

Questions Concerning Prof. Engelsma's Treatment on Spousal Abuse: Is it a Caving In To Feminist Ideology?

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(Note: There is an extended article at <http://www.puritans.net/2019/10/questions-concerning-prof-engelsmas-treatment-on-spousal-abuse/> of this more abbreviated article at www.puritans.net/articles/Engelsma.pdf .)

Prof. David Engelsma of the [Protestant Reformed Churches of America](http://www.puritans.net) has published on the internet a video series on spousal abuse, starting with the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5eBSHUgoNU>. In addition, there are transcripts of some of the series such as at <http://expro.freeforums.net/thread/627/spousal-abuse-follow>.

1. Prof. Engelsma speaks of “rape within marriage” and defends use and application of this term. In the United States, a husband could not be charged with raping his wife until 1979. For centuries English common law, reflecting the historic Protestant Christian position, has maintained “the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband which she cannot retract.” John Calvin notes regarding I Corinthians 7:4: “*Unless by mutual consent* He requires *mutual consent*, in the first place, because the question is not as to the continency of one merely, but of two;” In other words, Calvin points out that sexual intercourse cannot be stopped unless both spouses agree to it. It is why the Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that “conjugal love and cohabitation” are moral duties of spouses. So is it not patently absurd and contrary to God’s word to suggest that sexual intercourse when one spouse does not want it is criminal rape? Is Prof. Engelsma not engaging in malfeasance as a church officer against God’s word by promoting the concept and application of so called “marital rape”?
2. The definition and history of so called “marital rape” and its relation to the feminist movement are explained at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marital_rape : “**Marital rape** or **spousal rape** is the act of **sexual intercourse** with one's spouse without the spouse's **consent**. The lack of consent is the essential element and need not involve physical violence. Marital rape is considered a form of **domestic violence** and **sexual abuse**. Although, historically, sexual intercourse within marriage was regarded as a right of spouses, engaging in the act without the spouse's consent is now widely recognized by law and society as a wrong and as a crime... From the beginnings of the 19th century **feminist movement**, activists challenged the presumed right of men to engage in forced or coerced sex with their wives. In the **United States**, "the nineteenth-century woman's rights movement fought against a husband's right to control marital intercourse in a campaign that was remarkably developed, prolific, and insistent, given nineteenth-century taboos against the public mention of sex or sexuality."^[14] **Suffragists** ... "singled out a woman's right to control marital intercourse as the core component of equality."^[15] ... The marital rape exemption or defence became more widely viewed as inconsistent with the developing concepts of human rights and equality. Feminists worked systematically since the 1960s to overturn the marital rape exemption and criminalize marital rape.^[21] Increasing criminalization of spousal rape is part of a worldwide reclassification of sexual crimes "from offenses against morality, the family, good customs, honor, or chastity ... to offenses against liberty, self-determination, or physical integrity."^[22] In December 1993, the **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** published the **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women**. This establishes marital rape as a **human rights** violation.” Given this history, is it not fair to say that Prof. Engelsma has caved in to feminist ideology on the matter of so called “marital rape” and the issues implied by it?
3. Prof. Engelsma asserts that “verbal abuse is every bit as destructive as physical abuse if not more so”. He later proceeds with the following syllogism: Prop. 1: Verbal abuse is every bit as destructive as physical abuse if not more so. Prop. 2: Physical abuse warrants marital separation since it is proper for the endangered party to flee for physical safety. Conclusion: Verbal abuse warrants marital separation. Does Prof. Engelsma’s assertion that “verbal abuse is every bit as destructive as physical abuse if not more so”, especially as it relates to justification for separation of a married couple, have scriptural warrant? How should we think of it in light of Matthew Henry's treatment of Proverbs 21:9 (“*It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.*”) as it relates to the topic of desertion:

“1. What a great affliction it is to a man to have a brawling scolding woman for his wife, who upon every occasion, and often upon no occasion, breaks out into a passion, and chides either him or those about her, is fretful to herself and furious to her children and servants, and, in both, vexatious to her husband. If a man has a wide house, spacious and pompous, this will embitter the comfort of it to him-*a house of society* (so the word is), in which a man may be sociable, and entertain his friends; this will make both him and his house unsociable, and unfit for enjoyments of true friendship. It makes a man ashamed of his choice and his management, and disturbs his company. 2. What many a man is forced to do under such an affliction. He cannot keep up his authority. He finds it to no purpose to contradict the most unreasonable passion, for it is

unruly and rages so much the more; and his wisdom and grace will not suffer him to render railing for railing, nor his conjugal affection to use any severity, and therefore **he finds it his best way to retire into a corner of the house-top, and sit alone there, out of the hearing of her clamour; and if he employ himself well there, as he may do, it is the wisest course he can take. Better do so than quit the house, and go into bad company,** for diversion, as many, who, like Adam, make their wife's sin the excuse of their own."

In contrast to the above, feminist ideology asserts the "right" of the wife to separate from her husband on the basis of such verbal abuse. Is this also not Prof. Engelsma caving in to feminist ideology, contrary to the Westminster Standards that such desertion is a grievous sin of breaking the marriage covenant?

4. Prof. Engelsma says regarding elder adjudication of what is truth when a husband's and wife's accounts differ: "When a wife takes action or seeks help alleging abuse, abuse on the part of the husband is almost always, indeed invariably, a reality. A consistory may safely believe the woman." "... as the rule, the church ought to accept her complaint as true, and doubt her husband's denial of the wife's charge against him." Does this reflect Biblical due process and judicial fairness? Does it not discard with Biblical rules of evidence, like requiring witness accounts when parties' accounts differ?
5. <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/should-we-believe-survivors/> says this about the method of judging advocated by feminists: "we must believe that a survivor's account of their sexual assault is true. We have absolutely nothing to lose by believing a survivor's words, and a survivor has everything to gain through the experience of feeling trusted and validated. Even if the details seem confusing, we must stand firm in knowing that their account of sexual assault is rooted in truth. Even if we experience their account as disoriented, foggy, or even factually incorrect, we must understand that they are still telling their own deepest truth, and we must honor that. When someone tells me that they were raped at noon on Tuesday and that the moon was shining and it was pitch black outside, I still believe them, even though I know that, objectively, the moon wasn't shining at noon." In other words, feminist ideology requires believing the woman's account as the default position of truth. Does not Prof. Engelsma's methodology partake of this warped feminist methodology of judging cases, such as was publicly displayed during the Judge Kavanaugh hearing for Supreme Court judge?
6. Prof. Engelsma defines "verbal abuse" as "degrading words that destroy her [the wife] emotionally...she does not know who she is...Specialists in abuse call this 'loss of personhood'...abuse motivated by entitlement". He then relates this "verbal abuse" to the term "railer" or "reviler" in I Corinthians 5:11 and 6:10. He further asserts that such abuse, when it occurs, almost always is perpetrated by the husband against his wife, and not vice versa, and then justifies separation of the wife from the husband. Thayer's Greek Lexicon references Proverbs 25:24 as having a word with same essential meaning as a "railer" in I Corinthians 5:11: "*It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.*" The Greek Septuagint uses the same word for "brawling woman" as found in the Greek New Testament for "railer" in I Corinthians 5:11 and "reviler" in 6:10. Given this relation, why does Prof. Engelsma target men as the primary violators of the sin of being a railer when scripture itself does not do that? Indeed, could one not make the case that it is more typically a female sin in the context of marital relations, based upon what is indicated in Proverbs? Furthermore, Proverbs 25:24 in no way warrants a spouse to leave the home, but just the opposite, as addressed above. So why does Prof. Engelsma take it in this un-Biblical feminist direction? And why does he embrace so much of the feminist perspective?
7. Prof. Engelsma asserts in cases as described above the woman "should seek good legal counsel" and take it to civil court. Is that consistent with I Corinthians 6 ("Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?..."), given how modern US civil courts embrace the feminist agenda?
8. Prof. Engelsma appeals in his argumentation to "experts" like Anna Wood (see <https://www.womenspeakers.com/united-states/montgomery-/speaker/anna-wood>), who is a professing Christian feminist. Why does Prof. Engelsma want us to look to such "experts" as this as ones we should trust?
9. Prof. Engelsma says often professional help (specifically psychologists) from outside the church is necessary for couples in cases such as described above. Typically such psychologists in the world are steeped in feminist ideology. So why is Prof. Engelsma referring Christians to counselors who typically are steeped in feminist ideology?
10. Instead of turning to feminism, why does Prof. Engelsma not turn to sound Puritan sources like William Gouge and Matthew Henry on how spouses should conduct themselves? Or does he prefer feminism over Puritanism?
11. If there is a caving in to feminism, is caving in to sodomy far behind? Is there not the danger of this pronouncement by God upon the church: "Ichabod"?
12. Prof. Engelsma and the [Protestant Reformed Churches of America](#) do not agree with the Three Forms of Unity (specifically Article 36 of the Belgic Confession) nor the Westminster Standards in their original forms. Is there not reason to believe this makes him more susceptible to cave in to feminist ideology?