

Let it not be so among us

By Barbara Brunworth

Open with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal God's Word to you.

Read together the words of Psalm 7:9: *O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.*

The statistics are eye-opening: Did you know that the most dangerous place for a woman is the home? The 1991 FBI Uniform Crime Reports said, "Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between ages 15 and 44 in the United States."¹ Reports from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate 1,159 females and 385 males were murdered by intimate partners in 2004.



When I began my counseling practice 30 years ago, I counseled with Christian women whose pastors told them it was their duty as a wife to submit, no matter what her husband's behavior toward her was. This attitude is rarer in Christian circles today. Most pastors now are firm against any kind of abuse in the home and abusive men are not excused on any biblical ground. Many congregations support women's shelters available in communities.

Abuse can be defined as intimidation or harm verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually of another person. This can include unrelenting criticism, destruction of one's personhood with name calling, being the object of rage and threats, demanding the right to be served physically or sexually, as well as actual physical harm.

Most women don't believe they are marrying an abuser. They want to be loved. They meet a man who appears to have enough good qualities to ignore whatever warning signs may be apparent. The man's behavior may be extremely subtle and not be readily observable. It may be hidden until after marriage.²

When a woman marries a man who affiliates himself with the Christian community and is abusive, she may have an extra measure of confused feelings about what she as a Christian can and should do. She may feel compelled to forgive and even be told by him that this is her responsibility as a Christian.

Counselors — Christian and secular alike — can help in understanding the cycle of abuse and its impact. They can also help determine whether the marriage might be

salvageable if the husband seeks counseling or if the husband and wife are candidates for couple counseling.

If you are in an abusive relationship or are a family member or friend of someone who is, know and believe this is not what God intends. As we grow in His grace and wisdom through the reading of Scripture, we can see this clearly.

In **Romans, chapters 1 through 11**, Paul challenges us to look at ourselves to see our sinfulness and God's mercy toward us.

Read **Romans 12:2**. What is to happen when we are chosen as His sons and daughters through Christ? What will we be able to do?

Power Plays

Paul says not to conform to the pattern of this world. This is not an easy lesson to learn. The disciples that walked with Jesus had a hard time learning this lesson. John, the Elder, wrote eloquently about God's love and plan for us. But do you know that when John was a young disciple of Jesus, he really had a difficult time understanding God's plan vs. the way of the world?

Read **Matthew 4:21–22**. What is the occupation of John and his brother James? What kind of traits would you expect men like this to have?

Read **Mark 3:17**. What nickname did Jesus give them? Imagine why they may have received this nickname.

Read **Mark 9:38** (see also **Luke 9:49**). What does John's behavior here, in light of his nickname, suggest about his character?

Read **Luke 9:54–55**. What strong word describing Jesus' actions informs us of His thoughts and feelings about the behavior of James and John?

Read **Matthew 20:20–28** (see also **Mark 10:35–45**). What further information do we have that they were interested in their own gain, power, and rank in this world?

Look again at **Matthew 20:25–27** and **Mark 10:42–44**.

Jesus said: *it is not so among you* (NRSV).

Jesus was teaching that discipleship is not about power, authority, or lording it over another. Rather being His disciple is about service to each other.

Read **Acts 3:11–16**. Peter speaks of power from a very different perspective. To whom do the disciples attribute their power and for what purpose do they now use power?

Love in Action

Read **1 John 3:18**. What does John say love is? So how is it to be in the family and the relationship between husband and wife?

Read **Matthew 19:1–10**. What did God the Father intend? Why did Moses allow divorce? What was the reaction of the disciples? Why do you imagine they reacted this way?

Keeping in mind the love in action between men and women, read **Ephesians 5:21–33**. At that time in history, the word *submit* in relationship to one's husband would have been nothing out of the ordinary. But how might the words to husbands have sounded to men?

How does this passage tell a wife to express her love for her husband?

How does this passage tell a husband to express his love for his wife?

These words to husbands and wives are meant to transform their hearts and minds. Love like this is not just words and talk. It is true love, which shows itself in action.

Though a Christian woman who leaves an abusive husband will need to work through forgiving the abuser as God has forgiven her, she is not compelled to be in harm's way by continuing in the relationship with him. The words Christ used when he spoke about why Moses allowed divorce are especially descriptive, "because of the hardness of men's hearts." A man who sees himself as having the right to be served, to exert power and authority to the detriment of his wife and children, and to misuse the words to wives in Ephesians has failed to let the power of the Holy Spirit transform his heart and mind. He does not understand what it means to be a disciple.

Read **John 13:34–35**. Earlier it was stated that discipleship is about service. Jesus expands on what it means to be a disciple here. How do we show others we are disciples of Jesus?

Why do we want to do this for others? (See **1 John 4:19**).

It is because Jesus "loved the church and gave himself up for her" that we know we have been forgiven. He earned it for us and gives it freely to all who put their trust in Him. We live in that certainty. We **love** in that certainty. *That should be so among us!*

Closing: Read or sing the fifth stanza of "All Depends on Our Possessing" (*LSB* 732; *LW* 415; *TLH* 425):

Well He knows what best to grant me;
All the longing hopes that haunt me,
Joy and sorrow, have their day.
I shall doubt His wisdom never;
As God wills, so be it ever;
I commit to Him my way. Public Domain

¹Margaret J. Rinck, Ph.D. *Christian Men Who Hate Women*, (Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

²Andrea Lisette, and Richard Krause. *Free Yourself From An Abusive Relationship*, (Hunter House, 2000), p.xi .

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