

Sovereign Grace Statement on Child Sexual Abuse

Background

Child sexual abuse is a terrible reality in our fallen world. Sexual abuse in any form is grieving, because abuse is committed against people made in the image of God. Therefore, it constitutes a sin against God himself. Child sexual abuse is widespread in our world today, with as many as 1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men worldwide reporting having been sexually abused as children.¹ Further, child sexual abuse survivors often bear this heavy burden alone, dealing with the effects of sexual abuse for the rest of their lives.

The prevalence of sexual abuse means that churches are not exempt from the reality of sexual abuse among us, and survivors of abuse are an important part of our lives and our churches. As a family of churches, we must be prepared to minister to survivors of abuse in a manner that honors Christ and promotes justice, and to protect children to the best of our ability.

Biblical Basis for Our Response

The gospel of Jesus and the example of our Savior must shape our response to the reality of child sexual abuse. The church and its shepherds are charged with imitating the Chief Shepherd in these attributes:

Compassion: As a compassionate and loving Savior, Christ grieves at the effects of sin, and our churches should grieve with anyone who has been sinned against as a victim of abuse (Romans 12:15).

Justice: As a just ruler, Christ hears the cries of the oppressed (Exodus 22:21–24) and delegates authority to government to punish evildoers and promote righteousness (Romans 13:4). We must cooperate with God-given governmental authorities for the promotion of justice.

Healing: As the great Redeemer, Christ heals the terrible effects of sin (Isaiah 53:4–5) and will one day wipe away every tear through his plan to restore all things in him (Rev 21:4). Our churches are called to be places where every survivor of abuse finds hope on a path toward healing in this life, even as they look forward to the complete restoration and redemption of all things.

Protection: As head of the church, Christ uses his strength to protect his flock (Isaiah 40:10–11). We must strive to be a place of safety for children and abuse survivors alike.

¹ *Child Maltreatment* Fact Sheet. World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/>. Updated January 2014.



Affirmations

Given the prevalence of child sexual abuse and our Savior's example, we affirm these convictions as a union of churches:

Compassion

- We affirm that our churches must be places of compassion and love for survivors of abuse, thereby imitating our compassionate Savior.

Justice

- We affirm that anyone aware of child sexual abuse or allegations of abuse—whether occurring inside or outside the church—must report such abuse or allegations to duly appointed, God-ordained civil authorities. We exhort each of our churches to make all members aware of this responsibility before God to defend the oppressed and punish evildoers. We believe this course of action fulfills legal and moral responsibilities to protect children, thereby promoting justice that honors Christ.
- We affirm that our churches must proactively cooperate with all law enforcement efforts to bring perpetrators of abuse to justice, thereby protecting children and promoting justice that honors Christ.

Healing

- We affirm that our church leaders must give special attention to the care of victims of sexual abuse. In this care, we desire to point abuse survivors to the ultimate restoration found in Christ and the ultimate hope of God's perfect justice. While they long for God's perfect justice, survivors of sexual abuse need our enduring compassionate care as they wait for due process to establish earthly justice, knowing that earthly justice may be delayed or even denied in this fallen world. Each of our churches should seek to counsel abuse survivors with sensitivity, skill, and compassion, taking advantage of opportunities to use resources or counselors with special training in the area of child sexual abuse.

Protection

- We affirm that our churches must maintain robust child protection policies, implementing effective safety systems designed to protect children or youth, thereby striving to protect children involved in church programs as Christ protects the church.

With the affirmation of these convictions, we urge our churches to the faithful fulfillment of this task, conscious that at the final judgment, each one's work will be tested and each will answer to Christ. While our churches are diverse and distinct, we stand united in seeking to proactively protect children from sexual abuse. May our efforts be aided by God's grace and undertaken for his glory.