Spousal Abuse

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Spousal abuse is a difficult behavior to define because it encompasses a set of symptoms that involve both physical and/or emotional abuse. When it takes the form of emotional abuse, it is characterized by verbal ridicule and/or putdowns that demean and patterns of neglect. Physical abuse involves the threat of physical violence and may include slapping, shoving, and deliberate physical assault.

Spousal abuse is a pattern of behavior that may be the result of a number of different factors. It may be a learned behavior that a child observes occurring between parents and later repeats in his or her adult relationships. Studies show that abusers are often motivated by feelings of powerlessness and insecurity. Spouse abuse inflates the ego and provides a false sense of control. It may be the result of a misguided sense of love that results in unhealthy possessiveness and/or jealousy.

Society is now becoming more aware of spouse abuse than it has been in the past. Previously, even if gross abuse was reported to the authorities, the law was reluctant to get involved. It was assumed that the man was ruler in his own castle and the authorities had no business there. At best it was viewed as a misdemeanor. That view has changed. If a man or woman feels abused, there are now many organizations ready to help.

Spouse Abuse – What does the Bible say?
No where in scripture do we find God sanctioning any form of spousal abuse. In Colossians 3:18-19, men are instructed to pattern their love for their wives after Jesus’ love for His church. This is described as a sacrificial kind of love; the kind of love that seeks the very best for the one who is loved. Emotional and physical forms of abuse are diametrically opposed to the concept of sacrifice; such behaviors are selfish and self-seeking. 1 Corinthians 13 teaches what genuine love is all about and has much to say about what love is not. According to this passage, love is not self-seeking, is not easily stirred up, and does not behave hatefully. Clearly, abuse is not a demonstration of genuine love.
Misinterpretation of Ephesians 5:22 has led some to believe that the role of submission by wives permits their husbands to abuse the power of their position in the relationship leading to the mistreatment of their spouse. The true meaning of this passage is a demonstration of a husband's role as initiator of unconditional love, which results in the wife's role as responder, willingly placing herself under his spiritual leadership. Actually when husbands abuse their wives, they have given up their role as spiritual leader of the home as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ who is a spiritual leader who sacrifices for the needs of his bride, the Church. Submission is not something to be taken, but rather something to be given.

Spouse Abuse – Just How Serious is it?
Spouse abuse is a very serious form of exploitation that will escalate when left untreated. There is a cycle of violence that often begins with a pattern of verbal denigration and emotional abuse and intensifies until it manifests itself as a form of physical abuse. Verbal abuse is perhaps more sinister than overt physical abuse. Long after the black and blue bruises and broken bones from physical abuse heal, verbal abuse continues to silently erode its victim's self-worth.

The classic abuser conveys a message to his victim that she is responsible for his negative behaviors; that she is a failure in most or all of the roles that she is fulfilling; and that, apart from him, she is helpless. Victims of abuse eventually come to believe that they are powerless and objects of shame. Statistically, reports of women being abused are more common than that of men.

Often the most effective solution to making the relationship healthy and safe again is bringing in an objective third party, such as a Christian counselor, to intervene and mediate with the wife and her husband.

Christian Resources

These resources may help you get started in your effort to curb the emotional and/or physical violence you're experiencing.

- Karla Downing's excellent book, 10 Lifesaving Principles for Women in Difficult Marriages (Beacon Hill Press), offers solid biblical principles you can put into practice, including how to speak the truth in love, set boundaries and change yourself, rather than him.
Dr. Margaret Rinck, a clinical psychologist and author, dissects what happens in emotionally abusive relationships and offers sound and compassionate advice in her book, Christian Men Who Hate Women (Zondervan).

She writes, "We need to set women—and men—free from the terrible bondage that entraps them." It might seem that a husband is the "bad guy" in the relationship, but "in reality he is in no less pain than the woman, but he usually does not know it."

In a related essay, Dr. Rinck recommends using assertive responses to abusive bullying, such as:

"I guess we disagree. It's okay with me if we don't see eye to eye about this."

"It's not okay for you to react to me in this manner."

"I will not be manipulated by your screaming and yelling."

Learning to set limits in an abusive relationship is difficult, but necessary, for breaking the cycle of abuse.

If you are in a relationship in which you are being abused, verbally or physically, now is the time to take action to make your life and relationships healthier and safer. To set an appointment with a Christian counselor, call Kristina at 972-960-9981 or email your contact information to kstephens@christian-works.org.
“You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior.

As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husband in everything. And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man is actually loving himself when he loves his wife. No one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for his body, which is the church.”
(Ephesians 5:22-29)