

Why Do Couples *Fight to Be Right*?

The “Fight to be Right” can begin with almost any comment, opinion or observation. My experience is that the person who initiates the “fight” almost always does not intend to fight or even to be right. All the person wants is to express an observation, idea or feeling. Although it usually occurs when there is a negative communication, it can also occur when the communication is positive.

She says, “I am glad we remembered your mother’s birthday this year.” He says, “I thought we always remembered her birthday.” She says, “Yes, but we often get the card to her late.” He says, “I don’t think it is that often, and besides, she really doesn’t mind if it is late.” She says, “It is more often than I would like, and I feel bad if it is late.” He says, “I just don’t think we have forgotten that often. It is not a big deal.” She says, “I think it is a big deal.” He says, “It is not a big deal.” She says, “Well, I felt bad when you forgot my birthday.” He says, “I never forgot your birthday!” She says, “Yes you did. Three years ago.” He says, “Three years ago! Three years ago? Really?” She says, “Yes, REALLY!” He says, “I didn’t forget. I was just a day late.” She says, “Four days, **actually**.” He says, “That can’t be right. It was just a day late.” (Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera)

This “Fight to be Right” could go on for paragraphs, and I am sure we could all write it, because I think we all do it, but **why**? Why do we engage in these futile “Fights to be Right,” and usually forget why we were fighting in the first place?

I believe that it has absolutely nothing to do with being right. I think it has everything to do with a human need that is so deep and so important that it is far more painful than we realize when that need is not met. The need is the human craving to be “understood.” There is probably nothing more gratifying than feeling understood, or more emotionally painful than not feeling understood. I believe this need resides at the core of our being. I think feeling understood emotionally, relationally and spiritually is as important as the food we eat and the air we breathe. To be understood is to be emotionally embraced and nurtured. To be misunderstood is to feel rejected, alone and even ashamed. This need is most important with the people we love, and therefore, the ones who can hurt us the most. We endure being misunderstood by the rest of the world all the time. I think that is why we are so sensitive to having that need met with our spouses, our parents, our children, our friends, our teachers, our pastors and all the people we allow to be close to our hearts.

A New Perspective: Whenever we are fighting to be right, it is probably because we are feeling the pain of not being understood. And, when someone we love is fighting to be right, he or she may be really struggling with that same pain. The essence of the message lies in the feelings and not in the words. You **hear** with your ears, but you **listen** with your heart.