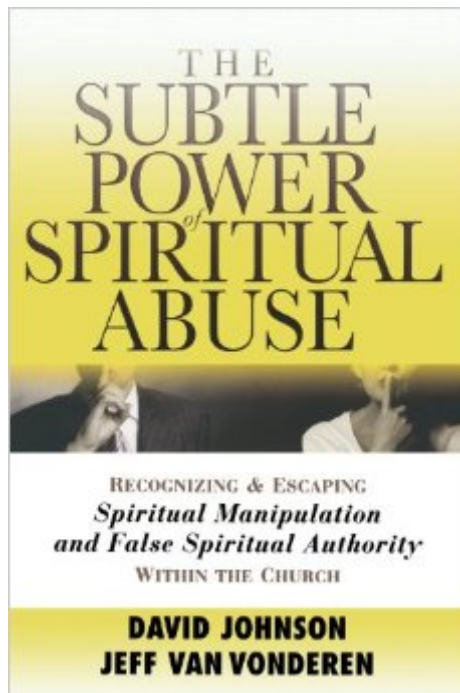


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# The Subtle Power Of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing And Escaping Spiritual Manipulation And False Spiritual Authority Within The Church



## Synopsis

In a breakthrough book first published in 1991, the authors address the dynamics in churches that can ensnare people in legalism, guilt, and begrudging service, keeping them from the grace and joy of God's kingdom. Written for both those who feel abused and those who may be causing it, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* shows how people get hooked into abusive systems, the impact of controlling leadership on a congregation, and how the abused believer can find rest and recovery.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's right on target. I've seen all of the signs of spiritual abuse in several churches I've attended, and I'm in a church now where the signs do not exist among the leadership (and it's easy to dodge the self-righteous members who do practice any of the bad signs... no church is perfect). The difference between churches that use manipulation and those that practice grace is like night and day. The key to preventing spiritual abuse is balance. God has placed boundaries around ministers and laypeople alike which should not be crossed. When the "leaders" run roughshod over the church members' boundaries while misusing Scripture to protect themselves from legitimate criticism, something is wrong. Pastors cannot claim authority reserved solely for God or expect to control people in ways that only the Holy Spirit can do. God has rules for leaders to obey, and ways for laymen to confront leaders about sin. I have to disagree very strongly with those who say that this book is anti-leadership or that this book causes problems in churches. One of the examples used in the book is about a pastor whose congregation expected too much of him. Yes, some churches do place burdens on pastors that are too hard to bear; so this book is for wounded ministers as much

as for wounded laypeople. Yes, we're guilty of expecting our pastors do everything when God really gives ministries to every believer. Van Vonderen and Johnson warn people who read the book not to use what they have learned as a weapon, but to take action only in the proper spirit. Of course, any time someone takes action in a church, real problems will become visible. My question in every case is: are those problems caused by those speaking out, or have they been there all along and are only now being exposed?

This book was the best book I've read on spiritual abuse issues. It covers all areas: from being spiritually abused, why things go wrong in the churches today, how to recognize an abusive system, to recovering and returning to a right relationship with God, one of faith, hope, love, and grace. These are the things that build a relationship, and create change in our lives. It's not about rules, regulations, being obedient to leaders, and having people tell you their perception and belief of God's will for your life. That's why God gave us His Word, and we are to grow in a relationship with Him. He will do the work in us, we could not do ourselves. This book was the key to helping our family get our lives back together after having experienced abuse in a church. It not only validated us, but it is packed full of scriptures to search the truth out for yourself, to really look at what the Bible is saying, to whom, why, and to see Jesus's true character, and heart of God's Word. What a blessing! I noticed a person was sort of negative in their response to this book, and spoke of how we are to submit to leaders, etc. The Bible tells us to submit to leaders who speak the truth, who operate in the "fruits of the spirit," and who love (both saints and sinners alike). How can we get to the lost, and get them saved if we are too self-righteous to reach out to them, and love them enough to meet them where they are. Self-righteousness sends people away from God, not toward him. Legalism is based on getting right with God, not how to have a relationship with Him.

I feel I must chime in to review this book. The authors define well the aspects of a dysfunctional system. The rules of don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel are conveyed with accuracy in an often unlooked setting, the church family. I highly recommend this book as not only to deal with dysfunction but to get a better feel of the grace of God. Jeff's other book, Families Where Grace is in Place, deals excellently with grace, how to look to God for all of your needs, and how to not control your children. This book is not a herald for mutiny but puts a face on the pink elephant in the room. Read the book and make your own judgement call. Do I agree with everything they say? No. Who does? As for the negative comments on this page, they trouble me. I am both angered and frustrated. One person is discussing repressed memories. What does that have to do with this book?

He also says it describes every church he has been in. We have a tendency to gravitate toward those churches with leadership that align with our dysfunctions. Another person talked of how the book destroyed their church. The person said a few members led a mutiny with the book. How did a few people take over a church? Where was the leadership and the membership? It sounds like the person is really grieving the loss of their church and that is a sad thing. If those people were engaging in known sin (and just not what the pastor didn't like), then those people were wrong. The book doesn't condone that. The authors are not responsible for people's distortion of the truth. One set of comments is really troubling. They both are from the same city, probably the same person.

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