



## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO EMOTIONAL ABUSE

*I was amazed to see that no one intervened to help the oppressed. So I myself stepped in to save them with my strong arm.*

Isaiah 63:5

The Scriptures never invalidate or minimize the effects someone's harsh actions and cruel words have on another person's soul, spirit, and body. **A cursory reading through Scripture amply illustrates God's disdain for mockers, abusers, deceivers, those who misuse their power, oppressors, revilers, ragers, hypocrites, and slanderers.**



For example, the psalmist says, "Your tongue cuts like a sharp razor; you're an expert at telling lies. You love evil more than good and lies more than truth. You love to destroy others with your words, you liar!" (Psalm 52:2-5).

David cries out to God, "Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles...My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking...It is not an enemy who taunts me—I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me— I could have hidden from them. Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend" (Psalm 55:2,4-5,13).

**Sadly, we've sometimes failed to validate the destructive consequences of living with a foolish, argumentative, angry, deceitful, contentious, indifferent, hard-hearted, or evil**

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**person when the Scriptures are quite clear that the effects are real.** The psalmist said, "Their insults have broken my heart and I am in despair" (Psalm 69:20).

I wonder if sometimes we haven't valued honesty as much as we preach it. When a woman goes to her church leadership and discloses what's going on at home, she hopes to be supported and protected, but for some women, that's not her experience. Instead, she's been scolded, shamed or shunned. She's been told to bring her husband in for his side of the story. How can she speak honestly with him present if she's afraid of what will happen when they get home? She's been told that she needs to be more submissive and try harder to make things work. She's been told that there is nothing in the Bible called emotional abuse and therefore what she's experiencing has no validity. She's been told that God wants her to somehow figure out how to make her marriage work because God hates divorce.

By our words are we telling her we don't want to get involved or help her? Do we inadvertently encourage her to keep quiet, placate, and pretend? And, if she refuses and gets persistent or demanding in her plea for our help, do we start to label her as aggressive, contentious, rebellious, unsubmitive, deceitful, or unstable?

I think sometimes we're afraid to get involved because, if we open our eyes to what's going on in some homes, we're not sure what to do. **We've valued the sanctity of marriage over the safety and sanity of the people in it.** Therefore, we've encouraged women to put up with abusive behavior rather than speak up or stand up and have our biblical categories challenged. Yet, Jesus commended the persistent widow in Luke 18, who kept pestering the judge for legal protection against the injustice she was experiencing.

**God has put the church together not only to model a loving family to a broken world, but also to model justice and protection when one of its members is destructive and unrepentant towards another.**

Deitrich Bonhoeffer said, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."