

VIOLENCE

in the Christian Home

Dr. Peter Robbins, Ph.D.



How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. -

Habakkuk 1:2-3

Scripture as a Weapon

In I Corinthians 11:3 we are told that the head (*Kaphale*) of every man is Christ and the head (*Kaphale*) of every woman is man... Traditionally this scripture has been interpreted as a corporate style leadership model - the top dog calls the shots, the little guy jumps. In Ephesians 5:22 we find that wives are told to submit to your husbands as to the Lord. These two scriptures, among others, when taken in limited context, have become the license to abuse in the church.

Abuse is any behavior that is designed to control and to lord it over another person through the use of fear, humiliation, and verbal or physical assaults. Abuse is the systematic persecution of one partner by another.

Abuse in the Church?

How can this be, when our role model - Jesus himself - was the picture of gentleness and care, *A bruised reed he will not break, an a smoldering wick he will nor snuff out.* - Isaiah 42:3. When abusers are Christians they may conveniently select scripture to justify their abuse and ignore Jesus' lifestyle and example as a mode for interpretation of scripture.

Common Traits of Abusers

- **LONELY** - few friends, isolated, feels unloved, expects spouse to meet needs perfectly
- **DEPENDENT AND INFERIOR** – power, anger and violence are a smoke screen to hide behind
- **MASTER INTIMIDATORS** - fears drive them to physically or psychologically dominate and exploit others (remember the puffer fish that is small but become puffed up to scare its predators.
- **Jekyll & Hyde Characteristics**
 - Charming/cruel
 - Generous/selfish
 - Abuses the person he fears losing the most!
- **ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE CAN INTENSIFY ABUSE**



Characteristics of Victims

(See Pastoral Care for Survivors of Family Abuse, James Leehan)

- **LACK OF TRUST** - Not only can she not trust her husband, she has great difficulty trusting herself.
- **LOW SELF-ESTEEM** - She eventually believes the lie that she is not worth anything.
- **POOR SOCIAL SKILLS** - Fear and low self-image cause her to isolate herself, eliminating opportunities to develop effective social skills.
- **FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS AND POWERLESSNESS** – If you can't determine what others want from you, then you begin to feel helpless and powerless in responding appropriately to them.
- **INABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS** –She is paralyzed with fear and self-doubt.
- **INABILITY TO IDENTIFY AND EXPRESS EMOTIONS** - Early childhood and subsequent experiences have taught her that to share feelings is to only make things worse. The one emotion that is felt is FEAR!
- **FLASHBACKS AND PHOBIAS** - The delayed reactions to early violence.
- **SEXUAL PROBLEMS** – Lack of trust seriously undermines intimacy

The Cycle of Abuse

- **STAGE 1 – RISING TENSION** - Pressures at work, with relatives, self and others begin to mount.
- **STAGE 2 – THE EXPLOSION** - The tension and pressure can no longer be contained, anything can trigger the rage attack.
- **STAGE 3 – REMORSE** - Genuine sorrow is expressed with promises to never hurt again. It is a time when good behavior is exhibited (the honeymoon period).



One in four women (25%) has experienced domestic violence in her lifetime. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The National Institute of Justice, Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence, July 2000. The Commonwealth Fund, Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health, 1999)

Estimates range from 960,000 incidents of violence against a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend to 3 million women who are physically abused by their husband or boyfriend per year.

(U.S. Department of Justice, Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends, March 1998. The Commonwealth Fund, Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health, 1999) Few women who are abused have the will or confidence to break the cycle.

On average, more than three women and one man are murdered by their intimate partners in this country every day. In 2000, 1,247 women were killed by an intimate partner. The same year, 440 men were killed by an intimate partner. Intimate partner homicides accounted for 30% of the murders of women and 5% percent of the murders of men. (Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001, February 2003. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S. 1993-2004, 2006.) Many of those abused minimize the risk and believe their unwavering love will eventually change the abuser. Others believe they have a religious duty to submit to them no matter what the cost.

Jesus did not submit to evil.

Jesus did not submit to evil even when it came from those closest to him. Peter was firmly rebuked when he attempted to interfere with, lord it over, and control Jesus regarding his call to die on the cross (Mt. 16:21-23).

Jesus did not and will not submit to those who would try to control him or try to make him do something not in agreement with his calling. Submission is done by choice, not by coercion or threat.

When others sought to control Jesus he withdrew himself from those trying to lord it over him (Mt. 12:15; In. 6:15). Jesus exemplified proper behavior when he attempted to convert the rich young ruler. When it was evident that the young ruler would not sell all he had and follow the Lord and as he began walking away, we do not see Jesus trying to lord it over him by following, pressuring, convincing, or threatening the man. If anyone had "good reason" to do so, it was Jesus! What was Jesus' response? He wept. Yet many men, for significantly less reason, use coercion and force to lord it over their wives to get them to do what they want. For them, submission is not a choice, it is a must, a demand! If compliance is not forthcoming then serious and painful consequences result; often, unfortunately, in the name of scripture.

Redemptive Withdrawal

In the Old Testament we see that wicked and evil men commonly exhibit violent behavior, use perverse speech, plot violence, and do not understand justice (Prov. 8:13, 13:2,24:1-2, 28:5).

We are also admonished to avoid, shun, and hate evil (prov. 3:7, 8:13; Ro. 12:9; I Th. 5:22).

Jesus himself modeled withdrawal as a means in dealing with evil, coercion, and manipulation. In fact, Jesus spells out a clear method of dealing with sin: *If your brother (husband) sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother (husband) over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan (unbeliever) or a tax collector.* Mat: 18:15-17 (parenthesis mine).

In other words, Jesus sets up the option to **withdraw** from someone who continues to sin against you or the church. This withdrawal is not necessarily to abandon or reject. Rather, Paul suggests that by withdrawing, the man's sinful nature might be destroyed and his spirit saved - Cor. 5:5. Withdrawing can be redemptive and is a biblical mandate! (See Titus 3:10-11).

Scripture Revisited

The scriptures quoted in the onset of this article, when taken in full context, actually hold the keys to a man's role in the Christian home and guidelines for mutual submission.

The word for head *Kephale* is used in Mt. 11:42 to describe the chief cornerstone. This is the same Greek word used in I Cor. 11:3 to describe the man as the head of his wife. In ancient times, the cornerstone was the first stone set on the foundation. Its levelness and stableness provided guidance for the other stones that were to be submitted upon it. If the cornerstone is not level or square, then any other stones falsely submitted upon it will only perpetuate the initial error.

Unlike the chain-of-command theory of headship, the head of the house is to be a servant, not the boss from on high, barking orders. Thus, to be the head of the wife means not only to serve, but to do so correctly.

Returning to Ephesians we see a clear admonition for mutual submission. In chapter 5 we are told to *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (vs. 21). Too much emphasis has been placed on the woman's role of submitting to her husband. Too little attention has been given to holding men accountable to scriptural leadership. Scripture is clear, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ love the church and gave himself up for her* (vs. 25). Just how should a man love his wife? Or, better yet, how did Jesus love the church?

A Husband's Role

Jesus not only spoke dearly about mutual submission of all Christians, but he dramatically exemplified the very behavior he desired. In the greatest of the kingdom teachings of Christ (see *The Jesus Style*, Gayle Erwin), Jesus unmistakably shows us that **the greatest in the kingdom is:**

- **A SERVANT/SLAVE** - Matthew 20:25-28
- **EXAMPLE** - John 13:12-17
- **HUMBLE** – Matthew 18:4, 23:11
- **AS A CHILD** - Luke. 9:46-48, 18:16
- **AS THE YOUNGER** - Luke 22:26
- **AS THE LEAST** - Luke 9:48
- **AS THE LAST** - Mark 9:33-35
- **POOR** - Matthew 6:19-21
- **ONE WHO USED NO FORCE** - Philippians 2:5-6
- **MADE HIMSELF NOTHING** - Matthew 16:24; Philippians 2:5-6
- **HUMAN** - Philippians 2:7, 8a; Hebrews 4:15
- **ONE WHO DID NOT LORD IT OVER OTHERS** - Mk. 10:42, 43a; Lk. 22:25, 26a; I Pe. 5:1-4

Can you imagine a wife having any trouble submitting to such a husband? When a husband strays from Christ's example, focus is often placed on the wife's responsibility to submit in spite of the husband's abusive behavior!

Guidelines for the Church

Jesus was always on the side of the oppressed. As Jesus is a model for the husband, so is he for the Church. The Church is called upon to stand with the battered wife by believing her and providing her, first and foremost, safety. It is important to help the battered wife understand that withdrawing from the violence is a wise and Biblical option. While safety is the initial goal, healing and reconciliation are the desired outcome. Long term intensive help is recommended for both the victim and the abuser. Clear and direct Biblical teaching must be provided instructing the husband about Christ-like leadership and strengthening the wife's understanding of her worth and stewardship of her personhood. We are not to abuse our bodies, nor are we to allow others to abuse us.

Closing the Wound

Violence causes guilt for the abuser, trauma for the victim and an uncomfortable dilemma for the Church. All must take bold steps to end the cycle of violence. Wives must confront the behavior of their husbands with the support of the church. Husbands must face their insecurities and fears and stop hiding behind power and violence. This too must be accomplished with the support of the Church. Finally, the Church must risk getting involved in the lives of hurting families, and provide the beacon of reconciliation for both sides of the conflict.

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