

Marital Rape, Myth or Reality

By Barrington H. Brennen, November 18, 2004

Is it possible for a married man to rape his wife? Yes. As one author states, "Even if a woman has had consensual sex with someone in the past, that person can rape her if he forces her to have sex when she does not want to. Anytime a man has sex with his wife with the use of fear and coercion, it is rape." In The Bahamas, if a couple is legally separated, in the process of seeking legal separation, or divorced, the husband **can be** charged with marital rape if he sexually forces himself on his estranged wife. However, there is no protection for the thousands of wives or husbands who are **not** separated or estranged from their spouses and appear to be living in a "normal" relationship, but who in their homes, are being sexually coerced and traumatized.

It seems that when the topic of marital rape is brought up, it causes a passionate flow of religious juices to start, especially among miss-informed Christian men. To support their notion that husbands cannot rape their wives, they quickly refer to Biblical passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:3-5:

³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

This text is being used to support some men's erroneous views that in no way can a wife tell her husband "not tonight honey." They say that the husband has the God-given right to just "take it," in spite of her feelings, sickness, or disagreements. These men need to realize that this text is simply speaking to the natural sexual role of spouses in healthy, mutually supportive relationships. Paul was reminding God's people of his day about the meaning and purpose of the sexual relationship in marriage because there were many unsound teachings among them about sex and marriage. Greek philosophy infiltrated the teachings an minds of the new Christian believers, causing them to question God and the roles of men and women in relationships.

Here are some of the erroneous teachings that influenced their lives. Socrates (469-399 BC) taught that "Being born a woman is a divine punishment, since a woman is halfway between a man and an animal" (Bristow) (Plato, *Timaeus*, Baltimore: Penguin, 1965). He also taught that "the difference between a husband and wife is like that of a man's soul and his body. The man is to his wife as a soul to the physical body, meant to command and guide arms and legs with wisdom and intelligence." These teachings affected the way men treated women and legislation about the role of women in society and home.

During the times of the Apostle Paul, it was the belief and practice among the Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians, that women were only sexual property. Her only role was to bear children for her husband. Therefore men would have other partners, sometime boys, for sexual enjoyment. Women had very little rights if any. They were no more valuable than the domestic pet on the

outside of the house. They were not allowed to go to school. They had no power to vote or make decisions in the community. They could not testify in court. They could not appear in public venues. They were not allowed to talk to strangers. These laws and practices were based solely on Greek Philosophy and not Biblical teachings. Today, unfortunately, these practices are being supported by so-called Christian teachings. This is certainly a modern-day dilemma.

Paul was doing his best to bring women back to the Edenic plan of equality. When he said “the woman’s body belongs to the man,” I am sure it rang a loud cheer among the men. However, they did not expect Paul to say “and the husband’s body belongs to the wife.” That was contrary to their teachings and practices. Isn’t it amazing that the very Bible passages that were designed to free women from the clutches of inferiority, male intimidation, and manipulation are being used today to “keep women in their places?” What is your pastor teaching you from the pulpit?

Men and so-called spiritual leaders who support the diabolical teachings that men cannot rape their wives need to read very slowly, saturating their minds with the word of 1 Corinthians 13:4-6: (*The New Living Translation*)

“⁴Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. ⁶It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.”

THE CHRISTIAN PARADOX

Isn’t it amazing that the greatest misunderstanding about marital rape is not among the secular-minded or non-Christians, but among those who call themselves God-fearing and born-again Bible-believing men? Note carefully that the confusion is not from secular or Christian women, because they know quite well, from experience or just from the fact of being women, that rape is not exclusive to non-married individuals. It is even more shocking to think that Christians would prevent legislation being passed that would protect the God-given rights of women (or men) to choose.

LOVING HUSBANDS NEED NOT FEAR

Men, there is no need to fear. If you are having a loving, understanding, caring and mutually supportive relationship with your wives, then you are not in the category of marital rapists. You are not controlled by your passion, greed for power, and obsession to have sex. All of your sexual experiences with your wives are spontaneous, reciprocal, and of mutual consent. You appreciate and understand their emotional, psychological and physical makeup. More importantly, you value their right to choose.

REALITY AND NOT A MYTH

In The Bahamas the statistics are alarming. In the past three decades, more than 3,000 cases of sexual violence against women and children were reported in Nassau alone. In 2003, 127 victims of sexual assault were referred to the Crisis Center. Thousands more hurting women are afraid to report to the police that their husbands raped them. Who would believe them? In my private practice, I often meet wives who share their pain because their husbands coerce them into sex. Many wives made statements like this one: “My husband does not care when I say no or I am not

ready or able to have sex. He just goes ahead, forcing me, hurting me, fulfilling his passion. When it's all over, I feel dirty, used, and abused." Many wives, after being forced to have sex, rushed to the shower, spending sometimes almost an hour trying to wash away the "dirt." Some stay in the shower with the water running just to mask the sobs and cries of their hurting heart. I have met too many wives who became infected with sexually transmitted diseases from their husbands who behaved as though it was the "duty" of their wives to have sex with them, even when they committed adultery.

IT'S ALL ABOUT POWER

It's imperative to understand that I have never met a wife who had a loving understanding husband rape her. Rape is not about sex. It's about power and control. Generally, men who rape are married or have multiple sexual partners. Men who rape their partners are not being overpowered by testosterone, but by their insatiable and evil need to control and be in charge. When their wives say no, they feel that their alleged power position is being threatened. Therefore, to show their authority in the marriage, they demand and force themselves on their wives. Too many bedrooms are darkened, not with romantic candle light, but with the pain of self-gratification, intimidation, and coercion.

WIVES WHO USE SEX TO HURT

Do some wives withhold sex from their husbands to intimidate and hurt them? Yes. Are there wives whose sexual drives are so low that they very seldom make love with their husbands? Yes.

However, these reasons do not constitute a license for husbands to rape their wives. I have counseled husbands who were not sexually satisfied in their marriage, but who have never raped their wives. Return next week as we seek to answer these questions and dig deeper into this topic.

Send your questions to P.O. Box N-896, Nassau, Bahamas; or email question@soencouragement.org Or call 242 323 8772 or visit the website www.soencouragement.org