

CHURCHES SHOULD BE “ABUSE-FREE” ZONES

The Bible has a high view of women,
therefore,
the church should be an “abuse-free” zone.

Church leaders should remember that sexual and physical abuse is a sin – and a crime. They should not ignore, cover up, or sanction such behavior. Above all they should listen to the admonition of Proverbs 24:11-12:

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?

If you are an abuser, there is only one word you need to know – *repent*. And, remember, repentance is not found in a few tears, an apology, and a promise to be better. It is found in counseling and treatment. It is evidenced in long term fruit. Think of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), who joyfully restored what he had taken, above and beyond what the Jewish Law required – and followed Jesus. So again, repent and get help. There is divine mercy and healing. But remember, God is on the side of the victim. To use the language of the Old Testament:

But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. (Ps 10:14-15)

What are the symptoms of abuse? How do you recognize it in yourself or in others?

First, there are a number of common excuses offered to rationalize abuse, for example: She deserves it; She enjoys it; She provokes it; It is a private, family matter; It is in her best interests, so that she learns to submit and accept her limits. Do *not* take refuge in these myths. They are not acceptable to God.

Second, what are the typical manifestations of abuse? There are forms of sexual and physical abuse, for example. But, as counselor and author, María Elena Mamarian, explains in her book, Rompamos el silencio, there are also many forms of chronic verbal and psychological abuse that are also deeply destructive. Here is a list of abusive behaviors and sinful character traits:

Degrading use of adjectives and utters threats (of death, to take the kids, to throw them out); criticizes her for everything she says or does; yells and gives orders (against the children and sometimes in front of others); humiliates, mocks, and makes jokes that hurt; blames her for everything that happens in the home; does not take into account her tastes, opinions, and feelings; is cynical, arrogant, and insolent to her; accuses her of being a traitor or disloyal if she shares with others what happens in the home; expresses contempt for women; humiliates and denigrates her in many ways; compares her to other women; confuses her with conflicting arguments and mixed messages; causes her to believe that it is she who is crazy or stubborn; ignores her presence; does not speak to her; looks down and laughs at it her; continuously accuses her of infidelity; has the last word on everything; does not admit wrong in anything; does not accept her explanations or criticism; is negligent with respect to her needs; threatens to commit

suicide or kill her; lies and does not fulfill promises or marital agreements; is not responsible for his mistakes; makes the children his allies and alienates them from their mother; demeans her in front of the children;...demands her submission and obedience; instills fear of the future if she abandons him; bullies her in many ways (through threats, breaking her valuables); criticizes her extended family and other relationships; manifests a rigid religious morality and is a perfectionist, which makes her feel guilty, deficient, and at fault. (55-56)

If you are a victim, do not suffer in silence. Get help. Go to the police, if necessary. Demand intervention from your pastors and friends. Get counseling. Do not allow your victimization to define or destroy you. Discover your true identity in Christ, knowing that you are very precious to him.

For those of us who are married, husbands, love your wives, just as:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (Eph 5:25-28)

Christian husbands ought to follow Jesus' earthly example in relating to women with respect and care. Certainly, the *last* place we should witness marital neglect or abuse is in Christian homes.

Further, think about Jesus' relationship with women and how it could impact your marriage. Ask yourself: If Jesus had been a married man, how might he have treated his wife?

He would *not* sexually, physically, emotionally, or economically abuse or neglect his spouse. He will *not* seek to control or manipulate. He would *not* stifle her personal development. He would *not* focus all of the family energy, time, and money on his own personal development or fulfillment. He would *not* leave all the domestic work or child care for her to do alone.

He would, to paraphrase Paul, "look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of" -- his wife (Phil 2:4). He would not simply lie on the couch and watch TV, while his wife labored heavily at two or three tasks. He would always be respectful. He would always be supportive. He would always affirm and encourage. He would, to use to Paul's terms, always strive to love, like Jesus:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Cor 13: 4-8)

How do we and our church view and treat women?

Like Jesus?

Or, like the world?