

# PASTORAL COUNSELING.... IS IT NECESSARY?

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Ralph held a loaded shotgun to Sally's head on Saturday evening at eleven o'clock. After much pleading, Sally convinced him to put the gun down. Sunday morning they arrived at church on time and joined in the worship service. To those who saw and greeted them, everything *appeared* normal. But although Ralph was active in his church and friendly with his pastor and others, he was critical and abusive to his wife and children at home. So when he went into a fit of rage two weeks later and shot his wife to death, both the church and surrounding community were shocked. *How could such a godly man do such a thing?* The answer is simple: "What you see on Sunday morning is not what you see at home."

Uncontrolled anger, spousal abuse, drug abuse, sexual abuse, and child abuse often remain hidden until something tragic happens. Thus, pastors must learn that counseling is just as important as preaching. Unfortunately, few pastors believe in or practice counseling for their church members. Why? Because it takes a lot of "sweat" to help people get through problems one-on-one. And it's a lot easier to stand in the pulpit and believe your preaching is so enriching and powerful that it will change the batterer without a one-on-one encounter.

Furthermore, the so called, "psycho-logical experts" want the public to believe that only they, the elite and brilliant thinkers with doctorate degrees, have the ability to counsel. This is not the case. Learning to counsel is a relatively easy task. But so long as we are deluded into believing the "elite" have all the answers, people will pay a lot of money for their exclusive and expensive counseling.

Men who batter come from many backgrounds. They are Agnostic/Atheist, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and others. Further, it's difficult to look at a man and know that he is a batterer. Unknown to the public, most batterers come from a Protestant or Catholic affiliation. Is there a "batterer" secretly lurking in your church?

In an attempt to identify how evangelical pastors usually deal with abuse, a questionnaire was sent to several thousand pastors of conservative protestant churches. Although the response was weak, the results prove there is widespread battering in the home. Seventy percent of the pastors reported that there is abuse "sometimes" or "often" in Christian marriages. Eighty-four percent of pastors reported they had counseled at least one battered wife during their tenure at their present church. Thirty-five percent of pastors reported counseling abused wives six or more times for battering. Be aware that wife abuse is more prevalent in Christian homes than most people believe. But as one minister aptly said, "Guilt and negligence within the churches keeps it repressed."

Current statistics suggesting that nearly seven million wives will be abused by their husbands this year sends a "shock-wave" through our nation. Don't be fooled! For centuries wife beating has been accepted as "natural" -- the consequence of a woman's status as her husband's property.

In fact, throughout much of history, male violence toward women and children has been socially, legally, and religiously accepted -- or worse yet -- endorsed. For centuries the man was not only the "head" of his household, but "king" of his domain, "the home."

In Rome, the *Law of the Twelve Tables* granted a father the absolute right to sell his children, as well as power of “life and death” over his children. The power of a Roman husband to exert authority over all members of his household reigned supreme. This power was firmly rooted in ancient societies and still exists today.

Christ came to teach equality, but He was opposed at every turn because Jewish traditions were biased and difficult to change. Proof of this bias is found in a recorded prayer of a Jewish man as he prayed, “I thank God that He did not make me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” Paul, being a Jew and a Pharisee, was aware of this bias. Likewise, he endeavored to change the view that both men and tradition held towards women. He said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) Paul’s message was not popular in a society that taught female subjection, and that the woman was not a person. A wife was only her husband’s possession, and as such, had no legal rights. Jewish divorce laws also reflect the inequality between the sexes. The wife had no rights of divorce unless her husband became a leper, apostate, or engaged in a disgusting (that is, “unclean”) trade such as “tanning and other unclean trades considered unclean.”

During the medieval church age, a majority of clergy taught that a husband had the right to beat his wife with a stick, if she did not follow his verbal commands. During the Middle Ages, a French law code stated that men were “excused for any injuries inflicted on their wives.” Thus, the law did not intervene, provided the husband did not kill or maim his wife.

Today’s church is lagging far behind when it comes to understanding and helping families enduring abuse. And it’s easy to see how the “elite and educated” have taken away the right of the clergy to counsel people with problems. This paradigm shift came about during the mid-nineteenth century because clergy simply ignored family problems, or denied they existed. When spousal and child abuse became overwhelming in America in the past half century, states intervened and set up “professionals” to solve this problem.

I challenge you, as a pastor, to learn what to do for the couples in your congregation that “suffer in silence.” Why not schedule a week to “get acquainted” with the members of your church? Invite them to visit you at the church office at a pre-determined time. When they do so, allow them to discuss whatever is on their minds. If only one spouse comes, that’s okay. Remember, this is only the beginning. And as you learn more about your members, you can help them in every facet of their lives.

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