

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## Dealing with an Explosive Spouse.

If you were to rank the issues that disrupt marital harmony and hinder conflict resolution, explosive anger would be placed near the top of most lists. Solomon declared that, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression" (Prov. 29:22). From my experience in counseling couples I completely agree with Solomon that angry and volatile individuals will continually transgress God's commands to love. In fact, there will never be lasting peace in a home like this because the angry spouse continually stirs up more and more strife.

Are you the explosive and angry spouse looking for a solution to your anger? Or, are you the spouse that is being crushed and destroyed by your mate's explosive outbursts? In either case this publication should be extremely helpful to you.

Because of the great confusion over the subject of anger and if it can ever be a useful emotion, let me begin by giving you some basic understanding as to why you even have the capability to get angry. What does Scripture declare about whether or not anger can ever be used in a constructive way?

### Constructive anger

It is important to note that Scripture commands you to "be angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Obviously if we are commanded to be angry and not sin, there must be a way to fulfill this command. It is possible to be angry and not sin. How? You must be angry at the sin and evil in this world. Anger like this would lead you to

remove yourself from any worldly or ungodly behavior.

You should also note that the Bible teaches that, "God is angry with the wicked everyday" (Psalms 7:11). In addition, Jesus spoke to the religious hypocrites, "with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts..." (Mark 3:5). In I Samuel 11:6, we also see that the fruit of the Holy Spirit coming upon Saul caused "his anger to be greatly aroused," which then motivated him to defend God's people.

Therefore, anger is an emotion that can be used in a constructive way if it is expressed in harmony with biblical limitations and principles. Constructive anger should then motivate you to a godly and biblical action. Moses was led to pray because of his anger toward the people's foolish actions (Num. 16:15). David was moved by anger to meditate upon God's Word and then he did what was righteous (Ps. 4:3-5). Nehemiah was motivated by his anger to rebuke the rulers of God's people for their sin instead of being silent and compromising with them (Neh. 5:6-7). These are just a few of the ways anger should motivate you to righteousness. The problem is that many times anger is not expressed in a biblical way and results in unrighteous actions that destroy relationships.

### Destructive anger

Anger becomes destructive when you allow yourself to blow up and vent your anger on your spouse or take actions that are clearly in violation of God's Word. Some people justify their anger by referring to it as just, "letting off steam," when in reality, it is a sinful display of anger that is being used to hurt or control another

person. The Scripture declares, "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). In other words, your wrath will never produce something good and righteous in your relationship. This is why David commanded, "cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it only causes harm" (Psalms 37:8). Do you see the harm that you are causing by unleashing your wrath upon your mate? You are foolishly destroying the intimacy and the relationship you have with your loved one. Solomon also declared, "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back" (Prov. 29:11). You need to learn how to hold back and control your emotions. Otherwise, your anger will do great harm to your marital relationship and frustrate the resolution of any conflict.



*Are you ready to explode?*

A second way anger is used destructively is when you internalize or bury your anger inside. Internalizing your anger is just as wrong as blowing up and venting it on your spouse. Paul taught in Ephesians 4:26, "do not let the sun go down on your wrath." To allow the sun to go down on your wrath means that you have not resolved what you are angry about. This command makes it clear that God doesn't want you to allow anger

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

to boil within your heart even for one night. He wants you to deal quickly with your anger and resolve whatever is causing it before you go to sleep each night.

## **How can you learn to control your anger?**

**1. Get your heart right.** Before you can begin to deal with your anger problem you must have a right relationship with God. What do I mean? Have you admitted to God that you have an anger problem and sought His forgiveness and help? If your anger has caused you to sin against your spouse, seek God's forgiveness right now. Remember, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). God won't forgive self-justification, excuses, and blame-shifting. Then go and confess your fault to your spouse and ask his or her forgiveness (James 5:16). These actions will begin the reconciliation process in your marriage and get you into a humble and right position before God.

If you're reading this publication and you are not a Christian, you must first ask God to forgive you for your sin and invite Him into your heart by prayer. Dedicate yourself to following and obeying Him. If you will come by faith to God here is His promise to you: *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Rom. 10:9). As a Christian, now you can count on God to resolve your anger problem.

**2. Surrender and ask for power.** Once you've gotten yourself into a right relationship with God cry out for God's power to be manifest in your life. Sinful anger is only proof that your sinful nature has been reigning in your life. You need the power of the Spirit to reign over you if you ever expect to change. Surrender to the Holy Spirit allows you to receive the power to change. The fruit of God's Spirit will enable you

to have self-control over your emotions (Gal. 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit will enable you to do all that I am about to explain in this publication. You need the *"living water"* of His Spirit to quench the fire of your anger (John 7:37-39). God's Holy Spirit is stronger than your anger or any emotion inside you. This is why Paul could boldly and confidently declare, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13). God will strengthen you through Christ's power to control your anger. If you will simply surrender and ask the Spirit of God to come and reign inside you, He will at this very moment. Why not take this step in prayer right now?

**3. Choose to restrain yourself.** The only way anger can be expressed constructively is when it is restrained and controlled. Is that possible? David declared that he believed it was possible when he stated: *"I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle"* (Psalm 39:1). Notice the words "I will" in this verse. Scripture makes it clear that your words and behaviors can and must be restrained by your willful choice. God would never command you to be slow to anger if you could not restrain yourself to do it (Prov. 14:29). Therefore, you must make a choice to control and restrain your anger.

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### **Have you admitted to God that you have an anger problem and sought His forgiveness and help?**

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But, I know some of you are thinking right now, *I can't control my anger. I've tried that before and it hasn't worked.* But, you *have* controlled your temper many times. All of us can restrain our anger when we want to. Let me give you an example. Have you ever been arguing with your spouse at home and the phone rings? What did you do? Didn't you choose to control your anger and an-

swer the phone calmly and politely? Then you get off the phone and you resume yelling at your spouse. Your actions were motivated by a simple choice not to let that person on the other end of the phone know that you were arguing with your spouse.

Here is another example of how you control your anger. You are at work and your employer does something that gets you upset. But, you choose not to say one word out of respect for his or her position or because you simply fear losing your job. But, then you go home and without respect or fear of losing your relationship with your spouse you scream and belittle him or her. This is the person you should show the greatest respect for in your speech. If you don't, it will seriously damage your relationship. Do you see the tremendous contradiction in your behavior?

Sinful anger is the result of a choice you make to allow your heart to be ruled by your fleshly nature. Paul taught, *"do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts"* (Rom. 6:12). Notice, the control of your outward behavior begins with letting sin reign inside you. Therefore, make the choice and stop your angry responses.

**4. Identify the cause.** If you ever want to control and restrain your anger you must identify why you are angry. This is obviously what God wanted Cain to understand when He asked him, *"Why are you angry?"* (Gen. 4:6)? God hoped that Cain would identify what was causing his anger and resolve it before his rage manifested into sinful behavior. Without understanding and dealing with the cause of your anger you are doomed to repeat your outbursts again and again.

Therefore, what are some of the causes of anger? In Cain's circumstance it was because of his pride and comparison with his brother. The Bible explains to us that those *"comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise"* (2 Cor. 10:12). God accepted Abel's sacrifice, but not

Cain's. What Cain should have done was answer God's question of why he was angry, which would have revealed his prideful comparison, and enabled him to resolve why his offering was rejected. Scripture tells us that it was simply because Abel offered in faith and Cain did not (Heb. 11:4).

Here are several other reasons for sinful anger.

(a) You can get angry because you don't agree with what your spouse has done (Num. 31:14).

(b) You can get angry because of jealousy toward your spouse (1 Sam. 18:8).

(c) You may get angry because you don't want your spouse to reprove you (2 Sam. 3:8).

(d) You might get angry because of personal guilt and failure in your own life (2 Sam. 6:8).

(e) You can get angry because you don't want to admit the truth about what your spouse is confronting you with (2 Chron. 16:10).

(f) You may get angry because you are resentful over other issues that are not resolved with God or with your mate (Jonah 4:1).

(g) You can get angry because you have unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations (2 Kings 5:1-14).

(h) You may get angry because of unresolved and reoccurring conflicts (Prov. 26:11; Ps. 78:40-41).

Each of these issues must be resolved separately in your own heart or your anger will continue to control you.

**5. Don't let issues build up.** The wisdom of this principle is easily understood by asking yourself one question. Have you ever allowed a multitude of minor issues to build up resentment in your heart and then one-day you finally explode? Many times the failure to resolve these smaller offenses with your spouse will naturally lead you to a volcanic eruption of anger and rage. Moses is one of the best examples of how this happens. He allowed a multiple of

smaller issues to frustrate and anger him until he erupted and "*spoke rashly with his lips*" (Ps. 106:32-33). The simple solution to this problem of allowing resentment to build-up was given by Jesus when He taught the disciples to deal quickly with conflicts (Matt. 5:25). Paul also taught that we should not allow the day to end on a point of wrath (Eph. 4:26). Therefore, don't hold these smaller resentments inside. Go to your mate and calmly discuss them today. Keep a short account concerning offenses with your spouse and be spared the explosions.

**6. Restrain your words.** Your words have a direct effect on your anger and the angry responses of others. Solomon taught that, "*a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*" (Prov. 15:1). Your harsh words will naturally stir up anger in your spouse, but they also inflame your anger. James gives the solution to this dilemma. He explained that if you want to control your anger then you must, "*be swift to hear, slow to speak*", and then you will be "*slow to wrath*" (James 1:19). In other words, stop talking so much and start listening more. Active listening helps you to calm down and reason more clearly.

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### **You need the power of the Spirit to reign over you if you ever expect to change.**

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**7. Stop the words.** Sometimes the best thing to do is just to *stop* a conversation when you realize that it is getting out of control. When you hear the volume start to rise and your words or your mate's words turn harsh or disrespectful, ask for a "time out" so you both can calm down. A short "time out" can keep your anger from escalating to the point where you both become irrational. This is exactly what Scripture teaches us to do: "*It is honorable to a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel*" (Prov. 20:3). God also

commanded us in Proverbs 17:14, "*Stop contention before a quarrel starts.*" Taking a "time out" stops a quarrel before it gets started. This simple step allows both of you to pray and get yourselves under control before an explosion occurs. This means walking away from the confrontation for a few minutes and coming back to try again. If the volume begins to rise in your second attempt, take another "time out." Even Jesus walked away from the emotionally charged confrontation when the Jews wanted to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-30). Eventually, you will learn to control your words and emotions to discuss the issue the first time around.

**8. Restrain your thoughts.** When you are taking this "time out" from your argument you must also control your thoughts. If you allow angry and resentful accusations to rule and control your mind, your emotions will continue to boil inside. You need the peace of God to rule your heart and mind if you want to think clearly and constructively. Determine why you are angry and what you might have done to provoke your mate to anger. Then think of a biblical course of action or solution to the problem. This is also the best time to ask God to forgive you for your bad attitude and any behavior that was selfish or inconsiderate. Then begin your next attempt to discuss the matter with a confession of your fault and ask forgiveness. Humble confession will soften both of your hearts and allow for wisdom to reign. Solomon explained that "*the discretion (wisdom or understanding) of a man makes him slow to anger, and it is to his glory to overlook a transgression*" (Prov. 19:11). God's wisdom and discretion will help you to think and act in an appropriate manner to resolve the issue that caused the conflict in the first place. Paul promised that if you would meditate on "*things that are true, things that are just... The God of peace will be with you*" (Phil. 4:8-9). Therefore, understand that what you are thinking will directly affect how you behave.

**9. Don't get physical.** One of the worst things you could do when you are upset is to grab, push, shake, or hit a person you are angry with or who is angry with you. Trying to force someone physically or injure them so they will do what you want will only increase their anger and resistance. To physically harm your mate is a serious sin before God and a crime of battery under the laws of our land, which may also cause you serious legal problems (John 18:23). Usually physical confrontations occur when one or both partners refuse to stop the conversation and take a time out. Don't make this mistake.

If there has been physical abuse in your marriage I would encourage you to go to our web site [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org) and print the article entitled, *How to deal with an abusive spouse*. This publication will give you further direction on this subject.

## How should you respond to an explosive spouse?

**1. Confront.** If you are the one living with an angry and aggressive mate, you need to confront your spouse and declare that his or her explosive anger is unacceptable. Make it clear that you believe that these angry explosions are ruining your relationship and the joy you once had in your marriage. The Bible makes it clear that it is not enjoyable to live with an angry spouse. Solomon revealed his personal experience in this matter when he said: *"Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman"* (Prov. 21:19). You could also insert *angry man* at the end of this Scripture because it makes no difference which spouse has the anger problem; no one enjoys being around a person like this.

If you don't confront your mate's anger problem head on several things occur. First, your mate will assume that he or she has no real problem with anger. Second, your mate will believe that you are willing to live with these explosive episodes. Don't

allow these explosions to continue for your sake and your children's sake. Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

**2. Get counseling.** If the explosive anger continues you should ask your mate to go for counseling so he or she can learn how to control these outbursts. Remember, *"Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety"* (Prov. 11:14). Do you want to see your mate fall and destroy his or her relationship with God? Do you want to fall into sinful behaviors yourself by responding incorrectly to your spouse's anger? Do you want to see your marriage deteriorate? Of course not! But all these things will happen if you don't get into counseling and resolve this anger problem. If the angry spouse refuses to seek help then the other partner should seek counsel to determine what further steps can be taken (Matt. 18:15-17). May God give you grace to act!

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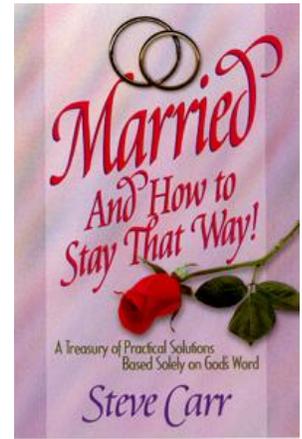
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- ◆ *Building Understanding with Your Spouse*
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