

"Pick Your Battles"

Allan Pole



Theme: Wise people focus on issues that matter.

Text: Proverbs 20:3

Here's a thought: Benjamin Franklin warned, "If you argue and rankle and contradict, you may achieve a victory sometimes; but it will be an empty victory because you will never get your opponent's goodwill."

Open with "My 3-year-old must argue and debate everything!" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFYsJYPye94. Did this video clip make you laugh or make you mad?

It's one thing for a three-year-old to act like a three-year-old but it is quite another for a 53-year-old to act like a three-year-old.

King Solomon shares a timeless principle with us in Proverbs 20:3, "It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel." NIV

The New Living Translation says Proverbs 20:3 this way, "Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling."

Ask yourself when facing a disagreement:

Is it Worth It?

Can I Walk Away?

Is it Worth It?



Is there a valuable pearl inside this oyster? Is this a hill worth dying on? Wise

people focus on what really matters while fools are easily distracted by what does not.

We could conclude from Proverbs 20:3 that it usually takes more courage to walk away from a fight than to pick one. The danger here is that we can use this to justify stuffing issues under the carpet and avoiding conflict. It actually takes great courage to face issues that arise with people. When should we stand up and speak up?

Farmer Joe decided his injuries from the accident were serious enough to take the trucking company (responsible for the accident) to court. In court the trucking company's fancy lawyer was questioning farmer Joe. "Didn't you say, at the scene of the accident, 'I'm fine'?" said the lawyer.

Farmer Joe responded, "Well I'll tell you what happened. I had just loaded my favourite mule Bessie into the ..."

"I didn't ask for any details," the lawyer interrupted, "just answer the question. Did you not say, at the scene of the accident, 'I'm fine'?"

Farmer Joe said, "Well I had just got Bessie into the trailer and I was driving down the road ..."

The lawyer interrupted again and said, "Judge, I am trying to establish the fact that, at the scene of the accident, this man told the highway patrolman on the scene that he was *just fine*. Now several weeks after the accident he is trying to sue my client. I believe he is a fraud. Please tell him to simply answer the question."

By this time the judge was fairly interested in Farmer Joe's answer and said to the lawyer, "I'd like to hear what he has to say about his favourite mule Bessie."

Joe thanked the judge and proceeded, "Well as I was saying, I had just loaded Bessie, my favourite mule, into the trailer and was driving her down the highway when this huge semi-truck and trailer ran the stop sign and smacked my truck right in the side. I was thrown into one ditch and Bessie was thrown into the other. I was hurtin' real bad and didn't want to move. However, I could hear ole Bessie moaning and groaning. I knew she was in terrible shape just by her groans. Shortly after the accident a highway patrolman came on the scene. He could hear Bessie moaning and groaning so he went over to her. After he looked at her, he took out his gun and shot her between the eyes. Then the patrolman came across the road with his gun in his hand and looked at me. He said, "Your mule was in such bad shape I had to shoot her. How are *you* feeling?"

Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed in Philippi where God shook the prison with an earthquake and the jailer turned to Jesus with his family. We then read in Acts 16:35-40:

35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace." 37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." 38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. NIV

Paul knew his rights as a Roman citizen, yet he did not claim these rights for his own sake but for the sake of the gospel. There was more at stake than his own personal reputation, for he had devoted his life to Christ and to spreading the gospel. This was an opportunity for the Lord and His people to be honoured and Paul was not going to miss out. This would surely open doors for them and make the authorities think twice about misusing and abusing their power to hinder the gospel and to mistreat God's people. This would position the fledgling church of Philippi for growth and progress. There is a time to embrace persecution but this does not mean we go looking for it. Neither a martyr complex nor a belligerent attitude bring glory to Jesus and to the gospel.

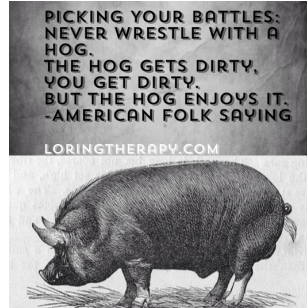
There are times when we need to stand up for what we believe. As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher – “The Iron Lady” - was certainly a woman of conviction. She warned, “Standing in the middle of the road is very dangerous; you get knocked down by the traffic from both sides.”

When we truly die to ourselves so we can live for Christ our attitude toward injustice is radically changed. We no longer seize opportunities to speak up so we can defend our own reputation but we consider whether speaking up or remaining silent affects others who might suffer if the injustice continues. It could be that our righteous anger will be of great benefit to others that follow us. The lessons we learned with the bully in the school yard back in grade one could serve us well later in life.

Your motivation for standing up to someone makes all the difference. Stop and ask yourself, “Is the issue important? Would I be speaking out for my benefit or for the benefit of others?”

Ask yourself when facing a disagreement:
Is it Worth It?

Can I Walk Away?



There can be a fine line between standing up for what we believe and being quarrelsome. Is this a mountain or a mole hill? Sometimes the issue is of little consequence. Sometimes the issue is not really the issue but more about our wounded pride. It could be we are more concerned with how we look and sound in the debate than with standing up for what is right. Sometimes people annoy us not because they are wrong but because they are right – and want everybody to know it. Sometimes people annoy us because they are right and we are wrong. You and I will do well sometimes to ask for input from wise counsellors and honest friends on these questions.

Are my emotions in check enough that I could let this go and walk away? Even though our culture encourages confrontation, some of the people I admire most are those who know when to keep quiet. Meekness is not weakness, so it takes tremendous self-control and inner strength to let someone keep that smug look while that voice inside is yelling at me to wipe it off. Not many people can go on with their day knowing they are right about something without having to prove it.

Matthew Henry comments on Proverbs 20:3:

Men think it is their wisdom to engage in quarrels; whereas it is the greatest folly that can be. Men think, when they are engaged in quarrels, that it would be a shame to them to go back and let fall the weapon; whereas really it is an honour for a man to cease from strife, an honour to withdraw an action, to drop a controversy, to forgive an injury, and to be friends with those that we have fallen out with. It is the honour of a man, a wise man, a man of spirit, to show the command he has of himself by ceasing from strife, yielding, and stooping, and receding from his just demands, for peace-sake.

The Lord is dealing with me about having the last word. I am learning to say

what I think and believe then to let the other person process what I said while *they* have the last word. It is difficult and I blow it more often than I would like but I am gradually releasing the desire to win arguments or to be right.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) warned:

If you argue and rankle and contradict, you may achieve a victory sometimes; but it will be an empty victory because you will never get your opponent's goodwill.

It is possible to win the battle yet lose the war. Which is more important – for you to be right or for you to have this relationship? If your mission in life is to be right, you will become one lonely person. Ties with family, friends, coworkers, schoolmates, neighbours and team members are strengthened as we concern ourselves more with *their* feelings than with *our* opinions.

Don Schlitz wrote the lyrics to “The Gambler”, made famous by Kenny Rogers:

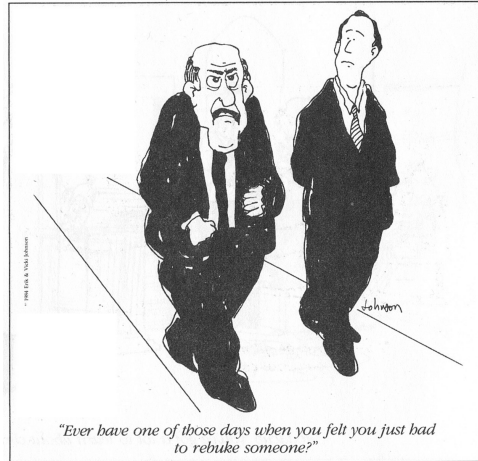
You've got to know when to hold 'em
Know when to fold 'em
Know when to walk away
And know when to run
You never count your money
When you're sittin' at the table
There'll be time enough for countin'
When the dealin's done
From

www.lyricsfreak.com/k/kenny+rogers/the+gambler_20077886.html

Have you ever been in a situation when a fight broke out? It's fascinating how those in the fight roll up their sleeves and bare their fists – literally or figuratively – while onlookers form a circle around so everyone can have a good view of what's happening. There is something in us that loves a fight – whether we are in it or we are watching it!

The next time you are at a hockey game and a fight breaks out on the ice take a look around in the stands to see how different fans react. I am surprised by the aggression that comes out of little old ladies and others that appear to be very gentle and peace-loving. How can someone who looks so kind shout, “Go after him! Punch him!”

It could be a lack of sleep or pent up frustration, but I need to pay attention to what is going on inside. Sometimes I feel like this:



The Apostle Paul had great influence on two members of his apostolic team, Titus and Timothy. Titus was sent to Crete where he could have been sidetracked very easily. Timothy was sent to Ephesus where it would have been very tempting to try to prove himself as a young leader.

Paul writes in Titus 3:9:

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. NIV

Paul elaborates in 2 Timothy 2:23-26:

23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. NIV

Jesus knew when to speak up and when to remain silent. There were times when He went toe to toe with the religious leaders while there were other times when He simply bit His tongue. He demonstrated great understanding of people by discerning when someone was open to input and when someone had already made up their mind.

It's possible to be right but to end up *dead* right when we are driving and when we are relating with others. This was carved on a tombstone:

Here lies the body of Thaddeus Gray,
Who died maintaining his right of way.
He was right, dead right, as he sped along.
But he's just as dead as if he'd been wrong.

Are your relationships marked by peace or conflict? When was the last time you let someone have the last word?

Ask yourself when facing a disagreement:

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Can I Walk Away?

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