

WIFE ABUSE

Pastor Jones preached a message from 1 Corinthians 13 about the love of God and how we are to show love to one another. Everyone told him what a great sermon it was. But on the ride home with his wife and children he was very angry and would not speak to anyone. His wife thought, "Oh, no! What have I done this time?" When they got home, she took the chicken and other food from the oven, placed it on the table, and sat down next to her husband. His face got very red, and he said, "What is this garbage, chicken again?" With his hand he scraped the bowl of chicken and all of the plates and glasses off onto the floor. His children sat at the table paralyzed with fear. Then he screamed at his wife, "Who was that man you were talking to in the back of the church?" She said, "I don't remember, just some member of the church." He said, "You dirty prostitute!" And he slapped her so hard that her chair tipped over backwards. She got up, crying, and ran into the bathroom.

This kind of abuse went on for 16 years until he eventually filed for divorce. He said God told him to leave her. He quickly remarried the church secretary. The church sided with the pastor and kicked her out of the church. This is a true story.

Then there is the story of Elaine, a middle-aged woman who attended an Assemblies of God church with her husband, Edward. He was the church's head deacon and everyone thought he was a wonderful Christian, but he was privately abusing his wife. If he had a hard day on his job, or if the car wouldn't start, or if Elaine said or did something that upset him, he would erupt into a fit of rage, cursing and slapping and hitting her. She learned to cover up her bruises with makeup. Her life was in turmoil. She didn't tell anyone at church about her husband's behavior. She assumed it was her fault and kept trying to adjust her own behavior so he wouldn't explode. Finally, after several violent episodes, she went to see the pastor.

The pastor had known Edward for a long time. He couldn't believe this good Christian man was doing anything wrong. And Edward was the head deacon. What would people say if they learned he had been beating his wife? It would be an embarrassment to the church. He said to Elaine, "He's your husband. He has authority over you. You must be making him angry. You just need to learn to submit." Elaine was devastated. Just as she suspected, it was all her fault. On two other occasions Elaine returned for pastoral counseling, hoping that the pastor would help her. One time she said Edward was getting more violent and she was afraid for her life. The pastor said, "I can't believe it's that serious. If you just love him and submit, God will change the situation. You just keep praying for him, and everything will be all right. Remember that God hates divorce, so you are not allowed to leave him."

A friend of Elaine's realized how serious the situation was and told her to get out of the house immediately, but Elaine was so beat down by her husband's abuse that she didn't have any strength left. Elaine said, "The pastor said it is not God's will for me to leave him." A few months later, Edward killed Elaine. This Christian woman was murdered by her own husband, a deacon in a Pentecostal church. This is a true story, and it is not unique.

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that a man given to anger is not qualified to serve in ministry. Paul says that bishops, deacons, and pastors: "Must not be given to wine, not

violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, **not quarrelsome**, or covetous, (and so forth)."(1 Tim.3:1-10)

Every year in the United States over five million women are assaulted by their husbands or boyfriends, about 2,000 are murdered, and all the surveys report that being in the church doesn't make any difference! (In Latin America, in more than 25% of marriages the wives are assaulted by their husbands.) Many pastors say, "That kind of thing is not going on in my church!" Yes, it is going on in your church. You are just hiding your eyes and refusing to see it, to confront it, to help the poor women and children that are being abused. In fact, the The Rapha Treatment Center in Dallas, Texas, reports that many of the calls from abused wives are not only from Christians, but from pastor's wives.

Let me stop and say something. I feel very strongly about this, because I was an abuser. I emotionally and verbally abused my wife (not my children, thank the Lord), for many years, and I built up so much hatred that I came close to abusing her physically. Doris was growing afraid of me. God have mercy on me! And He did. He rescued me from that trap, and my wife and I grew to love and respect each other. This did not happen quickly or easily. It took a lot of dying to self by both of us. But God gave us grace to do it. It was liberating. God did not hate me, He loved me. But if I had continued on that path, if I had not repented and cried out to God for help, I would have destroyed my marriage, my children (who are affected by the relation of their father and mother), my ministry, and my own soul. I'm not preaching a message of condemnation, but one of healing and hope. If God could rescue me He can rescue anyone.

I have been in ministry for over 50 years and heavily involved in counseling ministry for 36 years, and I have heard endless stories from wives and children of Christians - stories of abuse by Christian husbands and fathers (and also abuse by Christian wives and mothers) until it makes me sick. And I'll tell you something else: it makes God sick. It is an abomination to God! Listen to these words from Malachi that we all know so well, (from the Amplified): "For the Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'I hate divorce and him who covers his garment (**his wife**) with violence. Therefore, keep a watch upon your spirit (be controlled by my Spirit) that you deal not treacherously and faithlessly with your mate.'" God is telling us to be controlled by His Spirit, the spirit of love, gentleness, and kindness, not by a spirit of anger and rage and violence.

Listen to what God says to His people, to Christians, in Ephesians 5:22: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church..." Well, there you are. God tells wives to submit to their husbands. But note what God says to everyone in the church, including husbands and wives, in 5:21: "Submit **to one another** in the fear of God." And what does it mean to submit? The Greek word for submission, *hupotasso*, means something an individual imposes on himself or herself. I choose to submit, *hupotasso*, to you. If you impose your authority over me, that is suppression, domination, not submission! **Submission cannot be demanded from another individual or imposed upon one person by another.** That distorts the meaning of Scripture. And yet it is common for Christian husbands, and even non-Christian husbands, to say to their wives, "The Bible says you have to submit to me!" The Bible also says that we all, particularly husbands, are to submit to Christ. Ah, here is the comparison we need to make. How does Christ rule over us? With love, not with domination, anger, cursing, hitting. He is our example.

So let's look at the men who abuse. (And let me say that abuse is not restricted to men. There are situations where wives emotionally and sometimes physically abuse their husbands, and many cases where mothers verbally, emotionally, and physically abuse their children. But since men are the predominant abusers, I am presenting it primarily from that perspective.)

Why Men Abuse

- Most abusers come from abusive backgrounds. They lived with fathers or mothers who argued, screamed, slapped, hit, and sexually abused. They saw their mothers abused, or they were abused themselves.
- Some abusers have suffered a brain injury or another kind of trauma.
- Some are simply immature and unwilling to take responsibility for their behavior. It is common for men to refuse counseling and to blame their wives for any and all problems. This pattern started a long time ago. Adam said, "It was that woman that you gave me, God," thus blaming his wife and God for the problem in the garden. These men say, "I can't help myself, she pushes my buttons."
- Many of them abuse alcohol and drugs which fuels their angry outbursts. The next day they may deny doing the violent things they did.
- Many have deep feelings of dissatisfaction with self, feel weak, are loners with no friends, are full of pride and cannot admit they need help.
- They have negative attitudes toward women; many times they were rejected and verbally or physically abused by their mothers.
- The need to control others forms the crux of violent behavior.
- Some abusers go through a three-step phase: (1) Tension builds. Their spouse and children sense the tension and live in dread of the coming explosion. (2) They explode in a paroxysm of rage, verbal and physical abuse. (3) They act remorseful and may even bring their wife flowers and candy. (They may bring the flowers to the hospital unless the wife has had the courage to call the police and have the thug incarcerated.)
- Many abusers say, "I love my wife!" That is a lie. The way you treat people shows how you regard them. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." If you treat people with kindness, consideration, and gentleness, you demonstrate love. If you curse and insult them, isolate and deprive them of freedom, threaten, and beat them, in what kind of bizarre universe could that be called love?

Things the Abuser Does

- Prior to marriage, they may court their wife to be, pretending to be a kind, committed Christian (Dr. Jekyll), but shortly after marriage Mr. Hyde comes roaring out of hiding.
- They are angry. They explode upon the least provocation or no provocation.
- They criticize. They may criticize their wife's house keeping. Some come home and inspect the house like a drill sergeant, pointing out every flaw, while they curse the wife and call her lazy, stupid and incompetent. They criticize her in front of their children, family, and friends. They may call her fat, ugly, etc. They blame all of their children's problems on her.

- They are jealous and possessive.
- They control. They may isolate their wife from family and friends. They make all the family decisions. They are extremely selfish with money, sometimes not permitting their wife to have access to checks or cash, and criticizing the wife for spending money on groceries and clothes, while they may throw money around on gambling, cars, pickups, boats, alcohol and drugs, etc.
- Some abusers play a helpless, depressed game, constantly threatening to kill themselves.
- Some abusers threaten their wives if they leave them. They may say, "I will take the children away from you." Or "I will find you and kill you if you leave me." Sometimes they will kill a family dog or cat to instill terror in their wife. And, of course, sometimes they do kill their wives. We read of those cases in the paper regularly.

Women Who Are Abused

- Many times they are repeating the pattern seen and learned in their family of origin. Their father abused their mother and the children, and they marry a man just like their father.
- Many are filled with self-rejection and self-hatred and feel they deserve the abuse.
- They feel guilty, responsible, and helpless. They lose all self-respect and self-confidence. They are worn down by the verbal and physical assaults until they don't have strength to stand up for themselves and their children.
- Sometimes they hide the abuse from their family and friends and defend the abuser. They are thereby training their children that the abuse is okay.
- They are overwhelmed with fear. Remember that control is witchcraft. This is a demonic situation from start to finish. Satan is at work in abusive homes destroying every member of the family.
- Some come out of good, loving homes, and they are totally shocked by the abuse that is heaped on them. They don't know how to cope, they feel ashamed and responsible, especially if their family, friends, and church tell them it is their fault and that a good wife must submit no matter what happens.
- Their national culture, family culture, or church culture may tell them that abuse by their husbands is normal and must be accepted, even if they are killed.
- Some are trapped economically, especially in Mexico and Latin America. There is no social safety net, and they may suffer deprivation to the point of starvation if they leave their abusive mate. I have ministered to people in Mexico who told me that when their father abandoned their family, the mother worked 14 to 16 hours a day, leaving the children alone and vulnerable all day, and they were so hungry at times that they ate newspapers or dirt to put something in their stomachs.

What Should Abused Women Do?

- Pray. Meditate on the scriptures, especially the book of Psalms.
- Forgive your husband who is abusing you seventy times seven times, that is to say, times without end. Unforgiveness and bitterness will destroy your own soul, and it will defile your children.(Hebrews 12:15) But forgiving someone does not

mean that you allow them to continue to abuse you. Read the book, Boundaries, by Henry Cloud.

- Understand that abuse is wrong. Verbal abuse is wrong. Emotional abuse is wrong. Physical abuse is wrong. Sexual abuse is wrong. Abuse of your children is wrong, and if you stand by and do nothing when your children are abused, you are a party to the abuse.
- Find someone knowledgeable to talk to, and seek wise counsel. Be careful about going to pastors. Some are helpful, but many will defend the abusive husband, blame the wife, and take Scriptures out of context that they don't understand. Actually, it is the nature of God they don't understand. How can they possibly believe a loving God would condone violent words, hatred, emotional torture, physical assault of helpless women and children?
- If the abuse is physical or sexual, call the police. Assault is illegal, whether it is against a stranger, a friend, a spouse, or a child.
- If everything else fails, separate from the abuser. Take your children and flee for your lives unless and until he gets serious help and you see genuine heart change. Do not believe quickly proffered apologies, vows of change, etc. This is a deep problem, your husband is very sick spiritually and emotionally, and it will take many months if not years to effect a real transformation.
- Staying in an abusive situation is not helping your husband. It is doing just the opposite. His contempt for you grows as you enable him to continue the violence. A battered wife's options are very limited. Ultimately, the only thing she can do is to separate and make him face losing his family, with the hope that he will finally realize that his conduct is not acceptable and seek genuine change.
- Protect your children! They are being formed by these experiences.
- I realize that for some wives, it is simply not possible to escape because of economic or other reasons. All you can do is pray, forgive, and cry out to God for deliverance. Know that this situation is not of God, He sees your tears, and He grieves for you and your family.

The Church's Role

- Preach and teach about this huge problem, compassionately and courageously.
- Offer classes and counseling for the abused and the abusers.
- If a woman or child tells you that she (or he) is being abused, listen to them, respect them, and believe them, or at least check out their story. You may need to offer them shelter and protection.
- Encourage the victim to call the police. If they will not do so, then you must do so. Assault is against the law and condoning it damages the victims and brings disrepute on the church. Learn what the legal requirements are in your state or area about reporting the abuse of children or adults.
- If the husband is a member of your fellowship, confront him. Do this wisely and compassionately, but you must do it.
- It is a big mistake to pressure the wife to return to an abusive husband. The abuser may pretend to be remorseful and repentant, but healing for such people takes a long time and much hard work.

Some Pertinent Scriptures

- Over one hundred times the Bible says that abuse - whether physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual - is wrong.
- To the church: "Defend the poor and fatherless. Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked."(Psalm 82:3-4)
- "The violence of the wicked will destroy them, because they refuse to do justice."(Pr. 21:7) (Can you imagine that God says, "Violence is evil, it is wicked, you must not be violent, **except for your wife and children?** It's all right to curse and beat your wife or your children.")
- "Whoever causes one of these little ones to sin, it would be better if he had a millstone tied to his neck and he were cast into the sea."(Matt. 18:1-6) - -Abuse wounds children and inevitably causes them to sin through bitterness, repeating the abusive conduct, etc.
- "I hate divorce, and him who covers his garment (his wife) with violence."(Mal. 2:16)
- "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."(Eph. 5:25)
- "Let each one of you in particular love his wife as he loves himself, and let the wife respect her husband."(Eph. 5:33)
- "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh (bitter) with them."(Col. 3:19)
- "You married men should live considerately with your wives, honoring the woman as physically the weaker, but realizing that you are joint heirs of the grace of God, in order that your prayers may not be hindered and cut off. Otherwise you cannot pray effectively."(1Peter 3:7 AMP)
- "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."(Prov.18:21)
- "I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'You idiot!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool! Shall be in danger of hell fire.'"(Matthew 5:22) (We can surely substitute "Your wife, your husband, your child" for the words "Your brother.")

Is Christ Glorified by a Christian Wife Who Stays in an Abusive Relationship?

Does a battered wife achieve any positive results by remaining in that relationship? Does the suffering bring about good for her, her children, her neighbors? Does her behavior result in her husband's conversion? Does she learn something from the experience, even if only endurance? Does the non-Christian world marvel at her conduct and stand convicted by her piety? Thousands of cases say **NO**.

The longer the abused woman remains in an abusive situation, the more deterioration there is in her partner's respect for her and in her own self-esteem. Her husband increasingly despises her weakness. His contempt for her and her faith intensifies. Children in such situations initially support their mother, but after prolonged exposure to the violence and her failure to do anything about it, they become disillusioned with her and often begin to side with the abusive father. Boys even as young as five or ten years old frequently begin to copy the conduct of their father, cursing and hitting their mother and sisters and growing up to replicate the conduct in their marriages. Girls develop

bitterness toward their father and toward their mother for not protecting herself and them, and they are likely to marry a man just like their father and pass the curse on to their children.

If this woman is a Christian, she brings about the reverse of Peter's intended effect (1 Peter 3:1-6) by remaining in an abusive situation. Ultimately, the battered woman grows to despise herself, her husband, and God, attaining neither personal growth through discipline nor any effective witness to the non-Christian world.

A Final Word to Those Who Abuse, and Especially to Christian Leaders Who Abuse Their Wives and Children

In 1973 I was the pastor of a large church, yet I hated my wife and abused her verbally and emotionally. God, in His mercy, rescued me. Part of His rescue involved His using some people to cast many demons out of me. Prior to that time I did not believe in a literal devil, nor did I believe that demons could infest a Christian. Through a vision, God showed me that I had been but a step away from eternal destruction. Through that experience, I learned the fear of God, a concept that is foreign to most Christians in our churches. God called me specifically to minister to other Christians, especially Christian leaders. I have observed many godly pastors and leaders. They are men and women of prayer, humility, and integrity. They are truly Christ-like, living lives of love and sacrifice.

On the other hand, I have learned that much of the church is in a deplorable condition. The lack of integrity in much of the ministry is on a par with the congress of the United States. There is much lying, stealing, greed, jealousy, selfish ambition, manipulation and control by pastors and other leaders in churches. I have personally seen and experienced these things in ministering in scores of different churches during the past 36 years. This is nothing new. The New Testament has many warnings about false leaders from the beginning of the church. Jesus warns about false prophets, starting at Matthew 7:15. Paul warns about false apostles in 2 Corinthians, chapters 10 and 11. Peter warns about false teachers and pastors in 2 Peter, chapter 2. Jude warns about false teachers. In fact, most of the epistles in the New Testament were written in part to correct false teachings and false practices. Jesus tells us how to separate the true from the false: not by the gift of discernment, because we can easily be misled, but "By their fruits you will know them."(Mt. 7:20) We have to observe the lives and actions of leaders to determine if they are true or false.

It is not surprising, in light of all this, that in today's church there are many false leaders, and many false followers sitting in the pews. Pornography and substance abuse is a plague in the whole church, including pastors and leaders. Good or bad fruit is most easily discerned by looking at the families of Christians. Anger, cursing, and violence are common. They may have built a "successful" church, but in the process they have destroyed their wife and children. Just this past week, I ministered to the grown daughter of such a pastor.

Let me share a scripture with my brethren from the Amplified Version that I have paraphrased: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love springs from God; and he who loves his wife and children is born of God and is coming progressively to know and get a better and clearer knowledge of Him. He who does not love his wife and children has not and never did know God, for God is love."(1 John 5:7-8) And from the 3rd Chapter of 1

John, also paraphrased: "No one who lives in communion with Christ and the Father knowingly and habitually practices sin. He who lives a consistently loving and faithful life is righteous, he is of God, he is a Christian. But he who practices sin, such as anger, bitterness, cursing, and violence, is of the devil, he acts like the devil, he belongs to the devil, and his end will be with the devil." And this is a direct quote from the Amplified: "By this it is made clear who take their nature from God and are His children and who take their nature from the devil and are his children: no one who does not practice righteousness, who does not conform to God's will in purpose, thought, and action, is of God, neither is anyone who does not love his brother, his fellow believer in Christ."(1 John 3:10)

My earnest advice to my Christian brothers and sisters who are leaders in Christ's church and who are involved in any kind of abuse in their homes is simple: either repent or resign. Christian leaders shall receive a stricter judgment, and unless you repent and change your life, you are storing up wrath for yourself. "Be doers of the word, not hearers (and preachers) only, deceiving yourselves. For faith without works is dead."

Sources:

- (a) 10 Lies the Church Tells Women, by J. Lee Grady
- (b) Turning Fear to Hope, by Holly Wagner Green
- (c) The Sin We Hide From View, by Marcia Davis-Seale (Charisma magazine, August, 2007)
- (d) Dangerous Marriage, by S. R. and Linda McDill.
- (e) Boundaries, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend