

PASTORAL ABUSE



JOHN BORUFF

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*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing,
but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*

—Matthew 7:15—

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Introduction

At first some of the warnings here might seem to be ridiculous or unnecessary; and make you ask, “Why in the world would I need to be told these things?” The same could perhaps be said about many things in the Bible, such as the command not to commit incest, or not get drunk, or not murder people. But we are a fallen race; and even though Western society has normalized certain standards of right and wrong for centuries, over time the demoralization of America is quite evident. The twenty warnings here are against pastoral abuse in particular; and the first ten are against *power trips*. They are necessary for all churches, but especially for *those pastoring in non-denominational, independent churches*, with no church council or board of supervision. These warnings are intended to guard pastors from all walks of life from falling into even the most outrageous errors. All of these principles have been extracted from personal experience with some bad pastors and from Ronald Enroth’s *Churches That Abuse* (1992). Pastors, please read and heed; and do your best to take care of your flocks for Jesus!

POWER TRIPS

Matthew 23:9-10: “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in Heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.” It has been commonly accepted to call pastors by titles, such as “Rev. John” or “Pastor John,” or in the Catholic Church, “Father John,” but I don’t think Jesus really likes this idea. Notice in the New Testament that all of the apostles were addressed on a first name basis: Paul, Peter, James, and John, etc. Pastors of churches should do the same today. Even the attempt of some to use “Brother John,” is another version of this error. First name basis, it seems, is New Testament practice. I think it only swells the ego and pride of pastors to be called “Pastor John,” “Pastor John,” “Pastor John,” for years and years. If I were your pastor, then just call me John. Calling me “Pastor John” would not only add a level of *impersonality*; it would make me *unapproachable*, and make you feel like not being my friend. Don’t contradict the Bible by calling me anything other than just John! Don’t tempt me to get on a *power trip*; or put me into a mentality where I might slip into ruling and controlling you like a 5-year old who doesn’t know how to do anything! I am not your father, God is. I am just a guide to Him; and at that, a very broken and frail one, who needs all the help from Jesus I can get!

1 Timothy 3:2-5: “The overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to

drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" How often is this passage of Scripture overlooked by pastors! God Himself only knows. The pastor must "love his wife as Christ loves the church, and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). This is a challenging passage towards self-sacrificing love on the part of husbands for their wives' sakes. And if husbands are commanded to do this, then the pastor all the more! I believe *all pastors of churches must first learn to be good family men*. This is their training ground for pastoral ministry. If a man cannot learn to be a loving husband and father, then he will not learn to be a loving pastor. A pastor should not be a prideful arrogant macho man, a chauvinistic woman-hater, a negligent husband or father, a wife-beater, nor an abuser of women that treats them like doormats; the pastor must not be like a biker nor a gang leader, nor a "tough guy," especially if he is involved in ministry outreach to criminals, drug users, alcoholics, bikers, or is involved in an inner city urban street ministry, or prison ministry.

Such *tough guy pastors* often get into joking around and calling people names, emasculating other men to make themselves feel superior; putting people down, insulting them, hating, and belittling people with verbal abuse in a condescending and demeaning manner, always going unchecked, and without an apology. There can be an expectation in such ministries to wear a leather jacket and

be the “tough guy” that macho ex-gang members can look up to. But still, our example is Jesus. The Word of God tells pastors to be above reproach, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, gentle, not quarrelsome, etc. The *macho* tough guy persona has to go! There is no such thing as a *mean-spirited pastor* in the Bible! BOLDNESS in evangelism? Yes. PREACHING AGAINST SIN? Yes. CONFRONTATION of rebellious antinomians, God-haters, and apostates? Yes, if necessary. But preach the truth in LOVE (Eph. 4:15). Otherwise, instead of sanctifying your congregation...you'll just end up turning into a jerk who says rude things to people!

Ephesians 6:4: “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Fathers, which are the primary instruments of discipline in the family (Heb. 12), are not to provoke their children to wrath, or extreme hatred and anger, through unreasonably excessive punishments and disciplines. Parents should love their children with kindness; nurture them emotionally and intellectually, and “admonish” or teach them what is right according to the Word of God. *Parental abuse*: verbal, emotional, physical, can be the result of *pastoral abuse*. Proverbs 23:13-14: “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Hell.”

This passage, of course, was given as a wise direction to the covenant-keeping people of Israel. To the people who knew to love the Lord with all their heart and their neighbor as their selves (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18), as their highest

calling. All correction of children must be done out of a motive of teaching the child what is morally wrong; so that they will learn to do what is right. Senseless beating, or bizarre, *cruel torturing* of children is not taught in this passage! Physical abuse has regrettably been rationalized by bad pastors and parents who misuse this passage. Spanking has its place, but James Dobson suggests it should mainly be done from ages 1-5, and taper off, and stop at the age of 9.¹ I agree. I also think that it should be moderate and accompanied by a cool-headed explanation for why the punishment is being administered.

1 Peter 5:2-3: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” An abusive pastor contradicts this Scripture over and over. 1. *They hate being pastors.* They only thing they might like is having a voice and the privilege of preaching in the pulpit. But they hate managing relationships and counseling people; they have no compassion. They are not like shepherds at all; and they do not tenderly treat their church members like sheep or lambs. They feel God is forcing them to do this; and they bear a grudge against God for putting them in this position. They hold grudges against people in their church, they hate people in their church, and have hearts full of bitterness. 2.

¹ James Dobson, *The New Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), p. 65.

They pressure their church members to give more to the church; and they offend in this frequently. They are not honest in their financial dealings with the church. They set financial goals for the church much higher than is reasonable or necessary for the people under their care. 3. *They “lord it over the flock,” or require unquestioning submission and obedience to the pastor.* Anyone with an analytical or critical mind, who asks questions, who thinks critically, is accused of being a sower of discord, of having a rebellious spirit, of being under the influence of a demon called “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). It doesn't matter if church members or visitors have valid, Bible-based questions, constructive criticism of the pastor, or any feedback: all of this is unreasonably shot down as “rebellion,” and because the pastor is on such an authoritarian, totalitarian, tyrannical, power trip, he even goes so far as to call these questions “sins” for which people have to “repent” in order to get right with God! Any slight difference of opinion with the pastor, about anything, is immediately and unreasonably construed as rebellion against God Himself!

The pastor could even be in serious sin, indulging in luxuries or getting inappropriately close to other women; the pastor could be gravely wrong about something, and still the church staff would be expected to “obey” him uncritically; without any point of reference to the Word of God! He could be a prosperity gospel preacher, living high on the hog, while church members are languishing in the pains of poverty, while he does not provide ministry services for economic empowerment or poverty alleviation. This is unacceptable for a pastor. Hebrews 13:17: “Obey

them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Truly this passage is abused by authoritarian pastors. The emphasis of the text is always laid on the character and behavior of the church members. But the pastors, or “them that have rule over you” are meant to be godly enough in the eyes of Scripture and Jesus to be men of love and holiness to such a degree that they “watch for your souls,” and are men of joy. True, church members should not give nice, kind pastors a hard time. But neither should dominating, tyrannical, *Tyrannosaurus rex* pastors abuse this Scripture to brow-beat church staff and members to uncritically submit to their authority! Biblical passages about obedience are between Christians and Jesus; and NEVER are they in reference to some twisted, unquestioning obedience to an abusive pastor's directions!

Isaiah 42:3: “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.” God is not a ruthless tyrant. Although He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in His character He is the Father of Mercies. He loves everyone; and is not willing that any life should perish from that which He created it. Hell is God's last straw for the impenitent and godless. But Hell is the extreme opposite of God's plans for mankind. On the contrary, God is trying to draw all men up to Heaven through the cross of Jesus, through His mercy and grace and love, through faith in His Son. Through His Holy Spirit, God is always involved in this drawing work (John 12:32). The

text quoted above from the prophet Isaiah, shows us the grace and mercy of God towards those who have been beaten down by the world, the flesh, and devil, and even beaten and crushed by the discipline of God. If you have been bruised, *God will not break you*; if your spiritual and emotional zeal is about to die out, *God will not snuff you out*. He will allow mortification to run its course in your life through repeated trials, tribulations, pains, and sufferings--but God will “not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Satan, on the other hand, is a ruthless, abusive tyrant. The devil “wears out the saints of the most High” (Dan. 7:25). An abusive pastor is a child of the devil (John 8:44). An authoritarian, hyper-critical pastor will verbally and emotionally abuse you; if you are depressed, going through tragedy, and poverty, and life-threatening illness: it doesn't matter. *The abusive pastor is demon-possessed*, a foul stench secretes from him; he will tempt you beyond what you can bear, he will make your life absolutely unbearable, will wear down all true saints who are trying to live for the Lord; he will even put you down for being a sissy, a wimp, a loser, opinionated, if you even so much as whimper under the pressure and stress of your situations. Also, an abusive pastor will accuse church members about things that are not true (calling it “rebuking”), require that they admit it, confess it, “repent” from it, in order to “get right” with the pastor and God.

This demonic pastor will be overbearing, requiring that all people, including his pastoral staff, be *punctual* and attend all church events, and never be late. Thus this evil pastor *brainwashes*, and breaks down the will of the peo-

ple, much like a horse trainer. Rather than seeing pastoral ministry as a good shepherd tending a flock of sheep--he sees pastoral ministry from the perspective of a harsh drill sergeant, whose sole responsibility before God is to train up soldiers for the "army" of the Lord. Lording it over the flock like this is nothing new; it has been among authoritarian cults and heretics for ages. But in the recent past, it has taken hold on independent charismatic churches through the "covering" teaching found in Watchman Nee's *Spiritual Authority* (1972), Derek Prince's *Discipleship, Shepherding, Commitment* (1976), and John Beveré's *Under Cover* (2001). All of these books teach charismatic Christians that they are to obey their pastors in all things--not because they are right--but because they are appointed as God's delegated authorities! Be warned!

2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion." I wish pastors would just stop right there, but in many churches it has become a custom to give an "offering message" just before tithe and offering time. This is *manipulation, guilt-tripping, and financial control*. There is no need for such outrageous "offering messages"; people get the idea when the offering plate is passed around (which is awkward and pressuring enough). I say, put an *offering chest* by the entrance of the church, guarded by trustworthy male greeters, and let God deal with people's hearts about tithes and offerings! (Mark 12:41-44). Shut your mouth about the money, preacher! Don't put these dear people, whom God loves, under compulsion and *fundraising* obligations! 2 Kings 12:9: "Jehoiada the

priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid. He placed it beside the altar, on the right side as one enters the temple of the Lord. The priests who guarded the entrance put into the chest all the money that was brought to the temple of the Lord.” Sounds good to me. Get rid of the offering messages and the offering plates: it puts the people under compulsion. Stop talking about the financial needs of the church! It’s dishonorable, shameful, and embarrassing to the Lord!

Mark 16:17: “In My name they will cast out demons.”

Pastors of independent charismatic churches are commanded by Christ to cast out demons, just like all Christians are; but such pastors are usually the only ones who actually try to do this. And when they do, it is often *misguided* and leads to *verbal, mental, emotional, and psychological abuse*. This abuse is also anti-psychiatry, anti-counseling, and anti-medicine. It finds a demon under every rock and shrub; and behind every tree. Although Luther said, “And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,” *the abusive charismatic “deliverance minister”* says that through his dreams and visions, he is able to use the gift of discerning of spirits, and point out the existence of demons in his church members’ lives *on a regular basis*, for their own good. And through his frequent mystical revelations of said demons in his church members, he then “speaks to the demon, not the person,” and shouts, and screams, lays his hands on their heads, commanding demons to come out in Jesus’ name. For “the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

The abusive pastor may even use certain sins confessed (dirty information), during such deliverance sessions, to control and blackmail that person later on, in order to regain influence over that person in the church, for whatever reason. This is a false view of deliverance ministry. Every time Jesus and the apostles cast out demons, it was because a person had come to them for help due to mental illness and demonic harassment; or like the man in the Gadarenes, who spoke in the voice of devils in the first person (Luke 8:26-39); or the fortune teller in the book of Acts who was harassing Paul (Acts 16:17). The true exorcist is not a “demon hunter”: he does not spend time in prayer just trying to discover demons in his church members, so that he can harass them with his *fake, abusive exorcism prayers*. The true deliverance minister will cast out demons as the need arises; but he will focus most of his time preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and teaching the New Testament principles of holiness.

James 5:16: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” A Scripture like this can be useful, but only if done with people you know and love, and who--regardless of their position in your church--you personally trust and feel comfortable with. If you don't feel comfortable confessing your sins to a certain church leader, the Bible does not obligate you to. *Abusive church leaders can and will use your confessions against you:* small group leaders, who tell you they love you in the Lord, will act as informants for the pastoral staff, and talk bad about you behind your back, as they “pray” for you. They are not Catholic priests, under a sol-

emn vow of silence, under the supervision of a hierarchy. A non-denominational church leader can easily use your confessions against you, to blackmail you, intimidate, and insult you. In both counseling and the pulpit, they will suggest that you are sick because you lack commitment to the church, you're not a faithful church member, because you won't enter into the expected "covenant relationship" with the church, you won't forsake your independent spirit, critical thinking, personal identity, or self-made ideas of "spiritual discernment," etc.

If a pastor insults you privately or publicly, no apology is to be expected from him; rather, an apology and "repentance" is to be expected from you, for harboring the sin of "offense." And this is the only way to be healed, in this view. This is *mind control* abuse. This is not real friendship; it's all pressure and control-oriented leadership. Far be it from these types of people to be used by the Holy Spirit as instruments of healing! Such people are not motivated by the love of God; they have the devil inside them. John 5:42: "I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts." They will hurt you by reminding you of your sins, or keep bringing up false sins which they perceive they have seen in you; and if you refuse to admit them, it means you refuse to submit to the pastor, which makes you a rebel. With an abusive pastor, everything in the way they look at you, is with point of reference to your *obedience* or *rebellion* to their directions and advice; they see you like a 5-year old, even if you are a 25-year old. Their arrogance knows no bounds. You will only be worse off if you ask for such an abuser to hear your

confessions and pray for your healing! A church like that is only going to mess you up!

1 Timothy 5:19: “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.” Abusive pastors use this verse to suggest that the pastor and his staff cannot be questioned about anything; and that it is a sin to speak any negative criticism, constructive or frustrated, about them. Even with two or three witnesses. To them this is REBELLION and THE SIN OF WITCHCRAFT (1 Sam. 15:23). Obviously, this opens the door to countless *errors being continued in by the pastor* and his staff against church members. Because sanctification is a growing process, it is virtually impossible for such a pastor and his staff to make any personal adjustments or moral improvements, because *they refuse to be open to correction*. Proverbs 12:1: “He that hates correction is a fool.” Such pastors are fools; especially since they could receive correction humbly, privately, and discreetly. They might have a “Contact Us” email on their church website, where you can supposedly express any *questions, comments, or concerns*. But the likelihood is that these emails will be ignored, filtered out, and blocked; and will be interpreted by them as an “attack” from the enemy through you: again the “accuser of the brethren” concept (Rev. 12:10).

They are so arrogant, and so high on their horses, that they feel nobody is qualified enough to speak correction into their lives, even if that correction is based on Scripture, and the truth is spoken in love (Eph. 4:15). A sort of old boys’ club mentality surrounds them, where the pas-

tor's ego must be stroked, by his ever affirmative church staff of self-interested sycophants (yes men, brown-nosers, and suck ups). They become a law unto themselves. They do what is right in their own eyes, excluding all outside input, as probably coming from the world or the devil. Beware of such churches, where the pastors discourage negative criticism, concerned questions, etc.

On the other hand, if you see things among the pastoral staff that seriously bother you, be polite about it, but don't let them intimidate you, publicly retaliate against you, or pull you into their intimidating lions' den (the pastor's office). There needs to be a kind of leveling, where they don't think they are so high and mighty. If they insist on speaking in person, offer to speak at a coffee shop or fast food restaurant. If you go into their domain, they will likely be more unwilling to listen to anything you have to say. They are like how the Pharisees reacted to Stephen, after he exclaimed, "You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51). "At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him" (7:57). They cover their ears and rush at you with anger! Childish! But what do you expect with these kind of people? Maturity, humility, patience, and compassion? No way!

Matthew 20:25-28: "Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did

not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” This is in direct contradiction to the idea taught in John Bevere’s *Under Cover* (especially Section 3) and the teachers of the shepherding movement. Their doctrine is one of *unquestioning submission and obedience to the pastor’s directions*, whether you think he is right or wrong.

The rationalization for this false doctrine of pastoral ministry is based on Romans 13:1-2, where the apostle Paul orders Christians to be submissive to the civil authorities: the government, the police, etc. Bevere and the shepherding movement teach, however, that in like kind, PASTORS have equal authority over Christians’ spiritual lives as does THE GOVERNMENT. That is, one of unquestioning obedience; this always puts the pastor on a demonic, anti-Biblical POWER TRIP. Paul, no doubt, thought that the Roman government was vile and corrupt, filled with vice, as Romans 1 condemns many of the things that Caesar was guilty of. However, because these governing authorities were “appointed by God,” even though we may not think they are right in all they do, Christians have to make the choice to obey the civil laws they have set down for the order of society.

All that Paul is saying in Romans 13 is that he does not want the Christians, who are already suffering persecution in Rome, to make their lives even harder by becoming rebellious to the government, or seditious, and anarchistic. Paul is not talking about pastors at all in this passage. It is a sign of immaturity and poor hermeneutics to teach that Romans 13:1-2 also applies to the “spiritual authority” of pastors, and that they should “rule the church” in like kind

to “the rulers of the Gentiles”; and that pastors should “lord it over them” (Matt. 20:25). This is a DIRECT CONTRADICTION to the teaching of Jesus! Some believe this was part of the heresy of *Nicolaism*, mentioned in Revelation 2:6, 15. It just goes to show that true and sound doctrine can be discovered by allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture; and not taking passages out of their original context, and applying them to something else. In the case of Romans 13:1-2, abusive pastors take this passage on submission to the government (Caesar, the president, the governor); and then they twist it, and make it apply to the *pastor* of the local church, thus directly contradicting what Jesus taught in Matthew 20:25-28!

ONE-UPMANSHIP

Colossians 2:18: “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.” This verse is often misused by pastors to discredit or discourage seers and prophets from sharing prophetic dreams and visions in their churches. It’s clear in Scripture that pastors are supposed to facilitate prophecy and not quench the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thess. 5:19-22). But out of jealousy of these spiritually gifted Christians, they try to marginalize them and set themselves up as sober minded and responsible, in the name of protecting the church from error. All things must be done with love and faith. Rejecting visions needs to be just as welcome as accepting visions, so long as they agree with the Word of God (Isaiah 8:20). But if a pastor rejects

all visions as belonging to the realm of the “super-spiritual charismaniacs,” then he will abuse the prophets of God sent to encourage and warn the church, and be answerable to Christ for his unbelief!

There are some Gnostics in this world, to which Colossians 2:18 is referring: the modern application of this would likely be to those who follow the New Age movement, who truly do “worship angels” and have a “sensuous mind,” without regard for the sanctity of marriage, and are unrestrained, flirtatious, promiscuous, and sexually immoral. However, to use this passage against traditional Pentecostals, for example: those who believe much like the Assemblies of God, but who prophesy through visions--to use Colossians 2:18 against such Pentecostals, even when they repent and believe the Gospel, and love the Bible--is a great error. It is a *Sadducee spirit* to behave like this: powerless, lifeless, and carnal, to which Jesus would say, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). On the other hand, there are carnal charismatic prophets that get “puffed up” unreasonably, because they have visions and others don’t; and this is not the spirit of love (1 Cor. 8:1).

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

Isaiah 1:18: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.” Much like the one-upmanship abuse mentioned before, abusive pastors tend to be against their church members getting a theological education; or even sometimes any college degree. The reason for this is fairly simple: *it is harder to control educated people*. If the pas-

tor knows more than his church members do about the Bible, church history, Christian books and theologians, then he can steer the people in any direction he wants, and have little to no dissent or argumentation over church doctrines.

The problem, however, in evangelical churches is that they emphasize *personal Bible study*; this is even more of a problem for pastors of non-denominational charismatic churches, who tend to overemphasize experience of the Holy Spirit rather than knowledge of the Word of God. When members of charismatic churches study their Bibles, it raises many questions in their minds about God, the Christian life, and the church; and they start to think critically about everything. These questions are often directed to the pastor; and when they are directed, if the pastor can find a satisfying answer for the church member, then everything is okay. But if the pastor *disagrees* with the church member's interpretation, application, and conclusion of the Biblical passage, he will likely reply with an *insult* or some belittling speech, reasserting that he has *spiritual authority* over his church; and might even discourage the church member from too much Bible study.

If the church member has been told he is called to the ministry, then the pastor will likely discourage him from getting a theology degree, because it could mean that he will know as much or more than the pastor, and this is too much for the pastor's ego to handle. The church member must be subjugated underneath the domineering pastor, and this is most easily accomplished when *the pastor is the intellectual leader of the church*, and everyone else has to rely on him for their knowledge of God. It is a throwback to pre-Reformation days, when the Catholic laity were ex-

pected to rely on the priests for all of their knowledge of God and life: unquestioningly, unswervingly, and obediently.

MEDICAL NEGLECT

James 5:15: “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.” This passage is as true today as it was when it was written, but we are a post-Enlightenment culture, and not so apt to believe for healing miracles. Our faith is weak; Jesus said the apostles’ faith was weak (Matt. 17:20). If strong faith is a prerequisite for this kind of healing, then it needs to be practiced and exercised through healing services, or the faith that was gained will soon be lost. If a Pentecostal pastor chooses to venture into the arena of divine healing ministry, he should do so cautiously and humbly. He should still have a very high regard for doctors and medicine, as Luke the physician did, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts (Col. 4:14).

Professional medical attention should never be ignored due to “lack of faith”--true there is a lack of faith, but not concerning salvation--concerning *healing*. And this is nothing to be ashamed of since there are so few practitioners of divine healing these days. Pentecostal pastor, hear me: if there is someone in your church with a medical crisis, it is your responsibility to *encourage medical treatment!* But *in addition* to that treatment, use what faith you have, and *pray for healing!* If not, God will teach you through the harsh taskmaster of the court system! You will find yourself being taken to court, sued, and fined or even

jailed for leading people to extreme sickness or death, through teaching them to rely on faith alone for healing. Befriend medicine! Befriend faith! They are not mutually exclusive. All that matters: people are healed and helped.

CARNALITY

Matthew 7:15-20: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Jesus warns us against false pastors, false prophets--they are hypocritical religious actors, who pretend to be calm and harmless like sheep in public, but in their hearts, they are “ravenous” or extremely hungry to “eat up” the lives of the sheep in their churches; and like wolves, they devour, destroy, and consume the spiritual life within them (they are spiritually abusive).

Bad “fruit” is a symbol of bad behaviors or outcomes that the pastor puts on the church members. They manifest the works of the flesh: *“adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like”* (Gal. 5:19-21)--if not literally, then at least in spirit; far be it from them to express the character traits of the Holy Spirit,

or, that which you would expect to see exhibited in the life of a good pastor or true prophet: “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal. 5:22-23). Don’t allow yourself to be deceived. Wicked men, including evil pastors, will not inherit the kingdom of God, will not be saved, will not go to Heaven (Gal. 5:21). To go to the church of an evil and abusive pastor, is to allow yourself to be guided by a man who is unregenerate, and not even born again!

But you say, “On their church website, their statement of faith is evangelical; there is no error in their doctrine; they have sound doctrine; they are orthodox.” Yes, but *the pastor is still a false prophet if he is steadily manifesting the works of the flesh; and is not cultivating the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy* (right doctrine) is not good enough by itself; while it is essential to have sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)--it is equally important for the pastor and church staff to be demonstrating *orthopraxy* (right practice). If they do not, then they are just like the Pharisees, of whom Jesus said, “They do not practice what they preach!” (Matt. 23:3). A church may not be a “cult” in the *doctrinal* sense, but they may certainly be a “cult” in the *behavioral* sense. While no church is perfect (or sinless), a “good fruit” pastor will at least be leaning towards the behavioral traits of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:4: “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking.” Matthew 5:28: “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” With the

popular acceptance of movies in evangelical Christian life, with the repudiation of fundamentalist censorings, and with a free attitude of grace under the idea that the perfect righteousness of Christ covers our present sins like a cloak--we have a lot of pastors now who even indulge in *cussing*, from their pulpits! (Mark Driscoll is a recent example.) This is so outrageous it seems nothing should have to be said. But apparently Jesus and Paul felt it had to be said, so I'll remind you now: people who live like this will not inherit salvation. It can become accelerated, when mixed with harassment, verbal abuse, and insulting "rebukes" from the pastor.

FALSE COUNSELING

Proverbs 11:14: "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Who is right? Who is doing the counseling? From what source of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is the counsel coming from? If the counseling is Bible-based, that is a good sign, but is not good enough, because Satan gave twisted Biblical counsel to Jesus (Matt. 4). Abusive pastors, or false counselors, twist the Scriptures just like Satan. So, how do you know who is right and who is wrong? By *reading the New Testament for yourself*, and relying on *the internal witness of the Holy Spirit*, which you have received by faith in *the Gospel of Christ*. But even this, it seems, is not good enough. The Word says, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety": for the spirit, soul, and body.

I think it becomes absolutely necessary for all who would be responsible, wise, and good pastors, not only to purchase but study peer-reviewed reference works, such as Drs. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins' *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling* (2011), which is a summary of the accumulated wisdom of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC); on another level, the responsible, godly pastor might also consider pursuing a counseling license: the Board Certified Pastoral Counselor (BCPC) license, which encompasses wisdom with how to wisely handle an array of emotional and spiritual problems that church members face, including psychiatric and mental health issues. But people without a good counseling-pastor should try to find the most godly, consistent, faithful Christians they know—who have years of experience, a gift for wisdom and advice; spiritual guides and advisors.

I think the AACC, which is the largest organization of Christian counselors, is the best and most responsible, and most authoritative, concerning this discipline. However, I disagree with their 2014 statement against conversion therapy for gays; this being because some have abused homosexuals by this means. The AACC once tolerated conversion therapy, but now only urges gays to remain celibate. I see this as problematic for the salvation of gays. 1 Corinthians 6:11 definitely shows us that *ex-gay counseling is Biblical*; but this should be done with love and gentleness.

As with all things, the opinions of the AACC should be judged and evaluated by a plain reading of the New Testament; and a Reformed, Puritan, or Wesleyan understanding of the Gospel and the Christian life. There are some-

times *cheap grace counselors who overreact to authoritarian and legalistic abuses*; but antinomian counseling is not the way of righteousness, and is again, a false type of counseling. The only counseling that delivers souls is that which is solidly grounded in a soteriology of *Romans* and *the Protestant Reformation*.

Mark 10:9: “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” It is the pastor’s job to marry those he judges to be committed Christians and loving companions. It is not, however, the pastor’s job to counsel or encourage people to get divorced! This is between them and God! If God has joined two people together, then it is a sin for a pastor to intervene, drive a wedge, and tell them to get divorced, to separate them, or to come between them in any way. *Marriage counseling should always be geared towards reconciliation and not separation*. If separation has already occurred, that is another matter. If abuse is going on, again that is another matter. But if people are just “not getting along,” it is totally anti-Biblical to make people separate or encourage them to get divorced! To be sure, God will punish the pastor who does this, no matter how well intentioned he may be! God says in Malachi 2:16: “I hate divorce and I hate a man clothing himself with violence as with a garment.”

THE ABUSE OF HELL

Luke 17:29: “The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from Heaven, and destroyed them all.” This quote from Jesus is the first time

that the phrase “fire and brimstone” is mentioned in the New Testament; it appears several other times by the pen of the apostle John in the Book of Revelation, as a description of the Lake of Fire (14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). These passages are horrific to non-Christians, lukewarm Christians, and the spiritually unsure. Those who are unsure about their commitment to Christ often straighten up their lives upon consideration of such fearful passages. The fear of Hell, Solomon Stoddard rightly said, restrains men from sin. But *this doctrine can be easily abused*. It is true that God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11); it is also true that Hell is real, and that all of those whose names are not written in the Book of Life, will be thrown into the Lake of Fire for ever and ever! This is dreadful! *Dread* should grip your soul if you know you are impenitent or refusing to trust in Christ and His cross in any area of your life!

On the other hand, there are some independent fundamental Baptist pastors who do not preach the whole counsel of God concerning this. They preach Hell, but in a twisted manner: a style that does not preach the law or the full Gospel; it does not offer the hearers salvation through justification and sanctification. It leaves the people in a plain dread of Hell; and is *twisted into a perpetual, fear-inducing means of mind control*. All sorts of un-Biblical and even anti-Biblical rules can be placed on church members by abusive pastors, with the added meaning that they will “go to Hell” if they don’t do this or that thing the pastor says.

It becomes then, extremely important for all who would truly understand the doctrine of Hell in its traditional and

Biblical sense, to read the 1689 Baptist Confession, Christopher Morgan's *Is Hell for Real or Does Everyone Go to Heaven?* (2011), and just a study of Hell in the New Testament. During such a study, you will get a sense of what “damnable sins” are: or what the New Testament clearly says on the question of which specific sins send souls to Hell. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is one such passage. It says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” Here we have a list of sinful practices (and lifestyles) that debar and forbid souls from entrance into Heaven. If these sins are continued in until death, you go to Hell. But there are several other passages in the New Testament like this. “Inheriting the kingdom of God” means going to Heaven; but not inheriting it, means going to Hell.

I would advise caution on two sides concerning the doctrine of Hell. On the one side, avoid abusive pastors who simply “use” the doctrine of Hell as a means of mind control through fear, as they can be easily identified by their lack of citation of the Bible and its Hell-deserving sins, and how they also *create their own made up sins which they say also send people to Hell*. On the other hand, avoid the cheap grace counselors mentioned before, who tend to overreact to Hell-abusers, and leave you with the false impression that Hell is nothing to be feared or thought about; or that it is psychologically unhealthy to think about Hell. A New Testament study of Hell will correct both errors.

CLOTHING OBSESSIONS

1 Peter 3:3-4: “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.” Not wanting to detract from Peter’s direction to Christian women, pastors should also be careful not to abuse this passage and lay great emphasis on it, and get people all worked up, or even psychologically unstable, nervous, and preoccupied with their physical appearance. Some abusive ministers make all the women in their church wear prairie dresses, like on *Little House on the Prairie*; and the men are also held to a very strict dress code. (Not to say it’s bad if women want to wear prairie dresses.)

On the other hand, godly women should not dress themselves in a promiscuous or sexually immoral manner; because “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28), and for women to lead men on like this, is contrary to this teaching, and is akin to behaving like a prostitute. Hairdos, jewelry, and any clothing articles that bring unnatural attention to a woman’s appearance is prideful and vain and seductive; and Peter wishes to guard Christian women from this worldly influence, and instead to instill in them a gentle and quiet spirit. But a gentle and quiet spirit should be demonstrated by the pastor, not only in the pulpit at times, but on other occasions; and especially by *the pastor’s wife*. If young women need more specific di-

rections about how to dress modestly, then the pastor's wife; and not the pastor, might hold classes about such things, and teach it with love and gentleness (Titus 2:4).

IRRESPONSIBLE PASTORS

Ezekiel 34:2: “Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds”--to the pastors of all Christian churches: woe to the pastors who feed themselves and do not feed their church members the Word of God, nor give them economic help in times of trouble, nor give any good wholesome counseling in times of crisis; *woe to the abusive pastors*, who selfishly live in luxury while they refuse to help their starving and enslaved church members! Woe to these poor excuses for pastors! (v. 2). These spiritual abusers have not strengthened the weak, have not healed the sick (although they may have pretended to), have not given any medical or economic help, they have avoided evangelistic outreach in the streets and avoided the lost, the poor and homeless; and instead, spent all their time forcefully and cruelly ruling over their church members, controlling their lives. Woe to these disgusting wretches! (v. 4).

And so the “sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd,” no true shepherd, to guide them; they left these abusive churches and “became food for all the beasts of the field,” all the demons, abusers, manipulators, and God-haters of this world, who destroyed and ruined what faith in Christ they had (v. 5). God is against these abusive pastors, and is not on their side; and so, *it is GOD who will lead His sheep away from these abusive churches* (v. 10), even though the abusive pastors, in their deluded minds,

will attribute this exodus to the devil; no longer will God allow His sheep to be so *malnourished* with such weak preaching and poor fellowship (v. 10); no longer will God allow these abusive pastors to live high on the hog, ripping off their church members through offering messages, and religious extortion (v. 10). ENOUGH!

God will deliver His “flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them” (v. 10); no longer, no more will these wolves in sheep’s clothing be allowed to eat up and prey upon their church members! GOD SAYS NO MORE! Because there are no truly responsible pastors in the land, GOD HIMSELF “will search for His sheep and seek them out...He will feed His flock, and make them lie down” in peace, in good churches, resting in the Holy Spirit, with true peace of mind (vv. 11, 15). GOD HIMSELF will lead them to peace where a true pastor preaches the Gospel of Peace (v. 25). GOD HIMSELF will “bind up the broken and strengthen the sick” (v. 16). The sheep will be safe in *the good church that God leads them to*; and His people will know God as their Lord through personal experience; and they will be *free from the extra-Biblical legalism and spiritual slavery* from where they once were; and God will make them to “dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid!” (vv. 27-28).

THE PHARISAICAL SPIRIT

John 8:44: “You belong to your father, the devil!”
God’s heart is grieved and rain falls from the sky when He sees the abuse and activity of a Pharisaical spirit at work in

any church.² That rain is the tears of God and is not the rain of a blessing, but is the sadness of God expressing itself in nature. Those of His prophets who have the Holy Spirit can partake of this grief in their emotions, and they can weep like Jesus did, and cry, “O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Thou that killest the prophets!” (Matt. 23:37). Who is it? It is the Pharisees that do this, but under that external façade, is a kind of religious demon, or group of demons, which I will call *Pharisaical spirits* (Matt. 12:45). The Pharisees mentioned in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are definitely not the first people to be under the influence of these evil spirits. Jesus implied that other people had been guided by these spirits before them—namely, their forefathers who had been responsible for slaying many of the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 23:29-36). In this they are shown to be *prophet killers*: in fact, if they could have their way, all of the activities of the Pharisaical spirit seem to point to the final outcome of stamping out the gift of prophecy, the influence of prophets, and drive toward the martyrdom of saints or the killing of prophets—not the least of which was the Son of God Himself. If they can’t physically kill a prophet, then they will try to fire him or ruin his reputation.

All of their malevolent words and actions are essentially persecuting in nature; but they also have the nature of trying to enter in contentious conversations with God’s prophets, to trap them in their words (Matt. 22:15-22), and finally build a case against them, so they can take some

² Most of my Biblical proofs on the Pharisees here are from the Gospel of Matthew.

kind of formal action against them, and bring them into some kind of council and accuse them, and sentence them. They are very accusatory and litigious and they get a high off of this. They are heresy hunters for sure; but worse than that, they are also hunters of true prophets, and they can accomplish this just as easily as they attack rank heretics, by showing that these saints and prophets have dreams and visions that are not already written down in the Bible, and they can make the case that these prophets are going beyond what is written and are hence really heretics: merely because they've seen visions. This was what happened when David Wilkerson's *The Vision* came out in 1973 and he lost a lot of his supporters in Assemblies of God leadership (Gary Wilkerson's *David Wilkerson*, p. 174). The problem is, there is nothing in his series of visions that contradict the Word of God: in fact, they only served to enforce it, confirm it, and make more real the prophecies of God's Word concerning the last days.

I believe that when Annas, Caiaphas, and the Pharisees of the first century died, their demons flew out of their bodies, and sought other religious leaders to inhabit and influence; and I believe this has been going on for two thousand years (Matt. 12:43-45). You can see the face of the Pharisees in the corrupt Catholic priests before and during the Reformation; in the Anglican priests during the Puritan and Methodist revivals; you can find the Pharisaical spirit in the "proper" clergymen who opposed evangelical revivals in the United States from the Great Awakening to the Brownsville Revival.

As we wrap up this study on pastoral abuse, true Christians can only do themselves a favor to acknowledge what

the Bible says concerning the marks of a Pharisaical spirit:

1. **There is no fruit of the Spirit:** no love, peace, or joy that surpasses understanding, no patience, no gentleness, or kindness, or goodness (Matt. 3:7; Gal. 5:22-23).
2. **There is an element of showmanship,** of being a religious show off: to make a public demonstration of their ability to pray, fast, or wear fine church clothes (Matt. 6:5, 16).
3. **There is a nitpicky attitude,** of making mountains out of molehills; focusing on minor issues, and ignoring major issues; being extremely judgmental of others who don't fall in line with their foolish opinions and practices that don't even center around true kindness or righteousness (Matt. 7:5).
4. **They are prophet killers:** either of their bodies or their reputations (Matt. 21:33-45).
5. **They are adulterous:** since they have no guidance or consolations of the Holy Ghost, what else can they do but resort to fornication or adultery for comfort? (Matt. 19:3; cp. 12:39).
6. **They are authoritarian:** they literally worship the idea of authority. They push others around, they are pushy, rude individuals; if they do attain to a level of leadership through arrogant self-promotion, then they imbibe the

Pharisaical spirit at its greatest depth and give into a power trip that never goes away (Matt. 21:23).

7. **They are unrepentant:** and why should they repent? They think they are always right; and after all that hard work at getting into a place of authority, do you think they have the presence of mind to be humble and contrite or even transparent with others about their sins? No sir! (Matt. 21:32).

8. **They obsess over the condition of their church building, in an unhealthy way.** They seem to think that the building itself is more valuable than mystical experiences with the Holy Spirit. And so while they are busying themselves with blessing the house of God, praying for the house of God, and fundraising for the house of God—they also find the time to preach against charismatic prophets and mystics that might have found their way into their church (Matt. 12:6-7; 27:62).

9. **They abuse their church members,** if not physically, as that has happened in some very extreme cases—then definitely verbally and emotionally, and sometimes sexually. They can even bring themselves to go to bars, hang out with drunkards, and get drunk themselves, and be back in time for Sunday morning service (Matt. 24:49).

10. **If they have to, then they will resort to bribes, lies, and false accusations to snuff out their enemies**—no doubt, enemies that they have created by their annoying and controversial attitudes (Matt. 28:12).

11. **They are in a state of damnation, on their way to Hell** (Matt. 24:51).

12. **They reject the deity of Christ and demonize the Holy Spirit:** though I wouldn't say that "Christian pharisees" always do this in doctrine, but definitely in practice (Matt. 9:3; 12:24).

13. **Their hearts are far from God (Matt. 15:8); they talk about sports a lot; and often have worldly, macho attitudes.** Although I will admit the sports aspect is not mentioned in the gospels, nor do you see it often in church history, other than King James' *Book of Sports*: which was originally a measure against nitpicky Puritans who preached against playing sports on Sunday, because they saw it as a violation of the Sabbath day's rest. Still, in modern times, a Christian man can easily observe that other Christians or church leaders who happen to be football, baseball, or basketball fans, etc, or tend to fall in the "jock" category, tend to give into a lot of the same spirits or attitudes held in common with the Pharisees: namely—*the spirits of competition, authoritarianism, abuse, aggression, murderous or violent spirits, one-upmanship, cockiness, pride, arrogance, showmanship, greed, etc.* The references to football plays during church services and sermons are too innumerable to mention, far exceeding Paul's passing reference that a failing boxer is beating into the air (1 Cor. 9:26), even as these worldly-minded men often do with their empty speeches. The Puritans mainly opposed football because of its violent nature:

In 1531 the Puritan preacher, Thomas Eliot, argued that football caused “beastly fury and extreme violence.” In 1572 the Bishop of Rochester demanded a new campaign to suppress this “evil game.” In his book, *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) Philip Stubbs argued that “football playing and other devilish pastimes...withdraweth us from godliness, either upon the Sabbath or any other day.” Stubbs was also concerned about the injuries that were taking place: “sometimes their necks are broken, sometimes their backs, sometimes their legs, sometimes their arms, sometimes one part is thrust out of joint, sometimes the noses gush out with blood...Football encourages envy and hatred...sometimes fighting, murder and a great loss of blood.”³

14. They don't practice what they preach: there's a disconnect between orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Matt. 23:3).

15. They are sly political schemers, bent on entrapping and incriminating God's prophets (Matt. 26:3).

³ John Simkin, “Football and the Church” in *The Encyclopedia of British Football*, 1997.