

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

POSITION PAPER

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Introduction

The Assemblies of God affirms the intrinsic worth of every human being created in the image of God: “Man was created good and upright; for God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ However, man by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:17, 3:6; Romans 5:12–19).”¹

Because of the fallen condition of humanity, domestic violence exists today as commonplace in society. Statistics reveal that every minute of every day in the United States, an average of twenty persons experience violence in their relationship with their domestic partner. On average, domestic violence call centers receive twenty thousand calls every day.² These alarming numbers highlight the seriousness of this expression of human sin against spouses and children. The Assemblies of God must decry such actions in the strongest and clearest of terms.

God calls the Church not only to speak out against domestic violence but to also minister to both the abused and the abuser, albeit differently. The gospel of Christ stands as the power of God to forgive, heal, restore, protect, and empower for righteous living.

In response to the scourge of domestic violence in society, churches and parachurch organizations have established social agencies to help combat the crisis. As the Church addresses the issue of domestic violence, it must do so based on a solid foundation drawn from the Word of God, which reveals a strong position against domestic violence.

God’s Original Intent, Its Corruption, and Restoration

The biblical account of Creation provides vital information about the plans and purposes of the Creator. These insights provide the foundation for a biblical understanding of the sin of domestic violence.

God created humanity “in his own image;” “male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). He gave humans the responsibility to rule “over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1:26, 27). Humans were not granted rulership over one another.

Genesis 2 reveals that “it is not good for the man to be alone,” so God created woman as a “helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18). The role of a helper exists not as a subservient one but rather that of an indispensable partner in God’s mission for humanity. The role of helper implies a mutual and equal partnership rather than a subservient relationship.

¹ *Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, Number 4, “The Fall of Man.”*

² National Coalition against Domestic Violence, “Statistics,” www.ncadv.org, accessed February 7, 2022.

Although men and women each possess formal and functional differences, God has planned that neither need express control and domination over the other. Men and women were to complement each other and serve His purposes with unity and equality, as expressed in the Genesis description of marriage: the two unite to each other and “become one flesh” (2:24).

Marriage vows in Israel included the provision of food, clothing, sexual intimacy, and faithfulness (Exodus 21:10–11; Deuteronomy 24:1–4). The New Testament does not abrogate these provisions but rather reinforces them (Matthew 19:1–9; Mark 10:1–12; 1 Corinthians 7:1–16; 1 Timothy 5:8). The basic principles of marital vows as supported in the New Testament, then, include material support and physical affection. Violation of these vows could extend to physical and emotional abuse—both justification for dissolving the marriage relationship.

Despite God’s design and plan, the entrance of sin (Genesis 3) conflicted with that plan and opened humans to the evil of desire for domination over others. Although God created marriage to be an intimate and enriching relationship, sin corrupted that relationship. In Genesis 3, God declares the tragic results of sin: this most important relationship will be plagued by selfishness, frustration, and conflict. Here, God does not *prescribe* what their new conduct should be, but rather *describes* the nature of ongoing human struggle because of sin.

In Jesus Christ, God provided the way for humanity to align with His plan for how to treat one another. Jesus illustrates this by washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:4–15), teaching them that as He came to serve, so should they serve one another. Paul also notes that for children of God through faith in Jesus, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The work of Jesus has rendered the desire for domination over others futile.

Paul further emphasizes the power of the gospel to reverse the effects of sin by using the marriage relationship as an example (Ephesians 5:21–33; Colossians 3:18–21). Peter affirms Paul’s message in 1 Peter 3:1–7. Paul introduces his teaching with a powerful principle: “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). He calls for both partners in the marriage to exemplify mutual submission. To the wives he says, “submit yourselves to your own husbands,” and to the husbands, he says, “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:22, 25). This clear exhortation allows for no expressions of domestic violence in the marriage. The challenge to love one’s wife as Christ loved the Church demands that husbands their treat wives with respect and not abuse or mistreat them in any way. The relationship and responsibility described here is mutual.

God’s ultimate plan entails humans living in harmony and unity without any violence toward one another. Though the entrance of sin thwarts that plan, the gospel of Christ can transform each person into a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). This creates a new community in which domestic violence should not exist.

A Biblical Perspective on Violence

The first act of violence recorded in the Bible was one of domestic violence. Cain killed his brother, Abel, resulting in his removal from the presence of God and his turning into a restless wanderer (Genesis 4:1–16). Cain’s expression of unrestrained anger and his failure to accept responsibility for the welfare of another human earned both a strong rebuke and punishment from God.

The one who initiates domestic violence participates in violent acts against another. Such violence does not please God. The psalmist reveals God's attitude toward violence: "The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion" (Psalm 11:5).

Before listing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul identifies multiple human excesses which he called "acts of the flesh." Among those actions that he notes hinder one's inheriting the kingdom of God include "fits of rage" (Galatians 5:19–21). These negative emotional outbursts, which often initiate domestic violence, prove antithetical to the working of the Holy Spirit (See *also* Ephesians 4:26 and Colossians 3:8).

An abuser may verbally intimidate or belittle the object of his or her anger. Such abuse, though more covert, is also evil and intolerable. Jesus Christ, in His "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5–7), challenges Kingdom people to a higher standard of living. For example, when He decries the extreme of murder, He also notes that unrestrained anger and negative verbal expressions make one "subject to judgment" and "in danger of the fire of hell" (Matthew 5:21–22).

Tragically, abusers often direct their domestic violence toward children. Jesus teaches that His followers must "become like little children" in order to see the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:1–6; see also Mark 9:33–37 and Luke 9:46–48). He also says in Matthew 18:6, "if anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

For believers to close their eyes and minds to the prevalence and damage of domestic violence is unacceptable. As Proverbs 24:11–12 states, "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we know nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?" This solemn reminder that God sees and knows about the situation must serve as a warning that the Church must engage in identifying and reaching out with healing to those abused through domestic violence.

Ministry in the Crisis of Domestic Violence

Numerous avenues exist for the Church to increase its awareness of—and remain involved in ministering to—victims of domestic violence. More people feel the negative impact of domestic violence than the abuser and abused. Children, the extended family, friends, and even society itself stand within the circle of those victimized.

The Church must not see itself as immune to domestic violence but must remain especially diligent in addressing any domestic violence perpetrated by its leaders. Paul warns about this in his letter to Titus, declaring that the overseer "must be blameless—not overbearing, nor quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain" (Titus 1:7).

The Church's teaching and preaching ministry can serve as a preemptive way to address the issue of domestic violence. The Bible's powerful and living message, declared clearly and lovingly, can effect change in the hearts and lives of hearers. The same Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture anoints its proclamation to bring judgment, repentance, and restoration.

Expression of God's love through other believers remains a source of strength, and healing, and a demonstration of His grace. This grace assures any abused person of God's concern for them and His power to restore and heal their injuries. His grace helps abused persons not to blame themselves for what they have suffered; through His grace they also can see themselves as not beyond His help.

God does not will that people remain in abusive situations. The actions of abusers have lasting and tragic consequences, yet His grace provides a path to repentance for even the worst of sinners.

Conclusion

The Church must increase its awareness of domestic violence; keep its voice clear about this evil; and function as a source of protection, healing, and restoration for any victims of domestic violence. In Luke 4, as Jesus introduces His mission using the words of Isaiah the prophet, He declares, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (vv. 18,19). This mission of Christ must also remain the mission of the Church.