

DOES THE BIBLE SAY I HAVE TO GIVE MY ABUSIVE HUSBAND SEX ON DEMAND?

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 170 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I want to dive into a question that came up in the Flying Free private forum that had to do with a couple of Bible verses typically used to manipulate women into having sex when they don't want to. Doesn't that sound loving? I know.

"Since I want what I want and I want it now, and since I'm an entitled spiritual abuser, I'm going to actually use some randomly selected Bible verses, pull them out of context, ignore the rest of the Bible, and smack my little wife over the head with these verses to get what I want." Does that sound like something Jesus would do? I don't think so. But it's exactly what the devil does.

So here's the question that came in: "In 1 Corinthians 7:5, it says that couples are not to deprive each other of sex unless it is for a limited time to fast and pray. And in 1 Peter 3:1-2, it says wives need to submit to their husbands so that if their husband isn't a Christian, he will become one when he sees how cooperative his wife is. So doesn't that mean my husband can take my body even if I don't want him to?"

There are women in my forum who have been repeatedly raped by their husbands, including right after childbirth when their body is still healing, based on their justification from these Bible verse. Now, I'm not a theologian, and I say that a lot. I say, "I'm not a theologian" as a caveat before I go into what I believe in my faith. We don't have to be theologians to know what we believe and to be confident about what we believe in, alright?

But I also think I sell myself short a little bit. I don't want to go on and on about my credentials or why I should have credibility in your life, because honestly, it doesn't really matter what I think and what I believe. What matters for your life and how you show up is what you believe, right?

But I do want to offer this: I'm not a theologian, but I have been an actively practicing Christian for almost fifty years. And I just realized that's half a century, and that's a long time. I've read the Bible from cover to cover countless times in all the different versions. Not all of them, but many of them. I've done many, many, multiple, countless Bible

studies. I've taken Bible courses at a Christian college, I've taught in a Christian school, I've been a member of three conservative churches, I've spent several years doing missionary work, I've done tons of volunteer work, and I've read hundreds of books on the Christian faith because I'm an avid reader.

But here's the most important thing, you guys. Throwing all of that out, what I have is a faith that believes that God is love, that Jesus showed us how to love through His life, His demonstrated life, and that love is to be the main thing that undergirds and uplifts and is a foundation for everything that we do. Jesus said that love was the fulfillment of the law. If all we did was show up in our life in love, we would be as close to the character of God as a human could possibly get.

Now, taking advantage of another human being is the opposite of love. Demanding sex is not love. Making someone or forcing someone to do something against their will is not love. Violating the boundaries and personal bodies of other human beings is not love. And people who do those kinds of things, they do not represent Christianity or Jesus Christ. When a man demands sex and uses the Bible to manipulate his wife, he is not only guilty of sexual abuse, but also of emotional and spiritual abuse. He is abusive in that moment. And when he does this kind of thing on a regular basis, intermittently, he is an abuser.

The Bible calls people like this "wicked." I'm telling you, when people throw out Bible verses like this, it could be because they are ignorant or wicked. But it is not because they are behaving like Jesus at that moment or because they are emotionally or spiritually mature. And this includes religious leaders who have gone to seminary and who would like to call themselves theologians.

Now the context of those verses is not sexually abusive marriages. Marg Mowczko explains this in one of her articles, which I will link to in the show notes, that when people decide to follow Christ or become a Christian, "CHRIST-ian," some of them thought it was more holy to be celibate. I'm talking about back in the time of the Bible, okay, when Christianity was brand new. Paul was telling them that celibacy wasn't necessary, and in fact, it could be problematic for some couples and even lead to infidelity. So Paul is trying to communicate that one spouse didn't have the right to make that kind of vow to celibacy without the other spouse's agreement. They didn't have that right or the authority to do that.

Marg breaks down all the Greek words to make her points, and I'm not going to do that here. I will refer you to her article for a deeper understanding of this verse, and it's actually a very easy article to understand. I love her blog. I highly recommend it if you

want to look at the Hebrew and the Greek of verses that have typically been used against women, have been confusing, there's controversy around them. A lot of that controversy is because they've been mistranslated from the Greek or the Hebrew.

Alright, here is her expanded version of this verse based on the Greek. I'm going to read it, but you can go to her blog and read all the background behind this, okay? Her blog is margmowczko.com, and then this particular article (you can search for it in her search bar) is "A Wife Has No Authority of Her Own Body? (1 Cor. 7:4)."

Alright, here's her expanded version of this verse: "A wife does not 'have the right or license' to choose to become celibate (or have sex with someone other than her spouse) because her husband has an exclusive right to have sex with her. Likewise, a husband also does not 'have the right or license' to choose to become celibate (or have sex with someone other than his spouse) because his wife has an exclusive right to have sex with him. A husband and wife should give themselves, their bodies, to each other, and only to each other, in an exclusive relationship. However, some Christian wives and husbands in Corinth were making vows of celibacy as a demonstration of ascetic piety; some were making this vow without the mutual consent of their spouse."

But here's the thing, though. Abusive people will take that verse and twist it, as they often do, to make it mean that they can just take their wife's body at any time they please, including after childbirth. And she has no right to say "no." This is not how we use the Word of God, people. The Bible is meant to be a healing balm, not a whip. People who call themselves Christians have wrongfully used the Bible to justify slavery, genocide, child abuse, rape, and the exploitation of women for centuries. We don't want to mishandle scripture and misrepresent God's character.

Now then, this person in the forum asked about 1 Peter 3:1-2, but you know what, I'm going to refer you to the Flying Free Podcast Episode 66 if you want to hear my answer about that. And then there's also an article on this subject, too, that that episode actually came out of. If you go to FlyingFreeNow.com, the article is called, "Should Christian Wives Submit To Husbands No Matter What?" There's two parts to that article. You could also just Google that. Just Google that term, "Should Christian Wives Submit To Husband's No Matter What?" and my article should come up.

So I'm not going to reiterate all of that here on this particular episode, but I want to tell you something that I noticed in my private forum. There is rarely any arguing or bickering or condemnation in my private forum of the kind that I see in Facebook groups and pages. It truly is a safe place, and I'm really proud of it.

I've been taking it for granted, but once in a while a new member will come in and post a question like this one where she is asking about specific Bible verses that have held her in bondage for so many years, and her brain is still invested in believing the lies that the enemy has embedded in those verses. So she'll hear teaching that she hasn't heard before, and if she's been brainwashed with the idea that anything outside of her denominational teaching is heretical, she's going to feel triggered and scared, and rightly so. Is she hearing heresy? Is she going to go down the slippery path to perdition because the devil is deceiving her?

These thoughts come from her programming. She might even think that God is telling her this. But it's simply how she's been programmed to believe. So recently this happened, and when this woman posted these Bible verses in the forum, it triggered some reactions like, "Hey, this is a safe place! Our husbands throw these verses in our face at home. We don't want to have these verses thrown in our faces here in this forum!" You know, that kind of thing.

Do you see what a mess this could have become? But it didn't. It didn't, because in our forum, we work very hard to hold space for one another, the way Jesus did. We don't allow attacks, but we definitely allow questions. We allow scrutiny. We don't have to be afraid. We're safe. We are safe even if someone disagrees with us. In this case, the woman who posted the original question was so gracious. She just graciously apologized for unintentionally triggering other people, but she still hoped for some answers to her question. And then it was so beautiful, because the one who was triggered took responsibility for her own thinking and what she made the question mean for her, and she apologized for her reaction, and it was quite beautiful to watch.

When it comes to all of the things that there are to know about God and religion and the Bible, I can promise that neither you nor I know all of it. Nobody does. But most of us think that we do. And we will hop on Facebook and vehemently argue our case in utter ignorance of all that there is to know. I see people constantly saying ignorant things simply because the pastor of their particular denomination said it, taught it to them. And he was trained exclusively in his denomination's teachings, so we're just kind of perpetuating... Basically, we continue to pour the lemonade. The lemonade is in a pitcher with a couple of little rabbit turds in the bottom, and we just keep pouring the lemonade in other people's glasses, and we keep drinking it.

Let me give you an analogy, okay? It's not a super great one, but maybe it will help a little bit. Let's just say that you've got someone in kindergarten, and this kindergartener learns about outer space from her kindergarten teacher. The kindergarten teacher went to school to learn how to teach all of the subjects that a kindergarten-aged child

needs to know, but the kindergarten teacher did not get her PhD in aerospace. She's not an astronaut, she's not an astrophysicist. So her knowledge of outer space is limited to what she has maybe studied about it, which probably is not a whole lot. But that doesn't matter. She doesn't need to know all of those things about outer space. All she needs to know is all the six-year-old needs to know at this stage of the game.

So let's say that the six-year-old later overhears her mom talking to a friend who actually is a scientist who works for NASA. And the little girl hears the scientist say something that doesn't make any sense according to what her kindergarten teacher said. And the little girl is indignant, and she says, "That's not true, because my teacher said such-and-such."

Maybe the kindergarten teacher read a cute little book about the moon being made of cheese, and a little mouse wants to go up to the moon or something, and the little girl thinks the moon is made of cheese now. Is it okay that the little girl thinks the moon is made of cheese? It's fine. We know that the little girl might grow up and end up being an astrophysicist for all we know, and she'll figure it out.

But we're not going to be sad: "Oh, she doesn't know the truth. It's so sad." We're not going to give her a little lecture. We're not going to be mad: "I can't believe she believes the moon is made out of cheese. What a little moron!" We're not going to think like that about her, because it's okay that she thinks the moon is made of cheese.

But let's just say that she tells this scientist friend of her mother's, "The moon is made of cheese. Don't you know that?" and the scientist, from her education in this field, sees immediately what's going on here. And then it probably isn't possible to explain the complexities to a kindergartener... You probably could. This is where the analogy breaks down. Let's say the child is three-years-old, okay? You could probably explain to a kindergartener that it's not really made of cheese – it's actually made of rock. I have no idea what it's made out of, but it's not cheese. Anyway, you could probably explain that to a kindergartener. But maybe not a three-year-old. A three-year-old might not understand it. But do you see how presumptuous it is, though, to believe that we know it all and can speak with so much authority on the truth? We're the kindergartener in the story, okay?

I think back to who I was before when I was one of those little know-it-alls. I'm embarrassed. I mean, I really am. And I see other Christians doing it, and I feel embarrassed for them, too. I didn't come across smart; they don't come across smart. I don't want to stand in judgment of who I was and who these people are, where they're at in their faith. I don't want to be in judgment toward them. I want to look at them as

precious and adorable and this is just where they are and they don't know any better.

But here's the thing: I am precious and adorable even though I don't know a lot of things right now where I'm at. I'm really, really ignorant. In fact, the older that I get, the more ignorant I know that I am. The less I know that I know, okay? And what if that's okay to just be in learning mode until we die? I think that this is healthy, actually.

Think of a continuum, with shame on one end and then arrogance on the other. The shame on the one side comes from thinking that everyone else is right, and we are screwed up. We give everyone else credibility, and we give ourselves none. The arrogance on the other end of the continuum comes from thinking that we're always right, and everyone else is screwed up. And we give ourselves credibility and we don't give credibility to anyone else, unless, of course, they agree with us.

Humility is right in the middle. Humility knows that we are sometimes right and sometimes wrong. And other people are sometimes right and sometimes wrong. And it's all going to be okay in the end. Humility is okay with just getting out there, living life, holding space for you to make mistakes, for other people to make mistakes.

We don't have to control everybody and lecture them and correct them and tell them all the ways they're doing it wrong. We don't have to do that. We only have to do that if we're living in fear and scarcity and judgment. Then we have to do that. But if you don't want to live like that, you don't have to. God certainly isn't afraid of us making mistakes and learning and exploring and making decisions. So why do we need to be afraid?

When we do this, we are able to learn things on a deeper level rather than just by rote memorization of so-called "facts" that we have been spoon-fed by our kindergarten teachers. I believe that God is inviting us to grow up a little. We don't have to be afraid of not having all of the answers. I think that's the very point of faith. We don't know because it's provable. We know because we believe it by faith. Now if you want to learn more about my own faith and how I come to it, you can listen to Episodes 105 and 107.

So all of this to make the point that if a Bible verse isn't making sense, it's okay. When I look into a telescope at outer space, I know very little about what I'm seeing. It doesn't make much sense, and honestly, a home-style telescope can't even see that far. But that's okay. I know and believe there's a big universe out there. I know there is reality and truth out there, and my existence is about the privilege and the honor of getting to learn little bits and pieces here and there and being okay with that — being okay with not having all of the answers, and hopefully growing wiser and more full of love into my old age.

I love bottom lines. When I begin to analyze something, I like to eventually land somewhere on a bottom line. My brain will meander through rabbit trails until the cows come home, but when those cows are all put away, I want my brain and heart to rest too. So I need that bottom line.

For me, the bottom line is love and all that love involves. I may not always know how to get there, like when life goes sideways and people do mean things to one another. But love is my destiny. Love is the filter that I want to see the world through. Love is the filter I want to know God through. Actually, God is love, so God is the filter, the Source of our existence, the Source of everything.

Someone sent me an email a while ago, and she wrote this beautiful thing that I want to close with. She wrote, "I was at a funeral, and the pastor said, 'When we live, God breathes His breath into us, and when we die, He takes it back. He inhales us right back into Himself, into His love, into His protection, into His peace.'"

Thank you for listening, and until next time, fly free.