THE MISUSE OF POWER & POSITION

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WHAT DOES THE WORLD SEE?

• A pastor who uses church funds and resources to fuel a lavish lifestyle
• A Christian leader whose gifting leads to a quick rise in fame and whose pride leads to unilateral power and loyalty
• The ministry leader who uses position for sexual impropriety and infidelity
• Conservative leaders, academics & theologians who are removed from ministries, churches and seminaries due to the misuse of their positions

“For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”

- Romans 16:18
WHO IS IMMUNE?

- The allure of position and validation of gifts
- Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful
- “But for the grace of God, go I.”
- We are all enticed by “the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh & the pride of life.” (1 John 2:16)

Character and integrity must always proceed gifting.
“But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires, he is lured away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”
Pride in gifting

Demand for respect or loyalty

Sinful treatment of others
“Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its pleas for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear rather than too much. Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more than they are doing now. Christians should take a stronger stand for the weak rather than considering first the possible right of the strong.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer
WHAT DEFINES ABUSE?

Behavior

Impact

Intent

The motive to do harm

How any action impacts another individual

Lines are drawn to discern what behaviors rise to the level of abusive
“The church is the church only when it exists for others.. not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer
MISUSE OR ABUSE

The improper, ungodly treatment of others for self-service or personal gain.
May be demonstrated in the form of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual manipulation, or control or aggression that violates another human being.

- Physical
- Sexual
- Spiritual
- Emotional/ Psychological
- Financial
- Neglect/ Abandonment
WHAT IT IS NOT:

1. Temperamental qualities such as intensity, aggressiveness, assertiveness or how highly driven one might be. These qualities can rub up against others who are not similar or find it difficult. We have to ask, when are such traits strengths, when are they weaknesses, and when can they become sinful?

2. Sinful moments or events – such should always be called out, held accountable, and made right. Does such a moment rise to a category of abuse? When is it a serious moment to be addressed versus an abusive pattern to be stopped?
The better we do at clarifying what is or isn’t a pattern of mistreatment, the better we get at rightly handling and protecting those who are being grossly mistreated.
“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.”

- Ezekiel 34:2-4
Misuse of Power (Control)

• Abuse of power is commonly understood in the context of imposing leadership. Leaders who succeed in holding power, authority or control over those under them.
• Marked with aggression and intimidation.
• Meant to produce compliance, and often implemented by fear and coercion.
• Examples of this would be threats of demotion, public shaming or condescension. This approach demands respect rather than earns it. It enjoys using one’s authority or threats to accomplish an agenda.

It assumes a right to loyalty over transparency; it demands respect and devotion even if it’s accomplished through strong arming others. They “rule with force and harshness” as Ezekiel 34 illustrates.
MODERN EXAMPLES:

• Domineering behaviors: yelling, getting in people’s faces, demeaning remarks
• Members with genuine hesitations are belittled, punished, defamed, slandered, threatened or shunned for expressing concern
• Requiring loyalty that does not allow for differing of opinions or freedom for outside relationships
• Intimidation: mocking of those who do not share your views
MISUSE OF PERSUASION (MANIPULATION)

• Then there is the more subtle misuse of position – or we could call it the abuse of persuasion.

• One misuses a position in a manipulative way, perhaps not by demanding compliance or exerting control or intimidation, but shrewdly influencing others for personal gain or an agenda.

• The needs of those under them may be dismissed. Morals are compromised, people are used, and people are discarded should they be seen as either a stumbling block or a problem.

Ez. 34:3 says “You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.”
MODERN EXAMPLES:

• Embezzling funds – the love of money
• Using ministry resources to fund lavish personal expenses
• Marketing and deceiving the naïve to believe special objects, that if bought, promise spiritual and material blessing
• Entitlement that one deserves their fame, position, material possessions, etc.
• Using position to persuade or seduce another for sexual pleasure
• Driven by fame/ celebrity - An inflated sense of self-worth and purpose: “I am the only one who can______.” “This ministry needs me.”
• A ministry culture: Look how important we are, what good works we are doing, how liked or important we are.
“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”

-2 Timothy 3:1-5
WHY DO WE MISS THIS?

People see good fruit, lives changed, great sermons preached, and they want to presume that good fruit also means good character.

• Romans 16:18 affirms this: “For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.”
WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

1. Individual harm is done to people – and their faith in Christ

2. The witness to the world

1. The corruption of what is good and right about leadership

Character Matters, integrity matters more than gifting – more than position
CHRIST OFFERS A VERY DIFFERENT MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

- He made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant (Philp 2:7).

- He came to serve, not to be served (Matt. 20:28). He humbled himself, even to death on a cross (Philp.2:8).

- He gave himself up as a fragrant offering (Eph. 5:2). He goes and looks for the one lost sheep (Luke 15:4).

- He laid his life down for us and calls us to lay down our lives for each other (1 John 3:16).
WHAT DO WE NEED?

- Humility in leadership – an attitude that one does not “deserve” position
- A desire to serve more than to be served
- When accountability is welcomed openly
- Protective measures and checks are put in place
- A commitment to identify and protect the vulnerable
- A disposition that is receptive to godly disagreement and concerns
- Don’t trust your own character or virtue but are deeply aware our hearts are prone to wander
- Belief that people do not need you, they need Christ – and it is backed by our words and actions
- Financial transparency
- Organizational accountability
Edmund Burke says this:

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good to do nothing.”