

# OpenTheo

## Thinking Biblically About Abuse, with Jim Newheiser

August 24, 2021



### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this episode, Kevin is joined by Dr. James Newheiser, the Director of the Christian Counseling Program and Associate Professor of Christian Counseling and Pastoral Theology at RTS Charlotte. Attitudes toward abuse, both inside and outside the church, have changed dramatically within recent generations. How can pastors deal with this issue Biblically in their congregations?

Life and Books and Everything is sponsored by Crossway, publisher of *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*, by Sam Allberry.

In *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, Sam Allberry explains that all of us are fearfully and wonderfully made and should regard our physicality as a gift. He offers biblical guidance for living, including understanding gender, sexuality, and identity; dealing with aging, illness, and death; and considering the physical future hope that we have in Christ.

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“Always believe the victim.” [27:03 - 32:14]

“If you feel abused, then you were abused.” [32:14 – 36:36]

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Books and Everything:

What God Has to Say About Our Bodies, by Sam Allberry

When Words Matter Most: Speaking Truth with Grace to Those You Love, by Cheryl Marshall and Caroline Newheiser

## **Transcript**

(gentle piano music) - Readings and salutations. You are listening to life and books and everything. Good to have you with us.

I'm Kevin DeYoung, and Colin and Justin are not here, but I have a special guest that I'll be talking to. I'll introduce him in just a moment. So glad to have you listening with us again, as we roll on with this next season of life and books and everything as always, or at least as we have been for a number of months, we are glad to be sponsored by Crossway, grateful for their partnership and all of the good books that they put out.

And today, just want to highlight the newest from Sam Albury, what God has to say about our bodies. We live in a time where people are thinking, well, they're probably actually not thinking. They're just emoting and assuming, but they certainly have ideas about their bodies.

And the Bible has a lot to say about our bodies, chiefly that when we're Christians, we no longer are Lord of our bodies. Christ is, and that ought to have an impact on everything. So Sam's new book published by Crossway, you can check it out.

All right, I am joined today by my friend and colleague, Jim Newheiser, who teaches counseling at Reform Theological Seminary in Charlotte, was for many years before that, a pastor in California. Jim, welcome to the program. - Thank you, Kevin.

- I've really enjoyed getting to know you over, I guess you've been here five or six years in Charlotte. I've been here four years, but on the same faculty together and see you when your Baptist friends let you out to come to a Presbyterian church on Sunday evening, sometime you're there. Glad to have you as a friend and as a colleague.

Tell us just a little bit more about yourself. - As you mentioned, my main job is as the director of the Christian counseling program, which is really a biblical counseling program. Before that, we were in Esquito, California for 26 years as a pastor.

And for that I was six years a pastor of an underground church in Saudi Arabia. And so recent events in Afghanistan actually have really moved me a lot because I've been among believers in that part of the world for a part of my life and still keep in touch with some of them. - I didn't realize that about the church in Saudi Arabia.

Was this on like an American base or was actually in the country? You were there maybe you were in the country. - We were there for six years. It was underground English speaking expatriates.

So occasionally we did have, we had people from other Islamic countries coming. And even occasionally local people would come in Western dress. But it was a few hundred people of 30 different nationalities, meeting in homes, occasionally in embassies.

And then I got kicked out in 1987. - Oh really? - Yeah. - I didn't know that part of the story.

And you're married? - Yes, I've been married to Caroline for almost 42 years. Actually, since this is sponsored by Crossway, she has a book coming out with a friend next month with Crossway. - Oh, okay.

- The words matter most. So I'll probably get really good treatment for the rest of the day because I mentioned that. - Yeah, you should.

You should go check that out as well. And when you made the move from being a pastor for decades, what was that like? What convinced you? What now several years later? What do you really miss or not miss about the daily, weekly grind of pastoral ministry? - The bottom line for the decision was Psalm 90 where the Psalmist had teach us to number our days and established the works of our hands. And I concluded in the most difficult decision in my adult life to leave the church I love.

And quite frankly, San Diego, to come to Charlotte where it's humid and hot, but more so leaving friends and a great situation. But the idea of investing in the lives of men and women who would be serving the wider church, we determined that's how we could be most useful in kind of a later stage of our lives. - And what would you say is, and we'll get to our topic here in just a moment, but you said you lead the Center for Biblical Counseling or Christian Council.

Is there a difference still between biblical counseling, Christian counseling, regular counseling from a Christian? - Right, so words are usually defined by usage. And so the term Christian counseling is a great term in the sense. We want people to counsel Christianly.

But a lot of people use that term for what would be more integration is to counseling. People who want to get state licensed and would tend to want to counsel a lot of Christian conviction, but largely using the insights of psychology, which I would categorize as common grace insights. Whereas the biblical counseling movement is focused on the sufficiency of scripture to help people with their spiritual problems without denying the appropriateness of medicine when needed, and even the common grace insights of psychology can have value in a certain place.

But we would probably give a much wider view of where the Bible is the most important resource to help people with spiritual problems. - So your credentials, as it were, as a counselor, or being a Christian, having the spirit, knowing the Bible, being a pastor for all these years and being educated with various degrees. And now you teach a multitude of courses.

What are some of the courses that you teach at RTS? - I teach an introduction to counseling and marriage and family counseling. A course called typical problems in counseling, which deals with abuse and addiction and decision making. We assign your book for that.

And then I actually have the privilege of teaching a preaching course. I really miss consecutive expository preaching you'd asked earlier. That was the hardest thing probably that I still miss the most is just the weekly grind of studying a new passage I'd never really studied before and having the privilege of preaching it.

So I'm looking forward to preaching somewhere this Sunday night, actually. - Yeah, that's right. Thank you for doing that.

Well, we want to talk about an issue that has become, oh, it's always been important, but it's certainly been much more prominent in the church. And that's the way of Jim on life and books and everything to talk about abuse. And as far as I know, Jim, we're, this is just a conversation lots of people are having.

There's nothing in particular that's at the timing of this recording that is prompting this particular conversation. So when people think there's some, we're sub-tweeting or sub-podcasting something, but it is a continuing conversation and is really important. And I'll just put some of my cards on the table from the beginning and try to say this in the way that is, that people really believe what I'm saying.

And that is to say two things. First of all, abuse and we'll, I'm gonna ask Jim in a moment if he has a definition for us. But abuse is sinful.

It is often egregiously, heinously sinful. And I think we have seen over the past, I don't know how many decades that for too long in churches and not just in churches, that can be part of the problem to think that this is just a church problem, but it is a church

problem as well. Abuse has been a little spoken of, was not talked about as much as it should have or people were not given the proper tools to handle it legally, medically, criminally, and most importantly, spiritually.

So there is certainly, we want to say in the strongest terms possible that abuse is wrong and sinful, cover up of abuse is wrong. And sinful. And it's good that there is less tolerance for these sorts of things than perhaps their once was, even perhaps well-meaning people, just not knowing what to do.

So all of that is one thing worth saying. And then there's a second thing, which is as it happens with many cultural issues, to use the cliché that the pendulum can overcorrect or perhaps overcorrect is at the right term, because we want to correct 100%, but can maybe correct sometimes in ways that lead to more questions or in an effort to help hurting people can end up hurting other people. So there is an important conversation to have around abuse and Christians are having it, people in our culture are having it, but I fear that oftentimes it's very difficult wherever you think about it to really talk about these things and think through them theologically, biblically.

And one of the things that is important to remember that it is genre, and this is maybe one of my points and Jim, you can agree or disagree. But because these issues are traumatic, genuinely so, I think it certainly isn't coming upon any of us who talk about them to talk about them wisely and sensitively. At the same time, it's important to understand there's different genre of communication.

Sometimes I've written something on a blog and I try to be very sensitive talking about these or other issues and somebody may say something like, well is that how you would counsel somebody sitting across your desk as a pastor? And I'll say, well, no, because this person is not. If somebody's sitting there, my first response is gonna be, I'm so sorry, that's terrible and weep with those who weep and tell me more and ask all sorts of questions. So that doesn't give us a license to be rude or to be unthinking or uncaring towards people who have had very hard experiences.

But it does mean, just to remind us, we are having a conversation, Jim and I, a podcast to talk about this and think through it theologically and biblically. We are not through the interwebs trying to counsel people in that formal sense at this moment. Jim, anything you wanna say about that before I ask you the first question, what is abuse? - I agree with you that the situation you're addressing is very important and so as an example, my wife wrote a blog about how to help an angry husband and people said, well, what if your husband is beating you and doing this and this and this? And so, well, no, that's not what that blog was written for.

That was written for an entirely different situation. So I agree with exactly with you in terms of situationally, like even what we discussed today, we're speaking in broad terms and the best thing would be for people to have solid churches with godly pastors, elders

who would help them to walk through these very difficult situations. And quite frankly, one of my concerns is there are so many churches, pastors who are not equipped to do this well, be it on one end of the pendulum or the other.

And so I think it's so important that we help educate church leaders to deal wisely with these situations and to deal humbly with these situations. - So what is abuse? Is there an agreed upon definition? How do you understand it? - The language that's been helpful to me is a pattern of oppression or mistreatment of another person in like an intimate relationship. Normally you're talking about spousal abuse or intimate partner abuse.

And so not, I mean, obviously one major incident can qualify as abuse, but usually people are looking for some kind of ongoing pattern in a relationship. But even with a definition like that, it's really complicated because there are degrees of those behaviors and because we're all sinners, I can go through the definitions of all the kinds of abuse that can take place. And I think in most marriages to some degree, we've used money or the children or sex or we've said words that were wrong.

So abuse tends to be a matter of degree and repetition. Obviously there can be some events that are so severe. It jumps right into that category, but usually it's something that's an ongoing pattern of oppression.

And I hadn't thought of it before, but it makes sense. So you put in there, it's usually a personal intimate relationship. So somebody sees you in Central Park and doesn't know you and just punches you and steals your wallet and runs away.

We would call that some other kind of sin and a traumatic experience perhaps, but we don't normally label that abuse. - Right. - Yeah, it's often with people we know or people who have won our confidence and have this pattern of oppression.

I wonder, Jim, it seems to me that the word itself, you said earlier, words take on their usage and their meaning. And it's a perfectly fine English word to use. And so on the one hand, we certainly should use the word, it's helpful to use the word.

I think in most people mind it signals a kind of sin or a kind of infraction that is out of the ordinary. We never want to excuse ordinary sins as being not sinful. But the Westminster Confession does say that some sins are more grievous than others, are more egregious for all sorts of reasons.

So I think that the word is useful in that it signals to people, this is above and beyond the normal sort of wear and tear that happens in a human relationship with sinners. - Right, one of the most important lessons I've learned and something I need to confess repeatedly is in 40 years of ministry, I've learned so much about this and I was really wrong about many things in the past. But I think distinguishing in counseling between ordinary marital conflict and a pattern of abuse is very, very important.

And the wisdom now would be if there's really a pattern of abuse, you treat that differently often counseling the couple separately, as opposed to ordinary marital conflict where you work with them together. - And likewise, I think all of us in pastoral ministry, if we've been in it for any length of time, have had to learn on this and grow in this issue. So it's the humble of you to say that.

I think take child abuse of some kind. I think there was a time when pastors, and I am reticent to throw stones at them. I think they were doing what their instincts told them to do and what they thought was probably best.

Somebody comes and they hear of child sexual abuse and they begin thinking along familiar tracks of counseling and reconciliation. And so they might say, we'd like you to, well, Matthew 18 and you should confront this person. And then if this person says, I'm sorry, then you should forgive them and we should restore relationship.

And I wouldn't necessarily put those in the category of that the pastor was sinning in counseling in that way. But I think we can look now and say, at best, very unwise, unhelpful, probably made a hard situation even worse, ended up feeling like someone was maybe siding with the abuser rather than the victim. How do you think through things? And are we right at times to say, well, this is in a little different category that we need to handle that doesn't just plop down into a Matthew 18 matrix? - Yeah, I mean, 30 years ago, I feared child protective services thinking they were gonna take away the children from the people who spank or something.

And I've come to a different position now. First of all, when I've dealt with them, they've been usually reasonable, helpful. They've got huge problems to deal with and they're not really interested in spanking.

You're not entering people. But I think that it's really important to recognize that the abuse of a child, especially the sexual abuse of a child, is a crime and you're now in Romans 13 and not merely Matthew 18. And it's the job of the government to investigate when there's preponderors of evidence there may have been a crime and to punish.

And it's also been pointed out, especially there's been sexual abuse that if you go first to the perpetrator that may give him time to cover his tracks. And the government wants to get in and be the first investigator. So it's not our job as the church to do an investigation of a credible allegation of sexual abuse.

We need to let the government do its job. And the church can, alongside of that, deal with discipline, but it's a both and, not an either or. - Yeah, and that's really good.

And I think, I've had to learn and just check my own heart as these things are bound to happen at some point in almost every pastor's ministry, whether it happened under your watch or someone else's. There's going to be something. And I do think there is a real

need-jerk reaction in our hearts to think about our own dangers first and how I need to, no, rightfully, I wanna protect the church.

And what's gonna happen is this is gonna be a PR disaster and we'll maybe get to some of that because there are legitimate ways in which churches are castigated. And then there are unfair ways in which churches have been castigated. But I think it is fair to say that as pastors, we need to think first of all about, all right, how has this person been hurt? And how can we extend care as a church? And there may be allegations, some of which we, a particular church, which may say some of that's true, some of it's not, or it's shaded in a different way.

And there may come a time to try to help explain that. And yet if our first reaction is our own protection, that's probably not the best pastoral instinct. - Right, just because we've made such horrible mistakes collectively as the evangelical church where abusers have been allowed to continue to function, especially with children for a long, creative time.

And many people have been hurt. And so I think that's where we have to, not just, well, actually it does work in terms of self-protection because if you don't report really bad things may come upon your head, but just from the standpoint of righteousness. And to me it's protecting not just the present victim, but potential future victims because those who abuse children sexually, especially tend to do it many, many times before they're caught.

And so we must report for the sake of not just the children who are presently being harmed, but also for the sake of children who may be harmed. And I have cases where people come to me and say, well, this happened years ago. And now I'm an adult.

But if this person still has children around him, usually it's a him, then the government needs to investigate the allegations of what's happened in the past for the sake of those in the present, even if the person with whom you've spoken may be out of reach of the perpetrator. - I think I can share the general details of this story since it was 20 years ago, but it was early in pastoral ministry. And that's when this stuff was even, a lot has changed even in my 20 years.

And there was a man at the church, probably in his late 20s by then. And he came forward with his parents that he had been abused by a relative. And I mean, a flood of tears and emotions and absolutely believable and true what this man was saying.

And so the authorities got involved. And this is in a small town where everybody knows everybody and knows who's related to everybody. And eventually went to court.

And he is giving in graphic detail, as you need to sometimes with the medical terms and what happened and where this male relative abused him and touched him. And I went with the other pastor to meet with him before he was going to the courthouse in his



family and pray for him and say what he was doing was the right thing to bring this out into the open. And I hope it would be different now, but I'm not sure.

It was very divisive in the community and in the church because a whole lot of people felt like, why are you bringing this up? This happened a few years ago and you're now, this man, he said that he was sorry. And now you're airing your dirty laundry for everyone to see. And you hear, shouldn't we as Christians forgive and forget? And I remember that next Sunday at church, there were, I mean, it meant a lot to the family that some people would stand by them, but it was heartbreaking to see that many Christians looked as scans at them and were more upset with them for having brought this to light and involving the authorities who were prosecuting a case, then they were with the abuser who had done these things.

- Yeah, I think one of the great mistakes that many have made, including the church and even more so families, is they're more concerned about destroying the life of the abuser than protecting the present and future victims. And I've had to warn people, I said, if you bring this out into the open, you're not going to become more popular in your family. They want, often families just wanna make it quiet, make it go away, don't bring shame and scandal, same thing in the churches, where sometimes even the family of a victim will say, "We don't want our child to go through this investigation "or whatever, we just can keep our child safe "from the bad person." But the difficulty, biblically, would be, I still have an obligation first to obey the law, but also even more importantly, is to protect other victims.

And someone who is so penously hard of heart that he would sexually harm a child for his own pleasure is a danger, he is a pariah, he, we need to protect others from him. And it's likely he will continue to do this until he is caught and incarcerated. And they find churches to be soft targets and family members to be soft targets.

And so I've, I mean, I'm really glad you did that, 'cause I think many victims also would say when they finally did speak out, the family and even church kind of supported the perpetrator like, yeah, you should have been quiet because this person's life is, it's your fault, his life is gonna be ruined rather than the fact that he committed this horrible crime that's gonna be a big issue for the person or people who are victims for the rest of their lives. (soft music) - So given the fact that these dynamics of the human heart and the way in which the churches had a lot to learn and just honestly, many churches have made mistakes and I'm sure I've made mistakes. And I'm sure if I were a pastor in the 70s and 80s, I would have likely done the same things that all my colleagues were doing, well meaning, but we can look back and see where many of those best practices were not really best.

So given that reality and given how many victims have found people when they turned to, didn't believe them or didn't support them or thought they were the problem, we

understand the great weight and even the sense of needing to be your own advocate and needing advocates to see this through. At the same time, and just pivoting a little bit, because of the mistakes and sins and because of the energy and passion and experience behind all this, I think, and I think we share this together, that there can be dangers on the other side or at least not thinking perhaps as clearly as we ought to on some of these matters. And we end up hurting other people.

In an effort to help people who are hurting, we end up hurting other people. And you've written some really good blog posts over some more recently, but some go back to 2017 on the abuse pendulum. And I really like what you did there, Jim, is you walk through a number of sentences, slogans you might say, things that we hear, and you talked about the valid concern, the harm that can be caused, and then sort of resolved what's maybe a better way to put this.

And I'd like to just walk through a few of those because I think they're really practical, really helpful, and they'll meet pastors. We have pastors listening, but we have lots of non-pastors. I think they'll help all of us as Christians.

So one of them is you hear always believe the victim. What's the valid concern there? Right. I'd like to just take a slight step back in terms of when the pendulum, in my opinion, was in the other direction, from where I think it may be going now, is that I go back 30 years, and we were so concerned about protecting marriage from those who would divorce or separate you lightly.

And looking back, I've actually had to go back to women from 20, 30 years ago and say, I realize now that I should have done a better job of protecting you from a horrible situation and should have allowed you the freedom to be safe and encourage you to be safe better than I did at the time. So I wanna acknowledge as you already have that I think in general, even evangelicals have been so concerned to protect marriage, which God has joined, let no man separate, but we also have a duty to protect those who are oppressed. But as you said, there can be a reaction.

I think part of the reaction too is we've adopted secular methodologies and definitions of these things and lost sight of a scriptural perspective. And like you've mentioned, always believed the victim, a better way to put it would be, you always take an allegation of abuse seriously. If there's any question, the alleged victim should be made safe.

And if that means putting them, giving them a safe place to live by all means, but both men and women, oppressors even in the oppressed can be sinners. And I've run into cases in multiple occasions where people have realized the power of labeling somebody with a scarlet A of abuse and by making such an allegation, that's a way to cause harm to someone who you're angry. And I don't know the way of time, but I can tell you real cases where people have used false accusations to try to harm someone, or even a false accusation where they're in an unhappy marriage, which is a hard marriage.

And they know that abuse can be a get out of marriage free card and evangelicalism right now, when I think it may be more appropriate for them to keep striving to keep their marriage vows. - Yeah, because it is so heinous, and words have potency, and there's a few of them, racist, abuser, there can be other ones, if that scarlet A comes around your neck, it's usually, it's sometimes assume the worst first. And then if somebody is cleared of something, that's an afterthought, and you don't really hear about that.

But to your point, and we see the, and we often see the statistics that it's very rare that somebody lies about abuse. I wonder how do you process that? Because that's, that I can hear somebody saying, well Jim and Kevin, you almost virtually always can believe the victim, because nobody makes these things up. - Well, the Bible says you can't treat someone as guilty without proof.

And a single allegation can't be used against someone, a single person's allegation can't be used against someone to destroy them. And in terms of statistics, people who are advocates in their experience, by the way, I admire people who are willing to be advocates for victims of abuse. And I also would say their experience would be that so many victims do remain silent too long, then they're not believed, they don't get help.

And so I understand the experiences that there's probably a bigger problem with victims not being believed or not even being willing to speak out and they need a voice. So I get it, that's a really big problem. But also women can be sinners as well as men.

And I have had cases, there are cases where false allegations are made. And so again, we always take it seriously, but from the standpoint of the government, they have to investigate if it's a crime. But even in terms of the church, having to counsel people, whether they're grounds for divorce, or which is usually what's being aimed at, or whether you put a person in their discipline for being oppressive with his wife, you have to investigate beyond the allegation and some have misused the accusation.

- Right, and it may be worth distinguishing someone who tells a detailed horrific story of what somebody did to manipulate them. You could still, scripture tells us someone could still not be telling the truth there, but I think that we always take seriously, and that's probably less likely that somebody is not telling the truth and someone who maybe has interpreted their own experiences with certain labels or categories when it may not fit, which brings us to another one of these. If you feel abused, then you were abused.

What are we getting at that's helpful there and what might be a danger with that saying?  
- Right, well a lot of that just kind of fits our culture right now, where it goes into many other areas like racism, like you said, where people accuse others of microaggressions or you made me feel this way there for your guilty, and so I think you have to evaluate what people actually said and did. The Bible even says we should try to assume the best of each other rather than the worst of each other. And so, again, there are people who

have swung the other way in my opinion, and so they're looking for a reason to make an accusation, and I realize some people listening to this will say, but that's rare, and I agree, it may be rare, but it does exist, and so the Bible also offers protection against false accusation, and there is an obligation, like I said, not to look at what someone said or did, or the expression on their face and immediately label them the worst possible way.

- Yeah, it seems that common sense and sanctified common sense would have us as much as possible, not look the other way for genuine oppression, but I do think there is concept creeped with a lot of these things. Abuse, trauma, oppression are all important words. Oppression's a biblical word, I don't think, maybe abuse is, you would tell me, is abuse in the Bible in our English Bibles? - I think it's in a couple translations somewhere, but it may not be the way we use it.

- Right, right, and trauma wouldn't be. So they're important words, but there's a danger. There's a danger with concept creep, not only the danger that some people might get the label of an abuser or an oppressor when it's not accurate, but there's also a danger in time to victims of those things.

It's like, if everything is mission, nothing is mission. If everything is traumatic in trauma, then how are we to help those? So if your words are violent, and words can certainly hurt people deeply, but if a microaggression is oppression just as physically beating someone is oppression, and all of those are trauma, and all of those are this, if they all get the same label without any differentiation, in the long run, that doesn't really help the victims, because then everybody is a victim in some way, and that's just not accurate. - I think I need to put up.

One of the things I had to learn is early in ministry, the idea was unless there's blood, broken bones, and bruises, it's not abuse. And I think in common grace, there are people who have recognized, even outside of biblical circles, that you can horribly oppress someone without being physically violent. And so the idea of verbal, and I've had a case of a woman abusing a man by screaming at him while he's trying to sleep, and so there are more to oppression than physical violence, but with all of those categories, there are degrees.

None of us would like a video of worst five minutes of 40 years of marriage played for the world to see, or our worst thing we ever said or did, about the kids, or our wife, or whoever. So I think degree is very important, and I think sometimes you see a sin that may be a three in my perception, that's treated like a nine, and like you said, then it makes a real nine seem less significant. The other aspect that's really difficult is God is omniscient, and what seems to me to be a three, and is being reported as a nine, maybe a six.

- Right. - And so that's tough, but I fully agree with you that there's a big problem right

now with a raised voice, or a harsh word that's fairly rare, being treated as if, you know, on the same level of something much more habitual and oppressive than that. - How about another one of these? This is really dicey, so you're gonna wanna say some things on both sides, but you sometimes hear it's never the victim's fault, or we have absolute hermetically sealed categories.

Victim, victimizer, and the victimizer has, you know, deserves almost no really attempt of understanding, and the one who's a victim by definition could not have sinned or contributed in any way. How should we understand this in ways that's sensitive and yet scriptural? - Right, so I think where the abuse, pendulum may have swung too far, and I think some of it resembles critical theory, is where the person with power is guilty, and the person who doesn't have power is always completely innocent, and the Bible has a more nuanced view of human nature. It doesn't mean people are equally guilty, it doesn't mean both the abusers or oppressors, and there are some situations that are so heinous, you really have someone who's fundamentally righteous and someone who's fundamentally wicked, but the reality is there are a lot of situations, and one of my first abuse cases over 30 years ago, the wife would admit that she would deliberately provoke her husband until he would hit her in her way of winning the argument with him getting so angry he would strike her.

Again, there's no excuse for him striking her, it's horrendous, it's disciplinable, and yet she had guilt, even with reference to sexual abuse, especially her thinking of an adult, an endurotomy, it says someone who is approached for sex, an engaged woman, she's supposed to cry out. Now the person who goes after her sexually is far more guilty, but she has some responsibility to resist in that situation. Now I understand also that victims tend to be quiet, they tend not to want to speak out, which is one reason why parents and church leaders need to educate potential victims of sexual abuse, to cry out because that may not be their instinct, and again, the level of guilt is infinitely greater for the person who perpetrated the act, but we are responsible not to provoke others, we are responsible, how we act in situations where these things may happen, and it's not just that the powerful are completely guilty all the time, and those who have less power, the oppressed, can have no guilt whatsoever.

- The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. So there's, and I'll get to it in a minute, it is different that it's a woman with a man, and just the power dynamic of physical strength can be an added layer, but you have Potiphar's wife, she's clearly in a position of power over Joseph, and is enticing Joseph, it is threatening Joseph, it costs Joseph his livelihood, almost costs him his life, so he has to pay a huge cost, she's manipulating, we would say, bullying, we might say gaslighting, we would say all these things, and Joseph says, how could I commit this great sin? So he says, even with all of those things being true, it would have been a great sin. Okay, that's not the only type of category, and it's different if you're dealing with a minor, it's different if someone is physically overpowering you, you have no will in the situation, but there is an important lesson there that Joseph's with

all of that, and her sin would have been greater.

He nevertheless says, this would be a great sin for me to give into this. I read a story not too long ago of a man in Christian ministry who I gather reading between the lines had committed to an adulterous relationship and facing some consequences for that, but now looking back was explaining how it was really an abusive situation, and I don't remember all the particular details, it was an anonymous thing that was written, but the woman in a trip or some private setting got him in and made an advance at him and said, you need to have sex with me, and otherwise I'm gonna allege these things, I'm gonna claim these things, you're gonna lose your job, I'm gonna do this, all of these things that I guess she was in a position to hold over his head, and so he did, and had sex with her, and looking back was describing himself entirely, it seemed to me as a victim. Well certainly, if all that is true, there were some egregious sins that the woman was committing, and was a victim, and was manipulating him and threatening him and putting him into an awful situation, and yet if we can't say that he also sinned, maybe less so, and maybe it's different, I know there's again differences when men and women are in the shoes on the other foot, but you're so right, I mean Jim I think, that scripturally, biblically, we have to come at these things and say, the Bible has other categories, the Bible has more nuance, the Bible understands, and this has always been one of the mantras I've appreciated about CCF material, is that we are always sinners and sufferers, all of us at the same time, and not an equal measure, not an equal degree, but it seems like when we get into some of these categories, we just lose sight of nuance, or other sort of categories, and it's just all one thing, or all the other.

- I think a lot of what's happened is there's been, even in the evangelical church, there's been an adoption of the narrative of the world and psychology that doesn't recognize biblical categories in terms of the oppressor and the oppressed, and I also was very disturbed to read and listen to a testimony of someone who claimed it, because someone in authority over her lurched into a consensual sexual relationship, she is not a violator, she is merely a victim, and if you read the secular literature, that's what they will say, but the Bible teaches otherwise, that you can be both a victim of oppression and a violator, and that you did not respond to the oppression in the way that the Lord would have you to do according to scripture, in a grown person in their 30s, having someone in authority approach them sexually, then they happen to many, many people in the course of the lifetime, and Joseph was willing to go to prison, and by the way, he's also an illustration of a false accusation of sexual abuse from Potiphar's wife, but he was willing to suffer the consequences to do that which pleases God in spite of all the pressure he was under, and that doesn't mean, again, you're dealing with children, it's an entirely different situation, but I think for adults, there can be shared responsibility even if one party is far more guilty. - Man, we may need to add another episode to have Jim back, our time is running short, but let me ask a couple closing questions, and I'll try to keep my mouth shut and give you the floor and see if you can answer these briefly, but one,

you do a lot of teaching on marriage, you've done a lot of marriage counseling over the years, what do you want to say to help people in this whole messy category of abuse and automatic, I can get divorced, what are the unbiblical extremes in either direction, in particular, thinking of the marriage relationship? - Right, so what God has joined, let no man separate, and so when there's a situation where abuse is alleged or even may have taken place, just like if there's been adultery, my first effort in counseling is going to be to try to bring the guilty to repentance, obviously, an abuse to keep the victims safe, and yet with a long-term goal of trying to get the couple back together, and I appreciate many counselors who have written from that perspective, biblically, with all the emphasis upon it, they need to be separated while we make sure the wife and the children are safe, by all means, but let's make every effort to restore the marriage, and I have a good friend who, female, who is in an impressive, oppressive, abusive relationship, and they worked it through and they're together, and it's one now which much better reflects Christ in the church, this can happen because of the power of the gospel, yes, those who are oppressors, abusers can change, as the fruit of the Spirit is brought forth in them, I also do believe, according to 1 Corinthians 7, that this could be a form of abandonment by an unbeliever that would require in a solid church, a process of discipline where you have someone who is not repenting of horribly oppressive behavior, and so I think it could fall under that as a category, but that is not the first place I want to go. I would also say that when in doubt, in terms of, because I'm not omniscient and I don't really know how bad it is definitively, that if the person who believes they're oppressed believes they're endangered, by all means, they have the right to live separately while we figure out what's really going on, and so it's not you force them to live under the same roof where the person being mistreated is terrified, by all means, we're not sure, you can, we're not gonna push you too hard.

I think it's released in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul even says, you know, don't separate, but if you do, don't remarry, either get back together, but there's a situation Paul is allowing for a separation without, in my opinion, going back to 1 Corinthians 5 and saying, now we're gonna discipline you. So I think we get, if someone thinks they're being oppressed and they need to be a part, it's largely their choice, but we want to try to bring oppressors to repentance and bringing forgiveness in, but we can't force the issue, but we don't want to, I think, in some cases, I've seen actually quite frankly, I've had a big problem with women, I think that should have separated because it's so horrible, and they hang in there, and they hang in there, and they hang in there, and then you have others who I think are looking for a way to get out of a marriage to a guy's kind of a loser, even though it's not really abusive or oppressive. So I've seen both things, and we need pastoral wisdom.

This is also where you brought it up briefly. You need a woman involved as an advocate for the woman who is in the situation rather than her being in a room full of men, and ideally a woman who is biblically wise and has some experience in this area to help her

speak when she may have a hard time speaking up for herself and someone who can address the male leadership of the church and help them, perhaps to see what we're missing. - Yeah, that's really helpful.

Last category briefly. I mean, it seems with so much of this, I know I've used the word, we've talked about pendulum swing or overreaction, and again, there's no over-correction if you're just correcting. And almost everything, if we can say maybe from the advocacy wing of things, most everything is, in a certain place in context, is a right instinct and is helpful and is designed to protect and to help folks.

It simply seems to me that biblically, we can't drop every scenario into, okay, here, we got what the literature says about abuse, and so you've done something and I feel bad about it. It drops into that category now. I can't talk to you, I need to bring many others with me because I'm in an unsafe situation.

It's just the way in which really necessary well-meaning precautions and reminders and wisdom and biblical principles get brought to bear that then become either a one-size-fits-all or doesn't deal with the degrees in which people are offended and hurt and sin. And all that leads to my final point that so much of this has to do with authority, and I'm gonna do on the one hand on the other hand, on the other hand, and this is one of the things that I've had to learn, because generally my experiences in life, I haven't had horrendous experiences with people in authority, and I'm a pastor and I'm in positions of authority, and I realize that my instinct is to think, yeah, people make honest mistakes, but usually, if I hear that the person, they're probably doing their best, they're probably trying to make a hard decision, and maybe they look back and realize that wasn't wise and we could have done that better. So I know there is a tendency, I wanna give the benefit of the doubt, and I think there's something biblical about that, but I have to be honest that some of that is what I have experienced in my position, what I haven't experienced, and I remember listening to a Jewish author who used the phrase, some people like me may lack a catastrophic imagination, whereas if you understand how bad things can really be and how oppressive people can really be.

And so I want to learn from that, I want to hear that, I want to understand my own gut level, and yet on the other hand, if we communicate subtly or not so subtly, that authority is bad, that's demonstrably unchristian. We have a father, a heavenly father who's an authority over us, and good, well, exercise authority is a great gift. And so I think there's a danger, as we've tried to understand as a church, well, really sometimes people in authority absolutely do the wrong thing in really oppressive ways.

And yet, if that means my instinct is always to distrust authority, to catastrophize everything that happens, and to figure that if you're in authority, whatever allegations you get, you probably deserve, that's not biblical either. So I'll give you the last word, Jim. - Yeah, I think a really big problem right now, and I think it does go along with critical



theory, is that the mistakes that churches have made, and Christians have made, dealing with the problem of abuse, is being used to undermine complementarianism, and to undermine male leadership in the church, and male leadership in the home, because some churches have failed to protect women, and some men have been terrible leaders, and the answer is not to destroy what God has established, it's to do it right.

And I've had cases where I've helped pastors, dealing with their first case of abuse, and to help open their eyes, that they're having the wool pull over their eyes, the sky's playing them, he's manipulative, I've seen this before, you need to really protect the wife, you need to find a woman to help us. I mean, we need to do a better job of using the authority God has given us. We need to teach men to do a better job of being Christ-like leaders in their home, but we should not use the failures of authority to undermine what the Bible teaches about these things, and there are people even in our circles, who are trying to totally destroy complementarianism because of some bad examples, and that would not be best for anybody.

- The Bible is true even when people misuse it, and you see that the devil knows how to misuse true things, and true sentences, the devil knows how to misuse scripture, misapply it, so we have to keep going back to the scriptures, and yes, and lead the way in saying, no, you are misusing this scriptural principle, but if we end up in a position, and it'd probably be in our circles implicitly, more than explicitly, where authority can never be trusted, and all sorts of authority from elders, to husbands, to fathers, on down is suspect, then we're not only outside of the realm of what the Bible teaches, but in the end, we're not really going to help the people that we mean to help, because the antidote to bad authority is not no authority. It's authority biblically exercised, and lovingly and humbly administered. - Jim, thank you so much for taking time.

I know that you're on a trip. If you can't see this on the podcast, he has a wonderful t-shirt representative of a large theme park in Florida, and so glad that you're with us, and it's good to be your friend and colleague at RTS, and forward to seeing you at Christ Covenant when you're there. Thank you, Jim.

- Thank you, it's been a pleasure, and I'm so thankful to God for you talking about hard things, and may God help us to do so in a humble, balanced way. - Amen, so until next time, glorify God and join him forever, and go read a good book.

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