

TRUE HEADSHIP: A CHALLENGE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Sometimes in pastoral ministry you need to change your plans. After all, our programs and plans are there to serve the people God has given us to love, rather than the other way around. So we must be willing to interrupt them or change them when necessary. Sometimes a situation arises, an event occurs, or a concern is raised that needs to be addressed and not just overlooked. Christians and Christian congregations do not live in a cocoon, isolated from what is going on in the world around them and what is said, written or done can be unsettling and call for a careful response.

So this morning I have decided to break from the series I have been preaching through the Gospel of Matthew. As most if not all of you will know, there has been somewhat of a media storm around the issue of domestic violence. Accusations have been thrown around, counter-accusations have been made, statistics have been cited and the use of them has then been questioned, heart-breaking stories have been recounted — some contributors to the discussion have been unnecessarily defensive, others have sought to make mileage out of the discussion to further their own agenda. I don't propose to go into any of that this morning. It has been very distressing for many, both inside and outside the churches.

One thing should be clear above all else — even one case of domestic violence among us is too many. Marriage and families were designed by God to be safe-havens of care and nurture, not fearful prisons or arenas of abuse. There are no circumstances in which domestic violence is justified. None. And whether you are Catholic or Protestant, Reformed or Arminian, Anglican, Baptist or Pentecostal, egalitarian or complementarian — no Christian should condone, excuse or overlook domestic violence. We should all be among the loudest voices raised in support of those who have suffered in this way. We should all be at the forefront of providing safety and protection and a way out of the fear and the harm and the betrayal. If you feel trapped

in such a situation this morning I want to encourage you to seek help. We'll talk about how in just a little while. And I want to say, because this gets lost in the discussion, if you are or feel you could easily become someone who resorts to domestic violence, you need to seek help — now, today, before it begins. Can I be any clearer? There are no circumstances in which domestic violence is acceptable. There is no obligation whatsoever on a wife to remain in a situation where she or her children are in any kind of danger. We must not ignore the problem or explain away the problem or minimise the problem. And I am quite sure just about everybody here this morning would agree.

Now I expect that most of you are aware that this has been a concern for us on the Faculty, and the whole College I hope, for some years now. We have been seeking to address this issue long before the current media and social media frenzy. And Jane is going to talk for just a minute about how this has come about and what we have been trying to do.

For four years now, students at Moore have received lectures that are aimed to help them recognise and respond to Domestic Violence. These lectures have happened formally in Ministry & Mission in 1st & 3rd year, and have normally been taught by external guests – family counsellors. The Professional Standards Unit of the diocese (the PSU) speak on it briefly in their Safe Ministry sessions that all our students and faculty need to do. PSU also give a lecture to 2nd year Ministry & Mission students on child abuse, and the college also had a seminar on protective behaviours earlier this year. In the past all college chaplains and faculty have also received training on recognising and responding to Domestic Violence from Anglicare, and in June of this year all the faculty once again received training on recognising and responding to Domestic Violence at the Diocesan Faithfulness Training day.

In December 2014, a survivor of Domestic Violence came and spoke to Mark Thompson and myself. This woman had been a student and a student wife at college, and she had suffered intimate partner violence throughout her marriage, including during the years her and her now ex-husband, had been members of our community. Her and her ex-husband had left college more than a decade earlier, and it had taken her that long to be able to recognise what had happened, and to be able to speak about it.

At college and afterwards, she felt that she could not speak out about the abuse without threatening her husband's ministry career, and so putting herself in further danger. She also said that at times she felt ashamed, as if she was to blame for the abuse she was receiving. After years of abuse at the hands of her husband, she left him. She recognised that she needed to leave her husband. He was committing evil against her. He had sinned grievously for many years. She needed to be safe. People looking on – at their church where her husband was an assistant minister – assumed that the marriage only broke up because she had left him. People didn't ask her why she left.

A decade after leaving her husband she had more clarity about the situation, and she felt she able to finally talk about it with us. And she wanted to talk about it as part of her way of moving forward. But she also wanted to talk about it to help others. And to help college be a safer place.

It was an enormous privilege that she to be the recipients of that kind of trust, that she had been so open to Mark and myself. At the end of the conversation she said it had been the first time she felt she was able to speak of what had happened to her without it being dismissed as unreal, or simply an attempt at retaliation following her divorce and stigmatisation by many in the Christian community. So although it had been 10 years since she left her husband – this was the first time she felt people in authority positions within the church, believed what she said. She was keen that we at college have in place processes that would allow someone in her situation to speak out earlier. She was also keen that we teach about the realities of Domestic Violence and don't simply treat it as a problem 'out there' but as something that can and does happen in Christian homes, and even ministry homes.

The conversation with her ended up resulting in college wanting to have its own Domestic Violence Policy. We had the Faithfulness in Service guidelines, but we decided that we needed something more specific, for our specific situation. Mark Thompson, and the then Dean of Students, Keith Condie, wrote the Domestic Violence Policy. It was approved by the Governing Board in May 2015. It is on the website, and in the MooreWomen booklet. Alongside it on the website are a list of Counsellors, Psychologists, Social Workers and Therapists, help for both victims and perpetrators. And there is a list in the MooreWomen booklet, and the list was compiled by an independent expert. Not someone employed by college.

The college's Domestic Violence Policy is on the college's website so that it is easily accessible for anyone in the college community. And it makes clear the College's absolute refusal to tolerate any Domestic Violence, and it aims to provide a means of getting help and support for victims – female or male. And for perpetrators – male or female. The policy seeks to make clear that we want Moore to be a safe place, and that Domestic Violence will not be tolerated in our community. It is evil.

Because of the bravery of that one woman coming and speaking to Mark and myself, it meant a Domestic Violence Policy has been written, it has been used, its help keep Domestic Violence visible, not hidden, and others outside the college community have also benefited from it, e.g. a principal from another theological college contacted me about it because he was wanting a Domestic Violence Policy to help his college be a safer place. So we've already seen the fruit of her bravery.

The MooreWomen booklet, Domestic Violence: A Starting Point In Supporting Victims, began to be put together last year and it was published last week and has been distributed to all our female students, and to student wives. It is aimed primarily at Ministry Wives, as a Resource book for them, as they seek to minister to female victims of Domestic Violence. However, there is much in the booklet that is also good, no matter who we are, male, female, single, married, helping victims, helping perpetrators. But keep in mind, its main audience is the ministry wife to help female victims. Numerous people have contributed to it, including a woman who has spoken at MooreWomen on Domestic Violence. We hope to have an electronic copy of the booklet available by the end of next week. We will let you know when that happens. And that will end up on the LSS or website. The booklet covers a wide range of topics and covers a wide range of topics including: Biblical considerations, what is the nature of Domestic Violence, supporting victims, diocesan standards, and building healthy marriages.

So that is some of our history so far.

No doubt there is more to be done. We haven't said any of this as a way of patting ourselves on the back. We are not perfect and we have sadly failed people in the past by not noticing the warning signs and not making as clear as is possible that this kind of behaviour is completely unacceptable, no matter who you are and no matter what

your circumstances. But you need to know that we take this issue seriously and are trying to address it as effectively as possible.

The problem at the heart of domestic violence is ultimately human sin. You might remember that the very first casualty of the first sin was the relationship between the man and the woman. Prior to the Fall, the picture was idyllic: 'the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed' (Gen 2:25). They were not threatened by each other, they did not fear each other, they did not try to control each other, or manipulate each other, or exploit each other for their own ends. The picture in Genesis 2 is one of harmony and joy and delight. And yet after the Fall, after they both turned aside from God's word, questioned God's goodness and believed the lie of the serpent, 'the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths' (Gen 3:7). They were no longer at ease with each other. The harmony between them had been disrupted. The potential to use each other, to get a hold over each other, emerged as a result of the Fall. And the violence began soon afterwards – in the first instance between their two sons, Cain and Abel.

Sin has not eliminated the goodness of life as men and women in God's world, nor has it destroyed the goodness of marriage. But from this point on this relationship in particular continues under strain. Our selfishness, our desire for control and to protect ourselves and our interests, even at the expense of others – it distorts and pollutes the good things that God has made and given us. And it ought not to surprise us that relationships – so very important and precious because in his very essence God is relational – are as a result most vulnerable. Which is, of course, why, in the Old Testament and the New, so much time is taken up with teaching us the impact God's goodness, his grace and mercy and love, ought to have on our relationships. The Bible has a great deal to say about how we treat others in every arena of life: in marriage and in the home; in the work place; in the community and the public sphere. In the Old Testament, the Law spoke again and again about what is appropriate and what is inappropriate behaviour. The Old Testament prophets would call God's people back to

his pattern of right relationships. The Gospels record the teaching of Jesus which so often challenged the way people dealt with each other. And in the epistles, Paul, Peter and others spoke about holiness, purity, gentleness and love and how it shows itself in the various contexts of life.

Relationships matter to God. They are the stuff of life and they reflect the life of God himself. God is eternally in relationship: Father, Son and Spirit — relationships of mutual giving, relationships of love, relationships which cannot be extracted from who he is. God is always Father, Son and Spirit — not three brothers or three sisters, not three fathers or three sons, but Father, Son and Spirit. Relationships matter to God. And *our* relationships matter to God. That is why he calls us to account when we betray our relationships by how we speak or act.

It is very possible to take the good things God has given and twist them out of all recognition. It is possible to take something that is good and nurtures life and use it as a weapon or an instrument of control and power, abuse and degradation. Look at what the pornography industry has done with sex. Or what the crime syndicates have done with some of the most potent pain killers known to medical science. And there are many other examples, aren't there? We can abuse what God has given us rather than use it in a way which honours him and blesses each other. And it is very important that we learn to see the difference between abuse and proper use and distinguish them.

It was Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian of the thirteenth century who, among others, articulated the principle 'abuse does not abolish proper use' (*abusus non tollit usum*). Just because a good thing is abused does not mean there is a problem with the thing itself. Fire can keep us warm and cook our food but in the hands of an arsonist the effect is powerfully destructive. A knife can be used for good or ill. So can a car. But as one dictionary puts it: 'misuse of something is no argument against its proper use' (Merriam-Webster online). Or, 'wrong use does not preclude proper use'. And just as this applies to things it also applies to doctrines.

If we had continued in Matthew 5 this morning we would have seen something very much like this. Jesus did not cast aside the Law as if it was now useless. Rather in him it became supremely useful. It pointed to him and prepared for him and gives us the categories to understand him. Just because the Pharisees misused it and the Sadducees ignored it did not mean Jesus would cast it aside. Instead he showed what it was really all about. 'Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never even enter the kingdom of heaven' (Mtt 5:20). The Law refers to Jesus first of all and you will misunderstand it unless you see it in this connection.

And I want to suggest to you that this is just as true with regard to the biblical teaching about headship in marriage. Unless you understand it in its connection to Christ you will misunderstand it and more likely than not, in the world inherited from Genesis 3, you will abuse it. So I briefly want to look at the Bible's teaching on headship and see it in its proper light. And the best place to see that is in Ephesians 5. So would you turn to Ephesians chapter 5 with me for just a moment?

By the time we get to Ephesians 5, Paul has made his shift from talking about what God has done for us in Ephesians 1–3 into how we ought to live in response to such great mercy and grace in Ephesians 4–6. 'I therefore, a prisoner for Lord', Paul writes in 4:1, 'urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called'. 'Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds', he says later in that chapter. Chapter 5 begins with the words 'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God'. And then, from verse 15, we read,

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving

thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

I am not intending to attempt a detailed exegesis of these eighteen verses in five minutes. I simply want to draw your attention to the central truth in these verses, and that is that the headship of the husband is modelled on that of Christ. The husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. How you act as a husband is entirely to be modelled on how Christ has acted towards the church. And how exactly is that? Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Christ exercised his headship of the church by dying for the church. It was self-sacrificial service. It was entirely with the welfare of the church in mind: cleansing her, presenting her holy and without blemish, nourishing and cherishing his body, the church. It is not in any way an act of domination or control. It is not in any way an assertion of authority or a demanding of submission. It was not in any way focussed on his needs or his welfare or his will. Just the night before he died Jesus had entirely submitted his will to that of his heavenly Father.

Jesus is himself the pattern for every head in a marriage. Abstract the idea of headship from him and his sacrifice and you will misunderstand it. Insert ideas of control and domination into your understanding of headship and you dishonour Christ because that is not what his headship is like. That is not how he exercised his headship. To insist on your will over that of your spouse is not biblical headship, it is an abuse of biblical headship. Paul unrelentingly ties headship to Jesus and how he has served and saved the church.

And how was that:

‘I am the good shepherd’, Jesus said. ‘The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep’ (Jn 10:11)

He who was ‘in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross’ (Phil 2: 6–8)

He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age (Gal 1:4)

He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:14)

How is that consistent with violence towards one God has given you to love? How is that consistent with bullying — physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually? How is that consistent with degrading, humiliating or oppressing your marriage partner?

So I want to call out, and encourage you to call out, any form of domestic violence justified in the name of biblical headship. That is not and never has been what headship means in the Bible. It is not and never has been what headship modelled on that of

Christ means. Instead, domestic violence dishonours Christ, stands in stark contradiction of his word, and deserves the condemnation it receives.

Marriage is incredibly precious to God. He created it and he used it as a picture of his commitment to his people. It is not something we should ever give up on lightly. But it is never something that should be used as a cover for violence. It is, rather, intended as a safe-haven of love, gentleness, nurture and care. Our sinfulness will mean we all fail at this time and time again. We will need forgiveness and need to genuinely repent. But the violation of the very intention of marriage that comes with domestic violence is something on an entirely different level.

One of the most frightening things about domestic violence is that by its very nature it happens behind closed doors. We may never know unless we are alert to the signs. And so once again Jane is going to come and talk for just a moment about how we can care for each other in a world like this, not least by being alert to the signs that something is wrong.

How might we continue to care for each other in our community in terms of Domestic Violence? 11 points – not exhaustive by any means – Please look at the MooreWomen booklet for more resources, lots of great help in there, and the first 4 I'm suggesting are from the booklet, from Ruth Holt.

1. CLUES

Many victims of Domestic Violence don't tell anyone they are being abused. It is unlikely they will tell someone. Many cannot identify that they are being abused. Therefore, be ready to pick up on clues.

Clues such as:

(i) When they mention 'relationship problems'

(ii) Vague comments about a partner's anger

(iii) Them asking questions about forgiveness; about grounds for divorce

(iv) People who are isolated – that they can't really spend any time with you; are you allowed in their house; does their spouse want them to have friends?

These clues can be indicators of abuse – not necessarily the person is being abused, but they can be indicators.

Be ready to ask questions like:

- (i) How safe do you feel in your marriage?*
- (ii) How does your spouse behave when they're angry?*
- (iii) Are you worried about your safety or your children's safety?*
- (iv) How often does this happen?*

So firstly clues. Secondly, how we can continue to care for each other in our community...

2. TALK ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FROM THE FRONT

Whether that be you're speaking on marriage, or headship, preaching or submission, or another topic like that. Address Domestic Violence.

Thirdly,

3. DON'T PRETEND PERFECTION

Share challenges and difficulties you face in your own marriage.

4. ASK PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR MARRIAGES

If you model a healthy level of openness yourself, it will make it easier to ask people about how their marriages are going.

What are some other ways we can be caring for each other in our community?

5. HAVE A HIGH VIEW OF SIN

We all sin. Domestic Violence does exist. Men are perpetrators. Women are perpetrators. Domestic Violence does happen.

6. BELIEVE

If someone does tell us they're the victim of Domestic Violence, or Family Violence, maybe they're single and live with their family during college breaks, remember that we generally don't have to work out whether they're telling the truth or not. The police and others can work that out. Our job is to believe them at that point, and care for them. They most likely are telling the truth.

When someone does tell us, we can often be in denial – "But their spouse is so nice? He's always so nice to me." Well that may be because he's groomed you to think that he's a really nice guy! Or we can think, "How could she abuse

him? Wouldn't he just stop it? He's so much bigger, stronger than her?" "Surely this can't have been going on so long and not anyone notice?"

So don't deny, believe. And care for people. Help them be safe.

7. DON'T MINIMISE OR JUSTIFY THE ABUSE

We can minimize and justify the abuse – "She would be awful to live with – no wonder he ends up losing it with her. He wouldn't of done that if he married someone nicer." Don't minimize or justify abuse.

There is never any excuse for abuse.

8. BEYOND THE SUPERFICIAL

Try and create relationships at college where we're prepared to share beyond the superficial so if someone is suffering they feel safe to share. And that even perpetrators feel safe to share what is going on in their life. In prayer triplets, chaplaincy group, with other friends in college.

9. SPEAK UP

If you suspect someone in your year, your chaplaincy group, prayer triplet is mistreating their spouse - you need to speak up. Speak to someone at college. Or the PSU. Their number is in the MooreWomen booklet. You can ring them anonymously. Get advice from them. I've spoken to them several times and found them very good.

10. BE A CAREFUL LISTENER

Be a careful listener - because normally victims won't say it straight out. Give others much time to speak. Don't be afraid of silences in conversations.

11. USE THE RESOURCES YOU HAVE

Whether you're a victim, a survivor, a perpetrator, or someone that wants help understanding Domestic Violence, there are many resources you have here at college.

Your Christian brothers and sisters here at Moore – students, faculty, chaplains.

Prayer. The word of God. The MooreWomen booklet with its many resources including contact details for The Professional Standards Unit.

We want Moore College to be a safe place for everyone in our college community.

What we are talking about this morning is one of the horrible manifestations of sin in our world. It is a good thing that we are talking about it but it may indeed be very painful and personal for some here this morning. If that's you, you may want to talk to someone about your present situation, your past experience, or your fears for the future. Paul Grimmond and Jane Tooher are very happy to spend time with you if you would like them to do that. Up on the screen are the contact details of a number of others, outside of the College community and the diocesan structures you may prefer to speak with about these things. But I want to say again, if you feel trapped in such a dangerous situation this morning please seek help today. And if you are, or feel you could easily become, someone who resorts to domestic violence, you need to seek help — now, today.

I don't know whether the social media frenzy will continue. It's irrelevant really. What matters is that we act to model our relationships on the one for whom and by whom all things were made — the eternal Son who became one of us as Jesus Christ. I have no doubt some of what is being posted on social media is mischievous. Let me encourage you not to get caught up in it. Instead let's put our energy into caring for those who have been hurt and seeking to prevent it from happening to anyone else in any of the communities to which we belong. Husbands — be like Christ. Self-sacrificial love, genuinely seeking the welfare of our wives, laying aside our will so that she might be nourished and cared for as Christ nourishes and cares for the church. Wives are, of course, called to be like Christ too. Together in marriage husbands and wives are to care for each other, be generous and gentle with each other, and to create that safe atmosphere of nurture and support which allows families to thrive. That is our prayer for every marriage and every family represented here this morning.