



Sexual Abuse in Marriage Leslie Vernick

Christy was startled awake when she felt her husband yank her nightgown up and pull her legs apart. She tried to push him off her, but he was too strong as he pinned her down to their bed with his body weight. This wasn't the first time he forced himself on her, but this time was the worst. This night Greg was rougher than usual, and Christy felt it would never end. She bit her lips together so she wouldn't scream. Their little boy was asleep next to her in their bed and all she could think of was, "Please God, don't let him wake up and see this."

The next day, Christy had a fat lip, her back ached, and her insides felt raw and bruised. Later that evening, she tried to talk to Greg about what happened, but he blamed her. He told her if she wasn't such a prude, then maybe they would have a spicier sex life. Christy didn't see herself as a sexual prude, but she did think she ought to have a choice. She didn't think she should feel afraid of her husband or of sleeping in her own bed with him. She didn't think she should have bruises or injuries after sexual intercourse. Christy was right.

Sexual abuse in marriage is not something that is readily disclosed or discussed. It feels shameful to admit, even to one's self, that your own husband treats you as if your sole purpose is to provide him your body whenever, and however, he wants sex. But that is not God's intent for you a woman or as a wife.

As Biblical counselors, we must begin to understand the reality of sexual abuse in marriage and address it properly. Many women have written to me describing the foolish and unbiblical counsel they have received when disclosing marital sexual abuse. Their counselors often cite 1 Corinthians 7, "Your body is not your own." seemingly implying that God gives the husband a free pass to do what he wants with her body. That is a lie.

Friends, God designed the sexual relationship in marriage to reflect a sacred oneness of unselfishness, safety, and mutual love. Sadly, some marriages never get close to reflecting this picture. Instead, there is selfish demandingness, a total disregard for a wife's feelings, leading to abuse, shame, and fear.

Below are three indicators that a wife is being sexually abused in her marriage.

1. She is forced to do sexual things she does not want to do. Like Christy, she might be forced into sexual intercourse, but she might also be forced to do anal sex, oral sex, watch pornography, participate in degrading practices such as sadistic bondage rituals, or have sex with other partners (male or female) while her husband watches or photographs her.
2. She complies with his sexual demands but only because she is threatened or is afraid of dire consequences if she refuses. Even if she isn't physically forced to do these things, she may be threatened with divorce, told he will find someone else or visit prostitutes, she's threatened with harm or harm to her children, or pressured spiritually by telling her that the Bible says God says her body is not her own therefore she has no rights to say no.
3. Her feelings don't matter. For example, she's clearly told him that she doesn't like him grabbing her butt or breasts out in public, but he does it anyway. She feels uncomfortable wearing low cut tops, short skirts, and/or push up bras, but he insists that she wear them or pouts when she won't.
4. He wants a quickie in the laundry room but the kids are playing in the next room. She says no - but he always wins. Or, insists he needs to have sex three times a day, seven days a week and she is worn out, but that doesn't matter.

Each of these indicators reveals that her husband believes he's entitled to get what he wants with little or no regard for his wife's personal feelings, values, or desires. If it's good for him, it doesn't matter if it hurts or humiliates her. It's all about him and his needs. Her role is to serve and service him. Her feelings and needs are secondary or irrelevant. To him, a wife is a body to use, a possession to own, not a person to love.

This is not God's desire for her, for him or for their marriage. God doesn't care more about men than women or a husband's sexual needs more than a wife's feelings.

The Bible is clear. The picture of proper marital sexual relationship is described in the Song of Solomon. It is mutual, it is reciprocal, and it is freely entered into by both partners.

The Bible also has a lot to say about the misuse of sex. For example, Paul says, "Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people." (Ephesians 5:3-4). He goes on to warn, "Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do."

Sexual abuse in marriage is sexual greed and lust. The immoral person wants more and more regardless of whether or not it hurts or damages the other person. As biblical counselors, we must never minimize or excuse this behavior. Nor are we to encourage wives to put up with this or go along with it. Instead, Paul says we are to expose it for what it is (Ephesians 5:11-14).

It breaks my heart that women are not only assaulted by their own husbands but when they seek help from God's shepherds, they are reinjured by the very people God has put in place to protect them. Please read a woman's first-hand account of the sexual abuse in her marriage and how her church leaders failed her <http://leslievernick.com/sexual-abuse-in-marriage-a-real-life-experience/>. The comments from other women who also were sexually assaulted by their husband and then shamed, scorned, scolded or ignored by their church must be heard.

Friends, as Christian leaders, as Biblical counselors, we must do better here. God will not hold us guiltless.