

# YOU CAN'T GIVE WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE

Fireproof Your Marriage: Sermon Two  
John 3:16

“You,” said the doctor to the patient, “are in terrible shape. You’ve got to do something about it. First, tell your wife to cook meals that are more nutritious. Stop working like a dog. Also, inform your wife you’re going to make a budget, and she has to stick to it. And have her keep the kids off your back so you can relax. Unless there are some changes like that in your life, you’ll probably be dead in a month.”

“Doc,” the patient said, “this would sound more official coming from you. Could you please call my wife and give her those instructions?”

When the fellow got home, his wife rushed to him. “I talked to your doctor,” she wailed. “Poor man, you’ve only got thirty days to live.”<sup>1</sup>

Our series, called *Fireproofing Your Marriage*, is based on a film called *Fireproof*. It is the story of a marriage on the brink of divorce. The husband, a fireman named Caleb Holt, decided that, just like you never walk out on a partner in a fire, so you never walk out on a partner in a marriage.

Caleb’s father gives him a book called the *Love Dare* with daily suggestions on how to love Catherine his wife. Caleb has tried these steps over the previous twenty days, but they haven’t worked – their relationship is still on the brink of collapse. Caleb meets with his father and his father gets to the heart of the matter.

Listen carefully to what Caleb’s father is talking about and then notice Caleb’s response. When Caleb’s father asks Caleb, “What frustrates you the most about your relationship with Catherine?” focus in on Caleb’s answers and think about what that exposes about Caleb’s character and heart.

Let’s watch...

 **(Play Session Two from *Fireproof Your Marriage* DVD)**

I think the most revealing part of this exchange occurs when Caleb tells his dad how just the night before Caleb had fixed a nice dinner for Catherine and Catherine refused to sit down with him and just walked out of the room.

Here is what Caleb said to his dad “She does not deserve this, Dad. I’m not doing it anymore. How am I supposed to show love to somebody over and over and over who constantly rejects me?”

Here’s Caleb’s idea of love – he bought Catherine flowers, he changed the oil in the car, he made her dinner – but he did all those things with the expectation that he would get something in return. Isn’t that really self-centered love? That’s not unconditional love. Unfortunately self-centered love can characterize our marriages: I bring home the bacon, you cook the bacon; I mow the lawn, you do the laundry; I fix the car, you take

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://bible.org/illustration/doctor-s-warning>

the kids to school. And as long as you live up to your end of the deal, I'll keep loving you and living up to my end of the deal.

Conditional love like this creates a relationship of manipulation. Caleb is bringing Catherine flowers, fixing her car, making her dinner, but she doubts Caleb's sincerity and believes he is only doing these things to manipulate her. And he is. That becomes clear when he says he's done. It didn't work. Caleb didn't get from Catherine what he wanted so in his mind, she doesn't deserve his love anymore. That's conditional love. And conditional love kills relationship.

What happens in a conditional love relationship when one spouse does not live up to the expectation of the other? The one whose expectations are not being met feels justified in withholding their love and if it gets bad enough, like Caleb, withdrawing their love altogether.

Do you see how bad conditional love is?

But that's the only kind of love Caleb is capable of giving.

Why is that the only kind of love Caleb is capable of giving?

It's because Caleb has never received God's unconditional love for him. And God is the only source in the universe of pure, unconditional love. This is what Caleb's father was trying to help Caleb see: "You can't love her because you can't give her what you don't have."

Caleb keeps wanting to put the blame on Catherine; that she's the problem. Caleb's father is telling Caleb that the core problem is between Caleb and God. And the proof that the core problem is between Caleb and God is the fact that the only kind of love Caleb is capable of showing Catherine is self-centered, conditional love that is ready to quit after only twenty days. And the kind of love Catherine needs - unconditional love - Caleb doesn't have the ability to give her because he is completely cut off from the only source of unconditional love, God.

Because Caleb has not received God's unconditional love; Caleb cannot love Catherine unconditionally. He can't give what he doesn't have.

The same is true for us in our marriages:

## **WE CAN'T GIVE WHAT WE DON'T HAVE**

Caleb cannot love Catherine unconditionally because he is completely cut off from the only source of unconditional love, God.

Now you might be thinking, "Caleb's a firefighter and seems like a good guy. Why is Caleb cut off from God?"

Here is what Caleb's father was trying to explain to him:

The Bible tells us plainly that...

**...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**

Romans 3:23

When Caleb's father was talking to Caleb about God's standard, did you notice that Caleb basically argued that God's standard was wrong? Caleb argues that he's a good person; he's honest, he cares about people; he risks his life to save other people. But the point is that God's standard is so high that God considers hatred murder and lust

adultery. God is perfect. His standard is perfection. None of us are good measured against God's goodness.

God is perfect and holy. God is completely separate from anything that is evil. Lying is evil. Stealing is evil.

The Bible tells us that...

...the wages of sin is death...

Romans 6:23

The penalty for disobeying God is death. This death is spiritual death meaning that God has separated Himself from us and condemns our sin. Caleb is separated from God by his sins.

## **WE ARE SEPARATED FROM GOD BY OUR SIN**

Now this may sound to you like God is unloving and that all He cares about is pointing out how bad we are and condemning us to hell. But actually God does love us and He doesn't want us to be separated from Him now and for eternity. So God tells us the bad news so that He can tell us the Good News.

## **GOD LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY AND SENT JESUS TO SAVE US FROM DEATH**

The good news is that...

...God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Remember that this is the death penalty we talked about earlier: to perish means to be separated from God not only in this life, but in the next. God wants us to have eternal life. Eternal life is to know God and His Son Jesus Christ forever. We don't deserve eternal life, but because of God's love for us He made a way for us to be forgiven and restored to Him. God sent Jesus into the world to die for us and pay the penalty for our sin. God did this knowing that the vast majority of people in the world would still reject His love. But He did it anyway. This is pure, unconditional love. And this is the love Caleb realized he had been rejecting. If Caleb rejects this kind of unconditional love, it's impossible for him to show unconditional love to Catherine.

God so loved the world unconditionally that He gave His only Son Jesus Christ to suffer the penalty for our sin that separates us from God. Here is what Jesus has done for us...

First, **Jesus took our sins upon Himself.** The Bible says...

[Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree...

1 Peter 2:24

When Jesus hung on the cross, God took all the sins of the world (past, present, and future), and placed them into Jesus. Since God must punish sin and all of our sin was laid on Jesus, God poured out His punishment on Jesus.

Second, **Jesus died in our place.**

When Jesus died on the cross, He died as our substitute. Jesus was punished for our sins and died in our place. The prophet Isaiah predicted this 700 years before Jesus was crucified.

...he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace...

Isaiah 53:5

Since Jesus died in our place for our sins, God's justice was satisfied. Jesus paid for all man's sins, so any man who chooses to accept that payment will never have to experience the eternal wrath of God which must come upon all sin. Jesus paid in full for all man's sins!

This is the third reason God gave Jesus to the world: **Jesus' death paid for our sins in full and satisfied God's justice.** Perhaps you've heard what happened just before Jesus died.

<sup>30</sup>When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30

The phrase "it is finished" was actually an expression used in Rome in the time of Christ when a debt had been paid in full.<sup>2</sup> When Jesus shouted "it is finished" He was declaring that He had made a perfect and complete payment for sin. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof that God the Father was satisfied with Jesus' payment.

Jesus did all the work necessary to save us from our sins:

Jesus took our sins upon Himself.

Jesus died in our place.

Jesus' death paid for our sins in full and satisfied God's justice.

There is only one thing God requires of you to be forgiven and reconciled to Him and that is believe in Jesus and what He has done for you.

The Bible tells us that...

...by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works...

Ephesians 2:8-9

## **WE ARE SAVED BY BELIEVING (TRUSTING) IN WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR US**

God offers salvation as a gift to every one of us because He loves every one of us unconditionally. The Bible says:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

<sup>1</sup> John 4:9-10

When we trust in Jesus and receive God's love, God's Holy Spirit comes into our lives and gives us the ability to love unconditionally like God has loved us unconditionally.

---

<sup>2</sup> Kittle, VIII pp. 57, 60

The Bible says:

**We love because he first loved us.**

1 John 4:19

Caleb realized that what his father was saying and what his father had experienced were true. Caleb sought God's forgiveness and trusted in Jesus Christ as his savior. And because Caleb had received God's unconditional love, Caleb was able to love Catherine unconditionally.

Let's see the before and after. Remember what Caleb told his father?

 **(Play Session Two from 2:11 to 2:44)**

Hold that picture in your mind of that angry man, voice raised, finger pointed, listing all the reasons his wife didn't deserve his love and justifying himself that he shouldn't have to love someone who rejected him over and over again.

 **(Play Session 5 from 3:00 to 4:24)**

How can a man be so transformed? It is only by receiving God's unconditional love.

**LOVE DARE CHALLENGE #2:**

Receive God's *unconditional love* today - trust in Jesus Christ as *your Savior!*