

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

Volume 28 – Issue 2

Fall Edition

Dealing with a dominating and controlling spouse!

One of the most frustrating issues that couples have to deal with is when one spouse is controlling. In over 50 years of counseling couples, I have had to address this topic many times. It is important to understand that your gender makes no difference, because both husbands and wives can fall into this trap. If you are the one being controlled, it is a constant frustration, to say the least. But neither is it easy for the one doing the controlling, because they are usually anxious, angry, and fearful individuals. Why is this the case? Because a controlling person is caught in a web of lies that they believe to be true, such as, people just can't be trusted. At the same time, they realize that they are slowly destroying the love relationship within their marriage. Without radical change in a relationship like this, the marriage will not survive. This is why both parties in a marriage like this must be set free from this bondage of controlling behavior.

How does a controlling spouse act toward you?

- Controlling people want to dictate where you go and who you spend your time with.
- Controlling people will constantly ask you 20 questions about where you went, what you did, and who you saw.
- Controlling people are constantly looking at your search history on your computer, or they use spyware on your cell phone.
- A controlling husband will dictate what clothing you should wear, or how you do your hair, or sometimes even if you put on make-up.
- Controlling people tell you what you should eat.
- Controlling people throw fits if you don't do what they say.

- Controlling Christian people will constantly use Scripture to try to control all that you do.
- Controlling people use anger and criticism to force you to do things their way.
- Controlling people use threats of divorce to make you comply with their wishes.
- Controlling people use secrecy and want to control all the money, so they can keep you from leaving them.
- Controlling people will embarrass you in front of others to make you more submissive to their will.
- Controlling people lie about you to others, so they can play the victim in the relationship.
- Controlling people will constantly blame you for their own failings.
- Controlling people are distant emotionally, and even try and control all aspects of sex.
- Controlling people make you feel worthless and emotionally manipulated.

After reading through this list, I want to be clear that not every controlling person acts the same. You may experience a few of these behaviors or many of them. The important thing in looking at this list is, you must realize that you are not the only one with problems.

What causes your mate to constantly want to control you?

1. Fear. Most of the people that I have counseled who are controlling, usually have been deeply hurt by someone in their past, or by multiple individuals over and over again. This could be an abusive parent, an adulterous spouse, or someone who has brutally betrayed their trust. When these traumatic situations occurred, they felt like they had no control over the outcome, so now they want to try to control everything around them, so they won't ever be hurt again. The only problem with this philosophy of life is that we have little or no control over what other people will choose to do to us.

2. A lack of trust in God or you. With this level of trauma in a person's past, they have great difficulty trusting God that it won't happen again. Along with this lack of trust in God, they also distrust people. This trust can be rebuilt, but it is a long process, because trust is fundamentally built on the belief and confidence that God loves you, and others do too. The Apostle John wrote, "*We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him*" (1 John 4:16). The key to rebuilding trust in God and in people, is to accept the truth that God had nothing to do with what happened to you, and reject the lie that He doesn't care about you today. God is never to blame for what people have done to you. The God who sacrificed His only begotten Son for you will never do evil to you (James 1:13-17). Evil originates in the hearts of selfish and evil people (James 3:16).

3. Selfish and cynical. When people have been deeply hurt by others, they can also become very resentful and cynical towards people. They think to themselves, *You are just like that person who hurt me.* These self-protective thoughts end up causing a person to become very selfish. Selfishness is one way that a person attempts to protect themselves from being hurt again, by having everything their way and under their control (James 3:14-16). This aspect of controlling behavior is very detrimental to all future friendships and relationships of any kind, because selfishness will always drive people away from you.

4. Shame and hardness. Many times, when a person has been deeply hurt by others, they feel ashamed, because they have believed the lies of the person who hurt them. They then protect themselves by becoming tough, domineering, and controlling of all future aspects in their relationships. They think to themselves, *I will never let this happen to me again. No one will ever hurt me like this in the future!* But again, this is a losing

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

proposition, because an attitude like this only drives people away from you. Why? Because your hardness of heart keeps you from loving or receiving love from others. (Mark 16:14; Matt. 19:8).

5. Insecurity. When a controlling person has little trust in others, they are cynical and become very insecure, because they feel alone. One of the best examples of all these characteristics I have just explained was King Saul in the Old Testament. He was extremely cynical, hard-hearted, and insecure. This is what drove David away from his friendship with Saul. In the beginning of their relationship, David was one of Saul's greatest supporters. Saul was so insecure with David, that he sought to kill him multiple times (1 Sam. 18:11; 1 Sam. 19:10). Saul's insecurity caused him to become more controlling in all his relationships.

6. Jealousy and possessiveness. Becoming jealous and possessive is a controlling person's only option. Why do I say this? Because they don't trust people or trust God for their future. They allow hardness of heart and cynicism to control them, and with each new failed relationship this only confirms to them that this is just how people are, and they can't be trusted. This is why Solomon warned, "*Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealousy*" (Prov. 27:4)? The answer is no one can abide with a jealous and possessive person.

Controlling people want to dictate where you go and who you spend your time with.

After laying out all of these destructive causes of controlling behavior, is there any hope for a relationship like this? Yes, there is. But, if you are ever going to be able to effectively deal with your controlling spouse, you must first understand what motivates their behavior.

How should you respond to your controlling spouse?

1. Take action now. The time to address your spouse's controlling behavior is now. Why do I say this? Because the longer you wait to deal with this issue, the worse it will become. All sinful behavior is progressive by nature (Rom. 6:16-19). Sin that is harbored in your heart will

always lead to "*more lawlessness.*" This is why God declares, "*Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Cor. 6:2). The longer you wait to deal with any sin or rebellion toward God, the harder your heart will become, and the lesser chance you have of getting free. This is why the apostle wrote, "*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion*" (Heb. 3:15). But, what actions should you take to resolve controlling behavior?

2. Ask God for a reawakening in your relationship with Him. If you are the controlling spouse, you need Christ to begin an awakening work within you. Notice that each of the causes of controlling behavior that I have listed for you is in reality, a work of the flesh revealed in Galatians 5:19-21. The only solution to the works of the flesh will be allowing your life to be filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. Paul explained the simplicity of getting free from the works of the flesh when he taught in this same context, "*Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*" (Gal. 5:16).

This means that if you want to get free from controlling behavior, you must cry out to God for His Spirit to begin this work inside of you. The Spirit of God is the only One who can rule over and set you free from your fleshly thoughts and behaviors. He is the only One who can truly heal your heart from the resentment, hurt, and betrayal from the past.

If you are the one being controlled, you need this same spiritual awakening in your life. Why? Because you are allowing this behavior to take place in your home. God doesn't want you to be a spiritual, emotional, or physical slave to another person. He has called you to freely love and to be loved by your spouse. Therefore, ask Him for His Spirit to empower you. Pursue Him in His Word, and He will speak to you about what you should do. Get to church regularly so you can find encouragement and support from others.

3. Talk to your spouse. It is essential that you talk to your mate about their behavior, and explain to him or her that their controlling behavior is destroying your love and relationship. Jesus said you should personally confront anyone who has offended you personally. He said, "*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.*"

If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-17). If your spouse refuses to listen to you, this is when you must take the next step, which is go to your pastor or one of the elders of your church and ask for his help and counseling.

With this level of trauma in a person's past, they have great difficulty trusting God that it won't happen again.

4. Don't allow your spouse to isolate you. Controlling behavior is all about isolating you from others, so they have total control over you. Don't let this happen! This is why you should talk to your pastor or an elder in your church. Ask for help! Remember Phoebe is described by the Apostle Paul as "*the helper of many*" (Rom. 16:2). You need to find others who will help and counsel you regarding the steps you should take. Getting an impartial third party involved will greatly help to resolve the differences you have relating to the controlling behavior of your spouse. Allowing the wisdom that comes from above to flow into your heart and mind will bring great peace to your soul. Solomon said, "*Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days*" (Prov. 19:20). To experience God's peace in your relationship again will require both you and your spouse to listen, receive, and act on the counsel given to you. May God grant you that submissive heart to hear His voice and act upon what God's Word teaches!

5. Give specific boundaries. The boundaries you set with your spouse must be very clear and very practical. These boundaries will cover practical things that your mate does that you know are driven by their controlling behavior. If God gives us clear moral and behavioral boundaries in His Word, you can do the same with your spouse (Acts 17:26). Explain to your mate exactly what they do that is controlling, and how these behaviors make you feel.

6. Love cannot be forced. This fact is absolutely critical for both spouses to understand. No one forced you to date your spouse, or decide to marry them. No one made you walk down the aisle and pledge to be one another's companion for life. You did these things of your own free will. No one can force you to stay in love with your spouse; you have to make that decision yourself. A biblical marriage is the result of two people choosing to love one another for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, so long as they both shall live. Love is always something that is given freely by your own choice. This is exactly what God said about His love for His backslidden people. He promised, *"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him"* (Hosea 14:4). The Hebrew word for *freely* means to take an action voluntarily. No one twisted God's arm or forced Him to love you; He chose to have mercy upon each of us of His own free will. Why? God tells us why He has had such great mercy upon us. Paul declared, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us"* has redeemed us to Himself (Eph. 2:4). If this is the nature of true love, then you can't force God or anyone to love you. You also can't *be forced* to love someone else. You must remember that force will always destroy true love.

7. Explain to your mate that their controlling behavior is killing the love between you, not protecting it. This is the conversation you must have with your spouse. Ask them, "Do you want me to stay in love with you? If you do, then something has to radically change in this marriage. You are smothering me and killing the love we have for each other."

It is essential that you talk to your mate about their behavior, and explain to him or her that their controlling behavior is destroying your love and relationship.

This conversation should be a wake-up call for you, if you are the controlling spouse. You must realize that for your mate to say these things to you, you cannot be loving your spouse in the way that God has commanded! If you don't

hear this cry from your mate, they will lose all hope for a return to the loving relationship you once had.

8. Look at God's own example. Do you realize that not even God tries to control every aspect of your life? How can I be sure of this? Just read the entirety of Roman's chapter fourteen. Within this chapter you will find God's instruction that allows people great freedom over the non-moral and non-biblical areas of their lives. In other words, if the Bible does not condemn something as immoral, or declare explicitly a law against some behavior, then believers are at liberty to make their own personal decision on that issue. When believers condemned other Christians about what day they worshipped on, or whether or not they ate meat or were a vegetarian, this is what God said: *"Let each be fully convinced in his own mind"* (Rom. 14:5). Therefore, if God is willing to allow all of us the liberty to make our own decisions on issues like these, why can't couples agree to allow each other the same freedom?

9. Show some love and respect. It is important to understand, that allowing someone to make decisions over non-moral and non-biblical issues is fundamentally a way to show love and respect for that individual. If you truly love someone, you will be respectful toward them. Jesus explained this truth when He taught the parable of the landowner. He said, *"There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"* (Matt. 21:33-40). This is a simple parable that teaches a simple truth; if you love the landowner who is God, then you will respect His Son. The same is true for you. If you love God then

you will respect the one God has sent to be your husband or wife.

10. An important warning. If you do not show love and respect for your spouse, and cherish them as a precious gift, you are putting your spouse into grave temptation. What do I mean? I have seen this happen so many times in marriage counseling, I can't count them anymore. I have heard the stories of a spouse who is harsh, controlling, and dominating their mate. Then all of a sudden, another person comes along and begins to flirt and show the controlled spouse love and respect at work, at the gym, or some other place. At that moment your spouse is put in grave temptation. Why? Because the love and kindness they are not experiencing at home, someone else is now showing them. The temptation to leave the controlling spouse at this point is powerful. This is why Solomon warned his son with these words when he wrote, *"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress"* (Proverbs 5:18-20)? There are two commands in this passage. The first is to *"Rejoice with the wife of your youth,"* which means to be glad and to be cheerful toward your mate. The second command is to be *"Enraptured with her love."* The word *enraptured* means to be intoxicated with her love. This is a metaphor describing two people's loving and romantic feelings toward one another. If your spouse does not sense that you are happily and romantically in love with them, you are putting your spouse in real temptation. Don't let this happen!

11. Seek to compromise and find a middle ground. With those non-moral and non-biblical issues, simply find the middle ground of compromise. This is what true wisdom dictates. James said it this way, *"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to*

yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:13-18).

Do you realize that not even God tries to control every aspect of your life?

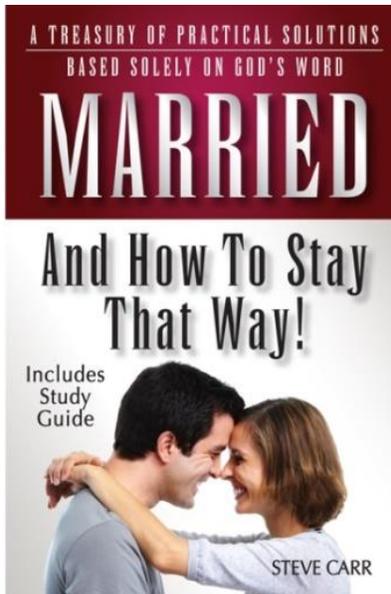
James makes it very clear in this passage that if you are living by the wisdom that God has given, then it will bear fruit that is peaceable, gentle and always willing to yield to find compromise with others. Why? Because fleshly wisdom is always selfish and self-seeking, which results in envy, confusion, and every evil thing. So, if you want the fruit of peace in your home, be willing to seek that compromise with one another!

12. If the controlling behavior progresses to abuse, you must remove yourself from the relationship. This is another word of caution. If your attempts to resolve your mate’s controlling behavior are rejected, many times this is when the controlling behavior becomes abusive. This is when it is not safe for you to remain together. To gain the wisdom of how to address abusive behavior, I would encourage you to read my article entitled, “*Dealing with An Abusive Spouse.*” You can find this article at: <https://covenantkeepers.org/online-articles/42-conflict-resolution/311-dealing-with-an-abusive-spouse> May God give you grace to hear His voice and take the appropriate actions for your situation!

COVENANT KEEPERS © 2022

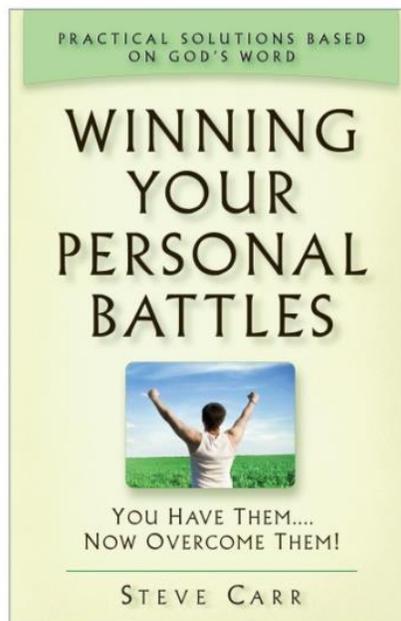
Please visit our website www.covenantkeepers.org for a complete list of available resources and over 600 articles, Bible studies, and discipleship material to help you and your marriage.

Married And How To Stay That Way: (New updated version includes study guide.)

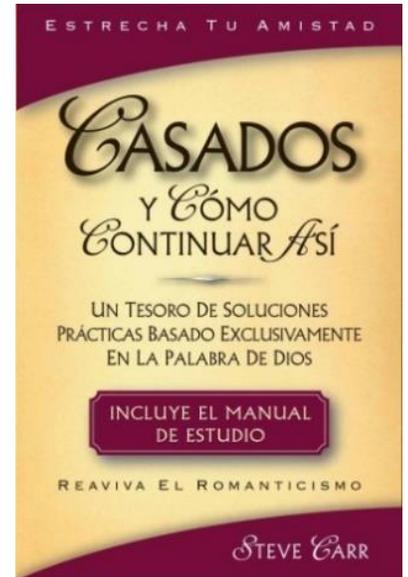


Winning Your Personal Battles:

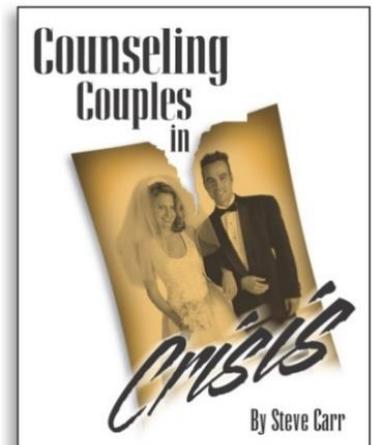
This is an invaluable resource that deals with the common struggles we all battle with throughout our lives. The issues covered in this book are the complicating problems that always seem to frustrate your marriage and other relationships.



Spanish Edition of Married and How To Stay That Way! (Study Guide included).



Counselor Training Manual: The *Counseling Couples in Crisis* manual with accompanying video training material has been developed for pastors and lay counselors to assist them to counsel couples in crisis.



Telephone orders: (805) 489-9088
Have your VISA or MasterCard ready.

E-mail orders: Send all shipping and credit card information to: scarck@lightspeed.net

Internet orders: www.amazon.com

Postal orders: Pastor Steve Carr, PO Box 463, Arroyo Grande, CA 93421

Book Prices: See our website www.covenantkeepers.org