

We have an abuse problem in the Church. Rather, we have a silence problem in the Church. We hide and excuse and cover-up the ongoing sins of our leaders. Al Mohler commented that while the Roman Catholic institution has an “organized conspiracy of silence” regarding the abuses which it covered up, it is also true that the evangelical protestant Church has a “disorganized conspiracy of silence.” What this means is that we have excused men who manipulate and use God’s people because of the charisma of their gifts, the shame which it brings upon the Church, and some kind of deceptive belief that the Church needs gifted leaders more than it needs holy ones.

This psalm is a victim’s psalm. It is the prayer of a person who has been abused and used and exploited by what he calls “the violent man” and the “man of speech”. He has been manipulated and lied to, deceived and flattered, all to the ends of serving the purposes of a man who did not truly care for him or for the Lord.

What do we do when we see such mistreatment of others? Look at what the Psalmist does. First, he sees it and calls it what is. He perceives the violent man and calls him the violent man. Then, he prays for God’s rescue from the power of the violent man. Then, he preaches to himself the truth of who God is, because abuse tends to confuse our understanding of reality, of holiness, and of where we place our hope. Then, he prays that God would keep the abuser’s efforts from success and would bring his destructive plans back on his own head. Finally, he preaches to himself again, reminding himself that God is on the side of the abused and will make the violent man answer to Him. He reminds Himself that God is active and righteous, and that the abusive man’s sin is not going unnoticed.

Like grasping a rope and climbing hand over hand to get out of a pit, once we’ve perceived the wickedness of abuse, this dual action of prayer and proclaiming is the means by which the victims of abuse get out of the dark confusion of the pit and into the light of God’s truth and the ultimate safety of the resurrection life of Christ Jesus among the people of God who love and care for her and work for her protection and her flourishing. There is hope for victims in perceiving the wickedness of the abusive man, in praying to the promise-keeping God, and in proclaiming the truth to ourselves over and over again.

Now, while I will be using the masculine form, the violent man, because David does so, it is equally true that an abuser and manipulator can be a woman.

1. Perceive the Violent Man (v1,4)
 - a. There is a category of person which the Bible describes as “evil” and “wicked” or “abusive”
 - i. Those pursuing such things are to be perceived by such a moniker and treated accordingly
 - ii. 1 Cor 5:11; 6:10
 - b. The “violent man” *uses* people (v2)
 - i. Exploitation is the unrighteous use of a person for one’s own satisfaction, i.e. abuse
 1. Physical exploitation (kidnapping, slavery)
 2. Economic exploitation
 3. Sexual exploitation
 4. Emotional exploitation
 - ii. Emotional exploitation seems to be the category which David
 - c. The “violent man” intends to use people
 - i. He “devises his intentions in his heart” (v2)
 - ii. Thus, this plan plans how to use people for his own advantage
 1. He schemes and plots how best to manipulate his victims by pressing their buttons
 - d. The “violent man” uses his tongue to harm people
 - i. In fact, he is called “the tongue-man” in v11, which is equated with the “violences-man” (parallel)
 1. His tongue is his violence
 2. He is a liar, deceiver, manipulator, using his tongue to unduly influence others through anger, guilt, shame, power, and deception
 3. Emotional abusers use intimidation, humiliation, isolation, and shame to create confusion and vulnerability in its target
 - a. Intimidation through a combination of anger and intimacy, cutting and flattering, so that the victim isn’t sure which man he is going to encounter in a given situation
 - i. This confusion makes the victim vulnerable to coercion and to being swayed by the abuser, who takes advantage of the “benefit of the doubt” and the victim’s desire to be wanted and to be needed
 - ii. This is particularly true when the abuser is more powerful or more influential than the victim
 1. Thus, the “poor” here are taken advantage of by the powerful – this power differential is a necessary component of exploitation
 - b. Humiliation through words intended to create shame and feelings of worthlessness
 - i. These words lead the victim to feel that they deserve to be treated poorly or that the abuse is their fault
 - c. Isolation through words which lead the victim to believe that nobody else would understand, nobody else would believe them, and nobody else could help them
 - i. Therefore, the victim become dependent upon the abuser by means of manipulative words and will never ask for help from somebody outside the relationship
 4. All of this is behavior which the manipulator intends to elicit from his victim
 - ii. Both are attempts to use people for his own advantage
 1. This is like Satan – v3 uses sibilant sounds (“ssh”) to sound snake-like

2. John 8:44 – “You are like your father, the devil, who was a liar from the beginning”
 - iii. An abusive man speaks half-truths, which are just whole untruths
- e. It is time the Church started calling these abusers what they are: The Violent Man – the enemies of God – wolves among the sheep

2. Pinpoint His Strategies

- a. He hunts (v5)
 - i. His intentions are to use another person to his own advantage, and to exert control or coercion through threat, force, or deception
 - ii. In this way, he is like a hunter tracking down and taking down his prey
 1. But he does so through his tongue, his speech
- b. He traps the fragile and vulnerable
 - i. The violent man looks good at first, but he is trying to control his victims
 - ii. David uses the term “bird-trap”, which indicates that the violent man is trapping the fragile, the weak, the defenseless so that they believe that they get away
 1. Manipulators deceive the fragile and vulnerable so that they do not feel like they can leave without some unbearable pain or cost
 2. Satan uses idols the same way: “You can’t lose this. If you lose it, you’ll never be happy again. If you do this to me, then you’re no better than my father who abused me. Etc.”
 - a. These are lies
 - b. Violent man uses lies by which he deceives little birds into believing, and thus traps them in his own control
 - i. “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they will come to their senses and escape the devil's trap where they are held captive to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:25b-26)
- c. He sets fires and digs pits (v10)
 - i. He deceptively creates fear – his tongue cuts like a sharpened fang
 - ii. He digs pits – his ‘kisses’ hide poisonous venom – hidden to harm
 - iii. He uses these fears to drive his victim to places where they will do what he wants
 1. Exploitation of fear, shame, guilt
 2. “You cannot tell anyone, or you will destroy me. You don’t want to destroy me, do you?”
 3. She will cry and pout and give the silent treatment whenever he made plans to hang out with his friends
 - a. He feels guilty when she is sad or upset, so she manipulates him through tears or pouting to get him to do what she wants for her own purposes
 - b. She “built a fire” to make him fearful and drive him to do what she wants - to trap him to do her will
- d. He stirs up distresses (v2)
 - i. Violent-tongued men work to create confusion in their victims
 1. They create confusion by acting differently at different times, so that the victim doesn’t know if they are going to have “nice guy” today or “angry guy” today
 2. Often, such manipulators and abuser will try whatever works, can will switch instantaneously between the two
 - a. So, if an angry response to the victim is met with resistance, they will immediately move to manipulate compassion by weeping or crying
 - b. They are pressing different buttons in order to control the response and behavior of their victim

3. By creating such confusion, they are leading the victim to doubt their own sense of right and wrong, making them distressed about their own ability to make proper judgments
 - a. Then, the violent man makes himself out to be the one who sees clearly and judges rightly
 - b. Thus, he can abuse the victim without resistance
4. He has trapped his victim through confusion
- ii. Violent men also use half-truths in the congregation to confuse and hide the truth
 1. They will try to sway the public to their side by telling only part of the truth
 - a. “God is a God of love” (neglecting justice and accountability)
 - b. “Isn’t God merciful? How could you judge me so harshly?” (neglecting holiness)
 - c. They use false dichotomies to make a questioner feel guilty for doing what is right
 2. False prophets almost always minimize sin by appealing to God’s mercy, but they merely use God’s mercy as an excuse for covering up sin
 - a. Thus, the true work of Christ’s atonement is actually minimized
 - b. For, with a false sense of security, people are lulled into spiritual lethargy and farther and farther away from the God who is holy
 - i. The truth of God’s Word is that if a person continues to pursue and walk in sin, he is not saved, there is not truth in him, and he is condemned to the wrath of God (see 1 Cor 5-6)
 - ii. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command you” (John 14)
 3. Violent men seek to comfort themselves in their sin while making the righteous out to be the bad guys
 - a. “Are you telling me that God is not patient with me?” (Ex 34:6-7a)
 - i. The danger with this kind of preaching is not what it claims (God is patient), but in what it leaves out
 - ii. “...but who will by no means clear the guilty.” (Ex 34:7b)
 - iii. Bad theology always leads to ungodly practice.
 1. This misrepresentation of God as *never* acting with judgment creates a safe haven for the abuse of power, the exploitation of the poor, the corruption of the courts, and the general profligacy of covetousness.
 - b. “Are you telling me that God doesn’t forgive me?”
 - i. “God is love”, He doesn’t judge!
 1. It is BECAUSE GOD IS LOVE that He brings judgment and discipline upon our idolatry!
 - c. “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness with requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*
- e. He arrogantly uses his speech eloquently to deceive anyone who would question him
 - i. He is arrogant and sees himself as above the rules that others must follow, so he excuses his sin with half-truths
 1. “Wives should submit to their husbands – you are being a bad wife”
 2. Yet he is not loving his wife like Christ loves the Church
 - ii. This type of emotional exploitative violence is much more subtle and hidden and excused in the Church because it is much harder to see and verify
 1. It is harder to argue against a half-truth than an outright lie because you have to see what is not said, what is missing, rather than a blatant lie.

2. Abusers of power depend upon people giving them the *benefit of the doubt*, using the word “grace” and “forgiveness”, when their motives are questionable and their behavior is inappropriate
 - a. But you cannot forgive an unrepentant man and leave him in power
 - f. He plans to “overturn your feet” (v4)
 - i. The violent man doesn’t want people to stand on their own, or to stand in the light
 - ii. He works to keep his victim without footing, without the certainty of what is right and wrong, so that they must depend upon him for everything
 1. He does so by constantly questioning his victim’s assertions with half-truths and logical fallacies
 2. Abusers make their victims feel guilty for their abusive behavior, which makes the victim want to hide it, rather than expose it for the abuser’s good
 - a. The reality is that the exposure of the violent man’s sin is always for his good
 - g. He baits (v5)
 - i. “Manipulation thrives in an atmosphere of indirect, devious, and deceptive communication. Agendas frequently are hidden and purposes disguised. Threats, intimidation, and coercion are preferred tactics...They often proceed in subtle, devious, or covert ways so that the manipulative character of the relationship is well established long before its true nature becomes apparent to the victim.” (Harriet Braiker, *Who’s Pulling Your Strings?*)
3. Plead the Protection of the LORD (v1,4)
 - a. The first step in fighting the violent man is to run to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to get you out from under the violent man’s influence and power
 - i. Pull me out! (v1)
 - ii. Preserve me (v1,4)
 - iii. Guard me (v4)
 - iv. Hear my pleas for help (v6)
 - b. By reorienting your eyes to the LORD rather than to the violent man you frame the circumstance within the proper perspective
 - i. Ultimately, the power behind the power is not flesh and blood, but the rulers and powers and principalities of darkness
 - ii. Without this proper framework, you will become a violent man in opposition to him, or you will run away in fear and not love him enough to confront him rightly
 - c. Prayer immediately puts hope where it belongs: in the Almighty, Promise-Keeping God who is our Master to defend and answer for the righteous
 - i. When I say “righteous”, I am using as the Psalmists do: those who are in the right in a particular situation, not that that anyone is right in every situation
 4. Preach the Power and Purpose of the LORD to Your Own Soul
 - a. Vv6-7 are the centerpiece of this Psalm, the most important part
 - b. You must preach to your own soul the reality of God’s presence, power, and purpose for you
 - i. The GOSPEL!!
 - ii. The power of the deceiver lies in his ability to manipulate your fears, your failures, your idolatrous desires, your shame with lies and deception
 - iii. Thus, the ability to perceive him as he is and to see the traps laid out is to know the truth: God is our hope
 1. Do not entrust yourself to men, because you know what’s in the heart of men
 - a. John 2:24-25
 - b. “Entrust” means to place your ultimate “OK-ness” in them

- c. Jesus did not put his faith in the applause or approval of men, nor of their mockery or disapproval
 - i. Men make horrible gods.
 - c. “My God is you!” (v6)
 - i. You are my promise-keeper (YHWH – covenant keeping God)
 - 1. The deceiver will make you promises, which you will be tempted to entrust yourself, bit by bit
 - a. Think: why is it that abused people remain silent about abuse?
 - b. They are getting something from the co-dependent relationship, which is really only something that they can ultimately get from the Lord
 - i. To be loved, desired, and treasured
 - 2. Remember that your God, who alone makes promises which He keeps for your good, is YHWH *who gave His life for you*
 - ii. You are My ruler (master/lord)
 - 1. You don’t have to obey the violent man or cover his sins
 - 2. The LORD is your master and the only one to whom you owe allegiance and the master who lays down His own life for His servants, who walks in the light not in secrecy, and who is the same in public as he is in private
 - 3. God’s Words are always true and not deceptive – he does not trap you, but frees you at his own expense
 - iii. You are My savior (strong salvation)
 - 1. The LORD has rescued you before, at great expense to Himself
 - 2. He always does things in the light, out in the open, without deception, wholly in truth
 - 3. He sent His Son to give His life to purchase you back from sin and death and slavery – He loves you
 - iv. You are my protection (you cover my head)
 - 1. We will not run to any other promisers to protect us
 - 2. The LORD is our protection and our defense and our hope
 - d. Names of God used here
 - i. YHWH – Covenant-Keeping Savior
 - ii. El – Almighty, powerful ruler
 - iii. Adon – Master who rules over me, authority

5. Pray for the Failure of the Violent Man

- a. This is not a prayer for the destruction of the person as much as it is a prayer for the destruction of his plans
 - i. “Do not give the wicked his desires” (v8)
 - ii. “Do not produce his plans” (v8)
 - iii. "When man justifies the wicked, it is a miscarriage of justice which God hates, but when God justifies the ungodly it is a miracle of grace for us to adore." (J.I. Packer)
- b. The prayer is that his plans will fall upon his own head – it is a prayer for wry justice
 - i. “Let their lies swallow them up (cover their heads)” (v9)
 - 1. There is a desire that the pretense which they speak, the hollow and powerless lie, be their own helmet which cannot protect their head b/c its pretense, empty nothing
 - ii. “Let the fires which they set fall back upon them” (v10)
- c. It is a prayer for the protection of the weak by the wickedness intended by the evil coming back upon them
 - i. “Let it knock them down so that they cannot rise again” (v10)
 - 1. Take their power away completely
 - ii. “Let them never be established in the land” (v11)

1. Don't let them gain any ground or footing in this land!
- iii. "Let evil hunt them down and run them through" (v11)

6. Proclaim the Promised Future for the Powerless (v12-13)

- a. The powerless are described here as those who are threatened by the powerful, arrogant, wicked, evil ones:
 - i. Poor – without the ability to defend themselves
 - ii. Needy – those being taken advantage of by the 'tongue-man'
 - iii. Trapped birds – the bird is a symbol of weakness, fragility, defenselessness – it can only fly away...unless baited and trapped
 - iv. Righteous – those in the right, who have not done the wrong which would require violent resistance against them
 1. There are the unrighteous, those who "eat and consume My people" who are rightly resisted
 - v. Straight – level, consistent with the 'straight-edge' of God's revealed righteousness
- b. God is the lawyer for the powerless who are taken advantage of
- c. God is the judge over such proceedings
- d. God sides with the abused against the abuser
- e. The coming judgment of God is real and true and good.
 - i. He will put an end to injustice and wickedness and make the violent man answer for his sins against the afflicted and needy and vulnerable
 - ii. This is both a warning to the violent man and a promise to the victim. God sees. God knows. God will act.

Conclusion:

But, it also creates a problem. Paul quotes this passage in Romans 3:13, arguing that all humanity is guilty before God and that all mouths have no defense before Him. We have all used our tongues for evil, like venomous weapons, and therefore are guilty before God. We have all been wicked.

What shall we do? Begin by calling it what it is and not excusing it. Such sin is violence. It is wicked. It is evil. Paul's reasoning is that we all must be rescued from the very wickedness inherent within us by the sanctifying grace of God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us repent and entrust ourselves to God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, in this humility, let us take a stand against such violence and manipulation and abuse. Particularly in the Church, but also in the world. Let us stand up with victims of abuse and tell the abusers that we will not have it. We will expose it. We will bring it into the light and plead for God to end such wicked purposes and intents. We will pray that God will cause their intentions to fail and their own traps to fall upon them and destroy their footing, that they would not be able to gain or keep such ground.

The most loving to do for a violent man is to expose his sin, to bring it into the light whereby he can be healed through repentance and faith. Manipulators thrive in the dark, where they can control their version of the truth. Truth loves the light and refuses to hide in the darkness and secret places.

The cross shows us God's hatred of sin, and His exposure of it, and also shows us the offer of forgiveness and restoration and life for those who perceive the evil of their own hearts and turn from it for the sake of righteousness.

If you are here today and you perceive that you are an abusive person, there is hope for you, but you must turn to fight against it, bring it into the light, so that Christ may shine upon you for your life. God gives grace to the humble, but He is opposed to the proud.

And if you fear that you may be a victim of abuse, bring it into the light. Pray like David and preach to yourself like David.

And Church, pray and preach with such victims. Listen and observe and weep and remind each other of the hope of the gospel. Our God is the LORD! He keeps His promises and can be trusted. His love is genuine and true and in the light. He gave His Son for us that we might live in the truth, which sets us free, not binds us up. When we see abuse, let us call it what it is and work for the redemption of the abuser, through repentance, and work for the restoration of the victims. If we must flip some tables and upset the order of the Church at large, then we know that we may just be walking in the footsteps of our Lord, doing His will by refusing to contribute in a disorganized conspiracy of silence, but instead walk in the light in the defense of the afflicted.