

# Rules of Engagement | FAMILY MATTERS

## INTRO:

Talking about conflict resolution and learning to fight fair this morning...

If you've ever played Monopoly with your family, you already know where this sermon is going to go.

Here's something that's actually true: almost nobody plays Monopoly by the official rules. Parker Brothers published a complete rulebook — but most families never read it. Instead, every family develops their own 'house rules.' Money goes on Free Parking. Auctions get skipped. Someone always has a different rule about what happens when you land on your own property.

We've got rules about

- rolling 'snake eyes' (double 1's - automatic \$500)
- landing directly on go (but not from a chance card) — double the reward— \$400
- Free parking starts with \$500. Every fee to the bank (aside from house/hotel purchases) goes there too
- What rules do you have?

See, here's where it gets interesting — every person at that table is absolutely convinced their version is correct. Because that's how they've always played it. That's how their family did it.

So you sit down with your in-laws for the holidays — two families, same game, completely different rulebooks — and before anyone has built a single hotel on Boardwalk, you've got a full-blown argument about whose rules are right.

Nobody cheated. Nobody was trying to start a fight. But without agreed-upon rules that everyone understands going in — conflict is almost guaranteed.

That's actually a pretty good picture of what happens in a lot of marriages. Two people. Same relationship. Completely different assumptions about how conflict is supposed to work. And nobody ever sat down and agreed on the rules.

That's what we're doing today.

## PERSONAL STORY:

- When Amanda and I started dating... way back in the day.
  - October of 2006 (the iPhone wouldn't be released for another year)

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- She had one background—mine was totally different.
- I grew up seeing conflict... and conflict being resolved.
- Therefore, I wasn't afraid of it. It didn't stress me out the same way.
- So we had to establish some rules... and premarital counseling helped strengthen them.

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## PRINCIPLES OR RULES TO FIGHT FAIR

**Note: these principles/rules will again sound very practical... but once again are based on biblical truths.**

- 1: Your marriage is sacred.**
- 2: Your communication must be gracious and loving.**
- 3: You have to love and respect one another.**
- 4: You must handle your anger in a godly way.**
- 5: There is wisdom in seeking godly counsel.**
- 6: You are commanded to forgive one another**

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## 1: REMEMBER WHOSE TEAM YOUR ON

- You are on the same team, your words and actions should be toward building each other up and strengthening the marriage.
- Work on building 'us' up, not winning 'me vs you' arguments.
- Remember: teams that have been through adversity are often stronger than teams who never face hard times — the same is true in marriage.
  - Conflict has the potential to destroy or strengthen and unify.
  - Make sure you're working towards unity NOT destruction.

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## 2: ROUTINE, PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

- Don't let small things pile up - keep the camel's back clear and clean.
- Volcanic eruptions—the ones that erupt often usually are contained and even tourist attractions. The ones that build pressure beneath the surface for years will often reshape the landscape dramatically when they explode.
- Routine maintenance on your vehicle or home, while it seems expensive and never ending—is usually less expensive than the catastrophic failures that can happen when you delay, avoid, or neglect maintenance.
  - Imagine never changing the oil on your car.
  - It's not a matter of IF, but WHEN your motor will catastrophically seize.
- If you don't regularly communicate about real issues, there WILL come a significant explosion along with the radioactive fallout.

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## 3: MANAGE YOUR ANGER IN A CHRISTLIKE WAY

Ephesians 4:26 NIV

<sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

**The question is not WILL you get angry, but HOW YOU RESPOND in your anger.**

- **No abrupt exits, hangups or door slamming exclamations.**
  - Learn to give resolution, even if its a temporary pause to reconvene at a better time.
  - Affirm your love for one another in the midst of the conflict.
    - Say something like: "I need a break, or we can't talk about this further at the moment, BUT I love you and we will figure this out."
- **Know when to take a timeout**
  - Self-control is a fruit of the spirit and wisdom knows when to not speak! Subsequently a lack of self-control is the work of the flesh and it is foolishness to speak brashly!

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- **Recognize your own emotional state and composure**
  - Is your heart racing?
  - Are your fists clenched?
  - Is your voice rising?
  - Are you seeing red?
- **Call a timeout for YOURSELF**
  - Research shows that telling your spouse to 'calm down' is often what triggers homicide. (joke)
  - But seriously, its not effective. You have to call it for yourself.
- **Allow your spouse to call the time out.**
  - Even if it seems inconvenient for you
  - Even if you're ready to talk
  - Communication requires two people (who are ready and able to talk)
- **Utilize the time to cool down NOT rearm**
  - Collect your thoughts, what matters the most (drop the trivial stuff)
  - Spend some time in prayer
  - Go for a walk
  - DON'T call your mom or best friend and complain about the situation and allow them to wind you back up.
- **Reconvene.**
  - Don't just sweep it under the rug now that you're calm.
  - Pick a time and deal with it

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## 4: CONTROL YOUR TONGUE:

Ephesians 4:29 *ESV*

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<sup>29</sup> Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

- **No name calling**
- **Erase these words from your vocabulary:**
  - Divorce
    - There are biblical grounds for divorce, but unfortunately most marriages that break down don't meet those.
    - Divorce shouldn't be brought up as an option OR used as a threat
  - Always & Never
    - They are almost always never correct in our usage—that makes us dishonest at worst, exaggerators at best (neither is helpful in a conflict)
    - Frequent AND Rare are probably more accurate — especially when we frame them with “I FEEL like...”
- **Do not unnecessarily or harshly criticize one another**
  - Criticism should be reserved for correcting and confronting, but done in love and with grace!
  - Often times, harsh criticism attacks character rather than a specific action—NOT HELPFUL!

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## 5: REMEMBER TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

- Affirm your love for one another mid-conflict (verbally).
  - This helps isolate the conflict to an issue and not the relationship
  - It's a reminder that you are FOR each other, 'for us', and NOT against one another
- Do not give or withhold love/affection/romance (verbally or nonverbally) as a means of getting what you want
  - This is manipulation, dishonest, and immature.
- I want to say something specifically to married couples here...
  - Sex is sacred

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- Sex is more than a physical act
- It is deeply spiritual and emotionally bonding (the two become one—this is part of why it is to be reserved ONLY for marriage—the other is procreation)
- This is not the remedy that will magically fix your marriage, but separating from each other is not the answer either.
- NOTE: It is apparent to me that the enemy wants to skew, misuse, and destroy godly sex.
  - Before marriage he wants you to wildly abuse it.
  - In marriage he wants you to abandon it OR find fulfillment elsewhere
  - God made it GOOD for Marriage!

*Further Study:* [Genesis 2:24](#), [Ephesians 5:31-33](#), [1 Corinthians 7:2-5](#), [1 Corinthians 6:16-20](#), [Matthew 19:4-6](#), [Hebrews 13:4](#)

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## 6: REMEMBER TO FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

**Colossians 3:13** *ESV*

<sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- Make room for one another's faults
- As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
  - That doesn't sound optional.
  - That doesn't sound like we can wait until they apologize with the right words, tone, etc.
- Once forgiven, let it go.
- Let it go, but expect right behavior, words, treatment — the right response moving forward
  - Forgiveness doesn't enable abuse or ongoing mistreatment.
  - On the other hand, forgiveness doesn't keep rehashing and reopening old wounds that have been repented of.

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- Don't forget to FORGIVE YOURSELF too.
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## 7: SEEK THE RIGHT COUNSEL

- **WRONG COUNSEL:**
  - **Do not make kids, parents, in-laws pick sides or get involved.**
    - That's not fair to them
    - That's not fair to your spouse
  - **Really wrong counsel:**
    - Your opposite sex co-worker isn't a great option.
      - BTW: the idea-terminology "work spouse/wife/husband" is an absolute abomination to your marriage.
      - Your spouse is the only one who gets that type of title, privilege, access and relationship.
    - Your ex-bf/gf isn't a great option
    - Your friend that really dislikes your spouse isn't a great option
    - Your friend that has no clue what the Bible says—bad option
    - Your friend that has failed multiple relationships—not great
  - **Often, the wrong counsel will**
    - Blindly support your 'side' of the story no matter what you say because they give advice or counsel that THEY THINK you WANT to hear.
    - Will talk poorly of your spouse (dishonoring) and highlight your spouse's failures and flaws.
    - This will likely put more fuel on your fire—causing the flames to rage all the more.
    - Even worse, in the case of some examples—they will try to fill the gaps of your broken relationship—or you will find them more fulfilling than your spouse. Utter destruction and pain will follow.
- **RIGHT COUNSEL:**

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- Will speak the truth graciously and in love
- Will honor your spouse and your relationship
- Their motive is to see your marriage succeed and not fail
- Their motive is to see the Lord honored in what they say and do
- They will be mature believers who share God's word and not worldly opinions
- They will pray with you through the storm
- Often the best counselors are ones who can speak to both at the same time.
- **IF SOMEONE SEEKS OUT YOUR COUNSEL: (you're the friend, coworker, family member)**
  - Honor the Lord and share his word
  - Pray for the right words—sound wisdom to share
    - Don't rush to share your opinions
    - Listen to understand
    - Listen critically/with discernment—your friend is sharing in their anger and emotion, it's probably a one-sided perspective
  - Honor the spouse not present.
  - Your aim should be to help preserve and encourage the marriage
    - (Unless we're talking about unhealthy extremes—the actual biblical grounds for divorce)
    - (But even at that, divorce IS NOT always required)
    - (often times, we'll advocate for temporary separation with the goal of reconciliation rather than divorce)
  - Your aim should also be to SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE
    - Help your friend see any potential blindspot of their own
    - Help them understand their spouse's point of view
  - Pray for reconciliation and healthy resolution
    - Too many people love drama and need to grow up

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- No one wins when a marriage breaks down
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## 8: DRAW NEAR TO CHRIST TOGETHER

- No matter how far apart you are right now... if you both seek to know and please Christ, you will inevitably draw nearer to one another.
  - Spend time in prayer
  - Spend time in God's word
  - Spend time in worship
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## CLOSING THOUGHTS:

- You are teaching your kids how to play Monopoly—how to handle conflict—for better or for worse!
- So model fighting right before your kids — you're setting them up for success in their future relationships and homes
- IMPORTANTLY:
  - Your marriage matters
  - God cares about you and your spouse
  - No conflict is insurmountable with God's help and some hard work

The rules are simple — even if they're hard. Stay on the same team. Keep short accounts. Watch your mouth. Handle your anger. Love each other well. Forgive like you've been forgiven. Get the right voices in your corner. And keep your eyes on Christ — because everything else flows from that.

### Prayer for:

- Better, grace filled communication.

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- The grace and strength to forgive.
- The discipline to walk out repentance.
- Love, respect, and honor to be felt and communicated
- The right, godly counsel to fill our homes.