



Responding to Domestic Violence

I. The Problem of Abuse

II. What is Wrong with Abuse?

- A. It is never, under any circumstances, appropriate for a husband to use physical force against his wife for the purpose of compelling her submission to his authority. A husband abuses his wife whenever he uses physical force against her.
- B. We know this from the biblical principle of triadic authority
 - a. The authority of the state is enforced with sword (Rom 13:1-4)
 - b. The authority of the church is enforced with the keys (Matt 16:19; 18:15-20)
 - c. The authority of the home is enforced with the rod (Prov 23:13-14)
- C. In each of these examples there is a notable absence. The relationship of a husband with a wife is the only authoritative relationship where those in authority are not given the responsibility to enforce their authority.
- D. This truth will rule out—on biblical and theological grounds—any forceful acts by a man against his wife. Whenever a man engages in any such behavior, it is a wrongful use of power and, therefore, abuse in any and every case.

III. Protecting against Childhood Abuse

- A. The biblical allowance for the use of force against children in instructions about the rod is not an endorsement of any kind of child abuse.
- B. At least five biblical principles regulate the use of force against children



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- a. The biblical encouragement for the use of the rod is balanced by the biblical teaching that the rod should be used in a controlled way (Prov 23:3-14)
- b. The biblical encouragement for the use of the rod is balanced by the biblical teaching that parents (especially fathers) must not provoke their children to wrath (Eph 6:4)
- c. The biblical encouragement for the use of the rod is balanced by the biblical call to love (e.g., Matt 22:39)
- d. The biblical encouragement for the use of the rod is balanced by the biblical teaching to avoid sinful anger (Eph 4:31)
- e. The biblical encouragement for the use of the rod is balanced by the biblical teaching that discipline— though punitive—is restorative in nature (Heb 12:11)

IV. Can Abusers Change?

- A. It is common for many today to believe that abusers cannot change. The common conviction is, “Once an abuser, always an abuser”
- B. Such thinking is not true for two reasons
 - a. An anecdotal reason
 - b. A biblical reason (1 Cor 6:9-12)

V. A Biblical Response to Domestic Violence¹

¹The following are general guidelines. Counselors must be familiar with the specific laws in their area, and the specifics of the particular situation in which they are ministering to be effective.



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A. Listen

- a. You must listen to the abused wife
 - i. How long has the abuse been happening?
 - ii. How often does it happen?
 - iii. When does it tend to happen?
 - iv. How severe is the abuse?
 - v. Have children been exposed to the abuse?
 - vi. Have they seen it happen or been recipients of it themselves?
 - vii. What would your husband's response be if he knew you were talking about the abuse?
- b. You must listen to the abusive husband
 - i. Biblical ministry wants to do ministry to the abused and abuser
 - ii. Ministry to abusive persons has risks so there are things to keep in mind
 - a. Restoration no stigmatization
 - b. What is he wanting? (Mark 7:14-23)
 - c. Be careful how you listen to the abuser

B. Consider Whether and How to Involve Law Enforcement

- a. Laws about reporting abuse vary from state to state, so it is always



wise to check on the requirements for your area, but Kentucky is similar to many other states. In Kentucky, most people are required to report abuse to the authorities when they become aware of it. This requirement stands unless the abused person requests that the offense not be reported. If a minister receives such a request he still may report the abuse, but is no longer required to report it. This stipulation will often make it necessary for ministers to make a judgment call about how to involve the authorities.

- b. Several guardrails inform this judgment call
 - i. Integrity and honest dealing should govern your interaction with the woman who has come for help
 - ii. You must protect the weak
 - iii. Informing the authorities can help prevent further instances of abuse
 - iv. There are no easy one-size-fits-all answers here.

C. Involve the Church

- a. The church must be mobilized to care for the abused
 - i. Women may need a safe place to stay with their children
 - ii. They may need food and clothing for a time
 - iii. They may need long-term financial help if restoration proves impossible. (A church in such a situation should consider helping a woman pay for her children's school or for her own education as she tries to get a job to support her family).
 - iv. They may need to provide childcare. They may need to help getting kids back and forth to school.



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- v. They will always need to provide the sort of Christian friendship that provides the opportunity for candid and loving counsel, for tears, and even for laughter.
- b. The church must be mobilized to care for the abuser
 - i. Church members will need to be mobilized to go and confront an abusive husband.
 - ii. If such a man is repentant, he may need a place to stay for a time so that his wife and children can remain in their home.
 - iii. He may need food.
 - iv. He will certainly need accountability, as well as Christian friends who can speak into his life as he grows and changes.
 - v. Furthermore, for a time, he may need church members to supervise visits he has with his wife and children.
 - vi. Ultimately, if he is unrepentant, he will need the church to bear testimony against his sin through a process of church discipline so that his spirit may be saved at the last day (cf. 1 Cor 5:5)
- D. If at all possible, restore the couple to one another in a wise way
 - a. Biblical ministry in the aftermath of abuse should seek to restore couples
 - b. Biblical ministry in the aftermath of abuse should also seek to protect the weak from harm
 - c. Resolving this tension



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- i. Violent men must be separated from their wives and families in order to receive help and establish trust
- ii. In the early stages it may be that the only time a husband sees his wife is during the times of counseling.
- iii. Slowly increase the amounts of supervised time as a couple and with children.
- iv. Slowly add unsupervised visits (dates, etc)
- v. Slowly move to reestablish the couple in the same house
- vi. Throughout the process we are looking for signs of genuine repentance from the man as well as signs that his wife is comfortable with progress.

E. Involve the couple in intensive counseling

- a. Emphasize the nature of abuse (Jas 4:1-2)
- b. Emphasize the gospel of grace (Rom 6:1-4)
- c. Emphasize the necessity of repentance (1 John 1:8-9; Prov 28:13)
- d. Emphasize the necessity of forgiveness (Eph 4:31-32)
- e. Emphasize God's use of suffering in the Christian life (Jas 1:2-4)
- f. Emphasize the importance of intimate communion with God (Pss 40)
- g. Emphasize the importance of intimate communion in marriage
- h. Emphasize the importance of discipleship and mutual accountability (Eph 5:8-12)



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