

Brandywine Together: Shepherds and the Flock Pt. 2
Responding to Shepherds
10/7/18

Message is PG-13. Finish series, Next two weeks Pastor Matthew and Todd will be preaching, In Israel, Start 1 Peter. Recap: Last week we looked at the biblical role of leadership in the local church- The Elders/Pastors/Overseers this one role with three terms. These shepherds are called to Preach and Teach the Word, Protect the church from false doctrine, care for the needs of the flock, model a godly lifestyle, equip the church, pray for the sick. I left you with some unanswered questions: How should a congregation respond to their leaders? What does the Bible say about authority and power? What if leaders fail or abuse their power?

I'm not sure if I can think of a topic that is more culturally relevant, more of a hot button, than authority, power and abuse, namely sexual abuse. As I wrote this sermon the Senate was pouring through the FBI report of Supreme Court Nominee, John Kavanaugh accused of sexual assault as a young man. Let me be clear since I brought up his name, that this message is not support or opposition, but simply that this topic reaches to the very highest levels. Whatever you believe about the credibility of his accusers, here's what you need to know- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused by 18. What is the toll this has on the victims? There are profound consequences. I listened to a series of lectures by the leading Christian Psychologist, Diane Langberg and was heartbroken by what she said, much of which I will not share- but no that victims often experience a profound sense of shame, loss of identity, may struggle with intimacy and healthy relationships, and often will suppress what has happen for years, maybe even their entire lives, can suffer with PTSD, and many kinds of other mental and emotional disorders from the trauma.

While sexual abuse has roots as old as human history, most recently, the #metoo movement has brought this hidden epidemic to light and has empowered thousands by providing a platform on social media for victims of abuse to talk about what happened to them. Powerful Men in the entertainment industry, in business, and in politics have been ousted from their positions as their victims have begun to come out of silence. But we cannot just point fingers out there into the secular culture because leaders who have claimed to represent Christ have also abused their power. We have dirty laundry in the Church. It was recently revealed that top Roman Catholic leaders in Pennsylvania covered up decades of child sex abuse involving more than 1000 victims, the ramifications of this will have a ripple effect that has yet to be seen. In Evangelical circles it was revealed that one of the most influential Christian leaders in America, Bill Hybels, was abusing his power through sexual misconduct with women.

While sexual abuse is certainly an epidemic as we have seen, it is not the only kind of abuse of power. People with any kind power- whether political, economic, physical, familial or religious- can use their power and authority to marginalize, control, hurt, condemn and silence those with less or no power. It happens on large scales through abuses such as slavery...which is not just a thing of the past. Today there are over 40million slaves worldwide. But abuse of power can happen in a quiet suburban home with a husband who abuses his power over his wife and

children. Even husbands who go to church, maybe even serve in positions of leadership, while their wives and children live in fear and numbness under his ruling thumb. And church leaders can spiritually abuse their power in the church. Sadly, some of you here I know have experienced that at another church.

So when we read **Hebrews 13:17** *Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority.* I wonder what goes through your mind? What kind of reaction does that cause in you? How do we reconcile a passage like this in light of our experiences and a long human history of abuse of power? Our natural tendency is to resent it or fight against this or ignore it altogether. What I'd like to do take a few minutes to look at what God has to say about power, abuse and responding to authority.

1) God hates abuse of authority.

God rails against the abusive leaders of Israel-

Ezekiel 34:1-6

The word of the Lord came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?

³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

Note that abuse of power here is seen not ONLY in what they did (treat harshly and brutally) but in what the FAILED to do with the authority they were given.

In Matthew 23, Jesus' harshest words were toward those who abused their power- Jesus gives these leaders 7 woes...listen I wouldn't want 1 woe from Jesus, let alone seven! He calls them hypocrites, blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs, snakes... why?

V. 4 *They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*

in verse **23**, *You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.*

God is passionately against abuse of authority. If you have been the victim of any kind abuse- God sees you, God's heart breaks for you. He is more offended by the sin against you than you

can imagine. It is not your fault, you did not deserve what happened to you. And he is not silent.

2) God will hold power abusers accountable.

God will judge those who harm and not heal, who exploit and not protect. God's judgment against the leaders of Israel who abused their authority was to remove them from their seat of power and bring destruction upon them.

Ezekiel 34:9-10

⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock.

I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

But they are not always judged in this life, God holds them accountable in eternity. Listen to Jesus' stern words for the abusive shepherds of Israel.

Matthew 23:35-36

³⁵ And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

If you have been a victim of abuse, know that no one is getting away with anything. A proper theology of God allows us to make room for God's judgement and not seek our own vengeance. When David was a victim of King Saul's abuse of power, what enabled him to remain strong? Was it not a correct understanding of God as the avenger?

1 Samuel 24:12

May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.

Not only does God hold abusers accountable,

3) God is the Defender of the Victimized

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-16

¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.

¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Jesus, himself, as the great shepherd is the ultimate fulfillment of this, but God desires to be the shepherd, the refuge, the stronghold and the helper of those who have become victims of abuse. Clearly God is opposed to abuse of authority, BUT on the other side,

4) God is opposed to the rejection of authority

From the beginning, the original sin was a rejection of God's authority in seeking authority of our own. Romans 13 tells us that rebelling against authority is rebelling against God. Why? Because...

5) God intends authority to be a blessing to people

2 Samuel 23:3-4

'When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, ⁴ he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.'

Authority, when done with righteousness and justice, contributes to human flourishing. Show me godly, humble, compassionate, skilled leaders and I will show you human flourishing for all those within its influence and care. In a household with parents, in a school, among law enforcement, in a nation. Godly authority leads to human flourishing. This is particularly true of spiritual authority in the local church.

I want to spend our last few minutes together practically addressing this dynamic in the church.

How should you respond to your leaders in the church?

Hebrews 13:17

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

1) Have confidence- Have a disposition of trust toward your spiritual leaders. Don't assume our worst intentions, but our best. Trust that we have the whole church's best interest in mind when we make a decision or lead with a vision. Even when you might do it differently, or it doesn't directly benefit you, or you prefer the old way and didn't know why we needed to change it.

2) Submit- Yield to the biblical instruction, correction, teaching of leaders. When we preach a message, assume that God has something for you to hear- to do, conform to, confess, repent of, believe. If we have a concern about an area of your life or are giving you guidance- that should hold weight in your life, that we have prayed about it, we have sought God's Word.

When should members not submit to and obey a leader?

a) Abandons fidelity to God's Word

Acts 5:29

We must obey God rather than human beings.

b) Stops living life of repentance

If we disqualify ourselves from the requirements of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

c) Uses authority to abuse

This is really a subset of not living a life of repentance.

This is why I believe in congregationalism and we practice this here at BVBC. You have a voice. And you should remove a leader who disqualifies himself, for the sake of the flock, for the sake of the leader himself and for the sake of Christ. The leadership of this church is not perfect. We sin. But we happen to be repentant.

How you can help us?

1) **Pray for us**, wisdom, discernment, personal purity.

Spurgeon, What is the secret of your ministry success- My people pray for me.

2) **Talk to us**, If you ever observe us not treating people right, confront

3) **Support us**. Follow us in a way that would make it a joy to lead you.

-What makes it a joy? Resolving conflict with one another.

Title Slide

If you are a victim of abuse- have you talked to anyone? We want to be a safe place for those abused. When you feel ready, talk to someone you trust. Maybe one of us. We would like to resource you. That might mean helping you develop a flight plan, getting you counseling resources, financial resources, spiritual healing of various kinds. Come Alongside Ministry that can walk with you.

If you have been a victim of abuse- know that Jesus our savior knows your pain personally did something about it. Read Isaiah 53:4-7. Communion reflection.