

# Love Is Powerless

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” – 1 John 4:18*

Plenty of human relationships are about power.

Usually that power comes in the form of a need. Sex, validation, financial provision – whenever we need something, the other side of the relationship holds the keys.

Of course, when you hold the keys in a relationship, you probably don’t admit it to yourself.

You probably think your relationship is based in love – a genuine desire for what’s best in the other person to come out and come alive. That’s very nice.

But you do hold keys. They probably look like the very means by which you express your love.

If you’re a parent, it may be your money. If you’re a spouse, it may be your praise and validation and physical affection. These things look a lot like glue that holds your relationship together. They’re things which you’re uniquely capable of bringing to the relationship.

So you’re not going like it when I tell you that you have to be willing to give those things up.

When we have something another person needs, it’s too easy for us to use it to dominate them. Parents can control their children for a quarter of the century through the promise and threat of financial support. Spouses can control each other for two quarters of a century through the promise of sex/validation and the threat of its withdrawal. It happens all the time, even in the shiniest, prettiest relationships. It doesn’t matter if you see it or not – the other party knows you have the power, and they aren’t going to press their luck as long as you do.

The lure of domination lurks wherever we hold the keys. And there isn’t much self-actualization going on in a relationship between unequals.

If you really want to see someone come alive and become more “themselves” – in other words, if you want to love them – you’re going to have to give up the keys. You have to

surrender your power.

The best parents know this. They let their children make mistakes, earn their own way, and celebrate their own successes. They surrender financial power early and often and encourage their children to make their own decisions. The sooner they do, the sooner parents and children enter a new, deeper, more mature relationship between equals.

The best spouses know this. They refuse to use sex or ego validation as tools of manipulation. They encourage their partners to develop self-esteem, goals, and meaning outside of the relationship. They lay down their power, and they learn to relate to each other as free people, with the free choice to work together on life.

You've seen this yourself enough times to know it. But again, you just may not know that you hold the keys in your relationship. That's fine – it's easy to find out if you do. Just pay attention next time someone in a relationship with you decides to stray off the path you've set for them (out of care and concern, of course).

If you have a carrot and a stick that immediately come to mind, you've probably just found the real problem with your relationship. You may be able to fool yourself, but your spouse/family member/coworker knows you're holding this over their head. They will come to resent you for it.

Don't prove them right.

If love is your goal, do the counterintuitive thing and give up your main hold on your significant other. You'll be powerless to control how the other person turns out, but that's kind of the whole point of love, anyway. Maybe you'll learn something new.