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2 Speaker 1 (00:00):

3 Um, there is a disturbing trend that we have seen in the church where we have someone who comes  
4 forward and claims to be abused and then uses that self-diagnosis to justify sinful behavior. This is  
5 facilitated by a bunch of unhelpful resources. Um, it did not take me very long by typing in a Google  
6 search to find a plethora of websites and materials discussing this. All of which seemed to point in one  
7 direction. This is not a situation where there's a balanced approach. There's a lot of material out there  
8 which will sort of reinforce that, you know, if you think you were abused, you probably are. And that  
9 therefore justifies you in doing a whole bunch of stuff. Irrespective of what the church may say to you  
10 and what your, your friends and people around you may say to you. So that's where we're going to be  
11 exploring this morning.

12 Speaker 1 (00:52):

13 And some of the nuances around that, I'm going to give you some quotes from some of the sources of  
14 material that are out there. These are not my words, but are from others. So please, if you find here  
15 some words coming out of my mouth that do not sound right, um, it might be that I'm just wrong, or it  
16 might be that I'm quoting someone else and I'll I'll, and I'll give you the, the websites and the quotations.  
17 Um, I'm going to talk a lot about this problem this morning in the context of marriage, because  
18 marriages are one of the things that the courts of the church find ourselves contending with a lot, you  
19 know, when, when someone wants to dissolve a marriage that causes us a lot of work and a lot of grief  
20 and a lot of effort. Um, but I have seen this phenomenon occur in parent child relationships and  
21 employment relationships.

22 Speaker 1 (01:36):

23 And in friendships. It is not limited to marriage. The kind of dynamics that we're going to talk about, um,  
24 can occur, um, in any human relationship, as far as I can tell. Um, but here's a, here's sort of a scenario,  
25 a composite scenario that will help us think about this.  
26 So we have a church member who's been married in the church for many years. Uh, suddenly comes  
27 forward, announces that he or she has been abused by his or her spouse. This is usually accompanied by  
28 a declaration that the spouse either doesn't want to talk to, live with, have anything to do with the, um,

**Commented [VH1]:** What counts as a trend? It seems rather unsettling that this particular church would have a trend of people reporting abuse in their marriages.

**Commented [VH2]:** "claims", "uses" – Abuse victims are immediately set up as lacking objectivity, lacking credibility, lacking evidence. Later the speaker will further undermine this idea of "self-diagnosis" to say that the church leaders will tell you if you've been abused or not. An abuse victim cannot determine that.

There is also the problem of claiming straightaway that an abuse victim self-diagnoses. It is actually rare for any abuse victim to call what they have suffered abuse, until after a long time, with a great deal of support. Most victims I talk to say things like: Surely this isn't abuse. I'm sure other people have it worse than I am. I can't call myself a victim of abuse.

**Commented [VH3]:** But what would constitute a balanced approach here? This is starting from a place of suspicion.

**Commented [VH4]:** There is plenty of material on abuse and trauma. I note that he nowhere in this talk cites any of the reputable literature from Christian or nonChristian experts on the dynamics and aftermath of abuse. In this way, this man is speaking out of ignorance.

**Commented [VH5]:** He has selected a small number of sources. But he fails to engage with the numerous studies, books, posts by experts on the dynamics of abuse. He positions himself as the expert, as the judge and jury.

**Commented [VH6]:** The church leaders are here portrayed as victims of the annoying abuse victims who cause them so much work and grief. What hurting person will want to speak to such a person, who so explicitly refers to them as a burden?

**Commented [VH7]:** What is the purpose of this composite approach except to support a position of skepticism? How was this composite approach formed? This speaker later admits his experience is limited. On what basis was this composite scenario arrived at? What literature has this man read on the dynamics of abuse other than the single online article and the Crying out for justice website he looks at?

**Commented [VH8]:** What does this mean, 'suddenly'? His language here makes it seem as if the abuse comes out of nowhere. It has no history. The speaker is centering his own experience here. He never saw a problem before, so his perspective is that the abuse has only just now become a problem.

**Commented [VH9]:** Similar language here casting doubt on the abuse victim, as at the start. Language like "claim," "report," now takes on greater force. The abuse victim is making a loud announcement now, a declaration! This paints a picture of a person who is aggressive, defiant, absolute. My way or the highway. This is an odd composite. This does not in any way resemble any abuse victim I have ever spoken to. There may be some who speak strongly like this – but it is only after a pattern of behavior has gone on for so long and the victim has received enough support to reach the end of their wits.

29 the allegedly offending spouse. And in some cases intends to separate or divorce. And again, the  
30 nuances of that vary a little bit from case to case, but it's something like that. Um, and we've seen this  
31 happen in marriages, both with and without children. Um, when questioned, um, the allegedly abused  
32 person usually denies that he or she has been physically assaulted.

33 Speaker 1 (02:28):

34 That's usually sort of the first question you would ask, right? Is, are you in physical danger? Is someone  
35 imminently threatening? You have you been beat up? Are you have you, you know, and usually that's a  
36 that's a no, and, and pretty much everything I'm talking about this morning is, is taking that branch of  
37 this tree, right? That's, that's another discussion if someone's being physically abused. So we're talking  
38 about situations where that's been denied, um, and whether we're talking about abuse that is emotional  
39 in nature. Now what this amounts to is that the spouse has allegedly used harsh words and, or given or  
40 withheld emotional support in order to manipulate the person and or the relationship. And I'm going to  
41 give you a more fulsome definition of that in a few minutes from someone else, but that's sort of a  
42 summary in my words. Um, then we go into this, this sort of cycle, I'll call it where the person in  
43 question will then report that this alleged abuse has been going on for many years and perhaps for the  
44 entire duration of the marriage. Any attempt to question the person about the conclusions that he or  
45 she has reached or to investigate the situation is met with resistance.

46 Speaker 1 (03:29):

47 If you don't completely believe and affirm the report of abuse, then you were part of the pattern of  
48 abuse and will be cut off from further communication. The accuser, um, can very quickly isolate him or  
49 herself by dropping all communication with anyone who does not reinforce what he or she already  
50 thinks. So this is kind of like a conspiracy theory that's all inside your own head, right? I mean, we think  
51 about political conspiracy theories and you always say, well, you know, if 9-11 was an inside job, right. If  
52 you deny it, you were part of it, right? Well, this is just sort of that, except it's all between your ears,  
53 right? And it might be true that everybody's out to get you and everybody is denying, what's really  
54 happening to you. That could be the case, but you know, if we apply Ockham's razor, there's a pretty  
55 good chance that that might not actually be the case.

56 Speaker 1 (04:17):

57 And it might actually be that there are some facts here that need to be interpreted, some wisdom  
58 applied by other people other than just you, right. That maybe all of your friends and relationships and  
59 everybody you know in the church, isn't actually out to get you right. But be that as it may, that's, that's  
60 where this can go and where I've seen it go. Um, and part of the trap here is I think the use of the word  
61 abuse, um, when we talk about domestic abuse, what that has meant historically for at least most of my  
62 life is that somebody is beating somebody else up, hitting, striking, kicking, punching, push, crashing into  
63 the door, or throwing things at, whatever, something that would meet the legal definition of, of battery,  
64 you know? Um, and so we have sort of some cultural ideas about that that speaks to us, right?

65 Speaker 1 (05:10):

66 We think that's really bad. And if you look at what the civil law says about it, the civil law has taken what  
67 at this point seems to be what I would call a very strong and perhaps extreme response. So if Rebecca  
68 were to show up at the magistrate's office and tell the magistrate that I got was beating her up, the  
69 magistrate would immediately based only on her word and without hearing from me, issue an order  
70 requiring me to move out of my house, to continue to pay the mortgage payments and all the utilities,

**Commented [VH10]:** How do they vary? This is an extreme picture!

**Commented [VH11]:** Here the speaker begins drawing a line between REAL abuse (extreme physical violence) and other kinds of abuse.

**Commented [VH12]:** Again he refers to the one scenario in which they would acknowledge danger: physical danger or imminently threatened (being beat up). All other scenarios are cast as less urgent, less severe, less worth attention.

**Commented [VH13]:** This is a minimization. The speaker acknowledges a few lines later that this is a "sort of summary" in his own words. He is not using the same language that abuse victims use. He is imposing less severe categories of meaning on their reported abuse.

**Commented [VH14]:** First, if this is a composite case, I wonder what the actual cases he is familiar with have looked like. What does this resistance look like? What kinds of questions have been asked? Considering the minimization of emotional abuse that the speaker has already begun, I wonder the extent to which the speaker's questions would take a similar approach of minimization, starting from a position of skepticism rather than listening.

**Commented [VH15]:** He has begun talking to "you" as if this person is in the audience now. This is becoming aggressive now. He is giving us a window into how he talks to people who have come to him for help.

**Commented [VH16]:** This is a crucial part here. He is pathologizing victims, casting them as conspiracy theorists. He reveals that what he believes is that it is likely that an abuse victim is not really telling the truth. Again, has he read the extensive literature on how denial is one of the most common reactions to abuse, despite the fact that as abuse advocate and founder of GRACE Boz Tchividjian notes, "Studies have shown false allegations are only somewhere between 1-7%."

... [1]

**Commented [VH17]:** I find this particularly disturbing as he is continuing to talk to "you" as if this person is in the audience now.

**Commented [VH18]:** Having pathologised the hypothetical abuse victim, he goes on here to begin to position others as experts. We will decide what your "facts" means. We have "wisdom", not you.

**Commented [VH19]:** More in the "conspiracy theory" vein here.

**Commented [VH20]:** Extreme violence is cited as acceptable grounds – made acceptable because this is what it "has meant historically".

... [2]

**Commented [VH21]:** It seems he has a beef with the civil response, which is more generous than his. He wishes that they weren't so cautious to err on the side of protection of someone who might be vulnerable.

71 to not have any contact with Rebecca or my children until further notice when I've had no opportunity  
72 for a hearing and no opportunity to tell my side.

73 Speaker 1 (05:47):

74 Now, eventually within a couple of weeks, I might have an opportunity to stand before a judge and try  
75 to explain that away. But as you can imagine, there's a presumption, a practical presumption is almost  
76 effectively taken place at that point. Right? So that's how the, the civil courts think about physical abuse  
77 and that's the kind of cultural kind of baggage I think that goes with it. Right? So I, and Rebecca and I  
78 were kicking around last night, my use of the word metaphor and this next bullet point. But I think you'll  
79 get where I'm going. The idea of, um, the phrase emotional abuse, I think was originally sort of a  
80 metaphor. In other words, it was treating someone emotionally so badly that it's like physical abuse,  
81 right? And so we use the term emotional abuse as sort of a, you know, a loaded term to say you're being  
82 really harsh or manipulative to me, such that it constitutes abuse, but what's happened over time.

83 Speaker 1 (06:42):

84 now is people have started blurring that together. And they just say, I'm being abused without clarifying.  
85 Whether that means someone is hitting me or someone is treating me harshly, manipulating me and  
86 doing all the other things that we're going to talk about that can be this sort of emotional abuse. But  
87 that kind of double meaning can create a situation where this is ambiguity that then attaches that  
88 cultural baggage along with it such that we start reacting to the emotional abuse the same way we  
89 would to the physical abuse, because we're not clear what you mean. Um, so I'm just gonna leave that  
90 out there for you to think about. Um, so we've got this ambiguity and suppose I call up one of you and  
91 say, Hey, my wife's been abusing me for years. Well, without me saying more, it's not clear what I mean,  
92 right.

93 Speaker 1 (07:36):

94 Has Rebecca been beating me up? Um, or has she been calling me names and running me down and,  
95 and, you know, controlling the finances and these various other sort of things, right. It could mean any  
96 of that. [Laughter] Um, you're all, you're all laughing at- you, you just see Rebecca when she gets mad.  
97 Um, uh, um, but so, you know, harsh words and manipulative behavior, calling that abuse makes it  
98 sound really bad and creates what I'm going to characterize as a rhetorical trap. Right. It's, it's kinda like  
99 when the legislature decides to have a harsher penalty for drunk drivers. Nobody's against it. Nobody's  
100 willing to stand up and say, well, you know, maybe we shouldn't have a mandatory you're in jail for  
101 drunk driving. Nobody's willing to say that, right. Because it's bad, bad, bad, bad. Right. And so there's  
102 the, you, you take away that sort of level of reasonableness.

103 Speaker 1 (08:25):

104 And so similarly, you know, you're subject to you. Do you, you mean to say that you don't think it's  
105 grounds for divorce, that the husband is abusing the wife? Um, well, no, I'm not so sure about that, but,  
106 but it's hard to say that, right. Because when someone, if someone puts it like that, so the bottom line is,  
107 is this: Abuse is not a magic word, right? The fact that you say you're being abused, or someone tells you  
108 that he or she is being abused does not create some automatic SWAT team response. Right. We're going  
109 to have to ask some questions to see what's behind that and understand what's really going on because  
110 it's not clear what you mean from that word alone.

111 Speaker 1 (09:06):

**Commented [VH22]:** His presumption is that a person who says they have suffered abuse is likely not telling the truth, is confused, perhaps even crazy.

**Commented [VH23]:** I'm paying attention to this – what does he mean by cultural baggage really?

**Commented [VH24]:** What evidence does he have that this is the case? He is dismissing the concept of emotional abuse based on his ideas about how the phrase has come into being. The extensive literature on emotional abuse doesn't suggest anything like this. Instead, the term emotional abuse by clinicians was born out of a body of case studies involving patterns of psychological manipulation and acute victimization. The Australian Institute of Family Studies notes that "It is increasingly considered to be the core issue in all forms of child abuse and neglect"

**Commented [VH25]:** Again, he is showing ignorance here of the literature on emotional/psychological abuse and trauma.

**Commented [VH26]:** How odd to require an abuse victim, who is undergoing trauma, to be able to make a convincing case, at his request, that their abuse meets his personal standards. I am getting the distinct impression that this man has never actually listened to many abuse victims.

**Commented [VH27]:** Again this term cultural baggage. This leader has a bone to pick with how the legal system errs on the side of caution. He does not want to err on the side of caution. He presumes the victim is lying. He wants to err on the side of the abuser.

**Commented [VH28]:** Again using extremes and making it seem as if someone who says the word "abuse" must then make an airtight case, to his satisfaction. Again, this shows little compassion and understanding of abuse victims. In fact, most abuse victims are reluctant to name what they are going through as abuse. And their awareness of what they are going through takes time to make sense of. This is not a linear process. The compassionate listener must provide a place where a suffering person feels safe to disclose things as they remember them, not to place heavy burdens of "prove it to me" on them, when they've worked up the courage to ask for help.

**Commented [VH29]:** Joking about abuse when abuse victims are likely in the audience is the opposite of pastoral care and wisdom. This is not something to make jokes about.

**Commented [VH30]:** Again with the "you" – He addresses the abuse victim. You are unreasonable.

**Commented [VH31]:** Positioning an abuse victim as aggressive, creating traps. They are unreasonable.

**Commented [VH32]:** Again, he uses "you" again, putting words into the mouth of the abuse victim.

**Commented [VH33]:** Who says that it is?

**Commented [VH34]:** We might not help you – that's the message. We aren't going to necessarily believe or aid you. We are starting from a position of skepticism and you h... [3]

112 All right. So this is a definition of emotional abuse that I cut and pasted from an article on the focus on  
113 the family website that was written by someone named Mary J Jerkes. So it was entitled. FAQ's about  
114 emotional abuse. And I picked that because I thought it was something, it was a somewhat sort of  
115 neutral resource, right? It wasn't, it wasn't clearly taking a position on one side or the other on the  
116 implications of this. And you can take or leave this definition just as you like, but this is, this is what she  
117 writes. Emotional abuse is any non-physical behavior or attitude that controls, intimidates, subjugates,  
118 demeans, punishes, or isolates another person by using degradation, humiliation, or fear. Yelling,  
119 screaming, and name-calling are all forms of emotional abuse as are more subtle tactics, such as  
120 refusing to be pleased with anything, isolating an individual from family and friends and invalidating  
121 others' thoughts and feelings. And based on the stuff I read, I, that's probably a pretty like broad what  
122 most people would mean by this. Now, one of the problems that I see with that, and don't get me  
123 wrong, those things are bad, they sound sinful, right?

**Commented [VH35]:** <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/faqs-about-emotional-abuse/>

124 Speaker 1 (10:12):

125 I'm fairly sure that there has never been a human relationship since the fall in which the participants did  
126 not sin against one another. And in fact, if you have been in any significant relationship, whether a  
127 marriage or a deep friendship, or a parent child relationship, and we've all been in one of those, um, you  
128 can probably look at most of the things on this list and go, yeah, that's, I've, I've met that. Yeah. Right. It  
129 becomes, it becomes a question of frequency and degree, right. So it becomes very difficult to sort of  
130 say, has this happened to me or not. Right. Um, and, and, and that, that, that ambiguity is part of the  
131 problem that we're trying to unravel this, this, this morning. Um, we take something where clearly you  
132 can think of a case where someone has been in a situation where they've been subject to these kinds of  
133 things, you know, often severely and has been put in a bad place as a result. And it's really struggled, but  
134 you can also see how it's hard to put your finger on it, right. It's hard to sort of say yes or no hard to find  
135 a bright line of what that means. Exactly.

**Commented [VH36]:** He is setting the stage for further dismissing the concept of emotional abuse by sin-leveling. We all sin. What's the big deal? What did you expect from marriage? This behavior is normal to marriage. With this, he is normalizing abuse.

**Commented [VH37]:** Normalisation of abuse.

136 Speaker 1 (11:12):

137 I prefer to hold questions to the end, if that's all right, just cause I've got a lot of material and I want to  
138 get through it. Um,

**Commented [VH38]:** He allows that it's possible that someone might have suffered emotional abuse, but he says it's almost impossible to identify those situations. Think of the person in the audience who is undergoing emotional abuse. What he is saying is: It will be almost impossible to believe or affirm you.

139 Speaker 1 (11:18):

140 So here's the, this is, this is a continuation of that last article. Examples of emotionally abusive behaviors  
141 include humiliating and degrading, discounting, distorting and negating, accusing and blaming, isolating,  
142 withholding affection, and emotional support, withholding financial resources, dismissive, disapproving,  
143 or contemptuous looks, comments or behavior, threatening harm to an individual's pets, possessions, or  
144 persons. The effects of emotional abuse are often debilitating. They include depression, confusion,  
145 difficulty concentrating, and making decisions, overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness,  
146 and pure physical and poor physical health. All right. So

**Commented [VH39]:** After reading this list, he moves quickly on. No acknowledgement of the trauma that this behavior inflicts.

147 Speaker 1 (11:55):

148 What, what we've seen, um, is that the ultimate goal in some of these situations is that the alleged  
149 victim wants to get out of the relationship. And in the case of a marriage, wants, you know, approval to  
150 divorce and or separate from his or her spouse. Um, now we sometimes have seen this morph into a  
151 situation where the, the alleged victim is alleging pastoral abuse. In other words, the church doesn't do  
152 what you want. It doesn't give you the answer you want. So suddenly the conspiracy has now  
153 broadened and, you know, aha, you elders you're abusing me too. Right. Because you don't agree with

**Commented [VH40]:** He now moves to undermine the idea that a person - who has suffered the trauma from that long list of abusive behaviours he has just read out - could rightly want a divorce.

**Commented [VH41]:** He doesn't even allow for the possibility of pastoral abuse here. Again he is addressing the "you" in the audience. And pathologising anyone (conspiracy) who would say that they are being spiritually abused by a church that is not believing or supporting them.

154 me, um, possible. Um, but you know, maybe that's not the answer. Um, one thing I can say with  
155 certainty and I put caveat up here for my heading, for the slide, um, we all sin against each other all the  
156 time.

**Commented [VH42]:** He admits it is possible but quickly dismisses it again.

**Commented [VH43]:** The only thing he is certain about is his idea of sin levelling – we all suffer from what “you” call abuse, so get over it.

157 Speaker 1 (12:45):

158 There's never been a marriage or any other human relationship where the husband and wife did not sin  
159 against one another. There are no perfect church officers and we can and do sin against the members of  
160 the church, all that is true. Um, it's also true that spouses can sometimes treat each other horribly and  
161 say incredibly cruel and hurtful things. Such sin violates our marriage vows and it's to be condemned  
162 and dealt with appropriately. The kinds of behaviors described above, meaning in that definition, um,  
163 particularly when taken to the extreme can be deeply hurtful. So they'll all, all that stuff is true. So  
164 please do not take anything I say as is, you know, negating those points. Um, however, here here's a big  
165 point.

**Commented [VH44]:** Again he admits that emotional abuse (which he doesn't name here) and spiritual abuse (which he doesn't name here) are possible and do happen. But this caveat has no weight, considering he has spent this entire talk undermining abuse victims and making it clear they will not be believed unless that present an airtight case which meets his impossible standards.

166 Speaker 1 (13:28):

167 Yes, this stuff is sinful, but the Bible gives us a way of resolving conflict and dealing with sin. And that  
168 way is not guilt by accusation. And it's not summary excommunication, and it's not get divorced anytime  
169 you want, for any reason, those are not in the Bible. In fact, the very opposite is in the Bible. We have a  
170 means of biblical conflict resolution that is laid out for us in Matthew 18, that is codified for us in our  
171 book of church order. And then it's implemented in the courts of the church. And significantly, no man  
172 or a woman, no church member is to be the judge of his or her own case. That's not how it works. That  
173 is not biblical wisdom. And that is where we see a clash of worldviews because the world outside of the  
174 church says exactly that. Your chief end is your own happiness.

**Commented [VH45]:** This neglects the dynamics of abuse. There is extensive evidence that a victim who confronts emotional abuse is risking escalating to physical violence.

“Specifically, if an abused partner asks or insists that emotional abuse stop, physical and sexual violence can result (Porcerelli, West, Binienda & Cogan, 2006).” – From [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.naswma.org/resource/resmgr/imported/FCE\\_emotionalAbuse.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.naswma.org/resource/resmgr/imported/FCE_emotionalAbuse.pdf)

**Commented [VH46]:** Moving again to address the “you” in the audience.

175 Speaker 1 (14:28):

176 Whatever is going to make you happy is what you should do. And it doesn't matter what anybody says  
177 or thinks about it. If you decide that divorcing your spouse today is what's going to make you happy,  
178 then you ought, you owe it to yourself to do it. And who cares what anybody else thinks? Just keep, you  
179 keep going. You'll find, you'll find a church eventually. That'll, that'll say that's okay. Right. Just keep,  
180 keep going. Um, so man's chief end is not in fact, his own happiness, right, it is to glorify God and to  
181 enjoy him forever. But that is where the church and the word of God clashes with the world. So I wanted  
182 to give you a couple of resources here, a couple of things to think about what the world says to us about  
183 just the idea that your own happiness is your goal. And the first one, this is a very famous quote from a  
184 Supreme court opinion written by Justice Anthony Kennedy in Planned Parenthood against Casey.

**Commented [VH47]:** Here he makes clear his concept of cultural baggage. He is identifying the victim with the “world outside the church.” So if you want a divorce due to abuse, you are allying yourself with those outside the church.

Noting also how he says that your happiness doesn't matter. You have to glorify God. God doesn't care about your emotional abuse, in other words. God doesn't care if you are unhappy.

**Commented [VH48]:** So the victim of abuse is now complicit in arguments in favour of abortion.

185 Speaker 1 (15:17):

186 This is from 1992, which by the way, is the year I graduated from high school and, um, ancient history at  
187 this point. But as far back as 1992, this is what the Supreme court in a majority opinion said. And this  
188 shows us how elite opinion tends to lead popular opinion, right? At the time this came out, it was  
189 shocking and conservatives spent 20 years mocking it. But at this point, I don't think you can mock it.  
190 Cause I think it's what most people think.

**Commented [VH49]:** Most people AKA the abuse victim asking for help.

191 New Speaker (15:44):

192 At the heart of Liberty is the right to define one's own concept of it, existence of meaning of the  
193 universe and the mystery of human life. And he goes on to say that beliefs about these matters could  
194 not define the attributes of personhood, where they formed other compulsion of the state. Um, I think

195 what's significant is the first sentence that what's really important is the right to define one's own  
196 concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe and on the mystery of human life. Do you see, it  
197 should be fairly clear. Do you see how that leads to transgenderism? Can you lead how that leads to  
198 queer culture? Can you see all that leads you to, you know, to, to absolute sexual license?

199 Speaker 1 (16:27):

200 Yes it's it's if you, once you had this, you could not have Obergefell, right. Once this became the law, but  
201 back in 92, it's the whole, I, gosh, that's so shocking now. It's what everybody thinks. Um, this next, um,  
202 quote, I'm going to read you is from a recent book by Rod Dreyer called Live not by lies: A manual for  
203 Christian dissidence, which I've read. I know some about some of the rest of you have read two. And,  
204 um, I, I come in the book to you with Dreyer as cultural critic. He is not a theologian so do not hold him  
205 out as such. He's an adherent of the Eastern Orthodox religion, which I do not recommend or endorse in  
206 any way. But once again, he's not a theologian, he's a journalist and he is a cultural critic. And he said  
207 something that I thought was very insightful.

208 Speaker 1 (17:13):

209 And one of the first chapters of the book, he says this in therapeutic culture, which has everywhere  
210 triumphed, the great sin is to stand in the way of the freedom of others to find happiness as they wish.  
211 This goes hand in hand with the sexual revolution, which along with ethnic and gender identity politics  
212 replaced the failed economic class struggle as the utopian focus of the post 1960s radical left. And he  
213 has a whole section. He talks about the triumph of the therapeutic, how it's no longer a question of  
214 what is the good and how do you pursue virtue, but rather how do you work out your issues? And that's  
215 really, what's important is, is, is Naval gazing and finding your own happiness. And you can see it this,  
216 right. This is, we had this in the seventies. It was all this, you know, every, everybody go into their  
217 psychologist to talk about their mother or whatever it is, but that's ultimately the thing. That is the great  
218 sin is to not let other people define and pursue happiness as they see it. And do you see how that  
219 relates directly back to the mystery passage? Right.

220 Speaker 1 (18:18):

221 It's really exactly the same thing he said. Now it's become mainstream. And how dare you tell me that I  
222 can't pursue whatever form of sexual deviancy occurs to me and impose it upon you and others and get  
223 the government to pay for it, et cetera. Right. But that's where we live. And I think Dreyer really nailed it  
224 with, with this. So I hope you can also see how that informs this question of self-diagnosis of abuse apart  
225 from any standards or external authority, which is where we're going now. Now in contravention to  
226 that, right, as Dennis very ably brought you last week, we have Westminster confession, uh, it's 25.6. I  
227 mistyped that it's not 24, 25, um, which says this, although the corruption of man be such as it's apt to  
228 study arguments, unduly, to put asunder, those whom God has joined together in marriage, yet, nothing  
229 but adultery or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate is  
230 cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is  
231 to be observed. And the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own  
232 case. Now I'm not going to spend any time really this morning talking about the scriptural underpinnings  
233 of that, because it was presented to you very clearly last week. Um, but it is summarized here in the  
234 confession. I, and every other officer of this church have sworn an oath before God that I believe this to  
235 be true and will govern the church accordingly.

236 Speaker 1 (19:48):

**Commented [VH50]:** More demonization of the abuse victim.

In the speaker's mind, the one who alleges abuse is not only ally of the world, they are also ally with transgenderism, with queer culture, with absolute sexual license. And these are enemies of "conservatives" as he has made clear in the previous paragraph. Things conservatives "mock."

**Commented [VH51]:** What abuse victims think is part of what is "shocking", what the world thinks.

**Commented [VH52]:** The abuse victim is selfish, the abuse victim only cares about themselves.

**Commented [VH53]:** Denigration of psychiatric care. Mocking.

**Commented [VH54]:** More positioning of the abuse victim with a larger cultural pattern that includes "radical left" etc.

**Commented [VH55]:** What does this have to do with the person who needs help with abuse in their marriage?

Note again how he is aggressively targeting "you" – You is not just an abuse victim. It is the person who is pursuing "whatever form of sexual deviancy occurs to" them.

**Commented [VH56]:** Emphasis on his oath. Are "you", the abuse victim, going to ask him to violate his "oath before God"? The emphasis on oath here is also given in contrast to the one who wants to dissolve the oath of marriage. The message is: We in the church keep our oaths to God, unlike you.

237 So let your expectations be set that if you come to us, telling us, you want to get divorced, this is the  
238 standard that we're going to apply and no other. And if you hear about us applying some other  
239 standard, you better go to the Presbytery. So there's two bases for divorce, adultery, willful desertion,  
240 that's it, nothing else.

241 Speaker 1 (20:12):

242 But think about this, right? And so this is written in the 1640s. The corruption of man is such as he is apt  
243 to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God has joined together in marriage. Does that  
244 sound familiar? Does that maybe sound like what people do exactly right now? Like maybe human  
245 nature hasn't changed. You think maybe. Yeah, exactly. And so a lot of the stuff that we're about to turn  
246 to and look at the stuff's been put out there by, by some of these, you know, abuse culture, enabler  
247 folks is- directly contradicts this. And in one case, I'm going to show you, show you, let me read you a  
248 quote from a, for a woman, wrote an article, basically taking a deconstructionist view of the  
249 Westminster confession and saying, these guys just really didn't get it when they wrote that. Um, and  
250 finally here at the bottom, of course, that the persons concerned in it are not left to their own wills and  
251 discretion in their own case, right? It's it's, it's not just up to your own private judgment, but rather the  
252 judgment of the church.

253 Speaker 1 (21:06):

254 So here's Matthew 18: 15 through 18, very familiar of course. And this, this is how we do biblical conflict  
255 resolution, right? It's abundantly clear. If your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between  
256 you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. Most cases, it stops there. But if  
257 he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the  
258 evidence of two or three witnesses. Might stop there. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.  
259 And if he refuses to listen, even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I  
260 say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth shall  
261 be loosed in heaven. And in the context of our polity, when you bring it to the church, that means you  
262 bring it to the session. Um, and this is part of what we do is adjudicate disputes in cases that have  
263 properly gone through the process. Do not come to us in the first instance, right? And this does happen.  
264 Someone calls us up or it comes up and says, Hey, you know, so-and-so is doing this blah, blah, blah. And  
265 I really don't like it. You know what response you're going to get, or at least you what you should get?

266 Speaker 1 (22:15):

267 Have you talked to him, why are you talking to me? If you haven't talked to the person in question,  
268 because I got nothing for you until you do.

269 Speaker 1 (22:24):

270 Another highly relevant scripture that is frequently discussed amongst our session, Proverbs 18, 17, the  
271 one who States his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him. It's been said that  
272 cross-examination is the most powerful, you know, truth discovering force in the law. Well, it's, it's right  
273 here in the scripture and it's also true in the courts of the church. So until you've heard both sides,  
274 withhold judgment, and by the way, this is highly applicable. If you find yourself in that middle step of  
275 Matthew 18, right? If you're, if you're the one other that someone has come to and say, Hey, you know,  
276 Matt, you know, said some outlandish stuff in Sunday school last week. And I, I approached him about it  
277 and he wouldn't repent. So will you please come with me, and talk to him, right. Be prepared to hear  
278 both sides before reaching judgment. All right.

**Commented [VH57]:** Again addressing the abuse victim. Emphasis on the rules not wisdom and discretion in applying them. Not the nuance of a session that considers particular circumstances. Not the fact that many other sessions, even within the PCA, would not start from this law-driven posture but would rather seek to listen, to understand and then to consider what steps forward to take, alongside the person needing help.

**Commented [VH58]:** Emphasis on nothing else.

**Commented [VH59]:** Emphasizing the time period – This is tradition. In this way, he contrasts this with what he sees as the newer, faddish idea of emotional abuse. But what of God's view of verbal violence? What does God say about violence? He offers no real engagement with the Biblical text beyond a few proof texts. He does not mention the Gospel, nor the heart of God, out of which flow love and kindness.

**Commented [VH60]:** He is identifying the abuse victim who comes to the session with the corrupt person who the Westminster divines were thinking of.

**Commented [VH61]:** Abuse victims who come to them are in his mind part of an abuse culture. Not to be believed or trusted. He has lost sight of his duty before God to exercise wisdom and discretion when it comes to each case before him.

**Commented [VH62]:** This use of Matthew 18 is not even consistently applied across the speaker's own denomination, the PCA. In a sermon on the book of Esther in 2016, Liam Goligher told his congregation, "spousal abuse is a reality and if you are being pushed or shoved or hurt, go to the police immediately, and if you talk to the pastor and he says go and talk to your husband who has been doing it, ignore him and go to the police immediately."

Justin and Lindsay Holcomb write that, "Sometimes victims consider confronting their abuser at the urging of others. It is important that victims are not pressured, coerced, manipulated, or forced into confronting their victim by any one for any reason. Their will was violated once, and it should not be threatened again by those who are to support them. Many victims will never want to confront their abuser, and that is completely understandable and should be supported. Victims need to be empowered, not told what they should do or have decisions made on their behalf.

They also point out that "it is always a good idea to not confront your abuser alone."

**Commented [VH63]:** Again, he isn't considering the relevance of power dynamics, of issues re: risk of violence when confronting abusive people.

279 Speaker 1 (23:11):

280 So this is book of church order 57 five. The book of church order of course, is part of our church  
281 constitution. Um, it is the rules by which the church operates. Um, so serving it to the scriptures and,  
282 um, 57 five is the other, the membership vows, which most of you should be very familiar with. And I'll  
283 remind you that promise number five says, do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of  
284 the church and promise to study its purity and peace? And there are a, you know, everyone, when we  
285 interview them for membership, always nods their head and says, yes, absolutely. I submit myself the  
286 government discipline of the church. It is not uncommon to get a very different story when you find  
287 yourself, uh, you know, subject to that government and discipline, or when we're not giving you the  
288 answer that you want. Um, but remember, this is an oath you have made before God, right? It was, it  
289 was not a casual mention. You stood in front of a bunch of people and affirmed it in worship and you  
290 were in fact bound by it. And we are in fact gonna hold you to it.

291 Speaker 1 (24:09):

292 All right. So having set that up, this and the next several things I'm going to read to you are from a  
293 website called Crying Out For Justice blog. And I became aware of the crying out for justice blog  
294 because, um, we had it, one of the situations that helped me form this material. It was cited extensively  
295 by one of the participants. So I went back and, and, and read it again yesterday and pulled some  
296 material from it that I think will show you, um, kind of what the culture and the sort of, you know, mileu  
297 that we're talking about here is right. So this is written by a woman named Barbara Roberts on the  
298 crying out for justice blog. Um, I am revoking my previous teaching that a victim whose abuser is a  
299 professing believer must pursue Matthew 18, as far as it is within her power. And that a victim should  
300 always seek to have her decision to divorce verified by the church.

301 Speaker 1 (25:00):

302 So she is revoking that previous judgment. I now see that - meaning that you have to follow the  
303 Matthew 18 process and can't get divorced unless the church agrees - I now see that teaching as extra  
304 biblical tradition, like all man made traditions, it just arrived from biblical principles, but it turns the  
305 beautiful conception of biblical guidelines into a rigid cage that locks people into bondage, just like the  
306 religion of the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. It denies victims of abuse the freedom to discern the godliness  
307 and wisdom or lack thereof of the church hierarchy from whom they are receiving counsel. And since it  
308 binds the conscience of the victim to the ruling of the church hierarchy, it deprives the victim of freedom  
309 of conscience. And it dissuades the victim from heeding the promptings of the Holy Spirit. So I hope,

310 Speaker 1 (25:48):

311 I hope you can see how sort of invidious this is, right? If, if you're, if you're, if you're somebody who's in  
312 a position where you don't like the answer you're getting from the church, this reads like a permission  
313 slip to go do whatever you want to do anyway. Right?

314 Speaker 1 (26:06):

315 That, Oh, you don't really have to follow Matthew 18. That's just a biblical guideline. Those grounds for  
316 divorce. They're just guidelines. They're not rigid. You're free to do whatever you want in your own  
317 private judgment, based upon the guidance, the guidance of the Holy spirit. Well brothers and sisters.  
318 Let me tell you, if you think the Holy spirit is telling you to do something that is contrary to the word of  
319 God, okay, You are mistaken.

**Commented [VH64]:** The message here is:  
We are watching you and we will force you to keep your  
vow. These are the words of someone who wants to enforce,  
to police, rather than to shepherd, guide and protect.  
Emphasis is on rules, on the law.

**Commented [VH65]:** He says he has chosen this because  
someone he knows cited this website. But there are many  
resources out there. If he wanted to look at blogs, he could  
have also considered the well known 'Flying Free' which is a  
forum and set of resources by Natalie Hoffman. But there is  
also a wealth of Biblical scholarship on this topic and breadth  
and depth of discussion even within his own denomination on  
this topic. By choosing this one website, he is minimizing the  
discussion and expertise that is widely available to abuse  
victims and church leaders.

The second here is that he is seeking to eliminate a source of  
help rather than pointing people towards other resources so  
that if they think there are problems with this site, then they  
can look elsewhere. He is setting up a straw man, in this way,  
positioning him and his session as the sources of truth.

**Commented [VH66]:** Again he speaks to the abuse victim  
in the congregation. We must remember all the meaning he  
has attached to this 'you', how he has pathologised and  
identified 'you' with what he believes is pagan, worldly  
culture. Is this how he speaks to abuse victims?

**Commented [VH67]:** Again he is neglecting the variance  
of interpretation on the way this passage should be applied,  
even within his own denomination! He now claims to speak  
on behalf of the Holy Spirit. His view of this passage is the  
true teaching of the Holy Spirit! What arrogance!

320 Speaker 1 (26:29):

321 I'm not one to mince words, as you all know. [laughs] And I'll say that again. If you, if you think the Holy  
322 spirit is calling you to do something, which contradicts the word of God, you are wrong. Alright, more  
323 from the same writer,

**Commented [VH68]:** He repeats his warning, wielding the authority of God's Word without humility, without acknowledging that his view on this passage is not shared by everyone, even in his own denomination!

324 Speaker 1 (26:44):

325 Be that as it may, the wording that, and this is she's talking here about that last paragraph of  
326 Westminster confession, 25, the wording that the persons concerned be not left to their own wills and  
327 discretion in their own case, can easily be morphed from a guideline or suggestion into a law that  
328 oppresses- and that's her error, that oppresses victims of abuse. It is my guess that like many Christian  
329 leaders today, the writers of the Westminster confession had insufficient empathy with the spiritual  
330 dilemmas of victims of domestic abuse and the way abuse flourishes in the dark long before victims  
331 disclose and seek help, let alone the effects that this ongoing trauma on the victims. In other words,  
332 they were not sufficiently mindful of the way their precept would be used by Christian leaders who are  
333 blind to domestic abuse. Their precept has been turned into a binding rule that persons considering  
334 divorce must not be allowed to make up their own mind at their own discretion.

**Commented [VH69]:** Another authority source he wields, claiming its authority for himself.

335 Speaker 1 (27:38):

336 So this is your deconstructionist reading of the Westminster confession, right? It doesn't apply. It  
337 doesn't matter because those guys didn't get it. Um, well, okay. I suppose you're free to reach that  
338 conclusion, but not in the church. The Westminster standards are, are in fact, a rule that your church  
339 officers have sworn to God they believe to be true. It is in fact, a binding rule of faith and practice. And it  
340 is one in which we, which we believe accurately summarizes the scriptures. So any suggestion that the,  
341 um, the precepts of the Westminster confession are merely guidelines is mistaken. Um, but you

**Commented [VH70]:** Note again the use of 'you' – Again, he addresses the abuse victim. You are deconstructionist. You aren't a real believer.

**Commented [VH71]:** He claims now to speak for 'the church' – This is more authority wielding, again not acknowledging that the PCA itself has set up a committee to look at the issue of abuse!

342 Speaker 1 (28:10):

343 see here, think about the effect this has on you. If you're not really in a good place emotionally already,  
344 and you're struggling, and the church isn't giving you the answer you want, this is enabling you to ignore  
345 the teaching of the church and the government and discipline which you have sworn to submit to. All  
346 right, one more from, um, Ms. Roberts.

**Commented [VH72]:** More pathologising. He doesn't mention WHY someone might be in a bad place emotionally, why they might be struggling. He seems to be suggesting here that this is some fault of the victim. If he believes that someone that goes to Barbara Roberts blog is in need of help, why doesn't he offer it? Why do you think people go to these blogs? Because they do not feel safe to approach leaders in their own churches for help in the first instance.

347 Speaker 1 (28:35):

348 I believe victims of abuse may judiciously ignore the Pharisee directives of church leaders. I'm going to  
349 stop there who are less than competent on domestic abuse. And to use language that even hints at  
350 victim blaming. If church leaders refuse to discipline a Christian abuser or only give him a slap on the  
351 wrist while putting expectations on the victim to reconcile, That we don't have to respect their rulings  
352 because they have shown themselves to be like the false prophets who called evil good and good evil. If  
353 church leaders demand that the victim present herself for a Matthew 18 process, and it's clear from  
354 how they've already been mishandling the situation, that this process is just going to oppress the victim  
355 more and give extra power to the abuser, I believe a victim is not only permitted to disregard the council  
356 of the blind guide leaders, but would be wise to disregard it for her own health and safety, more of the  
357 same. Um, and I'm not gonna

358 Speaker 1 (29:25):

359 read you this whole thing in the interest of time, but this is more, more of the same stuff. You Christians  
360 understand the dynamics of domestic abuse. I often encourage survivors of domestic abuse to give

361 more weight to their gut feeling intuition and common sense. However, I do this, not because I promote  
362 reliance on the flesh, but because I know that there has been so much misteaching on marriage, divorce  
363 and domestic abuse that very often a survivor's common sense and intuition, AKA guidance from the  
364 Holy spirit give more biblical direction than the bad counsel which he's absorbed from Christian  
365 tradition. Um, let there be no blame on victims who make the decision to divorce solely between  
366 themselves and God.

367 Well, let me tell you something. If you make, if you go out and get a divorce contrary to the teachings of  
368 the church, you are going to find yourself subject to church discipline in this church.

369 Speaker 1 (30:08):

370 That's just how it is. That could be because that's what we are obligated to do. We're obligated to follow  
371 the word of God and to govern the church, according to the BCO and the Westminster standards. All  
372 right.

373 Speaker 1 (30:18):

374 So this is another fella. Um, a man named Jeff Crippen who wrote an article called The abuse and limits  
375 of pastoral authority. And I take it. He is, he holds himself out as a pastor of some sort, and this is on  
376 that same website. He writes this, um, in my opinion, pastors and churches today who were laying the  
377 load of permanence view of no divorce ever, no remarriage ever, as long as the spouse is still living are  
378 guilty of this, meaning are guilty of pastoral abuse. They have come forth from their Holy counsels and  
379 announced, thus saith the Lord to their flocks, when the Lord has not spoken at all.

380 Speaker 1 (30:52):

381 Now I want you to think carefully about what I just read you.

382 Speaker 1 (30:58):

383 It should remind you of what Satan said to even the garden, because what he just said is not what  
384 anybody is teaching. Right.

385 Speaker 1 (31:08):

386 Did you hear me say no divorce ever under any circumstances? Have you heard anybody in this church  
387 say that? No, because that's not the, what the word of God says, Right?

388 Speaker 1 (31:17):

389 There are two biblical grounds for divorce. And I already told you what they are, but here this, this guy  
390 has distorted it to no divorce ever and is telling a lie about it. So this is like, when, you know, serpent  
391 said, Eve, did God really say, and then distorts God's words.

392 Speaker 1 (31:35):

393 Um, so this is from a guy named David Instone Brewer in an article called When is divorce okay. This was  
394 published in Christianity today in 2007. However, it's now available for your reading pleasure at  
395 abuserecovery.org. Um, and he says this and the bullet points are his. The emphasis is mine. Divorce is  
396 only allowed for a limited number of grounds that are found in the Old Testament and affirmed in the  
397 New Testament.

**Commented [VH73]:** Now the overt threat! This emphasis on rules, rule-keeping, rule-breaking – this is a legalistic hyper-focus on the law which neglects the Gospel. Where is the love and care for someone who is hurting? It is entirely absent.

**Commented [VH74]:** Here he cites his sacred authority. He keeps his vows, unlike the one who divorces because of abuse. He is positioning the abuse victim directly AGAINST the word of God and the PCA's BCO and the Westminster standards.

**Commented [VH75]:** More extreme positioning here. Note how he describes Jeff Crippen, as a "pastor of some sort" – He is making it clear to his audience that you can't trust another pastor. He then goes so far as to compare him to Satan! This is a strong judgement and on what basis? What authority does this speaker have to condemn another pastor like this?

**Commented [VH76]:** I study divorce sermons, and what Jeff Crippen is citing here is taught in sermons in various denominations in the United States. So the speaker is either ignorant or he is lying.

**Commented [VH77]:** Jeff Crippen is not telling a lie. This view of divorce is taught in many churches across the United States. Jeff Crippen is a Baptist minister, and this view is common both in Baptist churches and in "family-integrated" churches.

398 Speaker 1 (32:03):  
399 Adultery. And he quotes Deuteronomy 24:1. It says it's affirmed by Jesus in Matthew, 19. Emotional and  
400 physical neglect. And he cites to Exodus 21 and oddly first Corinthians seven, and then abandonment  
401 and abuse, which he says is included in neglect as affirmed in first Corinthians seven. And so you might  
402 notice this list does not sound much like the list I gave you earlier. In fact, he's added in emotional and  
403 physical neglect, and he's also added in abuse, right? Whereas we have adultery and abandonment,  
404 which I'll take to mean the same thing as desertion. Now, I particularly want you to focus on this  
405 emotional and physical neglect in that they are standardless. What in the world does emotional neglect  
406 mean? How in the world could we possibly adjudicate whether someone has been emotionally  
407 neglected, right? It might be true that you've been emotionally neglected, but that's going to mean  
408 something different to everybody in every circumstance. And it's quickly going to collapse into one of  
409 those, Anybody who wanted to get a divorce could, could probably find some way to claim they'd been  
410 emotionally neglected because we all fail to meet each other's needs on a regular basis. Um, similarly,  
411 we snuck the word abuse in here without any clarification as to what we mean by that. And keep in  
412 mind, this is, this is Christianity Today is a fairly broad and widely read public publication in the broader  
413 church. This is not some obscure corner of the internet.

414 Speaker 1 (33:40):  
415 So once again, I, again, note the subtle nature of this false teaching, right? If you just, if you just read it  
416 quickly, it would slide right by you. And I encourage you to ground yourself in the scriptures, in the  
417 Westminster Confession. And I put up here again, first, the relevant verses in first Corinthians seven  
418 because, um, Mr. Instone Rewers cited that for the proposition that emotional neglect is a basis for  
419 divorce. Um, Dennis presented this to you last week. I'm not going to read it to you again in the interest  
420 of time, but the --- of it is you've got, if you're married, you've got to stay married. And if you have an  
421 unbelieving spouse, who's willing to live with you, you have to stay and live with them. It doesn't say if  
422 you have an unbelieving spouse, you can leave them and go get a divorce.

423 Speaker 1 (34:26):  
424 In fact, it says just the opposite, but oddly people seem to have distorted it to come away with, You can  
425 get a divorce- how you get from this to you can go get a divorce because you're emotionally neglected. I  
426 frankly don't understand. I'd love to ask the fellow. All right. So I put 24 six up here again for emphasis.  
427 There's two basis: adultery, willful desertion and not just willful desertion, but willful desertion that  
428 can't be remedied. Um, I want to make the point to you that if we buy into this, everybody can get  
429 divorced for emotional neglect or the sort of vague concept of abuse, it's subject to a reductio ad  
430 absurdum meaning it. Meaning, if we apply this principle, we get absurd results. Because if we conclude  
431 that divorce is permissible for emotional neglect or emotional abuse, then divorce becomes essentially  
432 standardless.

433 Speaker 1 (35:22):  
434 If speaking harsh words is sufficient grounds for divorce, then anybody can get divorced. Because I, if  
435 somebody here is in a marriage where there have never been harsh words spoken, please come see me  
436 after class. I'd like to hear about it. Um, uh, because I, I am fairly sure that's not the case, right? So, so  
437 effectively what we end up with is the creation ordinance of marriage instituted by God for our mutual  
438 help is basically obliterated because nobody's going to be held to it because those marriage vows that  
439 you say don't mean a thing, because you're going to break them the first day. And then you got all the,  
440 you can get divorced whenever you want.

**Commented [VH78]:** This is untrue. What he doesn't like is the fact that he might have to learn to exercise wisdom and discretion in considering emotional and physical neglect. He might have to listen to other experts. He might have to educate himself. And it's clear he doesn't want to do that. It is indeed true that emotional abuse is hard to discuss and identify.

One of the leading experts on emotional abuse, Sarakay Smullens, wrote this, in 2006:

"When we question why emotional abuse has been excluded from widespread discussion we find several possible explanations, beginning with the facts that emotional abuse is difficult to define and measure (O'Hagan, 1995), and that it is often of a covert nature, with no visible scars to mark its impact but rather wounds that take, in some cases, decades to surface (Hamman & Bernet, 2000). Added to these intangibles is the transactional nature of this particular form of abuse; in Glaser's words, "Whereas physical and sexual abuse are in the nature of events, neglect and emotional abuse characterize the relationship between the caregivers and the child" (2004, p.98). Finally, emotional abuse may elude detection and focus because of its very pervasiveness in so many lives, families, and community and societal institutions (Smullens, 2002a, 2002b). At least one recent study has found emotional abuse to be, in fact, the most prevalent form of abuse (Sidebotham, 2000)."

... [4]

**Commented [VH79]:** Slippery slope argument! This man wants to avoid the difficulty of having to enter into the real difficulty and complexity of people's lives and suffering. He comes across as someone who wants only easy and clearcut answers to life's complicated problems. This is not someone who should be a shepherd.

**Commented [VH80]:** This is not relevant to the topic. This passage is not talking about abuse.

**Commented [VH81]:** This is simply not true. He is oversimplifying the trauma and tragedy of emotional/psychological abuse.

**Commented [VH82]:** Again he states something which is not true. There is a wealth of literature giving advice specifically to religious leaders on this topic. The person I mentioned above, SaraKay Mullens, is the founder of the Philadelphia based interfaith coalition, the Sabbath of Domestic Peace, which has identified clergy as "the missing link" in addressing the epidemic of domestic violence.

**Commented [VH83]:** Minimising. Emotional abuse is not just speaking harsh words. This is his own simplified definition. He is setting up a false caricature of very real suffering and waving it away. The height of cruelty.

**Commented [VH84]:** The message here: Everyone suffers this. Get over it.

**Commented [VH85]:** Now he holds the abuse victim and advocates responsible for "obliterating" God's creation ordinance of marriage! This is very strong and extremely inappropriate.

441 Speaker 1 (35:58):

442 So some points of application and the closing minutes that we have here, um, if you're having marriage  
443 problems or problems in any other relationship, the answer is Matthew 18. And if the first two steps  
444 don't resolve the sin, come to the session. Do this sooner, rather than later. I will assure you that when  
445 we have someone come to us and say, yeah, my marriage has been a disaster for the last 15 years. And I  
446 might, you know, my spouse has been abusing me for the last 15 years ever since we got married.  
447 Sometimes we kind of scratch our head about that and think, why is this the first we're hearing about it,  
448 right? If you've got a problem that's rising to that level, we need to know, cause we want to help you. It  
449 is our job. It is our calling. Letting it get to the point that you're ready to go, you know, break your  
450 marriage vows and abandoned your spouse and get a- seek an unbiblical divorce, um, means you waited  
451 too long.

452 Speaker 1 (36:52):

453 Um, frequently in my experience, and I realized my experience is limited. Um, when somebody says I've  
454 been abused for years or for the whole duration of the marriage or whatever the case may be, that  
455 starts to look a lot like a re-interpreting of past events in light of the conclusion that you've reached  
456 versus the other way around. And sometimes that requires some unpacking and maybe some godly and  
457 wise counsel from some friends who have walked through it with you. So maybe, you know, you talk to  
458 someone, you know, um, you know, Pat Swissdoc is sitting here on the front row. Well, I attended his  
459 wedding and he attended mine. We witnessed each other's swearing vows of marriage. Right. I assure  
460 you, I will want to make every attempt to hold him to those should he seek to, you know, leave his wife?  
461 And I would hope he would do the same for me. Um, and so having been in each other's lives for a long  
462 time,

463 Speaker 3 (37:44):

464 you say, wait a minute, I'm not sure that's really the case. Is it really the case that you've been abused  
465 for the last 20 years by Michelle and I, that doesn't mean [laughs] I think maybe that's not, that's not the  
466 case. Let's talk about that. Right?

467 Speaker 1 (37:53):

468 Right. So the point is you've got to be watchful, both if you think this has happened to you, and if  
469 someone is coming to you with these revelations to think, well, is this historically what actually  
470 happened? Or is this a retelling of the narrative, uh, based on selective interpretation of facts to support  
471 a conclusion that you've already reached. Um, and I'll say this, most of you should know this, but for the  
472 young people, it goes without saying that any accusation that includes the words 'always' or 'never' is  
473 probably less than helpful. You always do this. You never do this well, that's almost certainly not true. So  
474 when we're talking about accusations of sin, we want to be very specific. Um, because that is what is  
475 helpful and will allow us to reach resolution. Um, it is not reasonable to expect the church to exercise  
476 discipline against someone without process.

477 Speaker 1 (38:46):

478 One of the other articles that I didn't quote from, from Ms. Roberts, she takes the view that the sins  
479 enumerated in first Corinthians six are super sins. And that Paul's admonition to put the person out of  
480 fellowship means that we should have some sort of accelerated excommunication process, um, for  
481 people who engage in one of those sins and that if someone comes in and accuse someone of  
482 committing one of those, it must be immediately put out, well, that is not what we do. We have a well-

**Commented [VH86]:** He repeats this faulty advice, this misapplication of Matthew 18. He has already said that the session will not listen to anyone until they confront their abuser by themselves. This is dangerous advice. Justin and Lindsay Holcomb write, in the context of sexual assault (but this is applicable to emotional abuse as well):

"Another commonly unmet expectation is that the abuser will gently listen and express some sense of remorse. Instead, those who commit sexual assault often engage in a distorted power dynamic because they have very poor self-image and desire to maintain power over another individual. It is possible that your abuser will not react well to being confronted and out of their realm of control. This is why it is always a good idea to not confront your abuser alone."

**Commented [VH87]:** Complete ignorance of the dynamics of abuse. An abuser tears down a person's self-image and self-worth, isolates them, makes them feel unable to seek help which they are unworthy of. The speaker is victim-blaming here. Why didn't you tell us? should never be the first question.

**Commented [VH88]:** I don't see any evidence that he wants to help. He has made it clear he will not.

**Commented [VH89]:** It's your fault. More victim-blaming.

**Commented [VH90]:** This is unbelievable. He admits his experience is limited yet he pronounces judgement and cruelty so readily.

**Commented [VH91]:** More disbelief of victims. More ignorance about the dynamics of abuse. Most abuse victims are unable to even utter the word 'abuse' without huge amounts of support and time. Even rape victims are often reluctant to use the word rape. He again reveals here that he will assume when someone comes to him for help that they are making things up, that they are confused, badly influenced by 'worldly culture'.

**Commented [VH92]:** Making light of abuse. Joking and laughing about this serious topic is abhorrent.

**Commented [VH93]:** Now he brings in the audience to be complicit in his disbelief of victims. If someone comes to you, be skeptical. Be doubtful. Don't assume they are telling the truth.

**Commented [VH94]:** Now he even gives guidance about what to look out for as evidence of lying. This is a distortion of how language works. People can use 'always' and 'never' in many ways – in the cases of trauma, someone's bad behavior can feel so

**Commented [VH95]:** More rules making it clear that abuse victims will need to present an airtight case, from the beginning, with emphasis on the "process". No understanding here of trauma works, of the suffering of people who've had their imago dei trampled on and even destroyed, often over a period of years.

483 documented process. We're going to hear from both sides and we're going to reach a judgment and it  
484 can't be any other way. We're not going to- gonna summarily- We're not going to do like the, uh, the civil  
485 magistrate does and summarily judge you and punish you based upon an accusation where you haven't  
486 had an opportunity to be heard. And I can't, no one can seriously suggest that it should be any other  
487 way. Um, if you find yourself in a pattern of thinking where anybody who disagrees with you is abusing  
488 you, then you probably need to reevaluate your thinking. Um, because that is not probably very helpful.  
489 Um, and according to Occam's razor, it's almost certainly not right. So that

490 Speaker 1 (39:53):  
491 is what I have. We are at the end of our time. I think there's about two minutes. Um, I'm a little afraid to  
492 take questions, but I'll make, I'll make an attempt. Um,

493 Speaker 1 (40:02):  
494 Yes, ma'am well, um, my, my response to your comment and offer that for the recording, I'll say that,  
495 um, Mrs. Wescott commented that, um, I seem to be speaking to the extreme case and that there are,  
496 there is perhaps middle ground, you know, that's less extreme where you know should be dealt with  
497 and that is certainly true. Um, I think what I've said is if you have a complaint of sin against some,  
498 someone you should go through the Matthew 18 process and raise it sooner, rather than later, before it  
499 becomes extreme and before it's been going on for years. Um, that is true. We have frequently involved  
500 others in our pastoral care committees, and we would hope expect that following Matthew 18, you  
501 would involve someone else before you came to the session.

**Commented [VH96]:** This is another false opposition the speaker sets up. There are many other ways to go about this which show compassion to someone needing help re an abusive marriage. This holding up and prioritisation of the process over the exercise of discretion and pastorly wisdom is cruel and unnecessary.

**Commented [VH97]:** Here he speaks to the abuser. We will hear you. We won't judge or punish you. How odd. Having set up this very rigid criteria, having dismissed the concept of emotional abuse almost entirely, except for the slimmest of chances a victim might be believed, he reassures the abuser. Astonishing priorities here.

**Commented [VH98]:** Abuse victims find it very traumatic to be stuck in a pattern of disbelief. The speaker has encouraged the audience to be skeptical and disbelieving. He has made it clear he will be skeptical and disbelieving. It's clear that at this church, an abuse victim will find it very difficult to find someone who cares and believes. This kind of environment is what abuse victims react to. The speaker is here caricaturing and dismissing what is widely known as secondary abuse.

**Commented [VH99]:** He has spoken about a very complex topic and leaves almost no time for questions.

**Commented [VH100]:** So this is a statement of his approach. What about all of the other cases which don't fit such an extreme? Such extreme cases are in fact very rare!

## Discussion

PCA Elder Matt Fender delivers a Sunday school talk on domestic violence and divorce which focuses not on the Scriptures, not on the nature of God, not on what God says about violence and love, not on the Gospel, all of which would speak to the issue at hand. Instead, Fender constructs caricatures of abuse, of abuse victims and of advocates as a means to alienate and dismiss them.

### How does he do this?

Primarily, Fender creates a false dichotomy between, on the one hand, a person 'suddenly' asking for help with emotional abuse and sacred authority: himself, the session he serves on, the PCA's Book of Church Order, the Westminster Confession, the Word of God and God himself.

### First, the victims.

Fender pathologises and demonises the abuse victim in multiple ways. He positions the abuse victim alongside a host of negative people and concepts: conspiracy theorists (line 50-51, 152), those who create rhetorical traps (line 98), people who are unreasonable (line 102), someone who wants an "automatic SWAT team response" (line 108), a selfish person (line 174, 215). He demonises the idea of psychology (line 217). Even worse, he links the abuse victim with what he perceives as worldly culture, with those outside of the church (Planned Parenthood, for example, on line 184). He positions the abuse victim alongside 'civil law' (line 66), alongside transgenderism, queer culture, absolute sexual license (lines 197-198, 222), all things he condemns and, in doing so, condemns the abuse victim alongside. He connects the abuse victim with those "corrupt" person that the Westminster divines wrote about (lines 242-244).

Fender also defines and dismisses the concept of emotional abuse. He frequently does this via sin levelling, where he makes it seem that victims of emotional abuse are no different from any other married person (lines 154-156, 158-165, 434-436). In one odd section (lines 140-146), he reads out a list of examples of emotionally abusive behaviours and effects but then moves straight into condemning the abuse victim's desire for escape (line 148). His portrait of an abuse victim is someone who exaggerates their abuse, breaks their vow and has no regard for the Word of God or even God himself. They are even those who "obliterate" God's created ordinance of marriage (lines 436-440).

Fender likewise caricatures and demonises a select number of abuse advocates. Instead of engaging with the wealth of literature from those who study and teach on abuse and trauma, many of whom are orthodox Christians, he cites two writers from one blog, alongside one article from CT. He positions them very clearly against the sources of authority he cites: himself, his session, the PCA's Book of Church Order, the Westminster Confession, the Word of God and God himself. He calls Roberts a 'deconstructionist', calls Jeff Crippen a 'pastor of some sort' (line 375) and even connects Crippen's teachings with Satan (line 383) and says that Crippen is lying (line 383-384, 387, 390). He neglects the fact that Crippen is a Baptist pastor and that many Baptists do teach a permanence view of divorce. And finally, he cites David Instone Brewer, a Biblical scholar at Cambridge, a Baptist pastor and a specialist in texts on divorce and marriage. This person again he summarily dismisses without full engagement with the wealth of work this scholar has done, going so far as to call the outcome of his conclusions 'absurd' accusing his interpretations as making divorce 'standardless' (line 431-432).

Much of this pathologising and demonising of victims and advocates is accomplished using the word 'you' to address and condemn the abuse victim directly, as if he or she is sitting in the audience and needs a rebuke, even before having come to the session for help. At times, it's unclear who 'you' even is. In line 336, for example, is he talking to the abuse advocate or to the victim? He has morphed these targets into one. In the Q&A, he admits he is speaking to an 'extreme' case, which is not only unwise but cruel.

**Next, the sacred authority which Fender calls on.**

Against abuse victims and their advocates, Fender positions and wields an immense amount of sacred authority. Much of this begins in line 57, when, having pathologised the hypothetical abuse victim, he goes on here to begin to position those he will recognise as experts. We will decide what your "facts" means. We have "wisdom", not you. These are the real victims, the long-suffering church courts, who suffer "a lot of work and a lot of grief and a lot of effort" (lines 19-20) because of the hardship that abuse victims put them through.

He emphasizes how old the Westminster Confession is (line 242) as a means to dismiss what he has already characterized as a modern, faddish concept of emotional abuse. In lines 225-235, he makes it clear that he and "every other officer of the church" has sworn an oath to uphold the WCF, the implication being that we will not listen to your case of emotional abuse because our oath forbids it. This oath functions as a contrast to the one who wishes to divorce because of abuse. We keep our oaths (line 339-341). "You" do not (see line 288).

The speaker also focuses in on a select number of passages, holding up his interpretation of Matthew 18 (lines 167ff) in opposition to the abuse victim who thinks "Your chief end is your own happiness." He neglects the words of his fellow PCA pastors, some of whom interpret Matthew 18 very differently. He likewise cites Jesus's words re divorce in Matthew 19 but fails to consider the different interpretations of abandonment, even within his own denomination. Fender frequently uses word 'process' throughout (line 263, 303, 353-354, 476, 480, 483, 498), a reference to the church courts, the PCA Book of Church Order, rendered indistinguishable from what God wants and what God has said (lines 181, 228, 243, 217-319, 322). This is also linked closely with his vow.

Shockingly, Fender also addresses the accused abuser, in lines 484-487, reassuring them that they will have opportunity to be heard. I note that in lines 66-72, Fender has already imagines himself as a hypothetical abuser, portraying himself as a victim of a false accusation and listing the suffering he might endure from that. What he does not mention is the statistics re: false accusations. His main point here is opportunity to tell his own side before any cautionary protective orders are in place. His empathy is with the one accused of abuse. Hearing the abuser's account is not the problem here. What is a problem Fender's narrative of someone falsely accused of abuse, centring that in his talk, and even taking the time to reassure someone who might be an abuser. All the while spending the rest of the talk undermining the concept of abuse, demonising and pathologising the one who might be suffering abuse and anyone who advocates for the victim of abuse – This is quite the contrast.

Finally, Fender calls on the audience to participate in his own sceptical approach to those who disclose abuse. In lines 458-476, he gives the audience instructions to be 'watchful' (aka to start

Transcript and Discussion of Matt Fender's 17 Jan 2021 Sunday school lesson on 'The Current Abuse and Victim Culture'  
by Dr. Valerie Hobbs

from a position of doubt) and then even to look out for specific language that will lead them to question an abuse narrative. This is ignorant of how such language works and what it can point to in the context of trauma.

### **Closing Comments**

In summary, in this talk, Fender creates an image of the black and white, clear-cut set of straightforward rules with no room for the pastorly wisdom or nuance that other pastors, some of whom are in his own denomination, practice regularly. Fender shows ignorance of the wealth of literature on emotional abuse and trauma. Instead, he sets up a caricature of the abuse victim and those who advocate for them. Nowhere does Fender present God's view of violence, God's love for his people nor even the Gospel itself. This is not just an uninformed or even cruel message. Worse, it is not even Christ-centred.

**Page 2: [1] Commented [VH16] Valerie Hobbs 20/04/2021 08:36:00**

This is a crucial part here. He is pathologizing victims, casting them as conspiracy theorists. He reveals that what he believes is that it is likely that an abuse victim is not really telling the truth. Again, has he read the extensive literature on how denial is one of the most common reactions to abuse, despite the fact that as

abuse advocate and founder of GRACE Boz Tchividjian notes, "Studies have shown false allegations are only somewhere between 1-7%."

So his biased assumption is that the abused is likely not really being abused.

**Page 2: [2] Commented [VH20] Valerie Hobbs 19/04/2021 15:26:00**

Extreme violence is cited as acceptable grounds – made acceptable because this is what it "has meant historically".

What does the Bible say? There seems little engagement with the nature of God, how God talks about violence and takes violence seriously. There is no engagement with God's warnings about the power of the tongue to destroy.

**Page 3: [3] Commented [VH34] Valerie Hobbs 20/04/2021 09:17:00**

We might not help you – that's the message. We aren't going to necessarily believe or aid you. We are starting from a position of skepticism and you have to prove it to us, meet our standards, tell it to us in a way that convinces us. Which is unlikely to happen.

**Page 11: [4] Commented [VH78] Valerie Hobbs 21/04/2021 09:51:00**

This is untrue. What he doesn't like is the fact that he might have to learn to exercise wisdom and discretion in considering emotional and physical neglect. He might have to listen to other experts. He might have to educate himself. And it's clear he doesn't want to do that. It is indeed true that emotional abuse is hard to discuss and identify.

One of the leading experts on emotional abuse, Sarakay Smullens, wrote this, in 2006:

"When we question why emotional abuse has been excluded from widespread discussion we find several possible explanations, beginning with the facts that emotional abuse is difficult to define and measure (O'Hagan, 1995), and that it is often of a covert nature, with no visible scars to mark its impact but rather wounds that take, in some cases, decades to surface (Hamarman & Bernet, 2000). Added to these intangibles is the transactional nature of this particular form of abuse; in Glaser's words, "Whereas physical and sexual abuse are in the nature of events, neglect and emotional abuse characterize the relationship between the caregivers and the child" (2004, p.98). Finally, emotional abuse may elude detection and focus because of its very pervasiveness in so many lives, families, and community and societal institutions (Smullens, 2002a, 2002b). At least one recent study has found emotional abuse to be, in fact, the most prevalent form of abuse (Sidebotham, 2000)."

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