

The Christian's Marital Conflict Resolution Triangle, Part 1

By Daryl Wingerd



The triangle is considered the strongest geometric shape. This is because it evenly distributes weight across all three sides, providing stability and the ability to withstand heavy loads without collapsing. This unique property makes triangles essential in designing and building various structures, such as bridges and buildings—and marriages.

In this four-part series I will explain how your marriage can thrive and grow even if you and your spouse are struggling with what seems like endless conflict. The conflict resolution strategy I will commend to you takes the form of a triangle, with the three equally important sides being truth, humility, and love. Your marriage may never be totally void of conflict, but if you will faithfully follow this biblically grounded model in *resolving* and even *minimizing* conflict, it can be solid, enjoyable, and Christ-honoring.

Side 1: Truth

First, marriage must be grounded in the truth of the gospel, centering around grace, mercy, and forgiveness. The gospel is about God delighting in you and saving you despite your weaknesses and failures. Your marriage must be grounded in these same things.

You are not, and will never be, a perfect Christian, yet Christ accepts you fully and loves you deeply and faithfully. Your spouse is not, and will never be, a perfect husband or wife, yet if you are imitating Christ, you will accept him or her fully and love him or her deeply and faithfully. Performance or perfection must never be the basis of your full acceptance, love, or respect.

The gospel also informs us that harmony in the church does not depend on everyone coming from the same culture or ethnic background. Likewise, marital harmony does not depend on similarity. In fact, it thrives on just the opposite! A man and a woman, by God's design, are as different as two people can possibly be, and yet the harmonious union of these two very different parts of "mankind" was his design from the beginning!

The point is this: harmony can exist alongside significant differences. (cf. Rom. 14:1-15:7). God is glorified when we accept and love each other despite differences in personality, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses.

Consider Paul's reason for rebuking Peter and the others in Gal. 2:14 when they, as Jews, were withdrawing from fellowship with Gentiles. He said that "their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel." Be sure those words can never be used to describe your marriage in terms of the standard you require to fully accept, love, and respect your spouse.

Second, you must believe the truth about the prospects for reconciliation and the future of your marriage. The lie claims that your marriage is hopelessly off track and beyond repair. Since divorce is not an option biblically, you'll just have to settle in for the long-haul, consigned to dutifully enduring something less than enjoyable or Christ-honoring.

The truth is that there are no limits to God's ability or desire to fully restore and establish your marriage through his word, his Spirit, and help from his people. He created marriage for his glory, to depict the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32; Gen. 2:18-24). God himself joined the two of you together (Matt. 19:6). He specializes in reconciling those whom we would call hopelessly irreconcilable parties. Think of the Jew/Gentile enmity established in the Old Testament and still a weighty issue throughout the New Testament. These "hopelessly estranged" ethnic groups are harmoniously unified in Christ (Eph 2:11-22).

Third, you must resolve to understand the truth about your specific conflict. False versions of reality are easily created when one or both spouses rely on feelings, assumptions, impressions, or suspicions. What are the facts? What are the real issues? What really happened? What was actually said? If you're not dealing with facts, you'll always be frustrated as you try in vain to zero in on a subjective, ever-shifting target.

I will pick up here in **Part 2** with more to say about the third aspect of truth, and I will also add the fourth aspect of truth. In **Part 3** I will address the second side of the marriage conflict resolution triangle—**humility**. **Part 4** will then cover the third and foundational side of the triangle—**love**.

Until then, be encouraged as you consider what you have just read and the biblical truths supporting it! Your marriage is not a lost cause. It will grow strong and thrive if you will establish it on the truth of God's word!

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