

AUTHORITY  
*Abusers*



*J.G.*  
BLOOMER

AUTHORITY  
*Abusers*

TOXIC LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECTS  
IN HOMES, CHURCHES, AND RELATIONSHIPS



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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*Publisher's Note:*

Individuals' names and exact circumstances have been altered to protect privacy.

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## **AUTHORITY ABUSERS**

Toxic Leadership and Its Effects in Homes, Churches, and Relationships

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# AN ATMOSPHERE OF ABUSE

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*And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.*

Mark 9:42 (NIV)

**I**t is subtle and often invisible to those who are involved, but as deadly to the spirit as carbon monoxide is to the body. Police officers get jail time for it; parents lose custody of their children for it; but it happens every day in thousands of churches and families throughout the world.

I'm talking about authority abuse.

Most people have no idea how hurtful and destructive authority abuse can be. It's a complicated issue that is sometimes difficult to talk about. As with other forms of abuse, though, we must acknowledge that a problem exists before we can change for the better.

Exactly what is this problem? Is authority itself bad, something that should be avoided at all costs? Of course not. The problem is not with authority or even the use of

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authority. Rather, the problem is with people who abuse those under them and justify that abuse by their position of “authority.” When this occurs, spirits are crushed and lives are broken.

Authority abuse is sin—a perversion of something beautiful. Such perversion can happen in any realm of life. For instance, sexual desire between a man and a woman is a beautiful thing in the context of marriage; that’s how God designed it to be. Sex between a man and a prostitute,

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however, is an ugly, dirty thing that degrades both the man and woman involved because it does away with the holy intimacy God intended to be the focus of the marriage bed.

Similarly, godly authority is protective, loving, honest, and—above all—liberating, while the abuse of authority usually hinges on deception. Often, both the abuser and the abused are deceived, and such deception deprives people of God’s love and the freedom of His truth.

Authority abuse stands between God and man, and it is thus a sin against the very body of Christ. By separating innocent, defenseless members from the head, which is Christ (see Colossians 1:18), authority abusers spiritually cripple those members; often, this crippling is permanent.

Only when we reject authority abuse can we embrace the authority God has designed to bless and prosper us. But that’s getting ahead of the story.

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### A Parable

There were two brothers fresh out of college who began a start-up agricultural venture in the Midwest. One brother focused on farming, applying the latest technology and innovative strategies to produce several varieties of cattle feed. The other began breeding and raising cattle for beef, using state-of-the-art methods to track the herd's health and make breeding decisions. He bought feed exclusively from his brother, and the two developed a complex, highly personalized, but very profitable kickback plan for dividing their income.

By the time the brothers reached middle age, both were moderately wealthy, with the strongest young minds and bodies doing the daily managerial work for their agricultural estates. The summer that their combined worth topped four and a half million dollars, they turned off their cell phones and took their wives on a hunting vacation in the Rocky Mountains. They set no return date, only telling their foremen, "We'll be back when we both get our elk."

A month went by, and they were still gone. A month and two weeks. Two months. After two and a half months, the brothers returned with mountain tans, coolers full of hearty steaks, and one impressively mounted elk head apiece. The brother who raised beef found the office empty — one of his staff members was on a small, much-deserved family vacation,

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so the foreman was out on the range with the company helicopter, supervising the birth of twin calves. All the books were up-to-date; all the bills were current. Profits were slightly down, but everything was running smoothly and the foreman had logged more hours of work than any of the other help.

The brother with the crop-producing business came home to a party in his honor – or, rather, a party in honor of the “summerlong vacation” the foreman figured his boss must be on. This was one of a series of drunken bashes the foreman had hosted; workers were required to help entertain his friends (he called them “business contacts”) with no overtime pay. The office was full of empty coffee cups and doughnut boxes left over from the days the foreman spent there while everyone else was in the field.

Profits were higher than ever before – at least they would have been, had it not been for the expensive parties. No one had been given vacation time, and no employee bonuses had been issued for two and a half months.

Needless to say, the first foreman received a respectable bonus and a few extra days of paid vacation for his dedication and honest management. The second foreman was served a summary pink slip and couldn’t even talk his way into a job pitching hay bales on and off the trucks.

You’re probably not wondering why the second guy got fired. Nobody would protest, “But he made more money

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for the company!" It's more likely that you feel he got off easy because a person in his position is responsible for the well-being of other employees and should not spend company resources on his own recreation.

This man's behavior not only hurt the people he was supposed to motivate, encourage, and provide for, but it also undermined the goals he was driving them toward. (See Matthew 24:44-51.) This is a prime example of authority abuse in action.

### Feed My Sheep

In John 21, Jesus told Peter how the church is to demonstrate Christ's love to His people:

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."* (John 21:15-17 NIV)

Jesus' message to Peter is clear: loving Him means caring for ("feeding") His little ones ("lambs").

On the surface, the church seems to have remembered this. The manicured lawns, smiling faces, and open arms of greeters at church doors could be an inviting alternative to

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the rugged way of life offered in a society of corporate cataclysms and a “survival of the fittest” mentality. People are

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for God.**

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looking for acceptance, stability, and even guidance—ultimately, they’re looking for God—and the church should be the end of this search.

Unfortunately, the glitzy showmanship and manipulative teaching of men who seek self-glorification rather than to reveal the glory of God often obstruct the acceptance, stability, guidance, and love that people seek. Thousands of people avoid Christians and refuse to attend church because the only message they have ever heard is one of judgment, criticism, and performance-based love.

Irresponsible leaders have made God’s business—with its saving, grace-filled mission statement—infamous. They have turned the church into a place of rigid rules and stiff membership requirements, consequently turning seekers away from the God who can fulfill them.

In my twenty-three years of preaching, I have seen the following played out hundreds of times: a girl rebels against her parents, and, for a time, nothing they do works to bring her under control. She winds up getting pregnant.

Naturally, this jolts her to her senses; she returns to obeying her parents’ rules and seeks to give her life back to God in repentance. It’s a painful lesson, but at least she has learned it. She starts on her way to healing and renewal.

Then, authority figures at her local church intervene. They declare her to be an example of “sin in the camp”

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and demand that she leave her family and the church. Her mother is exiled from the choir, and her father is forced to step down as a deacon, all because their family is “tainted with sin.”

I have to ask, “Where, in all of this, is the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ?” The answer is, “Nowhere.” This is simply spiritual abuse and condemnation posing as godly authority; this is man enforcing rules that Christ never engineered. Time and again, I have seen lives devastated by this kind of abuse until I simply have to cry, “Enough!”

A few years ago, there were some serious scandals in the leadership of the United States Navy. Several high-ranking officials betrayed the trust given to them, mishandling both the resources and people put under their care.

The offenses were committed by only a handful of officers, while hundreds of loyal, honest men and women did their best to lead a strong and honorable branch of the armed services.

Inevitably, though, people began associating the US Navy with corruption. The abuse of authority is a serious, deadly thing, and the breach in trust outweighed generations of unbroken integrity and courage.

The same thing has happened in the American church, but we can't blame it on one or two famous televangelists like the Navy could point fingers at just a few officers.

From small country parishes to metropolitan mega-churches, it's possible to find pastors who abuse their

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**Authority  
abuse has  
corrupted  
the church  
in America.**

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position. The controlling, graceless dictatorship of man-centered religion knows no race or creed, gender or geography.

As a result, many stable Christian institutions, founded upon and continually following the Word of God, have

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**Dictators  
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Gospel.**

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been lumped together with the hypocritical, life-damaging minority. The Good News of Jesus Christ is continually hindered by self-proclaimed dictators in the guise of spiritual shepherds who actually lead the sheep astray.

A gentleman once told me that his church had a total of 147 people at every service, including Communion, baptismal services, and baby dedications. For years, there were never more than 147 people, and never fewer. Always exactly 147.

I asked him what kind of church it was, and the ministry he described sounded fairly decent. He explained, though, that the people of the church were absolutely terrified of the pastor and his wife. Apparently, the pastor and the first lady of the church had a say in the day-to-day lives of every member – daily duties, the way families were run, household finances – everything.

His story reminded me of my own experience growing up in church. As a young boy, I often prayed about my sins, but I did not worry about what God thought of them or of me!

My prayer was this: “Dear God, please don’t let the pastor find out that I sinned.” Because the pastor led a very

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dogmatic and legalistic church, I feared him more than I feared God. I was terrified that God might allow this man to know my thoughts and feelings without my even sharing them.

Situations like mine still exist. Even today, congregations suffocate in the poisonous atmosphere of an abusive authority. Many people have experienced a leader trying to control them by citing so-called “biblical obedience.”

Too often (even once is too often!), a person submits himself to the abusive pastor or ministry leadership only to find out that he is being made a slave to the personal whims and erroneous convictions of that authority.

This control often goes so far as to dictate when families should go on vacations, how long couples should wait to consummate their marriage, where a family’s children should attend school...sadly, the list goes on.

Countless people have been hurt by the institution originally established to bring them healing. Thus, there are many who truly and wholeheartedly love God but have no regard for the organized church.

Denominationalism, tradition, and authority abuse have left an unpleasant aftertaste in the mouths of congregation members who trusted and depended on their leaders.

Many pastors and leaders have become taskmasters in the lives of God’s people instead of being leaders who offer accountability and care!

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There are  
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### Authority Abuse Is a Device of Satan

Satan's desire has always been to exalt his position above the throne of God. He seeks to turn the world against the church and the God who upholds it, and he will use any willing vessel to achieve these goals.

Though the number of good pastors and good churches outnumber the horror story-inspiring, congregation-controlling dictators disguised as spiritual leaders, the enemy would like to magnify the few bad seeds to corrupt the entire institution as we know it.

How many people do you know who have totally turned their backs on the church and vowed never again to set foot in another Christian institution again because they have been hurt? Even though many people use this as an excuse not to come to church, we cannot ignore those who have sincerely been badgered, mishandled, and wounded by ungodly ministry.

It is now time for those of us in the body of Christ to break away from the man-made traditions and manipulative tactics of control that produce such wounds. But how can we prepare the road to recovery for those who've been injured, while simultaneously opening the eyes of others so they can avoid the same traps?

After my childhood pastor died, years after I had grown up and begun my own ministry, God began revealing to me just how deep was the darkness that had surrounded my former pastor's church.

God took me through a season of mental and spiritual purging during which my eyes were opened so that I would

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not unconsciously incorporate those same ungodly tactics into my own ministry.

In short, God began removing the mental barriers – barriers I put up in response to this abusive authority – that were preventing me from knowing God as He really is.

The more I understood about what true spiritual authority should look like and how this pastor had deviated from that truth, the more I understood God’s character.

Now I know that it is only when we reject authority abuse that we can embrace the authority God has designed to bless and prosper us.