

Domestic Violence in The Church: Beyond Pray, Stay, Obey

Religion, Faith, Spirituality, Science & Research:
Engaging for Safety and Accountability

Battering Intervention Services Coalition of MI
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Julie A. Owens

Throughout history, women have been subjugated in all major religions. Because of their inferior legal and social status, they were routinely punished.

For example, during the Renaissance, “The Laws of Chastisement” took for granted that violence against women was a part of the divine order of things.

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□ In the medieval church, clergy taught that disciplining his wife was *a husband's duty and obligation*.

□ Friar Cherubino's “Rules of Marriage” instructed that if a wife disobeyed, the husband was to
“take up a stick and beat her, not in rage, but out of charity for her soul, so that the beating will rebound to your merit and her good.”

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Why Understanding Faith Issues Should be Important to Secular DV Professionals

- Most Americans identify with a religion.
- Victims must feel comfortable and understood when sharing their faith beliefs with advocates.
- Houses of worship are one of the few places many victims are allowed to go & may be the only place they reach out for help.
- Often victims/survivors receive advice from faith leaders that is not helpful and doesn't focus on safety.

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Spiritually based Guilt

- My husband needs me. Jesus suffered, so why shouldn't I?
- The Bible says that longsuffering is a fruit of the spirit. I just need to practice it instead of fighting it or complaining about it.
- The Bible says 'God hates divorce'; leaving my husband will break God's commandment.
- A good Christian will always pray harder and "expect a miracle"
- If I give up on my husband, I am not being faithful to God or trusting in God's power to change people. It means my faith is weak & I am not a good Christian.

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CBW have all of the *usual* questions about abuse & . . .

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Spiritual Questions of CBW

- Is this God's will for me?
- Is God punishing me for something I did?
- Does the Bible say I must *submit* to abuse?
- Is this my *cross to bear*? My *thorn in the flesh*?
- Does the Bible say that abuse is a sin?
- If I am under my husband's *Biblical authority*, can I challenge him when he is abusive?
- Am I responsible for my husband's *salvation*?

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How Faith May Impact a DV Victim

- She may have been taught that peace in the home & keeping her family intact is her religious responsibility (and she will be failing God if her marriage fails).
- Religion may have been used as a tool of abuse by her abuser
- Religious beliefs may be intertwined with misogynistic notions or interpretations of scriptures
- Faith values or practices may play a role in excusing, minimizing or condoning her abuser's actions
- She may be ambivalent, wanting support from her faith community but fearing she will be blamed

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- She may be conflicted about seeking help outside of her faith community.
- She may believe that God is punishing her for something she has done, for sinning.
- She may believe that God is testing her.
- She may feel guilty about reporting the abuse, talking about it to others, separating or divorcing.
- Her faith may be the only thing that has sustained her through the abuse.
- She may feel that God has abandoned her.

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“Religion will be a roadblock or a resource. Our job is to de-construct roadblocks and re-construct resources.”

*Rev Marie M. Fortune, Founder
FaithTrust Institute*

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Faith leaders who have not carefully studied domestic violence sometimes advise victims that the abuse will make them stronger, etc. This minimizes the life-threatening potential of DV, ignores the psychological impact on the victim & children, and deflects attention from what must be the primary goal: stopping the abuse, and keeping the victim(s) safe.

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MYTHS OFTEN HELD BY PASTORS

- 1. There are no abused women in my congregation.**
- 2. Christian victims need only ‘faith, prayer, a positive attitude, and God’s grace’.**
- 3. Domestic violence occurs in certain cultural, racial & socioeconomic groups, and in urban areas.**
- 4. Victims can stop the battering by changing their own behavior. This will save their marriages & families.**

Rev. Al Miles **Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know**
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Faith leaders Areas of Concern

- Members being led astray from their religious convictions if they seek help from outside professionals who do not hold the same religious leanings.
- Referring members to secular professionals they perceive as promoting divorce and not valuing marriage.

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When Christian Leaders Blame Victims or Perpetuate Stereotypes of Femininity & Masculinity

- Christian author **Gillis Triplett** claims that there are 13 traits common to abused wives, including "**THEY LOVE THE DRAMA!**"
- Evangelical leaders **John MacArthur and James Dobson** have both gone on record stating that women *must be careful not to "provoke" abuse.*
- In **Love Must Be Tough** (1996) Dobson wrote of a woman battered by her husband. He stated she'd "baited" him to hit her so she could show off her black eye; "her prize."

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It appears that America's anti-Biblical feminist movement is at last dying, thank God, and is possibly being replaced by a Christ-centered men's movement which may become the foundation for a desperately needed national spiritual awakening.



Jerry Falwell

- **John MacArthur** calls the women's movement "Satanic." He blames working women for everything from smog to prison overcrowding.
- **T. D. Jakes** states in *Woman, Thou Art Loosed* that all women were *created to fulfill the vision of some man*. This belief is based on the physical characteristics of male and female genitalia. All women are "receivers" and all men are "givers", although women *give birth, give milk, give nurturing*, etc. Jakes claims women and men must operate like their genitalia in every facet of life.
- **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** says that to a godly wife, her husband "is her little world, her paradise, her choice treasure. She is glad to sink her individuality in him."

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- **Paige Patterson**, recent past president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, claims the Bible does not allow women to instruct men, so he dismissed Hebrew professor Sheri Klouda
- He started a "Homemaking" major at SBTS. Only women can participate. Classes cover childcare, cooking, sewing, a woman's role in marriage. (Courses are taught by his wife, the only female on the faculty.)
- Patterson states abused wives must
 - 1) Pray for their husbands
 - 2) submit to them, and
 - 3) "elevate" them.
- He admits this sometimes leads to beatings, but believes the men eventually get saved.
- He states he has helped women leave abusive husbands, but can never recommend divorce.

Why Faith Helpers May Not Address Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

It's well hidden most of the time & even if not,

- Both can be complex, confusing & time-consuming
- They may believe the common myths about DV
- IPV is still often treated as a private family matter
- It's widely regarded as 'a relationship problem'
- They haven't been taught about IPV, so they don't know that it's the root cause of many "relationship issues"
- When they do understand it, they often don't know what to do, how to help or where to refer victims
- They may have our own DV histories and or/biases

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In other words, even though they may want to help, they are just as likely as anyone else in society to

- believe the myths
- see abusers as “sick”
- collude with abusers
- see victims as the problem (not understand hostage dynamics & survival behaviors, etc.)
- assume couples counseling will help

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“Broken Silence” survey report 2014

- by IMA World Health and Sojourners
- 1,000 Protestant pastors
- 75% underestimate the level of sexual and domestic violence in their congregations
- 56% adequately familiar with local IPV resources
- 66% speak once a year or less about the issue
- 81% would take appropriate action if they had the training and resources to do so

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Broken Silence 2.0 2018

Sept 2018 by Lifeway Research, for IMA World Health & Sojourners

1,000 pastors surveyed

Since the 2014 study:

- 35% increase in awareness, training, seeing DV-SA impact, and knowing resources available to help
- 74% increase in # who know a DV-SA victim/ survivor
- 17% increase (now 51%) speak to their church about DV & SA several times a year, or more than the past
- 85 % know of the #MeToo movement (41% of these are more inclined to preach about DV & SA)
- 20% have experienced abuse or harassment directly, validating the #churchtoo movement and the need to address the problem inside church communities.

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For our society to be able to fully address the needs of individuals and families affected by IPV, the secular advocacy and religious communities must work to understand their differences, their commonalities, and how the combined strength of both can be a powerful force for addressing this crime - this sin - against the physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of individuals and families.

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Common Statements to Battered Women of Faith

- Your husband is a good _____. He doesn't mean it.
- Your husband is sick. You married in sickness and in health. Pray for his healing.
- Trust God. He won't *give you* more than you can handle.
- Pray about your part in this problem.
- Be a more submissive & obedient wife.
- Forgive your husband.
- Talk to the ____ about your husband's anger problem.
- We all suffer at times.
- Pray & work for your husband to change.
- Faith-based counseling or a marriage retreat will help.
- You married for better or worse. Divorce is no option.
- Don't go to a shelter. They break up marriages.
- Don't go to secular agencies for services.
- Don't go to court against another believer.

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Often, victims don't talk about the abuse with pastors or church friends, because of fear or embarrassment. When they do risk sharing, they are often met with disbelief, platitudes, bad advice or even outright victim-blaming.

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Common Beliefs of Christian Battered Women

- The Bible says that my husband is the “head” of me and the family. It is God’s will that I always follow his lead and do as he says.
- God’s word says that I need to “submit to my husband’s authority”.
- My husband is sick. I married “in sickness and in health”, so I cannot leave him.
- A Christian should not discuss marriage issues at church or with Christian friends.
- I must forgive my husband.
- My suffering must be endured. It’s my cross to bear.

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Major Biblical Issues

- Creation of males and females
- Husbands’ headship
- Wives’ submission
- Divorce
- Suffering
- Forgiveness

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Christian evangelical Beliefs

1. Complementarianism
1. Egalitarianism

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Creation Theology

“God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” Gen 1:27

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COMPLEMENTARIAN Position

BOTH CREATED EQUALLY in dignity, value & essence Gen. 1:26-27

GIVEN DIFFERENT ROLES BY GOD, per Paul

because:

- Eve was created to be a “helper” 1 Cor. 11:9-10
- Adam was created first
- Adam was tasked with protecting Eve from sin.
- Eve sinned first 1 Tim. 2:8-15
- As a result, males/husbands were given loving authority over females/wives (“headship”)
- Females must willingly, gladly, assist & submit to them Gen. 2 per Paul in 1 Cor. 11, 1 Tim. 2
- **Wives must be honored**

Egalitarian

- Man & woman were created equal.
- Hebrew has no gender neutral pronoun
- ‘mankind’ (adam) was used

Eve was not created to be Adam’s “help-mate” or assistant, intended to follow his lead.

- “Help-mate” isn’t in the Bible.
- The term “help” as it is used in the Bible is not an indication of subordination.
- The term in Hebrew (ezer) means “mighty helper” and is used repeatedly of God.

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Husbands' Covering & Headship

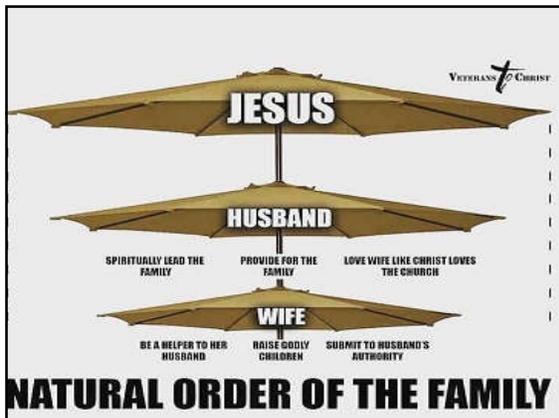
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An Abuser's Favorite Verse

"But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV)

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COMPLEMENTARIAN Position

GOD MODELED THE MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIP ON THE TRINITY

Per Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth

- **The 3 persons of the God-head are equal in essence**
- **The 3 are distinct in function.**
- **God the Father is authority (head) over Christ**
- **Christ is the authority (head) over every man**
- **Man is the authority (head) over woman**

-Bruce Ware, The Council on Biblical manhood and Womanhood

1 Corinthians 11:3 has been used to support an idea called "covering", which is that women need the covering or protection of a man's (spiritual) authority.

OT: Nothing in the Bible supports the idea that women need the covering of men.

God bypassed husbands & fathers and spoke to women directly, or he sent an angel to speak to women.

NT: God did not, and does not, single out men as his authorized spokesmen (prophets) or as protectors.

God used, and uses, women as prophets and protectors

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**WIVES ARE SUBJECT TO THEIR HUSBANDS
"IN EVERYTHING", IN RESPONSE TO THEIR
SUBMISSION TO THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST**

- **The husband is the "head" of the wife as Christ is head of the Church (5:23-24).**
- **Husbands must love their wives as Christ loves the Church (5:25-29)**
- **When husbands truly love their wives & wives submit to their husbands, we see what God intended in his creation of man and woman. (Paul, in Eph. 5:22-33)**

Many Christians have assumed that **‘head’** (kephalē) means “the one in authority” in 1 Corinthians 11:3.

However, “leader” or “authority” was not a usual meaning of the word in ancient Greek either before or during the first century.

4 FACTS THAT SHOW “HEAD” DOES NOT MEAN “LEADER” IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3 M. Mowczko

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- Greco-Roman society was patriarchal
- many works survive where Greek authors wrote about the rule of men and husbands.
- no author other than Paul, and Christian authors following him, used the word “head” when writing about the relationship of a husband with his wife, or when writing about men and women more generally.
- **Outside of Christian literature, “head” is never used in ancient Greek in a male-female context.**

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What does κεφαλή (head) mean in the New Testament?

- Regarding Jesus and Adam, it means “source” or “point of origin”.
- Adam was the “source” of Eve, who was taken from his side. Jesus is the “source” of life, growth and freedom in the church.
- Referring to husbands as the “head” of their wives (Eph 5:23), Paul tells them, “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25).

Jesus said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.” (Matt 20:25-28)

Does the word “head” in the New Testament refer to “male authority”?
The Equality Workbook: Freedom in Christ from the Oppression of Patriarchy

ALL WOMEN IN THE CHURCH MUST SUBMIT TO MALE AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

- Women must have a symbol of authority on their head (11:10), because they're the glory of man (11:7), originating from man (11:8) & created for man (11:9) (Per Paul via [Gen. 2](#) in 1 Cor 11)
- These instructions in a letter to one (particularly troubled) church in Corinth are meant to apply universally in the Church. [1 Cor 11:1-16](#)

WOMEN ARE NOT TO TEACH OR PREACH TO THE CONGREGATION (and/or are not be elders who judge prophecies).

- Only males may teach the congregation. [Per Paul, 1 Cor. 14:34-36](#)
- Women must display submission to male headship. They must learn quietly from them

EGALITARIAN Position

A. Man & woman CREATED EQUALLY by God

- Both genders were created in God's image; equal in all respects. No distinctions were made [Gen 1:26-27](#)
- Woman created a "helper" (ezer); a complement [Gen 2:18](#)
- Created as "one flesh"; neither is superior [Gen 2:22-24](#)
- BOTH were to rule over creation (*functional equality*) [3:28](#)

B. It is SIN that created a false hierarchy [Gen 3:16](#)

C. Christ ABOLISHED that hierarchy [Gal 3:8; 28](#)

D. BOTH receive God's gifts

- (e.g., [1 Cor. 11:5](#) women are given gift of prophecy)
- God's spiritual gifting is gender-neutral
- Therefore both genders should equally exercise their gifts in the church.



THINK
"EQUAL"
NOT
"THE SAME"

WOMEN TYPICALLY DON'T KNOW

The Bible doesn't state:

- that all men are the heads of all women
- that the man is the head of the household
- that the husband is to "lead" the wife

It does not give husbands decision-making authority over their wives.

The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are "heirs together" of the grace of life and they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility
(1Cor 7:3-5; Eph 5:21; 1Peter 3:1-7; Gen 21:12).

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An Abuser's Other Favorite Verse

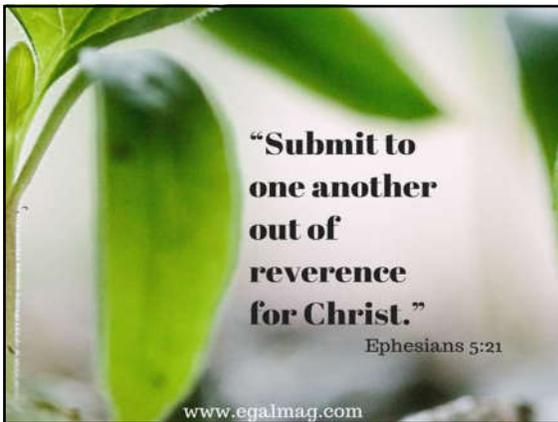
"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."

Ephesians 5:22-24

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Sometimes, a church-going abuser will quote another favorite verse.

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“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Ephesians 5:21

www.egalmag.com

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy. . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves also himself. . .”

Ephesians 5:25-28

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“Our actions towards our spouses is to be sacrificial, and *sacrifice is a choice we make, not an obligation we owe*. . . Any use of these verses to justify violence and domination towards another person is a travesty of God’s inspired Word, and is in itself doubly sinful.”

“The Epistle to the Ephesians and Domestic Violence”
The Rev. Evan Ash, M/Div, MS
Vicar, St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church,
Olathe, Kansas

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DIVORCE

“For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.”
Malachi 2: 16-17

“What God has joined together, let no one put asunder.”
Matthew 19:6

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- Directed at men only when it was written.
- Divorce was not ever a choice for women.
- Divorce literally meant "sending away"
- The Hebrew word used here for "violence" means cruelty, oppression, injustice.
- Not directed at those escaping violence, but at those instigating it and *covering it up*.
- divorce (*man's decision*) was a popular/ easy way to get out of a marriage

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“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9

Jesus recognized the possibility for the marriage covenant to be broken and challenged His hearers to appraise their own lives to consider any action that might break apart that which God joined together.

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“Any man who brings violence and abuse into his family life is putting asunder the marriage covenant that God has blessed. *The violence is what breaks up the marriage, and the one responsible for that violence is the one responsible for the breakup.*”

**Reverend Marie Fortune
Keeping the Faith:**

Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman

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SUFFERING

“Take up your cross and follow Me.”

Jesus

Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

1 Peter 1:6

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Many people misinterpret “cross” as some burden they must carry in their lives

That’s my cross to bear.”

not what Jesus meant: was instruction to his followers about giving up anything that might get in the way of their doing the will of God.

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Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, “I repent”, you must forgive him.

Luke 17:1-4

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Men who batter may also cite this scripture to insist that their victims forgive them:

“For if you forgive other people their failures, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failures.”

Matthew 6:14-15

They often claim that a good Christian must **“forgive and forget”**.

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FORGIVENESS does not mean **forgetting** the abuse or pretending that it did not happen. Neither is possible.

Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse. Rather, forgiveness means that the victim decides to let go of resentment and set herself free.

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The 3 Steps of Repentance

- 1) The perpetrator acknowledges the harm he has done and takes responsibility for it.
- 2) The perpetrator emphasises his need for fundamental change, and makes these changes.
- 3) Restitution to his victim(s), acknowledging the costs of his choices, and including attempts to make right that which was broken.

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

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Reconciliation without Repentance

Forgiveness cannot lead to reconciliation if the abuser is not willing to truly repent. With DV & coercive control there have been many, many offenses. Simply apologising does not constitute biblical repentance. It must be accompanied by a change in behavior.

In the absence of genuine repentance, forgiveness can be counterproductive and harmful. In such a case the abuser has no incentive to repent. His sinful behavior is simply reinforced. The abuse will continue, and will in fact, get worse.

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“The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion.”
Psalm 11:5

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“The last words of Jesus to Peter-revealing our Lord's burden and passion- were ‘Tend my lambs’, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ It is so sad that shepherds have often fleeced the sheep, rather than fed them. They have harmed the sheep, instead of protected them. They have allowed the sheep to become prey for *wolves in sheep's clothing.*”

**Rev Robert S. Owens, Pastor Emeritus
First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu**

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Faith leaders must thoughtfully support victims who are struggling with the issues of male headship, wifely submission, divorce, redemptive suffering and forgiveness. When they do not, they are colluding with the abuser to perpetuate the conspiracy of silence and the continued oppression of the victim, and are siding with the abuser.

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Primary Goals for Faith Helpers

- SAFETY for the woman and children
- ACCOUNTABILITY for the abuser
- RESTORATION of individuals, and
- IF POSSIBLE, relationships
- OR**
- MOURNING the loss of the relationships

Rev Marie Fortune, Faithtrust Institute

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What percentage of Christian therapists were able to identify abusive family situations when provided with DV scenarios?

Healing the Hurting
Kroeger, Beck

(c) Julie A. Owens 2017

Fewer than 10%

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Consequences

- **Victims are often not identified**
- **Victims are diagnosed or pathologized**
- **Couples counseling is provided**
- **Only the symptoms are treated**
- **Violence keeps getting worse**
- **Victims think that they are an equal part of the problem**
- **The children continue to be damaged**
- **The abuser gets away with the abuse**
- **The victim may feel abandoned by God**

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What do you think most faith leaders recommend for couples having marital problems?

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Couple's Counseling

- A study at University of Washington in Seattle indicated that 55%-56% of couples in treatment for 'marital distress' were violent, but the therapist didn't know it
- Most psychologists do not screen for abuse before agreeing to work with couples
- Few psychologist or pastoral training programs offer any required coursework in domestic violence issues

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Most victims just want to find help for their abusers. They believe that God can and does change people. They need help understanding why the abuse is occurring, how to know if the abuser is changing & what help is available for their partner. They may not be interested in leaving their abuser.

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- Encourage her to ask her clergy if they have received training on domestic violence *before* choosing to disclose abuse to them
- Offer to accompany her to meetings with clergy, or offer to arrange for clergy to visit her
- Arrange with churches to invite and transport her to services in her tradition
- Contact and collaborate with clergy members

Faithtrust Institute, ammended

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What Victims Need to Hear

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Helpful Phrases

- "I'm so sorry this happened to you."
- "I believe you."
- "Thank you for sharing. It takes courage."
- "You deserve to be treated with respect."
- "Other Christian women have told me this."
- Here is what your denomination says about DV
- "I'm afraid for you. You need a safety plan."
- "Would you like to meet some other church women having similar problems?"
- "I won't tell your husband or anyone that we've talked."
- "Focus on your safety. Here's where you can go for help."
- "You can 'Stand in the Light' for your husband from afar."
- "Sometimes a person who is sinning cannot see their own sin if they are too focused on someone else."

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- "It's not your fault."
- "Abuse is against man's laws - God's laws, too."
- "God didn't give you this burden."
- "God doesn't want you to suffer."
- "The marriage covenant was already broken by his violence."
- "Some women find they can help their husband most by staying away while God works with him."
- "Here's where your husband can go for help."
- "Here is a church that will support you."
- "Here are the names of _____ counselors who understand abuse."
- "I will be here for you."
- "A faithful person can love someone & pray for them but also chose not to live with them if they are ungodly."

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RESOURCES

- **Local DV programs**
- **Faith-based DV organizations**
- **Books**
- **Websites**

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Denominational Statements and Declarations

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

- Episcopal Church
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
- Presbyterian Church
- Southern Baptist Convention
- The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
- Union for Reform Judaism
- Unitarian Universalists
- United Methodist Church
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Available at www.interfaithpartners.org

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Christian Resources

- **Refuge From Abuse** Catherine Clark Kroger, PhD
Nancy Nason-Clark, PhD
- **Keeping the Faith –Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse** Rev Marie Fortune
- **When Love Hurts (support group book)** Karen McAndless-Davis & Jill Cory
- **Healing Hearts- A Bible Study for Women** Rhonda Encinas
- **The Study Bible For Women** Oxford Press edited by C. C. Kroeger, PhD
- **United Methodist Women**
<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/domestic-violence>
- **Anguished Hearts Bible study** - Presby. Against DV Network
- **Addressing DV in the Christian Home** – Facebook group

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When Love Hurts - 4 part TV series, free, on-line or DVD (Julie's story, Part 1) <http://dod.org/programs/when-love-hurts-understanding-and-healing-domestic-abuse-when-apologies-are-dangerous-part-iii/>

FaithTrust Institute www.faithtrustinstitute.org

RAVE (Religion And Violence E-Learning)
www.theraveproject.com

Julie Owens, website www.domesticviolenceexpert.org

BIBLICAL EQUALITY RESOURCES

Let My People Go: A Call to End the Oppression of Women in the Church Bob Edwards
Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) www.cbeinternational.org
The Junia Project <http://juniaproject.com/>

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Addressing Domestic Violence in the Church
by Bob & Helga Edwards, 2017

On-line support groups for Christian victims:
-"God Hates Abuse" by Robin Mullins Senger.
<https://godhatesabuse.com/god-hates-abuse>
- Called to Peace <http://www.calledtopeace.org>

Religion and Intimate Partner Violence by
Nancy Nason-Clark, PhD, et al Oxford University Press 2017

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