I abused by the age of eighteen. The majority of these abuse victims is that I am not the only one. What is so sad about my story is that I am not the only one to tell. I knew my secret must be enabling my father to continue their secrets. Meanwhile, more abuse victims were added to his list. People who knew of his sin chose to look the other way or decided not to "make waves." They kept their secrets. Meanwhile, more victims were added to his list. I realized my silence was enabling my father to continue his criminal activities. I knew my secret must be told. What is so sad about my story is that I am not the only one with a secret. Studies show that as many as one in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by the age of eighteen. The majority of these abuse victims will be abused by family members or trusted family friends. It is time to tell the secret. 

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

Silence Is Not Always Golden 

Some Secrets Must Be Told 

by Hope Graham*

It is time to acknowledge that this evil not only occurs in the secular world, but is also a reality in churches today. Today, the secret enables abusers to continue their sinful behavior. When my secret was revealed to members of our church, several women in our congregation shared similar secrets. One woman was abused by a pastor to whom she had gone for counseling. One woman who attended a school for missionaries’ kids witnessed sexual abuse by dorm parents. Two women told of their abuse by a former deacon in the church. 

Churches are finally starting to address the problem that there is an opportunity. This abuse continued until I was seventeen or eighteen. I cannot tell you how many times I was raped by my father—but it was something I constantly dreaded. Each day as I came home from school, I would pray, “Oh Lord, help him not to be home,” or “Lord, please help him to stop.” But the abuse didn’t stop. I felt trapped—a prisoner in my own home.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I realized my silence was enabling my father to continue his criminal activities. I knew my secret must be told. 

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

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

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

Contrary to what some might say, when we correct abuse behavior, we are not being unloving or unforgiving—we are teaching good character and a right self-image.

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

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

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

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

Others have mistreated God’s grace and forgiveness with the removal of all consequences. But we need to remember the examples in God’s Word of Moses and David—godly men who sinned and who had been forgiven of their sin yet still faced the consequences of their actions. God will not bless our churches if we allow immorality and sin to reign. We sing of God’s never-changing attributes, but we expect to be victorious in our spiritual battles if we are harboring and protecting criminals?

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

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

* The name has been changed for protection.

Alarming Statistics

- Studies show that from 25 to 33 percent of girls and 5 to 15 percent of boys will be sexually abused by the age of 18 (http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/2008/001/sexualabuse.htm).
- The majority of these abuse victims will be abused by family members or trusted family friends. Only a small percentage are abused by strangers (http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/2008/001/sexualabuse.htm).
- The name of this abuser has been changed for protection.
- This means that in all likelihood, out of every ten men you know, and out of every four women you know, at least one has a secret. Some of them may have been abused only once, some may have been abused numerous times by the same abuser, and others may have had several different abusers from the same family. 

Surviving the Name of Christ when we keep secrets.
Glimpse of the Lord’s passion regarding this matter—and hopefully directly, if we examine the situations surrounding its writing and sage from Isaiah. While it does not identify the issue of child abuse sufficiently motivated by these. Consider, however, this well-known passage that moves us to address such things; but alas, we are not always sufficiently moved by God’s passion toward those who were guilty of oppressing them. The fiery prophet demanded that God’s people embrace His standards and passion of a loving God who cares deeply for the helpless and oppressed. He called His people to return to the principles and application of true justice. He called on the leaders of Judah to relieve those who had been oppressed and to defend those who were legally helpless.

**God’s Passion and Compassion for the Abused**

**Observations from Isaiah 1:17**

by John Revell

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17 NIV)

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

**Relieve the Oppressed, Correct the Oppressor**

In the opening of his famous declaration in Isaiah 1:17, the fiery prophet demanded that God’s people embrace His standards of justice, but then he continued with three commands that naturally flowed out of God’s standards of justice. First, he commanded the leaders and people of Judah to embrace the oppressed (verse 2) or correct the oppressor (verse 3).

There is some debate among scholars as to the correct translation of this phrase. Actually, there is good support for either translation, and in fact, both ideas may be satisfied in this command. To relieve the oppressed requires a proper legal response to the oppressor. And, to correct the oppressor is to relieve the oppressed. When Isaiah presented this mandate, he could have had at least two different groups of oppressed people in mind. The first group was the poor who had been abused by the rich. He rebuked the leaders of Judah for plundering and crushing the poor (3:14, 15). In their day, the rich were illegally seizing the land of the poor, and when they attempted to respond by taking the landowners to court, the corrupt courts and civil leaders sided with the wealthy, leaving the poor with no legal recourse. Consequently, God instructed His people to stand as their advocate and boldly demanded relief from their oppressors.

In addition to the needs of the poor, God also showed a special concern for those who were victims of violent crimes. In verse 15, He accused the worshippers of raising bloodstained hands in prayer and accused some of shedding innocent blood. These references, and others, seem to picture a general condition of widespread violence in the land. Victims suffered at the hands of the ruthless, but because money could buy acquittal, the victims had no legal recourse. However, God was deeply concerned for those who suffered unjustly, so He stood in their defense and demanded relief. Beyond the picture of general violence was the very-specific travesty of child sacrifice to the pagan deity Moloch, which had not only become acceptable in the land, but was practiced by their very king Ahaz. The awesome act defined the very heart of God’s direct commands, and in His response we see a glimpse of God’s deep compassion for those who suffered mercilessly at the hands of adults who chose to ignore God’s timeless commands and principles.

Defend the Helpless

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He took them into the wilderness and established a covenant with them in which He would view the people of Israel as “His people” and they would view Him as “their God.” In this relationship, God would treat them as His own “treasured possessions,” pouring His affection, blessings, and love upon them (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). They, in turn, were to focus their love and obedient faithfulness upon Him (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). In this unique and loving relationship, God identified them as His very special group (Deuteronomy 7:6). Their deliverance from slavery and very existence as a nation was a demonstration of the special relationship they shared. The nature of the Jewish people was that they had been lovingly chosen. Furthermore, in God’s instruction to His people He indicated that because of this special and unique relationship, they were to be like Him. God identified Himself as holy, and so He called His people to be holy as well (Leviticus 19:2). The Lord identified several places that He viewed as “detestable,” and He expected His people to emulate these same things as detestable. God’s deliverance from bondage and the establishment of this special relationship should have moved God’s people to eagerly embrace His concerns and values.

**Why God’s People Should Be Concerned**

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He took them into the wilderness and established a covenant with them in which He would view the people of Israel as “His people” and they would view Him as “their God.” In this relationship, God would treat them as His own “treasured possessions,” pouring His affection, blessings, and love upon them (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). They, in turn, were to focus their love and obedient faithfulness upon Him (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). In this unique and loving relationship, God identified them as His very special group (Deuteronomy 7:6). Their deliverance from slavery and very existence as a nation was a demonstration of the special relationship they shared. The nature of the Jewish people was that they had been lovingly chosen.

Furthermore, in God’s instruction to His people He indicated that because of this special and unique relationship, they were to be like Him. God identified Himself as holy, and so He called His people to be holy as well (Leviticus 19:2). The Lord identified several places that He viewed as “detestable,” and He expected His people to emulate these same things as detestable. God’s deliverance from bondage and the establishment of this special relationship should have moved God’s people to eagerly embrace His concerns and values.

Finally, God expected His people to reflect the nature of God to the neighboring nations. When God instructed His people to obey His commands, He told them that the neighboring nations would see their obedience and realize that they belonged to God (Deuteronomy 28:1–9). He also pointed out that if they obeyed and followed Him, other nations would see and respect their wisdom (Deuteronomy 4:6–8). This pointed directly to God, for it was He who had chosen them. The people’s actions were supposed to send a message to the world about God’s greatness and love. Because of His nature and relationship with Judah, God’s people were supposed to reflect His concern in these areas of relief for the oppressed and defense of the helpless. When the world looked at their behavior, it should have viewed a living illustration of God’s love and compassion in each of these areas.

So, how does this apply to our responsibilities as Christians in protecting our children? It begins by looking at God’s words and reflecting on the history of His people. Our Father is still concerned for those who are victims of violence and oppression.
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today's world? Does God expect us to reflect His priorities in the same manner?

When we look to the New Testament, we find some striking similarities and expectations. It teaches that through the blood of Christ, God has delivered us from cruel bondage to sin (Romans 6:17-18) and established "a new covenant" with us (Luke 22:20). Those who have been miraculously delivered from this slavery to sin are also called a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

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

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

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

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

Implications

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

Our Father is still concerned for those who are victims of violence and oppression. He remains opposed to the destruction brought through sexual immorality and perversion. He is just as resolved in His concern for the helpless today as when He indicted Judah for their failure in this regard. But if we fail to call on our resolve in His concern for the helpless today as when He indicted Judah for their failure in this regard. But if we fail to call on our

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

The Trust Factor

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

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

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

No Discrimination

Studies clearly show that child molesters are from all walks of life—there are no ethnic, economic, religious, educational, or gender barriers. Both men and women are abusers, and both girls and boys are victims. Child molestation is an equal opportunity destroyer—given the opportunity, it will destroy children and families from all walks of life.

Recidivism

From my own interviews with perpetrators, victims, and mental health counselors, it is undeniable that many perpetrators have multiple victims and abuse them multiple times. It is clear that when given the opportunity, a significant percentage of these—Christians, as well as non-Christians—without a past record of sexual abuse will repeat that offense. A person who has used his or her position of trust to sexually abuse a child simply should not be allowed to remain in that position of trust.

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

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

Cooperate Within the System

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

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

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

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

Janice L. Lafferty is a member of Woodstock Mennonite Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and office and editorial assistant in the SBC Executive Committee's Office of Convention Relations. In the 1980s, she served ten years working with Child Protection Services, as a court appointed case worker, and as an Adult Probation Officer in Texas.
Tragically, when we deny the sin, it enables offenders to really happen. Things could happen in our midst—so we convince ourselves it never happened. Often is disbelief and denial. We do not want to believe that such a thing could happen in our midst. We do not want to believe that such a thing could happen in our midst—we convience ourselves it never really happened.

Tragically, when we deny the sin, it enables offenders to continue in their sin and further intimates victims into not speaking up. Fear no one will believe them.

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

The Lord expects His people to take appropriate action within the church when they recognize sins (Matthew 18:15-20). We must not only obey the Lord, but also for conscience’ sake not only because of wrath (Romans 13:11-14). Therefore you must be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience’ sake (NA SB).

But if you do evil, be afraid; for he who does evil is not afraid of the good. But if you do evil, be afraid for he does not fear the One who is able to execute wrath. Therefore you must be subject, not only for fear of wrath but also for conscience’ sake (NA SB).

Stop Excusing the Sin

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

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

Once again let’s look at the example of Saul. When Samuel indicated to Saul that he knew Saul had brought back the animals and Saul knew he could no longer deny the sin, he chose to excuse the sin by saying: ‘The troops took sheep and cattle from the plunder’ (1 Samuel 15:21). Saul excused his disobedience by blaming others for his sin. When they can no longer deny their sin, many offenders will excuse it by blaming the victims, or others, or their circumstances. In one recent case involving a pastor, the church people were blaming the other instead of the guilty party enough for their pastor.” When God confronted Adam with his sin, Adam blamed Eve—and, by implication, God—for his disobedience (Genesis 3:12).

As hard as it is to believe, many offenders who claim to be Christians will blame God for their vile behavior. They say ‘God made me do this’ or ‘God gave me these desires.’ In each of these, the assumption is that because of various external circumstances, their actions are understandable and excusable—but that reasoning will never stand up before God.

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

Stop Minimizing the Sin

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

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

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

Notice that Saul not only tried to deny and excuse his disobedience but also tried to minimize the sinfulness of it by reasoning with Samuel that the animals were saved to sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:5).

Proverbs 21:5 says: To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice of a sheep (NA SB).

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

Stop Breaking the Law

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

Consider what God says to the church in Romans 13:3-5: For rulers hold up a terror against wrongdoers. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but for conscience’ sake. For he is God’s minister to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. But if you do evil, be afraid for he does not fear the One who is able to execute wrath.

Therefore you must be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience’ sake (NA SB).

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

Proverbs 18:5 says: It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to be an enemy of the righteous. However, it is not good to be partial to the wicked or to be an enemy of the righteous. The Levite stands them both (NA SB).

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

Reflections from Jude 4

by Dale Ingraham

Distorting the Grace of God

When they can no longer deny their sin, many offenders will excuse it by blaming the victims, or others, or their circumstances.
A human beings simply specks of cosmic dust blown on the winds of fate? Is there no meaning or purpose to existence? Or, has each human being been created with purpose and meaning, and if so, what is that purpose?

We must realize first and foremost that we need to seek God’s face in our time of need. Second Chronicles 7:14 reminds us:

“If my people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”

David, the shepherd-king of Israel, gives the answer in a lyrical and beautiful description of our place in the universe in Psalm 8: “Lord, our Lord, how magnificient is Your name throughout the earth! You have covered the heavens with Your majesty,” he marvels.

“When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars which You have set in place, what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?”

You made him less than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him Lord over the works of Your hands; You put all things in subjection under his feet. We reflect the image and glory of the firstborn of creation.

“Man made him less than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him Lord over the works of Your hands; You put all things in subjection under his feet.”

And when the abuse is brought to light, innocent people are not healed immediately, but we judge a person who has been ravaged spiritually and emotionally by how quickly or slowly the healing comes.

In his foreword to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission publication, Our Southern Baptist Heritage of Life, my friend Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School, warns of the “danger of turning from the collective societal devaluation of human life itself. The trends offer a chilling parallel with the infamous genocides of Hitler. Once the German people rejected the premise that all human life is created by God and is sacred to Him, it became possible to do virtually anything to at least some human beings.”

The first victims of the Third Reich’s diminishing of human life were not German Jews, but mentally challenged German boys and girls who were decreed to have Lebensunwertes Leben—lives unworthy of life.

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

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

Available from The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

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The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Reading the Fruit of “Life Devalued” Child Abuse and Neglect by Richard Land

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SBC LIFE SPECIAL REPORT

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

by Richard Land

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“If my people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”

David, the shepherd-king of Israel, gives the answer in a lyrical and beautiful description of our place in the universe in Psalm 8: “Lord, our Lord, how magnificient is Your name throughout the earth! You have covered the heavens with Your majesty,” he marvels.

“When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars which You have set in place, what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?”

You made him less than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him Lord over the works of Your hands; You put all things in subjection under his feet.

When the abuse is brought to light, innocent people are not healed immediately, but we judge a person who has been ravaged spiritually and emotionally by how quickly or slowly the healing comes.

Conclusion

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

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

Dale Ingram is a pastor of Curtis Baptist Church in Addison, New York, and co-founder with his wife Faith, a victim of childhood sexual abuse, of Speaking the Truth in Love Ministries, established to address the issue of Child Abuse and Neglect because we have forgotten God and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. The wholesale abortion of approximately one third of our children for more than three decades has brutalized and desensitized our society and has caused the collective societal devaluation of human life itself.

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

Available from The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention
Prudence, Protection, and Church Policies

by Joe Langford

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

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

The purpose of this article is to assist churches by: 1) recommending some simple but critical steps in considering a candidate; 2) identifying guidelines that must be followed if an outside company— a consumer reporting agency (CRA)—is used for background checks; and 3) clarifying important differences that exist in the practice and process for all job candidates and volunteers, including careful scrutiny of the application and resume.

Simple But Critical Steps

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

- Carefully look at all dates provided on applications for any employment gaps. If a gap exists, candidates should completely clear the missing information with the understanding that it will be confirmed. For example, if they worked a part-time job for a brief period of time (and did not list it on the application) they need to provide missing data for your confirmation.
- Confirm that the educational information provided is correct. Even if no graduation date is provided, enrollment dates can be verified. This is true for high school, college, and seminary enrollment.

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

Components of Compliance—Providing Disclosure and Gaining Permission

While it may seem strange to a church, a thorough background check should be performed for every candidate—paid or volunteer—to rule out any criminal history. While many components of a thorough background check can be gathered without using an outside agency, the assistance of a CRA may be necessary to retrieve accurate "hands-on" criminal history records, sexual offender checks, criminal database information, additional residential addresses not disclosed by a candidate, and other vital information. When a CRA is used, there are specific federal (Fair Credit Reporting Act) and state requirements that the employer and CRA must follow. In general, those requirements center on proper disclosure, notification, and responsiveness to disputes.


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

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

Understand What You Are Receiving

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

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

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

The benefit from these databases is the fact they cover millions of records from all over the United States, they are instantly available, and are a relatively inexpensive way to increase the effectiveness of the church criminal search candidate. These databases may find criminal records in a county where the candidate never lived nor worked and excluded the record from their application.

c. County criminal searches are conducted by individuals who research the files by going directly (physically or electronically) to the courthouse within that jurisdiction. These records are...
When Child Abuse Is Experienced, Suspected or Discovered

by James P. Guenther

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

on church property or in connection with a church activity...

by a church member or participant, whether serving as a volunteer or an employee of the church...

• toward a victim who is a church member or participant in church activities...

• when knowledge of or information about the abuse came to a church member, volunteer, or employee as the result of their relationship to the church...

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

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

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

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

Report to Public Authorities

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

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

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

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

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

• in some states, clergy-penitent privilege is a professional code of conduct rather than a legal right granted under the appropriate law codes...

• if the minister learns of any abuse from another source other than the perpetrator of the crime, it is not a confession and is not covered under the privilege...

• if the perpetrator has told anyone else other than the minister about the abuse, privilege has already been waived...

• if a minister has a moral objection to sharing information learned in a pastoral counseling session, a minister may wish the legal and moral responsibility of protecting one of God’s children over against the moral code of ethics of his position...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Available from LifeWay

The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse
Dan B. Allender
NavPress Publishing Group, $17.00

Released from Bondage
Neil Anderson, Fernando Garzon, and Judy King
Thomas Nelson Publishers, $15.98

On the Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Hope and Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse
Diane Langberg
Tyndale House Publishers, $12.99

A Healing Marriage: Biblical Help for Overcoming Childhood Sexual Abuse
Brad Tuggle and Cheryl Tuggle
NavPress Publishing Group, $10.99

To order additional copies of this special report, call 866-722-5433.