



**REMARKS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA
AT THE SPECIAL SERMON ON
NO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

**RHEMA BIBLE CHURCH
30 JULY 2017**

Pastor Ray McCauley,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to commend Rhema Bible Church for taking up the struggle to end violence against women and children. By taking a stand on this issue the church is directing itself to one of the most devastating social crises of our young democracy.

Violence against women and children resembles an epidemic. It has spread through society, sparing no social group or class. It shows no sign of abating. The sense we get, whether true or not, is that the problem is getting worse.

Gender-based violence is not caused by a virus; it is not transmitted through coughing or physical contact, but it can certainly be spread. It is spread in the same way that attitudes and modes of behaviour are transmitted.

No man is born believing that he has dominion over women. Instead, this view is handed down from generation to generation. It is amplified through social custom, culture and popular media. It is implied in the social and economic arrangement of society, where men occupy most positions of authority and responsibility, earn more and receive greater social recognition.

This arrangement, which we know as patriarchy, is not natural. It is constructed by people – and it can be taken apart by people. Therefore, if we are to end violence against women and children, we need to confront patriarchy in all its forms and manifestations.

In his 1884 treatise, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Friedrich Engels spoke about a new society where there would be:



“a new generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman’s surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences.”

He envisaged a society with fundamentally different gender relations – where men and women would be equal in status, opportunity and rights. That is the society that we need to work together to build.

If we are to end violence against women and children, we not only need to change society – we also need to change ourselves. As men, although we live in a patriarchal society, there is nothing that compels us to hurt women.

As adults, there is nothing that compels us to harm children. Each one of us, regardless of our upbringing or social circumstances, has been given the power of free will. We can make a decision, each of us, not to engage in violence, and not to perpetrate abuse.

We are responsible for our actions. We have the power to choose not to commit acts that hurt others, and to respect and protect the vulnerable in society.

That is why it is so important for a church to take up this struggle, because violence and abuse have much to do with the choices that people make. They have much to do with the state of their soul and the strength of their convictions.

As we have often done before, we turn to the Church to guide society on the path of righteousness. During the worst days of apartheid we turned to the Church for hope and courage as we fought a righteous struggle for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, just and prosperous South Africa.

We turned to the Church – and to other faith-based groupings – because we believed that God had made all people – black and white, male and female – in His image. We read from the same Bible, and sang the same hymns, albeit often in different languages. We turned to the Church for solace and refuge.



We learnt that the barriers that had been erected between our people were not God's will, but the fiendish creations of man. We also learnt that God's love is not bound by race, gender or class. It does not favour any group over another.

So we have come here today to seek refuge, to find solace, to draw strength and to learn what God teaches about the way we should treat each other. We do so because gender-based violence cannot be ended merely through crime-fighting strategies.

By its nature, much gender-based violence is hidden. Much of it takes place in the home, involving intimate partners or parents and children. Too often, the family and close friends conspire to keep such acts of violence hidden from view. Too often, when children are abused we call family meetings instead of reporting a crime. When our brothers maim their wives, we call family meetings.

We allow perpetrators to escape without remorse, repentance or justice. That needs to change. An act of violence against a woman or a child is not an unfortunate incident of the sort that affects any family from time to time –it is a deliberate and brutal act of aggression and a violation of the rights of the person against whom it is perpetrated. It should not be hidden away. The perpetrator should be held to account. and the survivor should be protected, supported and empowered.

It is to the great credit of Rhema Church that you are speaking out on this issue. It helps to bring this into the open and to embolden the survivors of violence. It should also help to conscientise all of us, particularly those who might otherwise have allowed themselves to become perpetrators of violence.

More than that, the Church has an important role in ministering to men and assisting those who need to overcome patriarchal attitudes and violent tendencies. Perpetrators of violence may come to the Church seeking absolution. The Church is best placed to counsel on how one should seek forgiveness, but one expects that it requires people to take responsibility for their actions and that they truly repent.

Repentance is not the acknowledgement that one has been caught and is embarrassed at being caught: we need to hold perpetrators accountable, otherwise we become accessories to crime. We become responsible for allowing violence to continue.



In working to end violence against women and children, we need to ensure that men are centrally involved. Men need to organise themselves in a sustained campaign against gender-based violence. Individually and collectively, they need to understand that their actions now will determine the kind of society our children live in tomorrow.

We should combat the objectification of women. We should reject the idea of women as possessions of men and resist the practice of “blessers” and prostituting young women. We must help women reclaim agency over their lives and bodies.

The time has come for all of us to speak with one voice and take a stand. Just as we did during the apartheid struggle, we must mobilise all sectors of society against this scourge.

The Church must take responsibility, men must take responsibility and I must take responsibility. By becoming agents of change, men can help liberate women from oppression and also liberate themselves as perpetrators of inhumane savagery.

As Nelson Mandela taught us:

“The oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. “

It's time for all of us to change our ways. The campaign to end violence against women and children begins with you and me. Let us all take responsibility.

I thank you.