

## The Process of Becoming One (Part 3)

**Key Thought: It is not the absence of conflict that determines the health of a marriage, but the way in which a couple handle it.**

- **Conflict is inevitable for two important reasons:** *We are all different* (i.e. male/female; different temperaments; different familial backgrounds, etc.) and we *all possess a sin nature*. No husband or wife will see life from the same perspective or agree on every issue. It is unrealistic to assume that this is possible in a fallen world. The question is not will couples have conflict and disagreement, but will they handle it in a biblically constructive manner?
- **The most significant hindrance to resolving conflict is adopting a “win-lose” approach:** Discussing an issue in a *competitive, aggressive atmosphere will always leave someone hurt and offended*. This is sure to occur because the self-centered tactics of attack, withdrawal, filibuster, blame, put-downs, guilt trips, explosion, silent treatment, or exaggeration put the other person on guard and at a psychological disadvantage. The intent, of course, is to insure that the other spouse will lose the argument. The irony is that no one really wins when they get the upper hand. Winning an argument should not be the goal in a conflict, but resolving it. When a conflict is resolved in a biblically constructive manner, both spouses win (i.e. win-win) and the relationship is made stronger.
- **This approach is called “fair fighting”.** *It involves a set of ground rules that keep a couple “in bounds” during their dispute.* When each spouse honors these rules, no disrespect or abuse occurs. It is much like a referee explaining the rules to two boxers before a match starts. He instructs them as to what is considered fair and unfair fighting (i.e. hitting below the belt, hitting while on the ropes, holding, biting, etc.) and the penalty for violating the rules. During a conflict emotions can run high which makes rules for a fair fight all the more essential. Without rules hurtful things will be said and done that can compound a couple’s problems and drive the wedge deeper between them.

### (BASIC ASSUMPTIONS)

1. **Conflict is inevitable and sometimes unavoidable**
2. **Conflict is to be a win-win proposition**
3. **Resolving conflict can actually strengthen a marriage**
4. **Love is the underlying motive for conflict resolution**
5. **Mutual respect and understanding are the fundamental methods of conflict resolution**
6. **Resolving conflict is the responsibility of both spouses**

**RULES FOR A FAIR FIGHT:** (Instructions: Check the rules that you and your spouse are generally compliant with during a conflict. Put an X beside the rules that are generally violated during a conflict. Count the number of checks that you have and locate your profile below.)

H W

- Take time to cool off if you are too angry to fight fair (Prov. 14:29; 15:1; 25:15; 29:11).**
- Don't be hasty in your words. Think first and be slow to speak. (Prov. 15:23,28; 21:23; 29:20; James 1:19).**
- Address the issue/problem in a tactful and honest way. Do not exaggerate. (Eph. 4:15,25; Col. 3:9).**
- Do not use silence to frustrate your mate. Explain why you are hesitant to talk at this time.**
- Listen carefully to your mate's response without interrupting. Respect their opinion and their right to give it even if you disagree with them. (Prov. 18:13; James 1:19).**
- Keep the conversation focused on the problem. Refuse to digress to past problems or other issues.**
- Be solution-focused during the discussion. Approach the matter willing to negotiate or compromise.**
- Refuse to become involved in a quarrel. It is possible to disagree without quarreling ((Prov. 17:14; 20:3; Rom. 13:13; Eph. 4:31).**
- Do not accuse, blame, criticize, insult, or personally attack your partner. Use "I" messages rather than "You" messages (Eph. 4:29,31).**
- Stick with observable behavior and refrain from assigning motives to your partner. Ask for clarification if needed.**
- Request a 'time-out' if you are becoming too angry to talk rationally during the conflict.**
- If either partner accidentally or intentionally "goes out of bounds", agree to call "foul" and gently remind them of the rule(s) that is being violated.**
- If you are wrong admit it and ask for forgiveness (James 5:16).**
- Grant your partner forgiveness if it is requested. Do not question their sincerity or motive (Prov. 17:9; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; I Pet. 4:8)**
- In the event of an impasse, mutually agree on a godly person that can assist you in resolving the conflict.**

**Profile Score:**

**11-15 Fair-fighter: win/win approach**  
**6-10 Inconsistent (fair/dirty fighter)**  
**0-5 Dirty-fighter: win/lose approach**

