

The Sin of the Controlling Spirit

Control is a delicate subject that requires balance. So many things around us seem to be out of control. As parents we must control our children and help them learn self-control. As a church we need some control to keep us on the narrow way to Glory. But in the exercise of control there is potential for abuse! All human hearts have some tendency to err toward wanting more control than God has designed for us to have.

The Bible shows us the sin of being a controlling person. Controllers are very hard to reach. They often resist when friends try to show them their control problem. They must see it for themselves.

So what is a controlling person? How do they act? Let's look at some of the marks of a controller.

A controller often uses moodiness to make a statement or push a point. Moodiness intimidates people into cooperating rather than facing the pain of the bad mood. The silent treatment or the avoidance response is part of this.

A bad temper often accompanies a controller. They flare up when someone challenges or disagrees with them. They are often uneasy with questions. They don't like people questioning them because they aren't in control. They don't know where this discussion will go. They love to be the questioner.

They may fall into untruthfulness. They will often lie before saying, "I don't know." They stretch stories to their favor to make themselves look big. They seem to have a bigger story, a worse calamity, or a better triumph than others. They are prone to imagine bad about others and exaggerate their faults.

Controllers often offer few compliments. They don't like others to feel too good about themselves lest they gain control and confidence. Of the compliments they do give, many end up backhandedly showing a fault.

They can't accept "no" for an answer. It stops their control and they can't handle it. They might be silent and allow "no" to be the answer for now but will work to pressure the "no" to change!

These people seldom truly understand others. They can't accept others' realities. They would rather redefine others' realities. I might say, "I am tired." But they want to be going and working. So they say, "No, you're not tired. What's wrong with you?"

They often blame others. They seemingly never can say, "I am sorry." Even if it's becoming evident they did something wrong, they work to prove it was ultimately someone else's fault. Controllers often have few really close friends. They are jealous of popular people and critical of successful ones. They are demeaning and critical. The few friends they have are distant because they can control those friendships better.

They are not good at being team players. They try to run committees or boards themselves. They tend to keep others in the dark so they seem to know it all. Often they only share information that will get

their agenda accomplished. They are touchy if asked questions. In congregational life, they must be in the middle of everything going on.

When seekers come, they must be in the center of ministering to them, often to the point of turning them away again. They seem to always know the latest news and updates and will correct everyone else.

They abuse administrative powers. They are known for threats and manipulation. They can be generous at times, which sets the stage for us to value their generosity and fear the threat of losing that advantage.

That is an ugly list of some of the selfish traits of a controlling person. While we might not be a controlling person to this degree, all of us have some of these tendencies within us. God's Word calls us away from this into something better!

God calls us to humility and submission. First Peter 5:1-6 says, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

Here we are called to keep a servant mentality in any realm of authority we are given. We should value the input of our brethren. We should be open to their counsel, desiring to know how they see things. We must understand we are never big enough to escape submission. We must respect group decisions. We should participate in discussion and voting but then cooperate with the outcome. We should welcome accountability for our life. Godly wives will be happy to submit to their husbands. They will seek his direction and not try to run ahead. This kind of living is directly counter to the spirit of the controller.

Jesus instructed us that His kingdom is to be distinctly different from the world's kingdoms. "But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:25-28).

So greatness in God's kingdom is in serving and giving. It is in ministering to others' needs unselfishly. It is not in authority and exercise of dominion. This kind of spirit will be open with our fellow committee members in discussions. We will lay the whole subject open and share what we know. We will seek to serve, not to be served. We will seek to submit, not to rule!

We are directed to honor others' opinions above our own. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom 12:10). Philippians 2:1-3 says, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

This means we will try to connect with people and understand them. We will accept others' realities and seek to understand their limitations, wishes, struggles, and fears. We will hear them out and appreciate their thoughts. We will be happy if others' ideas are liked and accepted above our own. We will not always push our view when we understand that not all agree with us. We are called to love one another. First Peter 1:22 says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." First Peter 2:17 says, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

This point is at the very root of the controlling spirit. We must learn to appreciate others, see the good in them and compliment it. We should cheer others on in their success. True love for others does not feel threatened when others excel beyond us, but rather we seek to help others excel more.

We are called to have control of our own spirit. We must not succumb to bursts of anger, spells of moodiness, and rants of intimidation. We may not allow the "get even" spirit in our heart. Manipulation must go! Proverbs 25:28 says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." Proverbs 16:32, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Children should see that mother chooses self-control by God's grace when the day is stressful.

We are called to do our part and then trust God. Luke 17:10, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Part of this controlling problem comes from taking credit to ourselves when things go well. We can feel successful, powerful, and in control. Yes, parents, we must train our children. Teachers, we need some control in the classroom. Church leaders, we are called to lead out and help find a good way for our group. But in it all we must stay humble and realize we are still so very, very unworthy!

Another part of this subject is the question, how should we relate to a controller? We should love them while gently trying to help them see themselves. We should try to understand the situation. We must understand that returning controlling responses won't work. Force will generally not work well with controllers!

We should commit the situation to God for His work. God can move hearts, set up events, show the real persons, and exonerate the faithful. We should have faith in God more than our own ways of dealing with this problem. Let's keep humbly depending on God for the right words and appropriate responses.

We must never be ashamed to uphold truth. The principles of the Word are truth for us to live by regardless of whom it may touch. We must be committed to understand the truth of a situation or the facts about a story. When we make judgments based on personalities rather than Truth, we lose the blessing of God.

Another helpful response to controllers can be to choose space and time when it's appropriate. We don't have to fix everything right now! We might do well to distance ourselves for a period of time from a controller. Controllers eventually expose themselves. We do well to pray much and wait on God's timing to address these needs.

We must be careful that their ways do not rub off on us. We should stay humble, serving even if the controller is being more successful, more useful, more prominent. God is not fooled when He looks down on humanity. He sees right through us and knows our hearts.

God help us to curb our own tendencies to become a controlling person. May we look closer at our own hearts and ask God to help us be humble members in the Body of Christ, the Church. May we have wisdom to relate to the controllers we face in life.

~Luke Bennetch