

Biblical Perspectives On Domestic Violence: An Overview¹

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The Bible has much to say about domestic violence and God's concern for victims of domestic violence. Here are a few of the important insights and advice it offers:

1. When David became a part of King Saul's household, he became a victim of domestic violence. The account of David and King Saul in 1 Samuel 18-26 is a textbook on the classic dynamics of domestic violence relationships. It also discusses safety planning, and leaving an abusive relationship.
2. Psalm 55 is written by David, a victim of domestic violence while in King Saul's household, and provides a clear expression of the emotions felt by victims.
3. The account of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 praises the actions taken by a victim of domestic violence to protect her family from their abuser.
4. The Bible says that domestic violence is sin and wickedness and must be stopped (Malachi 2:13-16; 1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 4:31; Matthew 5:21-22; Luke 12:45-46; Leviticus 25:17; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-5)
5. The Bible is clear about marriage as a relationship of mutual support and concern (1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 5:21-33; Ephesians 4:32; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:24b-26). Each time the New Testament directs wives to submit to their husbands, it simultaneously commands husbands to love, protect, and honor their wives, and to not treat them harshly.
6. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands "as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18), and in doing so, to fearlessly do what is right (1 Peter 3:1,5-6). Because it calls domestic violence sin and wickedness, the Bible does not support submission to domestic violence. Submission is often confused with obedience, but in the Bible they are two separate words with different meanings. In the Old Testament, Abigail is praised for saving her family from the actions of her abusive husband, even though this required her to disobey his commands.
7. Victims are encouraged to seek safety (Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12; 1 Samuel 20; Luke 4:28-29; Acts 9:23-25; Matthew 18:15-17)
8. Perpetrators are directed to stop abusing and to be held accountable for their actions (Matthew 5:21-22; Ephesians 4:31; Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3).
9. The Bible calls the husband the head of the home (1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23); this headship should be like Christ's leadership of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Christ

¹ <http://abigails.org/Studies/Overview.htm>

taught and demonstrated that leaders should be servants, and lord it over others (Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-26; John 13:14-15; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:21).

10. Some victims feel that they cannot not leave a violent marriage, no matter how dangerous it is, because they took marriage vows before God. Though the Bible teaches that vows to God are a serious matter, the Old Testament law allowed vows to be annulled if they brought harm or bondage (Leviticus 27:1-25). The Bible says that domestic violence violates the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:13 -14,16).
11. Christ taught his followers to rebuke and correct those who transgress against them, and provided a series of safety procedures for doing so (Matthew 18:15 -17; Luke 17:3). He taught that reconciliation may not be possible where the transgressor refuses to stop violating (Matthew 18:17). Repentance must be accompanied by righteous actions (Luke 3:3,8-14).

Confronting Abuse As Sin

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God sees abuse as "sin."

There are many Bible verses that describe behaviors commonly seen in domestic violence. These scriptures clearly call these behaviors sin. One such biblical passage is found in Galatians 5:19-21:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21, NIV)

Let's see how these sins relate to domestic violence:

- Jealousy -- Jealous behavior is often one of the first warning signs of an abusive personality. At first it may be excused as love and caring, but it can quickly become a form of abusive control and coercion.
- Fits of Rage -- An abuser's raging can effectively intimidate and control his partner and children. By being scary and threatening, he can have his way.
- Discord and Dissensions-- Even in the absence of physical abuse, verbal and psychological abuse destroys relationships and homes. See *The Continuums of Abuse and the Types of Verbal Abuse* describe other abusive behaviors that bring discord and dissension.
- Drunkenness--Though alcohol and drug abuse are not the cause of domestic violence, they are frequently present with domestic violence. An abuser may use them as an excuse for battering, claiming they "made him out of control."
- Selfishness--Abusers are often self-centered and narcissistic (lover of self).
- Sexual Immorality, Impurity and Debauchery-- Sexual abuse is frequently found in domestic violence relationships. The "Continuums of Abuse"³ describes some types of sexual abuse. Abusers may also have "affairs" or engage in pornography due to an accompanying sexual addiction, or a desire to hurt and demean their partner.

² <http://www.abigails.org/a-studypage.htm>

³ <http://www.abigails.org/a-continuums.htm> (also included in this Study Manual on Restoration)

Other common domestic violence behaviors described as sin in the Bible include:

- abuse, lack of self-control, treachery, rashness, brutality, inability to acknowledge the truth (e.g., denial) (2 Timothy 3:1-8)
- slander and verbal abuse (1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:9, Mark 7:22, Matthew 15:19)
- anger (Matthew 5:21-22)
- lies, deceit, and falsehood (Malachi 3:5; Matthew 15:19; Romans 1:29)
- malice (Romans 1:28-32; Mark 7:22)
- arrogance (Mark 7:22)
- taking advantage of others (Leviticus 25:17)
- impressing others while covering secret sin (Matthew 23:23, 28)
- child abuse (Luke 17:1-3)

Abusers are in peril of eternal damnation

The Bible makes it clear that unrepentant abusers who do not turn from their ways will be judged and will not enter the Kingdom (Matthew 5:21-22, Galatians 5:19-21, and Revelation 21-22). Malachi 2:13-14 and 1 Peter 3:7 indicate that abusers' prayers are blocked. If a servant of God abuses others, he will be punished when Jesus returns, and will be treated as an unbeliever (Luke 12:45-46). It is so important that domestic violence be recognized and dealt with as sin, because the abuser's soul is in peril.

When we recognize abuse as sin, it is easier to see what action the Bible prescribes.

- *Believers are responsible for confronting sin:*
Abuse is a serious matter; the soul of the abuser is at stake. The sin of abuse must not be enabled, but rather be confronted (see Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 5:11, Leviticus 19:17).
- *Believers are to pray for those who mistreat them.* Abusers are trapped in sin and are in great peril of their souls. Believers are to pray for them, according to Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28, 1 John 5:16.
- *Jesus taught us a formula for confronting sin:*
Read Matthew 18:15-17. This plan promotes accountability while providing safety measures for the victim.

NOTE: When confronted, a hardened abuser frequently denies the situation and escalates the abuse and attempts to control. A victim should first have a [safety plan](http://abigails.org/safetyplan.pdf) in place. If the situation is too dangerous, confrontation may be inappropriate. It may be better to allow professionals, relatives, friends, or the courts to confront the abuser. (<http://abigails.org/safetyplan.pdf>)

Discussion Questions:

1. We rarely hear domestic violence referred to as sin. Sometimes people refer to it as "a love spat," "a private matter," or "a marital problem." How do each of these terms fail to hold abusers accountable for their actions?
2. The Bible says that sin can be transferred to future generations (Exodus 34:7) Have you seen domestic violence occur in different generations of the same family?

Keeping mercy and loving-kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but Who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.