

Repentance. . . Change. . . Reconciliation. . . ?

When a victim of domestic violence first approaches her church, she is looking for someone to affirm and believe her experiences. Instead she is told to forgive and forget and pressured into reconciliation. Reconciliation needs to be defined and appropriate signs of change need to be in place.

Reconciliation is . . .

- * **Resolving** conflict by exploring possible solutions that are mutually agreed upon.
- * **Reestablishing** friendly relations where there is communication, forgiveness, peace, and harmony
- * **Restoring** trust and respect

Before reconciliation can occur, there needs to be three evidences of sincerity.

1. **Regret**—feels sorry
2. **Remorse**—moral **anguish** over past misdeeds
3. **Repentance**—*He has had a change of mind about his behavior and shows it by changing direction. He turns around and does things differently.* Dr. Henry Cloud

The evidence of repentance requires a period of time in which there is **consistent** change for a year or more. Signs of change occur in five basic areas. It is essential to look for these areas

of change before reconciliation is even considered.

Responsibility

- ◆ **Admits** to his abusive behavior and stops trying to blame or cover up
- ◆ **Acknowledges** that all forms of abuse are wrong
- ◆ **Identifies** the ways he justified his abusive behavior
- ◆ **Acknowledges** that his abusive behavior was not a loss of control but a choice on his part
- ◆ **Admits** his mistake when he fails and changes his abusive behavior accordingly
- ◆ **Does not blame** his partner for his bad behavior

Accountability

- ◆ **Remains** in individual counseling for as long as it takes identifying the root of the problem, working through past experiences, and learning new patterns of behavior
- ◆ **Accountable** to church leadership for past, present, and future behavior
- ◆ **Enters** a batterer's treatment program and completes the program
- ◆ **Permits** the counselor, church leadership, and treatment programs to check with his partner on a regular basis to hear her

explanation of what is going on

Self-Monitoring

- ◆ **Recognizes triggers** that begin explosive episodes
- ◆ **Chooses** appropriate learned responses when frustrated or angered and does not inflict harm on his partner or children
- ◆ **Identifies** attitudes of entitlement or superiority and replaces his distorted thinking with a more positive and empathic view
- ◆ **Chooses** not to say or do things that threaten or frighten his partner or children
- ◆ **Committed** to not repeating his past behaviors and realizes it is a lifelong process
- ◆ **Willingness** to hear feedback and criticism, to be honest, humble, and accountable without retaliation

Respectful

- ◆ **Listens and respects** his partners opinions even if he disagrees
- ◆ **Let's** his partner express her anger or frustration toward him without being punished or abused

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- ◆ **Respects** her “no” in all situations including physical contact
- ◆ **Respects her time** with friends and family without jealousy and does not punish her later
- ◆ **Respects her need for time** to rebuild trust and does not pressure her to forgive or reconcile until she is ready

Empathetic

- ◆ **Recognizes** the effects of his behavior on his partner and children and is able to verbalize it to them
- ◆ **Seeks** to make amends for the harm he has caused
- ◆ **Consistently displays** respectful behavior towards his partner and children
- ◆ **Expresses** kindness and attentiveness in words and actions instead of being controlling and demanding
- ◆ **Recognizes and affirms** his partner’s feelings without becoming defensive

To begin a path of reconciliation, there needs to be significant change in all five areas. If the abuser is truly sincere in his repentance, he will persevere in the process of change. As Scripture states, these needs to be a “renewing of the mind”.

Taking a step back from the abusive relationship and becoming a close observer is crucial. Recognition that he has not changed can be found in three basic areas.

Blame

- ◆ Blame her or others for his behavior
- ◆ Uses guilt to manipulate her into dropping charges or keeping her silent
- ◆ Uses her behavior as an excuse to treat her badly
- ◆ Convinces other that she is either abusive or crazy
- ◆ Blames her for the consequences he incurs because of his actions

Attitude

- ◆ Will not admit he was abusive
- ◆ Demands to know where his partner is and whom she is with (jealousy)
- ◆ Does not respond well to complaints or criticism of his behavior when he slips back into abusive behavior
- ◆ Does not faithfully attend his treatment program and/or counseling
- ◆ Feels entitled to his partner fulfilling his needs always even if it is at her expense

- ◆ Demands to have full authority over his partner’s life and the household

Disrespect

- ◆ Continues to undermine his partner’s authority as a parent, and her credibility as a person
- ◆ Criticizes his partner for not realizing how much he has changed
- ◆ Pressures his partner to let him move back in before she is ready
- ◆ Continues to use sarcasm or verbal abuse expressing his position of superiority
- ◆ Continues to belittle his partner’s feelings, opinions, and beliefs
- ◆ Does not hear or want to hear his partner’s “no”

In Galatians 5 Scripture states if we belong to Christ, we are to live by the Spirit not our sinful desires. Living by the Spirit will produce fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Change can be measured by the fruit. When these are evident, then and only then can the process of reconciliation begin.

Seek discernment and wisdom from the Lord to know truth.

By Paula Silva