

“No More Silence”

by Mable C. Dunbar, Ph.D., L.P.C.

She is barely out of her teens. She grew up in Christian home where it was her responsibility to “make the family look good.” For most of her young life she endured physical, emotional, sexual and religious abuse. When she got the chance she ran away and married a “Christian” old enough to be her father. He forced her to obey him and prevented her from using contraceptives. After two miscarriages, two children eleven months apart, lack of health care, various health issues, physical, emotional, sexual and religious abuse, she cautiously, methodically planned and executed her escape from this abusive marriage.

Now she is struggling with some issues: Should she go back to her husband and try to “make the marriage look good”? Did she try hard enough to make the marriage work? Does God still love her? Is she a good mother for depriving her children of being with their father? If a Christian should always be happy why is she so sad and depressed? Why is she plagued with guilt and shame? Should she tell her story? Who will believe that her religious and pious husband is an abuser? How will the church look at her if she gets a divorce for abuse and not for adultery?

Unfortunately this is a true story. I often wonder how many of us Christians realize or can even conceive the deep, silent, and insidious pain and confusion that abused and abusive individuals face. Victims, advocates, and even perpetrators have cried aloud, have lifted up their voices to let the church know that there is a problem and they need help. But they are often ignored, ostracized, penalized and cautioned to remain silent. Their stories are discounted. The effect of their suffering is minimized. If they attempt to expose secrecy and eradicate apathy towards abuse they are seen as having an unforgiving spirit.

Brochures have been placed in churches, public bathrooms, places of business, and schools. Self-supporting ministries struggle to sustain healing centers to help the wounded and broken who want to experience wholeness. Information about domestic violence and sexual abuse has been made available in packets distributed during workshops and conferences.

But how do we end domestic violence? Do we conduct more research, write more books, produce more brochures, plan more workshops, forums, and conferences before we can help individuals in current crisis? What is the long term effect for the church if “she” is not proactive in addressing this dilemma now? The following quotation succinctly, yet sadly outlines the reality of why domestic violence and sexual abuse continue in our homes, schools, churches and society at large and whose agenda is being purported and supported when the church ignores cries for help:

“I believe that there is a devil, and here’s Satan’s agenda. First, he doesn’t want anyone having kids. Secondly, if they do conceive, he wants them killed. If they’re not killed through abortion, he wants them neglected or abused physically, emotionally, sexually...One way or another, the legions of hell want to destroy children because children become the future adults and leaders. If they can warp or wound a child, he or she becomes a warped or wounded adult who passes on this affliction to the next generation”. -Terry Randall in TIME Magazine, October 21, 1991.

What can we do to prevent our children from growing up to be wounded individuals that pass on their affliction to the next generation, our grandchildren? How can we minimize or end this intergenerational cycle of physical and sexual violence?

*“The reign of violence within many homes is evidence most basically of Satan’s kingdom at work destroying order, love and happiness in human relationships. And until **we enter the arena of domestic violence willing to battle evil**, our efforts to see violence stopped and families transformed will be ineffective at best. We cannot dismiss evil as some vague spiritual force that presides outside of human behavior. Evil is rooted in a superhuman personality: Satan. And when people are violent, hostile, argumentative, deceiving, accumulating, as it were, a treasure of evil goods within the economy of Satan, they gradually permit Satan to restructure their character and own them. Whether using psychological or theological language, the truth remains that acts of evil are acts of sin. They are assaults on God’s moral laws. They separate the evildoer from God and from fellow human beings. The problem of wife (husband) abuse is not one of feminism, secular humanism, or a lack of leadership in the home. It is the problem of evil - unseen and unopposed.”* -James and Phyllis Alsdurf, Battered Into Submission. (Illinois: Varsity Press, 1986) pp. 61-62.

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” James 4:17. In other words if we know that there is something good that we should do and we don’t do it we are sinning.

“When condoning evil, silence becomes a crime.” –Author unknown

The Question: Since allowing domestic violence or sexual violence to continue in our homes, churches, schools or business is a sinful act or crime who should take the lead in establishing and implementing Christ-centered programs and services that provide recovery, healing and support for a population of hurting members who have little or no voice and/or resources to get help?

The Answer: Anyone who identifies himself or herself as a Christian need to speak against any form of domestic or sexual violence that has been or is being perpetuated, condoned, ignored or justified. Anyone includes church administrators, pastors, teachers, parents, church members, civic leaders, men, women, the elderly, victims, mental health professionals, lawyers, doctors, perpetrators, advocates, young adults, and children. With passion, power and conviction, we must seek every opportunity to let our voices against this evil be heard, recognizing that when we do so, we are fulfilling the mission of Christ to heal the broken-hearted, bring recovery of sight to the blind, set at liberty those who are bruised, and set the captives free. Luke 4:18.

We must also conduct effective educational programs and create affordable resources in various languages that can help prevent domestic and sexual violence from ever occurring. We need to mandate education and training for church leaders, seminarians, and administrators to help them recognize the dynamics of abuse. We need to utilize the services of trained/skilled individuals to provide treatment, support and advocacy for victims as well as perpetrators as they journey towards healing and wholeness in Christ. We need to establish and replicate healing centers as necessary. We need individuals with the financial means to support and invest their resources in these initiatives.

When you determine to do what you can to work against domestic violence, when you choose to be “silent no more” you may face opposition, misunderstanding, and criticism. Even church politics can discourage you from even trying. There may be times when you get tired and feel too weary to go on. You may long for a comfortable, safe and financially secure life even though you know that many who are dealing with abuse issues are perishing. You may feel that the little you do is not good enough. Still move forward. “Cry aloud and spare not, lift up your voice...” Isa. 58:1

Your key to success: Trust in God and prayer: *“Prayer is the answer to every problem in life. It puts us in tune with divine wisdom which knows how to adjust everything perfectly. So often we*

do not pray in certain situations because from our standpoint the outlook is hopeless. But nothing is impossible with God. Nothing is too entangled that it cannot be remedied. No human relation is too strained for God to bring about reconciliation and understanding. No habit is so deep rooted that it cannot be overcome. No one is so weak that he cannot be made strong. No one is so ill that he cannot be healed. No mind is so dull that it cannot be made brilliant. Whatever you need or desire, trust God to supply it. If anything is causing you worry and anxiety, stop rehearsing the difficulty and trust God for Healing, Love and Power!” –Author Unknown.

Determine to be that voice, crying in the wilderness of abuse who “gives light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:79.