Abuse of Authority

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Growing Up With Abuse

I went to Faith Christian Academy in Sellersville (which later moved to Quakertown) from kindergarten through 12th grade. There were many people who liked it and many people who didn't. You might assume it is what you make of it, but a pecking order played a large part in it as well. It wasn't as much as bullies vs. nerds--that was more or less a non-serious game. The more serious game was whether someone had the right parents in the church. Faith Baptist Church founded the school and ran it up until long after I graduated.

The experience was uncannily like the movie "Saved!" (2004). There were self-righteous people, and I tried to become one of them. I barely made it into the "good Christian" group (which was actually heavily distorted in contrast to the Bible) toward the end. The teachers were required to be members of the church, and some of them were leaders (deacons, etc.). They seemed to mean well in retrospect, but in some cases I think their legalistic backgrounds held back their own maturity. The ones who stayed much longer after I left were able to change with the times, but back then several seemed strict or uncaring.

I ended up going along with being a "good" legalist, and everything that goes along with that including condemning others for things I did. That isn't to say that doing wrong was good for either of us, but I made many assumptions and distortions regarding others, and didn't recognize nor address many of my own problems. The adults who accepted me for behaving this way were the only stable ones in my life. I thought it was necessary and right. Of course, it was also a convenient way to feel better about myself. My home life was not great. I had one older brother Ray. We both had it bad, but he also took out his frustrations and abberant tendencies on me.

Legalism isn't a term in the Bible, but Christ had a lot to say about people putting burdens on others they themselves can't carry. That is one important aspect of hypocrites that he was against. If someone merely fails to attain to their own standards but is sincere, that doesn't necessarily mean the person is a fraud. However, when someone hides their wrongdoing that is of public concern (or from whom it concerns) or ignores or is in denial about such wrongdoing of others, that's where you may get into "religious fraud" territory.

I had first or second hand experience with a few genuine religious frauds. First hand would be my brother Ray, my ex Chameleon, and Dennis Dembrosky (convicted pedophile, later my landlord due to odd circum stances). Second hand experience would include with John Longaker, though I've heard him "preach" and teach first hand since he was a teacher while I attended. He was convicted and went to jail because of what he did to Kelly Romig, a girl in my brother's class.

The school wanted to "handle it internally" until Jason Brunt, the brother of Kelly's friend, stepped up. He said to Pastor Paul Auckland, basically "If you don't report it to the police, I will."

Even with the people who were sincere, there was a big blind spot caused by legalism. Someone who was good at "virtue signaling" could be supported even if they weren't in the right. It is

arguable how conscious people like Ray or John were about being phony. I know I wasn't very conscious of being phony. I was mostly desperate to overcompensate for insecurities. However, those with wisdom and the ability to confront these issues should learn to notice red flags.

Believing I was unusual was pretty easy for some people to notice, but it is harder to notice that bruises, lack of hygiene, sudden underachievement, or suddenly becoming quiet or aggressive are just some of the signs that someone is potentially being abused. Now these red flags are now taught in "mandated reporter" training, which I've heard some Christians say they think is "overbearing" government involvement or something like that. I wish my teachers had that training back then and that they had noticed, or that I even had the vocabulary to explain it when my fourth grade teacher seemed concerned.

I hit my classmate Ryan in the back of the head, one way my brother often hurt me, not the way my parents did. For some reason I just kept answering the teacher's concerns that it was my brother who hit me that way, not my parents. I wouldn't have even had the strength to hit Ryan hard enough to stun him and stop his breathing. If there was mandated reporting back then, there would have been an investigation despite the fact that I myself was the one in denial. Believing that something horrible happened under your oversight, and having the courage to do something about it can also be difficult. Like with my classmate Jared, one of the kids who helped put Dembrosky behind bars.

Growing Up With Myself

Well there's everyone else, then there's me. So what's wrong with me, anyway? I suppose this or that, maybe more or less as much as another person. I am not neurotypical, some would say. I can say that I had to learn to accept myself, and that was as important as being understood.

Accepting and understanding yourself can be as hard as to be accepted and understood. I've learned to deal with trauma and integrate with people who are more or less normal. If writing about it doesn't seem normal, well, I don't know what to tell you. Is every author a little eccentric? Maybe. If an author is more bohemian than the next, will their writing be indelicate? Probably sometimes. But I've done my best to accept both the encouragement and criticism gracefully, while focusing on what I believe are the appropriate and necessary goals and means.

I can say for pretty sure I wasn't a Christian in the sense of being born again, until I was 24. How can this be? Some people may ask. I was great at telling people what to do and what to believe. So what is the difference? I really believed facts about Christ, and I really believed I should to relay the message to others.

But there are several key differences between back then and now. For one thing, when I was a kid in church, even if I said "Amen" to Biblical preaching, or even when I was singing a church song, or even one of my own "Christian rock" songs, I was thinking about what other people should do, or what I wanted to have. Even if it was wanting to be accepted by God, I had the wrong approach. I wasn't thinking about how I might need to change, nor recognize what I couldn't do on my own. I wanted to figure out how to do better, or in some cases just feel better. Doing better deeds is not itself the Christian life. It is about discovering that Christ loves you and having a relationship with him, not about discovering the right formula for doing good and not doing bad and following that formula. I lived that for a long time, and it didn't serve to even make me feel better. That would be putting the cart before the horse.

We weren't made to walk between the lines, we were made to walk with God. That results in a better life, but you can't get their by your own formulation or effort, no matter how much you believe the right facts. A key common similarity between the "good old" version of me and the "good old" version of my brother Ray is probably something like that "cart before the horse" way of doing it. Regardless of how heartfelt that is, it is still backwards. It is reaching out to grab instead of with open hands of an inner filling with love ready to be re-gifted from the overflow. I only got there by letting go of control. Anxiety was normal for me until then. I had a tenuous yet white-knuckled grip on control instead of trusting God. Sometimes it is even necessary to trust people, to an appropriate extent for the person and situation. I wish I trusted someone enough to tell them about my home life and get me out of it.

I was happiest when doing extreme things. Exploring emotions and boundaries is part of growing up, but at the same time, I think doing both unhinged and underhanded things became major forms of escape. I didn't really know another way to feel better. I'm not just talking about sports

and stunts, though there was plenty of that, eventually. I got into a lot of "normal" trouble but usually it was with my friend Steven who was the son of my dad's friend and didn't go to the same school. When I was in school, I lived a double life. I reprimanded others for doing, saying, or watching the same things.

Why Talk About Them, and Why Now?

So why talk about certain people? And if I'm fulfilled, why me? Well, first of all, I'm not mentioning all the bad, nor all the bad people. Just the ones that continue to affect people I know and care about over 20 years after the initial events.

Dembrosky and Longaker after completing their sentences, and Chameleon in general, have served in churches after all this that I've discussed and more, and I'm not the only one who has expressed concern. Ray has continued to use his credentials as he is known as a former "preacher" even over a decade later, to discredit the Bible. It is important to know that he was just as much out of touch with God, and possibly reality, as I was during high school. Not many people in high school are in touch with reality, to be fair to us both, but that doesn't negate the point. He isn't an authority, and even around his 20s sometimes made things up about Hebrew or Greek when he was a Bible study leader, such as when I asked him about the meaning of "wait" in Isaiah 40:31 and at least one other time. It was clear he wanted to be the person with the answers. That can be beneficial or not, depending on whether it is a matter of seeking to become an worthy of a calling or merely an end in itself, and whether authority is shared with others where appropriate. Seeking to be "the" person with the answers vs "a" person with answers, and having a need to be needed vs a reasonable scope of authority are also important distinctions.

The ability of someone to be forgiven is not the only thing to consider. There is also the potential for ongoing harm. That can be prevented by recognizing it, but also by confronting matters of public concern publicly. That can include the legal system where applicable, or by speaking out (such as before or after a sentence is served, or if the harm to churches isn't illegal). Ongoing harm is likely in with these cases, having signs of false repentance such as denying facts that are a matter of record or of my own witness. If someone cannot admit their wrongdoing in a specific way, or can deny it outright, that is not a sign of repentance.

I have seen a problem from my childhood continue to today. Often churches view perpetrators as people to be given endless chances, and to be placed in roles without fact-checking. On the other hand, churches may view survivors of abuse as permanently biased. If you give hope to the perpetrator, why not the victim? If victims have ongoing concerns about a perpetrator, they are told to "just forgive." Let me tell you, I have been able to forgive a lot, but it doesn't mean I want the same thing to happen to other people. On the other hand, do you think someone who would harm a child, especially in felonious ways, just may have permanent issues? I do generally believe anyone can change, but if someone can do that, there are sometimes signs that they are not willing--despite wanting to be seen as willing, humble, and good, like most people do.

So what about that "Biblical confrontation" thing I talked about at the beginning? Matthew 18 talks about forgiveness and confronting. I don't think that is a mistake, nor random placement. If the forgiveness and grace aren't balanced out by rigorous confrontation, with a desire to mend but a path forward barring that, there is a serious threat. Confrontation is the immune system of the church. Sometimes I have seen just a hint of confrontation make someone throw themselves right out. But you don't always get off that easy. Sometimes you have to hold someone to their word, and to the facts. If they don't match, or there is stated or demonstrated unwillingness to change, you may have to ban them, we might say in modern terms.

Then there are matters of public concern. Even the Bible deals with these problems in a more drastic way than banning. For one, Jesus definitely had a different approach toward the Pharisees than toward the woman at the well. The apostle Paul wrote letters to several churches, including ones who weren't willing to deal with issues, even though some of the issues weren't illegal. Such a church's immune system has failed. In some cases Paul named the wrong that was being done right in the letter. In some cases, he even named names--and that isn't just a community discussion, and not just a public record, but in this case "it is written" for eternity. I'm not saying that when I speak "it is written," I'm in fact saying that I've been less extreme. In the cases of the people I'm discussing, instead of due diligence and due process in the ways I've discussed, leaders where enamored with the charisma and storytelling that a self-promoting person, or even someone merely suddenly accepted but not mature, provides. Either way, in many cases novices are put in leadership despite the Bible's warnings of destructive pride in such a scenario.

One thing that makes this pertinent is that last I checked, Longaker was a pastor. They knew what he did and still believed his minimized story that didn't match the public record (and still wouldn't be ok at all in his version). I don't know whether the survivor approves of this site, or of naming her. However, I've so far done my best to stand with her: She tried to warn his church but they reprimanded her instead in a letter, and then she went to a local newspaper. In that case she is publicly named and on record of her own accord. The article pointed out that there were telltale signs that Longaker himself was this "Mike Adams" who wrote the letter.