

A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a garden. Their relationship with God and each other was loving, happy, balanced, and without strife – until Adam and Eve took fruit from the forbidden tree. Their sin of rebellion (1) immediately affected their relationship with God, breaking the sweet fellowship they enjoyed with Him, (2) led to their exclusion from the garden and the tree of life, bringing unhappy toil and hardship into their lives, and (3) brought strife into their marriage relationship. Consider the following paraphrase of Genesis 3:16, God’s explanation of how their sin would affect their relationship with each other:

*God then spoke to the woman as a consequence of her rebellion against the beneficent rule of Yahweh, the following new realities that shall mark her life: I will bring something new into the wonder of the bringing of children into the world. I will greatly magnify your pain in giving birth. When you give birth to your children it will be in physical pain. I will also allow pain to come into your marriage relationship with your husband. You will tend to desire to usurp the role I have given him as the compassionate leader in your home, rejecting his role and belittling his manhood. And the man on his part will tend to relate to you in loveless tyranny, dominating and stifling your integrity as an equal partner to himself. (Ronald Allen, *The Majesty of Man* (Portland, Ore: Multnomah, 1984), 145-47.)*

Women do abuse their husbands, usurping their role as leader in the home and belittling their manhood, but men more commonly abuse their wives, relating to them in loveless tyranny, dominating and stifling them. To some degree this has been the legacy of Adam and Eve’s rebellion in every marriage in every age in every culture. Sad as the situation is, though, there is hope – in Christ. His death on the cross changes everything. We can be free from not only the penalty of sin, but the power of sin. We can change. In addition Jesus left us an example of what healthy marriage relationships can look like. In Ephesians 5:25, 28, 29 Paul explains:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife love himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church.

The King James edition in verse 29 uses the words “nourisheth and cheerisheth” to describe how a man ought to love his wife. Nourishing is far more than putting bread on the table. What women deeply need is nourishing on the heart level. They need their husbands to communicate and connect with them in a way that feeds their emotional needs. They also need their husbands to cherish them - to value them highly - and to communicate this to them in such a way that they have no doubt about how much they mean to their husbands. Jesus has done and is doing this for us, and husbands are to follow His example with their wives. But more specifically how does this affect the way in which a man treats his wife in their day-in-day-out relationship? What behaviors characterize healthy and abusive relationships?

HOW HUSBANDS RELATE TO THEIR WIVES

Healthy versus Unhealthy Relationships

Based on Ephesians 5:25-33, 1 Corinthians 13

Healthy, Christ-Like Relationships

Genuine love that is self-giving

A healthy love of self that is based on God's love for me

Leadership like Christ's headship over His church, which is like a shepherd

Active nourishing, building up the other, seeking the other's welfare and health

Cherishing that communicates the wife's value, and builds healthy self-worth

Touches in love communicating affection

Sex is mutual, building the relationship

Leads in the marriage like a shepherd

Creates an environment where each can talk about anything feels and expresses feelings trusts the other

Says you are beautiful,
Says I am so glad you are my wife
Says I love you, and then **acts** in loving ways

Brings peace, joy, faith, hope, and vitality into the relationship

Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

Love-less, taking what I want

A warped, selfish love of self, or even self-hatred

Control, manipulation, exercising power over the other, emotional or physical

Destructive behavior that sucks the life out of the wife, and shrivels the soul

Constant put-down, communicating worthlessness, "you can't do anything right"

Hits in anger

Sex is forced on her, destroying the relationship

Pushes like a cowboy driving cattle

Creates an environment where each learns not to talk about "it" buries feelings learns not to trust

Says: you are ugly
how did I get stuck with you?
I hate you, or says I love you but his actions deny it

Brings discord, despair, emptiness, hopelessness, and death to the relationship

A "health" distribution in marriages

