

From Beth Moore to J.D. Greear, Key SBC Leaders Respond to Horrifying Report That 200-Plus Pastors, Volunteers Abused More Than 700

Key Southern Baptist leaders from President J.D. Greear to prolific author and speaker Beth Moore responded with overwhelming grief and repentance on behalf of the denomination after the *Houston Chronicle* debuted the first in a three-part series detailing abuse within the denomination.

The *Chronicle* and *San Antonio Express-News* conducted a thorough investigation of the organization that revealed the following:

- In all, since 1998, roughly 380 Southern Baptist church leaders and volunteers have faced allegations of sexual misconduct, the newspapers found. That includes those who were convicted, credibly accused and successfully sued, and those who confessed or resigned. More of them worked in Texas than in any other state.
- They left behind more than 700 victims, many of them shunned by their churches, left to themselves to rebuild their lives. Some were urged to forgive their abusers or to get abortions.
- About 220 offenders have been convicted or took plea deals, and dozens of cases are pending. They were pastors. Ministers. Youth pastors. Sunday school teachers. Deacons. Church volunteers.
- At least 35 church pastors, employees and volunteers who

exhibited predatory behavior were still able to find jobs at churches during the past two decades. In some cases, church leaders apparently failed to alert law enforcement about complaints or to warn other congregations about allegations of misconduct.

- Several past presidents and prominent leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention are among those criticized by victims for concealing or mishandling abuse complaints within their own churches or seminaries.
- Some registered sex offenders returned to the pulpit. Others remain there, including a Houston preacher who sexually assaulted a teenager and now is the principal officer of a Houston nonprofit that works with student organizations, federal records show. Its name: Touching the Future Today Inc.
- Many of the victims were adolescents who were molested, sent explicit photos or texts, exposed to pornography, photographed nude or repeatedly raped by youth pastors. Some victims as young as 3 were molested or raped inside pastors' studies and Sunday school classrooms. A few were adults—women and men who sought pastoral guidance and instead say they were seduced or sexually assaulted.

SBC President Greear released a series of tweets responding to the report.

I am broken over what was revealed today. The abuses described in this @HoustonChron article are pure evil. I join with countless others who are currently "weeping with those who weep." 1/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

The voices in this article should be heard as a warning sent from God, calling the church to repent. As Christians, we are

called to expose everything sinful to the light. The survivors in this article have done that—at a personal cost few of us can fathom. 2/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

We must admit that our failures, as churches, put these survivors in a position where they were forced to stand alone and speak, when we should have been fighting for them. Their courage is exemplary and prophetic. But I grieve that their courage was necessary. 3/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

We—leaders in the SBC—should have listened to the warnings of those who tried to call attention to this. I am committed to doing everything possible to ensure we never make these mistakes again. 4/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

It's time for pervasive change. God demands it. Survivors deserve it. We must change how we prepare before abuse (prevention), respond during disclosure (full cooperation with legal authorities), and act after instances of abuse (holistic care). 5/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

I will pursue every possible avenue to bring the vast spiritual, financial, and organizational resources of the Southern Baptist Convention to bear on stopping predators in our midst. 6/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

There can simply be no ambiguity about the church's

responsibility to protect the abused and be a safe place for the vulnerable. The safety of the victims matters more than the reputation of Southern Baptists. 7/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

The Baptist doctrine of church autonomy should never be a religious cover for passivity towards abuse. Church autonomy is about freeing the church to do the right thing—to obey Christ—in every situation. It is a heinous error to apply autonomy in a way that enables abuse. 8/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

As a denomination, now is a time to mourn and repent. Changes are coming. They must. We cannot just promise to “do better” and expect that to be enough. But today, change begins with feeling the full weight of the problem. 9/9

– J.D. Greear (@jdgrear) February 10, 2019

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission Chair Moore penned a response on his blog:

The sexual abuse of the vulnerable is satanic at its very root, and, just as in the beginning of the cosmic story, the tools the devil and those who carry out such horrors use are twisted versions of the very words of God. How can these predators be back in churches, sometimes just moving down the street to another congregation, to prey again? Often, they do so by appealing to some perverted concept of God’s grace. “God can forgive anything,” they say. “Look at King David.” In so doing, these persons co-opt even the gospel itself (or, at least, a cheap, unbiblical version of it) as cover for their crimes. As the Apostle Paul said of such madness, “God forbid.” If your understanding of the gospel means that rapists and sexual offenders still have access to those who

can be harmed, you do not understand the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, in many contexts, church life has fueled the undue shame of the survivors of such abuse. Again, from the beginning, the devil seeks to shame the innocent into hiding, and to cover up the crimes of the guilty. Many survivors feel as though they have committed sexual immorality or that they are somehow at fault for “tempting” church leaders to abuse them. This is a scandal crying out to heaven. The church’s message to survivors should be a clear communication that they are those who have been sinned against, not those who have sinned, that they are not troublemakers in the church but those who are helping the real “trouble” to come to light. Sexual predation thrives on criminals counting on those they’ve harmed hiding in shame. When churches don’t combat this, we are in active cooperation with the works of the devil. ...

We should see this scandal in terms of the church as a flock, not as a corporation. Many, whether in Hollywood or the finance industry or elsewhere, see such horrors as public relations problems to be managed. The church often thinks the same way. Nothing could be further from the way of Christ. Jesus does not cover up sin within the temple of his presence. He brings everything hidden to light. We should too. When we downplay or cover over what has happened in the name of Jesus to those He loves, we are not “protecting” Jesus’ reputation. We are instead fighting Jesus himself. No church should be frustrated by the Houston Chronicle’s reporting, but should thank God for it. The judgment seat of Christ will be far less reticent than a newspaper series to uncover what should never have been hidden.

Beth Moore, founder of Living Proof Ministries, shared her thoughts on Twitter:

It's monstrously common for victims to be abused again by one they thought safe to tell. 2nd wave abuse occurs when those told are either scandalized (backs off, "don't tell me more") or tantalized (moves in, "oh tell me more"). Both heap shame upon ://

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) February 10, 2019

We understand how you feel. We didn't want to know about sexual abuse either.

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) February 10, 2019

In tears scrolling through childhood pictures of sexual abuse survivors thinking how...

**utterly precious each one is, how innocent and worthy of valuing and protecting.*

**most victimizations are never reported.*

**many victims who reported got blamed.*

**some victims don't survive.*

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) February 11, 2019

Also thinking how many pictures of little boys could've also shown up in that thread. Our darling brothers, we know you were among us. We know this doesn't just happen to girls. You count. We weep for you, too. It was not your fault either.

Jesus, redeem. Raise up. Reform us.

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) February 11, 2019

The Chronicle is expected to publish two more pieces in the series.