness of a particular problem “out there” can also produce great fear and anxiety in those newly informed or aware of a danger. Increasingly desperate attempts can be undertaken to ensure that no harm befalls those under our care, which often leads to other harmful extremes (anxiety and fear, withdrawal, hostility toward the world, condemnation of others who do not share the same level of concern, etc.). It is impossible and undesirable to avoid all risk in a fallen world.

## Duty of Resistance

**A duty of resistance.** So, those in positions of authority are responsible to protect those entrusted to their care, but are those who are facing abuse *obligated* to resist? This is, obviously, a very provocative question. Is it wrong if someone endures abuse without fighting back in some capacity? Deuteronomy 22:23–27 appears to imply as much in the scenario of rape:

If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.

In these verses, the betrothed virgin is stoned for adultery if the incident occurred in the city and no one heard her cry out.<sup>111</sup> The clear assumption is that if the incident were rape, and not adultery, she would have and should have cried out. It is the difference between innocence and guilt, between life and death (because of the penalty for adultery). However, if the incident occurred in the country, she is given the presumption of innocence. The assumption is that she did indeed cry out, but no one heard her because no one was around to do so. Though she may have been a willing participant (and thus adulterous), the biblical standard of *innocent until proven guilty* applies unless there is evidence to the contrary. In both instances, the obligation to resist in the form of crying for help is clear.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, Daniel's brave companions stood up to the civil-religious tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:16–18:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to

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<sup>111</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay notes that "this guideline is not absolute: whether in town or in the country, evidence that there was no one who could have saved her, that she resisted, or that her life was threatened if she resisted, would establish innocence; evidence to the contrary would establish guilt." Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 207. Most of those qualifications are almost certainly correct, as those guidelines are basically consistent with other biblical standards for evidence and due process.

<sup>112</sup> If one might postulate that the woman would not cry out in the country in order to not enflame her attacker further, the text offers no support: "though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her" (Deut 22:27). Crying out is clearly the right thing to do, and in the absence of contrary evidence she is assumed to have done so. Daniel I. Block argues similarly: "It assumes that if the act occurs in town an innocent woman will cry for help and either the man to whom she is betrothed or her townspeople will rescue her. However, since there is no one in the country to hear her cries when she is violated by a man, it gives her the benefit of the doubt and assumes her innocence. Meanwhile the man must be executed." Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade 2013), 163. These perspectives on justice will be discussed further in chapter 4.

deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Their insistence that they “will not serve your gods or worship the golden image” is part of a long-standing and well-established tradition in the history of God’s people.<sup>113</sup> When faced with the choice between denying our God and certain death, millions have chosen death.<sup>114</sup> The Babylonian exiles may have had the instructions of Proverbs in mind when they resisted: “Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked” (25:26). Jesus also taught his disciples, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32–33).

Naboth resisted the unrighteous land grab of King Ahab when he sought to steal his vineyard (1 Kgs 21). His express reason was obedience: “The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers” (v. 3). Naboth was honoring the Lord and his express commands regarding how land was allotted in Israel (cf. Lev 25:23; Josh 13:1–7). Ahab merely wanted the land for personal gain and convenience. When he reported his failure to Jezebel, she taunted him, “Do you now govern Israel?,” and promised to fix the problem. In the end, she acted as a slanderous tyranness, arranging for false charges to be brought against Naboth, which led to his stoning. In this sad tale, Naboth is clearly the righteous man whose integrity exposed the rot in the royal palace.

Finally, the last book of Scripture speaks to these issues as well. Throughout Revelation, John references “the one who conquers,” referring especially to those who are faithful to Christ in the midst of great opposition (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). In Revelation 21:7–8, he writes, “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” It is noteworthy that the first category on the list of damnable sins is “the cowardly,” and it stands both next to “the faithless” and in contrast with the one who conquers. Cowardice is a sin, biblically speaking, and given the opportunities for apostasy, the need for courage and conviction is great.

Perhaps it is one thing to stand up to governmental tyranny and another to stand up to more personal oppression and abuse. Perhaps it is one thing to cry out or resist the rapist and another thing with domestic violence, where resistance will likely produce worse beatings. What are the implications of resistance for children whose great disparity in size and strength make resistance practically impossible? What are the implications of resistance for a mother whose children are being

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<sup>113</sup> The Lord not only forbids worshipping other gods (Exod 20:1–6) but also syncretism in any form (Deut 12).

<sup>114</sup> The Decian persecution in the mid-third century brought this issue to the fore, with some Christians denying Christ in order to save their lives, only to seek readmission to the church after the death of Decius (AD 251). The church was divided over whether to readmit them. Cyprian’s treatise *On the Lapsed* speaks to the issues. Cyprian, *Laps.* (ANF, 5:437–47).

threatened by an abuser and who rightly feels a burden of responsibility for them? These are very difficult topics which require great care and consideration.

One approach to answering the question is to consider: is there any instance in Scripture where compliance with or resignation to oppression or abuse is commended? One example immediately arises: the commanded response of Judah to the Babylonian exile (Jer 29). However, the Jews were explicitly commanded to cooperate with the exile because the Babylonians were accomplishing God's judgment against them, even if they did so sinfully and imperfectly (Rev 18). Apart from this situation, I cannot find a single instance in the scriptural narrative where either cooperation with or resignation to abuse is approved or commended.<sup>115</sup>

Another factor to consider concerns other responses in Scripture to potential abuse or oppression, such as, David acting like a madman to escape the Philistines (1 Sam 21:10–15), the Hebrew midwives lying to Pharaoh in order to save infant boys (Exod 1:15–22), and Rahab lying to the king of Jericho to save the Hebrew spies and ultimately her entire family (Josh 2). In each of these scenarios, the person(s) who practiced deception in order to save innocent lives is commended. Their actions are viewed as honorable in Scripture.<sup>116</sup>

Besides the examples listed above, there are many other instances where God's people fight back or otherwise resist in the face of abusive treatment. Abram fought a battle to rescue his nephew Lot from his kidnappers (Gen 14). Jesus was not passive or pacifistic in response to abusive threats (Luke 4:28–30). Paul escaped his persecutors through trickery in one instance (Acts 9:23–25),<sup>117</sup> and

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<sup>115</sup> Two didactic passages in the NT could be used to argue for resignation to abuse: Matt 5:38–42 (turn the other cheek) and 1 Pet 2:18–25 (servants unjustly beaten). These passages can be read as calls to pacifistic resignation. However, that is an oversimplification of Jesus's and Peter's arguments. Jesus instructed against personal vengeance, but he was not advocating quiet resignation (John 18:22–23). See also Chris Moles's argument for "peaceful resistance." Chris Moles, "Resisting Abuse and Matthew Chapter 5," Chris Moles, February 25, 2018, <http://www.chrismoles.org/news/2018/2/25/resisting-abuse-and-matthew-chapter-5>. Peter assumed that the slave (in this instance) was in an inescapable situation and must therefore navigate his suffering in a God-honoring way. Elsewhere, slaves are commanded to seek their freedom (1 Cor 7:21).

One OT passage that appears to be questionable is Gen 16:1–16. As Sarai gives Hagar to Abram, and she bears a son, a conflict arises between the two women. Abram is passive throughout and allows Sarai to "deal harshly" (v. 6) with her servant. Hagar flees, only to meet the angel of the LORD who directs her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her," (v. 9) promising her the blessing of innumerable descendants for obedience. Two comments are apropos: (1) "dealt harshly" may (R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004], 239–41) or may not (John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. and ed. John King, Geneva Series of Commentaries [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000], 429–30) denote abuse and there is room for disagreement; (2) the promise of blessing also implies a promise of protection. The second factor is most important for the duty of resistance: Hagar had a clear and specific divine command to return to a situation where she had been mistreated but would now be blessed. She was not commanded to return to be abused.

<sup>116</sup> See Jochem Douma on the *mendacium officiosum*. Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 325–31. For a somewhat different reading, see John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), esp. chap. 6, "The Sanctity of Truth."

<sup>117</sup> I am indebted to Robert Jones for this illustration.

publicly humiliated them in another (Acts 16:35–40). Other examples could be supplied, but the point is clear.

One other category should be adduced: patient wisdom. Jesus did not call his disciples to revolt against Rome, even though there were certainly tyrannical elements in Roman rule. Yet Christianity did successfully displace the gods of Rome through a process of centuries.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, the NT commands slaves to serve their masters well in all things even if they are mistreated (1 Pet 2:18ff.). It also, and simultaneously, commands them to avail themselves of the opportunity for freedom, if at all possible (1 Cor 7:21). The gospel itself produced a societal transformation that has led to the abolishment of slavery everywhere Christianity has spread. Peter also commands wives to work to win their disobedient husbands through “respectful and pure conduct” even in the face of a frightening situation (1 Pet 3:1–7).<sup>119</sup> Their godliness under duress is “very precious” in God’s sight (3:4).

**Abigail.** Scripture also provides a sterling example of godly resistance to unrighteous domestic authority: Abigail (1 Sam 25). Though an extended treatment of this important story is not possible, a brief survey will reveal the value of her comportment. First, the text is very clear that her husband, Nabal, is a worthless man (25:3, 17, 25). He is the epitome of a selfish, boorish figure who looks out only for his own interests. Second, David had looked out for Nabal’s flocks and was entitled to some recompense, both as payment and, perhaps, as hospitality.<sup>120</sup> Nabal’s servants affirmed as much (25:15–16). Third, Nabal’s refusal was offensive and contemptuous, accusing David of rebellion and insubordination (25:10). Fourth, David’s anger—while understandable—leads him to an unrighteous response: he vows to kill Nabal and all the males of his household as well (25:22).

It is just then that Abigail appears on the scene. She is the very opposite of her husband: beautiful, discerning, and godly. When she is told of the unfolding situation, she rightly discerns that not only her husband, but her entire household, is threatened. Therefore, she uses her authority to circumvent the express commands of her husband.<sup>121</sup> Where he commanded that no goods be given

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<sup>118</sup> Constantine made Christianity licit with the Edict of Milan in AD 313. Later that century Theodosius established Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in AD 380.

<sup>119</sup> Peter’s command has certainly been both misused and maligned. His is no call to quietism, fatalism, or passivity. The wife is very active under Peter’s program: she evaluates her husband’s behavior (he is disobeying the Word), has a vision for change, and works to bring about his change through her respectful, pure, and faith-filled behavior. Further, Peter’s commands are not unconditional—there is certainly a time to resist and report, as the ensuing section should make clear.

<sup>120</sup> M. J. Selman claims, “Throughout Scripture, the responsibility of caring for the traveller and those in need is largely taken for granted. . . . Failure to provide for the traveller’s needs was a serious offense, liable to punishment by God (Dt. 23:3–4) and man (1 Sa. 25:2–38; Jdg. 8:5–17).” M. J. Selman, “Hospitality,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall et al., 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 484–85. John L. Mackay notes, “David is merely asking for reciprocity since his men have ensured that Nabal’s flocks have not been depleted by Philistines or marauding desert tribes.” John L. Mackay, *1–2 Samuel*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 3, *1 Samuel–2 Chronicles*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 245.

<sup>121</sup> It is at this point that Abigail is operating similarly to the lesser magistrate in Protestant resistance theory. She has real, though subordinate, authority in her household. The unrighteousness of her husband’s commands does not generate a

to David, she quickly arranges a small feast (25:18). Where he was dismissive and arrogant, she approaches David humbly and takes responsibility for her husband's folly, even while she pronounces him to be worthless (25:24–25). Remarkably, she also respectfully and artfully urges David to avoid shedding blood wrongly.<sup>122</sup> The character of David is then revealed by his response. He is persuaded by Abigail and relents from his planned revenge, praising her for her role in redirecting him (25:32–35).

The story concludes with Abigail skillfully revealing to Nabal the disaster that she had averted, the realization of which produces a fatal illness within him (25:36–38). After he dies, David takes Abigail as his wife, thus producing a remarkable, redemptive turn in her life (25:39–42). She is, then, one of the more commendable and godly women in the entire OT. Her example is a very helpful illustration of how someone who is in a physically and/or socially weaker position can successfully resist an oppressive authority—and in her case, do so while working with another authority who is himself bent on evil—in a manner that honors the Lord and works for the good of everyone involved. There is no guarantee that everyone who follows her example will experience similar results, but the path forward is clear” (98-107).

## Wrap-up, Q & A

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duty of obedience for her. Further, her responsibility to her household means that she has a duty of protection for them (as outlined above). Therefore, her actions—disobedience, from Nabal's perspective—are righteous, loving, and faithful. See my discussion of Gouge, above (p. 27ff.).

<sup>122</sup> Ken Sande cites this passage as an example of an inferior interacting with the problematic behavior of a superior by offering “a creative alternative that will accomplish the same end (assuming it is a proper one) but do it in a biblical and efficient manner.” Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 124. I am indebted to Robert D. Jones for this reference, though I do not read the text in the same manner as Sande. It appears to me that Abigail dissuades David from a sinful end by reminding him—quite skillfully—of his obligation to obey the Lord and to entrust vengeance into his hands.