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DOMESTIC ABUSE

By Darren Moore

The Church of England has recently published a report saying that bad theology leads to husbands abusing their wives. (*Responding to Domestic Abuse: Guidelines for those with pastoral responsibility - GSMisc 838*) By this they mean men who view themselves as the head and think that their wives should submit to them are more likely to beat them (or engage in other forms of abuse). I would agree that bad theology leads to abuse. However all the cases of abuse I have seen are a result of the opposite theology suggested in the report.

I confess that my experience is limited. But there is enough consistency in the cases of domestic abuse that I have encountered (inside and outside the Church) to make a few observations. All the cases I've seen of domestic abuse have not come from domineering men who see themselves as head of the household. Rather they have been pathetic men who feel disempowered and have low self-esteem. That is why I suspect we who work in areas of high unemployment see this more frequently than others. Of course this is no excuse for beating up anyone! Very few unemployed men respond that way. Also when we speak of unemployment (or other ways they feel disempowered) we mustn't make them victims. Sometimes at least part of the reason they are unemployed comes down to something in their control, but that is another thorny issue.

There may well be abuse caused by the views laid out in the report but if there are then the misunderstanding of those views need to be exposed rather than the teaching of the Bible 'corrected'.

When wives are told to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives in Ephesians 5 it is as an analogy to Christ and the Church. So when people draw our attention to verse 21 "Submit to one another", in order to suggest that husbands should not lead their wives, we have to ask back, does that mean that Christ should not be head over the Church?

Jesus tells us in Mark 9:42-45, that Christian leadership (in Church or family) is not like "rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over them," but rather "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant"

Surely if a husband were to follow Ephesians 5 far from beating his wife he would serve and die for her!

One Christian woman abused by her husband told me that she craved him to be more in charge of the situation, she longed for a husband that she could 'submit' to. By contrast the families that I see that take Ephesians 5 (and other family passages of the Bible) seriously, I invariably find gentle loving men with happy wives and children. A strong masculine man loves, serves and protects his family. A weak man beats them.

To further emasculate men in line with this report will cause the problems it seeks to combat. If we want more peaceful families teach wimpy men to do the role God gave them to do.

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