

HOPE AND HELP FOR THE ABUSER

Pastor Tim Nixon

The world defines abuse as:

The willful **intimidation**, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another. It is an epidemic-affecting people in every community, regardless of age, economic status, nationality or educational background. Violence against women is often accompanied by **emotional abuse** and **controlling behavior**, and thus is part of a systemic pattern of **dominance and control**. (Emphasis mine).¹

So what characterizes a dominant husband?

- Worldly view of a husband's leadership
- Dictatorial rather than a servant/leader
- He believes it is his role to make his wife submit.
- Has a pattern of overt expressions of anger over adverse circumstances: finances, job, sexual problems, and poor health.
- Harbors bitterness toward his wife (and children) over some past grievance.

The world often equates the dominant husband with anger, manipulation, and control. Women who are married to these men often describe anxiety and inner conflict about their relationships. They say things like, "Everyone else thinks he's great. I don't know what it is about me that sets him off," "I feel like he's never happy with anything I do," "He messes up my mind sometimes," "The thing is, he really understands me," and "He calls me disgusting names, and then an hour later he wants sex. I don't get it."

Each of these women realizes something is wrong but can't seem to put their finger on it.

In fact, even among women who have experienced violence from a partner, half or more report that the man's emotional abuse is what is causing them the greatest harm. The differences between the verbally abusive man and the physical batterer are not as great as many people believe. The behavior of either style of abuser grows from the same roots and is driven by the same thinking. Mentally cruel and manipulative men tend to gradually drift into using physical intimidation as well.²

Psychologists report major difficulty in recognizing these relationships in that the dominant husband does not appear to be such when outside the home. They are often kind and warm, friendly and funny, even with their wives and children most of the time. The dominant husband may have a good job and have no problem with drugs or alcohol. As we look at him in our

¹ The Artemis Center, Dayton Ohio, "Facts About Domestic Violence", <http://www.artemiscenter.org/dvfacts.php>. (Accessed June 22, 2017)

² Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: Putnam, 2002), 7.

culture and our world, he simply does not fit the image of a cruel or intimidating person. Yet if we look closely from the wife's point of view, we see the symptoms and behaviors. Wives report a husband who frequently puts her down verbally. He is almost always very selfish and tends to blow up in anger when he is irritated. These men are almost always shifting the blame to their wives, where all negative behavior from the husband is because the wife made him do it. It is very often the case, with the dominant husband, that he makes it clear to his wife that he knows her better than she does. From the point of view of the abused, most doubt themselves. The dominant husband has such an effect on his wife, that she often feels that the problem is a "badness" within her. The abused doubts herself and thus makes it even more possible for the husband to be dominant.

So how does the psychologist promote change? The first challenge for the psychologist is to motivate the man to work on himself. Lundy Bancroft has very little hope when he writes, "The reluctance of these men to change cannot be overcome through gentle persuasion, pleading, or cajoling by the woman. I am sorry to say that I have never once seen such approaches succeed. The men who make significant progress in my program are the ones who know that their partners will definitely leave them unless they change." He goes on to say, "The majority of abusive men do not make deep and lasting changes even in a high-quality abuser program." The psychologist requires the man to first accept responsibility. The following steps to change then must take place: he must admit dominance is wrong, he must acknowledge his behavior is a choice, he must show empathy for those he dominates, he must develop respectful behaviors and attitudes to replace the dominating once he is stopping, and he must make amends for the damage he has done. A standard program for counseling includes four elements: consequences, education, confrontation, and accountability. In all these areas, the psychologist confirms that the man's progress depends completely on the man himself.

What Does the Bible Have to Say?

Domination and oppression are common in the Bible. The biblical category of oppression describes the manipulative domination of one person by another. God speaks of oppression when Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites in the book of Exodus. Pharaoh was cruel and uncaring in his domination. But God noticed the suffering of his people, "And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them" (Exodus 3:9, ESV). This is not an isolated incident for we repeatedly learn of God's love and concern for those who are mistreated, "The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." (Psalm 9:9, ESV). Not only does God speak of his compassion and mercy for those being dominated, he also speaks of his lack of regard for those who are dominant. In Malachi 3:13-17, the Lord does not accept the offering of the people because of the way they treat their wives. God describes the man whose speech is contentious and offensive, "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts..." (Proverbs 12:18, ESV). Words can be a weapon used to cause pain (Proverbs 25:18-20). Jesus warns against name-calling in Matthew 5:22. Colossians 3:19 instructs husbands not to be harsh when Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them".

Unlike the opinions of the world, the Bible speaks authoritatively to the husband's responsibly, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians

5:25, ESV). Paul goes on to write in Ephesians 5, “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (v28) and “However, let each one of you love his wife as himself...” (v33). In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter reminds husbands that they are to live in understanding with their wives, treating her with respect, valuing her, and living with her as a co-heir in Christ. This is so serious that failure to do so will hinder one’s prayers.

By now in this sermon you are all hating these dominant spouses.

But the Lord Jesus Christ died for these spouses who are Christian. He took the penalty for their sin while he hung upon the cross. The heinous sin of the spouses (men and women) could only be satisfied by death. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world took that sin.

And he took yours as well. Jesus – who knew no sin – became sin for us. As we sit here this evening and judge the sin of the oppressor, we tend to forget the blackness, vileness, ugliness, putridness, and disgustingness of our own sin.

The good news for the oppressor is that God can transform their lives in the same way he has transformed so many of ours.

The Bible is clear that godly change only occurs through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit as the Word of God is brought to bear in the life of the sinning believer.

The knowledgeable Christian understands what the secular psychologist does not; that every aspect of our lives is affected by sin. And so, our goal in helping the dominant spouse is not simply to change his or her behavior, it is transformation toward becoming more and more conformed to the image of Christ.

The sinful behavior must be replaced by new behavior. In the case of the Christian, the Bible helps us clearly understand that we are replacing sinful habits with righteous behavior. We are, indeed, putting off an old manner of life and putting on godliness.

The root problem is a worship problem. Our behavior follows what we worship. The pride, fear of man, and lust that drive the dominant spouse are all indicative of self-worship.

“An abusive man is often so preoccupied with himself that he sees himself as misunderstood, not wrong... Let’s be clear: the abusive man is not a monster. Rather, he has become his own God who trusts in his own heart (Proverbs 28:26)”³

Where do we find hope for the oppressor?

³ Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 2007), 42.

Romans 12:14-21

There is hope for the oppressor when the oppressed responds righteously.

You are to bless the one who is sinning against you (v.14) with an aim to overcome evil with good deeds, not with sinful deeds (v.21). The Christian must not see themselves being defeated by responding to abuse God's way. When they believe God's Word and want what God wants, then their blessing words and good deeds will, as evaluated by God in the Kingdom, win over sin.

You are to be humbly sensitive to the needs of the one who is sinning against you (v.15) and meet those needs as you are able (v.20) so as to heap coals on their head. One of the great temptations in the midst of abuse is to become hardened to them, not paying attention to nor meeting their needs.

You must never strike back or take revenge (v.17), for when you do, you take the place of God and His wrath (v.19).

The Christian must carefully guard against getting even or striking back. God is the just one who will deal with the abuser in His way in His time, possibly as a result of the abused spouse following these principles and others. As much as you can, try to do all you can not to stir up the anger of the one who is sinning against you (v.18).

The Christian must be very careful not to be the cause of the anger or abuse.⁴

The dominant spouse can change. The gospel offers hope for those with pride, lust, and fear of man. The gospel turns our worship Godward and from ourselves. Transformation is available to even the worst of sinners. In helping this spouse, we must allow Scripture to determine our responses and trust that the Word of God is indeed powerful and true (2 Timothy 3:16).

The first step is to teach the sinning spouse that their behavior is sinful. They must understand that this behavior is grievous to God. Blame shifting must stop.

The Bible is not only calling this person to change his behavior, we are calling him to change his mind about his own sin and his relationship to God.

The oppressor must understand who they are in Christ from Ephesians chapters 1-3.

The oppressor must understand that Christ still intercedes for them and is merciful (Hebrews 4:14-16)

The oppressor must understand God's simple commands regarding loving relationships between brothers and sister in Christ from Ephesians chapter 4.

The oppressor must understand Philippians 2 and live their life in humility, not arrogance.

The oppressor must understand James 3 and the evil or good that comes from the tongue.

⁴ Russ Kennedy and Tim Pasma, "Abused Spouse", *Clearcreek Chapel Counseling Training Course*

The oppressor must learn servant-leadership because he thinks his family exists to serve him (Matthew 20:24-28)

Oppressive behavior is a life dominating sin and, like other sins, he will need to learn to put off the old self and put on the new (Ephesians 4:17-5;2).

The doctrines of creation, the image of God, divine sovereignty (control), his views of self, women and children, sin and forgiveness, salvation and grace are all distorted and will all have to be relearned.

There is hope and help for the abuser:

- Through the regenerating and sanctifying power of God the Spirit.
- Through God's all-sufficient Word.
- Through repentance and change.
- Through a church that loves enough to discipline.
- Through shepherds who will not run from these problems but who will love and care for the sheep God has entrusted them.

As we close this evening, turn with me to Ephesians 4:17-5:2