

The Christian's Marital Conflict Resolution Triangle, Part 4

By Daryl Wingerd



Truth and humility are essential components of healthy conflict resolution in marriage, but love is the foundation. When thinking of our triangle, picture love as its base.

Jesus' "new commandment" speaks to all believers, and it must be the foundation for Christian marriage: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Paul, building on the foundation laid by Jesus, writes, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:12-14).

Please read that passage again—slowly and thoughtfully. Then consider how the resolution of marital conflict—or even the avoidance of it—would be accomplished by two spouses consistently maintaining this disposition toward one another!

Now please read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, slowly and thoughtfully: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful [*the idea here is that love does not take offense easily and it does not keep a record of offenses*]; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

It is not a stretch to insist that a marriage where this kind of foundation is established and cultivated will be prone to endure and thrive. Where love like this is lived out by both spouses, a marriage simply won't be prone to failure or characterized by longstanding or unresolved conflict.

But the command to love hits home particularly strongly for the husband. Paul reserves his most poignant instruction about love to them when he instructs them to imitate Christ. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ love the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

In this simple yet profound command to husbands, Paul makes three things clear about what a husband's love must be:

- It must be **sacrificial**—as Jesus laid down his life for the church.
- It must be **unconditional**—as Jesus' loving sacrifice for his bride was not motivated by her performance or perfection.
- It must be **initiatory**—as Jesus loved the church first, leading her to love and submit to him in response (consider 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us").

As imperfect as any husband's love will be when directly compared with Christ's love for the church, where a husband works hard to love like Jesus, it is difficult to imagine a marriage rife with conflict or one where even deeply entrenched conflict can persist without eventual reconciliation.

Husbands, our culture is increasingly characterized by two ungodly extremes in men: harshness is one extreme, and passivity is the other. Don't allow either one to characterize you. Your strong, gentle, loving leadership is required in this aspect of marriage as much as in any other.

You are responsible before God to love your wife by leading her—by initiating and directing the kind of truthful, humble, gentle, patient, loving communication that will facilitate reconciliation. It doesn't matter how the conflict started, who started it, or who wronged whom. You, as the loving leader in your marriage, must take ownership of the situation and, with God's help, guide the reconciliation process to a Christ-honoring outcome.

Finally, good leaders know when they need help, and they are humble enough to ask for it. Husbands, there are likely a few brothers in your local church who are equipped to give you and your wife biblical counsel and encouragement. Don't be too proud or too passive to ask for help from a pastor or another wise Christian friend when you need it.