

# A Biblical Response to Domestic Violence

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1. **Abuse is always sin.** The scriptures are clear. Abuse of authority or power (even legitimate God given authority) is always sin. Abusive speech and/or behavior is never an acceptable way to communicate with someone (Malachi 2:16-17; Psalm 11:5; Colossians 3:8,19).

2. **Abuse is never an appropriate response to being provoked.** In working with abusive individuals they often blame the other person. This can be especially tricky when trying to counsel couples. There is no perfect person and victims of abuse aren't sinless. However, we must be very clear minded that abusive behavior and/or speech is never justified, even when provoked. People provoke us all the time but we are still responsible for our response (Ephesians 4:26; Luke 6:45)

3. **Biblical headship does not entitle a husband to get his own way, make all the family decisions, or to remove his wife's right to choose.** At the heart of most domestic abuse is the sinful use of power to gain control over another individual. Biblical headship is described as sacrificial servanthood, not unlimited authority and/or power (Mark 10:42-45). Let's not confuse terms – when a husband demands his own way or dominates over his wife, it's not called biblical headship, its called selfishness and abuse of power. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 13; Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:2-4 for God's rebuke of the leaders of Israel for their self-centered and abusive shepherding of God's flock).

4. **Unrepentant sin always damages relationships and sometimes people.** Unconfessed sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2-5) and from one another (Proverbs 17:9). It is unrealistic and unbiblical to believe that you can continue healthy fellowship with someone who repeatedly sins against you. We are impacted in every way (See Proverbs 1:15; 14:7; 21:28; 22:24; 1 Corinthians 15:33).

5. **God's purpose is to deliver the abused.** We are to be champions of the oppressed and abused. God hates the abuse of power and the sin of injustice (Psalm 5,7,10,140; 2 Corinthians 11:20; Acts 14:5-6).

Therefore, how does a Christian respond? Edmond Burke said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." We must not close our eyes to the sin of injustice or the abuse of power, whether it is in a home, a church, a work setting or a community or country (Micah 6:8). The apostle Paul encountered some spiritually abusive leaders and did not put up with it (2 Corinthians 11:20). We should never be passive when we encounter the sin of abuse.

However, because we too are sinners, it is tempting to react to abusive behavior with a sinful response of our own. The apostle Paul cautions us not to be overcome with evil, but to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). What

does that look practically? Here are some biblical guidelines that will help you empower someone to respond to the evil of domestic violence with good.

1. **It is good to protect yourself from violent people.** David fled King Saul when he was violent toward him. The angel of the Lord warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with Jesus because Herod was trying to kill him. Paul escaped from those who sought to stone him. We must help people to get safe and stay safe when they are in abusive relationships. This is not only good for her and her children; it is good for her abusive partner. If you are not experienced in developing a safety plan and assessing for lethality (often women are more at risk when they leave an abusive partner), refer or consult with someone who is knowledgeable in this area (Proverbs 27:12).

**2. It is good to expose the abuser.** Secrets are deadly, especially when there is abuse in a home. Bringing the deeds of darkness to light is the only way to get help for both the victim and the abuser. If you are working with a couple and notice that the woman defers to her husband, regularly looks to him before she answers, blames herself for all their conflicts, speak with them separately (Proverbs 29:1; Ephesians 5:11; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

**3. It is good to speak the truth in love.** When someone grievously sins against us and will not listen, it is good to bring the matter before the church or other authorities in order to get additional support. Biblical love is not simply turning the other cheek and putting up with mistreatment. Biblical love is action directed toward the best interests of the beloved, even when it is difficult or involves sacrifice (Ephesians 4:25; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 3:13)

**4. It is good not to allow someone to continue to sin against you.** It is not only good for the abused person to stop being a victim; it is good for the abuser to stop being a victimizer. It is in the abuser's best interests to repent and to change (Matthew 18:15-17; James 5:19-20).

**5. It is good to stop enabling and to let the violent person experience the consequences of his/her sinful behavior.** One of life's greatest teachers is consequences. God says what we sow, we reap (Galatians 6:7) A person who repeatedly uses violence at home does so because he gets away with it. Don't allow that to continue (Proverbs 19:19). God has put civil authorities in place to protect victims of abuse (Romans 13:1-5) The apostle Paul appealed to the Roman government when he was being mistreated (Acts 22:24-29). We should encourage victims to do likewise.

**6. It is good to wait and see the fruits of repentance before initiating reconciliation.** Sin damages relationships. Repeated sin separates people. Although we are called to unconditional forgiveness, the Bible does not teach unconditional relationship with everyone nor unconditional reconciliation with a person who continues to mistreat us.

A good example of this is Joseph (see Genesis 42-45). Although Joseph forgave his brothers, he did not initiate a reconciliation of the relationships until he saw that they had a heart change. Biblical repentance is not simply feeling sorry (2 Corinthians 7:8-12). Repentance requires a change in direction. When we put pressure on someone to reconcile a marital relationship with an abusive partner before they have seen some significant change in behavior and attitude we can put them in harms way. We have sometimes valued the sanctity of marriage over the emotional, physical, and spiritual safety of the individuals in it.

The apostle Paul encourages us to distance ourselves from other believers who are sinning and refuse correction (See 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15). A person cannot discern whether a heart change has taken place without adequate time. Words don't demonstrate repentance, changed behaviors over time does (Matthew 7:20; 1 Corinthians 4:20).

As Christian counselors we have the opportunity and the responsibility to be champions of peace. I encourage you to forward this blog on to other Christian leaders who may need to learn how to see domestic abuse through the lens of the Scriptures.