

## **Merciful Discipline 3: Broken, We Endure Shame**

This is the third post of six in the *Merciful Discipline Series*. A complete list of available posts will be at the end of each article as they are made available.

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### **Merciful Discipline 3: Broken, We Endure Shame**

In the Church, God has put Himself into hands that betray Him again and again. - Pope Benedict

Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers;  
may Your mercy come quickly to meet us,  
for we are in desperate need.  
Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of Your Name;  
deliver us, and forgive us our sins for Your Name's sake.  
Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"  
(PS 79:8-10a)

We repent on behalf of the abuse-broken church. We do not raise a defense for churchmen who did the right thing; we confess the sins of those who did wrong—bishops who failed to adequately discipline priests, negligent care of victims and their greater communities, the failure of the powers-that-be to steward existing policies of protection for minors.

We the Church are brought low. Our failures have leveled us. Just as the abuse of one is the abuse of us all, so is her discipline the discipline of the whole. Jesus prophesied on the eve of His crucifixion that 'the shepherd would be struck, and the sheep would be scattered.' (Matt. 26:31) As various Church leaders have been struck down by their mishandling of abuse, we too are cast down.

Will we scatter or fall forward unto the Crucified? We can repent on behalf of the abuse-broken Church. We can wait and pray. With Him, through Him, on His behalf, we can endure shame in the

hope of new life.

I faced such a choice many years ago. Under my charge, a close colleague had abused two minors. That instigated a 10-year-process of discipline which included: purging the staff, tending to the victims, searching out other potential victims, and establishing new policies of prevention. In the eyes of the law and (arguably) God, I was the one ultimately responsible for the abuse. I became the subject of countless interrogations and the agent of raising huge sums of money to repair the damage done.

We as a ministry surrendered to God. He was disciplining us. Though we had much to do, my posture was face down. Had we not discovered the Crucified we would have followed the counsel of most who urged us to dissolve the ministry in light of our new financial burden.

'When You disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer.' (Is 26: 16) We had no strength to run from His refinement. We stayed down and discovered that only His wounds could heal the shame of the wounds we had inflicted on others. Our hope lay in faith: 'He only disciplines those He loves.' (Heb. 12:6)

Similarly, the Church today must learn to get low and stay low in this season of discipline. We err in raising fists at greedy lawyers, godless journalists, or an outraged public. We look to the Lord of our discipline, who uses many agents to refine those He loves. Through the Crucified, we can endure the shame and accept His discipline as a severe mercy. In the words of Benedict: 'I wish to exhort all of you...to reflect on the wounds inflicted on Christ's body, the sometimes painful remedies needed to bind and heal them.'

Enduring the shame means accepting a loss of credibility, especially in regards to the Church's advocacy of the dignity and integrity and inviolability of every life. Sexual abuse mocks her beautiful sexual ethic, and weakens her authority to uphold it. Referring to decades of unrestrained minor abuse in Ireland, Benedict exhorted the bishops there: 'All of this seriously undermined your credibility and effectiveness.' We glimpse this in the Old Testament. After Eli failed to restrain his sons, Israel suffered a terrible defeat. She fled the Philistines who then captured the ark of the covenant. (1Sam 4:17)

We can endure the shame because of Christ. He endured the final shaming at Calvary to grant us grace to endure ours. Take heart! We become more like Him as we submit to discipline. Maybe that's why Lent is so long: 40 days along a thorny ascent path that ends before the broken body, crowned with thorns.

Lent is for slow learners like us. Change takes time. Discovering how to bear the shame of our corporate abuses is a lesson in endurance. In time, He will assume it wholly and transform us into transparent witnesses of our own failures and defenders of the weak.

Our discipline need not be morbidly introspection. He actively refines our hearts—their values and practices—employing real shame generated by the real damage done. As we turn toward Him, He burns off ‘the worldly sorrow that brings forth death’ (2Cor 7:10).

We ‘fix our eyes on Himself, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame...Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.’ (Heb. 12: 2, 3)

The hope of resurrection sustains us in this season of crucifixion, His merciful discipline. We are reduced to the bloody God. Like Him, we endure shame for the joy set before us.

It is likely that the rest of Pope Benedict’s pontificate will be consumed by this scandal. Sexual abuse in the Church will most likely define it. - Gregory Erlandson and Matthew Burnson Pope Benedict XVI and the Sexual Abuse Crisis

**MORE:**

The *Merciful Discipline Series* of Posts (updated with each new post as they become available):

- [Merciful Discipline 1: Broken, We Pray for the Abused](#)
- [Merciful Discipline 2: Broken, We Repent for the Church’s Mishandling of Abuse](#)
- [Merciful Discipline 3: Broken, We Endure Shame](#)
- [Merciful Discipline 4: Hopeful, We Rebuild Trust](#)
- [Merciful Discipline 5: Hopeful, We Fight for the Dignity and Integrity of Our Priests](#)
- [Merciful Discipline 6: Humbled, We Shine](#)