

Paul Christensen

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



AND
THE CHURCH



Domestic Violence and the Church

Domestic violence is an increasing epidemic in our society. Despite all the measures that the police, courts, and victim advocacy organisations have put in place to stem the flow of victims reporting violence by their partners, incidents are increasing all the time to the point where those who are concerned with the issues around domestic violence are running out of ideas. It seems that nothing is working, and high numbers of new cases are coming before the courts every week, along with the serial offenders who keep on coming before the court time after time, often with different partners reporting abuse.

But what is often not realised is that the domestic violence epidemic is also rife through the Christian Church. In secular society, it is calculated that one in every three persons, male or female, are either victims or witnesses of domestic violence.¹ The alarming statistic is that there is one in four Christian Church members who are involved in domestic violence at some level.² The tragic and sad part of this is that these are professing Christians who are either perpetrators or victims of domestic violence.

The principle around Christian conversion is that it involves a change of heart. Part of the evidence of genuine conversion is true repentance. This involves a turning away from the sinful behaviour as described in Galatians 5:19. Part of that list states: “hatred”, “wrath”, “strife”, “murders”. Paul says clearly that “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” So, what is he saying here? It seems to be clear that a professing Christians who continue the “flesh” behaviour are demonstrating that they are not genuinely converted to Christ, and therefore will not be accepted by Christ when they come up before Him at the Judgment. James says

¹ Domestic Violence Handbook For clergy and pastoral workers, p. 6.

² See “The Silent Epidemic”;

<http://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2004/september/silent-epidemic.html>

Domestic Violence and the Church

that if a person says that he has faith needs to demonstrate it by the way he behaves (James 2:18), and that faith without the evidence of a radical change of behaviour from the negative list in Galatians 5:19, to the fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23, then we would have every reason to believe that the profession of Christian conversion is false, and the person is still in their sins. If that person continues a Christian profession without that change in behaviour, then we would have every right to call him or her a hypocrite.

A professing Christian who is physically, psychologically, or verbally abusing his partner is demonstrating that his behaviour is not matching his Christian profession. He is a hypocrite by acting as a born again believer when in reality he is not born again at all. All he has is “religion” and not a true faith in Christ. True faith in Christ brings a radical change in behaviour as a result. That is what being born again is all about. If a person is a member of the church, and maybe in a position of responsibility, and abuses his wife and family at home, he is a false believer, a fraud, a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The sooner he is exposed as such, either through a personal challenge, and if he will not listen, to being challenged publicly before the whole church, the better it will be for all concerned.

The sad fact is that in many of our churches, there are men in leadership who are serial wife-beaters and abusers, and because no-one is willing to speak up, they are getting away with it.

But there is hope. Domestic violence is not the unforgiveable sin. The scripture says that “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men” (Matthew 12:31). God “takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 18:32), and that His desire that no-one should perish, but “that all may come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). So, although the consequences for wilful sin seem to be frightening, the person who turns their heart toward God and places his trust in Christ will find the way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jesus Christ is our refuge (Psalm 46:1), and the person who comes to Him with genuine repentance will never be cast out (John 6:37).

Domestic Violence and the Church

So, what exactly is domestic violence?

There is a very good handbook put out by the Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Programme, South Australia that provides a very good set of characteristics. What follows comes from that handbook.³

Domestic violence stems from an attitude of power and control. It comes from a patristic attitude in many churches where the scripture “wives submit to your husbands” (Ephesians 5:22) is misused to give some sort of scriptural permission for husbands to treat their wives as possessions to be owned and controlled, and to punish them if they refuse to comply with the husband’s demands.⁴

It does not have to always involve physical violence, although in most cases if left without intervention can end up in pushing, shoving, shaking, twisting limbs, restraining, punching, preventing sleep, slapping or drugging. It can also involve property damage such as throwing crockery, breaking furniture or household goods, damaging doors or walls, smashing windows, destroying treasured possessions. It can also involve pet abuse such as hitting, kicking, punching, choking, neglecting, sexually abusing, starving, killing or threatening to kill pets.⁵

Much of domestic abuse can start with what we can call psychological abuse. This involves making threats, stalking, looking or speaking in ways which are frightening or intimidating. This can include yelling, screaming, threatening punishment, ignoring the partner and treating her as invisible, driving dangerously with her or

³ A copy can be obtained from
http://www.sacc.asn.au/_data/DV_Handbook.pdf

⁴ Domestic Violence Handbook, p. 6

⁵ Ibid p. 7

Domestic Violence and the Church

the children in the car, threatening suicide or to hurt or kill her, the children, family or friends.⁶

A common form of domestic abuse, not always recognised as such, is using put-downs regarding a woman's body shape, grooming, intelligence, mothering ability, home management skills, etc. Telling her or making her think she is crazy, stupid, useless, worthless, and good for nothing. This can be in front of others or when she is alone.⁷

Other forms of domestic abuse can involve maternal alienation, sexual abuse, social abuse, economic abuse, legal abuse, male power abuse.⁸

Although all these aspects of domestic violence can be present among professing Christian believers, two areas stand out: spiritual and male power abuse.

Spiritual abuse is very common in most Christian churches to a greater or lesser degree. This involves in using scripture or ideas about God and the Church to justify the violence and the further control and abuse. This may involve preventing the partner from going to the church of her choice, having her own theology or belief structure which might be different from his, and to using selected scripture, especially about the wife being submissive to the husband, and threatening damnation if she does not comply.

Male dominance is present in many churches, especially fundamental churches where women are denied leadership roles, and where women's role, in their attitude is "limited to kitchen duties and child care in the home". The husband acts as lord and master in

⁶ Ibid p. 7

⁷ Ibid p. 7

⁸ Details can be read in Ibid pp. 7-8.

Domestic Violence and the Church

the home and treats his wife and children as servants who are there to cater for his every demand, and God help them if they don't comply.

Religious hypocrites have a habit of quoting only half a scripture, and often out of its context. Let's look at "wives submit to your husbands." This is only part of the scripture reference. Here is that reference in context:

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing^[a] her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."^[b] ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Domestic Violence and the Church

The scripture starts off with the instruction for the wife to submit herself to her husband as she does to the Lord. That's fair enough because Paul explains that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. There is no problem with that. But the hypocritical husband and church leader stop there. They place the requirement on the wife while ignoring the rest of the passage.

There is the requirement for husbands to love their wives just as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her. This requirement does not include the abuse of the wife as described above. If a husband is psychologically, physically, socially, spiritually or verbally abusing his wife, he does not love his wife as Christ loves the church. We do not see Christ abusing His church in the way many "Christian" husbands abuse their wives.

Paul goes on to say how husbands are to reflect the Lord's love for the church. Husbands are to work at bringing his wife closer to Christ. That does not mean beating "the hell" out of her in order to do that. He is to use his words to build her up in the faith, to encourage her to do great things for the Lord. When he is with her in public, he is presenting her as the best thing that has happened to him, to hold her up as a wonderful example of faith, holiness and commitment to Christ and to the church. Presenting her as blameless is to keep the "dirty washing" under wraps and not bring out all her failures and shortcomings in front of others and the church. This is so different to what so many religious husbands are doing to their wives. And there is an alarming number of wives in the church who are putting down their husbands and announcing their failures and shortcomings to their friends inside and outside the church.

Paul says also that when the husband shows love and care to his wife he is loving himself. What man would beat himself up, or exposes all his own faults and failings in front of everyone in the church, unless he has a mental health problem? A religious husband who physically and/or verbally abuses his wife certainly has a

spiritual problem. He still needs to be converted to Christ to have more than an outward display of religion. A wife-abusing husband fits into the Lord's description of religious hypocrites as outlined in the following reference:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

So it is quite clear that the Lord will reject professing Christians who abuse their wives and will view them as hypocrites and evildoers. These abusers may fool their friends, church leaders and pastors, the authorities, but they will not fool Christ, and they will find out to their horror and guilt that when they stand before Christ expecting to be accepted and rewarded, they will be cast away from His presence into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁹

So, Christian marriage is an equal partnership between male and female. The male's role is not to be the lord and master over the wife. They are equals in the home, each having their specific roles. If the Christian husband is genuinely born again and is living according to the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

⁹ Matthew 13:42

²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Then the very idea of any type of abuse toward his wife would be totally foreign to him and unthinkable. Paul says that the three principal attributes of Christian faith that will carry into eternity will be faith, hope, and love, and that the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). The 1 Corinthians 13 reference is often quoted at weddings, Christian and secular, to provide a standard on which a husband and wife should build their marriage. It is sad that many who hear that reference on their wedding day, soon forget it once they encounter the stresses of married life. But let's unpack the reference to show how a husband should behave toward his wife in order to maintain a genuine Christian profession.

13 If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

In the context of having a Christian profession and being a wife-abuser, this means that the husband's religion is false and everything he says in relation to it is just useless noise.

²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

This means that his religion is worth absolutely nothing in the sight of God. Everything he is doing in the church is just wood, hay and stubble which will be burned up when he gets to eternity, and he will stand naked and guilty before Christ.

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

It doesn't matter how hard he works for the church, and how many honours and positions of responsibility that are given to him by the church leadership, he gains absolutely nothing by them. Everything he does, supposedly for the Lord, is worthless.

This also applied to any pastor or other leader/influential person in the church who is supporting or encouraging him without accepting that he needs to repent of his wife-abusing behaviour. They become accessories, and are equally responsible before God for the way he is behaving. Therefore their work has no moral value to God, and although some may think they are blessed or helped through their ministry, it will come to nothing and end up being worthless, because their ministry will be limited to the flesh, because the Holy Spirit will not be guiding or supporting them.

⁴ Love is patient,

Now follows the behaviour that is characteristic of a genuine Christian believer. Firstly, he is patient with his wife and children. They may not always do what he wants them to do, or they may be slow to understand some theological principles that he considers important, but he is patient with them, accepting that they may be in a different space.

love is kind.

Kindness is a feature of a good Christian husband. His wife and children know that they are loved and cared for.

Domestic Violence and the Church

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

A truly born again Christian husband does not envy his wife's strengths and gifts, even if they are better than his. He celebrates her faith and love for Christ, and if she wins more souls or has a more effective ministry than he has, he rejoices in it with her. He does not boast of his gifts and abilities in ways that would demean his wife. He is not someone who plays "one-upmanship" with his wife to put her down by boasting that he is better than her. When his wife points out things that need to be corrected in him, he is humble enough to listen to her and put those things right if need be. He is not too proud to do the basic tasks around the house like putting out the garbage or doing the dishes.

⁵ *It does not dishonor others,*

A good Christian husband does not do anything to dishonour his wife. Physically assaulting a wife is doing her the greatest dishonour. What honour is it for a Christian wife to be seen in public or at church with a black eye and a bruised face? Putting his wife down through verbal, spiritual or social abuse is also dishonouring her, especially when it is done in front of others.

it is not self-seeking,

It is a feature of a good Christian husband that he does not put himself first. He goes by the principle that it is "better to give than to receive" (Acts 20:25). Therefore he is going to seek better ways of giving love and honour to his wife. Verbally abusing and threatening her would not be one of those ways.

it is not easily angered,

Domestic Violence and the Church

This is a significant attribute. Most domestic violence incidents are triggered by very minor events. Usually they start by arguing over, for example, the evening meal is not as hot as he thinks it should be. The argument develops into verbal abuse and then into slaps, punches or kicks. Anger is a secondary emotion. It is caused by something else. An attitude of power and control can spark an angry incident if the wife does not comply with the husband's wishes. Where a husband has a very strong view of his power and control over his wife, especially in some non-European cultures, he feels that it is his right to physically punish his wife. A particular church group put up a website teaching that it was permissible to physically punish a "wayward" wife, and give specific instructions on how it should be done.¹⁰ I cannot believe that this church could be a truly Christian one even though it might profess Christianity, because it violates many of the attributes of love described here.

it keeps no record of wrongs.

An unfortunate occurrence in many marriages is the recalling of past wrongs when a wife or husband makes a mistake. The spouse then trots out the whole catalogue of past mistakes, probably to try and correct perceived weaknesses. The problem with that is that reminding someone of their weaknesses robs them of their morale and strength. But rejoicing in their strengths makes them stronger and more determined to overcome their weaknesses. There is nothing worse than having to live with a nagging spouse. Proverbs 25:24:

"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."

¹⁰

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2013/09/10/christian-wife-spanking/>

Domestic Violence and the Church

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love is always stable and predictable. A good husband always protects his wife against anything that would cause her distress or danger. He will always trust his wife to manage the affairs of the home in a wise manner, even though he does not always understand some aspects of it. He always hopes for a better future with her, that the marriage will continue to develop positively so that they enjoy years of happiness together. If there are difficulties, he will persevere in his positive and encouraging attitude so they can work together to resolve issues. There are many issues that can threaten a marriage and cause stress in the home: sickness, redundancy, financial difficulties, wayward children, burglary, etc. Even though a resolution seems hopeless for a while, perseverance will bring the answer in due course and things are turned right side up again. Punishing the spouse because these things are happening are not the ways in which problems and difficulties can be resolved.

⁸ Love never fails... When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me...

When the principles of love are put into practice in a marriage, it can never fail. Love tends to bond marriage partners together. Even if one or the other spouse believes that he or she might have made the wrong choice in marriage partner, applying the principles of love to the marriage causes love between them to grow in spite of the initial incompatibility between them. Divorce and domestic violence are not God's answers to problems within marriage. Marriage is like the Christian Church. If a person walks out of the Christian Church because of issues, he may very well be walking away from God. It is the same when a spouse walks out of a Christian marriage. The

Domestic Violence and the Church

spouse demonstrates his or her lack of trust in the Holy Spirit to be able to assist them to resolve their differences and difficulties. It is, in effect, saying to God, "I don't trust You and I am going to do things my way. If my spouse does not comply I am going to punish her, leave the marriage and find a new partner who will comply with my wishes. If my church doesn't allow divorce, and I might lose my position in the church if I do leave the marriage, I'll just make my spouse's life a misery until he or she chooses to comply with my wishes, but I won't let anyone in the church know that I am doing it." These are the words of a person who is walking away from God, that is, if He was ever walking with God in the first place.

So, what can a believing wife do when she is being verbally and physically abused by her violent husband?

There is a scriptural process that is there to address when a church member is seen to be doing wrong.¹¹ This can be initiated by the person who is wronged, or someone else witnessing the misdeed.

The first step is to go to the abusing husband and tell him that he is doing wrong and needs to repent before God, turn away from the violent behaviour and develop ways of dealing with issues in a non violent way.

If he will not listen, the next step is for the person to take another person and repeat the requirement to repent of wrongdoing.

If the violent husband still will not listen, then it can be reported to the church. Usually that is done through the pastor, minister, or elders, depending on who is running the church.

¹¹ Matthew 18:15-17

Domestic Violence and the Church

If the violent husband still will not listen, then he is to be removed from fellowship and treated as an outsider. He may not be physically removed from the church, because he still needs to hear the Word of God in the hope that he will eventually be convicted by the Holy Spirit of his wrongdoing, but he is treated as if he is a sinner needing conversion.

But what happens when the church will not listen? In some churches, there is the attitude that husbands resort to violence because the wife is not loving, caring or submissive enough, and they spend more time counselling the wife instead of confronting the violent husband. This is unacceptable, because the abused wife is never responsible for the violence of her husband toward her. Therefore, if she cannot get relief through the church, she then has to resort to using the authorities to protect her and to deal with the violent husband.

She has the option of informing the police, who will arrest the abusive husband, charge him, and bring him to Court to be dealt with. He will be expected to do an Anger Management Programme, Relationship Counselling, and Parenting Programme if children are involved in the abuse. This can have a significant impact on his standing at his church, and possibly the reputation of the church itself. It can affect the credibility of the Pastor/Minister if the problem has been reported to him and no action on his part has been taken.

She can leave the marriage. If a violent husband will not repent of his violence and to seek to find other ways of dealing with marital and home issues, he has effectively broken the marriage contract where it says to “love and honour” his wife, “for better or for worse”. If the marriage vows that were made before God are broken, the abused wife is free to leave the marriage and remain separated from the violent husband until he is prepared to repent and turn things around so he is no longer violent.

Domestic Violence and the Church

But there are dangers in leaving a relationship or marriage when the abuser has a power and control attitude toward his partner and family. It is important that the abused wife who decides to leave the relationship is aware of the dangers and has a good safety plan in place.¹² There have been too many homicides involving female victims of abusive relationships where the abuser has adopted the attitude “if I can’t have her, nobody will.” But you might say that a Christian believer would not go that far. It would be dangerous for the wife of a professing Christian abuser to believe that and fail to have a good safety plan, thinking that his Christian faith would not go as far as doing anything that would directly threaten her life.

My view is based on what Jesus said about a person hating another in his heart is a murderer at heart already (1 John 3:15). Also, Galatians 5:20 states that those who hate and have fits of rage will not inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, even if a person is a professing Christian, if he is physically or verbally abusing his wife, he is hating her in the Lord’s eyes, and if this abuse is happening because he cannot control his anger and attacks her during fits of rage, then his Christian profession is empty and worthless until he repents and asks the Lord to, by His grace, to set him free from his angry and hateful ways, to give up his power and control attitude. I would go as far as to say that a wife-beater’s profession of Christianity is entirely false, and that he has entered his spiritual pilgrimage “over the wall” instead of through the “narrow gate” (Matthew 7:13).

So, an unrepentant wife-abuser should be viewed as an unbeliever, in spite of his religious profession. So the marriage between them, although it may have started out as a Christian marriage, the husband’s abuse of his wife breaks the contract, and he loses his

¹² Here is the article that every person leaving an abusive relationship should read.

<http://stopviolence.com/domviol/WhySheSometimesStays.pdf>

status as a Christian believer, so the marriage is no longer Christian. If the abused wife decides to walk away from the marriage because she sees no other way, and because her life may be in danger if she stays, then she would not be walking away from God. This applies also to a marriage partner walking away from a Christian marriage where the other partner had committed adultery or deserted her.¹³

There are many Christian churches that recognise that wife-abuse is unacceptable and is a violation of the Christian faith. They will not hesitate to discipline and censure a wife-abuser, and if he is fulfilling a responsible or leadership role in the church, he is made to stand down until the situation is resolved. They may require the wife-abuser to leave the fellowship to allow the victim to continue in fellowship without having the trauma of having to encounter the wife-abuser in an environment where she would be expected to worship God in safety. This is in keeping with the scripture:

"But as it is, I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Even though the scripture here does not mention wife-abusers, we have already equated wife-abusing with hatred and fits of rage, and these along with these ones of the Corinthians list are on the

¹³ Adultery and desertion, along with physical abuse breach the marriage vows made before God and destroy the marriage contract, therefore the innocent partner is free to walk away from the marriage and to say separate until the sinning partner repents or God views the marriage as irreconcilable and divorce is the only reasonable option to set the innocent partner completely free from any further obligation to the unrepentant, sinning partner.

Domestic Violence and the Church

Galatians 5:19-20 list. So I am confident in stating that the innocent Christian marriage partner should have no fellowship with the wife-abusing partner until he is prepared to repent. If the church pastor is prepared to understand this and to provide protection for the victim, then it is right for him to tell the wife-abuser to stay away from the church until he is prepared to resolve his problem. There is nothing to stop the pastor referring the perpetrator to counselling, but to provide counselling himself may be a conflict of interest because he would have to maintain a neutral position between the perpetrator and the victim. But he does have a responsibility to victims of domestic violence for them to be able to continue in fellowship without prejudice of any kind. He is not there to apportion blame, even though the perpetrator may have been accused of wife-abuse. The pastor can ask other qualified persons to investigate the complaint to establish the truth of what happened, and to report back. Those qualified persons should not be close friends of the perpetrator or the victim to avoid a conflict of interest one way or the other. It may be that the pastor may call upon suitably qualified people from another fellowship who are not associated with the perpetrator or the victim to conduct the investigation. That way the investigation can proceed without prejudice.

However, this is the ideal. Unfortunately, in practice, it doesn't always work out that way. If the pastor is a close friend of the perpetrator then he would find it difficult to believe any version of events other than that of the perpetrator, and is liable to favour the perpetrator over the victim. This has happened in some churches and the perpetrator is given greater support and responsibilities while the victim is accused of not being submissive enough, giving the impression that the abuse has happened because she is not a good wife, and that to stop the abuse she should repent of being unsubmitive. This has the effect of alienating the victim from the very people who could be in a good position to help her.

Domestic Violence and the Church

Because the church in some places has been unsupportive of the victim, she has been forced to go to the authorities. In some ways this has been made worse for her because she is now subjected to more intense criticism and judgmentalism from the pastor and church members because she has gone to the police.¹⁴

My view is that if a church pastor, minister, or members do not support a domestic violence victim, and overtly give their support and encouragement to the perpetrator, they could be viewed as accessories to the abuse and held as much to account as the perpetrator himself. If the police are involved and the case is going through the Domestic Violence Court, if the pastor and/or elders put any pressure on the victim to either drop the charges or minimise her account of the incident, they may find themselves in danger of being charged with conspiring to defeat the course of justice, which is a criminal offence. If the case is going through the Court, and if such pressure is placed upon her, she should inform the police officer in charge of her case to allow the police to have the discretion about what they will do about it.

It is not a sin for a victim of a domestic violence incident to go to the police. Domestic abuse or assault is a criminal offence and should be reported, and the perpetrator should be put before the Domestic Violence Court and have to accept responsibility for his actions and be prepared to get the help he needs to stop him being violent. In my opinion, the Church does not have enough “teeth” in law to successfully deal with domestic violence perpetrators. Domestic violence needs effective intervention to have any hope of bringing an effective resolution to the affected families. Unless there is effective intervention, the violence will always get worse, and the victim could

¹⁴ See <http://groupthink.jezebel.com/churches-are-failing-domestic-violence-survivors-1635611183> for a sobering article on the way some churches fail domestic violence victims.

Domestic Violence and the Church

end up in hospital with serious injuries or even in the graveyard! Paul supports the use of the police in such matters:

For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4).

The real downside of domestic violence is how it can affect the children in the family. Often they witness incidents of violence, and it usually is very frightening and traumatic for them, even if they are not victims of assault themselves. To see their father beating up their mother can negatively affect them for the rest of their lives. Professing Christian fathers who engage in domestic violence toward their wives and families need to have a clear appreciation of the serious damage that they are doing because of their violent behaviour. Jesus had some very serious things to say about the effects on children:

"If anyone causes one of these little ones--those who believe in me--to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42) .

Jesus didn't mention domestic violence specifically, but His statement nevertheless applies to domestic violence perpetrators whose behaviour causes their children to believe that this is an appropriate way of getting their own way. Many young witnesses and victims of domestic violence end up being violent themselves, and so they have to take the consequences of their own behaviour; but the violent parents who caused these children to "stumble" in the first place can only expect to receive a fearful judgment from the Lord

if they persist in the violence. Even if the child does not resort to violent behaviour when he or she grows up, the traumatic effects of witnessing or experiencing the violence can stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Being a violent unbeliever is one thing, because he doesn't know any better and is stuck in the groove of sinful behaviour, and without a work of the Holy Spirit in his heart, he will always be that way, ending up perishing in his sins. But a professing Christian should know better because he knows the gospel, and he has seen the example that Jesus has set concerning how we should conduct ourselves with others, especially those of our own families. There are two significant scripture references that give the Lord's attitude toward those who begin a profession of Christianity and then turn their backs on Christ through sinful behaviour:

Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

"How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:29).

In my opinion, a professing Christian who resorts to domestic violence in any of the forms described at the start of this booklet is a person who has put his hand to the plough in the sense of "accepting" Christ and starting out on the Christian life, but then "looks back" by going back into the type of sinful behaviour that he should have left behind him. What we are talking about here is not the momentary lapse for which he might be immediately remorseful,

repents, and seeks counselling to ensure that it does not happen again. What I am talking about is the person who makes violence toward his family a regular occurrence and will not listen to advice nor will he seek help.

Furthermore, a professing Christian who descends into domestic violence to control or get his way with his spouse and family is actually trampling the Lord Jesus Christ underfoot, and has treated the Blood of Christ as an unholy thing through his sinful behaviour. Also because he is frustrating the grace of God, he is insulting the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of grace. There is no way that a person like that will go out into eternity in a right state with God. Light cannot fellowship with darkness. A person cannot say that they are a child of the light when their deeds are darkness.

The only way a violent person can get right with God is to have a change of heart and throw himself on the mercy of God's grace and plead that the Holy Spirit will work in him to change the way he behaves toward his spouse and family.

What are the steps that a domestic violence perpetrator can take to making peace with God?¹⁵

1. Admit to God that you are addicted to domestic violence and that there is no way you can change unless there is a work of God taking place in you.
2. Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, and through His resurrection, He can bring victory over the

¹⁵ See http://www.azmag.gov/archive/DV/Resources/RDVC_2011-04-04_Domestic-Violence-Resource-Guide-for-Faith-Leaders.pdf for a very good guide for church leaders.

Domestic Violence and the Church

violence and cause you to undergo a radical change in your heart and conduct.

3. Receive Christ into your life as your Saviour and the one who can affect change in your life as your Lord.
4. Do all the things you need to do to take responsibility for your behaviour, by getting anger management help, relationship counselling, and working with the Holy Spirit to live a holy, non-violent life.

The reason why you need to take these steps of faith is that you cannot achieve victory through your own strength. If you try outside of the grace of God and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, you will find that the harder you try, the victory will be more unachievable.

"This is the victory that overcomes...even your faith" (1 John 5:4).

"We always have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

The good news is that there is forgiveness and cleansing for domestic violence sinners:

⁹"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The first part is the most difficult. It takes a lot of courage for a domestic violence sinner to "come clean" about his sin. The natural tendency is to try and justify the behaviour and to put part of the blame on others. But what God requires is for the sinner to take full responsibility for the sin by a full and frank confession. This brings

Domestic Violence and the Church

God into the situation with all the resources He has to bring in order to make the necessary changes. The first thing He does in response to the confession is to completely forgive and cleanse the sinner, and to restore that person's standing with Christ. Then, from that stable position, the actual work of changing the behaviour can take place. The Holy Spirit takes charge of the change, bringing guidance and strength to successfully deal with stressful situations in the home, and to heal the effects of the violence on the victim and the children.

Once the Holy Spirit takes charge, then the marriage and family are built on the three great foundations of the Christian faith – Faith, Hope, and Love.

Faith – to believe God that He can affect positive change.

Hope – that the future will be brighter and better than the past.

Love – experiencing the love of Christ will bring a whole new sense of love between spouses and children.

So, if you are a domestic violence sinner, know that you can be restored and healed if you put your trust in God, be completely open and honest with Him, and be prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to bring change into your life.

If you are a victim, remember that your fervent prayers are very effective in bringing the Holy Spirit into your family to bring healing and restoration, or if that does not happen, to give you guidance on how you can take measures to keep you and your family safe.

If you are a child victim or witness to domestic violence, know that Jesus always listens to the prayers of children, and does not hesitate to come and help. You will be amazed at the miracles that happen when children pray from their hearts.

Domestic Violence and the Church

If you are a pastor, minister or church leader, pray and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance on how to deal with domestic violence offenders, and how to effectively and wisely support their victims.

We all have to make choices in life, and I hope that as you read this, you will make the right ones.





