

DISHONoured AND UNHEARD:
CHRISTIAN WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE CHURCH

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
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No other source has been used for this Thesis except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the seven women
who each generously and sacrificially shared their stories with me.
You are being heard.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to present the view that responses by evangelical Christian communities to domestic violence suffered by Christian women are for the most part, limited and inadequate and as a result, responses to and the prevention of violence within Christian families is not given the attention that it should within evangelical circles. Consideration is given to how scripture is used and applied within evangelical churches when women who are abused seek help, counselling or advice and how that understanding and use of scripture shapes options and choices for the women concerned. The differing viewpoints of egalitarians and complementarians regarding how particular scriptures apply to the roles and responsibilities between husbands and wives are explored, giving particular consideration to domestic violence in the context of marriage. Key themes of forgiveness, divorce and the permanence of marriage, and headship, submission and patriarchy are explored in this regard. The empirical content for the thesis is drawn from interviews conducted with seven Christian women who had previously been in abusive intimate partner relationships. The interviews ranged over themes identified in the relevant literature and also explored how the church helped or hindered them in their respective journeys.

The main conclusion drawn from the thesis is that responses by evangelical Christian communities to family violence are, for the most part, limited and inadequate. As a result, responses to and the prevention of violence against women within Christian families are not given appropriate attention. In the face of such inadequacies, a sounder basis for understanding and responding to domestic violence within the Christian home, theologically as well as practically, is identified.

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Chapter One

Christian Women, Domestic Violence and the Church

Mary: *The first time that Sam hit me, - he just... I was on the bed and he was slapping my face, side to side like that, you know (moves head)... hurting... and I thought to myself "I'm not going to cry, I'm not going to let him see that this is upsetting me". And I just lay there and let him do it to me. Where did that come from?! I've not a clue. He just slapped, slap, slap - like this - and I didn't know it was abuse. I just lay there, thinking, "There's one thing I'm not going to let him do to me - and that is I'm not going to let him break me".... that was so early in our marriage, like, maybe a year into our marriage. I just... something just shifted in my thinking towards him, from then on - and I was married to him for 13 years. Covenant is something to be taken seriously. I didn't think God ever broke covenants - so if we made a covenant with God, then we shouldn't break it either. Which sort of takes my mind down the road to - well, how bad is divorce, then?*

Introduction

Mary is a Christian woman who was subjected to physical abuse by her husband during her 13-year marriage. The above comment was recorded as part of a research project in which I sought to explore the issues Christian women face firstly as they suffer abuse at the hands of their husbands and then, beyond this, as they seek assistance, counsel and guidance from their church communities. It has been my experience in working in pastoral care within an evangelical church that abused women do not always get the help they need from their churches. As such, I want to explore the relevant literature on the topic in order to establish how the experiences and stories of Christian women who have been abused match up with what is presented in the literature. I also want to explore how scripture is used and applied within evangelical churches when abused women present for counselling and how teaching based on these scriptures not only shapes women's options but, more importantly, constrains their choices.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the thesis is that responses by evangelical Christian communities to family violence are, for the most part, limited and inadequate. As a result, responses to and the prevention of violence against women within Christian families are not given the proper attention that they should. In the face of such inadequacies, a sounder basis for understanding and responding to domestic violence within the Christian home, theologically as well as practically, needs to be identified, championed and embraced as an alternative to what have been standard responses to date.

Family Violence¹

According to Christian sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark (1997), family violence includes “all forms of violent or abusive behaviour that occur within intimate relationships.”² Nason-Clark insists that while, as might be expected, deliberate acts of physical violence or abuse tend to be most closely identified with family violence, “other abusive behavior can include wilful neglect and sexual, emotional, or financial abuse as well as threats of intended aggressive acts.”³ Nason-Clark goes on to suggest that violence in the family “always involves the abuse of power and control to hurt, shame, or humiliate another person through intimacy and shared experience.”⁴ The consequences of family violence, she says, “are far-reaching and enduring for its victims: in addition to physical and emotional pain, there is the violation of the trusting relationship which may never be resolved. For religious victims, their spiritual journey may be adversely affected as well.”⁵ The most common victims of family violence are of course women, children and the elderly, but Nason-Clark insists that men too can be victims of abuse.

What is of significance for this present thesis is Nason-Clark’s insistence that in responding to domestic violence within its midst, the values, teachings and practices of many evangelical churches sanction and therefore leave unchecked domestic violence within the Christian family.⁶ In secular situations when a woman continues to return to a violent relationship, the question most often asked is, “Why doesn’t she just leave?” Within the church, however, leaving is a possibility that is frequently denied an abused woman. When seeking help from her faith community, says Nason-Clark, it is more than likely that she will be asked a series of faith-related questions which she no doubt has already asked herself:

- Have you prayed about the problem?
- Have you forgiven him?
- How have you contributed to the escalation of conflict?
- Have you been a good witness or example?
- Have you been submissive?
- Didn’t you promise to stay for better or for worse?

¹ In this thesis the terms “family violence,” “domestic violence” and “intimate partner violence” will be used interchangeably, depending on the literary sources that are being referenced.

² Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). 3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 14-15.

- Doesn't the Bible say we are to suffer for our faith?⁷

Each of these questions is undergirded by and justified with traditional understandings of particular scriptures, such as forgiving seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22), women remaining silent (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), and wives submitting to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18). These and other scriptures will be referred to and discussed in later chapters.

Nason-Clark claims that sometimes, instead of being strongly encouraged to leave the abusive relationship, a Christian woman is presented with a myriad of reasons why she should stay. She is told of her responsibility to remain and to behave in ways that will discourage or prevent violence towards her. She is often expected to adapt to the violence directed at her. Such advice is often theologised and framed in biblical teaching that emphasises a hierarchical pattern in family life ordained by God, or by encouraging women to forgive seventy times seven, or by attributing value to suffering as Christians.⁸ In addition, teaching within church communities and the consequent modelling of appropriate behaviour often promote values which attribute greater worth and entitlement to males and husbands.⁹ Having looked to the church for help, then, women in abusive family situations often tell of experiencing minimisation and blame as well as expectations that they will return home, behave differently, forgive, exercise patience, pray and so forth.¹⁰

According to Nason-Clark, a Christian woman confronting the realities of domestic abuse often has to navigate her way through a theological grid that includes such themes as: forgiveness, the permanence of marriage, the role of suffering, God's will, spiritual headship within marriage and other moral and spiritual issues.¹¹ These are themes that will be systematically explored in the rest of the thesis.

The Nature and Extent of Domestic Violence

On 14 July 2009, the world section of *The Christchurch Press* reported that former US President Jimmy Carter had severed his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention after some six

⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 83-84.

¹¹ Ibid., 55.

decades. The title of the article read, "The Words of God do not Justify Cruelty to Women."¹² In the article, former President Carter was quoted as saying, "The male interpretations of religious texts and the way they interact with, and reinforce, traditional practices justify some of the most pervasive, persistent, flagrant and damaging examples of human rights abuses."¹³

Christians refer to the Bible's central message as "good news." However, when it comes to the use of scripture in relation to Christian family violence, Article 2 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is perhaps "better news" than many female victims of violence find in churches or in scripture as it is sometimes interpreted. The declaration reads, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."¹⁴

According to the UNIFEM publication *Not a Minute More: Ending Violence against Women* (2003), violence is a major cause of death and disability for women aged between 16 and 44.¹⁵ The report goes on to state, "globally, the World Bank estimates that violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer and a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined. In a majority of cases, the abuser will be a member of the woman's own family or someone known to her."¹⁶

In a similar vein, a UN report on domestic violence published in 2006 revealed that the most common form of violence experienced by women globally is intimate partner violence.¹⁷

That Christian families are not immune to "intimate partner violence" and that the frequency, extent and consequences of this are not adequately appreciated by the Christian community are views supported and shared by Christians working as theologians, researchers and practitioners.

¹² Claire Shipman; Katty Kay, "The Words of God Do Not Justify Cruelty to Women," *The Christchurch Press* 2009.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a2>

¹⁵ UNIFEM, "Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women," (New York, USA: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2003), 8. These statistics incorporated countries within Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Violence against women in third world countries could only be referred to in general terms.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, citing the World Health Organization *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva, Switzerland, World Health Organization; and Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller, 1999.

¹⁷ United Nations, *Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action*, ed. Secretary General (New York, USA: United Nations 2006). III.

Writing in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Steven Tracy, a Phoenix seminary professor who specialises in sexual addiction, child abuse and protection says, “The scope and consequences of domestic violence are often misunderstood and rarely addressed in the evangelical church.”¹⁸ Tracy cites a 1998 US Justice Department analysis of crime which showed that more than 40% of adult female hospital emergency room visits are caused by male intimate partners. In the same article Tracy cites a study that focused on 1,000 battered women. Sixty-seven percent of the women in the study said they attended church; one third of these women sought help. Of these, fully two-thirds said their church leaders were not helpful in addressing their situation.¹⁹

Christian sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark and theologian Catherine Clark Kroeger, in their joint book *Refuge from Abuse* (2004), highlight a number of related alarming facts.²⁰ They say, “The United States Surgeon General has reported that domestic violence accounts for more adult female emergency room visits than traffic accidents, muggings, and rapes combined, and is the greatest single cause of injury to American women.”²¹ They also comment that around the world, “gender violence causes more death and disability among women aged 15-24 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war.”²² Significantly however, Nason-Clark claims elsewhere that “researchers in the field of family violence have consistently argued that the rate of male violence against women knows no religious boundaries.”²³

Nason-Clark claims that family violence does not operate in a vacuum but functions in a context where shame and secrecy exist and which is upheld by significant “societal beliefs in

¹⁸ Steven R Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007): 573.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Nancy Nason-Clark and the late Catherine Clark Kroeger are major commentators in the area of domestic abuse within the Christian family. This is why their views have been given such prominence in this introductory chapter.

²¹ Catherine Clark Kroeger; Nancy Nason-Clark, *Refuge from Abuse: Healing and Hope for Abused Christian Women* (Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press 2004). 39., citing Evan Stark and Anne Flitcraft, *Medical Therapy as Repression: The Case of Battered Women*, (Health and Medicine, summer/fall 1982): 32. The same statistical claim is made at http://www.strengthenoursisters.org/facts_domestic_violence.html, referring to Stark and Flitcraft's research "Violence Among Intimates: An Epidemiological Review," in Haslett et al (eds.), *Handbook of Family Violence, 1987*.

²² Ibid. 39, citing *News from the World Association of Christian Communication* number 204, March 1998.

²³ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 59., citing L Freedman's chapter "Wife Assault" in *No Safe Place: Violence Against Women and Children*, ed. C Guberman and M Wolfe (Toronto, Canada: Women's Press, 1985): 41-60.

the privacy and sanctity of the family.”²⁴ In *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (2001), a book that she co-authored with Kroeger, Nason-Clark states, “The family may be sacred, but sometimes it is not safe.”²⁵ Kroeger and Nason-Clark, in a sad indictment, claim that there are many women and children who leave church on Sunday and return home to abuse.²⁶ Additionally, citing a study of clergy’s understanding of domestic violence, Nason-Clark concluded that some clergy were unable to acknowledge that Christian men can be violent; that the Christian worldview does not eliminate violent behaviour for all; and that many Christian families do not experience happy Christian family living.²⁷

Documented evidence not only reveals the prevalence of family violence in Christian homes, it also highlights how most victims do not disclose the abuse.²⁸ By their reticence, negligence or oversight, Christian women and their church communities may be tolerating violence and limiting victims’ options for a solution due to ignorance, theological influences and traditional mind-sets. Very often the supposed resolution of these issues finds validation in scripture which is interpreted and hermeneutically applied within a particular spiritual framework. This view is supported by Christian writers such as Catherine Clark Kroeger (1992, 2001), Nancy Nason-Clark (1997, 2001), Marie Fortune (1983, 1995) and others, who in response to a growing awareness of family violence in general, have been writing on the issue of Christian family violence since the 1970s.

Kroeger has been particularly significant in drawing attention to the fact that Christian families are not exempt from domestic violence and that indeed the existence and persistence of domestic violence within Christian families has been brought about by traditional and inaccurate interpretations of certain biblical passages, thus contributing to what Nason-Clark has referred to as “the holy hush.”²⁹ Fortune says both victim and abuser have misused scripture and theology to justify family violence and that such misuse has largely resulted from a combination of a lack of understanding of the nature and causes of family violence and from

²⁴ Ibid., 4., citing the *Fire in the Rose Project* (Ottawa, Canada: The Canadian Council on Justice and Corrections, 1994); D Harrison and L Laliberté, *No Life Like It: Military Wives in Canada* (Toronto, Canada: James Lorimer, 1994).

²⁵ Nancy Nason-Clark; Catherine Clark Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001). 44.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 64.

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ Quoted in Victoria Falburg, "Book Review : Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 3 (2011): 13.

a failure to recognise how dangerous it can be. This misuse has resulted from what Fortune takes to be a misappropriation of religious teaching. She comments, “The silence that the religious community has maintained on the subject has contributed to the lack of understanding by failing to correct it.”³⁰

Kroeger, Nason-Clark and Fortune have been important in influencing the approach that I have followed in undertaking research for this thesis. Kroeger took on the challenge of researching the scriptures that relate to family violence; Nason-Clark undertook sociological research on the complex faith journey undertaken by a Christian woman dealing with abuse; and for her part, Fortune focused on exploring pastoral responses to domestic violence. This thesis aims to explore issues raised in the work of these writers and others. In setting a discursive framework for this, however, we begin by distinguishing between complementarian and egalitarian views on domestic abuse.

Christian Viewpoints referring to Domestic Abuse: Complementarians

Those who advocate that an abused woman should return to the abusive context and be submissive and forgiving, reflect a complementarian view of scripture and gender roles.

The complementarians assert that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family and church life. In this view, men are exclusively assigned leadership and authoritative positions in these contexts while women are limited to support roles. The complementarian view holds that God has created women and men equal in worth, but different and complementary in function; men are to thus maintain headship in the home and, by extension, in the church. Such a view of marriage assumes gender-based roles for husbands and wives. Husbands have a God-given responsibility to provide for, protect and lead their families. The wife’s role is to collaborate with her husband in this, respecting him and serving as his helper by managing the home and nurturing any children. The complementarian view claims that the Bible instructs husbands to lead their families and to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Wives, for their part, are called to respect their husbands’ leadership. This is to be done out of reverence for Christ. The husband holds moral

³⁰ Marie M Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum For Clergy And Other Helpers* (Cleveland, Ohio, USA: Pilgrim Press, 1991). 5.

accountability for his wife and is to love her sacrificially; the wife is to reciprocate her husband's love and receive his service and leadership.

Scriptures cited in support of the complementarian view include: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. These are discussed in later chapters.

An illustrative statement of a complementarian position on marriage can be found on the website of the Southern Baptist Convention.³¹ There it will be seen that the husband and wife are of equal worth before God since both are created in God's image, and that the marriage relationship is to model the way God relates to his people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, protect, and lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.³²

As an extension of this, complementarians limit women's roles in the church setting, believing women should not lead, teach or have authority over men. In 1987, a group of pastors and scholars assembled to address concerns over the influence of feminism, not only in the wider society, but also in evangelical churches. Because of what they perceived as a widespread compromise in the biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood and its tragic effects on the home and the church, these men and women established The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), an evangelical Christian organisation that promotes complementarian views of gender. In opposition to the growing movement of feminist egalitarianism, they drafted "The Danvers Statement" which affirms that men and women are equal in the image of God, but maintain complementary differences in role and function.³³ In the home, men are to lovingly lead their wives and family, and women are to intelligently submit to the leadership of their husbands. In the church, while men and women share equally

³¹ <http://www.sbc.net/> as at 20 May 2013.

³² <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp#xviii> as at 20 May 2013.

³³ A copy of The Danvers Statement is included as an appendix in Wayne Grudem; John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 1991, pages 469 to 471. See also: http://www.churchcouncil.org/iccp_org/Documents_ICCP/English/17_Male_Female_Distinctives_A&D.pdf as at 20 May 2013.

in the blessings of salvation, some governance and teaching roles are restricted to men.³⁴

Those who promote the CBMW agenda include John Piper (1991), D A Carson (1998), James B Hurley (2002), and Wayne Grudem (2006). The respective views of these and other complementarians will be reviewed in detail in the next chapter.

Christian Viewpoints on Domestic Abuse: Egalitarians

In contrast to the complementarian position, the egalitarian viewpoint emphasises equality and mutuality between the genders. Egalitarians believe that the Bible proclaims the fundamental equality of believers irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or economic status. In 1987, *Priscilla Papers* was established as a scholarly journal to promote biblical perspectives on egalitarianism. Constituent members of the group included Gilbert Bilezikian (1985), Catherine Clark Kroeger (1992), and Gretchen Gaebelein Hull (1998). Along with others, the group established Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), a national organisation to provide leadership, support and education regarding biblical equality. In support of women's full participation in all levels of ministry, as well as mutuality in marriage, they developed a statement entitled "*Men, Women, and Biblical Equality*."³⁵ This statement was given exposure in 1990 in two key evangelical magazines, *Christianity Today*, and *Leadership* and has also been translated into 15 languages and widely disseminated.³⁶

Egalitarians essentially believe that men and women are created equal in God's image and that any interpretation of scripture which demeans women within marriage and prohibits women from using their spiritual gifts and abilities in ministry is unjust. The four central tenets of egalitarianism are:

- The Bible extols the equality of women and men
- God has given each person gifts to be used for the good of Christ's kingdom
- Christians are to develop and exercise their God-given gifts in home, church and society
- The Bible teaches that Christians are to oppose injustice³⁷

³⁴ <http://cbmw.org/core-beliefs/> as at 20 May 2013.

³⁵ <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/men-women-and-biblical-equality> as at 20 May 2013.

³⁶ <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/our-mission-and-history> as at 20 May 2013.

³⁷ Ibid.

The differing views of complementarians and egalitarians are significantly centred on competing interpretations of the meaning of headship and whether it means “authority” (as the complementarians would have it), or “source” (as the egalitarians advocate). The verses which are disputed include 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as cited earlier, and also Ephesians 5:21-23. Again, these scriptures will be discussed in later chapters.

The main early theological proponents of egalitarianism are Alvera and Berkeley Mickelsen (1981), Gilbert Bilezikian (1985), Gordon Fee (1987), Catherine and Richard Clark Kroeger (1992), Craig Keener (1992), Marie Fortune (1983, 1995) and Carol Adams (1995). As with the complementarians, the respective viewpoints of these and other egalitarians will be reviewed in the following chapter.

With regard to Christianity and gender, while this study uses the contrast between complementarians and egalitarians as the point of reference for its comparative framework, the related positions of biblical patriarchy and Christian feminism also need to be acknowledged in passing. Biblical patriarchy shares similarities to complementarianism but takes the view that exclusive male leadership is part of God’s design, not only in home and church but also in the wider community, and that a woman’s primary role ought therefore to be restricted to a caring, supportive role in the home.³⁸ While Christian feminists share many values with egalitarians, especially in affirming the equality of women and men, the main differences for the former relate to the gender of God and on drawing on other religions, not only the Bible, to uphold their beliefs.³⁹ Taking such issues into account, it was decided to focus on the contrast between complementarians and egalitarians as the main point of reference for the thesis in order to ensure clarity in the discussion.

Methodology

In order to provide empirical content for this thesis, seven Christian women who had formerly been abused by their partners were interviewed between July and September 2010. These

³⁸ Authors promoting Biblical patriarchy include Douglas Wilson, (*Federal Husband*. Moscow, Idaho, USA: Canon Press, 1999), and R C Sprout, (*Bound for Glory: God’s promise for your Family*. Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 2003).

³⁹ Two prominent Christian feminist writers are Rosemary Radford Ruether, (*Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Fortress Press, 2007), and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, (*In Memory of Her: Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. SCM Press, 2nd Revision Edition, 1996).

women were from a variety of evangelical backgrounds and churches.⁴⁰ On hearing about the research from friends or family members who had become aware of the project, the women responded to my invitation to be interviewed. Each woman was initially contacted by phone and invited to participate. Eight women were contacted, one declined and thus seven were interviewed.

The interviews were structured around four main themes drawn from the relevant literature, viz., forgiveness, divorce, suffering as a reflection of God's will and patriarchy.⁴¹ The interviews also focused on asking how their churches helped or hindered their respective journeys in dealing with domestic violence (see Appendices 1-4 for copies of the interview documentation).

Interviewing was carried out in line with the ethics criteria of Laidlaw-Carey College, especially as these related to respecting and ensuring confidentiality.⁴² In confirming their willingness to participate in the research, each woman signed a consent form.

Interviewing of this nature enabled the generation of rich narrative data. The reason for this approach was to make use of women's experiences as related by them first-hand and thus "give them voice."⁴³ This approach made it possible to begin to explore how evangelical Christian women come to terms and deal with their experiences as victims of family abuse and violence. A brief pen portrait of each of the seven women follows.⁴⁴

1. Mary is 60 years old and has been married twice. She was abused for several years by both of her husbands. Her two children witnessed this abuse as pre-schoolers. As a four-year old,

⁴⁰ Only one of these women attended the church in which I pastored, but she had no dealings or pastoral relationship with me.

⁴¹ Three of these themes are dealt with in detail in later chapters – forgiveness (Chapter 3), divorce (Chapter 4) and patriarchy (Chapter 5). Consideration of the theme of suffering is not treated separately. Instead it is woven into the discussion in these other chapters where relevant since it underpins each of the other three themes.

⁴² Transcripts of the interviews were treated as highly confidential documents due to the sensitive nature of the material that was discussed. The women were assured of this during the interview process.

⁴³ "Giving voice" to women's experiences is a consistent theme in research of this type. For illustrative examples of this in the domestic violence literature see Gill Hague and Audrey Mullende, "Giving a Voice to Women Survivors of Domestic Violence through Recognition as a Service User Group", *The British Journal of Social Work*, December 2005, Volume 35, Issue 8, 1321-1341; Gill Hague and Audrey Mullender: *Who Listens? The Voices of Domestic Violence Survivors in Service Provision in the United Kingdom*, *Violence Against Women*, June 2006, volume 12, number 6, 568-587; Elaine Weiss: *Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who Broke Free*, Volcano Press, Volcano, California, USA, 2004; and *The Voice - The Journal of the Battered Women's Movement*, a publication of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <http://www.ncadv.org> as at 21 May 2013.

⁴⁴ All names are fictitious and personal details have been altered where necessary to ensure anonymity.

her son even tried to intervene to help his mother on a number of occasions. Mary suffered verbal abuse, physical abuse - being hit and punched - as well as sexual assaults. Her mother was even assaulted and permanently injured by Mary's first husband when she attempted to intervene. Mary's first husband was unfaithful and left her; her second husband was also unfaithful and left her after ten years of marriage, leaving her with his debts. Mary was brought up in a Christian home and despite her experiences continues to have a strong commitment to her Christian faith.

2. Celeste is 70 years old. For several decades her Christian husband abused her verbally and physically. On various occasions he threatened her with knives and often threatened to commit suicide while in a rage. They had five children. Celeste was the main breadwinner. She has been widowed for fifteen years.

3. Ethel is in her seventies and during 20 years of marriage was subject to her husband's rage as well as his controlling and threatening behaviours. Ethel believed that she would be breaking the marriage covenant if she left her abusive husband. During the marriage, her teenage son committed suicide. As a teenager, her daughter was fearful of her father due to the nature of the corporal punishment to which he subjected her. Ethel left her husband following the suicide of their son. She took with her their adolescent daughter, now in her forties, who suffers from mental health issues. Ethel continues to care for her daughter. Ethel has been a Christian since childhood. Although she has left the mainstream evangelical church she still belongs to a local faith community which meets in members' homes.

4. Amanda is 40 years old. She was physically and verbally abused by her husband who "became a Christian" in response to Amanda leaving the relationship. This was a move he assumed would bring her back to the marriage. She did go back but the violence continued and so she subsequently left again. Their two adolescent children remain in the husband's custody with Amanda paying maintenance. Amanda was too scared of her husband to contest custody and did not have the same financial means to provide for them as he did.

5. Megan is in her fifties. She was married for 25 years. Her Christian husband neglected her, pursued relationships on the Internet and engaged sexually with other women. While this was going on, he expected Megan to continue having a sexual relationship with him. Their four

children, now adults, became aware of his pornography addiction having seen content left on the screen of his computer. Megan left the relationship fifteen years ago and continues to attend church.

6. Harriet is in her fifties. She was raised in a Christian family. Her husband was and continues to be a church leader, fulfilling a teaching role within their church. Harriet was physically assaulted by him. Over many years he was involved in affairs with men. Having unprotected sex with men and confessing this to Harriet resulted in her ending the marriage since her health had been put at risk without her knowledge. The couple have three adult children.

7. Kiera is in her fifties. She has been a Christian for several decades and has been involved in small group leadership as well as teaching Sunday school. Kiera was subject to physical threats from her husband including being threatened with a cricket bat. She was also hit from time to time. As a result of injuries received during this abuse she required medical treatment. One assault occurred at her work place to which police and doctor were called. A trespass order was issued but her husband continues to violate this 10 years later. Kiera has custody of their two adolescent boys.

Due to the older ages of the women interviewed, it could be assumed that abuse within Christian families was a problem that occurred in previous decades and is no longer an issue. This is not the case. For ethical reasons, these seven women were selected on the basis that they were no longer in an abusive marital relationship. This ensured that some time had elapsed from the events under discussion, hence their relative ages. This also meant that in being invited to participate in the project the women were relatively safe from harm, physically as well as emotionally. As the subsequent discussion of recent literature in following chapters will also indicate, domestic violence continues to take place within Christian homes.

In the following chapters, especially 3, 4 and 5, the personal experiences of these seven Christian women will be considered in the light of what the literature and scripture reveals. It is hoped that the combination of literary research, scriptural exegesis and analysis of narratives drawn from the first-hand experiences of these women will provide insights that will be both helpful and challenging for the evangelical Christian community in dealing with the domestic abuse in its midst.

Conclusion

As mentioned previously, this thesis will explore the issues evangelical Christian women face as they try to cope with family violence and seek assistance and guidance from their church communities. It will present the view that responses by evangelical communities to these women victims have by and large been limited and inadequate because of the complementarian view of gender roles to which they adhere and that as a result the prevention of Christian family violence has thus been a neglected topic among evangelical communities. In contrast to this, it will be argued that the egalitarian view of gender roles provides a sounder basis for understanding and responding to domestic violence, theologically as well as practically, and reflecting this, it is the view that will inform and underpin the development of central arguments in this thesis.

The literature reflecting complementarian and egalitarian viewpoints on gender roles and their respective responses to domestic abuse and violence within the Christian home will be reviewed in more detail in the following chapter (Chapter 2). This will then lay the foundation for a more in-depth analysis of the three key issues of forgiveness (Chapter 3), the permanence of marriage (chapter 4), and spiritual headship within marriage (Chapter 5). A final chapter (Chapter 6) will then bring together the various threads from the previous chapters and draw appropriate conclusions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to set a context for this research, relevant literature was identified and read. This will now be reviewed. A key contrast will be drawn between complementarian and egalitarian views of Christian marriage and family giving due attention to more recently published texts in each case but also noting earlier works where relevant. This will be followed by a brief historical discussion of writings from women involved in the early evangelical movement, noting their subsequent influence on writers who promote the egalitarian view. This will set the scene for discussion in subsequent chapters of forgiveness (Chapter 3), divorce and the permanence of marriage (Chapter 4) and submission, headship and patriarchy (Chapter 5). Firstly, however, we will consider the contrasting viewpoints of complementarians and egalitarians.

The Complementarian Viewpoint

Complementarians hold to a traditional interpretation of scriptures relating to marriage and family in asserting that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family and church life. The key writers here include James Hurley (1981), John Frame (1987), Wayne Grudem (1991), and John Piper (1991).

According to Hurley, “the marriage relationship entails the self-sacrificing headship of the husband and the responsive submission of the wife.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, Hurley maintains that “practices which signify abdication or rejection of these roles ought not to be adopted.”⁴⁶ John Frame says that men and women resemble and represent God by exercising control and authority differently and that women’s submission to the authority of men mirrors God insofar as “God the Lord is not too proud to be ‘our helper’. Christ the Lord is not unwilling to be a servant. Godly women stand as models, often as rebukes, to all who would be leaders.”⁴⁷ Frame also maintains that “The body of a godly woman is an appropriate accompaniment to

⁴⁵ James B Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 1981). 245.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem; John Piper, ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 1991), 230.

her personality, reinforcing our impression of her inner meekness and quiet strength.”⁴⁸ This view is supported by Grudem who maintains that the scriptural admonition “wives, be submissive to your husbands” (1 Peter 3:1), means that a wife should willingly submit to the husband’s leadership and authority in the marriage, including obedience and the honouring of his leadership even when she dissents.⁴⁹ For his part, Piper does not believe that stressing headship and submission bears any relation to or gives impetus to abuse within marriage. Rather, he says, abuse has its roots in the failure of parents to impart “the true meaning of masculinity and femininity” to their children.⁵⁰ For Piper, it is the confusion and frustrations of sexual identity that often lead to harmful behaviours.”⁵¹

Others have also contributed to the development of the complementarian viewpoint. For example, in his contribution to *Two Views of Women in Ministry* (Blomberg and Beck, 2001), Thomas R Schreiner of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary claims that scripture forbids women from teaching and having authority over men. He bases his stance on a particular interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 viz, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.” (NIV). Schreiner’s interpretation of these verses is that women were not appointed to the pastoral office and are not called to function as pastors, elders or overseers.⁵² As background to this, Schreiner suggests that different roles for men and women were established in Genesis 1-3 and that it was Adam who was given special responsibility as a leader. He was created first, he was given the command not to eat from the tree, Eve was created as a helper and was named by Adam. It was Eve who was tempted, not Adam and it was Adam not Eve who was approached by God following the eating of the apple.⁵³ Schreiner claims that the women of Corinth to whom 1 Timothy is being addressed were an example of a principle which fits with all of scripture - women were not to speak as leaders and thus in today’s contexts are to behave submissively and leave the pastoral office to men.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁵¹ Ibid., 82.

⁵² Thomas R Schreiner. "Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective", in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan Publishing House 2001), 177.

⁵³ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 232.

Hurley, Frame, Grudem, Piper and Schreiner thus explicitly oppose an egalitarian view of scripture regarding family, believing that God ordained gender hierarchy and as a result, created men to lead and women to follow.

Two other complementarian theologians who have contributed biblical reflections relevant to the topic of family violence are Steven R Tracy and Craig Blomberg.

Steven R Tracy is Professor of Theology and Ethics at Phoenix Seminary in Phoenix, Arizona. His books include *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (2005) and *Marriage at the Crossroads: Couples in Conversation about Discipleship, Gender Roles, Decision Making and Intimacy* (2009) (co-authored with Celestia Tracy, and William and Aída Spencer). Articles by Tracy that are relevant to the topic of family violence include:

- “Calling the Evangelical Church to Truth: Domestic Violence and the Gospel”, in *Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to Churches and Their Leaders* (2011). In this chapter Tracy explores how evangelical Christians have not responded well to domestic violence by being slow to address the issue, by not offering courses in seminaries or having resources and knowledge or skills available within local churches to meet the needs of victims. He says “When churches do respond to abuse, they often do so in unsound and harmful ways. Their self-assessments are often inaccurate - they exaggerate the care they provide survivors of family violence, and minimise actions and teaching that may harm violent families”.⁵⁵
- “What Does ‘Submit in Everything’ Really Mean? The Nature and Scope of Marital Submission.” *Trinity Journal* (2006). In this article Tracy considers the limits of marital submission especially regarding women and the occasions when submission ought to be qualified where there is abuse of male power.
- In “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (2007) Tracy explores the nature of patriarchy and addresses its limits as a reason or origin of abuse. He also explores other influences which foster family violence, for instance biological influences, intrapsychic and social construct issues and how these contribute to abuse.

⁵⁵ Steven R Tracy “Abuse and the Gospel: Calling the Evangelical Church to Truth” in *Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to Churches and their Leaders*. (Eugene, Oregon, USA: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2011), 41.

- In “Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (1999), Tracy deals with the confusion within religious communities regarding abuse and forgiveness. He seeks to clarify forgiveness biblically and particular how it relates to the practice of forgiving an abuser.

In relation to the topic of forgiveness and family violence, Lewis Smedes’ *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve* (1984) is also worth mentioning. In this book, Smedes covers many different aspects of forgiveness including people who do not care, monsters, God, and ourselves. Smedes suggests that forgiveness it is not about excusing, smothering conflict, accepting people, or showing tolerance. Rather it is about facing up to the underlying issues and practicing forgiveness a little at a time.

Blomberg’s work in the area of forgiveness and scripture is of particular relevance to family violence. In his article *On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counselling with special reference to Matthew 18:15-35* (2006) Blomberg discusses whether forgiveness is a necessity or a nicety for the Christian. Focusing on discipleship, he highlights not only the misuse of scripture when there is repeated forgiveness in the absence of repentance and accountability but also the dilemma that arises when a victim does not receive an apology or when reconciliation is not possible. The challenge in such instances is how to apply forgiveness which is still faithful to scripture. This is an issue that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The book *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2001) is also of interest here. Edited by Craig Blomberg and James Beck, the book explores the issue of the role of women in the Bible with input from both egalitarian and complementarian scholars. Craig Keener and Linda Belleville represented the egalitarian stance while Thomas Schreiner and Anne Bowman represented the complementarians. In this book Blomberg defends the view that a woman can do everything except be a senior pastor. The main focus of the discussion is whether the debated texts from Paul (1 Corinthians 11 and 14; 1 Timothy 2) are directives applicable only to specific issues in Corinth and Ephesus at the time Paul wrote, or whether they are biblically mandated principles for all time and thus to be applied to all women in all churches, families and cultures. The texts

drawn on include Genesis 2, 1 Timothy 2:13-15, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Romans 16⁵⁶ and Ephesians 5:21-33.

The Egalitarian Viewpoint

Key writers within the egalitarian viewpoint include Marie Fortune (1991 and 1995), Catherine Clark Kroeger (1992, 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2004) and Nancy Nason-Clark (1997, 2001 and 2004). Other writers of significance include Al Miles (2005, 2011); Gilbert Bilezikian (1985); and Ron Clark (2005 and 2009).

Marie Fortune is considered by many to be a pioneering expert in the area of women and abuse, specifically sexual abuse. She began writing on the topic in the 1980s and her books include: *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (1983); *Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Study for Teenagers* (1984); and *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Curriculum for Children Ages 9-12* (with Kathryn G Reid, 1989). In 1991 Fortune edited a workbook entitled *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*. This was one of many resources to come out of The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence of which Marie Fortune was the director. Founded in 1979, the Center is now known as the FaithTrust Institute.⁵⁷

In 1995 Fortune co-edited *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*. This was intended to be a resource for those who minister to women and their families, both victims and perpetrators, and covered such topics as conceptions of God, suffering and forgiveness, submission, covenant and divorce, and how churches respond to abusers.

Within this book, a chapter contributed by Fredrick Keene (“The Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament”) looks at the relationship of repentance to forgiveness and considers all the instances in the New Testament where forgiveness is taught about and applied. Keene is of

⁵⁶ Eight women are specifically mentioned in the “personal greetings” of Romans 16: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphema, Tryphosa, Persio, Rufus’ mother, Nereus’ sister.

⁵⁷ The FaithTrust Institute (formerly the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence) is an American, multi-faith, multicultural training and education organisation with global reach, working to end sexual and domestic violence. It offers a wide range of services and resources, including training, consulting and educational materials. It provides communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse. It works with many communities, including Asian and Pacific Islander, Buddhist, Jewish, Latino/a, Muslim, Black, Anglo, Indigenous, Protestant and Roman Catholic.

the view that forgiveness can only be offered to an equal or to someone with less power, reflecting the belief that someone with less power cannot offer forgiveness to one of greater power. When considering the plight of a victim of abuse he claims that it is outside the realms of scripture to expect a victim to forgive an abuser when that abuser is in a greater position of strength. Keene maintains that much of the teaching where people were enjoined to forgive by Jesus and Paul was in a context of mutuality within the faith community. This is a matter that will be taken up in the next chapter.

Catherine Clark Kroeger's passion has been for the abused, believing that the gospel was not intended as a means to oppress women, but rather that it holds the path to liberation and wholeness. One of Kroeger's areas of expertise is the issue of headship. In this regard she maintains that traditional interpretations of scripture relating to creation, marriage, leadership, submission and authority need to be corrected. Kroeger claims that the statement, "man is the head of woman" (drawn from 1 Timothy 2:11-13) represents a misinterpretation of scripture and thus has often led to abuse. Along with others she set about proving that equality between the genders was the biblical mandate, in opposition to the traditionally sanctioned hierarchical model claimed as biblical by those of the complementarian school. This view was substantiated in *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (1992) and in *Women, Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture can be used to Hurt or Heal* (1996). These two books dealt with the challenge of rethinking scriptures which have been used to justify abusive practices.

Carolyn Holderread Heggen contributed a chapter entitled "Religious Beliefs and Abuse" to *Women, Abuse and the Bible*. In this chapter Heggen challenged the justification of abusive behaviour based on biblical passages and certain religious principles. She deals with four of these principles:

1. God intends that men dominate and women submit
2. Woman is morally inferior to Man and cannot trust her own judgement
3. Suffering is a Christian virtue and women in particular have been designed to be suffering servants
4. Christians must quickly forgive and be reconciled with those who sin against them.

Heggen asserts that for the most vulnerable, religious teaching based on such principles often reflects a distortion of scripture.

Also of significance in *Women Abuse and the Bible* is a chapter by David M Scholer entitled “The Evangelical Debate over ‘Headship’.” In this chapter Scholer helpfully documents the historical debate since the 1980s when the mainstream evangelical view that scripture mandated the submission of women and the headship of men began to be contested. Scholer contrasts the contribution of complementarians such as Wayne Grudem, John Piper and John Hurley with egalitarian responses provided later in the 1980s by such writers as Gordon Fee, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Gilbert Bilezikian and Richard Cervin. He concludes his chapter with a caution that biblical misinterpretation and misrepresentation should in no way be used to justify abuse within Christian families.

Kroeger’s *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope and Help to Abused Women* (1998), profiled the issue of family violence within the church community and offered guidance and advice to victims, pastors and counsellors.

Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home (2008), edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger, Nancy Nason-Clark and Barbara Fisher-Townsend, contains two pages of peer acknowledgments that honour Kroeger as a most influential voice in the previous four decades in the evangelical academic world, particularly with regard to Christian domestic violence. Further works co-edited by Kroeger have been *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary: An Indispensable Resource for All Who Want to View Scripture through Different Eyes* (2002), and *The Women’s Study Bible* (with Mary Evans, 2009). The Bible commentary focused particularly on historical and archaeological particularities relating to women, noting scriptures which have been historically contentious and used to promote a complementarian view of scripture. The study Bible and commentary also examine passages relating directly and indirectly to abuse. In 2005 Kroeger established the organisation Peace and Safety in Christian Homes (PASCH).⁵⁸

According to Mimi Haddad (2011), Kroeger’s influence can be seen in the fact that one of the position statements that she played a key part in drafting (*Men, Women and Biblical Equality*) was published in a number of influential evangelical Christian magazines in the 1990s, viz.,

⁵⁸ <http://godstowomen.org/pasch.htm> as at 20 May 2013.

Christianity Today, Leadership, Today's Christian Women, The Reformed Journal, World Christian and Faith Today.⁵⁹ The statement was drafted on behalf of the organisation Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE)⁶⁰ and was drafted by a significant group of egalitarian biblical scholars which, in addition to Kroeger, included such people as Stanley N Gundry (series editor of *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, published in 2001), Gretchen Gaebelein Hull (author of *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel*, published in 1998); and Gilbert Bilezikian (author of *Beyond Sex Roles*, published in 1985, and republished in 2006). The position statement was in part a response to the work of complementarian James B Hurley and the views expressed in his *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (1981). In this book Hurley argued that the Bible supports benevolent male authority as God's will for male-female relationships and that scripture mandates an "authority/subservient pattern for male-female relationships in church and family".⁶¹ In response to Hurley's position, Gilbert Bilezikian explored the same scripture passages as Hurley but advocated instead an egalitarian interpretation which suggested that gender equality is the goal of a progressively revealed and on-going restorative movement of God's Spirit throughout Scripture and history. According to this view, Christ was, and through his Spirit still is, removing vertical structures of power which oppress, with the goal of establishing the way for God's liberating and inclusive community of oneness.

Nancy Nason-Clark has made a contribution to literature regarding abuse within Christian families specifically through her sociological research. Her main works in this regard include *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*, (1997), *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (with Kroeger, 2001) and *Refuge from Abuse: Hope and Healing for Abused Religious Women* (2004).

In *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (1997), Nason-Clark claimed that religious as well as secular men hurt and humiliate the women they have promised to love. This mirrors the assertion made by researchers in the field of family violence that male violence against women knows no religious boundaries. According to Nason-Clark, religious institutions have a role to play in both responding to the needs of abuse victims and reducing violence that is characteristic of so many families. A stated goal of the book was to assist clergy

⁵⁹ See Mimi Haddad, "Dr Catherine Clark Kroeger: An Evangelical Legacy," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 3 (2011): 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*: 11.

and communities of faith to “work toward reducing violence and responding with compassion to empower those who suffer the hurt and humiliation of abuse”⁶² Another goal was to address the gap in current scholarly literature concerning the role of religion as it relates to violence against women.⁶³ The book was based on survey data, focus group discussion, participant observation and in-depth interviews.

No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence (2001) was co-authored by Nancy Nason-Clark and Catherine Clark Kroeger. It emerged from an International Task Force on Abuse which met in 2001 as part of the World Evangelical Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and was written as a resource for pastors and others working with victims of family violence. The first four of the book’s chapters address the prevalence of abuse in the world and in churches at large and the last nine chapters present a biblical discussion of relevant theologies which condemn abuse of wives and women. The concluding chapter encourages churches to contribute to the voice and efforts of secular agencies in highlighting and resourcing a message of hope and healing for victims. Kroeger and Nason-Clark insist that churches have a role to play in and a responsibility to prevent violence against women in their homes. Also considered in the book are doctrines relating to abuse, such as those of patriarchy and subordination.

Refuge from Abuse: Hope and Healing for Abused Religious Women (2004) has the primary focus of providing a resource for pastors and others who are seeking to walk alongside women, men and children who suffer as a result of family violence. This book was also written with Kroeger and outlined steps towards healing with special emphasis on faith issues relating to abuse. The following questions of a victim are addressed: How do I know I need help? How much of my story should I tell? Where do I find spiritual support as a victim of abuse? What help can I find in the community? How do I get started on the healing journey? What key steps will I need to take to get on with my life? How can I understand what help my abuser needs? How do I learn to trust God again? Biblical stories were used throughout the book to extrapolate the principles to women as victims in abusive relationships.

⁶² Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997)., xvi.

⁶³ Ibid.

The strengths of Nason-Clark's work is the comprehensive picture that it provides of the experience of victims of family abuse, their relationship to their own faith communities and beyond this, to other women victims both sacred and secular. Nason-Clark's research highlights the fact that issues of faith and domestic abuse-cum-violence are complex. Comprehensive and significant themes such as forgiveness, divorce, and suffering are highlighted as a painful reality for all too many women of faith.

In addition to her writing, Nason-Clark has led a research project in Canada. The RAVE Project (Religion and Violence e-Learning), based at the University of New Brunswick, "is an initiative that seeks to understand the interface between religion and domestic violence in the family context."⁶⁴ RAVE's web-based resources are informed by research and are designed to equip religious leaders to respond to domestic violence. The material and resources are informed by the "latest research and best practices for professionals, clergy, friends and family to walk alongside victims and survivors on their journey to healing and wholeness."⁶⁵ The RAVE material acknowledges and enables collaboration and knowledge-sharing across varied disciplines, practices, services, victims and survivors so that faith-based resources are shared in a way that will equip professionals and others to respond to Christian family violence.

Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to the Churches and their Leaders (jointly edited by Nason-Clark, Kroeger and Fisher-Townsend, 2011) is the most recent book to take a multidisciplinary approach to the topic of domestic abuse in Christian families. It draws on contributions by a varied collection of experts on Christian domestic abuse. Much of the content was presented at the third international PASCH conference in 2008 in Maryland, USA. The book is aimed particularly at pastors and brings together the collective voice of expertise from psychologists, pastors, theologians, sociologists and a poet. It contains information on issues of biblical interpretation relating to the vexed questions of headship within Christian marriage and provides advice for pastors dealing with domestic violence, offering them directions for getting a victim to safety and to enable a perpetrator to access help. There is also a section dealing with the evidence that achieving lasting change on the part of perpetrators is challenging.

⁶⁴ "The RAVE Project: Developing Web-based Religious Resources for Social Action on Domestic Abuse," *Critical Social Work* 10, no. 1 (2009): 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Another volume of significance here has been *Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home: Raising Voices for Change* (2008). Fourteen contemporary experts on Christian family violence each wrote a chapter based on their research and experience. PASCH's second international conference in 2006 provided the material for this book and was motivated by Kroeger's desire that the papers, discussions and lessons learned from the conference be made widely available and discussed. Topics covered include theological and biblical reflections, the experience of a pastor, victims' stories and also research outcomes from the RAVE project concerning men as abusers and the role of faith and hope. In addition to Nason-Clark, several of the other contributors had previously written in this area including: Al Miles *Domestic Violence What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (2000, and the second edition 2011); Steven Tracy *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (2005); and Ron Clark *Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology of Domestic Violence* (2005). Ron Clark has also published *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call to Christians Concerning Domestic Abuse* (2009).

A second edition of Al Miles' *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* was published in 2011. In it Miles explores abusive relationships and the role those in ministry can take in the subsequent healing process. Catherine Clark Kroeger wrote the foreword for the book. On the back cover, Marie Fortune describes how Miles helped show the way for women to get practical protection as well as safety and support within the church communities. This includes the assurance that "God and the Bible are with her in her hour of need" and that she deserves both safety and assurance concerning her faith. Miles had written two previous works on family violence including *Violence in Families: What Every Christian Needs to Know* (2002) and *Ending Violence in Teen Dating Relationships: A Resource Guide For Parents and Pastors* (2005). In this most recent book, the second edition of *Domestic Violence*, Miles supports the view that women seeking help within communities of faith do not get adequate and helpful responses. He says this is due to ignorance around the extent, implications and complexity of family violence. He draws attention to the need some pastors have for success stories and in the absence of these, their naivety in dealing pastorally with victims and abusers. Pastors who are unaware and uninformed believe prevention or cessation of abuse will simply result from a process of confession, prayer and a stated intention to change. Topics covered in the book include: awareness and countering myths about abuse, traits of abusive men, leaders who abuse, forgiveness, best approaches to victims and abusers and biblical and theological perspectives.

Ron Clark's *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call to Christians Concerning Domestic Abuse* (2009) was written to challenge the church because in Clark's eyes, secular organisations do not view the church as a positive force in advocating for victims of family violence. In fact, as well as being perceived by secular organisations as irrelevant, the church is seen at times by them as contributing to the problem. In turning to their churches for help, victims are often told that submissiveness and forgiveness are required and, as a consequence, some women are instructed to go back to their abusive husbands. For some women, leaving abusive husbands has resulted in being abandoned by their church community. Clark addresses issues that the victims of violence face and how families are impacted, pointing out that when children observe verbal or physical abuse, emotional and physical development is impeded which can lead to anxiety issues, post-traumatic stress and learning and cognitive disorders. Clark brings a theologically compassionate portrait of God's heart for victims of abuse to the discussion, and considers abuse in the context of marriage as a covenant. Other issues considered include what it means to be male and female created in God's image, and how submission in marriage has been abused and as a consequence has resulted in abuse for women. Regarding God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament, Clark maintains that marriage in God's design is intended to be an equal partnership of love and mutual respect. Clark deals with divorce in relation to abuse drawing attention to Malachi 2:16 where the Lord God of Israel says "'I hate divorce" and "I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment." In these terms, *Freeing the Oppressed* is a call to recognise that the church is not immune to abuse and in dealing with it, is called to follow Christ and tend to the victims.

Gilbert Bilezikian's *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (2006), is the third edition of a book that was first published in the mid-1980s when the egalitarian biblical equality movement was in its early days. Writers such as Catherine Clark Kroeger, Patricia Gundry, Margaret Howe, Mary Evans, and Aida Besancon Spencer were arguing for gender equality and mutuality in the 1970s and early 1980s, grounding their arguments in a high view of scripture. Complementarians resisted such a stance. In 1981 James B Hurley had just earned a Ph.D. from Cambridge University for his consideration of the biblical text on this topic. The resulting book, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (1981), was selected as a Gold Medallion Book of the Year by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. In it Hurley argued that benevolent male authority is God's will for male-female

relationships. As mentioned, Gilbert Bilezikian responded to Hurley's argument in *Beyond Sex Roles* (first edition, 1985). Here Bilezikian explored the same passages of Scripture as Hurley and offered an alternative opinion, one that reflected an egalitarian view. Bilezikian claimed that the Bible affirms gender equality and mutuality as being the goal of an on-going movement of God's Spirit through Scripture and history. This on-going movement is not confined to gender. Christ by his Spirit intends to dismantle all vertical structures of oppression and power in fallen human society in order to make way for a new, liberating and inclusive community of God.

Earlier Evangelical Women Writers

Long before the work of scholars such as Fortune, Kroeger and Nason-Clark and others, evangelical women theologians such as Katherine Bushnell, Pandita Ramabai, Catherine Booth and Frances Willard were writing on women's issues in the late 1800s.⁶⁶ Convinced by the need to apply the core values of evangelicalism to the plight of women in the late 1800s, these women were to influence and shape later thinking and writing, particularly that of the egalitarian viewpoint.

As background to the work of these early evangelical women writers we need to have an appreciation of the four key values of the early evangelical movement. As identified by the British historian David Bebbington (1989), these values were: (1) Conversionism - the belief that lives need to be changed; (2) Activism - particularly as a means of advancing the gospel; (3) Biblicism - a particular view of the Bible which holds that "all spiritual truth is to be founded on its pages"; and (4) Crucicentrism - stressing the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as an atonement which reconciles sinners before a holy God.⁶⁷ According to Haddad, the writings of these early evangelical women were undergirded by these four values and as such have had a strong influence on present day evangelical thinking around issues of justice, the use of scripture and the place of women in church and society at large.

Katherine Bushnell (1856-1946) studied three hundred Bible passages which refer to gender and published her conclusions in *God's Word to Women* (1919). She claimed that the whole of

⁶⁶ Material for this section has been drawn from Mimi Haddad, "Dr Catherine Clark Kroeger: An Evangelical Legacy," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 3 (2011).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

scripture views females and males as equal in being and in service.⁶⁸ Bushnell claimed that abuse of women would not cease as long “as the subordination of woman to man was taught within the body of Christ.”⁶⁹ Bushnell’s work was fuelled by Biblicism and the evangelical’s love of scripture and the trend to appeal to scripture when considering social issues of the times. This high view of scripture brought challenge and debate over biblical words and methods of interpretation to such issues as slavery and women preaching. Bushnell drew on her biblical expertise to justify the expectation that the British Parliament would end the sexual slavery of Indian women who were victims in the brothels established by the British military in India.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1952) laboured for 15 years translating the scriptures from Greek and Hebrew into an Indian dialect. She also applied her understanding of scripture to housing the blind as well as ministry to abandoned babies, the disabled, unmarried mothers and the sick. She wrote and published material advocating on behalf of child brides, wives who were doomed to be burned on the death of their husbands, temple prostitutes and the need for greater levels of education for females.⁷⁰

Reflecting the activism value of the evangelical movement, Catherine Booth (1829-1890) brought her social justice convictions to bear in lobbying to get members of the UK Parliament to raise the minimum age for involvement in prostitution from 7 to 13.⁷¹ She also wrote about injustice and on the need for women and men to have equality of voice in teaching scripture and preaching. She substantiated this from scripture.

With regard to conversionism, the early evangelicals were passionately committed to having new converts engage in evangelism, even when it meant “challenging cultural taboos such as giving slaves and women new positions of leadership and freedom.”⁷² As a result of this, the priority they gave to evangelism “loosened the grip of ethnic and gender prejudice within the body of Christ.”⁷³

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Frances Willard (1839-1898) and her message regarding the suffering bought upon women due to alcohol abuse was championed by William Bell Riley (1861-1947), who founded North Western College in Saint Paul, USA and the World's Christian Fundamentalist Association. After hearing Willard speak he believed her to be one of the greatest evangelical speakers in the United States and he encouraged women to speak out against injustice, especially domestic violence. In this way he felt that the gospel would be advanced. Riley invested in the value of conversionism in 1902 when, in the face of opposition, he welcomed women to the Minneapolis Institute convinced of women's call to advance the gospel and address social concerns such as family violence. Willard was a leader and voice in The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), advocating for evangelism, abolition of alcohol, temperance, and suffrage. She worked against prostitution and pressed for laws covering domestic violence and rape.⁷⁴

According to Haddad, evangelicals published at least forty-six biblical treatises on gender and service between 1808 and 1930. These documents marked the emergence of the first wave of feminism which Haddad considered to be "a deeply biblical movement and one that drove the evangelical causes that included suffrage and abolition."⁷⁵ A whole-of-Bible approach began to emerge on issues such as women and slavery and a Christian worldview was fostered which gave women and slaves equal standing in leadership and service. Haddad concluded, "The exegetical work of the early evangelicals inaugurated an egalitarian theology that opposed centuries of teaching presuming the inferiority of women and slaves."⁷⁶

The efforts of these women embodied the value of crucicentrism, a passion for the cross and all that Christ accomplished. Their understanding that Calvary offered equality with others to the marginalised and entitled them to the full benefits of blessing and reconciliation underpinned their efforts to evangelise, study scripture and invest in social reform.

Haddad went on to say that the subsequent removal of women from prominent positions of leadership "happened concurrently with a modernist and enlightenment challenge to scripture's account of the miraculous."⁷⁷ Fearful of the encroachment of higher critical thought

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

and its secularising impact on culture and theological education, Haddad maintains that Bible institutes retrenched on their earlier support of female students.⁷⁸ After 1930, evangelicals placed less emphasis on the academic pursuit of scripture, thus fewer evangelicals were inclined to examine passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in their historical contexts or in the original languages, relying instead upon a “plain reading of scripture.”⁷⁹

In contrast to this, Kroeger, Fortune and others continued in the tradition of valuing the importance of original language interpretation and appreciation of biblical historical context. According to Haddad, Kroeger’s work in particular opposed the subjugation and abuse of women and promoted a biblical basis for equality.⁸⁰ Like Bushnell, Kroeger worked to understand what was contextual about scriptures which appeared to subjugate women and what the overall principles were in texts which assumed and expected equality in serving, leading and authority. In their writings, Kroeger and Fortune were adamant that abuse within Christian homes was often related to issues of biblical interpretation and emphasised the need for clarity in relation to discerning what is prescriptive and what is descriptive in the scriptures. Like their early evangelical predecessors, Kroeger, Fortune and others saw connections between the abuse of women, devaluing of women, male dominance and the consequent submission of women.

Conclusion

Writers, theologians, practitioners and researchers of family violence continue to produce literature which highlights the fact that abuse within Christian families continues. There is confusion around how victims and perpetrators are best served, cared for, disciplined, pastored, and managed and how abuse can be prevented. The Christian community has its share of particular challenges with understanding Christian principles and use of scripture. Much of the literature mentioned above will be drawn on as the thesis progresses over the following three chapters. Chapter Three with its focus on forgiveness will draw on the significant work of Blomberg, Fortune, Keene, Smedes, Tracy, Nason-Clark and Kroeger. Chapter Four with its focus on the permanence of marriage and divorce will draw on the work of Clark, Fortune,

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

Kroeger and Nason-Clark. Finally Chapter Five, with its focus on the role of patriarchy, submission and headship, will draw on Belleville, Heggen, Bilezikian, Nason-Clark, Scholer, Tracy, Grudem and Piper.

Chapter Three

Forgiveness

Amanda: *He never said sorry. I remember somebody saying to me that you have to forgive - that you have to... you, as a Christian wife, need to forgive him. You can't forget what's happened, but you need to forgive, and with you forgiving him, um... with me forgiving him... he will then see the change in you... and, and then he'll understand what forgiving's all about, basically. That's the way I took it, like the Bible says "forgive seventy times seventy"... that's a lot... seventy times seventy times seventy times seventy... I mean, how many times can you forgive someone? And then, you know... in the marriage, you get hurt, you get abused - and sometimes he'd say sorry, and sometimes he wouldn't - and then you'd say "It's a new day, let's forget about it, let's move on". And that's not forgiving, but forgetting and moving on - but it would always continue. I prayed for forgiveness... it never went away. And I don't know if it was me not wanting to forgive, or I was too hurt, or..."*

Matthew 18:21-22 - Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive someone who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."⁸¹

Introduction

This chapter will reflect on the issue of forgiveness and its relation to domestic abuse and violence focusing on some common beliefs based on certain Biblical understandings. The first section will consider New Testament biblical discussions regarding forgiveness by several well-known theologians. The second section will look at the intertwining of biblical and therapeutic views on Christian domestic abuse and note responses and experiences of therapeutic experts, some of whom are also theologians. A third section will draw on the theologians and practitioners referred to in the previous sections, focusing on questions and challenges specifically regarding forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to domestic abuse. A final section will explore the consequences of applying different understandings of forgiveness as well as discuss well-being and dilemmas faced by victims seeking to appropriate forgiveness. Comments and reflections from interviewees will highlight issues raised throughout the chapter.

Commonly Used Scriptures on Forgiveness

The biblical doctrine of forgiveness is a complex issue, a factor which, according to theologian Steven Tracy, religious leaders often fail to recognise.⁸² Reflecting this, a number of

⁸¹ All texts quoted in this and the following chapters are from the Today's New International Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated.

⁸² Steven R Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 27, no. 3 (1999): 219.

theologians and writers in the field of family violence are concerned that commonly used scriptures concerning forgiveness are misunderstood and thus misapplied pastorally to women living with violence. These commonly used scriptures are as follows:

Matthew 5:38-39 - You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

Matthew 6:12 - "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Matthew 18:21-22 - Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive someone who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Luke 6:27-29 - But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt.

In 1995, Pamela Cooper-White, a theologian and expert on violence regarding women commented, "One of the most common complaints of battered women is that they have been pressured into forgiving and 'turning the other cheek'."⁸³ Likewise, Catherine Clark Kroeger says "Too often Christians demand that others forgive immediately, before it is appropriate or advisable, before there can be adequate contrition, reflection or amelioration".⁸⁴ For her part, Martha Thornson, a counsellor and spiritual director in California, considers that texts on forgiveness have often been misdirected. As a result, victims continually forgive abusers who, for their part, continue to mete out harsh penalties for "perceived sins that often were no sins at all."⁸⁵

This mirrors aspects of Kiera's experience. She commented:

He was able to justify his abusive behaviour towards me - I deserved it. Because his life was not going the easy way it should, there must be some sort of perpetrator of that, and so that was me. Therefore...I deserved to be punished! I could never understand it. I could never understand the logical thought behind his judging, his punishment was verbal and physical.

⁸³ Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar Violence Against Women And The Church's Response* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA Fortress Press, 1995). 252.

⁸⁴ Nancy Nason-Clark; Catherine Clark Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001). 113.

⁸⁵ Nancy Nason-Clark, "The RAVE Project: Developing Web-based Religious Resources for Social Action on Domestic Abuse," *Critical Social Work* 10, no. 1 (2009): 76.

For Christian women in relationships where abuse is taking place, biblical misunderstandings of forgiveness can keep them bound and committed to the relationships, even tolerating the abusive behaviour. Such beliefs as “I must forgive him or God won’t forgive me” or “I must forgive seventy times seven” are used by women as they consider their role and perceived obligations regarding forgiveness. Marie Fortune laments the fact that such interpretations of scripture are often offered as pastoral advice to Christian women who have been subjected to family violence.⁸⁶ Commenting on this, Steven Tracy says, “Much of the religious literature implores forgiveness, but never clearly defines it.”⁸⁷

Forgiveness and Repentance

Fredrick W Keene (1995) addresses the underlying complexity of forgiveness by exploring the relationship between forgiveness and repentance with the question “is repentance required for forgiveness to be granted, or should forgiveness be granted with no conditions with repentance required so that there is recognition and acceptance of unconditional forgiveness?”⁸⁸ Keene explains that the argument for forgiveness based on repentance draws on such texts as Mark 1:4, while unconditional forgiveness is validated by such parallel scriptures as Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26.

Mark 1:4 - And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 2:1-12 - A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them

⁸⁶ Marie M Fortune; Carol J Adams, ed. *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (New York, USA: Continuum, 1995), 201.

⁸⁷ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 219.

⁸⁸ Frederick W Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Marie M Fortune; Carol J Adams, (New York, New York, USA: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 121.

all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (see Luke 5:17-26 for an alternate version of this incident).

Keene goes on to explain how forgiveness between Christians takes its model from divine forgiveness in line with Matthew 6:12 ("...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors") and Luke 11:4 ("...forgive us our debts as we forgive"). From Keene's perspective, Christians not only seem to be expected to model their forgiveness on divine forgiveness but their own expectation of personal forgiveness is somehow dependent on their forgiving others.⁸⁹

Steven Tracy (1999) highlights the complexity of understanding forgiveness by drawing attention to apparent contradictions in biblical treatments and scenarios. He points to Colossians 3:13 and Mark 11:25 where believers are commanded to forgive without any qualification.

Colossians 3:13 - Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Mark 11:25 - "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

However, Tracy points out that in Luke 17:3 and 2 Corinthians 2:7, forgiveness is contingent upon repentance.

Luke 17:3 - So watch yourselves. If a brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

2 Corinthians 2:7 - Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

In Ephesians 4:32, Tracy notes how Paul commands forgiveness without any qualification, and yet God refuses to forgive in Hosea 1:6 and in Deuteronomy 29:20.

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Hosea 1:6 - Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means "not loved"), for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Deuteronomy 29:20 - The LORD will never be willing to forgive them; his wrath and zeal will burn against them. All the curses written in this book will fall on them, and the LORD will blot out their names from under heaven.

Tracy also notes Matthew 18:21-25 where Jesus insists on unlimited forgiveness, yet in Matthew 18:15-18 Jesus insists on repentance.⁹⁰

Matthew 18:21-25 - Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive someone who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt."

Matthew 18:15-18 - "If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the 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."

Keene is of the view that because of the cultural context of the Mediterranean world where there was an imbalance of power, forgiveness with or without repentance was not always possible or expected.⁹¹ Keene considers the social anthropology of the New Testament context and examines the words and ideas regarding forgiveness which occur within the actual texts. This gives an opportunity to reconsider justice and abuse processes, especially as they relate to forgiveness of a perpetrator by a victim of family violence. Keene claims that the New Testament suggests that a person with less power cannot forgive a person of greater power. So a tenant could not forgive a landlord and by extension, a wife could not forgive an abusive husband. Keene says, "interpersonal forgiveness is possible only when, within the context of the interaction in which the question of forgiveness arises, the putative forgiver is more powerful than, or at least an equal of, the person being forgiven."⁹²

In developing his argument, Keene highlights the Mediterranean patron-client world represented in the New Testament text whereby the forgiveness of another would only have been relevant or appropriate when someone of higher rank or greater power was the one offering to forgive. In this context, if one were to receive forgiveness, one would have had to seek forgiveness and would have needed to offer themselves as a client in return. Forgiveness

⁹⁰ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 220.

⁹¹ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 122.

⁹² Ibid., 123.

had little to do with repentance but rather was concerned with honour, particularly the honour of the person being forgiven. For an inferior person to offer forgiveness to a superior person would be seen as an insult whereas forgiveness coming from a superior person or someone of equal standing would be acceptable. Keene goes on to say, "One person forgiving another would have been seen as laudable only if the forgiver were in a higher socio-economic position than the forgiven, and hence in a position to act as a patron."⁹³ Mark Strom (2007) reinforces the pyramidal nature of social networks within this Greco-Roman context by saying, "a vast web of patron-client relationships carried formal obligations and conventions, one worked to create obligations to oneself and called upon the conventions of enmity when slighted."⁹⁴

In addition to the theological discussion, Craig Blomberg (2006) asks the question: "Is forgiveness a necessity or a nicety for the Christian?"⁹⁵ When looking at Matthew 18:15-25, Blomberg considers the immediate context within the chapter rather than following Keene's treatment of forgiveness that looks at the wider New Testament. As a result, Blomberg suggests that the practice of forgiveness influences the well-being of a follower of Jesus in this life and the next. In these terms, forgiveness is not only possible but beneficial for individuals and for the community of faith. However Blomberg goes to great lengths to stress the use of "brother or sister" in Matthew 18:15 in order to emphasise the point that this expectation applied where there was an assumed relationship with no power imbalance since it was delivered solely to a select group of Jesus' followers.⁹⁶

Blomberg's treatment of Matthew 18:15-25 thus assumes forgiveness is operative or expected within a context of equality as followers of Jesus. He maintains that Matthew 18 is the fourth block of five main blocks of teaching within the gospel of Matthew delivered exclusively to a group of Jesus' followers (the others are Matthew 5-7, 10:5-42, 13:1-52 and 13:23-25). Equality is thus assumed in verse 15 by the use of the phrase "a brother or sister".⁹⁷ So, according to Blomberg, this admonition occurs in the context of how Christians are to respond to fellow Christians who have sinned against them and includes aspects of humility, scandal,

⁹³ Ibid., 122.

⁹⁴ Mark Strom, *The Arts of a Wise Leader* (Sydney, Australia: Sophos, 2007). 186.

⁹⁵ Craig Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 25, no. 2 (2006): 137.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

drifting from the faith, forgiveness and discipline. Blomberg says that Jesus' instruction in this mandate, as with other ethical injunctions, had less extreme offences in mind. He says "the most pathological exceptions are not necessarily in view"⁹⁸ and gives the example of not requiring a rape victim to confront her father. One would expect Blomberg's exceptions here would include the situation of a battered wife. Blomberg also claims that it is misguided to apply verses 21-22 of Mathew 18 to addictive behaviours such as abuse since to do so merely encourages the continuation of hurtful patterns of behaviour when intervention could be redemptive.⁹⁹

In considering domestic violence it is a challenge to take these wider principles regarding forgiveness into account when writers such as Blomberg insist that these principles do not apply to serious offences, or when Keene says it is not possible for a weaker party to forgive.

Lewis Smedes (1984) would disregard Keene's view of how power imbalances might influence forgiveness. In his book *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (1984), Smedes says that forgiveness is the key to wholeness for a victim even for serious offences. Repentance must be part of the deal for reconciliation to take place but this is not always wise, possible or necessary for a certain level or kind of forgiveness to be achieved. In contrast to others, Smedes says that "we need to forgive the unrepentant for our own sake. We need to forgive people who do not care if only so that we do not drown in our own misery."¹⁰⁰ Smedes has a view of the individual taking ownership and responsibility to release forgiveness and that although complete resolution, reconciliation or even healing may not be achieved, nevertheless there is much freedom and healing to be achieved in applying biblical principles of forgiveness and by doing what is possible. He says that while the climax of forgiveness takes two, the reality of forgiveness can still be achieved without such a climax. You do not always need a thing whole to enjoy it at all.¹⁰¹

In contrast to this Smedes cites the views of the late American theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965), who believed that "genuine forgiveness is participation, reunion overcoming the power

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York, USA: Harper Collins, 1984). 69.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 70.

of estrangement."¹⁰² Tillich believed that forgiveness cannot happen unless people come together in a renewed, close and connected, mutually accepting manner.¹⁰³ Smedes does not agree with this, saying that even if people are not brought together in renewed relationship, expressed forgiveness can be experienced partially by a victim. He says "we need not deny ourselves the healing of incomplete forgiving: we can forgive and be free in our own memories."¹⁰⁴

According to Tracy (1981), David Augsburger, (a popular writer on forgiveness), has a stance which aligns with some of Tillich's views. Tracy cites Augsburger's insistence that if we don't forgive others we will not be forgiven ourselves and claims such forgiveness involves the restoration of trust, letting go of all emotions including fear, anger, suspicion, alienation, and mistrust.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, Tracy insists that there is a need for abuse victims to hold onto mistrust and their fear of unrepentant abusers in order to remain safe or protective of themselves or others.¹⁰⁶ Tracy promotes a style of forgiveness which involves letting go of personal attempts for revenge and where possible and appropriate, extending grace and kindness, not hatred. This, he says, offers hope for abuse survivors and provides a call to repentance for abusers.¹⁰⁷

Based on her experiences, Ethel highlights this need to remember and thus remain safe:

Forgiveness. Well... I have found forgiveness, although I still would like to understand more. I certainly think that 'forgive and forget' is very dangerous. And one of the things when I was trying to re-establish some kind of relationship with the man I had been married to - in order to... well because I was trying to be open and honest, and he was still the father of our daughter. And I went to the minister and this time, instead of sending me back into the marriage - which is what he had done before... This time he said "Look after your sacred self, and remember the pain of the past. Don't forget it. Remember the pain from when you were in that relationship, so that you don't go back into the same things that you have gotten out of. You have to remember, not forget". So I think forgiveness is about some honest recognition. And it's about grace, and realising - I mean, it's not for me to judge and say somebody is evil if they do this or that or the other thing. There's grace in this, there is a bigger forgiveness and forgiveness on my part, to people - and somehow there has to be for myself in that kind of grace. But also, it doesn't mean that I forget everything, and it also means that

¹⁰² Ibid., 30.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 220., citing David Augsburger in his two volume work *Caring Enough to Forgive: True Forgiveness*, and *Caring Enough to Forgive: False Forgiveness* (Ventura, California, USA, Regal Books, 1981).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 227.

I focus on the actions that are harmful and injurious, rather than saying the person is wicked and evil. What they have done has been deeply injurious.

This resonates well with Smedes' earlier suggestion that forgiveness is essential for wholeness. Smedes refers to the role of memory and processing thoughts in light of the bigger picture of understanding the complexity of sin and our common need of grace. He says "You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well".¹⁰⁸ This is a powerful statement in the present context.

Theologian Miroslav Volf (2007) also has a view on the role of memory and how it relates to forgiveness, especially as it relates to the call to love our enemy. His views are from the perspective of his post-abuse experiences at the hands of the Yugoslav military in 1984. He says in such circumstances the Christian victim has a challenge when it comes to remembering 'rightly'. He says, "loving those who do me harm was precisely the hard path to which Jesus called me to follow him".¹⁰⁹

What we can conclude from this discussion is that the views of Blomberg, Keene, Smedes and Volf affirm that what is sometimes suggested pastorally as appropriate for a woman in an existing violent relationship, is not and was never intended to be applied to that situation by Jesus or Paul. Neither Paul nor Jesus expected a woman in such circumstances to forgive "seventy times seven," or to reconcile continuously in the absence of true repentance on the part of the perpetrator. In such circumstances, repentance has deeper significance to it than just saying sorry between equals.

Tracy helps us understand this when he explains, "while scripture does describe forgiveness as the removal or letting go of a debt (Matthew 6:12), forgiveness does not remove negative consequences for the one forgiven. Nor does it automatically grant trust and reconciliation".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*: 29.

¹⁰⁹ Miroslav Volf, "God's Forgiveness and Ours: Memory of Interrogations, Interrogation of Memory," *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 2 (2007): 225.

¹¹⁰ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 220., citing Doris Donnelly, "Forgiveness and Recidivism", *Pastoral Psychology*, 33, no. 1, (1984): 15-24, and Andy Bustanoby, "How do you forgive the Unrepentant?", *Leadership*, no 12, (1991): 98-14.

For his part, Keene grounds his argument regarding power imbalance and forgiveness in a study of New Testament linguistics saying there are three Greek words which are used for the verb “to forgive” - *apuluō*, *aphiēmi* and *charizomai*:

- *Apuluō* is used in Luke 6:37. It most often has the meaning of dismissing or divorcing a wife. It is also found in Matthew 5:32, Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12 again with this meaning. This, of course, was within a hierarchical context where power and control are in the hands of the husband. Forgiveness in these contexts thus flows from the more powerful to the less powerful.¹¹¹
- *Charizomai* has the meaning “to give freely, to be generous” and is from the same root as *charis*, the word usually translated as “grace” in the Pauline literature.
- *Aphiēmi* has two basic meanings; one is a juridical meaning of to leave or release e.g., “He has sent me to release the captives” (Luke 4:18); the other is related to commercial practice and relates to the remittance of a debt. Thus in the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4) and in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:27), the references to forgiveness have commercial connotations. The two meanings are related to the noun *aphesis* which means one is released from a debt, an obligation or penalty.¹¹²

Tracy concurs with this stance to some degree by saying that the classical Greek meaning of forgive as “to release” was carried over into the New Testament and nuanced with different shades of meaning including: to let go, send away, to cancel, remit, to leave, to give up, abandon, tolerate, permit. He says it is not appropriate to appeal to the root meaning “to release” exclusively as a comprehensive mandate for biblical forgiveness in the context of sexual abuse. He encourages a broad range look at scripture to ascertain pertinent principles.¹¹³

As mentioned, Keene claims the words forgive and forgiving relate to a more powerful person releasing another from an obligation, penalty or debt. He is adamant however that such use “...does not have an implication of a religious or cultic cleansing.”¹¹⁴ The references to forgiveness in the Bible he says are few and far between within the New Testament. Where

¹¹¹ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 126.

¹¹² Ibid., 125.

¹¹³ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 220.

¹¹⁴ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 124.

they do occur, they relate to God's forgiveness of sins; also to Jesus forgiving the sins of another; or, particularly following Jesus' resurrection, a combination of these where Jesus mediates God's forgiveness. In all these instances, says Keene, we observe a hierarchy with God and Jesus being in positions of power in relation to sin. The overtones of *aphiēmi* and *aphesis* suggest juridical and/or commercial dimensions to forgiveness. Keene claims "When it comes to people forgiving other people there are not very many references".¹¹⁵

A concern for many Christians is the exchange issues around forgiveness. Women victims who already face a burden of guilt are impacted significantly by this, especially where personal forgiveness and its relationship to God's forgiveness of us are concerned. These concepts are found in the Lord's Prayer with its reference to "and forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us" (Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4).

Keene claims that such petitions, "ask God to forgive human beings because they forgive others, leaving open the question of whether God will forgive humans if they did not forgive others." Such a prayer takes place within a hierarchy.¹¹⁶ Matthew 6:12 says because we have forgiven (*aphiēmi*) our debtors, then God should forgive (*aphiēmi*) our debts. These words according to Keene relate to juridical and/or commercial contexts but can also include spiritual aspects.

Looking at the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35 and Luke 17: 3-4, Keene observes that this does not involve a hierarchical situation as the people are referred to as "brothers" or "another disciple." This is thus a relationship of equals, as mentioned earlier. Blomberg makes the same observation.¹¹⁷

Keene says, "While forgiveness is neither expected nor required when the offender is higher in the power hierarchy - indeed, it probably is neither possible nor desirable - it is however expected when the person is an equal in the power structure."¹¹⁸ In these terms Matthew 18: 35, ("So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 125.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 138.

¹¹⁸ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 127.

or sister from the heart”) is reinforcing equality, not the forgiving of someone more powerful.¹¹⁹

A significant example is presented in Keene’s argument that the direction of forgiveness is from the more powerful to the least. In this regard, he asserts that Jesus did not actually forgive when he was on the cross (Luke 23: 34). Rather, says Keene, Jesus asked God to do the forgiving, since Jesus himself did not have power in this situation of execution and hence could not forgive. This is the one place where, if Jesus wanted the weak to forgive the strong, he could have indicated it. He did not, suggests Keene. Jesus asked the stronger (i.e., his Father) to forgive (*aphiēmi*), and, being the least powerful he did not offer the forgiveness himself. The relative positioning within the power structures remains the same: only the more powerful can be expected to forgive. The less powerful are not expected to forgive, and in the case of Jesus on the cross, they do not forgive the more powerful.”¹²⁰

Miroslav Volf has a very different perspective of Jesus’ prayer from the cross. In his book *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996), he quotes Moltmann, who seems to say that Jesus is actually doing the forgiving. Moltmann says “to forgive those who have wronged one is an act of highest sovereignty and great inner freedom. In forgiving and reconciling, the victims are superior to the perpetrators and free themselves from compulsion to evil deeds.”¹²¹ This is in contrast to Keene who sees Jesus as a victim in this situation. Volf expands his understanding of forgiveness and the cross in even greater contrast to Keene when he says “More than just the passive suffering of an innocent person, the passion of Christ was the agony of a tortured soul and wrecked body offered as a prayer for the forgiveness of torturers.”¹²²

It is interesting that Keene makes no reference to Jesus’ forgiveness toward the man crucified on his right. In some respects this could be taken to be an example of Keene’s stance on equality and power since Jesus was of equal standing relative to this man in a way that he was not with regard to those who were crucifying him. But then neither were those crucifying him asking for forgiveness. It is interesting that Jesus seeks and advocates for their forgiveness regardless of the absence of repentance and awareness on their part of their wrong doing.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 128.

¹²¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abington Press, 1996). 122.

¹²² Ibid., 125.

Perhaps this shows Volf's model in action or even illustrates part of Tracy's argument and highlights why forgiveness as an issue ends up being skewed for women victims of abuse. Volf is maintaining that forgiveness is required rather than revenge and as such is the more Christian ideal.¹²³

Brian Zahnd's book "*Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness* (2010) is endorsed by Volf who wrote the foreword. Zahnd also discusses forgiveness in relation to revenge. He says "forgiveness is a choice to end the cycle of revenge and leave justice in the hands of God".¹²⁴ Volf does say however that forgiveness is not a substitute for justice, and indeed forgiveness can include a demand for change and the righting of wrong.¹²⁵

Clearly in Jesus' treatments of forgiveness there is an intent that people be forgiven regardless of his ability to orchestrate this from the cross, and in leaving it in God's hands, it represents something of the letting go to which Tracy and Volf refer. For some, this is a kind of forgiveness which is enough in itself in God's economy. But is such a stance appropriate in the context of existing and on-going domestic violence? Zahnd seems to suggest that it is. In relation to Jesus' prayer from the cross, Zahnd says forgiveness was offered in the midst of great suffering.

It is notable in Zahnd's book that the examples of expressed grace and forgiveness occur post-abuse and are related to instances of historical abuse. In each instance the victim had reached a position of power, i.e., a nurse tending an injured soldier who has previously been a rapist. He does, though, refer to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and quotes from him on the cost of discipleship, "The call to follow Christ always means a call to share in the work of forgiving men their sins."¹²⁶ Zahnd reminds his readers that Bonhoeffer's theology was forged in the crucible of real and costly suffering.¹²⁷ However, we know that Bonhoeffer's suffering was a response to his own stand against the unjust suffering of others which he saw as something not to be simply tolerated by victim or bystander.

This is in contrast to Keene who also notes the four places in the New Testament outside the gospels where interpersonal forgiveness is discussed (2 Corinthians 2: 5-11, 2 Corinthians

¹²³ Ibid., 122.

¹²⁴ Brian Zahnd, *Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness* (Florida, USA: Charisma House 2010). 20.

¹²⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*: 123.

¹²⁶ Zahnd, *Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness*: 21.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

12:13, Ephesians 4: 32, and Colossians 3: 13). All are in Pauline or deuterio-Pauline literature and all four use the *charizomai* form of to forgive (i.e., “to give freely, to be generous”). Equality within the community of faith is a given and God’s hierarchy of power which governs forgiveness is also present.¹²⁸

Keene is adamant that we note here that there is no hint that the less powerful are being asked to forgive those with greater power. He especially draws attention to 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 where Paul, from a position of leadership and power encourages forgiveness of a brother following a punishment exacted by the congregation.¹²⁹

Again the pattern advocated by Keene is observed, viz., forgiveness can take place between equals; where there is inequality, forgiveness should flow from the more powerful; but when a weaker person has been offended against, that person is not expected to forgive. Based most especially on the stance of Jesus on the cross not being in a position to forgive (at least according to Keene), he says “no one should be asked or expected to forgive those who retain power in a relationship where forgiveness might be applicable.”¹³⁰

This discussion has broadly raised the varying biblical perspectives of what forgiveness meant historically in the context of the New Testament and how some well-known theologians have dealt with the topic. The different stances and interpretations highlight the complexity and confusion faced by women in abusive relationships as they attempt to appropriately apply their own understandings and commitment to forgiveness and what they believe is being asked or modelled in scripture. For some there is help, relief, guidance, hope and liberation; for others there is only confusion and bondage.

Harriet expressed this confusion:

I beat myself up ... because for a while Mark had taken this moral high ground and he's moved on and he's doing what I should be able to do, and why am I so stuck? Why has the church embraced him and he's got all this new life and ... you know, I'm still...? It doesn't take me much to take me back and it breaks my heart - yet he's got this whole new life, he's forgiven... he says he doesn't care who I tell and what I say about it - but we've got children, and I'm very respectful of their privacy. It frustrates me that he is leading such a successful Christian life, and I'm still really struggling. And I don't

¹²⁸ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 129.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 130.

know whether that's part of embracing that... his ability to embrace his forgiveness and my inability to forgive, or I don't know... it's difficult...

Intertwining Biblical Views of Forgiveness with Therapeutic Practice and the Implications and Possible Outcomes for Victims

As stated previously, forgiveness of her abuser looms large as an issue-cum-dilemma for a victim of domestic abuse. Achieving a sound understanding and constructive application of forgiveness is a challenge both for those caught up in the situation and others offering advice and counsel from the side-lines. There are many different and varied understandings and interpretations of forgiveness, with some understandings leaving the door open for the abuse to continue. This issue is of paramount concern in this thesis. Relevant views of Christian practitioners and some biblical scholars in the field of family violence will now be discussed.

Australian narrative therapist Patrick O'Leary works with male sexual abuse survivors who were abused within the context of the church. His insights may be helpful in considering forgiveness choices open to a woman caught up in an abusive family context and subject to pressure to constantly forgive. There is too much to lose by withholding forgiveness, says O'Leary. He claims that for some victims, forgiveness can be one of the few options available to enable them to move forward in their lives especially for those who have no option but to live in close physical proximity to a perpetrator or for those who share a social network and family relationship with the perpetrator. According to O'Leary, not all victims have the same option of condemning a perpetrator.¹³¹ He also notes that "For Christians, not to forgive can represent a failure to fully practice their faith."¹³²

As previously mentioned, biblical scholar Craig Blomberg is of help here because of his scathing critique of interpretations of Matthew 18:15-35 being applied to family or friends who have addictive behaviours. He maintains that by citing these verses, people are given license to continue harmful patterns of behaviour without redemptive process and intervention.¹³³ He advocates Jesus' interpretation of this by saying verses 15-20 relate to church discipline whereas, in verses 23-35, God as King retracts his forgiveness. Along similar lines, biblical scholar Steven Tracy says that in the previous verses of Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus calls for the

¹³¹ Patrick O'Leary, "The Church, Confession, Forgiveness and Male Sexual Abuse," *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* 1, no. 1 (2002): 8.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³³ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 137.

excommunication of those who do not repent.¹³⁴ Tracy again reminds us of the need to draw principles from the various passages which deal with forgiveness.¹³⁵

In wanting to be obedient to God and church, Christian women living in abusive situations are exposed to admonitions to forgive but their understanding of scripture and how it applies to their situation does not always result in freedom from abuse, lead to changed behaviour, or indeed provide the hoped for emotional relief. Marie Fortune talks of the hope that forgiveness will bring healing and will resolve the emotional pain and attendant issues related to the abuse.¹³⁶ The expectation women have regarding the benefits of offered or pressured forgiveness do not always lead to freedom, closure or beneficial results. This in turn can lead to a greater sense of guilt and frustration and sometimes increased danger. Lewis Smedes discusses the role of truthfulness in the process of forgiving saying that a perpetrator must know that the sin suffered at their hands was unfair and undeserved and that they in turn must feel the hurt the victim feels.¹³⁷

Celeste's comments allude to these issues:

Forgiveness, in relation to family violence was difficult! Very much the - what was it - seventy times seven? It's something I had to keep on doing. Yes because the same situations would arise and you'd still need to forgive... and ask for the help to do so. I was repeatedly forgiving the same things, again and again and again. You need to, if we hold on to issues and don't forgive; it's going to poison us. Forgiveness during abuse is incredibly difficult - but there's still the knowledge that somehow I had to get there. It was something that I couldn't turn around and say "Look, I forgive you for that", because it was never understood. I couldn't express it, because I'm quite sure that he had no understanding that he was being abusive - absolutely none. So the benefits of forgiveness for me during abuse were I guess, trying to keep the slate clear. Not allowing it to build up and become bitter. And definitely not allowing me to become bitter. It's hard for me to look back to that, I knew that if I didn't forgive, then it was going to build up, and build up, and build up. I didn't want to become bitter, so that I could... and in some way, keeping myself in the place where hopefully I could encourage Brian to make some growth himself - it never happened, but... that was a large part of where I was coming from over those years. Trying to encourage him to - grow up!

And for Celeste there was the recognition of potential danger:

I had medical staff saying "You should leave him". And my response was "No - it's not right. You don't leave somebody just because they're sick, and this is sickness." I didn't make the decision until it came to the point where my life was at risk.

¹³⁴ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 221.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Fortune; Adams, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, 201.

¹³⁷ Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*: 34.

Mary's understanding of forgiveness did not leave her unaffected or free of pain in her future:

I'm a Christian I've got Christ, all things forgiven, start anew - I kind of packaged it all up and put it in my past, and just wanted to keep it there, you know what I mean? And not bring it up. The thing that's brought it up again was when my daughter was in an abusive relationship - and that became like a huge shock to me! And so, you know - whether I packaged it up and put it aside and went on from there - didn't stop it happening again in my family! And also I didn't want to talk about it too much because I didn't want my children to take on that mantle of "My mother was abused" or "My father abused my mother." You had to leave some shred of decency about that person for the child. I didn't tell exactly, just how... Not as bad as it was, no. I mean, I might have told my daughter about her father once or twice - I remember telling her about one incident... and I can remember telling my son about his Dad - maybe one or two incidents - but no, I have never gone into the real horror of it, never even now. I've never sat down and looked in their face and said, "Do you realise what that did to me? Do you realise what that person did?" Because that's their father!

Carol Schweitzer, professor, pastor and pastoral counsellor, states that women are most vulnerable following the third stage of the abuse cycle when a partner has expressed remorse and made promises to change. According to Schweitzer, the first stage of abuse is the escalation of conflict; the second stage is the specific violence; this is followed by a third stage of contrition and requests for forgiveness.¹³⁸ Schweitzer says those victimised are most vulnerable at the third stage, particularly if they subscribe to religious beliefs that include a mandate to forgive.¹³⁹ Such beliefs prevent a woman from seeking physical safety. Lewis Smedes is in agreement with this when he says, "we don't have to tolerate what people do just because we forgive them for doing it, forgiveness heals us personally. To tolerate everything only hurts us all in the long run."¹⁴⁰

In an article in the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* (2008), researchers and clinical psychologists Elizabeth Krumeri, Annette Mahoney and Kenneth Pargament reported on a study of divorce records where those involved reported varying degrees of "turning to God to forgive." The research found that higher levels of forgiveness at the time of divorce led to an increase in ex-spousal verbal aggression over time. This may be consistent with the view that forgiving transgressors provides them with a license to continue in wrongdoing. This led the

¹³⁸ Carol L Schnabl Schweitzer, "Violence Against Women and Children: How Churches Can Respond," *Word and World* 24, no. 1 (2004): 69.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*: 49.

authors to ask “does engaging in spiritual forgiveness place individuals in a vulnerable position for experiencing continued and increased transgressions from the ex-spouse?”¹⁴¹

In reflecting on her experiences, Kiera commented:

We have to forgive people, but we also have to set boundaries very clearly. That's part of the forgiveness. That's part of the journey of them coming to forgiveness themselves. Well actually I had to learn the hard way because that's an area I am very weak - because I let the perpetrator come right into private areas. And there the law helped me - protection orders were put into place, trespass orders were put into place - so there were boundaries that he was not to come close to here, and he had to stay away when we meet in public. But these boundaries - they were so important and necessary, and from those boundaries I actually learned to take boundaries. Like sometimes he would come to the door - even now he does it - he comes to the door, he throws something at me, and I've learned to say "I'm sorry, I'm quite busy, I have to go soon and I'm closing the door now" and then I close the door. I could not do that as a newly separated person, I was too vulnerable. You learn with the years, he still comes and behaves badly, not too badly anymore but he is still on a journey to actually acknowledge the truth.

Krumrei, Mahoney and Pargament's research also reveals that post-divorce, Christians who emphasised forgiveness as part of the divorce process did not become more verbally abusive towards ex-spouses over time. This, they say, may reflect a lack of power. They state, “Although individuals who to a greater extent turn to God to try to forgive report improvements in their spiritual lives over time, they also report more conflictual post-divorce relationships with their ex-spouses over time.”¹⁴² These forgiving women continue to have the imposition of unwanted conflict.

Harriet was a victim of her passive tolerance:

Maybe that whole covenant thing is that. He strongly believes that we'll get back together - even though we're divorced - and he tells me on regular occasions that he loves me, that he's right there - anything I need. But I think he just completely forgets about what he did that ended our marriage, and how disrespectful it was... and it was, like... not the first, you know... it was like - we've already worked through this stuff, you know... I've already forgiven you and forgiven you and forgiven you... and it gets to the point where I can't do that anymore.

Marie Fortune is cited by Nason-Clark (1997) as claiming that forgiveness should not be the starting point of a process and that it is misguided to think that words of forgiveness by

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth J Krumrei; Annette Mahoney; Kenneth I Pargament, "Turning to God to Forgive: More than Meets the Eye," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 27, no. 4 (2008): 309.

¹⁴² Ibid.

themselves reduce the pain and augment the healing process.¹⁴³ Fortune contends that forgiveness before justice represents cheap grace and helps neither victim nor offender. Indeed it can be dangerous to the victim and suppress the possibility of reform for the abuser, effectively perpetuating the cycle of abuse in a relationship.¹⁴⁴ This is supported by Blomberg (2006) who maintains that to simply say one is sorry or to offer an apology, does not constitute biblical repentance; there must be an accompanying change in behaviour.¹⁴⁵ Kroeger shares this view when she says, "Forgiveness does not mean going on as though nothing ever happened. Neither God nor human beings can forgive in a vacuum. Repentance calls for a transformed attitude and lifestyle."¹⁴⁶

Carolyn Holderread Heggen (1996), psychotherapist and expert practitioner in the area of abuse, also supports this view. She maintains that a facile, quick forgiveness that does not demand accountability and responsibility increases the possibility of on-going violence.¹⁴⁷ Heggen quotes Lenore Walker (1979) whose research found that women with strong religious backgrounds are often the least likely to believe that violence against them is wrong.¹⁴⁸ Fortune shares this stance regarding the cycle of abuse and suggests that the crisis phase (stage two) is often followed by contrition and loving behaviour and pleas for forgiveness (stage three). Complying with this pattern may simply perpetuate or reinforce the abusive behaviour.¹⁴⁹ Blomberg agrees with this in his treatment of Matthew 18:21-22 when he says, "When there is not true repentance on the part of the abuser it can be counterproductive or even harmful to forgive"¹⁵⁰ Blomberg refers to the partial dis-fellowshipping suggested in these verses and to God's judgment of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35.

¹⁴³ Cited in Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). 17.

¹⁴⁴ Fortune; Adams, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, 202.

¹⁴⁵ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 145.

¹⁴⁶ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 116-17.

¹⁴⁷ Carolyn Holderread Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture can be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger & James R Beck (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), 27.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴⁹ Fortune; Adams, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, 202.

¹⁵⁰ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 146.

Fortune claims that forgiveness is the last step a survivor may or even should make with regard to the healing process and that prior steps are needed for a victim to be “freed to forgive.”¹⁵¹ Commenting on Luke 17:3-4, Fortune says that before forgiveness is approached, prerequisites are necessary comprising “elements of justice” without which forgiveness has no meaning.¹⁵² She says hasty forgiveness which disregards justice may perpetuate the abuse cycle and also negate and disallow redemption for abusers because they are prevented from being made accountable.¹⁵³

In describing justice as being pre-conditional to forgiveness, Fortune highlights three steps. The first step involves the perpetrator acknowledging responsibility for harm. The second step is the perpetrator’s repentance with an emphasis on the need for fundamental change. The third step is restitution which acknowledges cost and includes an attempt to make right that which was broken.¹⁵⁴ While each of these steps is necessary for the offender, Fortune nevertheless acknowledges that often the offender is “unwilling or unavailable” to take them.¹⁵⁵ Such an unwilling stance may put the offender into the more powerful position, as Keene has claimed.¹⁵⁶

As stated previously, Blomberg advocates the need for repentance and claims that in Matthew 18:15-35, when a fellow Christian fails to repent, the appropriate response as prescribed in verse 17b is “some kind of dis-fellowshipping.”¹⁵⁷ He says, however, that the disciplining of a fellow believer in the New Testament was “always restorative” and not “retributive in intent.”¹⁵⁸ The well-being of all parties is dependent on change and “relationships clearly cannot move forward with ‘business as usual’ until the disputes that initiated the process of discipline are adequately resolved”.¹⁵⁹ Blomberg goes on to say that forgiveness cannot lead to reconciliation if one party is not willing to repent. Jesus’ understanding of unlimited forgiveness as described in verse 22 means returning to the way things were prior to the

¹⁵¹ Fortune; Adams, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, 201.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 202.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 132.

¹⁵⁷ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 139.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., citing C F D Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Biblical and Theological Essays* (1998).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

offence.¹⁶⁰ In a battered wife scenario this often means offences, plural. Blomberg also claims that simply apologising does not “in and of itself constitute biblical repentance unless it is accompanied by a change in action”.¹⁶¹ Blomberg, like Kroeger, claims that in the absence of genuine repentance, it can be counterproductive and harmful to forgive within the framework of behaving as if all is well again. This stance means the offender “has no incentive to repent” and his sinful behaviour is reinforced.¹⁶²

Harriet concurs with this:

He feels completely forgiven and renewed, and is very comfortable about what happened and what he did and where he's moved on from and all that... and I ... haven't moved on in the same way, and struggle with... um... how quickly he moved on from the trauma that it was for me. But I think he just completely forgets about what he did that ended our marriage, and how disrespectful it was... and it was. And I want him... part of me wants him to understand the depth of my pain - but he's a man. I don't think they think the way we do, or suffer the way we do, or feel things the way we do - that's what he did, he's forgiven. God has given him new opportunities in a new place, so he doesn't have to deal with my sadness or anger or whatever, because he's just there waiting for us to be together again because he believes our marriage is a covenant under God, and ultimately God will put it back together. And despite me saying "It's not really God's decision, I think it's up to me as well", he says "Yeah, but just give yourself enough time, God's going to change you".

Megan didn't experience repentance:

So I was able to forgive him for the affair, but I couldn't forgive him for the porn and for following up with these women, or texting them - in some ways it was childish, it was just... you know... um... and sneaky, and... yeah... and just... it was just stupid, and it just got in the way of trying to fix things and trying to help. So he thought he was hiding it!! But it was really, really obvious! He thought he was being pretty sneaky and smart and all the rest of it but the wife always knows. I knew when something had happened. And I thought about it and thought about it, and then I asked him - and he said "No." And then when I found out, I thought, I knew it! Your instinct is always on the money. So - things on the computer, and the way he was acting - I just thought... oh... you're fooling yourself as well, trying to pretend that it's not happening. And then the texts - oh, and I must admit that, you know, you'd find other things - you'd find notebooks - and he had things written down and you'd just think "Oh my goodness - this is just incredible". There were lots - I mean, heaps more, but I had enough to know what was going on, and to know it was going on really, really regularly over the years. He wanted to stay married, but at the same time he had at this stage a real addiction to women on the internet - many who I think he connected up with, in one form or another - and I began to feel very uneasy that he was sleeping with other women. I moved out of our bedroom, because I couldn't trust him to have safe sex with other people. It's very abusive to have your husband on the internet with other women...Yeah! And the kids knew! Yeah - cos he'd go into the study and there'd be 'fumble-fumble-fumble' - with the computer. And you'd think "Oh for goodness

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁶² Ibid., 146.

sake - do you think they're stupid?" The kids... at one stage my daughter hacked into his account and sent emails to some of his lady-friends and told them what-for and all the rest of it - she would've been 15 and in the end I said "The kids know - there's no point in trying to cover it up, they're not silly". And he was really silly about occasionally leaving things up on the screen.

I feel in some ways that he's got away with it - that he's done all these awful things, but because there's not been a great big, out and out fight and screaming match and the other thing, that he's... oh well.

Questions and Challenges concerning Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The pressure for an abuse victim to forgive a perpetrator often includes expectations of reconciliation reflecting the view that this is a pinnacle to which Christians who are estranged from each other should aspire.

Kroeger challenges this viewpoint, however, in claiming that the Bible does not insist on returning to a relationship within which there has been conflict, violent or otherwise. In this regard she cites the relationships between Paul and Barnabas, Peter and Paul and Jacob and Esau. She also notes that even Joseph tested the genuineness of the repentance of his brothers.¹⁶³

Millar (1994) also draws on Joseph's story and points out that his willingness to forgive was dependent on a complete change in his brothers' behaviour.¹⁶⁴ This is somewhat congruent with Keene's New Testament treatment of power¹⁶⁵ insofar as Joseph was only able to forgive and be reconciled from his position of power.¹⁶⁶ However, the process was long and the outcome was dependent on his eldest brother Judah taking full responsibility for past misdemeanours.

Millar's definition of forgiveness is "letting go of resentment."¹⁶⁷ She advocates for the Greek juridical interpretation of forgive as "to leave" (*aphiēmi*) and suggests that the application of this relates to one's inner attitudinal response of being gradually able to think of offences without "being overwhelmed by churning emotions of fear and rage."¹⁶⁸ She says forgiveness

¹⁶³ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 116.

¹⁶⁴ Melissa A Millar, *Family Violence: The Compassionate Church Responds* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Herald Press, 1994). 155.

¹⁶⁵ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 132.

¹⁶⁶ Millar, *Family Violence: The Compassionate Church Responds*: 156.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

is different to reconciliation. While forgiveness means a survivor can let go of resentment, it does not necessarily mean that the relationship is reconcilable.¹⁶⁹ While agreeing with Kroeger who says that the Bible exhorts us to forgive others, Millar says that it does not however insist that we return to the circumstances which occasioned an offence. Forgiveness thus does not assume reconciliation. Kroeger says forgiveness involves putting something away, setting it free, as well as putting it aside in order to move onto something else. She sees this in terms of putting away our anger towards another, so that it no longer controls our life".¹⁷⁰ Kroeger translates forgiving as loosing or freeing oneself from anger and resentment towards another. Again this process is assumed to apply to a post-abuse situation where abuse is no longer taking place. Unlike Keene¹⁷¹, Kroeger sees forgiveness as an ultimate goal but not in the context of existing abuse. Post-abuse, she sees the need for prayer and the solace of scripture, to deal with the impact of painful memories.¹⁷²

While Keene suggests the victim cannot forgive,¹⁷³ Kroeger claims the Bible does exhort us to forgive since it is forgiveness which settles the soul. Smedes (1984) puts it tenderly when he says "If they cannot or will not pay their fare (meaning take responsibility for wrongdoing) you will have to settle for your own healing, your private freedom from hate, and your own inner peace."¹⁷⁴

Blomberg draws on a distinction made by Berecz (2001) who describes two levels or types of forgiveness – disjunctive and conjunctive. Disjunctive forgiveness involves a release, where the parties separate. Conjunctive forgiveness on the other hand, involves fully fledged reconciliation.¹⁷⁵ Blomberg goes on to say that conjunctive forgiveness is dependent on cooperation between parties and points out that God's offering of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for individual sin does not impose reconciliation on one who would reject him.¹⁷⁶ Disjunctive forgiveness is expanded into two subcategories - singular and mutual. In a situation where there is abuse or adultery and a perpetrator is in denial of any wrongdoing, the victim may need to separate unilaterally (singular disjunctive forgiveness). If, however, there is an

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 153.

¹⁷⁰ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 115.

¹⁷¹ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 123.

¹⁷² Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 117.

¹⁷³ Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," 123.

¹⁷⁴ Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*: 32.

¹⁷⁵ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 146.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 151.

amicable divorce where “both parties agree repentance is not sufficient to salvage a marriage from the sins committed”, one may speak of mutual disjunctive forgiveness.¹⁷⁷ Blomberg says all three types of forgiveness can be faithful to scripture and “may be the best that can be managed in this fallen world”.¹⁷⁸

With Nason-Clark, Kroeger maintains that in Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8; Luke 19:8-9; Acts 26:20 and Ephesians 4:28, Jesus and Paul called for repentance that went well beyond a mere trite expression of contrition:

Matthew 3: 8 - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Luke 3:8 - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Luke: 19:8-9 - But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

Acts 26:20 - First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

Ephesians 4:28 - Those who have been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Such scriptures counter an inappropriate misuse of the “seventy times seven” admonition, especially when directed at a victim of domestic violence. Kroeger maintains that repentance calls for a transformed attitude and lifestyle.¹⁷⁹

Tracy is of the opinion that the most damaging definitions of forgiveness conflate forgiveness, trust and reconciliation, eliminating the possibility of negative consequences for the offender. He further says that Christians ought to encourage perpetrators to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour, take steps to change, respect the boundaries of their victims and ensure there is no risk of a victim being further victimised.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 146.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 117.

¹⁸⁰ Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 224., citing J G Haber, *Forgiveness* (1991)., and Lewis Smedes, "Forgiving People Who Do Not Care", *Reformed Journal*, (1983), 33: 13-18.

While Marie Fortune is of a similar view,¹⁸¹ she advocates a culture of repentance and forgiveness which can leave the door open for the option of reconciliation but that the prospect of reconciliation must be approached with great care:

“Reconciliation therefore means that the survivor and abuser no longer relate to each other as victim and abuser. The survivor is not powerless; the abuser is not overpowering and coercive. The survivor need not be fearful. Battering is no longer an option for the former abuser as he relates to the survivor. In this context, the survivor and former abuser may choose to renew an intimate relationship. Many formerly battered women desire to renew an intimate relationship. For them, reconciliation takes this specific form. Others never want to be in an intimate relationship with their former abuser again; for them reconciliation may mean clearly ending that relationship while being assured that their former abuser will not continue to pursue and harass them.”¹⁸²

In relation to forgiveness and reconciliation, the preceding paragraphs have presented a range of views, understandings and expectations held by the Christian community based on particular understandings of scripture. These views have found their way to varying degrees into the mind-set and hearts of women living in the context of domestic violence or who have left an abusive or violent relationship. How appropriate some of these views are regarding reconciliation in the context of existing violence as opposed to the forgiveness processes post-violence are questions that are both challenging and complex.

Harriet attests to this:

I'm 99% sure that we'll never get back together, but there's that 1% that says you never know with God. But the other reason that I don't think I could is that I just don't think I could live with him saying, "See! Told you so! God said it would happen!"

As does Amanda:

...I used to always have this picture in my head when things used to happen, and he'd say "Suck it in, get over it, that's in the past - we'll put it in the past and just forget it and move on." And I used to have this picture every time he said that, like there was this mat on the floor - and he would just sweep the issue under the mat. And it was never forgiven, it was never forgotten - it was always just pushed to the side. Well, it wasn't ... I mean, it couldn't have been forgiven from me because he was the one that pushed it away... he's the one that put it under the mat. He didn't ask for forgiveness... No, but if anything happened, he'd always - as I say - sweep it under the mat. And I remember saying to him one day "You've pushed so much stuff under that mat that

¹⁸¹ Marie M Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum For Clergy And Other Helpers* (Cleveland, Ohio, USA: Pilgrim Press, 1991). 185.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 186.

one day you're going to turn and just fall on it." It was just a big mountain of just crap, and he didn't deal with the issues that were happening that he didn't want to deal with - like, issues that could've been brought out and that could've been discussed and could've been... I dunno... forgiven.

Relating Forgiveness Issues to Existing Domestic Violence

As explored in the previous sections, an area of conflicted understanding relates to what forgiveness does or does not mean. Many of the views expressed, however, relate to historical abuse rather than the situation where a victim is still in an abusive relationship. In the main, therefore, viewpoints are expressed from the perspective of post-abuse forgiveness rather than forgiveness within an abusive situation. The difference is significant.

Patrick O'Leary's work with adult male victims of sexual abuse (2002) offers further insights into the complexity where victims want to offer forgiveness. While some abused women need to manage on-going relationships after divorce or separation (usually because of children), it is nevertheless the case that some have had positive experiences in their relationships even while abuse was occurring. They shared defining moments of intimacy with their spouse. However, within the context of sexual abuse such experiences may have been part of the tactics for perpetration.¹⁸³ Another genuine complexity arises from feelings of love and pity that the male victims who were part of O'Leary's study felt toward their abusers.¹⁸⁴ Abused wives feel these emotions too, especially wives who are Christians.

Harriet says:

Early on in our relationship he hit me on two occasions - once he was just absolutely furious about something and just lost it, and the other time he was just stressed and had failed a course, and was in a really bad place. I was married for 30 years, and I would have said that I had a pretty happy marriage, really. We had our highs and lows and ups and downs, but I thought it was okay.

O'Leary has some views regarding forgiveness within on-going relationships. When Christian women victims are pastorally advised to forgive and remain in the context of violence it is assumed that confession and forgiveness wipe the slate clean and things can get back to normal. O'Leary says of such a scenario, "this process does not work in the real world."¹⁸⁵ After forgiveness is sought and given, the relationship does not go back to how it was. It is not a

¹⁸³ O'Leary, "The Church, Confession, Forgiveness and Male Sexual Abuse," 9.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

matter of wiping the slate clean. There may be some transformation, but it never goes back to how it was prior to the wrong being committed.¹⁸⁶

This is the burden women victims carry. As already stated, offers of forgiveness to the one who abuses but is still the focus of love, are more often than not accompanied by a naive hope for change and safety.

Fortune (1995) says that for a victim “forgiveness is letting go of the immediacy of the trauma, the memory of which continues to terrorise the victim and limit possibilities.”¹⁸⁷ Volf (2007) also leans towards the role of memory in dealing with abuse, as does Smedes (1984). Fortune claims that memory is the lens through which we view the world and claims that when one forgives, the lenses are put aside but kept close at hand. Like Volf, forgiveness means choosing to no longer allow a memory of abuse to continue to trouble. Melissa Millar asserts that “healing depends on remembering”¹⁸⁸ but that forgiveness and reconciliation are completely different.¹⁸⁹

Fortune also reinforces the point that forgiveness is not a starting point; it requires time and must be driven by the timetable of the victim. Fortune claims that forgiveness is part of healing but that forgiveness does not mean forgetting. She says trying to forget is a waste of valuable energy and that “putting the memory into perspective so that it no longer dominates one’s life is more useful”.¹⁹⁰ Thus, Fortune claims forgiveness does not need to mean trusting or returning to a relationship and the choice to forgive ought not to be tied to decisions to reconcile. This stands in contrast to the view that returning to and restoring a relationship is the fruit of true forgiveness.

It needs to be remembered that Volf, Smedes, and Blomberg are reflecting on forgiveness after the fact. For women functioning within a present and existing abusive relationship, however, forgiveness is not so straightforward. These scholars would presumably not expect battered women to remain in a context of cohabitation and on-going violence with her abuser. Yet in some church communities this is the expectation that is brought to bear on the situation

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Fortune, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, 203.

¹⁸⁸ Millar, *Family Violence: The Compassionate Church Responds*: 157.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 153.

¹⁹⁰ Fortune; Adams, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, 204.

of Christian wives suffering abuse. This can be seen from the following statement from the Saddleback Church of Southern California: "Domestic abuse is no excuse for divorce."¹⁹¹ Some within the Christian community perceive staying as a true marker that one has successfully forgiven.

Volf deals with the difficulty that is being faced here. He says "instead of wanting to forgive, we instinctively seek revenge".¹⁹² The trouble with revenge, of course, is that it enslaves us. However with regard to a victim living with violence, is forgiveness offered from confusion and wanting the (sometimes biblically misconstrued) spiritual benefits of one's own forgiveness and/or the need to stay within the approval of Christian community, or even to de-escalate conflict? Maybe there is room in God's economy to withhold the existing status quo in a relationship of violence in order to pursue safety and create appropriate boundaries.

Having left an abusive situation, a woman can perhaps approach forgiveness differently, but questions need to be asked about the appropriateness of this while the woman is still in the abusive situation. Blomberg helpfully quotes from Dan Allender when he says "A forgiving heart cancels the debt but does not lend new money until repentance occurs. A forgiving heart opens the door to any who knock. But entry into the home – that is, the heart – does not occur until the muddy shoes and dirty coat have been taken off."¹⁹³

Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on the topic of forgiveness and how particular scriptures (i.e. Matthew 6:12; Matthew 18:15-25) inform some common beliefs regarding how forgiveness relates to Christian women facing domestic violence. Questions and considerations regarding how repentance applies to situations of abuse were noted. The intertwining of biblical understandings and practical application were explored, focusing on the caution to forgive in the absence of changed behaviour expressed by Blomberg, Smedes, Fortune and others. Issues relating to having a high regard for reconciliation as an ideal goal in forgiveness were

¹⁹¹ Catherine Clark Kroeger, "More About Saddleback, Abuse and Divorce," *PASCH: Peace and Safety in the Christian Home* 2008., page 104. http://issuu.com/anrbuckley/docs/jan_feb_2009_pasch_newsletter. The original context of the Saddleback statement is no longer available via their website.

¹⁹² Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*: 120.

¹⁹³ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 147.

discussed, taking into account the complexity for women when safety and well-being remain in question, especially when in a situation of on-going abuse.

Chapter 4 will now explore the issues of divorce and the permanence of marriage.

Chapter Four

Divorce and the Permanence of Marriage

Amanda: *I remember when I was younger Mum would always say "Oh, you can't get divorced - when you marry, you marry for life". Obviously Mum's 78 now, and maybe there's people who divorced or separated in her lifetime and they were always shunned, or... for me it was always 'you make your bed, you lie in it'. You've chosen, this is what you chose, and so you need to stay in it there was... can't remember the woman's name... in the Bible... and she was, um... does it start with T? She was, um... raped... Tamar, that's right. And I guess that's kind of I'm saying sometimes I felt like that in my marriage. Physically raped... physically, things were torn away from me... physically abused, mentally and emotionally abused... discarded I felt worthless, used, unworthy, that's in my marriage, but also in the church... I mean, 'raped' is a really big word, but stripped, I suppose, would be better. When I left my husband, my so-called friends... I thought they were my friends and I thought they cared - they were kind of stripped away, they decided to move on. Like I said - when I saw the church marriage counsellor after I had left Jack, it was just like... we'd spent so much time with her and she knew so much about me, and I just wanted to... I just, I don't know... I just wanted to talk to her and just explain, or just have a hug or whatever, and it didn't happen - you know what I mean? I don't know how to put that. I often felt rejected. Blacklisted, or... like a blemish, you know what I mean.*

Matthew 5:31-32 - "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

Introduction

The concept of marriage as a covenant is often claimed as the justification for its permanence, regardless of relationship difficulties or whatever else may be taking place within a particular marriage. This chapter will consider and explore views of theologians, practitioners and relevant writers on this topic, focusing on the concept of covenant in relation to an abusive marriage and also the elevation of the Christian family as an ideal within some evangelical circles. These two concepts, marriage as covenant and family as an ideal, will be considered in relation to the presence of abuse in a marriage, noting the dilemmas when pastoral responses encourage or promote commitment and staying together regardless of abuse. As in the previous chapter, comments and reflections from interviewees will be used to illustrate issues being raised.

In order to understand the intent and application of the concept of marriage-as-covenant within scripture, the following issues will be discussed:

1. Covenant scenarios in the Old Testament
2. Covenants can be broken

3. The permanence of marriage
4. The New Testament and divorce
5. Covenant-making between individuals, and
6. Putting “saving the family” above concerns about ensuring personal safety.

Discussion of these will be preceded by noting the dilemmas regarding divorce faced by Christian women caught in abusive marriages.

Dilemmas Regarding Divorce

As Amanda explained in the comment at the head of the chapter, Christian women living within relationships of violence face challenges that derive from internalised values and beliefs regarding the sanctity of the family, divorce and marriage as a covenant. According to Nason-Clark, the pressure within the evangelical Christian community which holds the “family” in such high regard presents distinct struggles and dilemmas for Christian women who are battered.¹⁹⁴

Ron Clark (2009) describes his perception of Christian women who are battered and how they experience church:

“They sit in the pews and see healthy families (or those that appear to be healthy) and feel guilty. They hear sermons critical of divorce and how Satan is causing the breakdown of the family. They hear how Jesus overcame evil by submission and endurance. They hear how marriage is not about happiness but commitment. They hear how we are victims of the wickedness of society, and that hope, prayer and endurance will bring us victory... How has the faith community become an enabler of the abuse cycle? We hold to spiritual doctrines that further victimise victims and that keep abusers abusing. We turn our heads from the cries of the oppressed. We confront victims rather than abusers, and call for submission rather than justice.”¹⁹⁵

Nason-Clark (1997) quotes American traditional family advocate James Dobson’s claim that “God hates divorce” (see Malachi 2:16), and notes his conclusion that everything possible should therefore be done to salvage even violent marriages. Dobson is of the view that change is possible even in such circumstances and that it is the responsibility of the victim to take

¹⁹⁴ Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). 83.

¹⁹⁵ Ron Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2009). 80-81.

initiative for that change with a “firm stand”.¹⁹⁶ In response to this, Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2001) ask, “Is it possible that promoting an unrealistic view of family life can actually compound the problem?”¹⁹⁷

Psychotherapist and writer Carolyn Holderread Heggen (1996), maintains that while Christians need to uphold the sanctity of marriage, they also need to understand the permissive nature of God in those instances where a marriage covenant has already been broken because of the existence of violence and abuse. In her view, marital permanency is not more important than the sanctity and safety of a woman.¹⁹⁸

Kroeger (2001) says when abuse is present, “Divorce is clearly the least desirable option, but sometimes it is a necessary option; and it is indeed a biblical option.”¹⁹⁹ In support of this, Kroeger quotes from the NIV version of Malachi 2:16 as follows, “The man who hates and divorces his wife... does violence to the one he should protect...” Kroeger goes on from this to ask why Christian abusers and their victims do not consider verses such as Proverbs 6:17-19 which lists seven things which God hates, “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.”²⁰⁰ Kroeger asks why the church compels victims to remain in marriages characterised by any of these seven qualities which God hates. Kroeger follows this question by insisting that it is too often the case that preservation of a marriage is exalted as a higher good than the safety of a human life. She claims this is not what the Bible supports.²⁰¹ Kroeger’s conclusion from this is that the possibility of divorce reinforces the serious nature of the offence and should serve as an incentive for changing abusive conduct.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Cited in Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 31.

¹⁹⁷ Nancy Nason-Clark; Catherine Clark Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001). 103.

¹⁹⁸ Carolyn Holderread Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture can be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), 26.

¹⁹⁹ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 131.

²⁰⁰ It should be noted that the NIV renders the last of these “hates” as “a person who stirs up conflict in the community.”

²⁰¹ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 132.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 131.

Steven R Fleming (1996), a mental health specialist who works with male batterers, agrees that divorce at times will be the lesser of two evils and as such may be the answer to an unjust situation. He also says that an alternative rendering of Malachi 2:16 has God declaring “I hate a man’s covering himself with violence.”²⁰³

Because Christian marriage is considered to be a covenant relationship, some Christian women therefore face the dilemma of feeling compelled to remain committed to a marriage despite being victims of domestic violence. While divorce may not be a desirable option, it needs to be noted that covenants were established, broken and renewed in the history of Israel. We turn now to consider scriptures relating to covenants in the Old Testament.

Covenant Scenarios in the Old Testament

Old Testament scriptures describe the treaty arrangements of the nations and tribes among whom the Israelites settled. Making a covenant enabled two groups to define a relationship which allowed for responsibility and obligation. God adopted covenant principles in relation to His people.

Kroeger (2001) describes how at Mount Sinai the Israelites agreed to the covenant whereby God set Israel apart from the other nations. This “set apart people” were to demonstrate to all other nations what it meant to serve Yahweh. In exchange God promised His blessing, to be their faithful God.²⁰⁴

In the workbook from The Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence (1991), Mitzi Eilts describes the mutuality of God’s covenant - God makes promises and takes on responsibilities and, in addition, names the obligations required from the other partner to the covenant. Eilts says “covenants are good for us *and* good for God.”²⁰⁵ Eilts notes that contained within God’s covenant were promises of deliverance, well-being, release from suffering, from

²⁰³ Steven R Fleming, "Competent Christian Intervention with Men Who Batter," in *Women, Abuse and the Bible. How Scripture can be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books 1996), 183.

²⁰⁴ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 132.

²⁰⁵ Mitzi N Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," in *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*, ed. Marie M Fortune (Cleveland, Ohio, USA: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 236.

persecution or from being oppressed with an expectation of loyalty and “commitment of heart reflected in behaviour.”²⁰⁶

These values are illustrated in the stories of Noah, where God promises never to destroy the earth (Genesis 9:11); of Abraham, where there is the promise that from barrenness will come future generations (Genesis 17:1); and of Moses, who is given the promise of a home instead of bondage (Exodus 3:8). Eilts claims the covenants made between God and His people “have as their most basic element the offer of liberation from bondage or affliction - the offer of new life, life as God intended it to be for us.”²⁰⁷

Ron Clark (2009) talks of God establishing a covenant at creation (Genesis 2:15) and how a marriage relationship is similar in that the covenant is to be holy, calling for faithfulness from each partner. Contained within the covenant there are agreed stipulations and obligations. The texts indicate there are conditions and that humans have responsibilities to honour and respect God.²⁰⁸ Clark draws attention to the fact that covenants with God have always been two-sided: “God promises to be faithful to humanity and expects the same loyalty from the creation. Since marriage is a reflection of a covenant between God and humans and between Christ and the church, loyalty within the covenant should reflect shared faithfulness.”²⁰⁹

Nancy Ramsay (2006), writing in the journal *Family Ministry*,²¹⁰ says that within the Christian and Jewish faiths there is an understanding that marriage is a covenant rather than simply a contractual arrangement. Ramsay says there is a difference in the expectation of trust within a covenant and that care deepens the simple exchanges of a contract. A covenant marriage expects a context of mutual loving, honouring and cherishing. Ramsay quotes Eilts as follows:

“With regard to Jewish and Christian scriptures, covenants between people are reciprocal arrangements of care presuming mutually trustworthy commitments to particular obligations and responsibilities. There are consequences for not keeping faith in a covenant and repentance is necessary to restore the integrity of such agreements. Such vows make it clear that the spouse who abuses their partner is the one who breaks the covenant, not the one who leaves to assure self-protection and the protection of children”.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence*: 82.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Nancy J Ramsay, "Confronting Family Violence and its Spiritual Damage," *Family Ministry* 20, no. 3 (2006).

²¹¹ Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," 240.

Ramsay is convinced that “The scriptures leave no doubt that God’s love always intends protection of the vulnerable so that divorce is preferable to continuing life threatening and dehumanising suffering for family members.”²¹² Nevertheless, there are certain circumstances in response to which a covenant can be broken.

Covenants can be Broken

While God is loyal and faithful (see Deuteronomy 7:9-11 and Titus 1:2), God’s people nevertheless violated the covenantal relationship that they had with Him (see Hebrews 8:7-13 and Jeremiah 11:18). God had two options as a response - to punish or forgive; not surprisingly, God does both.

When Israel and Judah were captives of the Assyrian and Babylonian kingdoms in the sixth and seventh centuries BC, they turned their backs on God. In response, God punished them by withholding compassion and protection and described the punishment as an abandonment or divorce:

Jeremiah 3:8 - “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.”

Isaiah 54: 6-7 - “The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit- a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. This is what the LORD says.”

Isaiah 50:1 - “Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold;”

God had been faithful to Israel but they for their part had not been faithful to the covenant. Through the prophets God called them to rectify their disregard but the leaders chose to ignore God’s requests for respect, loyalty and love.

Ron Clark (2009) says that the Israelites acted like a husband who ignores, abuses, or is unfaithful to his wife; and a wife who humiliates and is unfaithful to her husband. As such, the

²¹² Ramsay, "Confronting Family Violence and its Spiritual Damage," 36.

covenant relationship became dysfunctional. God was being humiliated and dishonoured due to His people being unfaithful (Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:22).²¹³

God wanted to be glorified and honoured among the other nations. God was worthy of respect as a God of love, truth and mercy. In practicing divorce, God was taking action to protect the purity and sanctity of His covenant with His people but it was they who brought dysfunctionality to the covenant relationship; it was the people not the covenant with whom God found fault. Clark says, “Yahweh had to become over-functioning to keep the covenant, while Israel continued to under-function due to their sin and neglect. God could not tolerate this kind of relationship and divorced Israel for the sake of the covenant. God punished them for the sake of honour. Divorce likewise, is an aggressive action to maintain the honour of covenant relationship”.²¹⁴

Clark says marriage as a covenant is an agreement with obligations and stipulations and in addition, needs loyalty from each side. Loyalty relates not only to sexual faithfulness but also to issues of respect and appropriate sharing of power. Marriage reflects God’s relationship and covenant with Israel (Ezekiel 16:8-14), and also the relationship of Jesus to the church (Ephesians 5:25, Revelation 21:2). The covenant is violated when a spouse chooses not to honour, respect and love the other. Clark says divorce is not the problem; rather it is how one treats a spouse. Just as God has the option of calling bad behaviour to account, to expect repentance and request holiness, so too does a victim of abuse within a marriage.²¹⁵

In the case of Harriet, her loyalty was one-sided:

I tried to get some support before I got divorced, because... that whole 'covenant' thing. As a Christian, I wanted one marriage. I wanted one marriage partner, I wanted a way of making it better and making it right and tried to get some support at church before I got divorced, I thought “I don't really want to get divorced if there's a way of saving the marriage” because I believed in the concept that it could, should, would be saved - that I had made a marriage commitment for life and this was the 'better for worse' bit - that ultimately I am meant to work through whatever it is. I certainly have felt this strong sense of 'covenant' though - I think that's perhaps felt more because I am a Christian. Because when I made my marriage vows, I was determined that there would be nothing that happened between us that we couldn't work out - as a loving couple, with Christian input in our lives, with children to keep us together and to give us a reason for being - I thought we would be able to work it out. Whatever comes between us, we will be able

²¹³ Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence*: 83.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to work it out and you know... I thought, "I don't know if I want to do it again and again and again, and at what point do you decide you've done enough?"

The Permanence of Marriage

Another aspect of God's covenant-making that is worth considering is the insistence on a covenant being a once-and-for-all settled event, especially since Eilts (1991) claims that as Christians we are constantly renewing and restabilising our covenants with God. We see this characteristic displayed in the covenant God established with Moses and re-affirmed through Joshua as the Hebrew people came into the Promised Land. The covenant made with Moses had its origins in the covenants with Noah and with Abraham and then renewed with Isaac and Jacob. Though the Davidic covenant in turn was perceived as new, it had links with the covenant made with Abraham. According to Eilts, both Jeremiah and the New Testament writers "represented the covenant being re-established in new ways."²¹⁶ For covenants to be relevant to present contexts and circumstances, renewal has been needed as new generations emerge in different contexts.

In response to the claim that a marriage covenant must never be broken, we can observe those instances where covenants have been broken between God's people and their God and what eventuated as a result. The language of blessing and curses within God's covenants is worth noting, especially as found in Leviticus 26:15-46, Psalm 78 and Deuteronomy 29.

Such verses reveal that the consequences for breaking a covenant relate to being separated from God and God's favour. There are consequences when we don't keep our side of the agreement and repentance is necessary for the covenant relationship to be restored:

Deuteronomy 30: 1-3 - When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

2 Chronicles 7:14 - if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

²¹⁶ Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," 236.

Clark speaks of the negative reaction Christians have to the concept of God punishing or abandoning people since for some there is an expectation that God will be faithful regardless of our behaviour. Clark says God does not ignore unfaithfulness, neglect and rebellion. While God promises faithfulness on His part, He also expects reciprocal faithfulness. In a covenant relationship shared responsibility is a key feature. Clark highlights the point made by David Instone-Brewer in *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (2002), that in Old Testament times, marriage was referred to as a covenant which was a common term for a binding agreement or contract. As such, a marriage contract as with any contract, had within its arrangement agreement on penalties when or if the agreement was broken. Divorce and losing a dowry were the penalties for breaking a marriage contract.²¹⁷

We know from the prophets that the Israelites and God were reconciled following separation; God initiated forgiveness and brought them back from Babylon. Once the nation repented (Daniel 9; Jeremiah 29) God renewed the covenant, bringing God's hope and peace in place of abandonment. God expressed mercy and grace in offering this new start. God is clear however about expectations that His people be obedient and loyal in the covenant relationship:

Zechariah 3:7 - If you walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.

Clark explains that faithfulness is required from both sides for a covenant to be valid and that the consequences for breaking a covenant rest on the one who offends. The person who is offended against is in the right to choose forgiveness or punishment. In breaking her covenant with Yahweh, Israel was forgiven many times. Nevertheless God punished and divorced Israel because, as Clark says, "the covenant had become dysfunctional" when the nation was audaciously violating the loyalty and trust given by Yahweh.²¹⁸

Clark claims these principles are transferrable to marriage; both partners are to be faithful with regard to the covenant. If dysfunction dominates a marriage, both the covenant and spouse are at risk of being violated and dishonoured. The partner who is offended can choose to confront the offender and require repentance. The offender can choose to repent and

²¹⁷ Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence*: 85., citing David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, 2002), 19.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

commit to healing the relationship or risks being excluded and cut off from the marriage relationship.²¹⁹

Kroeger (2001) considers how the situation of the covenant included the expectation that in order to prevent the influence of false gods, there would not be intermarriage. This was to ensure cohesion and perpetuity of the faith as it passed from generation to generation. Ezra demanded that those unfaithful Israelites who had abandoned believing spouses for more advantageous foreign marriages should divorce the foreigners and so remain within the covenant community (Ezra 9). Just as there was provision for sacrifice to remedy sin, so too there was provision for divorce where there was an untenable situation (Deuteronomy 24:1).²²⁰

The covenant between Israel and Yahweh was described as a marriage which was betrayed and sabotaged by a wife who was idolatrous. Three times in the Old Testament there is reference to Yahweh divorcing his people (Isaiah 50:1; Isaiah 54:6-7; and Jeremiah 3:8). While not desirable, divorce was an option in particular situations. Kroeger says “The evangelical church cannot wholly condemn an action adopted by the Lord of heaven and earth in response to wilful and persistent sin.”²²¹

Of equal relevance to divorce and covenant discussions are the scriptures which deal with the restoration of covenant. Ezra 9:1-2 describes how Israelite men had taken foreign wives. A decree of divorce was created for those wanting to re-establish a covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Those returning from Judah with renewed commitment to the laws and who had abandoned the commitment to marrying Israelite women sought to redress this. Ezra commanded such people to divorce in order to continue to belong to the covenant community (see Ezra 9).

Kroeger says this account implies that divorce must be considered in relation to the wider community. Where a marriage is endangering family members, there needs to be sober

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 133.

²²¹ Ibid.

reflection on the consequences of maintaining the union. God's intention was to give meaning to life rather than to maintain a damaging relationship.²²²

Kroeger says the covenant was based on divorce and was "the least undesirable solution to a terrible situation".²²³ One purpose of the covenant was to ensure the continuation of the generations or the perpetuation of a "Godly seed" (see Malachi 2:15). The welfare of children in divorce is an important consideration. If children must endure the presence of violence, there is violation of the intent of the covenant of marriage in God's economy for the well-being and witness of His people.²²⁴

Talking of her children Amanda says:

There were lots of times - especially towards the end - when Jack would get angry with Tim and he'd push Tim into a corner, like the back door, into a corner, and I physically pushed my way between Jack and Tim so Jack wouldn't hit Tim. And I mean, there were times when I was frightened of him. It was more Tim than Louise, but I used to have to protect Mandy as well, when she was little. Well with Tim, he (Jack) was threatening to punch him. Tim would've been seven, I mean, Jack just used to get so angry - just really, really angry. I preferred for me to get his anger... for his anger to be directed at me rather than to the kids, because, um... I don't know... they were only little. Yeah, there was times when I did try to divert his anger...towards me... and I used to defend the kids to the hilt. Defend the kids off him, protect them, especially Tim. He said to me years later after I left, we were talking one day and he said "Mum, I understand why you left"... he said "I know that Dad used to hurt you and that"... and he said "Mum, you left it too long". He would have been about 12, but he knew what I'd gone through, he could see.

But then you stay together for the sake of the kids. I don't know why women think that, but... you stay together for the sake of the kids because you don't want the kids hurt - well, my kids were hurting in the relationship. There was something on one of the DVDs I got from one of the kids' lawyers. It was about talking to children about separation, and how children feel about separation... and there was one little boy who used to start fights between his Mum and his Dad... he used to start a fight, because his Mum and his Dad would be fighting, and so to stop them from fighting he would do something wrong so all their energy was towards him. So Mum and Dad weren't fighting anymore, and when I listened to it and watched it for the first time, I thought "Fuck - that's what Tim used to do, that's exactly what Tim used to do". And we were watching it together one day, and he said "That's what I used to do - I used to try and cause a fight so you and Dad would stop fighting." Which is sad, really, isn't it?

Ethel's children paid dearly as well:

Actually my daughter was terrified of him I found out later, because of particular times that he had been really scary in how he administered physical punishment. It wasn't like it left physical scars on her, but it terrified her. And so... and so... the rest of her life she will

²²² Ibid., 135.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

be on medication for anxiety because in her growing up and early teen years anxiety was embedded because she did not feel safe at home - she was anxious that she was not physically safe. So you don't have to beat somebody until they're black and blue - you can erode them, emotionally. And so why did I stay in it? Well, because after all, it wasn't as bad as... it wasn't like he was drunk, it wasn't like I was black and blue - and I made a sacred vow to love honour and cherish, until the day I died. 'Til death do us part. Okay, it was a sacred vow. The only way I could actually get out of that one was by a blessing from the church - and the church wasn't recognising this. And people outside the church didn't understand the nature of that. This was destroying me and my daughter, and he had already destroyed my son who had suicided in the midst of this - I mean, we're talking major impact. I mean, I can deal with the fact that I made a mistake and I was in a relationship that was not what I hoped - but dammit, what makes me really, really, angry was the cost to my children, because - as I say, my son lost his life, my daughter will be on medication for the rest of her life. But I look at the cost to her and... The church is just one part of it, the marriage relationship was just one part of it - but they were key, and that's what I'm talking about. They're key - and so don't say "Oh well, it was a whole bunch of other things - never mind", that would have made a major difference. Regarding the church well dammit - they just wouldn't listen. It's about listening! You go in church and you sit down and you read the script and you sit and listen - I'm supposed to listen, but I'm not listened to. And the minister pre-digests all this and spits out a sermon that will be 'one size fits all', but if I go and I ask for help then I'm given some band-aid like "It'll be okay", or "Oh you're just over-worried". They don't open it up and find out what's really going on.

Clark also comments on Malachi 2:16, saying that it is used wrongly as a principle for pastors and leaders responding to the plight of a woman who may be considering such action. Like Kroeger, Clark claims Yahweh also practiced divorce with the Israelites and also points to Isaiah 50:1, Isaiah 54:6-7 and Jeremiah 3:8, which question the stance that God is opposed to all divorce.²²⁵

Malachi recounts how the nation of Judah has come back from captivity in Babylon and Persia between 538 and 535 BC. Haggai and Zechariah challenged them to rebuild God's temple (Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 2:7-13) and God tells them they can begin again and be holy (Haggai 2:19). As time moves on, the nation begins to revert to the practices of previous generations; they neglect the required sacrifices and begin to practice idolatry (Malachi 1:1-6). In Hosea, God is portrayed as an offended husband (Hosea 1:2); in Malachi God is the offended wife (Malachi 2:11-16). Israel is described as now married to a foreigner and exhibiting behaviour which God says is unjust. This is a repetition of previous behaviour that contributed to their previous divorce. In response God, as the one offended, warns them to cease their violation of the covenant whereby they had abandoned Yahweh and committed to a foreign goddess.

²²⁵ Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence*: 86.

Clark says Malachi may not be referring to human marriages but rather Judah's covenant with Yahweh and that the book has many references to how the nation is violating the covenant with Yahweh. While Malachi does warn that God hates divorce, nevertheless he acknowledges that God will resort to it where necessary. The text also says God hates one who covers himself with violence and we need to be concerned about marriage partners who direct violence towards a spouse since God condemns this - "I hate divorce", says Yahweh, God of Israel, "And I hate a man covering himself with violence as his garment" (Malachi 2:16). This does not imply God is angry toward those who are divorced; rather the text warns it is those who behave unfaithfully and violently who are provoking God's wrath. These scriptures are about God calling his people back to Himself, and they challenge those who are being violent and dysfunctional in a covenant relationship to mend their ways. Yes, God hates divorce, but God will resort to it where necessary, even though He is eager not to do so. What this reading of scriptures suggests is that, contrary to the view of complementarians, divorce is an option that can and should be exercised in an effort to maintain the covenant as holy and honouring.

The New Testament and Divorce

In Matthew 5:27-32 and 19:3-9 we read of Jesus being embroiled in an on-going argument with the legalistic Pharisees. The school of Shammai held the view that divorce was permissible when there had been adultery. The school of Hillel, on the other hand, believed that a variety of reasons could be drawn on to justify divorcing a wife such as burning the dinner or finding a more attractive or younger woman. Men often wanted to send their wife away but keep her dowry.²²⁶

These responses to the issues of marriage and divorce were what Jesus challenged in Matthew 5 as he countered social and religious mores with the phrase "you have heard it said, but I say" and went on to say, "... anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his own heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). The Matthew 5 statement was countercultural at the time regarding the status and attitudes towards women when it came to marriage, adultery and divorce. According to Carrie Miles (2006) Jesus was going beyond the condemnation of adultery here by urging men to cease objectifying women sexually.²²⁷

²²⁶ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 136.

²²⁷ Carrie A Miles, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Brazo Press, 2006). 66.

Willard Swartley (1983)²²⁸ draws attention to the observation of Evelyn and Frank Stagg who, in *Woman in the World of Jesus* (1978) said that when Jesus taught about looking at a woman in lust and divorce, he was protesting against male domination over women.²²⁹ Within the culture of the time, adultery was understood as a transgression of the rights of a husband or father. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus was saying that lust adulterates a woman, and was thus extending the understanding of adultery in two ways: first, it was committed against the woman; and second, it was committed in the heart.²³⁰

Carrie Miles says of Jesus' stance here in Matthew 5:27 that by being the focus of lust, women's freedom was limited.²³¹ Miles also points out that in this passage Jesus was addressing the Greco-Roman cultural pressure on men to prove their manhood by means of sexual conquests or by being in the company of women who were attractive to other men. Miles says that "aggressiveness, virility and sexual prowess" were significant aspects of men's claim to honour and status in the culture of the Greco-Roman world.²³²

According to Kroeger (2001), divorce in this cultural context was in the main initiated by husbands, the options for women were limited and women could be given to another for marriage or prostitution.²³³ In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, however, Jesus acknowledges that '*porneia*' which relates to a variety of sexual deviancies such as adultery, abuse, and prostitution was an allowable basis of divorce.²³⁴ Miles comments that in relation to contemporary assumptions of the time regarding marriage and divorce, this was "a surprising twist".²³⁵

Taking a similar stance to Swartley, Miles says that within the ancient cultures, adultery was seen as a crime committed against men. Miles comments that in most legal systems of that

²²⁸ Willard M Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, USA: Herald Press, 1983).

²²⁹ Christopher D Marshall, *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Telford, Pennsylvania, USA: Pandora Press, 1984). 163., citing Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Women in the World of Jesus*.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Miles, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* 65.

²³² Ibid., 66., citing Carolyn Osiek and David L Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, 1997.

²³³ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 136.

²³⁴ Ibid., 137.

²³⁵ Miles, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* 58.

time it was impossible for a man to be considered adulterous. The wider Greco-Roman society into which Jesus spoke did not require or expect men to restrict sexual relations exclusively to their wives. Only where a man engaged in sex with a married woman would adultery be considered to have taken place. Jewish sexual laws were not as liberal as Greek and Roman laws, but the sin of adultery was perceived to be against the husband of the adulteress rather than against the wife herself.

In Matthew 19:4-6, where Jesus defines marriage in terms of a one-flesh relationship, he recasts adultery from being a property crime of one man against another, to the breaking of an important union which God created. In Jesus' view of marriage, a husband's unfaithfulness was a sin against a *wife* and being in possession of a writ did not change the fact that divorcing and remarrying was adultery against her (Mark 10:11 and Matthew 19:9). The underlying message in these statements is that marriage and sexuality are to be held in high regard and that marriage is more than a convenience. In taking this stance, Jesus was recognising women as equal partners in the marriage relationship and that sexual expression between a husband and wife is sacred and an asset to the relationship rather than a disposable resource.²³⁶

Clark says some people think that in Matthew 19 Jesus is saying adultery is the only excuse for divorce. However, Clark maintains that in these passages in Matthew and in Luke 16:15-18, Jesus was responding to Pharisees who were seeking reasons and a validation for divorce which often left women victimised.²³⁷

Jewish divorce had become influenced by Greco-Roman culture thus giving more freedom for men to divorce. Jesus' agenda, however, was not about forms or reasons for divorce. Rather he was making a stand to prohibit the common practice of men victimising their wives.²³⁸

Nancy Ramsay (2006) says that while Jesus did speak against divorce, he nevertheless condemned men configuring options in their own interests thus allowing them to break sacred promises of care and leave divorced wives with few resources (Matthew 5:27-32; Matthew 19:3-9).²³⁹

²³⁶ Ibid., 59.

²³⁷ Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence*: 87.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ramsay, "Confronting Family Violence and its Spiritual Damage," 36.

Paul addresses the issue of divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16:

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 - To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

In verses 10 and 11, Paul is addressing those who have become followers of Christ and are married to unbelievers. However, in verse 12 to 16 he addresses the situation where a believer has an unbelieving spouse. In the former instance he says that those who do divorce should not remarry. Paul encourages Christians not to leave the marriage but not to compel an unbelieving spouse to remain married (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).²⁴⁰

Kroeger says that while passages referred to earlier (Ezra 10:1-14 and Nehemiah 13:23-28) required divorce so that the integrity of the covenant community could be preserved, these verses in 1 Corinthians 7 seek to offer a peaceful solution to a troubled context regarding faith and relationships. She says we should note this passage when considering situations where the covenantal values in a relationship have been broken or come under strain because of abuse, desertion or infidelity. Abuse within a marriage relationship does not reflect Christ's love for his church.²⁴¹

The Bible offers two reasons women can seek divorce: unfaithfulness and desertion (see Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-16). In his chapter "Holding Christian Men Accountable for Abusing Women",²⁴² author and medical practitioner Al Miles takes the view that where there is violence, the sacred vow of marriage, of oneness is broken by an

²⁴⁰ Nason-Clark; Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*: 137.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Al Miles, "Holding Christian Men Accountable for Abusing Women," in *Men's Work in Preventing Violence Against Women*, ed. James Newton Poling; Christie Cozad Neuger (Binghamton, New York, USA: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2002).

abusing husband. The abuser destroys a marriage covenant when he abuses his wife. In essence, says Miles he deserted her by his inappropriate abusive behaviour.²⁴³

With regard to an abusive marriage, a question of significance is “who decides when a covenant is broken?” Is it the one who is abusing, who is hurt, who is betrayed; or is it the one who is trying to keep the marriage intact regardless?

In the scriptures it is God or those called by God such as the prophets who call attention to the fact that the covenant has been broken. Eilts points out that God says “if you want to be in a relationship with me you must change your ways - return to the promises you made with me” (Deuteronomy 30:1-5). God is the one who has been faithful and thus is the one who says the covenant is broken and is no longer operative. It is the one who has been faithful to the covenant who calls attention to the fact it has been broken.”²⁴⁴

Covenant-making between Individuals

In the Bible there are many examples of covenants being established between individuals. This is seen in the relationship between Abraham and Abimelech (Genesis 20:14-16), and between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:44–54). In a similar vein, people of the Christian faith apply the covenant concept to God and human relationships. As already claimed Christians see marriage as a covenant.

In a workshop reference resource put together by Marie Fortune (1991), Mitzi N Eilts points out how the concept of marriage-as-covenant has historically been understood in two ways: first, as a mutual covenant between two people; and second, as a covenant offering protection or care in exchange for nurturing and or obedience.²⁴⁵ Eilts says it is the first of these which most closely resembles and models God’s purposes regarding marriage. Mutuality enables health and well-being within a relationship. Where there is a suzerainty type agreement of exchange and obligation between humans (as in the second meaning), Eilts says there is distortion and proneness to domination and control. Eilts cites Marie Fortune who claims there are four elements that enable a mutual marriage covenant which fulfils God’s intentions for

²⁴³ Ibid., 20., Al Miles citing his own work in *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know*

²⁴⁴ Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," 238.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

relationship and most closely mirrors the covenant between God and people of faith.²⁴⁶ These elements are:

1. It is made in the full knowledge of the relationship
2. It involves a mutual giving of self to the other
3. It is assumed to be lasting
4. It values mutuality, respect, and equality between persons²⁴⁷

A marriage of this nature leaves little room or opportunity for abuse. Where it does occur, however, promises and vows are broken and covenant trust is breached. When violence is occurring, the intent of the covenant is broken and the relationship becomes one of bondage and suffering rather than compassion, justice and mutual loving.

This was a reality for Kiera:

The first time we moved out. What brought me to it was his physical aggression, really. It came to a point - he was really violent. There was just no way we could be in the same house. At the time, I remember he had the cricket bat, and he was just lashing out. Yeah. There was just no way I could stay, or the boys. But yeah, it was the first time. Before that, there were times when I would stay away for a day because he was just in a very aggressive mood - we would stay away in a mall, just to be away and give him time to calm down. But yeah - it was the first time I actually moved out. There was also a time - about a month before we actually separated - I mean, it was very clear to both of us we were struggling in our marriage, and I decided I wanted to go to my family for a month, just to be amongst people that appreciated me [chuckles] and loved me. And while I was away - that was how I explained it to my husband then - we would both have time to think about what we wanted from our marriage, from each other, from how we see the future. And so I went, I took the children with me, and when I came back from my family he became very violent...

But because you make this promise to stay... and especially we got married in a church too, but we made the promise before God and the people were present, to stay 'until death do part'. You see - and then you break a promise... and so it's quite... yeah, it's really huge. Oh! Somehow you need to work through that, because it's just that you've given your word, and now you take it back. And then there is your children, and you see them - with all their pain, and their insecurities, and wounds that they carry around with them - and I mean, that's on-going.

Eilts says that for the Christian woman caught up in such a situation, dilemmas inevitably occur regarding the marriage covenant. Her promises are important and significant, especially as they reflect a commitment to ensuring that the relationship will last. To stay may mean suffering but in leaving she feels she is breaking promises. Many do stay and suffer due to

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 239.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

taking seriously their commitment but fail to comprehend that the covenant is already broken by the abuse of the husband.²⁴⁸

Mary's experience illustrates this...

Covenant to me has always meant something really, really, very important, because covenant is something to be taken seriously. And I didn't think God ever broke covenants - so if we made a covenant with God, then we shouldn't break it either. Which sort of takes my mind down the road to - well, how bad is divorce then? However, on the other hand, no one should have to put up with abuse - that's the other thing. But I think it would be hard for a woman to make that huge, huge choice... this man isn't keeping the promises he made, so therefore it's got to be surely some, some way out... in the Godly sense. But I've never heard anyone say to me that that's how it could be. Well, I was brought up thinking that marriage was forever - so that must've been instilled in me through my childhood. My parents were always together.... I can remember once or twice my father being a bit cruel to my mother... um... but... you know. Once, I can remember - it's stuck in my mind like crazy - I don't know how it came about, but my mother was on the kitchen floor... on the floor... I was quite a small child - and she was crying and calling out, crying. And I don't know whether my father kicked her, but I can remember him being aggressive over her, angry, that's always stuck in my mind.

Harriet talked of facing the same dilemma:

...that I had made a marriage commitment for life and this was the 'better for worse' bit - that ultimately I am meant to work through whatever it is.

Al Miles challenges adherence to the notion of the sanctity of marriage where there is abuse.²⁴⁹ Christian traditionalists claim marriage is a covenant in which a man and a woman make an oath before God and witnesses to stay together until death parts them. A couple make vows to honour, love, respect and be faithful to each other. Miles says Paul speaks of this bond in Ephesians 5:21-33 and talks of mutual submission, comparing marital love with Christ's love for the church. The passage talks of a husband loving his wife as he loves himself and as Christ loves the church. Family violence stands outside these admonishments for how followers of Christ should treat their family. Abuse disregards these instructions and disrespects Jesus and the church.²⁵⁰ Reflecting this Miles says, "Abuse also causes a great amount of damage to wives, children and ultimately, to the abusers themselves because the perpetrators miss out on the many blessings God offers husbands and wives when both individuals commit to the biblical virtues of love and respect. Domestic violence is neither

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 241.

²⁴⁹ Miles, "Holding Christian Men Accountable for Abusing Women," 18.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

loving nor respectful, and... Christians must resist following the traditional pathway churchgoers take of labelling all marriages between Christians as holy".²⁵¹

Miles goes on to point out that many Christians hold the sanctity of a marriage covenant in higher esteem than the physical safety of women and children. A phrase which is often quoted is "a marriage must be saved at all costs." Therefore some women, despite on-going violence, are told by pastors and counsellors to be obedient and prayerful and to remain in the relationship, believing that the marriage covenant is sacred and must not be broken.²⁵²

Celeste reflected on this:

The expectation was, well, marriage was... it was for life. You were expected to meet your vows and keep your vows - and regardless of what was happening, also as far as scripture is concerned - that divorce was hated; that God hates divorce.

Megan, for her part, commented:

But I did go and get up the courage to finally talk to the minister's wife who had done a lot of counselling - so she was really 'up there', and who I thought would be really sympathetic and practical... [sighs]... but in the end - and she had another elder come in with her... all they wanted to do was pray over me and encourage me to speak in tongues and stuff like that... and I just thought..... that's... [laughs] ... not kinda what I want! I want practical help on what I can do in this situation. And I was also... um... quite frustrated - because by the time I'd gone to talk to them, you know... the marriage had been in difficulty for a few years and we'd been struggling for a few years. And I was feeling like I was doing all the hard work - but their attitude was, "Well you should just stick it out, because you don't want to give up on something that's been long-standing". And I thought "Well, no... I'm not saying I want to give up, but I want to know how to get on." I found it really hard to talk to Christian people about it, because, you just had the impression that you were a failure as a Christian, as well as a woman, and a wife. So I tended to keep it pretty quiet. So that sort of situation went on and drifted on for quite a number of years, me feeling really horrible about the whole thing, churches are so big on 'Family' - but you do feel like a real failure - twice the failure you would've felt out in the normal world where these sort of things... well, they happen and you deal with it and move on. And I think, because of the church thing and 'marriage is supposed to be for life', I hung on and hung on and hung on and in hindsight I think I wasted 10 years, where I should have called it quits a long time ago and said "this is not going to improve". He wanted to stay married.

Steven Tracy cites James and Phyllis Alsdurf,²⁵³ who refer to one of the largest surveys of Christian leaders' views on domestic violence (a survey of five thousand North American Protestant ministers that was carried out in the 1980s). Commenting on the results of this

²⁵¹ Ibid., Al Miles is referring to his own work in *Violence in Families: what Every Christian Needs to Know*.

²⁵² Ibid., 20.

²⁵³ James and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: the Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Crowborough, East Sussex, England: Highland Books, 1990).

survey, the Aldsdurfs said that a quarter of those surveyed said that “if a wife would begin to submit to her abusive husband, God would honour her obedience and the abuse would stop or God would give her the grace to endure the beatings.”²⁵⁴ Furthermore almost one fifth said no amount of violence from an abusive husband would justify a wife leaving.²⁵⁵

Clark (2009) mentions three reasons women do not leave abusive husbands: fear, finances and fantasy of change. In church, women hear how wives must submit to their husbands and their patience and submission will result in changed behaviour. In response to this they feel guilt and responsibility regarding the state of the marriage.²⁵⁶ Clark quotes Mary Miller (*No Visible Wounds: Identifying Nonphysical Abuse of Women by Their Men*, 1995) as saying, “Abuse never - and I use the word *never* fully aware of its pitfalls - goes away of its own accord; it escalates.”²⁵⁷

Saving the Family

Eilts (1991) highlights the problem that occurs when emphasis is placed on saving a family by insisting on keeping the covenant despite the presence of violence in the relationship. On-going suffering often results. Victims sometimes stay patiently in a relationship in the hope that the relationship will get back to what it is intended to be. Choosing to be patient in such circumstances often reflects church teaching on long-suffering as a virtue. According to Eilts, however, long-suffering in response to what are seen to be God’s ideals does not apply when suffering is imposed by one who has previously made promises to live with God’s values for relationship but does not do so. Eilts maintains it is dangerous in an abusive relationship to apply hope and patience in the absence of safety and intervention since the cycle of abuse will inevitably continue to worsen unless the abuser repents, takes responsibility and seeks assistance. Others would agree. A covenant relationship cannot be restored unless there is confession and repentance.²⁵⁸

Other Christian values lead to a victim tolerating abuse such as when a woman feels guilt because of a belief that women are responsible for the quality of the marriage relationship.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 149.

²⁵⁶ Clark, *Freeing the Oppressed: A Call To Christians Concerning Domestic Violence*: 22.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

²⁵⁸ Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," 240.

Because of this, some women think they deserve the treatment they are getting. However, as Eilts comments, "covenant is a two way street, a partnership with responsibilities and obligations for both people involved." Eilts goes on to say, "Too seldom is the one who is really breaking the covenant, the abuser, being called to account for creating a home environment that is so oppressive that his partner needs to seek safety and peace elsewhere."²⁵⁹

Amanda reflects:

About God's will in my marriage...I mean, I always prayed that my marriage would get better, I always prayed that Jack would change - that my marriage would get better, that I could be the one that would change him...and life would be different...and then I'd go back to 'you made your bed and you lie in it' - so I've made my bed and I'm lying in it - so was this God's will for me?

For some women separation from a husband will also mean judgment, separation or expulsion from her church community. However a victim seeking safety, separation or divorce, is acknowledging the marriage covenant is no longer operative but that she is not the one breaking the covenant. While a marriage covenant is intended to last, scripture does not support a marriage of suffering with violence. Kroeger (2004) says it is violence which ends a relationship, not a victim's decision to leave. A victimised wife does not necessarily bear responsibility for the failure of an abusive marriage.²⁶⁰ As stated previously there are examples of covenants ending when their purpose has been ignored and transgressed. A marriage covenant is not more precious than the human being who is being wrongfully treated. The intention of a marriage covenant is to ensure that justice, mercy and God's love are lived out and applied in ways consistent with a covenant.²⁶¹ When abuse cuts across this intention and ideal, a victim must be able to seek safety and peace even if it means separation or divorce.

Amanda speaks of being ostracised by her church after leaving her abusive husband:

I mean the whole thing with leaving and divorcing your marriage - you feel like, um... I guess it's abuse... I guess it is abuse in a different way. I lived with an abusive husband in an abusive marriage, but then I leave him and - I don't know if abuse is the word for it - but you're ostracised by people, you're ostracised by the church maybe, you're labelled... um... like I said, I felt like a leper. People - you know, like you think people care, but then when something like that happens, people withdraw from you, and did they really care for you in the beginning? And where's that unconditional love, you know? I mean, and that can be really hurtful too, because you've been through as much as you have been, and all you

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 241.

²⁶⁰ Nancy Nason-Clark; Catherine Clark Kroeger, *Refuge from Abuse: Healing and Hope for Abused Christian Women* (Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press 2004). 51.

²⁶¹ Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," 241.

want to do is start a new life, and you think that the people at church... some of the people at church are your friends, and even your so-called friends don't want to know you, so you wonder how real the whole thing was at the beginning, really.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the consequences that the concept of marriage as a covenant raises for women when they are victims of abuse. As such, the question explored was “is a covenant more important and sacred than the safety of a woman and her children?” The dilemmas facing abused women in such circumstances were discussed. This was then followed by a discussion of a number of related issues - covenant scenarios in the Old Testament, instances and responses when those covenants were broken, what the issues were which affected their permanence. Both Jesus’ and Paul’s radical teaching on marriage and divorce were discussed and this was followed by considering covenant-making between people and the elements and intentions of covenants between God and people of faith. The chapter ended by discussing whether “saving the family” should be put above concerns about ensuring the safety of a woman and her children.

In the next chapter we move on to explore the issues of submission, headship and patriarchy.

Chapter Five

Submission, Headship and Patriarchy

Mary: *I was never aware that I could go to my parents and say, "Um... my husband's belting the shit outta me", he actually abused my mother! He actually picked her up and threw her across a room.*

Ephesians 5:22-24 - 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 Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Introduction

This chapter will consider the role of patriarchy within the Christian family and claims that its tenets contribute to family violence. Christian beliefs about headship, submission, authority and their relationship to abuse will be discussed. We will especially highlight views which challenge the traditional view of submission and headship and highlight the effects on women living within the context of abuse. Four issues are identified which have become central to the debate between complementarian and egalitarian proponents of gender roles within the Christian family:

1. The meaning of *kephalē* (head)
2. The meaning of *authentein* (to have authority)
3. Genesis 1-3 and the relationship between men and women
4. The role of patriarchy in contributing towards violence against women

Interspersed throughout the discussion will be comments and reflections from the seven women who were interviewed. Firstly, however, we set a context by considering gender roles within the family.

Gender Roles within the Family

Nason-Clark (1997) reflects on the observation by secular agencies that women in faith communities appear to be particularly vulnerable to abuse. Religion and religious involvement are linked to specific attitudes regarding women, gender roles and family life. Women who are especially vulnerable are conservative Christian women who subscribe to prevalent attitudes within their communities, especially as they relate to submission of the wife as an ideal.

Nason-Clark cites Lori Beaman who says, "The doctrine of submission and attendant beliefs

about appropriate gender roles may contribute to a woman remaining in an abusive situation."²⁶²

Amanda is a case in point:

Back in the Bible there were martyrs who were stoned for Christianity, and whose lives were taken... Well I mean... is what I went through with my husband part of suffering as a Christian? You know, like, my Mum used to say to me years ago - and I hate the saying - "You make your bed, you lie in it". I mean, you chose to do this and you have to stick with it. My husband had an affair; our baby was six months old. Once he was angry with the dog and he threatened "You wait 'til I get home, I'm going to fuckin' kill it; I'm going to fuckin' wring its neck, I was frightened. He would get angry with our son and push him into the corner and I pushed my way between them, the kids were only little. I'd go back to "you made your bed and you lie in it"- so I've made my bed and I'm lying in it. If I hadn't had the kids I would have just killed myself for sure, the marriage never got better. One day I realised how unhappy I was that I couldn't keep going like this anymore but I felt like the church counsellors told me to stay. "Let's try counselling, we'll try this and we'll try that, hang in there and everything will be alright, we'll pray for you" - I kind of felt I had a big, big weight, and all people wanted to do was pray. I mean, they had no idea, with the way that I lived. And obviously, when you go to counselling, you've got a husband and a wife together, seeking somebody and seeking help - and you aren't going to be able to open up fully how you feel for you, as I felt, with him being there, because you wouldn't feel safe. Because you can't feel safe, you can't let it all hang out, really, you can't open up and say exactly.

In responding to the elevation of traditional views regarding the role of women and submission, Barbara Boone Wooten (2008) claims that research reveals a higher percentage of women in traditional marriage relationships suffer from depression and other mental health issues than either unmarried or working women. Also women in traditional marriage relationships where the husband is considered to be the head are beaten 300% more often than women in egalitarian marriages.²⁶³

Jackie Hudson (1996) lists the particular scriptures that are strongly referenced and applied by complementarians in this regard. They include 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:12-14, Colossians 3:18, Ephesians 5:21-24, and 1 Peter 3:1-6.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). 141. Nason-Clark supervised research by Lori Beaman as part of a Ph.D. degree in sociology: *Feminist Practice, Evangelical Worldview*, 1996.

²⁶³ Barbara Boone Wooten, *Destiny Denied: the Veiling of Women in the Traditional Church* (Lake Mary, Florida, USA: Creation House, 2008). 73., citing Diana R Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downer Grove, Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000) 200-201.

²⁶⁴ Jackie J Hudson, "Characteristics of the Incestuous Family," in *Women, Abuse and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), 73.

1 Corinthians 11:3 - But I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 - Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

1 Timothy 2:12-14 - I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Colossians 3:18 - Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Ephesians 5:21-24 - 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 Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

1 Peter 3:1-6a - Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord.

Complementarians understand these scriptures to mean that God ordained gender hierarchy at creation and extended it to marriage and family where husbands are assigned authority over their wives. Within marriage there are roles where the husband is the leader, the wife a submissive follower and where the spiritual welfare of the family is the husband's responsibility.

Advocates of traditional family living defend gender-based hierarchy claiming it is essential for protecting family values. Wayne Grudem says in the Danvers statement, "We are convinced that denial or neglect of these principles (of asymmetrical relationships in marriage) will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches and the culture at large."²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Wayne Grudem; John Piper, ed. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 1991), 471. A copy of The Danvers Statement is included as an appendix to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991), pages 469 to 471.

Celeste commented...

In the 1970s Christian women were taught a great deal - you know that you had to have your home right, and you had to be just right when your husband was coming home and all the rest of it, I'm sure you know... The husband is the head of the house.

In contrast to this, in a chapter on the social and cultural context of wife abuse, Nason-Clark (1995) says that feminists continue to highlight the connection between violence against women within marriage and the subordinate position of women within marriage,²⁶⁶ and that wife abuse exposes the danger of patriarchal systems within the family structure by setting the scene for control by males.²⁶⁷ Nason-Clark quotes from the study *Violence against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* (Dobash and Dobash, 1983) which argues that the origins of wife beating lie in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male control and authority. Dobash and Dobash say, "This relationship between women and men has been institutionalised in the structure of the patriarchal family and is supported by the economic and political institutions and by a belief system, including a religious one, that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just and sacred".²⁶⁸

Jackie Hudson (1996) provides insights into patriarchal families from her work with incestuous families.²⁶⁹ She refers to the work of Alexander and Lupfer (1987), Herman and Hirschman (1981) and Trepper and Barret (1989) who claim that father/daughter incest is related to specific traditional family values which include women being subservient to men and children being subservient to adults. Hudson also cites the work of Jehu (1990) who found male dominance was a factor in the family of origin of over half the incest victims studied. Also around half of the fathers in this study exhibited anger, hostility and violence toward the wife and children. Other researchers cited by Hudson found such men autocratic, dictatorial and patriarchal (i.e., Cohen, 1983; Finkelhor, 1984; Herman and Hirschman, 1981; Hull and Burke, 1991; Jehu, 1990).²⁷⁰ In many such situations the father had a sense of ownership regarding

²⁶⁶ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence: 4.*, citing L Timmins, ed., *Listening to the Thunder: Advocates Talk about the Battered Women's Movement* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: Women's Research Centre, 1995).

²⁶⁷ Ibid., citing M Merritt-Gray and J Wuest, "Counteracting Abuse and Breaking Free: The Process of Leaving Revealed through Women's Voices," *Health Care for Women International* 16 (1995): 399-412.

²⁶⁸ R Emerson and Russell Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* (The Free Press, 1979). 34-35.

²⁶⁹ Hudson, "Characteristics of the Incestuous Family," 77.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

his daughter and viewed her as his property (Cohen, 1983; Jehu, 1990). Frequently, these fathers held strong beliefs relating to women and children being subordinate to men and children being obedient to parents. Hudson cites Jehu's (1990) claims that such patriarchal family structures are characterised by power imbalances where no one can challenge the father; thus a daughter is left unprotected.²⁷¹

Filling such a subservient role led to Kiera experiencing more abuse as she fitted in with her husband's demands:

Everything had to be focused around his life, life had to be fitted around his needs, in fact the more I tried to accommodate my life around his needs the more critical and blaming he became - I was constantly being blamed. It was getting too much.

Caught up in a similar situation, Celeste experienced an inability to protect her children:

He wanted to be the centre of attention, and did everything he possibly could to ensure he was, which was for the children to be neglected. The abusive behaviour, it wasn't just towards me it was to the children and towards his mum and siblings... some of the things that happened I was horrified at.

Nason-Clark refers to the work of Joy Bussert (1986) who claims that as long as theological traditions hold up submission as the ideal model for wife and husband relationships, battering will continue.²⁷² Nason-Clark quotes Ron Clark who says patriarchy supports women being owned by men which allows men to do "whatever they want with their woman".²⁷³ Silence and denial within church communities regarding wife abuse may immobilise women victims and at the same time inadvertently support the practices of abusive husbands.²⁷⁴ As a result, church silence about sexual violence has been regarded as an act of complicity²⁷⁵, what Nason-Clark has referred to elsewhere as "the holy hush."²⁷⁶ Supporting this view, Shirley Gillett (1996) says that while there is an increasing awareness of such abuse within Christian evangelical books and magazines, "few are willing to confront the basic inequality of male-

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence: 4.*, citing Joy Bussert, *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment* (New York, USA: Lutheran Church of America, 1986)

²⁷³ Ibid., citing Ron Clark, *Pastoral Care of Battered Women* (Philadelphia, USA: Westminster, 1986)

²⁷⁴ Ibid., citing M D Pagelow and P Johnson, *Abuse in the American Family: The Role of Religion* in Horton and Williamson, *Abuse and Religion*.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., citing L Gehr Livezey, "Sexual and Family Violence: A Growing Issue for the Churches", *Christian Century* (October 28, 1987) 938-42

²⁷⁶ Victoria Falburg, "Book Review : Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 3 (2011): 13.

female relationships that is at the root of all forms of woman abuse".²⁷⁷ Gillett says a typical response to abuse by men is that these men "abuse their God-given roles as leaders of their families" (see Sanford, 1994:30). However, it is the actual role which sets up a basic inequality and thus encourages abuse, discourages disclosure and turns victims away from the church which has had a hand in the abuse but rejects their plight.²⁷⁸

In Nason-Clark's study, there were varying levels of agreement by clergy that abuse is linked to hierarchical patterns within families. Some clergy accepted that the adoption of hierarchical positions of responsibility may in part be responsible for male aggression and may contribute to excessive control.²⁷⁹ Others believed the church was at times guilty of exacerbating problems of abuse within families by enthusiastically endorsing female submission and male headship.²⁸⁰ Nason-Clark says, "Abusive Christian men offer evidence that male leadership and power can be motivated by a desire to control" and asks whether violent families are an example of the traditional family pattern gone awry.²⁸¹

Ethel comments on her experiences of church culture:

I would look back because I just think it's urgent that we consider these kinds of things. So that's kind of the context from which I speak. When I thought about it, I thought it was a whole culture, a whole ethic, as well as a theology, and as well as a practice. It was... it was how we were when we were together, it was the values that we accepted from a culture that I believe are really counter to the gospel... but we accepted them, and we justified them by scriptural passages, and we reinforced them by the things we read from scripture, the things that were in the sermon, the hymns - oh gosh, the hymns, - the kinds of prayers.

There was this whole ethic and how we acted with each other - how the church council met, and how they dealt with things that arose, and what kinds of things they even considered worth giving their time to - all of those reflected attitudes and values that were a whole culture, and there was also a theology that I just believe is very, very unhealthy. It was a theology of domination, in which the great God - He who does all these things and is in control and takes charge - and that was mirrored in that men are the ones who take charge, and they solve things by taking charge, and that women are there to assist and that subservience and suffering are somehow virtuous in their own right.

And it was the culture that said that. And it was not offering the Good News that Jesus brings among us. And so it was this whole culture and ethic, and then it was

²⁷⁷ Shirley Gillett, "No Church to Call Home," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), 110.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 65.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 66.

this kind of theology, and then it was this practice, which doesn't really examine "So what is forgiveness? What is reconciliation? What is selfishness? What about the sacredness of each person? What is marriage really? What are partnerships about? What is mentoring?" All of those kinds of practices. "What is pastoral counselling? How does it actually be helpful, instead of disenfranchising people? And how do we listen? How do we provide for children and marriages and things that help people grow instead of stamping them down and keeping them in line?"

A big one, of course, was sex - because I was 'being cruel and depriving him of something that was really essential to him' by not wanting to go to bed. So here we were - with this selfishness on my part, and my desire to care for and provide for this person that I cared so much about - and if we disagreed, who gets to decide? Well, he's the man, he's in charge, I'm the woman, I can go along with it - it's okay, I don't have to have my way. And so - it's not just 'Oh okay 'how do we decide things?' And 'how important is myself as a person and the things I believe in' and in fact, 'do I even own my body?'

Megan highlights how the male culture of church got in the way of her quest for help:

Also, there's, you know, a lot of pastors tend to be male, and I must admit that I kind of... I like male pastors, but um, there are women, especially in bigger churches who can help, but if you're in a small church and the minister's a male, you're limited. My minister's interested in my situation, but if it does come back to sex, - men see it differently from women, and... Well it's just uncomfortable, talking about it with a man. So even on a practical sort of level, you know... There had been issues - well, pornographic. But of course, pornographic stuff gives them unrealistic expectations about what ordinary, normal women are about, and it starts to be that you can't... match up.

Nason-Clark (1986) highlights the predicament victims face when their submission and passivity are seen by clergy as the reasons for family problems.²⁸² Victims also face a dilemma when clergy promote traditional gender-based hierarchy. In the circumstances, passivity and submission reflect the fact that battered women tend to have low self-esteem. According to Heggen (1996), drawing on research by Lenore Walker (1979), women with low self-esteem are less likely to confront negative behaviours in others and are thus not likely to be effective in stopping violence towards themselves or their children.²⁸³ Christian women in this situation believe that they are expected to be meek and submissive and that by resisting violence against them, they will be violating Christian family principles. A Christian woman who had experienced domestic abuse described her dilemma in the following way: "I feel like I can't be

²⁸² Ibid., 103.

²⁸³ Carolyn Holderread Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture can be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), 21.

psychologically healthy and a good Christian wife at the same time. How can I confront his behaviour and be submissive at the same time?"²⁸⁴

Steven Fleming (1996) also refers to Walker's work (1984 and 1985) which found that common characteristics of an abuser include the holding of traditional ideas about family and roles, especially that the husband is the supreme leader in the home, and as a result, he holds power and control in an autocratic manner, believing that women are inferior and men superior.²⁸⁵

James R Beck (1996) cites Lisa Goodman et al (1993) who say,²⁸⁶ "Many authors locate the roots of violence in women's efforts to escape their historically subordinate roles in settings such as the family."²⁸⁷ Whereas secular authors will attribute value to an effort to escape, conservative religious leaders view such a goal as unbiblical, wrong and contributing to the existing problems.²⁸⁸

David Scholer (1996) identifies five issues and a range of scriptural texts which have become matters of contention between traditionalists and egalitarians. These are as follows:

1. The meaning of *kephalē* (head) which is traditionally understood to mean authority or headship. This relates to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Ephesians 5:21-33 which use *kephalē* in regard to the relationship between men and women
2. The meaning of *authentein* (to have authority), as used in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15
3. The relationship of men and women as established in Genesis 1-3
4. Biblical examples of various women in some kind of authority In the Old Testament, in the life of Jesus and in Paul's ministry, and

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁸⁵ Steven R Fleming, "Competent Christian Intervention with Men Who Batter," in *Women, Abuse and the Bible. How Scripture can be Used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books 1996), 176.

²⁸⁶ Lisa A Goodman; Gwendolyn Puryear Keita; Mary P Koss; Louise F Fitzgerald; Nancy Felipe Russo, "Male Violence Against Women: Current Research and Future Directions," *American Psychologist* 48, no. 10 (1993): 1056.

²⁸⁷ James R Beck, "Theology for the Healthy Family," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible* ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA Baker Books 1996), 219.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

5. The meaning of submission and admonitions relating to women remaining silent, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.²⁸⁹

The Meaning of *Kephalē*

According to Scholer, there has been an on-going debate since the 1980s regarding the meaning of *kephalē*.²⁹⁰ The traditional stance that *kephalē* means to “rule over” or to have “authority” was expounded by Wayne Grudem, a complementarian, in his seminal article “Does *Kephalē* (Head) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature?” (1985).²⁹¹ Grudem considered 2,336 examples of *kephalē* in Greek literature.²⁹²

In contrast to this, the egalitarian stance that *kephalē* means “source” rather than “head” began to be expounded in the 1970s and early 1980s with two articles by Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen in *Christianity Today* (1981).²⁹³ In these articles the Mickelsens argued that *kephalē* meant “source” or “origin” and did not have any relationship to “authority”.²⁹⁴

In 1987, reporting on an Evangelical Theological Society conference held in Atlanta in 1986, *Christianity Today* published an article by David Neff entitled “The Battle of the Lexicons”,²⁹⁵ which reported on a debate where egalitarians Catherine Clark Kroeger and Gilbert Bilezikian challenged Wayne Grudem’s stance of 1985. Kroeger’s work was later published in Gretchen Gaebelein Hull’s *Equal to Serve* (1987) as an appendix entitled “The Classical Concept of *Head* as ‘Source’”.²⁹⁶ Bilezikian’s work was also later published in *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family* (1990). Bilezikian’s work responded to every one of the examples from Greek literature cited by Grudem.

²⁸⁹ David Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical "Headship", " in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible. How Scripture can be used to Hurt or Heal*, ed. James R Beck and Catherine Clark Kroeger (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1996), 40.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Wayne Grudem, "Does Kephale (Head) Mean "Source" or " Authority Over" in Greek Literature? ," *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985): 38-59. Grudem’s article was originally included as appendix 1 in George W Knight III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching*, 2nd ed (Chicago Moody, 1985), 49-80, and then reprinted in Trinity Journal.

²⁹² Ibid., 38.

²⁹³ Alvera and Berkeley Mickelsen, "The 'Head' of the Epistles," *Christianity Today* 25, no. 4 (1981): 20-23.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁹⁵ David Neff, "The Battle of the Lexicons," *Christianity Today* 31, no. 1 (1987).

²⁹⁶ Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 2003). 267-83.

Scholer also points to Gordon Fee²⁹⁷ who also concluded that *kephalē* means “source”. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians in the *Evangelical New International Commentary on the New Testament* published in 1987, Fee drew on Kroeger’s material in Hull’s *Equal to Serve* (1987).²⁹⁸ Fee’s summation is that “Paul’s concern is not hierarchical (who has authority over whom), but relational (the unique relationships that are predicated on one being the source of another’s existence).”²⁹⁹

A further challenge to Grudem came from Richard S Cervin (1989) who joined the critique of Grudem’s work in a similar manner to Bilezikian by responding to each of Grudem’s examples. Cervin’s work was published in *Trinity Journal*,³⁰⁰ the self-same journal in which Grudem’s 1985 article had originally appeared. As well as the Corinthian textual meaning of “source”, Cervin also believed that *kephalē* means “pre-eminence”. This, he claims, is its basic Hellenistic meaning.³⁰¹ Grudem for his part responded to Cervin in 1990, again in *Trinity Journal*, reaffirming his 1985 stance.³⁰²

Craig S Keener also sided with the “source” interpretation of *kephalē* in his book *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (1992).³⁰³ Keener believes that in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:8, Paul’s use of ‘head’ can be understood as meaning “source”.³⁰⁴

Scholer concludes that the metaphorical meaning of *kephalē* can be varied to mean “authority over”, “pre-eminence” and “source”. It is important to note, however, that the Septuagint evidence is clear that *kephalē* was not generally used to translate the Hebrew *ro’ sh* where the Hebrew term meant “leader”, “ruler” or “someone in authority”. Such evidence strongly suggests that *kephalē* in Hellenistic Greek did not mean “authority over” or “ruler”.³⁰⁵

²⁹⁷ Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical "Headship"," 41.

²⁹⁸ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans). 506.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 503.

³⁰⁰ Richard S Cervin, "Does Kephale Mean "Source" or "Authority Over" in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal," *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989).

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁰² Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of Kephale "Head": A Response to Recent Studies," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990).

³⁰³ Craig S Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). 33-34.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰⁵ Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical "Headship"," 42.

Looking specifically at 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Ephesians 5:21-33, Scholer says the texts provide support for understanding *kephalē* as “source” and also for equality and mutuality between women and men within the church community.³⁰⁶ Scholer says, “the christological issue in the words ‘and God is the head of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 11:11-13 NRSV) is better served in Pauline theology by the understanding of “source” rather than “authority over”. Further, even the Genesis argument (c.f., 1 Corinthians 11:8-9) fits very well with understanding *kephalē* as “source”. Paul’s strong balancing statement (1 Corinthians 11:11-12) makes clear that his intent in stating “In the Lord” is for the mutuality (or equality) of men and women. Further the clear recognition that women as well as men participate in prayer and prophecy (1 Corinthians 11:5) also underscores this understanding.”³⁰⁷

With reference to Gordon Fee’s remarks on 1 Corinthians 11 in relation to men and women maintaining appropriate customs regarding hair and dress styles,³⁰⁸ Scholer finally says, “the fact that Paul states (in verse 10) that women in the Lord who wear the proper cultural head covering do have active, positive authority (*exousia*) makes clear the authoritative participation of women in worship.”³⁰⁹

Ephesian 5:21-24 reflects a general Jewish and Greco-Roman understanding of marriage where wives were understood as having a responsibility to submit to their husbands. Scholer says it is clear that this cultural understanding regarding marriage is clearly qualified for the followers of Jesus, and the passage is teaching an overarching concept of mutual submission and carries no permission for the authority of men over women. The opening sentence (Ephesians 5:21) makes clear the essence of the passage, i.e., “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”. Scholer stresses that within the passage, men are instructed three times to love their wives which was not a typical injunction in the Greco-Roman culture. This injunction is modelled on Christ’s love for the church, which is described in self-giving terms.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*: 521.

³⁰⁹ Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical "Headship", " 43.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 44.

Scholer maintains that the New Testament use of *kephalē*, when understood in context, does not support male headship and female submission but that in Christ a new understanding of mutuality, support and submission is brought to bear in the relationship between men and women.³¹¹

The Meaning of *Authentein* and 1 Timothy 2:8-15

When considering the term “authority” or *authentein*, the main textual passage of contention is 1 Timothy 2:8-15 which refers to women being silent. This is traditionally understood to provide support for male headship and female submission. A key issue in this regard is whether the instruction is intended for that context in particular or is a normative rule for all situations.

The debate has primarily concerned the actual meaning of *authentein*, but other issues relate to how Genesis is used in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 (discussed later) and how the heresies which were being faced in 1 and 2 Timothy affect the debate. Of importance is the fact that *authentein* is a very rare Greek verb. It only occurs once in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 2:12, and beyond this, is used very rarely in the Greek language.

Catherine Clark Kroeger initiated the “authority” debate in 1979 in the *Reformed Journal*,³¹² by noting that *authentein* was not the word that was usually used for positive authority since it had a negative connotation. As such an alternative English translation was ‘domineer’.³¹³

Scholer says a strong defence for the traditional understanding of “authority” was provided in 1984 in an article by George W Knight III, published in *New Testament Studies*.³¹⁴ In relation to 1 Timothy 2:12, Knight said the word “authority” had a neutral meaning and not the negative connotation of “domineer” as claimed by the *Berkeley Version*.³¹⁵ Knight claimed to draw his conclusions from the work of earlier lexicographers Atticista Moeris, Hesychius’ *Lexicon* and

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Catherine Clark Kroeger, "Ancient Heresies and a Strange Greek Verb," *Reformed Journal* 3, no. March (1979).

³¹³ Ibid., 12.

³¹⁴ George W Knight III, "'Authentein' in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12," *New Testament Studies* 30, no. 1 (1984).

³¹⁵ Ibid., 155.

Thomas Magister. He also claimed that internal considerations within 1 Timothy 2:12 favour the meaning of “have authority over” rather than “domineer”.³¹⁶

In 1988, in the same journal *New Testament Studies*,³¹⁷ Leland Wilshire published an article which drew on his use of *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG), a computer-based project containing three thousand ancient Greek authors from Homer to A.D. 600. He found that from the sixth to fourth century B.C., the word *authentein* almost exclusively meant a perpetrator of a violent act, either murder or suicide and that in Hellenistic Greek it continued to refer to murder or a murderer. Wilshire’s work therefore supports *authentein* carrying a negative meaning in Paul’s context, in line with ‘usurp’ or ‘domineer’. This also supports the view that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is addressing a specific problem of abuse in the church related to the false teaching opposed by Paul in 1 and 2 Timothy.³¹⁸ Wilshire says Scholer understands *authentein* in 1 Timothy 2:12 to mean ‘instigating violence’ and both Scholer and Wilshire believe that the widows of 1 Timothy were speaking on behalf of the false teachers of the cults and consequently were being told to be silent.³¹⁹ The instruction therefore has nothing to do with ecclesiastical power or authority; rather Paul is making clear he will not tolerate a certain type of negative behaviour from a section of women within the community of faith.

In 1992, Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger jointly published *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence*. This included a study on *authentein* in which they concluded that it meant “origination” or “source”.³²⁰ The Kroegers translated 1 Timothy 2:12 as: “I do not permit a woman...to represent herself as originator of man”.³²¹ This reflected their belief that there was a heresy being practiced in Ephesus which fused gnostic and pagan feminism prompting the idea that woman was the source of man. The conclusion to be drawn from this is therefore that in 1 Timothy 2:13 Paul is correcting false teaching by making reference to Genesis 2. The main issue for the Kroegers is that 1 Timothy 2 is culturally limited and does not represent a mandate to exclude women from authority or ministry.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 154.

³¹⁷ Leland E Wilshire, "The TLG Computer and Further Reference to 'Authentein' in 1 Timothy 2:12," *New Testament Studies* 34, no. 1 (1988).

³¹⁸ Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical "Headship"," 46.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 50.

³²⁰ Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman. Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1992).

³²¹ Ibid., 192.

Genesis 1-3 and the Relationship between Men and Women

Genesis 1:26-31 - Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may 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." So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Genesis 2:7 - Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:15-25 - The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will certainly die." The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, for she was taken out of man.'" For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 3:6 - When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Genesis 3:16 - To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

The first three chapters of Genesis are interpreted differently by complementarians and egalitarians with respect to God's intention for the relationship between men and women. It is the 1 Timothy 2:11-15 scriptures relating to the creation narratives which are the source of the differences.

In answer to the question “do the Genesis narratives describe an intended model of gender hierarchy? as complementarians claim, or do the chapters illustrate a relationship of mutuality as the egalitarians believe?”, Linda Belleville (2001) says that the complementarian claim that male leadership is intrinsic to the creation of female and male by God is difficult to support from the texts. She says while there was a deliberate and calculated distinction between the genders, the primary thrust is their sameness.³²²

In Belleville’s view, men and women were both formed from the earth, both were named *ʿādām*,³²³ and both were created in God’s image. She says *ʿādām* in Genesis 1:26-27 is not referring to gender; rather it is properly translated as “human” or “humankind”.³²⁴ There was sameness with regard to function - both were commanded to exercise dominion over the earth, to rule over and subdue it. With regard to family function there was also sameness, both were given joint responsibility for the bearing and rearing of children. Both were told to be fruitful and to enjoy the fruits of the land. Belleville notes, however, that the pronouns used in this regard throughout Genesis are plural: “God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number. I give you (*plural*) every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours (*plural*) for food.” (Genesis 1:28-29).³²⁵

In God’s sight there is sameness insofar as both are created as spiritual equals - both are blessed by God (Genesis 1:28), both directly relate to God (Genesis 3:9, 3:13), and both are personally held accountable by God (Genesis 3:16-17).³²⁶ Bilezikian says “since both man and woman bear the image of God, they are both assigned the task of ruling the earth, without any references to the differentiation on the basis of gender.”³²⁷ The purpose of gender differentiation was not intended to be structural so that one half of the population could govern the other half.³²⁸

³²² Linda L Belleville, “Women in Ministry, The Egalitarian View: Two Perspectives,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, edited by Craig Blomberg and James R Beck, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 140.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid., 144.

³²⁵ Ibid., 141.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2006). 19.

³²⁸ Ibid., 20.

So, while the egalitarians would highlight the personal, social and spiritual equality of male and females in Genesis 1-2, complementarians would call equality into question. In doing so, the complementarians typically highlight four issues.

1. The first issue is the fact that Eve was created as a helper for Adam (Genesis 2:18); complementarians claim that the term 'helper' (*‘ezer*) implicitly supports the notion of subordination, with the one receiving help being in authority over the one giving the help.

The egalitarian view however, as expressed by Belleville, suggests that "partner" more accurately captures the sense of the word "helper" than one who is inferior.³²⁹ Belleville points to the nineteen passages of scripture in the Old Testament where someone of strength such as a king, ally or an army helps someone in need and how, most often, the word is used in the Old Testament to describe God alone being the provider of help (Exodus 18:4, Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 20:2; 33:20). In support of this, Belleville points to the text of Psalm 121:1-2: "I lift my eyes up to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth". Help given to one in need thus fits Genesis 2:18 quite well. The male's situation was that of being "alone"; God's evaluation of this situation was that it was "not good" (Genesis 2:18). The woman was therefore created to relieve man's aloneness through "strong partnership".³³⁰ Bilezikian says "the Hebrew word for "helper" is not used in the Bible with reference to a subordinate person, but is generally attributed to God Himself".³³¹

In contrast to this, complementarian Raymond Ortlund (1991) believes God can become a subordinate to humans when he says: "It is entirely possible for God to subordinate Himself.... He does so whenever he undertakes to help us... the fact that the Old Testament portrays God as our helper proves only that the helper role is a glorious one, worthy even of the Almighty. This biblical fact does not prove that the concept of helper excludes subordination. Subordination is entailed in the very nature of a helping role."³³²

³²⁹ Belleville, "Women in Ministry, The Egalitarian View: Two Perspectives," 143.

³³⁰ Ibid., 142.

³³¹ Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family*: 22.

³³² Raymond C Ortlund Jr, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3." In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Wayne Grudem and John Piper, editors, 104. Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 1991.

2. A second claim to superiority of males by complementarians relates to the naming of the woman by the man. By naming her, the male is seen as exercising authority and is demonstrating his created role as leader. Belleville maintains, however, that in antiquity naming was not an act of power but rather was “a way of memorialising an event or capturing a distinctive attribute”.³³³

3. A third difference between complementarians and egalitarians concerns the name Adam (man) as used in Genesis 1:26-27. In relation to this, Raymond Ortlund, says, “God’s naming of the race of ‘man’ whispers headship... God did not name the human race ‘woman’.”³³⁴ Egalitarians claim, however, that there is scholarly consensus which proves that *ʾādām* is not a term which denotes gender. In Genesis, the term *ʾādām* is connected with the earth and “human” or “humankind” is the correct translation. In the last part of Genesis 1:27, gender-specific terms for male and female are used, but prior to this *ʾādām* is gender-inclusive with repeated reference to “them” (see Genesis 1:26, 27). Additional to this, in Genesis 5:1-2 God named the created male and female *ʾādām*.³³⁵

4. The fourth issue of contention concerns the order in which man and woman were created. The complementarian’s claim that as *ʾādām* was created first it means God intends men must take the lead. The egalitarians counter this view pointing to the teaching of Jesus about the first and the last (Mark 10:31) and note that the animals were created prior to *ʾādām* and this does not mean they were superior.³³⁶

Belleville says that Genesis 1-2 emphasises human completeness after the creation of the woman; the man was alone and God said “It is not good” but when male and female were created, God saw it was “very good.” Thus subordination of the female to the male is not part of the creation accounts; rather both female and male are subordinate to God who commands, and both male and female are called to obey.³³⁷ There is no evidence that God intended male leadership or male-female hierarchy in Genesis 1-2. However, after the Fall

³³³ Belleville, “Women in Ministry, The Egalitarian View: Two Perspectives,” 143.

³³⁴ Raymond C Ortlund Jr, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3.” 98.

³³⁵ Belleville, “Women in Ministry, The Egalitarian View: Two Perspectives,” 144.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid., 145.

things change, as the egalitarians acknowledge. Reflecting this, Genesis 3:16b states “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

Considering Egalitarian and Complementarian Differences Claimed to be Found in Genesis 3

As male rule is so prominent in traditional evangelical reasoning, it is important to acknowledge the egalitarian view that male rule is not mentioned in scripture beyond Genesis. The woman is never commanded to obey man and the man is not commanded to rule the woman. Significantly, the rest of scripture highlights that Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:23-24 are normative rather than Genesis 3:16. Male and female relationships are called to be lived out in light of God’s initial intention of mutuality and partnership. Jesus is clear in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:8 that the marriage relationship is to be characterised by oneness, not hierarchy.

Some complementarians maintain that Eve’s disobedience was in taking the lead and then forcing the male to do as she wanted. Ortlund, in his contribution to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991) says because she usurped Adam’s headship in the temptation, God hands her over to the misery of competition with her rightful head. This is a just, measure-for-measure, response to her sin... God may be saying “You will have a desire, Eve. You will want to control your husband. But he must not allow you to have your way with him. He must rule over you.”³³⁸ However, according to the egalitarians, it is not stated that the woman desired to take the lead. Instead, the text says she desired to be wise like God. The male followed. As Belleville says, a divine command had been given “you must not eat from the tree” (Genesis 2:17). Both the man and woman were disobedient (Genesis 3:6-7), and both paid the price (Genesis 3:14-19).³³⁹

According to the egalitarians, Genesis 3 is describing the consequences of human disobedience and male rule as an outcome. The original divine intent of partnership and joint responsibility had been sabotaged. Belleville says “It is a sad state of affairs indeed, when one must seek biblical warrant for gender hierarchy in a male-female relational dysfunction that resulted from disobeying God.”³⁴⁰ Del Birkey, in *The Fall of Patriarchy* (2005), says complementarians hold that the Bible teaches that women are under the authority of men, but nowhere in scripture is that said and neither can it be said that scripture supports the view that women

³³⁸ Raymond C Ortlund Jnr, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3.” 109.

³³⁹ Belleville, “Women in Ministry, The Egalitarian View: Two Perspectives,” 146.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 148.

have an inferior status or function.³⁴¹ Bilezikian says in agreement, “There are no references in Genesis 1-2 to divine prescriptions for man to exercise authority over woman... Only God had authority over Adam and Eve”.³⁴²

Complementarians hold to the view, however, that hierarchy between the genders is sanctioned by scripture insofar as women are equal in person but subordinate in status. Del Birkey notes the representative view expressed by Ortlund who asks, “So, was Eve Adam’s equal? Yes and no”.³⁴³ Ortlund goes on to assert in this same passage that from Genesis “woman was made from the man (her equality) and for the man (her inequality)”,³⁴⁴ so she is equal as a human but unequal in function.³⁴⁵ Ortlund concludes from this, “The idea of ‘equal rights’ in an unqualified sense is not Biblical.”³⁴⁶

To recap, in relation to the verses cited previously from Genesis and Timothy, the egalitarians see *authentain* in terms of negative connotations relating to violence and inappropriate behaviour. Rather than reflecting the complementarian’s assertion of the establishment of male headship and female submission for all time, egalitarians maintain that these verses reflect negative behaviour that Paul is forbidding.

As discussed, exegetical and hermeneutical issues are complex in relation to the debates around headship and submission. The egalitarians would affirm the Bible does not institute or expound male headship and female submission. Rather, scripture supports and teaches mutuality of respect and equality in Christ for men and women, both in ministry and in marriage. As such, Biblical misinterpretation and misrepresentation should not to be used to support, justify or sanction abuse within the family.

The Role of Patriarchy

The above discussion leads on to questions regarding the role of patriarchy and its contribution to abuse especially where Biblical interpretation plays a role in undergirding

³⁴¹ Del Birkey, *The Fall of Patriarchy: Its Broken Legacy Judged by Jesus and the Apostolic House Church Communities* (Tucson, Arizona, USA: Fenestra Books 2005). 49.

³⁴² Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family*: 30-31.

³⁴³ Ortlund Jnr, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3.” 102.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Birkey, *The Fall of Patriarchy: Its Broken Legacy Judged by Jesus and the Apostolic House Church Communities*: 48.

³⁴⁶ Ortlund Jnr, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3.” 105.

beliefs and influencing perpetrators, victims and those offering advice or help to the abused and the abusers.

Steven Tracy, a complementarian, believes patriarchy is overemphasised as a reason for the existence and prevalence of domestic violence and sees the feminist explanation which blames patriarchy for domestic violence as reductionist when it comes to providing a complete and final explanation. Tracy quotes Donald G Dutton who asks "If patriarchy is the ultimate basis for all violence against women, then why is it that on an annual basis, 90% of all North American men do not abuse women?"³⁴⁷

Likewise, Tracey quotes Cynthia Ezell who comments, "Patriarchy is not responsible for an individual husband's violent action toward his wife. It does, however, create an environment ripe for abuse. A weakened immune system does not create the virus that leads to deadly infection, but it provides the environment in which the virus can thrive and do its killing. Patriarchal beliefs weaken the marital system so that the deadly virus of violence can gain a stronghold".³⁴⁸

To some degree Nason-Clark supports this assertion linking hierarchy and wifely submission with abuse, but she tempers any extreme expression of it by claiming that while many scholars link abuse to wifely submission, the link between hierarchy and violence is unclear. She does say, however, that while "violence is not inherent in the Christian model of family living" it nevertheless "clearly develops as a by-product in some families."³⁴⁹

Tracy draws attention to the fact that other factors are operative in men who abuse and while these factors can be influenced by various forms of patriarchy, several of the factors transcend them. These factors include biological influences, intrapsychic disorders, and social construct issues.³⁵⁰ Referring to studies which have specifically assessed the relationship between religion, patriarchal beliefs and abuse, Tracy says these studies do not support the view that

³⁴⁷ Steven R Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007): 578., citing D G Dutton, *The Domestic Assault of Women* (Vancouver, Canada, University of British Columbia Press, 1995), and D G Dutton *The Batterer: A Psychological Profile* (New York, USA, Basic Books, 1995).

³⁴⁸ Kroeger, Catherine Clark; Beck, James R, ed. *Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope and Help to Abused Women*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1998, 39.

³⁴⁹ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 51.

³⁵⁰ Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," 579.

patriarchy is entirely to blame for abuse.³⁵¹ In some studies, adult male abusers were unable to be differentiated from non-abusive men solely on the basis of their traditional (patriarchal) gender attitudes.³⁵² However, Tracy says early population studies found that less egalitarian nation states had the highest rates of violence, and where there were extreme definitions of patriarchy, higher abuse rates were found among patriarchal men. He concludes, “Studies do find there is a relationship between conservative religion and domestic violence; it is not the simple causal relationship the feminists’ model would predict.”³⁵³

Tracy draws attention to a number of studies which found an inverse relationship between church attendance and domestic violence. Conservative Protestant men who attend church regularly were found to be the least likely to abuse their wives while conservative Protestant men who were irregular church attenders were the most likely to abuse their wives.³⁵⁴ This reaffirms Tracy’s stance that this disproves feminist claims that patriarchy is the single underlying cause of all abuse towards women. However, these studies do strongly suggest that patriarchy plays a role in abusive behaviour.³⁵⁵

Tracy goes on to explain the benefits of what he refers to as “soft patriarchy”. He claims that recent sociological studies of conservative Protestant family life reveal that while most American evangelicals affirm distinctive gender roles in marriage and affirm male headship, they do not practice traditional patriarchy but rather soft patriarchy. This form of patriarchy “de-emphasises male authority and control, defines male “headship” in terms of loving sacrificial service to one’s family, and lives this out in terms of joint decision-making, shared parenting and shared domestic duties”.³⁵⁶ He says it is by no means clear that this brand of patriarchy promotes abuse of wives. In pointing to abusive forms of patriarchy he says, “it is both logical and biblical to assume that in a sinful world males would use their power to dominate and abuse”.³⁵⁷ It is interesting that he identifies the curse as predicting that men would seek to dominate harshly women where he and other traditionalists claim that hierarchy was an initial plan and intention at creation rather than a consequence of the Fall,

³⁵¹ Ibid., 581.

³⁵² Ibid., 580.

³⁵³ Ibid., 581.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 582.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 584.

which is what egalitarians claim. Tracy maintains that the model of patriarchy was initiated by the curse and identifies it as flawed since it was birthed at the Fall. He goes on from this to assert that some forms of patriarchy are scripturally sanctioned by discussing when it is allowable for a wife to submit, implying that some forms of patriarchy (soft) are appropriate while others are not. He seems to be both for and against patriarchy by maintaining that some patriarchal practices are allowable and justifiable while others are not. In this regard he criticises Grudem's stance of there being no causal connection between male headship and domestic violence and for attributing blame for domestic violence on feminism.³⁵⁸ Patriarchal teaching that stimulates many men to be more loving and sensitive to their wives and children is unhealthily distorted by other men to justify male superiority, domination and abuse of females.³⁵⁹ However, while Tracy's soft patriarchy enables biblically-sanctioned power over women as wives, he says it is important that conservatives start to acknowledge the "casual connection between male headship and domestic violence".³⁶⁰

Tracy nevertheless upholds soft patriarchy pointing to the claim that men who regularly attend church are less likely to abuse their wives. Reasons for this are: "1) regular exposure to biblical teaching and preaching on family life detoxifies abusive beliefs about male headship; 2) Christian community offers salutary models on a loving, non-dominating masculinity; 3) the experience of Christian community increases men's sense of confidence and masculinity which in turn decreases their need to control women and children."³⁶¹ Tracy maintains that those who attend church irregularly and are prone to violence, for the most part will hear some form of patriarchal gender view i.e., male headship - which may confirm their views of male superiority and their right to dominate women.

As we have shown, egalitarians have a different take on the scriptures used to substantiate the complementarian model of headship and submission and the view of different forms of patriarchy being constructive.

Therapist and writer Carolyn Holderread Heggen says that inherently, the logic of patriarchy allows men the right to dominate and control their wives and families; it also allows the right

³⁵⁸ Grudem; Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 62.

³⁵⁹ Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," 584.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

to enforce control. It is this control over women and children that enables violent and abusive behaviours.³⁶² Heggen quotes Helfer and Kempes' book *The Battered Child* (1968) as follows: "the assault rate on children of parents who subscribe to the belief of male dominance is 136 per cent higher than for couples not committed to male dominance".³⁶³ Other concerns regarding the application of these values are raised from Lenore Walker's (1979) extensive research on battered women. She claims that women with strong religious beliefs are the least likely to believe that the violence against them is wrong. Battered women also tend to hold to traditional views concerning sex roles in the home.³⁶⁴

Harriet's childhood and adulthood journey exemplifies these themes of the rights and expectation of male dominance:

We were a 'Catholic family'. Until we got to teenage years - and by then Mum had been unwell, Dad had been in prison, the family was in a bit of the state, and we, sort of stopped being Catholic... I think because Mum went on the contraceptive pill - she had decided that was enough! - And so we didn't have that involvement. But those beliefs I think follow you for a long, long time... that the church is... in charge in some ways? I remember the priest coming in and looking around the house, sitting us down and giving Mum a bit of a hard time, Dad wasn't here... so they were in charge of the family, that's what it felt like... and so we were very typically Catholic.

It is my biblical belief that my husband was supposed to love me like God loves the church, and I'm supposed to be submissive or subservient or obedient. And I guess, deep down, I was looking for a stronger man than what I saw in my mother's and father's relationship - in actual fact, I married someone like my mother. I thought that he made all the big decisions, I like to think that I would be able to contribute. But I didn't originally see marriage as a partnership - I thought it was this sort of... thing where he was....a bit more in charge - that was what I wanted. I went through a stage of thinking that's why the marriage broke up, I contributed to the marriage break up because... I've disempowered him, or I have been... because I always worked, I always worked either part-time or full-time through our married life, even when the kids were little I worked part-time and did nights - that was a little bit financial as well. But also my mother was always so reliant on my father - she didn't have a profession, he earned the income and she stayed home with the kids. I didn't want to be that dependent, and so I was fortunate enough to finish my nursing training and got to stay in the workforce, which meant I had financial freedom that my mother never had - and now I'm so grateful because I'm completely financially independent. But I did go through a stage... and I still think there's a bit of me that wonders... I must have contributed something to the breakup, because nothing is usually ever one person's fault. What he did was his fault, but what did I do to contribute that made him behave like that or whatever - I still struggle with where my role in it is I guess, although his behaviour is his behaviour... but it's that whole

³⁶² Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse," 17.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

idea that you're in it together, and it takes two to tango, and yeah... so I still have a bit of that stuff that I'm working through as well, I guess.

Heggen is convinced that the Christian community cannot both support patriarchy and stop domestic abuse. In agreement with the egalitarian view of Genesis 1-3 she claims patriarchy was not God's intention, but rather a consequence of the Fall, a result of sin. She directs us to Jesus for the model for relationships which reflects values of the new creation. She maintains that Ephesians 5:21-6:9 shows a radical movement from patriarchy to mutuality, as does Galatians 3:28, which shows the revolutionary equality that was intended and instituted by Christ - "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, New Revised Standard Version).³⁶⁵

While complementarians do not always relate patriarchy to abuse, or like Tracy see other factors contributing to abuse which transcend patriarchy, other voices regard patriarchy as a dominant factor.

A United Nations report on violence against women (2003) asks why gender violence continues seemingly unabated. The report says "The answer is deceptively simple, but the solution is deeply complex: gender inequality fuels violence against women and the power balances it creates are not easily rectified".³⁶⁶

The report highlights a specific United Nations research project in 2001 which looked into how masculinities are created and perpetuated and what it means to be a man in different cultural contexts. The focus of the research was to identify ways in which male violence developed and to find methods to rectify this.³⁶⁷ Possible steps towards prevention identified in the report included addressing the larger context of violence.³⁶⁸ The report also claimed that social transformation would require reconfiguring societal conversations about violence.³⁶⁹

Regarding Christian family violence we could ask in what ways beliefs around headship and submission contribute to the wider context of violence within Christian families.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 19.

³⁶⁶ UNIFEM, "Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women," (New York, USA: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2003), 7.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 70.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

A 2006 United Nations publication about ending violence against women claims “there is no region of the world, no country and no culture in which women’s freedom from violence has been secured”.³⁷⁰ The pervasiveness of violence against women across the boundaries of culture, race, and class points to its roots in patriarchy - the systemic domination of women by men.³⁷¹ In opposition to Tracy’s view, the report claims violence against women cannot solely be attributed to individual psychological factors; to focus on individual behaviour or personal histories such as alcohol abuse or exposure to violence overlooks the broader impact and influence of systemic gender inequality and its role in the subordination of women.³⁷²

“Male dominance and female subordination have both ideological and material bases. Patriarchy has been entrenched in social and cultural norms, institutionalised in the law and political structures and embedded in local and global economies. It has also been ingrained in formal ideologies and in public discourse... Violence against women is both the means by which women’s subordination is perpetuated and a consequence of their subordination.”³⁷³

The report goes on to highlight the relationship of patriarchy to domestic violence saying, “intimate partner violence is significantly correlated with rigid gender roles that associate masculinity with dominance, toughness, male authority in the home and threats to male authority”.³⁷⁴ According to this United Nations report, the roots of violence against women lie in historically unequal power relations between the genders and persuasive discrimination against women in both public and private spheres.³⁷⁵

The comprehensiveness of male violence can be under-appreciated. Del Birkey, for example, claims that violence by males can be assumed to be motivated by individuals and have minimal social consequences.³⁷⁶ However regarding the influence of patriarchy, Birkey quotes from Silvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), “Violence against women has all the characteristics ... of a social structure, and cannot be understood outside any analysis of patriarchal social

³⁷⁰ United Nations, *Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action*, ed. Secretary General (New York, USA: United Nations 2006). 28.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid., 29.

³⁷³ Ibid., 28-29.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

³⁷⁶ Birkey, *The Fall of Patriarchy: Its Broken Legacy Judged by Jesus and the Apostolic House Church Communities*: 35.

structures".³⁷⁷ Violence against women is firmly embedded in patriarchy's legacy and Birkey quotes the work of Dobash and Dobash *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* (1979), "Only in recent times have influential persons opposed the long patriarchal tradition of 'natural' hierarchical relations between husbands and wives".³⁷⁸ Birkey goes on to say, "The history of the divine rights of husbands to beat their wives in 'lawful correction' to establish and maintain their masculine authority permeates both state and church history. Europe, Early America and England were guided by legal systems in which law clearly institutes women's subordination. In British common law, the 'rule of thumb' states that a man was able to beat his wife as long as the instrument used was no thicker than his thumb. Wife beating rights were supported by most prominent secular and religious figures in Western society. Although there is strong resistance to acknowledge patriarchy's grip in the West, the mind boggling fact is that a wife became a legally equal partner only in the nineteenth century of Western human civilisation".³⁷⁹

In considering the role of scripture and its negative contribution to domestic violence in promoting and reinforcing gender inequality, Bilezikian and Kroeger have drawn attention to a set of related principles. Kroeger emphasised the challenge and value of fully understanding an ancient text and applying it appropriately to contemporary situations.³⁸⁰ Mimi Haddad echoes Kroeger's view, saying, "The challenge of abuse within the Christian home is often related to matters of biblical interpretation - discerning what is descriptive from what is prescriptive in the Bible".³⁸¹ Bilezikian explains how the first two chapters of Genesis describe God's ideal community on earth. There were three structures which reflected aspects of God's divine image which God invested into human life. Firstly the ontological structure of oneness, which makes up the very essence within the Godhead. Secondly, the relational structure that bound the original in an arrangement of mutual servanthood. And thirdly, the ministry context where there is serving within a relationship of complementarity of gifts free from differentiation concerned with rank or gender. Completely absent in the order of creation is a hierarchical

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ R Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*, (New York, USA: The Free Press, 1979), 24.

³⁷⁹ Del Birkey, *the Fall of Patriarchy: Its Broken Legacy Judged by Jesus and the Apostolic House Church Communities*. Tucson, Texas, USA: Fenestra Books, 2005.

³⁸⁰ Barbara Fisher-Townsend; Nancy Nason-Clark; Catherine Clark Kroeger, ed. *Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to Churches and their Leaders* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: WIPF and Stock Publishers 2011), 8.

³⁸¹ Mimi Haddad, "Dr Catherine Clark Kroeger: An Evangelical Legacy," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 3 (2011): 8.

structure between men and women. The original creation reflected oneness and mutuality, says Bilezikian.³⁸²

Until sin entered the world, this harmonious co-operation operated. The Fall has implications for domestic violence with regard to God's ideal being contaminated with qualities that were never part of His original intention. Oneness was lost, mutuality was replaced with hierarchy, complementarity of function was thus affected and gender specific roles resulted from the separation. These results were consequences of the Fall, and domestic violence is but one of the fruits. Yet, according to Nason-Clark, the voice of complementarian writers still claim that "family unity is achieved most fully and satisfactorily when couples subscribe to the hierarchical model of family living... and hierarchy is considered one of the most defining and differentiating features of couples subscribing to a conservative Christian world view".³⁸³

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of patriarchy within the Christian family and discussed claims that the tenets of this hierarchical model contribute to family violence. The complementarian view which supports submission and headship is challenged by egalitarian viewpoints. Four issues were highlighted in the chapter which are central to the debate regarding headship, submission and authority. These included:

1. the meaning of *kephalē* (head)
2. the meaning of *authentēin* (to have authority)
3. Genesis 1-3 and the relationship between men and women, and
4. The role of patriarchy in contributing towards violence against women.

Having considered the issue of submission, headship and patriarchy, the remaining chapter will draw together the issues raised in the preceding chapters in summary form.

³⁸² Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family*: 171.

³⁸³ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 24., citing her previous work in "Conservative Protestants and Violence against Women", and "Clerical Attitudes Towards Appropriate Roles for Women in Church and Society".

Chapter 6

We Need To Be Heard

Mary: *Well of course there is that "Wives, be submissive to your husbands"... It also says in that verse, that "Husbands, love your wives like Christ loves you". To me, that was always like the ultimate - if a man loves a wife like Christ loves him, what more would a woman ever want? To me, I always thought that. Well I think it's been misinterpreted, forever and ever. And I think there's something in a lot of men that just, somehow, have... they have to have that 'lording over'... they have to be the boss, they have to be in control - they can't be, um... spoken back to. Their ideas or their statements can't be challenged. I think there's something like that in a lot of men. I think it's just as prevalent in Christian men, yes I do - I really do.*

Because marriage is a covenant that's made between her and God – it's harder for a woman with that understanding to walk away. However, on the other hand, no one should have to put up with abuse... this man isn't keeping the promises he made, so therefore it's got to be surely some, some way out... in the Godly sense. But I've never heard anyone say to me that that's how it could be. Well, with my marriage - the forgiveness thing - I laid it at the foot of the cross like people told me you do when you want forgiveness, and leave things to God and stuff - that's what I did. I packaged it up, I laid it at the foot of the Cross - "I forgive this man, I don't want to be hounded by the thoughts of this anymore"

However, when I look at my marriage, and I think my unforgiveness is... is just totally there. I don't know whether I've forgiven that situation at all. Things like "Turn the other cheek" and "Forgive seventy times seven" in the context of abuse? Oh no... in the context of abuse... gosh, we're taught that that's what we have to do when we read the bible, that's what we have to do. Keep forgiving. Forgive. But when I look at my daughter, and I see what I see.... I would just say to her "Run! Get out of there! Stay out of it! Don't ever - please - let it happen to you again! Don't start denying it and waiting for it to happen again, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive them"? What does that mean, in the context of abuse? I think at the moment it just shows that I haven't done a good job at forgiving. It really does... it keeps coming up. I don't get healed because I'm not forgiving.

I feel that I haven't done a good job in forgiving because I'm as sick as ever. It's come from Christian teaching. People say even now - you're suffering, (I've got arthritis) - if God isn't healing you, it's because you're holding on to unforgiveness . It's a stumbling block to me spiritually too, the fact that my daughter has been in that abusive relationship - didn't listen to anything, didn't listen to advice or whatever.... it's taking a huge toll I think emotionally on her daughter, and on... well everyone involved, really. But Oh no... I wouldn't want my daughter to be 'forgiving seventy times seven' and 'turning the other cheek'; in the presence of abuse - if they were in an abusive relationship - get out of there! Christian or not - get out of there. That's what I would say to my family. I would not want any abuse. Hideous, it's hideous.

Introduction

Mary's reflections set the scene for the opening of Chapter 1 and in this final chapter her words set the scene again - bringing together aspects of domestic violence that are particular to Christian women, especially as they grapple with faith-related issues. The chapter will draw together issues raised in the preceding chapters and suggest some tentative conclusions. It will draw to a close by giving the final say to one of the other women who were interviewed.

Key Concerns and Contrasting Viewpoints

A key concern of the thesis has been to explore the issues evangelical Christian women face as they try to cope with family violence and seek assistance and guidance from their church communities. In order to provide empirical content for the thesis, seven Christian women from a variety of evangelical backgrounds who had formerly been abused by their husbands were interviewed. The interviews were structured around themes of forgiveness, divorce, suffering as a reflection of God's will and patriarchy, all of them key issues in the relevant literature. The interviews also focused on how their churches had helped or hindered these women in dealing with domestic violence.

The literature on domestic abuse was explored in order to establish how the experiences and stories of the women matched up with what is presented in that literature. As a complement to this, the matter of how scriptures relating to forgiveness, the permanence of marriage, headship, submission and patriarchy have been used and applied within evangelical churches was also explored. This led to the conclusion that teaching based on scriptural understandings prevalent in most evangelical churches not only shapes women's options but more importantly, constrains their choices in responding to and dealing with abuse. Responses by evangelical Christian communities to family violence are thus seen, for the most part, to be limited and inadequate and as a result, the prevention of violence against women within Christian families is not given the proper attention that it should. A key conclusion here is that much of these inadequacies stem from the complementarian view of gender roles to which most evangelical churches subscribe.

According to the complementarian view, as presented for example by James Hurley (1981), John Frame (1987), Wayne Grudem (1991), John Piper (1991) and others, men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family and church life. Men are exclusively assigned leadership and authoritative positions in these contexts while women are limited to support roles. The complementarian view holds that God created men and women equal in worth, but different and complementary in function. Men are thus to assume headship in the home and, by extension, leadership in the church. The complementarian view considers that the Bible instructs husbands to lead their families and to love their wives sacrificially as Christ loves the church. Wives, for their part, are called to

respect their husbands' leadership, out of reverence for Christ. Adherence to such a patriarchal view of gender roles within marriage tends to lead to abused wives being encouraged to return to the abusive context, to be submissive and forgiving towards their husbands and in no way to consider divorce as an acceptable option.

In contrast to this, it was argued that an alternate view of gender roles needed to be championed and embraced that would provide a sounder basis for understanding and responding to domestic violence, theologically as well as practically. Such an alternate viewpoint, it was suggested, can be found in the egalitarian perspective of Catherine Clark Kroeger (1992, 2001), Nancy Nason-Clark (1997, 2011), Marie Fortune (1983, 1995) and others. This is the viewpoint that was adopted in developing the central arguments of the thesis.

Instead of emphasising complementarity between genders roles, the egalitarian viewpoint emphasises equality and mutuality. Egalitarians believe that men and women have been created equal in God's image and that any interpretation of scripture that demeans women and prohibits them from using their spiritual gifts and abilities in ministry is unjust. According to the website of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), a key forum for egalitarian views, the central tenets of egalitarianism are as follows: Believers are called to mutual submission, love and service; God distributes spiritual gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity or class; believers must develop and exercise their God-given gifts in church, home and world; believers have equal authority and equal responsibility to exercise their gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity or class and without the limits of culturally-defined roles; restricting believers from exercising their gifts - on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or class - resists the work of the Spirit of God and is unjust; and believers must promote righteousness and oppose injustice in all its forms.³⁸⁴

In reviewing the literature on complementarian and egalitarian viewpoints on gender roles and their respective responses to domestic abuse and violence within the Christian home, it was found that writers, theologians, practitioners and researchers agree that abuse within Christian families is a continuing but largely unrecognised problem. A review of the literature also shows, however, that there is confusion around how victims and perpetrators are to be best served, cared for, disciplined, pastored and managed, and how abuse can be prevented.

³⁸⁴ See <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/our-mission-and-history>

Not surprisingly, what the literature also reveals is that the Christian community has its fair share of differing viewpoints when it comes to understanding Christian principles and applying scripture to situations of domestic violence, especially in relation to forgiveness, the permanence of marriage and divorce, and submission, headship and patriarchy.

Forgiveness

In reflecting on the issue of forgiveness in relation to domestic abuse and violence we considered in turn: New Testament discussions of forgiveness; the intertwining of biblical and therapeutic views on Christian domestic abuse; questions and challenges relating to forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation in the context of domestic violence; the consequences of applying different understandings of forgiveness to the well-being of victims and the dilemmas these victims often face as they seek to appropriate forgiveness; and lastly, the importance that needs to be placed on ensuring that the safety of women and their children is given priority in situations of on-going abuse.

New Testament passages relating to forgiveness highlight the general dilemma domestic violence victims face when they equate tolerance with forgiveness. Most of the women interviewed referred specifically to the admonition to forgive “seventy times seven” and considered this to be a God-given expectation, even in the circumstances of abuse that they faced. This perspective on forgiveness derived from Church preaching and teaching as well as direct advice from pastors and church-based counsellors. As a result, all of the women interviewed had over many years prioritised the need to forgive over and above their own personal safety and in some cases, over the safety of their children. Reflecting on this, the seven women spoke of receiving unhelpful advice. Their experiences were in line with the expressed view of Steven Tracy, “a number of theologians and writers in the field of family violence are concerned that commonly used scriptures concerning forgiveness are misunderstood and thus misapplied pastorally to women living with violence”.³⁸⁵

While in abusive situations, none of the women interviewed held their partners accountable or demanded a change in behaviour or evidence of repentance. Instead, they each hoped for better treatment based on their generosity in forgiving, and thus they continually put

³⁸⁵ Steven R Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 27, no. 3 (1999): 219.

themselves at risk. Several of the women mentioned a lack of awareness on their part that the behaviour of their husbands was abusive or wrong.

Neither those interviewed, nor those from whom they sought advice, seemed to share Fortune's views, as cited by Nason-Clark, that forgiveness should not be the starting point of a process and that it is misguided to think that words of forgiveness by themselves reduce the pain and augment the healing process.³⁸⁶ In a similar vein, Blomberg maintains (2006) that for a perpetrator to say simply sorry or offer an apology does not constitute biblical repentance; there must be with a change in behaviour.³⁸⁷ In discussing Matthew 18:21-22, Blomberg warns "When there is not true repentance on the part of the abuser it can be counterproductive or even harmful to forgive".³⁸⁸ Heggen cautions that a facile, quick forgiveness which does not demand accountability and responsibility puts the victims and others in danger of on-going violence. This outcome was experienced by all of the interviewees. Because of this, they illustrate a key finding of Lenore Walker's (1979) research which was that women with strong religious backgrounds are often the least likely to believe that violence against them is wrong.³⁸⁹

The interviewees, or those advising them, did not take a long-term approach to forgiveness. Instead, the women offered forgiveness to their partners along the way, almost immediately as a response to abuse whether it was requested or not. Mostly forgiveness was not asked for, yet the women felt obliged to offer it as they lurched from one crisis to the next. It was the first step the women took rather than Fortune's ideal whereby forgiveness is the last step towards healing with prior steps fulfilling the necessary function of freeing up a victim to forgive.³⁹⁰ The women in this study, however, were unaware of Fortune's view that hasty forgiveness which disregards justice may perpetuate the abuse cycle and also negate and prevent redemption for abusers because they are not made accountable.³⁹¹ None of the victims' partners were ever held accountable in such a manner and, as a result, the abuse was perpetuated.

³⁸⁶ Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). 17.

³⁸⁷ Craig Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 25, no. 2 (2006): 145.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁸⁹ Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman*. New York, USA: Harper and Row, 1979.

³⁹⁰ Marie M Fortune; Carol J Adams, ed. *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (New York, USA: Continuum, 1995), 201.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 203.

It should be noted, however, that to a large extent, the literature on forgiveness that was drawn on for this study dealt with forgiveness in relation to past wrong-doing rather than on-going abuse, i.e., the situation of women who were continuing to live with on-going abuse. The distinction was seen as being important with regard to suggested outcomes.

The seven women who were interviewed applied the concept of “forgive and forget” as a pattern rather than placing value on remembering previous abuse and acknowledging that they had been sinned against. They did not embrace their own worthiness or their right to live in safety and be respected. In their understanding, their entitlement to safety was of lesser importance than the need to forgive since they understood that forgiving was expected by God and the church. While Fortune (1995) laments the fact that such interpretations of scripture are often offered as pastoral responses to Christian women who have been subjected to family violence, Tracy (1999) makes the pertinent point that, “much of the religious literature implores forgiveness, but never clearly defines it”.³⁹² Tracy talks of the complexity involved in making sense of the need for forgiveness due to apparent contradictions in biblical treatments and scenarios. In some scriptures believers seem to be commanded to forgive without any qualification while in others, forgiveness is contingent upon repentance.

In noting interviewees’ responses to scriptural interpretations of forgiveness, however, and what this meant for them in abusive contexts, there was no confusion. Each of them was clear that forgiveness was the right course of action to take. This response was based on a literal understanding of scriptures which refer to “forgiving seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22) and “forgive us our sins even as we forgive others” (Matthew 6:12). While being troubled at this, they nevertheless believed that as Christians they had no other choice. On the whole they did not recognise or refer to scriptures which offered the option of their forgiveness being contingent upon repentance by their abusers. Neither were they aware of any scriptures which offered pastoral support or compassion with regard to their circumstances.

And so, for women caught up in a relationship where abuse is operative, biblical misunderstandings in relation to the need for forgiveness can thus keep them bound and committed to the relationship, even to the point of willingly tolerating on-going abusive

³⁹² Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," 219.

behaviour. Such ingrained beliefs as “I must forgive him or God won’t forgive me” or “I must forgive seventy times seven” are adhered to by such women as they consider their role in the abusive situation, the commitment they are meant to have towards their marriage and their perceived obligations when it comes to forgiveness.

Overall for the women who were interviewed, their understanding of forgiveness and how it should be applied to their situations led to them having to deal with an overwhelming sense of failure. In the circumstances, this is regrettable. Sadly the misunderstanding of scripture around forgiveness by the seven women did not prevent the violence and has not been life-giving or liberating with regard to their past abuse or their future lives. For most of the women, their present Christian walk is impeded by a continuing sense of failure and a questioning of their own integrity, self-worth and spiritual well-being. Even the understandings they apply retrospectively to their abuse reinforce a sense of guilt in the face of what they perceive as personal failures. This can be seen in the use of such phrases as, “I don’t know whether I’ve forgiven that situation at all”; “I feel that I haven’t done a good job in forgiving”; “unforgiveness is a stumbling block to me spiritually”; “why am I so stuck?”; “Forgiveness, I just struggle with it”; and “Am I not as good a Christian if I can’t forgive and move on from it?”

Had these women been able to embrace their rightful entitlement to genuine repentance they might have experienced some peace. Speaking into their situation, Smedes (1984) says, “If they (the abusers) cannot or will not take responsibility for wrongdoing, you will have to settle for your own healing, your private freedom from hate, and your own inner peace.”³⁹³ Freedom from guilt might also be possible if these women had been able to apply Blomberg’s (2006) ideas around disjunctive forgiveness where a victim chooses to leave the abusive relationship due to denial by the perpetrator or an unwillingness on his part to take responsibility for his actions. Blomberg sees a biblical justification for disjunctive forgiveness and concludes that leaving “may be the best that can be managed in this fallen world”.³⁹⁴

Divorce and the Permanence of Marriage

³⁹³ Lewis Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York, USA: Harper Collins, 1984). 32.

³⁹⁴ Blomberg, "On Building and Breaking Barriers: Forgiveness, Salvation and Christian Counseling with Special Reference to Matthew 18:15-35," 146.

The concept of marriage as a covenant is often claimed to be the justification for considering it to be a permanent arrangement, regardless of relationship difficulties or whatever else may be taking place within the marriage. In reflecting on this we considered and explored the views of theologians and practitioners and also on how the Christian family has been elevated as an ideal within some evangelical circles. These two concepts, marriage as covenant and family as an ideal, were considered in relation to the presence of abuse in a marriage, noting the dilemmas when pastoral responses encourage or promote commitment and staying together regardless of the presence of abuse. In attempting to understand the scriptural basis for the concept of marriage-as-covenant, a number of related issues were discussed including covenant scenarios in the Old Testament, instances and responses when covenants were broken and what the issues were which affected the permanence of covenants. Both Jesus' and Paul's radical teachings on marriage and divorce were also discussed. We also considered whether "saving the family", i.e., maintaining the marital relationship no matter what, should be put above concerns about ensuring the safety of a woman and her children.

The women who were interviewed generally expressed the view that prior to marriage they were committed to the concept of the permanency of the marital relationship. They mostly entered their own marriages with high hopes and with no inkling that their relationship would be soured by abuse. If asked at the time, they would no doubt have agreed with James Dobson's view that, "because God hates divorce even violent marriages should be saved from divorce".³⁹⁵ As we discovered in reviewing the literature, however, a number of commentators claim that promoting such an unrealistic view of family life compounds the problem women face when they are abused within marriage. Carolyn Heggen (1996), for example, holds to the sacredness of marriage but says that Christians need to appreciate the permissive nature of God where a marriage covenant is broken by abuse. They also need to appreciate that marital permanence is not more important than personal safety. Likewise Catherine Clark Kroeger (2004) maintains that while divorce is the least desirable option in such circumstances, it is sometimes necessary and is indeed a biblical option. In support of this Kroeger says, "the possibility of divorce reinforces the serious nature of the offence and serves as an incentive for changing abusive conduct".³⁹⁶

³⁹⁵ Quoted in Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 31.

³⁹⁶ Nancy Nason-Clark; Catherine Clark Kroeger, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001). 132.

In exploring covenant scenarios in the Old Testament we drew on the work of Mitzi Eilts (1991), Catherine Clark Kroeger (2004), Nancy Ramsay (2006) and Ron Clark (2009). Eilts highlighted the mutuality of biblical covenants. Covenants were good for people as well as for God. Kroeger reminded us how God promised to bless the faithfulness of his people. Ramsay highlighted the fact that a marriage covenant should set the scene for a relationship that was loving, honouring and cherishing. Clark drew attention to the covenant established as part of creation and concluded that a marriage relationship is similar in that the marriage covenant calls for faithfulness from each partner.

As part of this discussion, we noted the times when covenants were broken by the unfaithfulness of God's people. When covenantal relationships were violated in this way, God withheld compassion and protection. Indeed, on such occasions God was forced to divorce Israel in order to maintain the honour of His name (Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:22).

Ron Clark (2009) endorsed the view that marriage reflects not only God's covenant with Israel but also Jesus' relationship with the church. As such, says Clark, the covenant is violated when a spouse chooses not to honour, respect and love the other. In these terms, divorce is not the problem; rather it is how one treats a spouse. Just as God has the option to call bad behaviour to account, to expect repentance and request holiness, so too does a victim of abuse within a marriage.

God constantly renewed and established His covenant with Israel in new ways as new generations emerged in different contexts. In response to the claim that a marriage must never be broken, we noted the language of blessings and curses especially in Leviticus 26, Psalm 78 and Deuteronomy 29. These scriptures show that there were consequences for breaking a covenant which included being separated from God and being denied God's favour. God promised faithfulness, but He also expected reciprocal faithfulness in order for the covenant to retain its validity.

In considering New Testament treatments of divorce, it was noted that Jesus adopted a radical stance for his day which challenged cultural practices and attitudes towards women. Jesus recast adultery from being a property crime of one man against another. Women were not to be considered simply as a disposable resource. Rather they were worthy of respect and protection. Jesus was thus making a stand against the victimisation of women by going beyond

the mere condemnation of adultery and instead, urging men to cease objectifying women sexually. The issue here was not Jesus saying that women could not leave abusive relationships. Rather, as Ramsay explains (2006), Jesus was condemning the situation whereby men sought to configure options in their own interests, thus allowing them to break sacred promises of care and leave divorced wives with few resources.

The New Testament offers two grounds on which women can seek divorce: unfaithfulness and desertion (c.f., Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:8 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-16). According to Carrie Miles (2006), however, where there is violence towards a woman within a marriage then the sacred vow of oneness that is the essence of marriage (i.e., two becoming one flesh – Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:8 and Ephesians 5:31), is broken by an abusing husband. In these circumstances, the abuser destroys a covenant when he abuses his wife and in essence he deserts her as a result of his inappropriate abusive behaviour. Ramsay says, "The scriptures leave no doubt that God's love always intends protection of the vulnerable so that divorce is preferable to continuing life threatening and dehumanising suffering for family members".³⁹⁷

In seeking safety through separation or divorce, a female victim of abuse is acknowledging that her marriage covenant is no longer operative. In taking such action, says Kroeger (2004), the woman is not the one breaking the covenant. Kroeger points to the fact that covenants were ended by God when their purposes were ignored and transgressed. A marriage covenant is therefore not more precious than the human being who is being wrongfully treated. The intention of the marriage covenant is to ensure that justice, mercy and God's love are lived out reciprocally and applied in ways consistent with the covenant. When abuse impinges on this and undermines it, a victim must be able to seek safety and peace even if it means separation or divorce.

The women interviewed held dearly to the concept of the marriage being a covenant and believed it was they themselves who would be breaking the covenant if they were to leave the marriage relationship. They did not perceive that their abusing husbands were the ones who were in the wrong. Somehow the women did not grasp that God's values in covenant relationship include protection of the vulnerable and that in these circumstances they were the vulnerable party.

³⁹⁷ Nancy J Ramsay, "Confronting Family Violence and its Spiritual Damage," *Family Ministry* 20, no. 3 (2006): 36.

Three women saw the unfaithfulness of their respective husbands as biblical grounds for divorce but they did not consider that abuse spanning several years was an equivalent justification. This can be seen in their use of such phrases as, “you marry for life”; “you made your bed”; “I promised to stay”; “I believed it should be saved”; “I stayed for the kids”; “I made a sacred vow to love, honour and cherish until the day I died”; “we made the promise before God”; “I didn’t think God ever broke covenants so we shouldn’t break them either”; “I made a marriage commitment for life”; and “marriage is supposed to be for life so I hung on and hung on and hung on”.

Of note is the fact that when these women went to ask for help from a pastor or church leader they were by and large reminded of their marriage vows and encouraged to go back to their husbands and pray more. It is significant that none of these women were shown or told of scriptures that were pastorally compassionate or that suggested abuse was not honouring the covenant to which they and their husbands had committed.

Submission, Headship and Patriarchy

In reflecting on the role of patriarchy within the Christian family and claims that the tenets of this hierarchical model contribute to family violence, Christian beliefs about headship, submission, authority and their relationship to abuse were explored. Egalitarian views which challenge the complementarian view of submission and headship within marriage were especially highlighted and four issues were identified which have become central to the debate about gender roles within the Christian family: the meaning of *kephalē* (head); the meaning of *authentein* (to have authority); what Genesis 1-3 has to say about the relationship between men and women; and the role of patriarchy in contributing towards violence against women.

Each of the women who were interviewed described being in a marriage relationship of inequality where the greater power was held by their husbands. Choices made by husbands left each woman feeling disadvantaged and in some instances led to them being injured. The children within these families also suffered (and continue to suffer) as a result of this misuse of male power. The women remained in positions of vulnerability and danger, guided by beliefs adhered to within their respective faith communities that such submission was biblically expected and directed.

In developing the argument in relation to headship, submission and patriarchy, we questioned complementarian views on the biblical mandate for male authority and female submission and considered how such Christian beliefs contributed to abuse. Different meanings of the Greek word *kephalē* were considered, with a particular focus on whether it meant “to rule over” or “source or origin”. Likewise, the use of the Greek word *authentēin* in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Timothy 2:8 was explored as the basis of the “authority” whereby women are told to be silent. Complementarians support its meaning as a normative substantiation of male headship and female submission, while egalitarians see it as a particular instruction for a particular context and therefore not normative for all time. Certain complementarian understandings regarding a supposed hierarchical relationship between men and women to be found in Genesis 1-3 have been countered by egalitarians who believe that the original creation account describes male-female relationships in terms of mutuality and equality rather than headship and submission. Complementarians understand God to have ordained hierarchy at creation and extend this to marriage and the family. Roles within marriage are seen by the complementarians as being complementary where the husband is the leader, the wife the submissive follower and the spiritual welfare of the family is the husband’s responsibility. Egalitarians on the other hand affirm that the Bible does not institute, expound or support male headship and female submission *per se*. Bilezikian (2006), for example, pointed to the absence of hierarchy in the order of creation which instead was characterised by oneness and mutuality. Sin interrupted this harmony, however, and God’s ideal was contaminated. Mutuality was thus replaced with hierarchy and gender roles resulted from human separation from God.

Patriarchy as an influence on domestic abuse was explored. It was noted that it is disputed as the primary and exclusive cause of abuse by some complementarians such as Grudem (1991) who believe such values protect the family and that to neglect such traditional principles will lead to destructive consequences for families, churches and culture. These values, however, are seen to varying degrees by egalitarians as being causative and as contributing to the increasing risk of violence within marriages. Nason-Clark (1997), for example, claims that while “violence is not inherent in the Christian model of family living”³⁹⁸ it nevertheless clearly develops as a by-product in some families because of the adherence to hierarchical values. This is supported by a 2006 United Nations report which claimed, “The pervasiveness of

³⁹⁸ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 51.

violence against women across the boundaries of culture, race and class points to its roots in patriarchy - the systemic domination of women by men".³⁹⁹ The report also stressed that intimate partner violence is significantly correlated with rigid gender roles that associate masculinity with dominance, toughness, and authority in the home, and that the roots of violence against women lie in historically unequal power relations between the genders and pervasive discrimination against women in both public and private spheres.

In support of this, Fleming (1996) cited research which found that male abusers commonly subscribed to traditional ideas about family and gender roles, especially that the husband is the supreme leader in the home and as such holds power and controls family members in an autocratic manner. Underpinning this is a belief that men are superior and women inferior.

Nancy Nason-Clark (1997) drew attention to the observation made by secular agencies that women in faith communities were particularly vulnerable to abuse, and that religion and religious involvement were linked to specific attitudes regarding women, gender roles and family life. Women who are especially vulnerable are conservative Christian women who have been abused and who attribute value to such attitudes, especially where submission of the wife is emphasised as an ideal. Nason-Clark also highlighted the connection between violence within marriage and the subordinate position of women within marriage and how the abuse of women exposes the potential danger of patriarchal systems within the family structure, by setting the scene for control by male.

The women who were interviewed lent support to Lori Beaman's view that, "The doctrine of submission and attendant beliefs about appropriate gender roles may contribute to a women remaining in an abusive situation".⁴⁰⁰ It was noted that battered women also tend to hold traditional views concerning sex roles within the home.

According to Shirley Gillett (1996), where the complementarians would say that men who abuse their wives are abusing their God-given roles as leaders of their families, egalitarians would say that it is the actual role which sets up a basic inequality which in turn encourages abuse, discourages disclosure and turns victims against the church which unintentionally has

³⁹⁹ United Nations, *Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action*, ed. Secretary General (New York, USA: United Nations 2006). 28.

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted in Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*: 141.

had a hand in the abuse but which nevertheless rejects their plight – Nason-Clark’s “holy hush”.⁴⁰¹ Silence and denial within evangelical communities regarding the abuse of women may thus immobilise female victims and at the same time inadvertently support the practices of abusive husbands.

Catherine Clark Kroeger’s contribution to the discussion (1979) was to draw attention to the importance of understanding scriptural texts in context and applying them appropriately to contemporary situations. At root, this requires asking what is descriptive and what is prescriptive within scripture.

Patriarchy and the role that it has played in contributing to domestic violence are the result of the Fall, says Heggen (1996), an eventuality which required that Jesus come and model relationships that reflected the values of the new creation. As such, the claim is made by egalitarians that Ephesians 5:21-6:9 shows a radical movement from patriarchy back to mutuality, as does Galatians 3:28 which exemplifies this revolutionary equality in claiming that, “there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.

These new-creation assertions of mutuality and respect as exemplified in the life, work and teachings of Jesus and Paul are missing in accounts provided by the seven women. This is shown in their use of such phrases as: “The husband is the head of the house”; “Everything had to be focused around his life”; “Do I even own my own body?”; “Men are the ones who take charge”; “Women are there to assist and subservience and suffering are somehow virtuous in their own right”; “I am supposed to be submissive or subservient or obedient”.

Postscript

Before drawing this chapter, and the thesis to a close I would like to draw attention to some additional themes that emerged from the interviews. They highlight issues for further exploration that unfortunately were beyond the scope of the present study.

⁴⁰¹ Quoted in Victoria Falburg, "Book Review : Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 3 (2011): 13.

In responding to the interview situation, each of the women reflected on the fact that she had never before told her complete story. This is congruent with the claim that most women in abusive relationships do not disclose. What is striking, though, is that the secrecy continues not only in relation to their past pain but also in relation to their present and continuing bondage. This in turn relates to how they perceive God's word and how they view their Christian walk. None of the women interviewed are free from the spiritual consequences of their abuse even though they are no longer in intimate relationship with those who abused them. Beyond this, other themes of note were:

- The women felt neglected by their churches
- They all spoke of feeling excluded or being irrelevant in church and of being isolated
- Several of the women did not recognise the treatment meted out by their husbands as abuse
- Several of the women had had to endure forced sex
- Several of the women struggled with mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety
- Several of the women spoke of the failure that they felt in not managing their past abuse
- Three of the women confided in their mothers-in-law in the vain hope that as mothers the older women would advocate on their behalf with their respective sons. In each instance, however, the mothers-in-law sided with their sons and blamed the victims for the abuse
- Several women worried about the emotional pain their own mothers might have suffered because of the abuse that they, their daughters, had suffered

Future research on themes such as these could inform more fully the complexity and comprehensive impact of domestic violence on Christian women.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis has reflected on statements made in the introduction that within evangelical churches abused women often do not get the help they need from their churches. Responses by evangelical communities to women suffering domestic abuse are for the most part limited and inadequate. As a result, the prevention of violence within Christian families is not given the proper attention that it should. By their testimonies, the seven women

interviewed have validated such claims. It is fitting then that we end with a concluding comment that underscores the need for these dishonoured women to be acknowledged and heard:

Ethel: *There was one point, after the divorce, when things just really, really hit me, and I started to weep, and I could not stop weeping. I wept for 24 hours, and finally I thought 'somehow I need absolution'. And it was Saturday by then, and the Protestants aren't open on Saturday but the Catholics are, because they have confession. So I went - I think it was partly that I believed that I had done things that were terribly, terribly wrong, but I also believed that it hadn't just been me. So I went to the Catholic Church, and I asked if I could go to confession - and the priest said "sure", and he sat down and I sat down - I think it was actually a confessional booth. I've never been in one before. "That's okay" he said. And I was really concise, and I said in like 15 minutes what my journey had been, and some anger I had at the church also. And when I had finished, he said "You have been heard". And he said it in a way that got right to the core of me. And then he would've given me some benediction that I don't remember - probably "Go in peace" - and I left and I wasn't crying anymore. I think it was that he heard me. He really heard me, and I think he probably said "Your sins are forgiven, go in peace" - I don't know, I just know that he said "You have been heard" and that the benediction he gave me was to go and cause me to go in peace. But it was like... it was like my uncle or someone putting his hand on my shoulder, but I know he wouldn't have touched me at all because I remember, but he reached me, and I guess I think I want to put that in, for how the church was helpful. It needed to be the church that did that. [Pause]*

Okay - now you can turn it off!

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Interviewee Consent Form

I have read and understand this information and consent form. On this basis I agree to participate as an interviewee in this project, and I consent to the interview being audio taped. I understand someone other than Daphne Gracie Marsden may transcribe my interview. I understand that brief excerpts of my interview will be quoted in the interviewer’s thesis about the relationship of the evangelical church and domestic abuse. I have been informed that my interview transcript will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous and that I will not be identified or identifiable. I understand that without giving any reason I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided up to the date of submission of the thesis work (December 2011).

Please cross out the statements which do not apply:

I would like a copy of the interview script.

I request that all copies of this interview (tape, written and electronic) be destroyed at that end of this course.

I agree to an anonymous copy of this interview script (with blinded references to all persons, places and organizations) being kept for future teaching and research purposes.

Signed..... Date.....

Supervisor’s Contact Details

Dr Alan Jamieson

Email: ajamieson@spreydon.org.nz

Work phone: 338 4163

Appendix Two

Interviewer Declaration

I hereby agree to keep all interview material in strict confidence. No names will be used in any written transcripts or discussion. I will at all times ensure the strict confidence of this interview material and your identity.

Signed: _____

Interviewer's full name: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: Daphne Gracie Marsden

Email daphnesgracie@hotmail.com

Phone 331 6453

Appendix Three

Questions for Interviewees

How does or how did your church community and culture help or hinder your life journey in relationship to an abusive marriage experience?

What has been the least helpful for you regarding church culture as you experienced an abusive relationship?

What has been most helpful in your experience with the church concerning your relationship?

Considering scripture, which passages do you relate positively to your past and present experiences?

Has your church helped your understanding of these more difficult passages?

Which passages of scripture do you struggle with or feel a dilemma with in regard to your choices or outcomes in relationship to the experience of domestic abuse?

Please comment on these issues and your experience:

1. God's will
2. Suffering as a Christian
3. Forgiveness
4. Family and divorce

Interview Information Sheet

If you have had previous experience with violence within a marriage relationship and are no longer in that marriage relationship, and you are a Christian you are invited to participate in an interview. The interview will explore your experience of the relationship between an abusive marriage relationship and the evangelical church.

The interview is part of a Master's Thesis being undertaken with Laidlaw Carey Graduate School of Theology/Laidlaw College of New Zealand. The interview is required as part of a student's master's research.

Your involvement in this project will require one interview of approximately one hour. To enable the interviewer to prepare, a written transcript of what you say the interview will be audio-taped. Someone else other than Daphne Gracie Marsden may transcribe your interview. Please phone Daphne (03) 331 6453 or email daphnesgracie@hotmail.com if you are willing to participate.

You are invited to participate in an interview which will explore your experience of the relationship between an abusive marriage relationship and the evangelical church.

If you choose to participate in the interview your complete confidentiality will be maintained.

In order to maintain the highest standards of confidentiality the interviewer undertakes to:

- Ensure that no names are used in the interview script or the written discussion of the interview which will be part of the written assessment in the study.
- Any names (of people, places and organisations) will be blanked out or replaced with fictitious alternatives.
- All copies of the interview script (taped, written and electronic) will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may, however choose to allow the written interview to be kept by the student for future research purposes.

You may request a copy of the interview script for your own interest.

The interviewer will provide you with this information and consent form, and a copy of the questions to consider prior to the interview.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this interview the supervisor's contact details are provided.

In the unlikely event that you do experience emotional discomfort as a result of the interview, Ainslie McDowall counsellor/psychotherapist of the Arahura Medical and

Counselling Centre has agreed to meet with you for a one hour free consultation to help you. Her contact details are (03) 338 1080.

Without giving any reason you are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any stage and withdraw any information you have provided up to the date of submission of the thesis work (December 2011).

Thank you for being willing to be part of this interview.