

A Brief Look at the Bible's Stance on Abuse

- There is debate between Christians about how the Bible should be interpreted regarding men and women. However, the Scriptures that reveal God's heart for people and stance on abuse apply no matter whether you're complementarian (believing in separate roles for men and women ordained by God) or egalitarian (believing that God's call depends on gifting, not gender)
 - 1 Cor 12 – “those we think less honorable we treat with special honor” (so even though everyone in the Body of Christ is different and has different spiritual gifts and roles, this does not translate into valuing or respecting some over others.)
 - Eph 5 – a husband is called to love, not be harsh, and treat his wife's body like he treats his own.
 - 1 Cor 7 states that a woman's body belongs to her husband *but his also belongs to his wife* (v4) and it is his concern to please her (v 33).
 - A few inferences that can be drawn here:
 - instructions to husbands NEVER include enforcing their own way;
 - Jesus example of suffering is often [poorly] used to tell women to put up with abuse and not confront it, and abusive husbands often excuse their behavior by saying they were enforcing their wives' need to submit – however, if wives should willingly suffer their husbands breaking their duty to “love your wife as your own body”, shouldn't husbands also willingly suffer a wife breaking her duty to “submit”, rather than trying to force her to submit through violence?
- Submission
 - The Bible has a very positive view of submission and calls all believers to it (Eph 5:21; Php 2). In the Philippians passage, Jesus is used as the example of submission – thus it is clear that submission is a positive trait not just when we are under someone else's authority, but also when we are in positions of power or positions of equality.
 - Jesus' example of leadership is always one of service & sacrifice, rather than demanding others' submission, (see John 13 and Matthew 20:24-28/Mark 10:42-45)
 - Submission within equality: the Trinity
 - Scripture is clear that there is *only one* God
 - Any hierarchy within the Trinity would create a situation of God + demigods, or God + lesser gods.
 - Scripture is also clear that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct
 - Thus, within the very God we believe in, we have an example of distinct and different persons who are nonetheless equal and who treat each other with mutual submission and honor.
 - This same God is the one who said “Let us make man in our own image”, and then created “man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27 NIV). Thus the distinct and different genders are a reflection *together* of the image of this God.
 - Thus differences between people do not need to translate into hierarchy between them – and reflects the image of God less than equality and mutuality do.
- The Bible's condemnation of abuse:
 - Non-violence is part of the “checklist” of required qualities of those placed in spiritual authority (1 Tim 3:2)

- Peter implies that failing to treat one's wife with respect and as an equal heir of God's grace will "hinder your prayers" (1 Pet. 3:7) [There is a good article about this verse on www.cbeinternational.org, which points out that "weaker" in this verse can refer to political/societal power: thus men are commanded to intentionally treat their wives with respect *because* they recognize that women are disempowered in society, and because they recognize that in God's eyes they are equally "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life".]
- The entirety of the Psalter condemns violence; there are literally too many verses within Psalms that condemn violence to list them here.
- Isaiah 58:4-7 condemns outward piety that hides violence and neglect of one's family
- Scriptural reasons to confront abuse:
 - Many argue that because the Bible says to "turn the other cheek" and "bear up under unjust suffering" and "submit", that one should not confront abuse. However:
 - Matthew 18 – we are *commanded* to confront people who sin against us. Similarly, in 2 Thess. 3:14-15, Christians are counseled to give sinning brothers and sisters a relational "time out" to encourage repentance. (Sometimes a relationship does need distance, if repentance is not forthcoming; Titus 3:10-11 also talks about this, as does the Matthew 18 passage.)
 - Gal 6:1 – we are also commanded to restore those who are caught in sin; James 5:19-20 also talks about this. One cannot help someone repent without identifying and confronting the sin.
 - Ephesians 5:8 ff – we are commanded *not* to have anything to do with evil, and to expose it [interestingly, this passage details how to live as light rather than darkness, and culminates with the command "submit *to one another* out of reverence for Christ" – which then provides the context for the following specific commands to husbands and wives]
 - 1 Cor 5 – commands us to take it seriously when there is sin in the Church and to get rid of the sin among us, concluding with the command to hold people accountable inside the Church and have the unrepentant ones leave. Thus it is actually our duty to seriously address it when a husband is sinning against his wife, not just to tell her to forgive and submit. (Many times abused people are told to repent of their sins of bitterness and unforgiveness [without being given ample time to grieve], while the abuser is not held equally accountable to repent of their far greater sin of abuse.) This becomes an issue not just of a single couple, but of the purity and faithfulness of the Church; we are letting the Church be unhealthy when we let abuse continue.
 - Many egalitarians posit that it is actually not possible to prevent abuse within a complementarian approach. While there is debate about that, and we'd have to get deep into some sociological/psychological nitty gritty to thoroughly assess whether or not that's true, here are a few passages to consider regarding egalitarian ideas:
 - Acts 2: both women and men are present in the upper room and receive the Holy Spirit and tell "the wonders of God" publicly by the Holy Spirit's power. (Interestingly, verse 6 in the original is gender neutral, not "these men" as translated by the 1989 NIV. Translators inserted this for ease of reading, but it does not exist in the Greek or in many other translations, and the context from chapter 1 is clear that the Galileans in question were both men and women.) Peter then explains the phenomenon by quoting Joel 3, in which God promises to cause "your sons *and your daughters*" to prophesy, and reiterates the inclusion of both genders (and all socioeconomic levels) in saying "even on the male and female slaves I will pour out my Spirit".
 - Galatians 3:28 – "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

- Genesis 1-3 – Both man *and* woman are commanded to rule over the earth; it is only after the Fall that gender distinctions come into play, and they come into play as a curse and a sign of the brokenness of the world, not as an example of how God always meant to have gender relations be.
- For super helpful articles on specific passages (especially the tough ones like 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy 2), see the CBE website (www.cbeinternational.org); also *Beyond the Curse* by Aida Besancon Spencer and *I Suffer Not a Woman* by Catherine and Richard Clark Kroeger
- For more on this subject, see *No Place for Abuse* by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark; this is one of the best resources so far I have found on responding as a Christian to domestic violence. It can be easily and cheaply purchased online.