

REASON TOGETHER STUDY



CHILD EXPLOITATION

What Does God Require When a Child Is Treated as Property?

JOEL 3:1-8



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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Child Exploitation

Sermon Transcript

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Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you have attended church for most of your life, whether this is your first time with us or whether you are not yet sure what you believe, we are glad that you are here.

We especially want to recognize our honored guests.

You are not expected to pretend that you have all the answers.

This is a place where sincere questions are welcome.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If you would like us to stay in touch, our guest card asks only for your first name and email address.

You are welcome to complete it, but there is no pressure to do so.

After the study, please join us at Reason Together Café.

The coffee is free.

And there are always free refills on conversations.

For families with children, our Keiki Kids Center is available.

We are grateful for every child God has brought among us.

That makes today's subject especially important.

Today we are going to address the exploitation of a young child.

I will not describe the encounter graphically.

Nevertheless, this may be difficult for some people to hear.

If you need to step out at any time, you may do so without explanation or embarrassment.

No survivor owes this congregation a public account of what happened to him or her.

Before we begin, let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for gathering us together today.

Give us wisdom rather than curiosity.

Give us compassion rather than spectacle.

Give us courage rather than comfortable silence.

Open our eyes to Your Word.

Open our eyes to the little ones whom others overlook.

Protect those who are in danger.

Comfort those who carry wounds that no one else can see.

Show us how to speak truth without using another person's suffering for our own purposes.

Teach us to receive the vulnerable as we would receive Jesus.

In His precious name we pray.

Amen.

Our primary Scripture reading today is Joel 3:1-8.

The Bible says:

“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

“I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.

“And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.

“Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head;

“Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things:

“The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border.

“Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head:

“And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it.”

Before we continue, I want us to remember one sentence from that reading.

They “sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.”

We will return to those words.

If you are visiting with us, we also want you to understand our approach to giving.

We do not pass a plate.

Guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to support your home church.

If you choose to give here, please do so privately, cheerfully and only as God leads you.

There is a giving box at the back.

Money can be used to feed a hungry person.

Money can be used to support a faithful Pastor.

Money can be used to protect someone who is vulnerable.

But money can also be used to purchase access, silence and power.

Our question today is not simply what our money can buy.

Our question is whether anything God created in His image should ever be for sale.

The title of today’s message is “Child Exploitation.”

The question we will Reason Together is this:

What does God require when a child is treated as property?

Some memories gradually fade.

Others never do.

They remain clear because they changed what we knew about the world.

We remember where we were.

We remember who was standing beside us.

We remember what we heard.

We remember the moment when something we could barely imagine became something we could no longer deny.

Years ago, while serving in the Philippines, I joined a small group from a local church as they went door to door.

There were five of us.

My wife Danielin was with me.

There was a local Pastor and two teenage members of the church.

We were sharing the Gospel and inviting people to church.

I had been in the country for only a short time.

I knew very little of the local language.

If someone spoke English, I tried to participate.

Otherwise, I smiled, listened and prayed.

We entered a neighborhood where I saw poverty unlike anything I had experienced in America.

The sights and smells were difficult.

The living conditions were painful to observe.

At that time, I thought of myself as the missionary who had come to help.

But that morning I was dependent upon the local believers to understand almost everything happening around me.

That fact would soon become very important.

After about forty-five minutes, we approached a house where a man eagerly welcomed us.

He spoke some English and invited us to sit on a bench outside his home.

The Pastor began talking with him about Jesus, the Cross and eternal life.

The man listened for a little while.

But he repeatedly redirected the conversation toward me.

He wanted to know where I was from.

He wanted to know how long I would remain in his country.

I answered his questions and attempted to direct the conversation back toward the Gospel.

Then the man excused himself.

He returned a few moments later with his daughter.

She appeared to be about six or seven years old.

Her hair was wet, and it seemed that she had just finished taking a bath.

Her father spoke with pride about how intelligent and pretty she was.

He whispered something to her.

She came over and sat on my lap.

At the time, I thought it was simply a child being friendly toward a visitor.

The father and the Pastor began speaking loudly in words I could not understand.

They moved a short distance away.

The girl stood in front of me and did her best to communicate in English.

She told me her name.

She told me that she could read some English.

She attempted to demonstrate what she knew.

Then she asked whether I wanted to see her room.

I began to stand.

Immediately, the two teenage church members jumped from their seats.

They pushed my shoulders down and forced me back onto the bench.

I was confused.

But I could see terror in their faces.

The Pastor quickly returned and told us that we were leaving.

I did not know what was happening.

I knew enough to trust the Pastor.

We hurried away from the house.

When we were safely out of the neighborhood, the Pastor explained what had taken place.

The father had been attempting to sell sexual access to his young daughter.

The requested amount was the equivalent of less than two American dollars.

He had also attempted to negotiate a larger fee if I kept her during the remainder of my stay.

Everyone except me had understood what was happening.

I had been looking at a little girl.

Her father had been looking at something he believed he could sell.

I wish I could tell you that the child was immediately removed from danger and that everything turned out well.

I cannot honestly say that.

The local church continued returning to the neighborhood.

They continued witnessing to the family.

They planted a church only a few doors away.

But the child remained vulnerable.

I later received a report that her father died during a dispute connected to another occasion when he had exploited her.

The amount involved was reportedly enough for him to purchase a small amount of whisky.

His death did not automatically rescue the child.

It left her in the same poverty, in the same neighborhood and in continuing danger.

Now listen again to Joel 3:3.

“And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.”

Those words were written centuries ago.

But the sin they expose has never become ancient history.

Joel was speaking about nations that scattered God’s people.

They divided the land.

They cast lots for human beings.

They treated boys and girls as objects of exchange.

A boy could be traded for sexual pleasure.

A girl could be sold for enough wine to drink.

The small price was part of the insult.

A life created by God was exchanged for something that would soon be consumed and forgotten.

God saw it.

God named it.

God summoned the nations to judgment for it.

The traffickers had treated God’s people as merchandise.

But God still called them “my people” and “my heritage.”

The buyer did not determine their identity.

The seller did not determine their worth.

Their value was established by the God to whom they belonged.

This brings us to a foundational truth.

A child is entrusted to a parent.

A child is not owned by a parent.

Psalms 127:3 says:

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.”

A heritage is something received.

The child does not originate in the parent’s authority.

Parental authority originates in God’s trust.

A parent is authorized to protect.

A parent is authorized to provide.

A parent is authorized to teach.

A parent is authorized to correct with love.

A parent is authorized to sacrifice for the child.

But a parent is never authorized to sacrifice the child for the parent.

In Ezekiel 16, God confronts His people for sacrificing their sons and daughters.

The passage uses the language of spiritual unfaithfulness.

But listen to the way God describes the children.

Ezekiel 16:20-21 says:

“Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured.”

“That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?”

The parents had borne those children.

Yet God called them “my children.”

Human parenthood did not cancel God’s claim upon their lives.

The father in my story could call that little girl “my daughter.”

But those words gave him a greater duty to protect her.

They did not give him permission to sell her.

Leviticus 19:29 speaks directly:

“Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness.”

Notice where God places responsibility.

The command is not directed toward the exploited daughter.

It is directed toward the person exercising power over her.

God does not assign her the shame for what another person does to her.

He confronts the one who causes it.

And God says the damage does not end at the door of that house.

The land becomes full of wickedness.

Child exploitation is never merely a private sin between a customer and an offender.

It corrupts families.

It corrupts communities.

It corrupts institutions.

It corrupts every person who knows and decides that silence is easier.

The Bible gives us another story of a young person treated as merchandise.

Genesis 37 tells us that Joseph was seventeen years old.

His brothers hated him.

They stripped him of his coat.

They placed him in an empty pit.

At first, some of them wanted to kill him.

Then Judah asked a revealing question.

Genesis 37:26 says:

“What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?”

What profit is it?

They had stopped asking what they owed their brother.

They began asking what they could gain from him.

When the Ishmeelite merchants passed by, Joseph’s brothers sold him for twenty pieces of silver.

Joseph was carried into Egypt.

He was sold again.

He was later subjected to sexual pressure by someone who possessed power over him.

When he refused, he was falsely accused and imprisoned.

The details are different from the story I witnessed.

We should not pretend the experiences were identical.

But the underlying transformation is the same.

A person becomes merchandise.

A relationship that should have provided protection becomes the means of betrayal.

Joseph was not first endangered by strangers.

He was sold by his own family.

Children are often warned about dangerous strangers.

That warning has value.

But danger does not always arrive through someone unknown.

It may come through someone the child loves.

It may come through someone the child has been taught to obey.

It may come through someone with a respected position, a trusted title or a religious reputation.

Access is not the same as trustworthiness.

Authority is not the same as character.

And a family relationship does not give anyone permission to violate the person God entrusted to his care.

Joseph's story eventually included deliverance.

God raised him from slavery and prison.

God used him to preserve many lives during famine.

Years later, Joseph told his brothers:

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

Notice what Joseph did not say.

He did not say that selling him was good.

He called their intention evil.

God's providence did not transform the brothers' betrayal into righteousness.

God overcame the evil.

God brought good out of it.

God can redeem what people do to us without declaring that what they did was right.

That distinction matters to survivors.

Sometimes Christians are too quick to point toward a good result.

We say that the suffering made someone stronger.

We say that God later used the testimony.

We say that another person was helped by hearing it.

Those things may become true.

But a later good does not make the original evil necessary, acceptable or small.

Joseph's brothers were still responsible for selling him.

The father in the magazine story was still responsible for exploiting his daughter.

God's ability to redeem evil never gives us permission to commit it.

Think about the prices found in Scripture.

Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver.

Joel described a girl sold for wine.

Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver.

The little girl in the story was assigned a price of almost nothing.

But price and value are not the same.

A price is what another person is willing to pay in order to acquire or use something.

Value is what God placed upon the person when He created that person in His image.

The father's small asking price did not reveal that the girl had little value.

It revealed how little value he was willing to recognize.

It revealed something about the seller.

It revealed something about the intended buyer.

It revealed nothing about the child's true worth.

Suppose the father had requested much more.

Would that have made his conduct less evil?

Of course not.

The wrong was not that he set the price too low.

The wrong was that he believed he possessed the right to set a price at all.

No amount of money could purchase moral ownership of her body.

No transaction could turn exploitation into consent.

No financial desperation could erase her personhood.

The price placed upon a human being tells us about the buyer and seller.

It tells us nothing about the value God placed upon that person.

Now turn with me to Matthew 18.

The disciples came to Jesus with a question.

They asked:

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

They were thinking about position.

They were thinking about recognition.

They were thinking about which of them would possess the greatest importance.

Jesus answered by calling a little child.

He placed the child in the midst of them.

The powerful men were told to look at someone who possessed very little social power.

Jesus said:

“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

“And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.”

Jesus did not describe children as distractions from His ministry.

He placed a child at the center of the lesson.

He told the disciples that receiving the little one in His name was receiving Him.

Then Jesus gave one of the strongest warnings recorded in the Gospels.

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

The words “little ones” in Matthew 18 are not restricted only to biological children.

Jesus also uses the language for humble and vulnerable believers.

We should not make the passage say less than it says.

But we should not overlook the fact that an actual child was standing among them.

Jesus intentionally used someone small, dependent and socially unimportant to expose the disciples’ distorted view of greatness.

Then He said:

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.”

To exploit a child is an extreme form of despising that child.

But exploitation is not the only way a child can be despised.

A child may be despised when an adult refuses to listen.

A child may be despised when an institution protects a respected leader instead of investigating a serious allegation.

A child may be despised when people describe the damage to a ministry’s reputation as more important than the danger to the child.

A child may be despised when adults demand quick forgiveness but refuse to establish meaningful protection.

Jesus says, “Take heed.”

Pay attention.

Do not look away.

Do not assume the little one is too unimportant to command Heaven’s attention.

Jesus says that receiving the little one is receiving Him.

That creates a difficult question.

If receiving a child in His name means receiving Jesus, whom are we rejecting when we refuse to protect that child?

The millstone warning should not be used to encourage personal revenge.

Jesus did not appoint us to become a violent mob.

He was declaring the seriousness with which God regards the offense.

Some crimes remain hidden from human courts.

Some offenders manipulate evidence.

Some institutions conceal the truth.

Some victims are never believed during their lifetimes.

But God is not confused.

God is not deceived by religious language.

God does not forget the little one.

The Judge of all the earth sees what happened.

And Jesus says that the offender will discover that a millstone and the depth of the sea would have been preferable to the judgment of God.

That is severe language.

It came from the gentle Savior who welcomed children into His arms.

His tenderness toward the vulnerable and His severity toward those who destroy them are not contradictions.

They are expressions of the same holy love.

Now we must face another difficult question.

Does poverty excuse what that father did?

The families in the neighborhood experienced desperation that many of us have never known.

Employment was scarce.

Hunger was real.

Public assistance was limited.

Some parents believed they had no legitimate way to put food on the table.

It is easy for comfortable people to pass judgment upon choices made under pressures they have never experienced.

We should approach such poverty with humility.

We should try to understand the conditions that allow predators and traffickers to flourish.

But explanation is not justification.

Poverty can explain why a temptation becomes powerful.

Poverty cannot transform exploitation into love.

Hunger does not transfer ownership of a child's body to a parent.

Desperation does not erase the child's humanity.

The father in the story remained morally responsible.

But the church also had a responsibility.

James 2:15-16 asks:

*“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,
“And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled;
notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it
profit?”*

It is not enough to tell a hungry family to make better choices while refusing to help provide food.

It is not enough to preach against exploitation while ignoring the economic vulnerability that allows it to continue.

It is not enough to tell people about eternal life while pretending that their immediate danger is spiritually irrelevant.

The Gospel is essential.

Only Christ can transform a sinful heart.

But the Gospel that saves souls also commands us to protect bodies.

First John 3:17-18 says:

*“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his
bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”
“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”*

The magazine article described several local Pastors who understood this balance.

They had families in their communities who had used exploitation as a means of survival.

The Pastors did not approve what was happening.

They did not merely preach a sermon against it and walk away.

They found legitimate work that the parents could perform.

Some cooked or cleaned.

Some helped with construction and other church needs.

The Pastors paid them from support that had originally been intended for the Pastors themselves.
Those men reduced their own resources to give vulnerable families an honorable alternative.
They preached the Gospel.
They confronted sin.
They addressed hunger.
They created work.
They remained present.
The church must never excuse evil because people are hungry.
But neither should the church condemn hungry people while refusing to help feed them.
That morning, two teenagers taught me something about intervention.
They recognized what was happening before I did.
They became visibly uncomfortable.
They did not remain politely seated.
They did not tell themselves that the father's conduct was none of their business.
They stood up.
They physically stopped me from following the child.
The local Pastor removed us from the situation.
I was the American missionary.
I had education and resources.
I had traveled to share the Gospel.
But I was not the person who understood the danger.
The Filipino believers protected me from becoming an unwitting participant in something evil.
That matters.
This is not a story about an American arriving to rescue helpless people in another country.
It is a story in which local believers saw what the visitor could not see.
They acted while I was still confused.
Sometimes the person who arrives to help must first learn to listen.
Proverbs 24:11-12 says:

“If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain;

“If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?”

At first, I truly did not know.

But after the Pastor explained what had happened, I knew.

I could never again say that such exploitation existed only in distant reports.

Knowledge creates responsibility.

We may not know everything.

We may not immediately know the perfect response.

But when danger becomes visible, we must not pretend that we saw nothing.

Psalm 82:3-4 says:

“Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.”

“Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.”

Those are action words.

Defend.

Do justice.

Deliver.

Rescue.

Biblical compassion does not merely feel terrible about what happened.

It moves toward the person in danger.

Sometimes defending a child means interrupting an adult.

Sometimes it means asking a question that will not be welcomed.

Sometimes it means refusing a demand for secrecy.

Sometimes it means removing someone from access to children.

Sometimes it means making a report to lawful authorities.

Sometimes it means admitting that someone we trusted may have done something terrible.

Courage is not always knowing exactly what to do.

Sometimes courage begins by refusing to pretend that nothing is wrong.

We must also bring this question home.

Child exploitation is not limited to Asia.

It is not confined to squatter villages.

It is not a sin that belongs to some other culture.

It can be hidden inside prosperous homes.

It can be hidden inside schools, athletic programs, businesses and religious institutions.

Technology can provide an exploiter access to a child without the exploiter ever entering the house.

Images can be copied, traded and sold long after the original abuse occurred.

Religious authority can be manipulated to demand silence.

Respectable appearances can become a wall behind which suffering remains unseen.

Poverty can make exploitation visible.

Wealth can provide better places to hide it.

This means the church must examine itself.

When abuse is suspected, our first question must be:

Is the child safe?

Our first question cannot be:

What will people think about our church?

Our first question cannot be:

How important is the person being accused?

Our first question cannot be:

Can we keep this matter within the congregation?

Our first question cannot be:

Will reporting this hurt the ministry?

The first question must be:

Is the child safe?

The church must listen seriously.

The church must act to prevent continued access.

The church must report suspected crimes to the proper authorities as the law requires.

The church must cooperate with those trained and authorized to investigate.

The church must provide pastoral care without attempting to replace professional care.

The church must protect the person who disclosed abuse from gossip, pressure and retaliation.

Prayer is essential.

But prayer is not a substitute for protection.

Pastoral counseling has value.

But pastoral counseling is not a substitute for reporting suspected crime.

Church discipline is Biblical.

But church discipline is not a substitute for lawful investigation.

Concern for the offender's soul does not permit neglect of the child's safety.

A church cannot protect the name of Christ by sacrificing a child to protect its own name.

Someone may now ask another difficult question.

Can a person who has exploited a child be forgiven?

The answer is yes.

The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient for every person who genuinely repents and believes.

There is no category of sin more powerful than the saving grace of God.

But forgiveness does not mean pretending that nothing happened.

Genuine repentance tells the truth.

Genuine repentance stops the conduct.

Genuine repentance accepts lawful consequences.

Genuine repentance makes no demands upon the victim.

Genuine repentance respects boundaries.

Genuine repentance does not use forgiveness as a method of regaining access.

Forgiveness and trust are not identical.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are related, but they are not identical.

A survivor may forgive without meeting privately with an offender.

A survivor may forgive without restoring a relationship.

A church may believe that an offender has repented while still permanently prohibiting that person from working with children.

A forgiven offender can attend worship under appropriate safeguards.

A forgiven offender can receive pastoral care.

A forgiven offender can grow spiritually.

But forgiveness does not create a right to leadership.

Forgiveness does not erase criminal consequences.

Forgiveness does not require a child to carry the risk so an adult can demonstrate that he deserves another chance.

A genuinely repentant person should welcome boundaries that protect others.

He should say, “If my absence from this responsibility makes a child safer, I will gladly remain absent.”

That is not rejection of grace.

It may be evidence that grace has begun to change the heart.

Now I want to speak gently to anyone who has personally experienced abuse or exploitation.

The story in Genesis 21 tells us about Hagar and her son Ishmael in the wilderness.

Their water was gone.

Hagar placed the boy beneath a shrub.

She moved away because she could not bear to watch him die.

She lifted up her voice and wept.

Then Genesis 21:17 says something beautiful:

“And God heard the voice of the lad.”

Hagar was crying.

But Scripture specifically says that God heard the boy.

God knew where he was.

God knew what he needed.

God opened Hagar’s eyes to the provision that was nearby.

If something was done to you when you were young, God saw you.

If you could not find words to explain it, God heard you.

What an adult did to you was not your fault.

Fear was not consent.

Silence was not consent.

Freezing was not consent.

Being unable to stop someone older, stronger or more powerful did not make you responsible.

The shame belongs to the person who exploited power.

You are not what someone did to you.

You are not the name someone called you.

You are not the price someone placed upon you.

You do not owe this congregation your story.

You do not need to stand up today and identify yourself.

You may seek help privately from trustworthy and qualified people.

If a child is presently in danger, that danger should be reported immediately to the proper authorities.

But you are not required to turn your pain into a public performance in order for God to hear you.

He heard the voice of the lad.

He hears you.

There is one more responsibility we must consider.

The church must not exploit the child's story a second time.

It is possible to condemn someone for turning a child into merchandise while turning that same child into promotional material for ourselves.

Ministries sometimes use shocking stories to raise money.

Photographs of vulnerable children may be distributed without meaningful permission.

Missionaries can unintentionally make themselves the heroes of another person's tragedy.

Preachers can linger over painful details because strong emotion holds the attention of a congregation.

We must refuse to do that.

The child in this story remains unnamed.

I will not invent her thoughts.

I will not claim an ending that I do not know.

I will not pretend that my presence rescued her.

I will not allow her suffering to become property belonging to my ministry.

Her story is sacred testimony.

It is not material to be mined for emotional effect.

That is why the details have been limited today.

The goal is not to make you curious about what happened in a room.

The goal is to make us obedient to what God says about the little one.

Now let us return to the prices.

Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver.

Joel described a girl sold for wine.

Judas asked the religious leaders what they would give him to betray Jesus.

They agreed upon thirty pieces of silver.

The little girl in my story was offered for less than the price of an ordinary meal in America.

Human beings repeatedly attempt to place prices upon other human beings.

But First Peter 1:18-19 says:

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

The world speaks in the language of price.

God speaks in the language of redemption.

Exploitation says, “You exist for my use.”

Redemption says, “You were loved at immeasurable cost.”

Exploitation takes from the vulnerable.

Jesus willingly gave Himself for sinners.

We must make an important distinction.

The child did not choose what was done to her.

Jesus knowingly and willingly laid down His life.

He entered human suffering.

He was betrayed.

He was falsely accused.

He was stripped, mocked and crucified.

Then He rose from the grave.

He did not remain under the power of those who assigned Him a price.

Through His death and resurrection, He offers redemption to people trapped beneath sin, guilt, shame and suffering.

Redemption does not mean that every earthly wound instantly disappears.

It does not mean that painful memories cease to exist.

It does not mean that justice and treatment are unnecessary.

It means that evil does not receive the final word over your identity, your future or your relationship with God.

The world may attempt to name your price.

Only God has authority to declare your value.

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, He invites you to come to Him today.

All of us have sinned.

All of us have fallen short of the glory of God.

We cannot purchase forgiveness with silver or gold.

We cannot earn it through religious work.

Jesus Christ died on the Cross for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

Salvation is received by grace through faith.

If you have been exploited, your suffering does not make you unacceptable to Christ.

You are not spiritually contaminated by another person's sin against you.

Jesus receives the wounded.

He is not ashamed to call those who trust Him His own.

If you are guilty of harming another person, your excuses will not save you.

Poverty will not save you.

Secrecy will not save you.

Religious reputation will not save you.

But Jesus will save the sinner who comes into the light, turns from sin and trusts Him.

Repentance is more than regret over being discovered.

It is surrender to the truth and to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

If you desire to trust Christ today, you may pray with me.

The words themselves do not save.

Jesus saves.

But you may use these words to express sincere repentance and faith.

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died on the Cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my faith in You.

Forgive me.

Save me.

Make me the person You created me to be.

Teach me to walk in truth.

Teach me to accept responsibility.

Teach me to protect those who are vulnerable.

Thank You for hearing me.

Thank You for receiving me.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Let us pray together.

Heavenly Father, we pray for children who are in danger today.

Some are visible.

Many are hidden.

Protect them.

Send courageous people who will recognize what is happening and refuse to look away.

Give wisdom to parents, teachers, Pastors, counselors, law enforcement officers and every person entrusted with a child's care.

Comfort survivors who carry wounds in silence.

Remove false shame from them.

Help them find people who will listen, believe and respond wisely.

Bring offenders into the light.

Grant genuine repentance where repentance is possible.

Establish justice and boundaries that prevent further harm.

Provide food for hungry families.

Provide honorable employment for desperate parents.

Strengthen faithful local churches that remain in difficult communities after visitors have gone home.

Forgive us for the times we protected comfort, position or reputation rather than the vulnerable.

Make this church a place where little ones are received in the name of Jesus.

Give us the courage to defend the poor and fatherless.

Give us the wisdom to act lawfully and responsibly.

Give us compassion that moves beyond words into deed and truth.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.

Before we leave, I want each of us to carry several questions.

Have I ignored something because knowing would require me to act?

Am I more concerned about protecting someone vulnerable or protecting someone powerful?

Have I confused forgiveness with the removal of consequences?

Do the practices of our church reflect the concern Jesus expressed for the little ones?

Am I willing to provide practical help to a family under pressure, or am I satisfied merely to condemn its failures?

Have I carried shame that properly belongs to the person who harmed me?

Do I believe that God heard me even when no one else did?

The little girl in this story was assigned a price by someone who should have protected her.

But her father did not create her.

The intended customer could not own her.

The missionary did not rescue her.

The ministry does not possess her story.

She belonged to God.

The same Jesus who placed a child in the midst of His disciples still places the little one before His church.

He asks whether we will receive her.

He warns us not to despise her.

He commands us to defend her.

He reminds us that how we treat the little one reveals how we receive Him.

A price is what someone is willing to pay in order to use a person.

Value is what God established when He created that person in His image.

The world may attempt to assign the price.

God alone declares the value.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Child Exploitation

What Does God Require When a Child Is Treated as Property?

Joel 3:1-8

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Introduction

This commentary examines a question that must never be reduced to an arresting title or a painful story: What does God require when a child is treated as property? The question arose from a ministry encounter in the Philippines, but Scripture prevents the reader from keeping the issue at a comfortable distance. Joel condemns nations that exchanged a girl for wine. Jesus places a child in the midst of His disciples and declares that receiving a little one in His name is receiving Him. Proverbs commands rescue. The Gospel announces a redemption price that reveals value without turning the redeemed into merchandise.

The subject requires restraint. The originating encounter is described only to the extent necessary to establish danger, intervention and the continuing need for protection. No graphic detail is needed. Curiosity is not compassion, and a child's suffering is not raw material that belongs to a preacher. The commentary therefore concentrates upon the Biblical reasoning beneath the sermon, the interpretive boundaries that keep the major texts in context and the pastoral practices that should follow from them.

The controlling conclusion is direct. A child is a trust from God, never property. When anyone assigns a price to a child, God does not accept the transaction's definition of the person. He sees His image, His little one and a life entrusted to adult care. His people must protect the endangered, involve proper authorities, refuse coercive secrecy, care for survivors without blame and build forms of practical support that reduce vulnerability.

Controlling conclusion

A price is what an exploiter attempts to assign to a person. Value is what God established when He created that person in His image. The Church must never confuse the two.

1. The Story Behind the Question

A Local Church Visit

The supplied magazine article recounts a door-to-door church visit in the Philippines. Dr. Hawksley went with his wife Danielin, a local Pastor and two teenage members of the congregation. The purpose was ordinary Christian ministry: share the Gospel, meet families and invite people to church. The group entered a poor home where hospitality and conversation initially appeared unremarkable.

The visiting missionary knew little of the language and less of the danger developing around him. That limitation is important. Physical presence does not equal cultural understanding. Good

intention does not produce instant discernment. The people who recognized the warning signs were the local teenagers and Pastor, whose language, relationships and situational awareness enabled them to see what the visitor did not.

The Intervention Came Before the Explanation

The teenagers acted before the visiting members understood why action was necessary. The Pastor then removed the group from the situation. Only afterward was the proposal explained: the father had attempted to sell access to his young child for a very small amount of money. The public sermon keeps the description brief because the moral meaning does not require more detail.

The sequence provides a useful ministry lesson. Protection cannot always wait until every observer understands. A person who recognizes immediate danger may need to interrupt, remove a child from exposure or contact lawful authorities while others are still processing what is happening. Explanation remains important, but the safety of the vulnerable is not suspended until the entire group reaches intellectual agreement.

No Convenient Ending

The local Pastor continued ministering to the family. The church attempted to answer material need through food and honorable work. Later reports did not establish a safely resolved future for the child. The father's death did not by itself remove the conditions that had made exploitation possible. The story therefore offers no tidy ending in which one visit, one sermon or one gift repairs everything.

That incompleteness should be preserved. Christian testimony is sometimes tempted to force events into a clean arc of danger, intervention and victory. Scripture permits lament and unfinished knowledge. The Church can act faithfully without claiming an outcome it cannot verify. Protecting truth includes telling the listener what is not known.

Why the Story May Be Told

A painful story belongs in ministry only when a strong Biblical question justifies its use. Here the question is not whether the event was shocking. It is whether God's Word defines a child differently from the people who would assign a price. The story serves the question and then recedes. It is not used to make the preacher appear brave, compassionate or important.

The local believers must also remain visible in the account. They recognized danger and acted. Presenting the American visitor as the rescuer would falsify the event and reinforce an unhelpful cultural hierarchy. The more truthful lesson is that ministry requires humility, local knowledge

and a willingness to be corrected by people whom the outsider may initially assume he has come to teach.

2. Joel 3 and the Language of Human Commerce

Judgment in the Valley

Joel 3 looks toward divine judgment upon nations that scattered God's people, divided His land and treated captives as commodities. The language is corporate and historical. The nations are summoned because their economic and military power did not place them beyond God's moral government. What they did to vulnerable people remained visible before Him.

The passage should not be reduced to a general lesson about unkindness. It describes conquest, displacement, sale and deliberate humiliation. Human beings are placed into systems of exchange for the convenience and pleasure of those who hold power. Joel's God is not neutral toward that market. He identifies with the people whom the nations attempted to convert into inventory.

Joel 3:3

“And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.”

A Girl Exchanged for Wine

The horror of Joel 3:3 lies partly in the smallness of the exchange. A girl is sold for wine that can be consumed and forgotten. The verse exposes the blindness of commodification. The transaction attempts to say that a temporary appetite is worth more than a human life. Scripture records the price, but it does not endorse the valuation.

The distinction between price and value therefore arises from the text itself. A market can place a price upon what it has no moral right to sell. A powerful person can make an exchange without possessing the authority to define the one exchanged. God's judgment overturns the transaction's false claim. The girl has not become cheap. The sellers have revealed the poverty of their own moral vision.

My People and My Heritage

Joel repeatedly preserves God's covenant language. The captives remain 'my people' and 'my heritage.' Sale changes their location and legal condition under human systems, but it does not dissolve divine recognition. Their identity is not surrendered to the vocabulary of the captor. This

is a crucial word for survivors: what was done to a person does not become the person's spiritual identity.

The Church should adopt the same discipline of language. A child may have been exploited, trafficked or abused, but the act committed against the child does not define the whole person. The survivor remains an image-bearer capable of faith, relationship, calling, joy and a future that is larger than the offense.

Judgment Is God's, Protection Is Ours

The later verses return recompense upon the nations in the imagery of the ancient world. They affirm that exploitation will not escape divine judgment. They do not authorize private vengeance or permit Christians to imitate the commerce that the passage condemns. The Church reads Joel through the fuller Biblical witness, including lawful authority, love of neighbor and the final judgment of God.

Believers are therefore neither passive nor vengeful. They may report crimes, cooperate with authorities, protect access to children and pursue justice through lawful means. At the same time, they refuse retaliation that creates new victims. God's promise to judge strengthens moral courage because protection does not depend upon the rescuer becoming another exploiter.

3. A Child Is a Trust From God

Image Before Usefulness

Genesis 1 establishes human value before any later discussion of social position, wealth or usefulness. Humanity is made in the image of God. A child's value therefore does not wait for education, productivity, maturity or the approval of an adult. The child bears a God-given dignity that no poverty and no transaction can erase.

The image of God is not a measurable capacity by which stronger people receive more value than weaker people. It is a divine declaration about humanity. Children, people with disabilities, the elderly and those who cannot protect themselves do not possess a lesser version of human worth. Their dependence intensifies the responsibility of those with power.

Children Are an Heritage of the Lord

Psalm 127 calls children 'an heritage of the LORD' and 'his reward.' The language does not create an ownership title for parents. It reminds parents that children come from God and remain answerable to His purposes. Parental authority is therefore stewardship. It is real authority, but it is delegated, bounded and accountable.

Stewardship answers the question, 'What may I do with what has been entrusted to me?' by first asking, 'What does the Owner require?' A parent may guide, teach, discipline, feed and protect. A parent may not convert authority into permission to exploit. The fact that a child depends upon an adult creates duty, not dominion without limits.

God Calls Them My Children

Ezekiel 16 condemns Jerusalem for sacrificing sons and daughters and records God's accusation that they had slain 'my children.' The adults may have spoken as though the children were theirs to offer, but God asserted a prior claim. The same logic appears in the law's rejection of child sacrifice. Religious language cannot sanctify adult use of a child.

This principle reaches beyond obviously criminal conduct. A church can also misuse children by treating them as proof of institutional success, material for publicity or instruments in adult conflict. Protection includes refusing to place a child on display, pressuring a child to tell a painful story or making access to community depend upon pleasing a leader.

Authority Under the Father of Spirits

Hebrews 12 distinguishes earthly fathers from the Father of spirits. Ephesians 6 commands children to obey their parents in the Lord and immediately restricts fathers from provoking their children to wrath. Biblical authority is never self-originating. It stands under God's character and commands.

The phrase 'in the Lord' prevents obedience from becoming a weapon for secrecy. A child is not Biblically required to cooperate with sin, conceal abuse or remain alone with an unsafe adult. Churches should teach respect for parents without teaching that every adult instruction carries God's approval.

4. Betrayal Can Occur Within a Family

Joseph Was Sold by His Brothers

Genesis 37 confronts the reader with exploitation inside a covenant family. Joseph's brothers first consider killing him, then sell him for silver. Kinship does not prevent commodification. Shared ancestry and religious identity do not automatically produce safety. The betrayal is intensified, not lessened, by the fact that it came through brothers.

Joseph later recognizes God's providence, but providence does not retroactively make the sale righteous. Genesis 50:20 holds both truths together: the brothers meant evil and God meant good. A future act of God can redeem consequences without converting the perpetrator's intent into

obedience. This protects survivors from being told that the harm was acceptable because God later brought some good from their lives.

The Family Is Not Beyond Examination

Scripture honors family, but it does not romanticize it. Eli fails to restrain sons who abuse sacred office. Amnon violates Tamar, and the royal household's response deepens the devastation. Jeremiah condemns rulers and households that practice oppression. Biblical truth does not permit the word family to function as a shield against accountability.

When credible danger is disclosed, the Church must not assume that preserving the family's public appearance is the highest good. Protection may require separation, supervision, reporting and outside intervention. The goal is not hostility toward families. It is faithfulness to the God who designed families for care rather than concealment.

God Heard the Voice of the Lad

Genesis 21 describes Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness after household conflict leaves them without water. The text says that God heard the voice of the lad. The story is not a direct parallel to abuse or trafficking, yet it reveals a repeated Biblical pattern: the vulnerable person whom others push beyond the edge of the household remains heard by God.

Churches should be slow to interrogate and quick to listen. Listening does not mean accepting every interpretation without careful assessment. It means that a child's words are not dismissed because the accused adult is respected, generous or powerful. The voice of the vulnerable deserves a safe path to people trained and authorized to respond.

5. Jesus and the Little Ones

A Child in the Midst

Matthew 18 begins with the disciples asking who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus answers by calling a little child, setting the child in their midst and challenging the disciples' assumptions about greatness. The child is not merely an illustration placed at the edge of the lesson. Jesus makes the little one visible at the center of a conversation about power.

The first movement is conversion and humility. Adults must turn from status-seeking and become humble as the child. The scene does not teach that children are sinless or naturally omniscient. It teaches that entry into Christ's kingdom cannot be secured through rank. The person with little recognized status becomes the Lord's chosen correction to those competing for prominence.

Receiving the Child in Christ's Name

Jesus then says that whoever receives one such little child in His name receives Him. Reception includes welcome, but it is deeper than friendliness. To receive someone in another's name is to respond with regard for the one whose name is carried. The disciple receives the child because of Christ and, in doing so, receives Christ.

This gives child protection a Christological center. Policies, supervision and reporting procedures are not merely administrative precautions. They are forms of reception. A church that makes itself safer for children is not being distracted from ministry. It is receiving Jesus in the manner He described.

Matthew 18:5-6

“And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

What It Means to Offend

The verb translated 'offend' carries the idea of causing someone to stumble or placing a snare in the path. Jesus is not speaking merely about hurting a child's feelings or disagreeing with a young believer. The warning concerns conduct that becomes an occasion of ruin, sin or spiritual collapse. Exploitation is an extreme example because it uses adult power to place devastating evil in a little one's path.

The phrase 'which believe in me' also keeps interpretation careful. In the immediate setting, Jesus moves between the literal child and the humble disciple represented by the child. The warning certainly protects vulnerable believers and cannot reasonably be used to exclude actual children from Christ's concern. The strongest reading preserves both: Jesus values the child before Him and all little ones who depend upon Him.

The Millstone Warning

Jesus' image of the millstone is intentionally severe. It does not instruct disciples to execute offenders. It declares the gravity of causing a little one to stumble. The person who appears insignificant to the world is so precious to Christ that harming that person places the offender under terrifying judgment.

Churches sometimes soften this text into a warning about being a bad example. That application is true but incomplete. The language should retain its moral force. Leaders must not protect a

ministry's reputation at the expense of a child. Christ does not weigh institutional embarrassment more heavily than the safety of a little one.

Do Not Despise One of These Little Ones

Matthew 18:10 warns against despising a little one. To despise is to regard as beneath notice, lightly valued or expendable. Exploitation begins before the transaction. It begins when an adult permits appetite, convenience, money or reputation to count for more than the child's personhood.

The chapter then speaks of the Father's concern that one of these little ones should not perish. The lost-sheep imagery does not justify reckless retrieval by untrained people. It reveals divine priority. The one is not disposable because ninety-nine appear secure. A church cannot treat one child's safety as an acceptable cost of preserving a gifted leader or successful program.

Matthew 18:10, 14

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ... Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

6. Poverty May Explain Pressure, but It Cannot Excuse Exploitation

The Moral Difference Between Explanation and Excuse

The originating encounter occurred in severe poverty. Ignoring that context would make the story shallow. Poverty can narrow choices, increase dependence upon powerful people, disrupt schooling and expose families to predatory offers. These realities help explain why exploitation often grows where protection and economic alternatives are weak.

Explanation becomes excuse when hardship is treated as moral permission. Scripture repeatedly addresses people under pressure without declaring that desperation transforms another human being into property. The father's poverty was real. The child's value was also real. Compassion must hold both truths without using either to erase the other.

Do Not Slander the Poor

Most poor parents do not exploit their children. Many make extraordinary sacrifices to protect them. The study must therefore avoid implying that poverty produces moral inferiority or that affluent societies are free of exploitation. Wealth can purchase privacy, influence and access. Exploitation crosses national, cultural and economic boundaries.

The proper comparison is not between virtuous Americans and dangerous foreigners. It is between every human system that assigns prices and the God who establishes value. The Church approaches vulnerable communities as a learner and neighbor, not as a civilization announcing its superiority.

Bread and Honorable Work

The local church's continued response included food and efforts toward honorable employment. That combination is Biblically fitting. James rejects a blessing that offers words without necessities. Second Thessalonians honors willing work. Acts describes believers arranging material care so that needs are not ignored.

Material help does not replace the Gospel, and Gospel speech does not replace material help. A family facing hunger may need immediate food, safe housing, transportation, legal assistance and sustainable work. The Church should provide what it can, form partnerships where expertise is required and avoid promises it cannot keep.

Consent and Unequal Power

In discussions of trafficking and child exploitation, adult language of agreement can conceal coercion. A child cannot make an adult's exploitation righteous by appearing compliant. Dependence, fear, manipulation and unequal power shape what can be said or resisted. Responsibility remains with the adult who uses power and with those who knowingly facilitate the harm.

This principle matters pastorally because survivors often ask whether they caused what happened. The Church's answer should not transfer the offender's responsibility to the child. A child's attempt to survive, appease or endure is not permission. Shame belongs with the wrongdoing, not with the person against whom it was committed.

7. Rescue, Reporting and Lawful Authority

Deliver Them That Are Drawn Unto Death

Proverbs 24 commands action on behalf of people being led toward destruction and rejects the excuse, 'Behold, we knew it not.' The passage does not require reckless heroics. It destroys cultivated ignorance. Once danger becomes reasonably known, God's people may not protect their comfort by pretending that uncertainty removes all duty.

Rescue may include calling emergency services, contacting child-protection professionals, preserving immediate safety, following mandatory-reporting requirements and preventing an

accused person from unsupervised access. Prayer accompanies these actions. It does not substitute for them.

Proverbs 24:11-12

“If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?”

Defend the Poor and Fatherless

Psalm 82 addresses unjust rulers who fail to defend the weak. Its verbs are active: defend, do justice, deliver and rid. Biblical concern for the powerless is not satisfied by sympathetic feeling. Authority is accountable for what it permits as well as what it performs.

Church leaders exercise limited spiritual and organizational authority. They are not police, prosecutors or therapists unless separately qualified. Their duty is to create safe ministry conditions, respond appropriately to disclosures and involve those with lawful responsibility and professional competence.

Psalm 82:3-4

“Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.”

Reporting Is Not Gossip

Gossip circulates information for interest, influence or injury. A good-faith report carries relevant information to a person or agency responsible for protection. Confusing the two can silence people who should act. Confidentiality is meant to protect the vulnerable, not to protect danger from lawful examination.

A church should never promise absolute secrecy before hearing a disclosure. A better response is honest: 'I will treat this carefully, but if someone is in danger I may need to involve people who can protect them.' Information should then be shared only as required for safety, reporting and professional response.

Law and Clergy Responsibility in Hawaii

Hawaii law includes clergy among persons with mandatory reporting responsibilities for suspected child abuse or neglect under specified circumstances. The statute contains a limited provision concerning certain penitential communications, but that provision should never be

summarized casually or extended beyond its actual terms. Churches should obtain current legal guidance and train leaders before a crisis occurs.

Current law, reporting channels and organizational policy must be checked whenever this commentary is used operationally. The moral principle remains stable: the Church must not use spiritual office, counseling language or institutional loyalty to hide credible danger. Romans 13 recognizes a role for civil authority in restraining wrongdoing.

8. Care for Survivors Without Blame or Appropriation

A Survivor Is Not Spiritually Contaminated

Biblical categories of sin distinguish the wrongdoer from the person wronged. Being exploited is not a moral stain upon the child. A survivor may carry fear, anger, confusion, grief or patterns of survival that require patient care, but the offense committed by another does not make the survivor impure before God.

Church language should be examined carefully. Appeals to purity can accidentally suggest that something essential was stolen from a survivor and can never be restored. Christian holiness rests in God's redeeming grace, not in an untouched biography. The believer's identity is in Christ.

Listen Without Interrogating

A caring adult does not need every detail in order to believe that protection is necessary. Repeated retelling can deepen distress and complicate professional investigation. The first pastoral task is to listen calmly, affirm that the disclosure matters, state that the child is not to blame and connect the child with those responsible for safety.

Questions should be limited and non-leading. The church worker should not conduct an amateur investigation, confront the accused in a way that increases danger or demand a public testimony. Trained professionals can determine what information is needed and how it should be gathered.

Forgiveness Is Not the Same as Access

The Gospel offers forgiveness to every repentant sinner who comes to Christ. That promise does not require a survivor or congregation to restore an offender to unrestricted access. Forgiveness, reconciliation, trust and qualification for leadership are related but distinct questions.

Repentance accepts truth and consequences. It does not demand secrecy, quick restoration or contact with the person harmed. A church that imposes access in the name of forgiveness may

repeat the original misuse of power. Love for an offender includes refusing conditions in which further sin can occur.

The Story Belongs to the Survivor

A survivor does not owe the congregation a testimony. Consent to tell a story once is not perpetual permission for every future use. Photographs, names and identifying details require special care, particularly when the person was a child or could face stigma, retaliation or renewed danger.

Ministry communication should ask whether the story is necessary, whether the person can be identified, who benefits from publication and whether the same truth can be taught with fewer details. The strongest testimony to compassion may be the detail the Church chooses not to tell.

9. Price, Value and the Redemption of Christ

Redeemed, Not With Silver and Gold

First Peter 1 turns from corruptible silver and gold to the precious blood of Christ. The contrast does not place a market price upon Jesus or imply that God participated in human trafficking. It uses redemption language familiar to the ancient world to announce liberation from a vain manner of life through Christ's sacrificial death.

Silver and gold can record a transaction, but they cannot measure a soul. Christ's blood reveals both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of grace. The Gospel does not say that a child's value depends upon an exploiter's demand. It says that God acted at immeasurable cost to redeem sinners and form a holy people.

1 Peter 1:18-19

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Bought With a Price

First Corinthians 6 says that believers are bought with a price and therefore should glorify God in body and spirit. The language establishes Christ's lordship and rejects the believer's return to enslaving sin. It does not grant church leaders ownership over another person's body.

The passage is especially powerful in this study because Paul uses purchase language to defeat human claims of possession. The believer belongs to God. No exploiter, family member,

congregation or Pastor may use Christ's purchase as permission for control. Divine ownership liberates from rival masters and orders the Church toward holy care.

The Gospel for the Exploited and the Exploiter

The Gospel speaks to the person harmed: Christ sees, receives and does not confuse another person's sin with your identity. It also speaks to the offender: concealment is not repentance, and religious language cannot purchase exemption from truth or consequence. Grace is free, but it is not an agreement to preserve darkness.

At the cross, justice and mercy are not enemies. Christ bears sin and rises victorious. A repentant offender may receive salvation, yet salvation does not erase the need for reporting, restitution, boundaries or lawful consequences. The Church must never make a survivor carry the cost of proving that grace is real.

10. Witnesses Beyond the Canon

Canonical Authority Comes First

Non-canonized Jewish and early Christian writings can show how communities near the Biblical world spoke about the poor and vulnerable. They are historical witnesses, not an additional rule of faith. They may illustrate a moral concern already established by Scripture, but they do not create doctrine or correct the canonical text.

This ordering matters especially in a sensitive study. An arresting sentence from an ancient source should not be given authority merely because it sounds compassionate. Every claim remains accountable to the Bible, with the King James Version controlling the Scripture quoted in this commentary.

Sirach and the Needy

Sirach 4 urges the reader not to deprive the poor of life and not to turn away from the needy. As a historical Jewish witness, the passage demonstrates that care for those with little social power was recognized as a serious moral obligation. Its language resonates with the canonical commands of Deuteronomy, Proverbs and Isaiah.

The commentary uses Sirach only at that historical level. It does not depend upon Sirach to establish the duty of protection. Psalm 82 and Proverbs 24 already supply sufficient canonical authority.

Wisdom of Solomon and the Righteous Poor

Wisdom of Solomon 2 portrays wicked people conspiring against a righteous person whose life exposes their conduct. The text is not a direct teaching about child exploitation, but it illustrates how power can treat a vulnerable person as an obstacle to appetite and self-justification.

The useful historical observation is that oppression often requires a story in which the victim matters less than the powerful person's desire. Scripture exposes the same lie more directly. The weak are not morally negligible because the strong agree to ignore them.

The Didache and the Prohibition of Harm

The Didache's early moral instruction condemns murder, corruption of children and the killing of children. Its compact list shows that early Christian communities understood discipleship to govern conduct toward vulnerable life. It also joins generosity with discernment rather than treating charity as careless display.

Again, the Didache is not used as inspired proof. It is a witness that early Christians heard the canonical Gospel as a call away from exploitation and toward a community whose habits protected life.

11. Historical Preaching and Interpretive Restraint

Chrysostom on Matthew 18

John Chrysostom's homily on Matthew 18 emphasizes humility, the danger of scandal and Christ's care for the little ones. His preaching helps the modern reader feel the severity of Jesus' warning rather than domesticating it into a lesson about politeness.

The value of Chrysostom here is pastoral, not controlling. His homily can sharpen attention to the text, but the interpretation must still arise from Matthew's context. The literal child, the humble disciple and the vulnerable believer belong together in the chapter's challenge to adult ambition.

Spurgeon and Right-Hand Sins

Charles Spurgeon's sermon 'Right-hand Sins' treats Christ's language about cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye as a demand for decisive separation from cherished sin. Matthew 18 places that self-denial immediately after the warning about offenses. The sequence turns attention from condemning the world to removing what within the disciple becomes a snare.

Applied carefully, the point is not bodily harm. It is that churches must sacrifice convenience, prestige, access, money and even beloved programs when those things enable danger. A ministry

cannot claim to take Jesus' millstone warning seriously while refusing to cut off the institutional conditions that protect an offender.

Do Not Build Doctrine From Horror

Sermons on exploitation sometimes gather the most disturbing possible accounts and allow emotion to carry the conclusion. Strong feeling is understandable, but outrage alone cannot sustain Biblical reasoning. The question must be established from the text, and application must be proportionate to what Scripture actually says.

The present study therefore avoids using the incident as a universal description of the Philippines, poor families or mission work. It also avoids speculative claims about the child's later life. Restraint makes the moral conclusion stronger because the sermon does not need exaggeration in order to show that a human being is not property.

12. Pastoral Practice for the Local Church

Create Safety Before a Crisis

Child protection should not depend upon the intuition of one leader. Churches need written screening, supervision, transportation, communication, bathroom, photography and overnight-event practices appropriate to their ministry. At least two responsible adults should know how to respond when a concern arises, and children should have more than one safe person to approach.

Policies are not proof that a church is safe. They must be understood, practiced, reviewed and enforced without favoritism. A gifted volunteer, generous donor or respected Pastor should not receive an exception that would be denied to someone less influential.

Respond Calmly to a Disclosure

The first response can shape whether a child continues speaking. The adult should remain calm, listen, avoid expressions of disbelief or horror, affirm that telling was right and explain the next protective step in simple language. The adult should record what was said as accurately as policy and law require without adding interpretation.

The child should not be promised a particular outcome. Safety systems can be slow and imperfect. The Church can promise to take the concern seriously, involve proper help and remain present without making commitments beyond its power.

Protect Without Becoming the Investigator

Church leaders may possess valuable relational knowledge, but they should not attempt to prove a case before reporting a reasonable concern. Confronting the alleged offender, interviewing multiple witnesses or circulating details can increase danger and damage a lawful investigation.

The ministry's role is narrower and still important: preserve immediate safety, follow reporting duties, restrict access, cooperate with authorities and arrange appropriate pastoral support. Spiritual care should never be conditioned upon keeping the matter inside the church.

Support Families Materially

Protection also includes reducing the pressures that predators exploit. A church can provide food, transportation, school supplies, temporary lodging assistance, employment connections and referrals to competent community services. It can support caregivers who are exhausted or isolated before crisis becomes catastrophe.

Material ministry must preserve dignity. Help should not require a photograph, a public testimony or attendance at a service. The Gospel may be offered openly and lovingly, but necessities should not be used as leverage. The child is not an outreach statistic.

Current Oahu Reporting Information

As of September 2026, the Hawaii Department of Human Services lists 808-832-5300 for reports of child abuse or neglect and 808-832-1999 for reports concerning child trafficking. The department identifies both lines as available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Immediate emergencies should be directed to 911.

Telephone numbers and legal requirements can change. Anyone using this commentary later should verify the current information through the Hawaii Department of Human Services. A printed resource should never become a reason to delay urgent help when a child may be in danger.

Pastoral safety principle

When a child may be in danger, preserve immediate safety, listen without interrogation and contact the people legally and professionally responsible for protection. Prayer belongs beside action, not in place of it.

Pastoral Summary

What does God require when a child is treated as property? He requires the Church to reject the transaction's lie. Joel records a girl sold for wine, but God still calls the captives His people. A human price does not become a divine valuation.

God requires adults to recognize children as image-bearers and trusts from Him. Psalm 127 does not authorize possession without limit. Ezekiel's language, 'my children,' places parental and communal authority beneath God's prior claim. Dependence creates responsibility.

God requires His people to receive the little one in Christ's name. Matthew 18 joins humility, reception, the warning against causing a little one to stumble, the command not to despise and the Father's will that the little one not perish. Child protection is not separate from receiving Jesus.

God requires active rescue. Proverbs 24 rejects the shelter of cultivated ignorance, and Psalm 82 commands defense and deliverance. Reporting credible danger to lawful authorities is not gossip. It is one way limited church authority honors the roles God has permitted civil and professional authorities to fulfill.

God requires care that does not blame or appropriate survivors. The person harmed is not spiritually contaminated. Forgiveness does not mean automatic access. A child's story is not ministry property. The Church listens, protects, maintains wise boundaries and allows healing to proceed without demanding a public performance.

Finally, God directs the question toward Christ. The world uses silver and gold to assign prices. Believers are redeemed not with corruptible things but with the precious blood of Christ. That redemption does not make people the property of religious leaders. It restores them to the Lord whose authority is holy and whose care is good.

The pastoral application can be remembered in a single contrast: the world asks what a vulnerable person can be made to yield; Jesus asks how the little one may be received in His name. The Church must answer by protecting, reporting, supporting, listening and proclaiming the Savior who brings people out of darkness without using their wounds for display.

Selected Biblical References

Genesis 1:26-28; 21:8-21; 37:12-36; 50:15-21; Psalm 82:1-4; 127:3-5

Proverbs 24:10-12; Isaiah 1:16-17; Jeremiah 22:1-3; Ezekiel 16:20-21

Joel 3:1-8; Matthew 18:1-14; Mark 9:33-42; Luke 17:1-2

Romans 13:1-4; First Corinthians 6:19-20; Second Corinthians 1:3-7

Ephesians 5:8-13; 6:1-4; First Thessalonians 5:21-22; First Peter 1:18-19

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