
COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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An Equal Relationship!

This article will *not* cover a woke or worldly dissertation on equality between heterosexual and same-sex couples, or any other unbiblical relationship our culture offers today. What I will discuss is biblical marriage, and the equality that husbands and wives should render toward one another. The Bible is clear on this topic, and instructs couples in the most practical ways how to demonstrate this equality.

Our Heavenly Father is a God who shows partiality to no person, but who treats everyone the same, and who commands us to treat others just as He does. God has made it so clear throughout His Word that equal treatment of others must be translated into His people's daily lives. God began in His Word by declaring to the judges of the land, "*You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's*" (Deut. 1:17). This equal treatment under the law within the Jewish judicial system was also commanded to all the Israelites when He said, "*For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*" (Deut. 10:17-19). In the New Testament you see the same truth taught by James when He declared, "*My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a*

man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts" (James 2:1-4)? James also adds to this exhortation a few verses further on in this same chapter by warning, "*If you show partiality, you commit sin*" (James 2:9). Therefore, judicial or social partiality is a serious issue with God, because He wants us all to treat one another equally, showing partiality to no one.

How are husbands and wives equal before God?

1. We are equal before God as sinners. Paul declared in Romans 3:21-24 that, "*Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" God gives His righteousness to all who will repent and believe in Him, because we all have the same sinful nature and have fallen short of His glory.

2. We are equal before God in our faith. In 2 Peter 1:1 the Apostle Peter declared to the church their equality with himself when he wrote, "*Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and*

Savior Jesus Christ." The two words like *precious* in this verse are actually one word in Greek, meaning something that is similar and of equal value. Peter is declaring that his faith, and the faith of those to whom he is writing, are of equal value. This is an incredibly humble statement by Peter, because he realizes just as Jesus taught, that he was just one of the brethren (Matt. 23:8-12). Peter was no better or worse than anyone else.

3. We are equal before God as male and female. Paul also made a revolutionary statement for first century believers when he declared, "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:26-28). These passages are God's declaration that if someone is in Christ there is no difference anymore between the Jew and the Gentile, a slave or free born person, or a male or female. We are all equal in Christ Jesus.

4. We are equal before God as joint-heirs in our inheritance.

Peter also in his first epistle declared that husbands and wives were equal when he wrote, "*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered*" (1 Peter 3:7). The words *heirs together* in this passage mean that a husband and wife are co-heirs or joint-heirs together before God. This Greek word is also used concerning Jews and Gentiles as co-equal and fellow-heirs of all of the promises of God (Eph.

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

3:5-6). Therefore, if God sees everyone equally before Him, how can we do anything less than treat one another equally?

Why is equality a key ingredient to a loving marital relationship?

The simple answer to this question is that equality between a husband and wife is the fruit and proof of real love within their relationship. If God is love, and treats each of us equally before Him, how can any Christian husband or wife treat their spouse as less than themselves? Both individuals in the marital relationship must perceive that they are respected, valued, and honored as an equal partner in the relationship. If one spouse feels used, manipulated, not consulted, not listened to, or shut out of decision-making, the love relationship eventually breaks down. Many times, I have observed this kind of behavior with both husbands and wives in the way they treat each other in public. Other times, people will confess to me in counseling that they are being treated in this manner. If a husband believes that his headship in the home means that he must dominate and control everything, he has sadly misinterpreted the biblical teaching on this subject. By living with this attitude, he is declaring by his actions that his wife has little worth in his eyes. Or, in the same way, if a wife makes her husband feel like a child that must obey her every whim, or if she belittles him and his ideas, she is essentially declaring that she considers herself superior to him. This relationship will not prosper! For love to grow and mature in any relationship, there must be a sense of respect and equality in all aspects of that relationship.

The real question is this: If you believe that your spouse is an equal partner, do you treat them as an equal in the practical aspects of your life and marriage? It's one thing to declare you believe this truth, but quite another to demonstrate by your actions that you believe it. If you are

unsure about the answer your spouse might give, why not ask your mate if he or she senses that you respect them as an equal partner in your marriage?

What are the practical signs that you are in a marriage where you are not equal?

1. Money is completely controlled and hidden from you by your mate.
2. Your spouse will not divulge personal needs to you.
3. Your spouse wants you to pray for them, but they will rarely ask you what your needs are.
4. Your mate will be selfish in decision making, and will not even ask you what your thoughts might be.
5. Are you the one that is serving around the house while your partner is sitting in front of the TV or off doing what they enjoy?

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6. Your spiritual, emotional, or sexual needs are not a priority to your spouse.
7. Are your ideas and opinions important to your mate?
8. Your spouse will be prideful and harsh with you, while at the same time rarely seeking to comfort or encourage you when you are struggling.
9. He or she will take care of their own needs, but compassion and concern for your needs is a rarity.
10. Do you feel manipulated and used by your spouse, so they can get what they want?

11. Are you consulted and listened to, or are you shut out and made to feel like your ideas don't matter?

12. Are you respected and honored by your spouse, or verbally put down by your mate?

If you don't perceive and see by practical action that you are an equal partner in your marriage, then I can assure you that you will not have a happy and fulfilling relationship. Why would I come to this conclusion? Because after 50+ years of marriage counseling, I have observed couples making this terrible mistake of not addressing this problem in their marriage, and disaster is always the result. It is not just wives that feel dominated and treated unequally by their husbands, but sometimes it is the wives who also control and manipulate their husbands.

If you are experiencing any of the behaviors that I have just listed, you need to ask your pastor, or an elder of your church for help. You are in an unequal and unloving marriage that will only grow worse as time passes. Don't wait to get help!

What does equality look like in your marriage in practical terms?

Take the following biblical commands and apply them to your marriage relationship. If you see your spouse as an equal partner then you will behave in the following ways. Note in these verses the words *one another*, repeat in every command. As you apply these commands to your marriage, you will easily see why you should respond equally to one another.

1. If you have an equal relationship with your spouse then you will pray one for another with equal intensity. This demonstration of love, honor, and value toward your spouse will keep your prayers from being hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

2. You will show affection to each other equally. God commands you to,

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:10). By giving him or her preference, you are demonstrating your honor toward your spouse. As you both love each other in this manner, you will find the depth of love God intends for your marriage.

3. If you have an equal relationship, you will be like-minded toward one another. Paul taught, *“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus”* (Rom. 15:5). The word *like-minded* means to see another person as you see yourself. Jesus taught that you are to, *“love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matt. 22:39). This is true equality in the most practical terms.

The real question is this: If you believe that your spouse is an equal partner, do you treat them as an equal in the practical aspects of your life and marriage?

4. You will seek opportunities to build up your spouse. Paul taught, *“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another”* (Rom. 14:19). What would your marriage be like if you both were looking for ways to build each other up, instead of tearing each other down? Peace would fill your home!

5. You will also be receptive to one another equally when needs are expressed. Paul again said, *“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God”* (Rom. 15:7). The word *receive* means to welcome or assist another person. This is what makes husbands and wives both servants in their own home.

6. An equal relationship allows you to respectfully and equally correct and

warn one another without a major conflict erupting. Paul explained to the Roman church that, *“I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another”* (Rom. 15:14). Love enables this receptiveness in both directions. Only an attitude of prideful superiority refuses to listen to correction.

7. If you see one another as an equal partner, you will also consider the sexual needs of your mate as equal to your own. Paul told the Corinthian church that both husbands and wives were to respond equally to each other, when he wrote, *“Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”* (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Note that both husbands and wives are equally commanded to respond to each other’s sexual needs.

8. You will equally serve one another when a request for help comes your way. Paul stated clearly that all, *“Brethren have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”* (Gal. 5:13). If you apply this passage to your marriage, then both husband and wife must equally serve one another.

9. An equal relationship between two people will motivate both to humbly pursue peace with each other, and they will never consciously seek to provoke the other. Paul commanded this response when he taught, *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another”* (Gal. 5:26). Notice again that a prideful superiority is what causes someone to provoke a conflict. Pride is also what keeps you from seeking reconciliation

with your spouse after a conflict occurs. Are you the one waiting for your spouse to come to you with an apology?

10. To love one another equally you will willingly bear one another’s burdens. Paul again commands, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself”* (Gal. 6:2-3). When you think yourself to be something, then you will not be compassionate toward your mate’s burdens.

11. You will also willingly forgive your spouse just as you have been forgiven, and refuse to hold resentment in your heart. This is what all believers are to do equally to anyone who offends them, as Paul stated, *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you”* (Eph. 4:32). As God has done for you, then you also must do to your spouse (Matt. 7:12).

If you have an equal relationship, you will be like-minded toward one another.

12. If you are treating your spouse with true equality, you will be equally honest and transparent with one another as you confess your faults, and pray for each other when you fail. This is exactly what James taught when he wrote, *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16). Equal confession is essential to staying humble with each other.

13. You will also equally comfort and encourage one another when life gets difficult. This is why the apostle to the Hebrews commanded, *“Exhort one another daily, while it is called*

'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). If you want your spouse to encourage you, then you should equally encourage them.

14. One of the most important ways that you demonstrate equal treatment is by subordinating your selfish desires toward your spouse. This is the meaning of, "Submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). This is what keeps a husband from becoming domineering, and a wife from attempting to usurp the leadership role from her husband. See also Peter's exhortation on this topic of submission in 1 Peter 5:5.

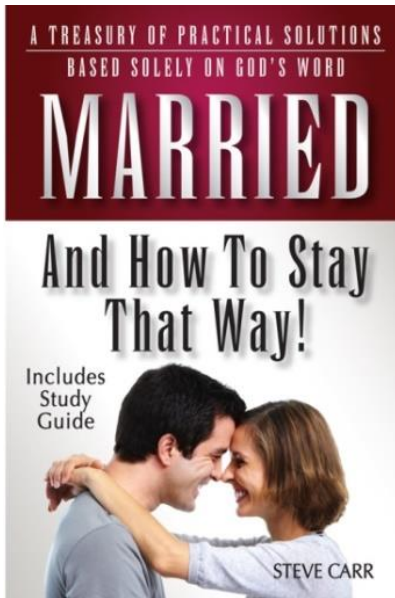
15. Each of the behaviors that I have outlined in this section reveal that you and your spouse are to fervently and equally love each other. This is what Peter declared in his epistle when he wrote, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:8). Each of these behaviors in this list all result from true love.

These are the biblical commands given in Scripture to all believers that reveal what true equal treatment means in your practical daily life. This is how you and your spouse should treat each other. If God commands all believers to treat one another as I have detailed for you here in this article, how much more should a husband and wife treat one another in the same way? Remember, Jesus said, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:13).

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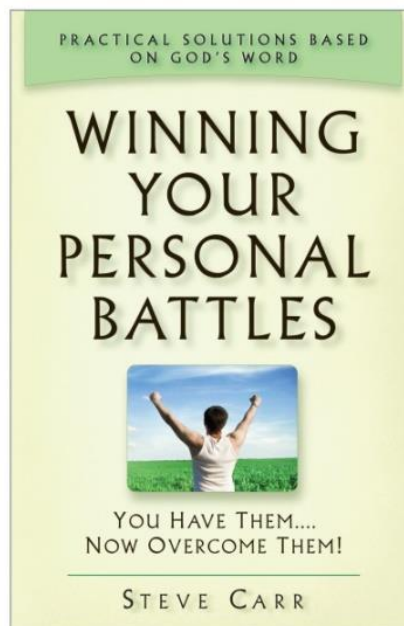
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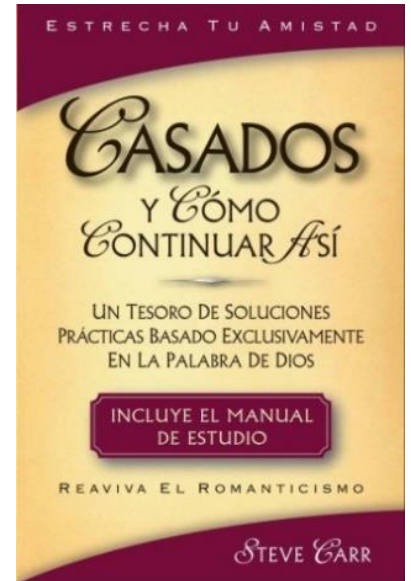


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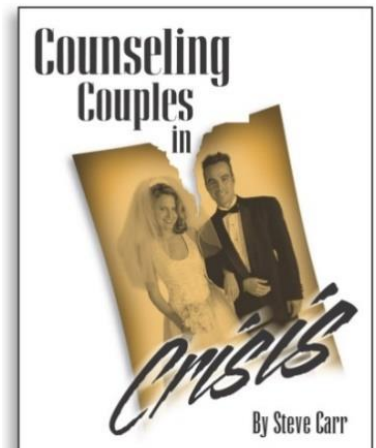
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