

TEN RULES FOR A GOOD CLEAN FIGHT

Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

By Brent Hunter
1924 Prestwick Drive, La Grange, KY 40031
Brenthunt@aol.com, 502-222-3153

Introduction

- A. Two ideas to remember about hostility:
1. It is natural. Motion (growth) requires some friction.
 - a. Marriages are made in heaven, but so are *thunder and lightening storms!*
 - b. Marriage is similar to the merging of two great rivers
 - 1) Merging into ONE two different lives, backgrounds, habits, etc.
 - 2) Trying to share the same time, space & resources
 - 3) What happens when rivers merge together – RAPIDS! WHITE WATER.
 - 4) It is only natural that the blending of lives together will produce some friction, disagreements and conflicts.
 2. Since it is inevitable, you must agree to settle differences "agreeably." **It is the #1 interpersonal skill necessary for long-term marital stability, so make sure you master it!**
- B. Handled properly conflict can be a good thing. Learn to view "*fights*" not as tragedies, but opportunities!
1. Venting personal frustrations through lips which have learned how to do so can serve a wonderful purpose.
 2. Skill and self-control **can** turn potentially destructive squabbles into "*fair fights*" which solve problems and yield positive results!
 3. Remember: The secret to a good marriage is not finding the right person, but *learning to fight well with the person you have found!*

Rule #1—BE DRIVEN BY LOVE!

- A. This is the **one principle** from which all the others spring (we're laying the foundation). Husbands and wives are to love each other, **Eph. 5:25; Titus 2:4**.
1. That means more than just having warm feelings of affection for each other. It means I always want to act in their best interest – always seeking their good and never doing anything to hurt them.
 2. It's not just an emotion; love is a decision to behave in a certain way. When Paul defined love, he described it as ***a way of behaving***, I Cor. 13:4ff.
 3. If we want to manage conflict well, then we need to be sure that our actions are **always driven by love**, I must never do anything thing to hurt. I should always be acting in the best interest of my spouse.
 - a. Love needs to be the atmosphere that fills our homes and pulses through our marriage conflicts.
 - b. Before we speak or act, we need to ask, "Am I acting with love?"
 - c. Folks, that's not just a good idea, that's what God demands.

- B. Now, the other principles spring from this one. If you want to act with love, then before you can address a conflict, you first need to...

Rule #2 -- DO YOUR THING TO COOL OFF! (Eph 4:26; Prov 29:8, 30:33, 17:27)

- A. Never be ashamed of anger--it is natural, not sinful. The only thing you need to regret is handling it badly. Prov 29:22 "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."
- B. Since you are literally in a state of **intoxication** when your *"fuse is lit,"* reduce the emotional state before a discussion begins.
1. *"There is more hope for a fool than a man of quick temper."* Prov 29:20
 2. *"...and a wrathful man stirreth up contention."* Prov 15:18
 3. **IF YOU ARGUE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY, YOU'RE APT TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE!**
- C. If we are driven by love, we will do whatever it takes to cool off FIRST!
1. Engage in some physical activity
 2. Go for a walk
 3. Take a hot bath
 4. Pray alone--it calms the spirit so you can see the situation more clearly.
- D. The key here is this: **Rule our passions, rather than allowing our passions to rule us!**
1. Prov 16:32 "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, then he who captures a city."
 2. **No one likes living with a volcano** – we must cool off and get anger under control.
- D. Afterwards, you may just decide to forget the whole thing! (Prov 17:9, 19:11)
If not, proceed to Rule #3!

Rule #3--ARGUE WITH THE RIGHT PERSON (Prov 3:30, 25:9)

- A. Remember to express frustration/anger toward the person you are really angry with and **not some innocent party.**
1. Be honest. Husbands, how many times are you angry and frustrated at something at work, and the poor wife suddenly can't do anything right?
 2. Similarly, wives can be frustrated after dealing with the kids all day and consequently are ready for war as soon as their husbands come in the door?
 3. We all do it – and it is grossly unfair!
Prov 3:30 "Do not accuse a man for no reason – when he has done you no harm!"
- B. Beating up on innocent third parties is called *"dumping."*
1. **Dumping is cruel,** it allows you to **escape** the real person or issue, and **resolves nothing.** It only makes matters worse!
 2. So, have the courage to **make sure** you are bringing your complaint to the right person.

Rule #4--ARGUE ABOUT THE RIGHT THING (Prov 15:7, 28)

- A. Seems obvious too, but how many marriage conflicts are really about an **unspoken agenda?** Many arguments are fought about the **wrong subjects.**
1. Ex. Husband criticizes his wife's housekeeping when the real complaint is a

lack of intimacy in the relationship!

2. Ex. Wife criticizes her husband's tardiness when the real issue is she is feeling neglected?

3. We must be **in touch with our feelings** and ask, "*Am I really angry because of this or is it something else?*"

4. Sometimes our arguments solve nothing because we are not talking about the right thing.

5. A good indication of a hidden agenda is when OUR ANGER IS OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE OFFENSE.

B. The issue here is one of Honesty, Eph 4:25.

1. We must learn to be upfront about our frustrations and stop working with a hidden agenda.

2. Not only is it dishonest and unfair, but arguing about the wrong thing does nothing to solve the problem!

3. Jn 8:32 Jesus said: "*The truth will set you FREE.*" You will not have an *authentic* successful marriage unless you are honest.

Rule #5--ARGUE AT THE RIGHT TIME (Ecc 3:1-11; Prov 25:8)

A. Both must agree the time is right before beginning. Something as simple as timing can make a big difference in how we resolve our marriage conflicts.

B. Here are some times ***not*** to argue:

1. **In front of company.** To do so is *degrading*. *Violates trust*.

2. **When there is not enough time to finish.** Have you ever found yourself in the middle of big argument right before company arrives or it is time to go to services?

3. **When either party is hungry or tired**

4. **Just as one or both spouses comes home from work**

a. 80% of marital fights occur between 5-6 pm

b. Instead of celebrating being together, we dump on each other. That is a bad time.

c. Good rule of thumb: Do not discuss problems until **after** dinner.

Rule #6--DON'T BE HISTORICAL (Eph 4:26)

A. Man complains, "My wife always gets historical." Amused, his friend replied, "I think you mean hysterical." "No, I mean historical," he said. When we argue she reminds me of everything I've ever done wrong."

1. Why do we drag up the past? Often we are losing an argument so past blunders are brought up in order to gain some advantage.

2. Example: "I might be wrong now, but you are just as guilty." This moves us in the wrong direction!

B. Be committed to **not bring up past fights**.

1. "*He that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends.*" Prov 17:9

2. Bringing up items that you thought were resolved **breeds mistrust** and a **lack of confidence** in the relationship.

C. The real issue is one of **FORGIVENESS**. Eph 4:31-32

1. Once an argument is resolved, it is to be **buried and never resurrected**. Don't bury the hatchet with the handle left sticking out of the ground.

2. Before ending an argument, make sure it is closed for both parties.

- a. If it's not, don't drop it until it is resolved.
- b. But when it is finished, then **both must agree is over**. Period.
3. Paul said that in true love, I Cor 13:5 one does not "*Take into account a wrong suffered.*" Love means we stop keeping the books.

Rule #7 – DON'T RAISE YOUR VOICE.

- A. That is tough if increasing the decibel level is how you grew up! To some, a fight isn't a fight without some yelling!
 1. Truth is, loudness does not make things better; and it does not communicate love. In fact, it's often when we start getting louder that hurtful things come out of our mouth.
 2. Yelling at someone is *disrespectful and degrading*. It certainly is not the golden rule.
 3. Harsh, loud words are **not consistent with the love that should drive our actions**. Paul said that love leads us to be "kind," (I Cor 13.4).
- B. **Listen to Solomon:** Prov 15:1, "***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.***"
 1. Here is the key: "Lower your voice one octave, rather than raising it two."
 2. Make a point as the heat goes up in a discussion, to take the volume down.

Rule #8--AVOID NAME CALLING (Prov 14:22, 27:4)

- A. There is no excuse for hurling insults or profane names at loved ones.
 1. Abusing intimacy and resorting to "*knife twisting*" are especially harmful.
 2. Thoughtless names (labels) puncture deeply and are remembered for years.
- B. Three reasons why personal verbal assaults are so destructive:
 1. They throw an argument off-track and does not lead to a resolution.
 2. They focus attention on the mate, not on solving the problem.
 3. They hurt the relationship and **ruin mutual respect**.
- C. Three suggestions:
 1. Tackle the problem, not the person.
 2. Replace "**you**" statements with "**I**" statements. (Instead of "*You lazy bum!*" say, "*I feel you're not working as hard as you could.*")
 3. Be determined to only use words that edify! Eph 4:29 "Let no unwholesome words proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so it will give grace to those who hear."
- D. Insults, sarcasm, filthy and profane names are sometimes used with our spouse that we would never even consider using with anyone else!
 1. We should treat our families the best, not the worst!
 2. I Cor 13 tells us love is patient, kind, does not act unbecomingly.
- E. Name calling is counter-productive because it often creates a problem that is bigger than the original problem that provoked the argument!
 1. Careless insults can create pain for years to come. How absurd!
 2. Solomon in Prov 12:8 "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
 3. Words are powerful. If we want to manage our conflicts well, we must use words

that edify!

Rule #9--AVOID "STAMP-SAVING" (Prov 10:18)

- A. Some save up grievances like stamps, waiting until the book is full to cash it in.
 - 1. Ex. Unloading other complaints in rapid succession during an argument over something else.
 - 2. Be sure to only discuss one disagreement at a time.
- B. Don't let things build up! Foster the type of relationship where you can express irritations as they occur.
- C. Stamp-saving...
 - 1. Overwhelms the poor mate who is bombarded with so much all at once.
 - 2. Is disconcerting to the one who discovers that true feelings weren't revealed earlier.
 - 3. Breeds both a lack of trust as well as confidence.
- D. **The cure:**
 - 1. Express displeasure at the earliest convenient time.
 - 2. Mention it next time it occurs (if a recurring fault), and not during an argument about something else or choose to forget it forever!

Rule #10: Don't Focus on Winning. (Eph 5:21) "Submit yourselves one to the other in the fear of Christ."

- A. If we're not careful, our marriage conflicts can take on a life of their own.
 - 1. The focus can become **winning the argument rather than reaching a resolution.**
 - 2. When that happens, *everything changes.*
 - a. We begin to use every trick in the book so we can win.
 - b. We refuse to admit any wrong or acknowledge any validity in what the other person is saying, less we give them some advantage.
 - c. We begin to pick a part every little detail of what is said, i.e. "I don't forget to take out the trash all the time; I did once last year!"
 - d. The conversation begins to be dotted with challenges, i.e. "prove it" or "give me one example when I did that."
 - 3. When we reach that point, **no one will come out a winner.** We may win the battle, but ultimately lose the war...and the "good will" and mutual respect we both need and desire for a good relationship.
- B. What we need to remember is that marriage is a **cooperative enterprise.**
 - 1. If my goal is to **win and get my way**, then I'm going to make my spouse miserable.
 - 2. The goal should be to **reach a solution that will please God** and that both of us can live with. A good marriage provides for some "give and take."
 - 3. I've got to be unselfish and take into account the needs of my spouse as we try to work this out, **Phil. 2:3-4.**
 - 4. In **I Cor. 13:5 Paul says that love "does not seek it's own."**
 - 5. We need to accept our share of the blame and never resort to threats or give ultimatums. We certainly should never use sex or money as weapon.
 - 6. We need to reach a conclusion that if possible will suit both, not just one.

To do otherwise may help us win more arguments, but in the end, **we'll lose the war – and perhaps our marriage too!**

CONCLUSION:

- A. Take these home and make a pact to live by God's rules when managing conflicts.
- B. Mature partners know that differences are not wrong. Conflicts can be worked out fairly, amiably, and lovingly.
- C. Both must be honest so a wall of silence will not be built and drive them apart.
- D. Marriage run by God's principles can be a little bit of Paradise left to bless both man and woman in a sinful world.
- E. Remember: *"Marriages are made in heaven, but the maintenance contract must be maintained on earth."*
- F. God has the answers for our every need, do you rely and depend upon Him for help?