

HE SAID/SHE SAID

Fireproof Your Marriage: Sermon One
Ephesians 5:21-33

In 2008 Sherwood Films released a film called, “Fireproof.” I hope many of you have seen this movie. It’s the story of a couple – Caleb and Catherine - whose marriage is breaking up. They’ve been together for seven years, but they’ve lost that lovin’ feeling, and things are going south quickly.

Fireproof is the story of how this couple, with the help of God, put their marriage and their lives back together again. They struggle through the issues of forgiving, rekindling feelings for each other, breaking free of addictions and things that hinder our marriages. We’re going to explore each of these themes over the next six weeks as we learn how to Fireproof Our Marriages. I’ll be focusing on our marriages but these principles are applicable in all of our relationships.

Today, we’re going to look at how to get along with members of the opposite sex. I hope by now you’ve noticed that men and women are different? Well, in the film, one of the first cracks that develop in Caleb and Catherine’s relationship comes from a challenge all men and women face, which is, “How do I relate to someone who is so different than me?”

In this clip we’re about to show, watch what can happen if you expect your partner to be just like you.

I thought about putting all the men on one side of the room this morning, and all the women on the other so you could all elbow and kibbutz about the superiority of your gender and the strangeness of the opposite sex. But, since our assignment today is to learn to live together, stay where you are and let’s look at Ephesians 5:21-33. As we read this passage you’ll see that God gives different instructions to husbands and wives. Why? Because we are different and if our marriages are going to work, we need to learn how to treat one another according to our differences.

Ephesians 5:21-33

²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. ³¹“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become

one flesh.” ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.
(English Standard Version)

There are three of principles here that, if you practice them, will fireproof your marriage.

First, Ephesians 5:21 gives the over-all governing thought for what is to follow. Paul says, in v. 21...

²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

That verb, “submit,” is the word, *hupotassomenoi* in Greek. **HUPOTASSOMENOI**. It means, **TO LINE YOURSELF UP UNDER**, or, **TO GIVE UP YOUR RIGHTS**.

The word only appears here in v. 21. It’s then implied in both of the next two paragraphs.

So, when we read in v. 22, “Wives, submit to your husbands...” that verb “submit,” isn’t actually in the sentence. It’s understood from v. 21 that that’s what Paul is talking about.

Likewise, when you get to v. 25, the same verb, “submit,” applies from v. 21.

Here’s what the Bible is saying: Men and women are to line themselves up under their mates in order to make the marriage work. Each one is to give up their rights and look out for the best interests of their partner. Do this and your marriage will work well. Line yourself up on top of or refuse to give up your rights, and your marriage won’t work well.

Why? Because giving up our rights is an essential part of meeting each other’s needs. If my wife needs me to take out the trash, I submit, I line myself up under her. I give up my right to sit on the couch and watch the next point being scored or the next piece of action in the movie I’m watching. Conversely, if I need my wife to figure out the directions while we’re driving to a friend’s house, she figures them out as well as she can, and gives them to me. We submit to each other.

Mutual submission is one of the great keys to a great marriage. So, fireproofing principle number 1 is...

1. MARRIAGE WORKS BEST WHEN BOTH HUSBAND AND WIFE GIVE UP THEIR RIGHTS FOR THE SAKE OF THE OTHER.

Men, that doesn’t mean that she has to rub your feet every time you ask her to. And women, it doesn’t mean that he has to run to Starbucks every time you have a craving.

Here’s what it means. Elsewhere, in 1 Peter 3:7, God tells husbands...

1 Peter 3:7

⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Husbands we are to study our wives, consider her needs and her personality. It’s our job to figure out what helps her grow and then do it.

That’s principle number one. The principle of submission. Give up your rights.

Men, imagine what would happen if your wife sat you down at a table tomorrow and said, “Honey, I’ve been making some demands of you, and I’m giving those up. I’m lining up under you. I’m giving up my rights to expect you to be who I think you should be.”

Women, imagine what would happen if your husband sat you down at a table tomorrow and said, “Babe, I know there are some things you’ve needed from me and I haven’t been willing to line up with them. But starting today, I’m going to do my best to meet your needs, as I understand them.”

For some of us, there would be a quiet revolution of joy, which is how marriage was designed in the first place.

Husbands, submit to your wife. Wives, submit to your husband. That’s principle #1 of a fireproof marriage. Because if we’ve each got the other’s back, then nothing can sneak up on us and no one can get between us.

The second fireproofing principle comes from the last verse, where Paul says,

³³ ...let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Look at this verse for a minute... from what you find here, are husbands and wives given the same command? (No.)

What are husbands supposed to do? – Love their wives.

What are wives supposed to do? – Respect their husbands.

Does that mean that husbands don’t have to respect their wives? (No.) Does it mean that wives don’t have to love their husbands? (No.) But because we are different, we have different ways of receiving what we need. And while men want to be loved, at the core of our being, we need to be respected by the one that matters most to us, or it’s very hard to compete in the world we live in. Likewise, while women want to be respected, they have a hard time fulfilling their life’s purpose unless they feel loved by the one who matters most to them.

Here’s the core principle:

2. MARRIAGE WORKS BEST WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AND TREAT EACH OTHER ACCORDINGLY.

Author Gary Smalley wrote about his personal experience with the gender differences. He said:

“Several years ago, after going through the section in Ephesians on husband-wife relationships, I decided I was going to commit myself to my wife. But how could I demonstrate my willingness to build our relationship?

Suddenly the idea hit me – shopping! My wife loves to shop. I could show her how much I care for her by getting a babysitter and going with her to the mall.

As we walked around the shopping center, I got a real-life lesson in some of the common differences between men and women. What I learned that night began to

change the way I related to my wife, and it's continued to be one of the most enriching concepts we've ever applied in our marriage.

Norma told me she needed to look for a new summer blouse. After walking into the nearest women's clothing store, she held up a blouse and asked, "What do you think of this one?"

"Great," I said, "let's get it."

Then she picked up another blouse and said, "What do you think about this one?"

It's great too." I said. "Get either one of them." But after looking at a number of other blouses, we walked out of the store without getting *any* of them!

Then we went into another store where she did the same thing, and then another and another. All the time we were going into and out of all those shops, I was getting more and more anxious. Then, after looking at what seemed like hundreds of blouses, she held up a dress that was our daughter's size and said, "What do you think about this dress for Kari?"

I couldn't take it any longer. I blurted out, "What do you mean, a dress for Kari? We're here shopping for blouses for you, not dresses for Kari!" And if that wasn't bad enough, after we left that store without buying anything, she asked if we could stop, sit down and talk, and have coffee!

Do you know what I learned that night? I wasn't at the mall shopping for blouses with my wife. I was *hunting* for blouses. I wanted to conquer the blouse and then get back into the car and head home. My wife, however, looked at shopping from a very different angle. For her it... it was a way to spend time communicating and sharing together.¹

There are some very obvious differences between men and women. Men have thicker skulls, thicker skin, more red blood cells and more muscle tissue. Women tend to be more resistant to heat and cold and outlive men by several years.

From the first moment of birth, little girls have more lip and mouth movement than boys. In a Harvard study of hundreds of preschoolers, researchers found that 100% of the sounds coming from little girls' mouths were words, whereas only 60% of sounds coming from preschool boys were words. The other 40% were yells and sound effects like, "Vrrooom!" "Aaaaagh!" and "Toot, toot!"

Smalley points out, "This difference persists into adulthood. Communication experts say that the average woman speaks over 25,000 words a day, while the average man speaks only a little over 10,000. What does this mean in marital terms? Very often a man has already used up his 10,000 words at work... while his wife is just warming up!"

"I have asked several thousand women how much time they need to spend with their husbands in meaningful conversation. A wife will say 45 minutes to an hour each day. What do their husbands sitting next to them say is enough? Fifteen to 20 minutes – once or twice a week!"

¹ Hendricks: *Husbands and Wives*, Victor Books, p. 186.

These differences are what make marriage challenging – but they're also what make life wonderful!

We could create a long, long list of ways in which we're different. But for now, for fireproofing purposes, let's just start with one, because it will take us 90% of the way down the field to a good marriage.

Women, you've never been a man (I hope), so take this on faith: while we can be tough and sometimes rude on the outside, on the inside, there's a puppy dog side to us that needs the one who matters most to us to believe in us. If we're not the heroes of our homes, then we're not going to be heroes anywhere else. If you've stopped respecting your man, think about what first attracted you to him, pray about how you can regain that sense of respect, make a list of things you need to do if it will help you, but decide that you are going to respect your husband once again and then get about showing it to him.

Phrases like these will really help:

I'M SO PROUD OF YOU

I BELIEVE IN YOU

YOU DO THAT SO WELL

Men, that would feel really good to hear every day, wouldn't it?

Guys, I must tell you that your challenge is bigger than the one I've just given to your wives. Because God says that she needs love, and that your job isn't just to give her spoonfuls of it.

This passage says,

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Men, you've never been and will never be a woman. You'll never go through monthly cycles or menopause. You'll never have to – or get to – carry a baby around inside of you, or do any of those things that make women women. So, you'll never really understand what it's like to be a woman.

Take this by faith: your wife needs to know that you love her. She needs to hear it from you, see it from you, feel it from you, receive it from you. And the way she receives it best will probably be a way that you have never studied or trained or prepared for. Because the way she receives love best is to have you listen to her. If you will sit and listen, with full eye contact, and as much emotional engagement as possible, for 5 to 10 minutes a day, it will fill her more than you can know and reap more benefits for you than you can imagine.

Now, when you listen to her, she does not want you to fix her. The way she gets fixed is to be empathized with. Men tend to listen for the problem to be solved. Your woman doesn't want you to solve her problem, she wants you to care about her. So, while she's talking, as best you can, try to listen for and understand what she's feeling. Then say something like, "That must have felt terrible." or, "That must have felt great." If you got it wrong, she'll let you know and you may need to start over, but take your best shot at it.

Listen to her, pay attention to her. Then, say it to her. “Honey, I love you. Of all the women in the world, I choose you, and I’m so glad I did.” “Honey, you are the woman of my dreams.”

Guys, write this down: If you want to fill her tank tomorrow, pick up the phone and call. Say, “I just wanted you to know I was thinking about you and I love you.” Then, don’t ask her for anything, to remind her of anything, don’t plan or solve anything. Just find out how her day is going, listen and tell her you love her before you sign off.

Let’s look at our assignments again:

2. MARRIAGE WORKS BEST WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AND TREAT EACH OTHER ACCORDINGLY.

A. MEN NEED RESPECT.

B. WOMEN NEED LOVE.

If you had to take the second principle by faith, this principle may require even more faith. It comes out of v. 32.

³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

3. MARRIAGE WORKS BEST WHEN YOU REMEMBER THAT SOMETHING MORE THAN MARRIAGE IS TAKING PLACE – YOU ARE A LIVING ILLUSTRATION OF JESUS’ RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH.

A mystery is something you cannot understand unless it is explained or revealed to you.

The church, which is made up of men, women and children who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, is the Bride of Christ. The Bible tells us that even though the church is not perfect or even pure, Jesus will never leave or forsake His Bride.

So if you are married, or plan to be married, treat your marriage carefully, sacredly. Give up your rights. Build it with fireproof materials like love and respect. Recognize that you will never fully understand all that is involved in a life-long commitment to a single spouse, and revel in the fact that you do not pretend to understand it.

What we do with marriage matters, friends, because it is in some mysterious sense a rehearsal for what God’s Son will do one day with all who call on His name.

Way back in the 1960’s, the Beatles wrote a song that has sold about as many records, cassettes, cds and downloads as one song can sell. The song was called, “All you need is love.” Remember it?

I’ll bet most of us could recite the entire lyric from that song right now, from memory, without too much trouble.

The words are: *All you need is love. Oo, oo, oo, oo, oo...*

The Beatles’ were wrong. It takes way more than a mushy kind of love to fireproof two people from the pressures threatening our marriages. As we’ve learned today it takes submission and it takes giving each other what we need; respect and love.

So I want to issue you all an assignment today. In the movie, Caleb is about to give up on his marriage, when his dad hands him a special little hand-written book. The book is called the **LOVE DARE**. In it is 40 days' worth of practical ways for Caleb to demonstrate his love to Catherine.

Caleb's dad challenges him to do one of these love dares every day for the next 40 days and see if it doesn't change his attitude and his marriage. Caleb takes the challenge, and the dares do their work. At the end of the 40 days, he really is a different man.

One of the things Caleb discovers while working his love dares is that putting tangible effort into loving his wife does more to change *him* than change *her*.

Over these next six weeks – which works out to almost 40 days – we are going to have our own Love Dare Challenges. They'll be practical assignments designed to raise the level of your relationships, whether you're married or single. So, are you up for this, friends?

Here's your first Love Dare:

LOVE DARE CHALLENGE #1:

Wives: what makes your husband feel respected by you? And therefore, what would you like to do this week to make him feel respected by you?

Husbands: what makes your wife feel loved? And therefore, what would you like to do this week to make her feel loved by you?

Singles: in your work, school, or home environment, whose life would you like to add value to by giving them greater love or respect? What can you do this week to make that happen?