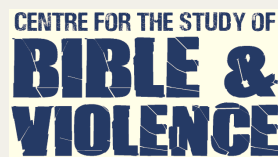


# MAD, BAD, AND DANGEROUS TO READ?

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# THE BIBLE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE



## INTRODUCING JENNY

I would like to understand what happened. How could a Christian marriage end like this? What does God think of it? What was the church doing? I know the Bible very well – we read a chapter aloud each night for 38 years, I know all the hard parts. I know that Hagar escaped and God sent her back. Why? I know that the Levite abandoned his concubine to save a man and she died at the hands of men. Who cares? I know it says wives should keep silent in church and ask their husbands at home. Huh! If you can make any sense of all this and help the churches to do so, I shall be glad.

“

The man who abused me used to say it was God's will, and that I had to obey him, because he was God's holy representative.

**LIES 'CHRISTIAN'  
ABUSERS TELL**

## Lie One: Wives must submit even to abuse

Ephesians 5

- Where is the paragraph break?
- The middle voice “submit yourselves”
  - *“Wives submit yourselves...” Paul does not tell the husbands to subordinate their wives or to exhort their wives to be subordinate. The exhortation goes directly to the wife.” Ben Witherington III, The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A socio-rhetorical commentary on the captivity Epistles p. 190.*
- Where is the burden of the instruction?

Instruction to husbands	Instruction to wives
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.	
	Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.
For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.	
	Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,	
	and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body,	
just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.	
However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself,	
	and the wife must respect her husband.

## Lie One: Wives must submit even to abuse

Ephesians 5

- Where is the paragraph break?
- The middle voice “submit yourselves”
- Where is the burden of the instruction?
  - *“If anyone squirmed in the pew of the first century church, it must surely have been the husband, not the wife” Ruth Tucker Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife p.47*

## Lie One: Wives must submit even to abuse

Ephesians 5

- Where is the paragraph break?
- The middle voice “submit yourselves”
- Where is the burden of the instruction?
- “As your own body”
- “As to the Lord”

## Lie Two: Be like these ideal wives...

Sarah

- *Abraham's massive failure of faith and love*

Vashti/ Esther

- *??!!\*\*\**

## Lie Three: The Bible says you must say yes to sex

1 Cor 7:4-5

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

- Use of selective quoting
- Context - over-realised eschatology/ gnostic heresy
- Although... yet not... but rather (Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity*)

## Lie Four: You're just a helper

Gen 2:18

It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.

What is a helper?

## Lie Five: You're under God's curse

Gen 3:16

**"I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you."**

**Prescription or description?**

**A ban on farm technology and labour analgesia?**

"Some Bible interpreters argue that this curse of inequality is prescriptive for all times – that we dare not tamper with it. But the curse on the ground that meant Adam would be tilling the soil snarled with thorns and thistles has been largely reversed. Even as inventions of machinery and fertilizers have relieved the backbreaking work of agriculture, so have legal statutes mitigated the effects of gender inequality." Ruth Tucker, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife*, pp. 43–44.

## Lie Six: Keep silent!

1 Cor 14

Four perspectives:

- a. women should be completely silent in church
- b. women could pray and prophesy but not teach (Carson)
- c. Order in the conduct of worship (Tom Wright)
- d. Paul didn't write this - quoting the Corinthians not giving his own perspective (Kirk MacGregor); or a textual addition (Gordon Fee)

There is enough ambiguity about the interpretation of these verses that make it frankly dangerous to pin a whole theology of gender roles on to them. And – more importantly – there is nothing here, even in the most conservative interpretations, that implies that women should be subservient or are of lesser value than men.



# WAYS CHURCHES MAKE IT WORSE



“

**I was groomed for  
abuse, and the church  
played a part in that  
grooming**

“

**There was no  
framework or  
mechanism that would  
enable me to complain  
or raise concerns.**

“

After 14 years of abuse,  
I was told by my priest,  
'It's a storm in a  
teacup.'

“

Early in our marriage I went to a  
clergyman who told me that my  
husband meant no real harm, I  
was just confused and insecure.  
So I was encouraged to be more  
tolerant and understanding.  
Most important, I was told to  
forgive him the beatings just as  
Christ had forgiven from the  
cross.

“

**I knew the violence  
against me wasn't right,  
but the Bible was being  
used to prevent me from  
calling it out... I became  
the problem in the  
church's eyes.**

“

**God hates divorce, and  
therefore hates me if I  
get divorced.**



**The church taught me a passive way of being a Christian woman.**



**There was a culture of silence, a culture of submission. There was no context to resist or complain.**



**After pouring out my heart (it took a long time to summon the courage), the vicar blamed me for the abuse.**

## **Mistake One: God ‘hates divorce’**

Mal 2:16

- For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. (NRSV)
- The man who hates and divorces his wife,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘does violence to the one he should protect,’ says the Lord Almighty. (NIV)

## Mistake One: God 'hates divorce'

Mal 2:16

- The context
- Talking to men (vv.14-15)
- The Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth (v.14)
- Three key words
  - *Bagad to be treacherous/ faithless (break covenant – cf Jdg 9:23)*
  - *Berit covenant*
  - *Hamas violence*

## Mistake One: God 'hates divorce'

Mal 2:16

- A suggested translation: “For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.”
- This parallels divorce with violence. Divorce and abuse: God hates them both. If God hates the ‘sending away’ of a wife, God hates violence against her, too.
- This passage in Malachi is all about protecting wives. Protecting them from destitution and protecting them from violence. **To use it to manipulate a woman into staying with an abusive husband is an exact inversion of its original purpose.**

## Mistake One: God 'hates divorce'

OT provision for divorce Ex 21:10-11; Deut 24:1

If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.

If a man enters into marriage with a woman, if she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce...

## Mistake One: God 'hates divorce'

Matt 19:3 "Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?"

(From David Instone Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*)

- Rabbinic debate – divorce for adultery only, or for “any cause” – separating the clauses in Deut 24? They are asking Jesus to weigh in on a particular debate
- Jesus doesn't answer but turns to Gen 2: a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.
- Marriage for life is the ideal. 'Any cause' divorce not acceptable. Jesus does *not* overturn the OT.

## Mistake Two: 'Just forgive him'

- "Forgiveness is easy – just get on and do it."
- "Forgiveness means you have to restore the relationship with the person who hurt you."
- "Forgiveness means you need to make yourself available to be hurt again."
- "Being forgiven means that the consequences of your actions are now nullified."

## Mistake Two: 'Just forgive him'

What do I do if my brother or sister sins against me?

'Go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.'...

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:15-17, 21-22

Note that this is when sinner against by a "brother" ie someone with equal power.



## Mistake Two: 'Just forgive him'

"Turn the other cheek"

What does it mean?

You only have two cheeks!

## Mistake Three: Suffering is a holy vocation

"Consider it pure joy..." James 1

- Persecution need not be embraced: Peter and Paul both accept their release from prison when it is offered to them (e.g. Acts 12:9; 16:35–40). Paul uses his Roman citizenship to avoid a flogging – and seriously embarrass the officials at the same time (Acts 22:25).
- Not all suffering is persecution: Paul urges slaves to gain their freedom if they can (1 Corinthians 7:21).

## Mistake Three: Suffering is a holy vocation

“Consider it pure joy...” James 1

Who gets to commend suffering?

- “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Matthew 16:24. Jesus – crucified
- “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” James 1:2. James – martyred, probably thrown from the top of the temple
- “Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.” Peter – martyred, probably crucified
- “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus... Join with me in suffering.” 2 Timothy 2:1, 3. Paul – martyred, probably beheaded.

## Mistakes and Lies:

**Women must submit**

**Marital rape is permitted by Paul**

**Sarah and Esther model ideal marriage**

**Women are just helpers**

**The curse says women should be dominated**

**Women should be silent**

**God hates divorce**

**Forgiveness entails enabling ongoing abuse**

**Suffering is your holy vocation**

## Mistakes and Lies:

Women must submit

Marital rape is permitted by Paul

Sarah and Esther model ideal marriage

Women are just men's toys

The curse says women should be dominated

Women should be silent

God hates divorce

Forgiveness entails enabling ongoing abuse

Suffering is your holy vocation

The Bible doesn't tell you so!

THE TRUTH WILL  
SET YOU FREE

## Truth One: God is for the downtrodden

- The law and the stranger, the widow the orphan
- Narratives and violence against women
- The psalms and imprecation
- Wisdom and the poor
- The prophets and social justice
- The rage of the Saviour
- James and the rich
- Throughout, a God of justice and judgment

## Truth Two: Jesus suffered, too

- The incarnation
- Wilfully misunderstood
- Betrayed
- Suffered physical abuse
- Nakedness and possible sexual abuse

**From research by Rocio Figueroa. See the book she co-edited with David Tombs and Jayme Reaves *When Did We See You Naked?***

- “I asked the question why me? Why has this happened to me? The answer that came to me was the picture of the crucifixion. God cries for me; God also suffers with me. For me this is a great consolation.”
- “Despite saying to myself ‘You are not guilty’, one part of me, in my innermost part, maintains my guilt and leads me to accuse myself ‘You could have done something to avoid the abuse’. And then I have the experience and the knowledge that Jesus was innocent... Seeing his innocence, I see my innocence.”

### Truth Three: Jesus was a non-toxic man

- The bleeding woman
- The adulteress
- The Samaritan woman (serially abused?)
- The forgiven sinner

## Truth Four: God loves you!

- Image of God
- On sparrows and millstones

## Truth Five: Don't be silenced

- Women who won't be silent e.g. Judges 19
- The all-seeing eye of God Ps 94
- Mark 1 and the power of vested interest
- What is hidden will be shouted from the rooftops.

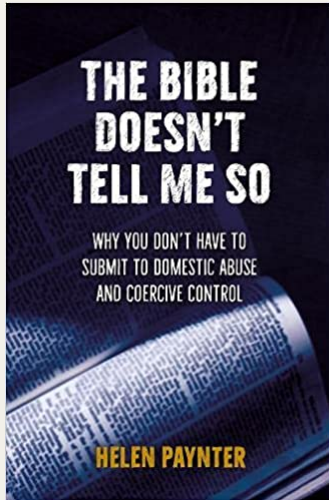
## A lament: Ps 55

<p>My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me.</p> <p>5 Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.</p> <p>6 And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest;</p> <p>7 truly, I would flee far away; I would lodge in the wilderness;</p> <p>8 I would hurry to find a shelter for myself from the raging wind and</p>	<p>tempest."</p> <p>12 It is not enemies who taunt me— I could bear that; it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me— I could hide from them.</p> <p>13 But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, 14 with whom I kept pleasant company; we walked in the house of God with the throng.</p>
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## A lament: Ps 55

<p>But I call upon God, and the LORD will save me.</p> <p>17 Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice.</p> <p>18 He will redeem me unharmed from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.</p> <p>20 My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me</p>	<p>21 with speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war; with words that were softer than oil, but in fact were drawn swords.</p> <p>22 Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.</p>
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To go deeper:



- Book and study videos (for small groups)

Also see [Restored.org](https://restored.org)