

How To Argue With Your Spouse (*Rules Of Engagement*)

Text : **Eph. 5:22-31 , I Cor. 13: 4-7**

INTRODUCTION :

A. Have you ever had a quarrel with your spouse ?

1. That's a silly question.
2. Only single people have never had a dispute with their spouse.
3. In the golden age of radio, there was a program called "The Battling Bickersons." John and Blanche Bickerson argued over everything. (**Illustrative Sample**)
 - a. If a couple is like the Bickersons, they have a significant problem.
 - b. However, it's normal for couples to occasionally quarrel.

B. Why is this true ?

1. Arguments occur because of :
 - a. Disagreements
 - b. Misunderstandings
 - c. Selfishness (Loving self more than mate.)
2. Over generations research has revealed that married people argue most about :
 - a. Money
 - b. Children
 - c. Sex
3. But, there are two taproots from which most arguments grow :
 - a. Lack of communication
 - b. Lack of love.

C. How can there be lack of communications between people who live together ?

1. The problem starts before marriage. Young people don't talk about core values.
 - a. They are interested in social activities. "*Where are we going and with whom ?*"
 - b. They talk about people, places and events, but not about important things.
2. Once they are married they have an intimate relationship so they erroneously *ASSUME* their mate knows how they feel.
 - a. Neither love nor physical intimacy enables one to read his/her mate's mind.
 - b. People hear *ONLY* what we actually say. (*Men typically miss hints.*)

D. Early in a marriage the lack of real love makes marital harmony difficult.

1. Typically, young couples have a lot more *eros* than *agape*.

2. The love which binds a couple together is selfless.

Agape love is defined as : ***The sincere and consistent desire to selflessly advance another's good above one's own.***

However : even in the presence of sincere love and devotion, arguments occur so it is important for couples to learn how to argue constructively.

I. Arguments can be good for your marriage.

A. Constructive small controlled arguments can prevent major blowups.

1. If unexpressed frustrations build up causing resentment, even hostility.

2. One small event may release a host of penned up frustrations.

B. It's common for people to argue over something that's not really the issue.

1. Many small irritations feed resentment over one central issue.

2. For example, a husband forgets the wife's birthday, but she says nothing about it.

a. Days later he leaves dirty cloths laying around and wife explodes into a rage.

b. What was really the problem ? The clod forgot her birthday.

C. Having regular sessions encourages more open communications.

D. When both parties feel they are being heard, love grows in the peaceful soil.

II. It is important to approach an argument with the proper attitude.

A. No spouse should enter an altercation with selfish motives.

1. In a marriage the two are one so there can be no competition.

2. There can be no winner or loser.

3. Either both parties win or both parties loose.

B. Arguments are not a way for one party to bully the other.

1. One partner should never have to "walk on eggshells" fearing the other's outburst.

2. It is not love when one party uses arguments to get his or her own way.

3. Love surrenders ... a loving relationship is mutual surrender.

C. Enter ALL arguments with an attitude of love.

1. Remember what love is and what love demands.

I Cor. 13: 4-7 Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, **6** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

2. Love is not selfish, but rather a surrendering to another. (*Not getting your way*)
3. Proper attitude : “What can I do to make her/him happy ?”

D. Enter the argument anticipating a positive result.

1. Knowing that because you love each other, you will resolve the problem.
2. Anticipate the improved atmosphere after the issue is resolved.

III. Arguments must never be allowed to just happen spontaneously.**A. Spontaneous arguments are undisciplined expressions of emotion.**

1. Those in the throws of any strong emotion do not act rationally, i.e., reasonably.
 - a. You can't reason with unreasonable people.
 - b. It's like trying to reason with a two year old child who is obsessing over a toy. The child does not have the ability to reason.
2. The devil uses strong emotions to allow the body to seize control of the spirit.
 - a. Angry short-circuits the normal thought process.
 - b. Jealous removes one from the realm of reality.

B. A Christian must maintain self-control at all times.

1. When the Apostle Paul taught Christianity, he taught the need for self-control.

Acts 24: 24-25 But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. **25** But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.”

2. Self-control is part of having the spirit of God.
 - a. **Gal. 5: 22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

b. **II Tim. 1: 7-** For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and self-discipline.

3. Our text explains that love is under control. **Text ... I Cor. 13: 5-** is not provoked, ..

C. Schedule a time for a “discussion” which is agreeable to both parties.

1. Allow sufficient time for reason to prevail before discussing issues.
2. There are times when arguments should never be conducted :
 - a. Not during the first few minutes after arriving home.
 - b. Not in the last few minutes before leaving.
 - c. Not in the last few minutes before bed.
 - d. NEVER on an empty stomach.
 - e. Not when time is limited.
 - f. Never when tired.

D. Choose an appropriate neutral setting for your argument. (*Not in-law’s house*)

1. “Appropriate” is defined very differently by people.
 - a. At kitchen table.
 - b. In the car. (*Couple goes to place where they counted stars when courting.*)
 - c. One couple sat back to back , **but** another held hands facing each other.
2. Eliminate all disturbances and prevent interruptions.
 - a. Turn off TV, telephones and electronic devises.
 - b. Put out do not disturb sign. (*Kids to grandma’s house*)
 - c. Don’t have anything on the stove.

IV. Conduct the argument as mature people and abide by the rules.

A. Always set an agenda when you set up the confrontation, argument, discussion.

1. This prevents dumping. (*It’s not an occasion to vent every frustration.*)
2. It prevents becoming sidetracked by peripheral issues.
3. It gives both parties opportunity to think about how they really feel on that issue.

B. Make sure you are discussing the real issue.

1. The “final straw” which provokes the “*That’s it !*” moment is seldom the real issue.
2. Many small things add to the frustration caused by one underlying issue.

* *She fussed about his clutter, but the real problem was the birthday he forgot.*

C. Work together toward a solution.

1. An argument should NEVER be about getting the other person “told.”
 - a. One does not have the right to make himself feel better at the expense of the other.
 - b. **No one has the right to knowingly hurt another person, especially his mate.**
2. Take turns speaking. (*Don't allow clamming up; require a response.*)
 - a. Verbal bullying is never appropriate. (**Filibusters are only legal in congress.**)
 - b. When it is over, both parties must feel they have been heard.
3. Never permit the raising of voices or talking over one another. *“Reason together.”*

D. Don't forget common sense; use standard, established communication skills.

1. Don't interrupt others while they speak.
2. Listen carefully to the other while she/he speaks. (**Not thinking of what to say.**)
3. Think before you speak.
 - a. Once released, words can never be recalled.
 - b. Act, don't react. Respond don't react. (*Reactions are often not well considered.*)
4. NEVER assume anything. Nothing unspoken is part of the conversation.

E. Never under any circumstances make personal attacks.

1. Criticism of one's person or character is never appropriate in an argument.
2. Neither frustration nor anger justifies unchristian or unloving behavior.

Eph. 4: 29- Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

*** Who more deserves your grace than the one you love.**
3. Never express hostility ...even when you strongly feel it. (*Don't attribute motives.*)

James 3: 1- For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

F. Address facts, not suspicions. (If there is proof, it is fact not suspicion.)

1. The truth is seldom as dramatic or exciting as that which is imagined.
2. Suspicions are most often irrational. (*They may reflect an attitude problem.*)

Titus 1:15- To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.
3. It is correct to ask if a suspicion is true, but be prepared to accept answer.

I Cor. 13: 7- bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

V. Dead bodies stink so leave them buried.**A. Lovingly work to a resolution which is mutually satisfactory.**

1. If it cannot be resolved in one setting, make another appointment.
2. Never assume the issue is resolved unless such is clearly stated. **ASK !!**

B. Once an issue is resolved, bury it.

1. Forgiveness requires putting resolved issues aside.
2. Love requires that one release his/her past grievances.

I Cor. 13: 7- does not take into account a wrong suffered,

VI. Be Realistic in your relationships and in your discussions realistically.**A. SURPRISE !! Men and women are more different than just physical.**

1. Men and women think and reason differently. (**Mars** -vs- **Venus**)
2. Consequently, men and women communicate differently. (*Accept it.*)

B. The success of a marriage depends upon mutual acceptance, not conformity.

1. Make sure your expectations are reasonable.
2. Accept the unchangeable. (*If normal, you wouldn't like a mate just like you.*)

VII. Recognize when you need outside help and get it.**A. Some problems exceed a couple's ability to deal with them.****B. There are some sources to which a couple should not go.**

1. Parents and friends are seldom neutral and objective.
2. Make sure it is a qualified person.
3. Only go to a Christian – scripture oriented – counselor.

(**ILL.** *A non-Christian counselor recommended have affairs.*)

CONCLUSION :**A. Apply I Cor. 7 Prayers / worship can be hindered (*Pray together !!*)****B. Read ... I Cor. 13: 4-7**

Lesson texts :

Ephesians 5: 22-31

22 Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body.

24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, **26** so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. **28** So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; **29** for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, **30** because we are members of His body. **31** For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

I Corinthians 13: 4-7

4 Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, **6** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Dialogue Between The Battling Bickersons

As transcribed by John Crosby, this was a typical Bickersons exchange :

Blanche : You used to be so considerate, but since you got married to me you haven't got any sympathy at all.

John : I have, too. I've got everybody's sympathy.

Blanche : Believe me, there's better fish in the sea than the one I caught.

John : There's better bait, too.

Blanche : I don't see how you can go to bed without kissing me good night.

John : I can do it.

Blanche : You'd better say you're sorry for that, John.

John : Okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Blanche : You are not.

John : I am too. I'm the sorriest man that was ever born.

Blanche : Is there any milk for breakfast?

John : No.

Blanche : Then you'll have to eat out.

John : I don't care, I've been doing it all week.

Blanche : What for? I left you enough food for six days. I cooked a whole bathtub full of rice. What happened to it?

John : I took a bath in it.

Blanche : Why didn't you eat it?

John : I've told you a million times I can't stand the sight of rice.

Blanche : Why not?

John : Because it's connected to the saddest mistake of my life.