

Faith Baptist Church Valentines Banquet

February 12, 2016

Thank Brian and Sharon Phalon for the invitation

We've been friends for a quarter of a century. Brian and Sharon disciple my wife and I when I was first saved. We're also good friends with Brian's sister Mary and her husband Charlie. When you've been friends for as long as we have you are more like family than friends.

In the ministry you sometimes go through some very difficult trials, and its good to know that you have some solid people, some true friends who are there for you; people that support you, counsel you, encourage you, and sometimes even cry with you as you go through the dark days. Brian and Sharon have been all of that and more to Cindy and me.

Introduce Cindy

We are in our 32nd year of marriage, and though there have certainly been some trials along the way, the good times have outnumbered the bad times by far and if I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't hesitate for one second to marry her again.

We have 4 children, 3 of which are grown and married with their own children. Our youngest is Hannah who, though she acts like she is 30, is actually only 14

We also now have five grand-children, which we actually like a lot better than the children; and two more on the way.

Ice Breaker (Who says we don't bring our marriages with us into Heaven?)

Men in Heaven - Who is the Head of the Household?

At the end of the age when all the believers were standing in line waiting to get into heaven, God appeared and said, "I want all the men to form two lines.

One line will be for the men who were the true heads of their households.

The other will be for the men who were dominated by their wives."

God continued, "I want all the women to report to St. Peter."

The women left and the men formed two lines.

The line of men who were dominated by their wives was seemingly unending.

The line of men who were the true head of their household had one man in it.

God said to the first line, "You men ought to be ashamed of yourselves.

I appointed you to be the heads of your households and you were disobedient and have not fulfilled your purpose.

Of all of you, there is only one man who obeyed me. Learn from him."

Then God turned to the lone man and asked, "How did you come to be in this line?"

The man replied, "My wife told me to stand here."

Text – Genesis 29:18 – 20

"And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." (Genesis 29:18-20)

Jacob loved his wife Rachel. He was deeply attracted to her before they were married, and he loved her just as intensely throughout the marriage. They were married for over twenty years, but unfortunately, God took her home to Heaven prematurely immediately after she gave birth to their youngest son, Benjamin.

They stayed together until they were parted by death.

In the culture that we live in today many married couples fall out of love, separate and then divorce. Very few marriages today survive until they are parted by death. However, sometimes people remain married for many years but even though they stay together, they lose the love that they once had for one another.

I'll share a story that illustrates this perfectly:

Satan-In-Law

One bright, beautiful Sunday morning, everyone in the tiny Midwest town got up early and went to the local church.

Before the services started, the townspeople were sitting in their pews.

Suddenly, Satan appeared at the front of the church.

Everyone started screaming and running for the entrance, trampling each other in a frantic effort to get away from an evil incarnate.

Soon everyone was evacuated from the church, except for one elderly gentleman who sat calmly in his pew, not moving.....seemingly oblivious to the fact that God's ultimate enemy was in his presence.

Now this confused and irritated the Devil a bit, so he walked up to the man and said,

"Don't you know who I am?"

"Yep, sure do," the elderly man said.

Satan asked, "Aren't you afraid of me?"

This time the man said, "Nope, sure ain't!"

Satan, a little more perturbed at this, asked, "Why aren't you afraid of me?"

The man calmly replied, "Been married to your sister for 56 years."

Introduction

Tonight, I am going to talk to you for a few minutes about how you can be married for 56 years, but not feel as though you have been married to Satan's sister (or brother)

You can be married for 56 years and still be just as in love or more in love with your spouse as you were when you first wed.

First let me explain what I mean when I use the word “love”:

In the Bible, as in life, love can mean different things.

1 There is what is known as agape love:

This is the love that God demonstrated for us when Jesus died for us:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

(Romans 5:8)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Agape love is love in action – it is sacrificial love:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

1st Corinthians 13 defines this type of love for us. In this passage, the word for agape love is charity, which again means love in action. Missionary Darrell Champlain called it “love with shoes on”:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: (1 Corinthians 13:1-8)

Every marriage must have this agape love to survive.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;"

(Ephesians 5:25)

Agape love is critical, but it has more to do with duty than devotion.

But there is another kind of love that is also necessary if a marriage is going to be what it should be:

2 There is also phileo love – this word has more to do with feelings than with action; it has to do with affection, kindness, friendship. (Philadelphia = city of brotherly love).

Illustrate – I agape broccoli – I phileo chocolate chip cookie dough

What I want to help you with tonight is the feeling part of marriage. Many times in our Christian homes, we don't struggle as much with the acts of love – the doing of right – the providing for needs – the taking care of the children, etc. – but, we do struggle maintaining that level of affection and attraction that once brought us together in the first place.

Illustrate – When I first met Cindy at Shoprite – I knew that she was the one for me. I was determined to win her heart, and I did; but, what I failed at many years later was in continuing to win her heart, or keep her heart. Oh, I gave her what she needed, and I provided for our children, but I failed to demonstrate my affection for her; I failed to communicate phileo love to her, at least the way she receives it, and as a result for a while our marriage was broken.

In order for a marriage (or any relationship) to be what God intends it to be, there must be affection and kindness and devotion. There must be the feeling part of love, the passion, the emotion. The fire that was there when you were first married must be rekindled throughout your relationship if it is going to be enjoyable and fulfilling, and if it is going to survive.

Illustrate – The same is true with your relationship to God.

Transition

I believe that every couple in this room is one of three relationship categories:

I Hot Pursuit

In our text we read about Jacob who was pursuing Rachel. He loved her, he worked for her father for fourteen years so that he could marry her. He communicated love to her.

It's easy for us in the pursuit stage to communicate love. It comes naturally.

What do we do:

We give gifts – for any occasion or not even for an occasion

We write notes – or communicate through messages, phone calls, etc.

We are conscious of our appearance

Illustrate – Jeff and Debbi

We spend exclusive time

This stage usually lasts for at least the first year of marriage and sometimes beyond that. We work through difficulties and differences because the feeling that we have for each other is stronger than anything that can sever us.

II The Maintenance Mode

Love within the marriage needs to be maintained:

*"... Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was **sporting** with Rebekah his wife." (Genesis 26:8)*

This is where I blew it. Now I have her. She married me. She bore my children. I provide for her. I work hard every day and I'm home every night. That should be enough, right? Why should I have to do anything else to maintain our relationship.

Illustrate – what happens to your house if you don't maintain it? What happens to your car if you don't change the oil?

What happens to your marriage if you fail to continue to communicate love? What happens when we are married for 10, 15, 20 or more years, and we are just dutifully going through the motions? It leads to unhappiness within the marriage, and unfulfillment.

For a while, you won't even notice it, but eventually, maybe when the kids are grown and gone, it will provide an opportunity for Satan to get in and convince one or both of you that there is something better outside of the marriage.

Pastor Clark says, "Satan checks your back door every night looking for the one night that you left it unlocked.

A marriage needs to be maintained. All of the things that you did to get her, you need to keep doing to keep her. She needs to know that you "phileo" love her, just as much as she needs to know that you "agape" love her.

When's the last time you took your wife out and did just what she likes to do?

When's the last time you wrote her a note and told her that you love her?

Illustrate – I used to brag about the fact that I don't need to tell my wife that I love her.

When's the last time you got rid of the kids and fixed your husband's favorite meal and provided an intimate night for the two of you?

When is the last time that you communicated love the way they receive it?

Illustrate – Love Languages Quiz

III Relationship Renovation

If your relationship is not maintained, then it will someday need to be repaired. If you do not work at communicating love throughout your marriage, you will very likely end up with a broken marriage that will need a renovation. Ask your spouse – Does our marriage need a renovation?

Illustrate – David and Michal

It is much easier to maintain a marriage than to repair a broken one.

This is where Cindy and I had found ourselves a couple of years ago after nearly 30 years of what I thought was a healthy and relatively happy marriage. The fire of affection had gone out. We were both focused on other things. I had my world, and she had hers. I had the church. The church was my mistress.

Somewhere along the way we stopped communicating love to each other, and we found ourselves on the very edge of the marital breakup cliff. We almost didn't make it. There were four things that kept us together when our feelings for each other were broken:

- 1 The grace of God
- 2 The love and support of family and friends
- 3 The counsel of godly men and women
- 4 Our commitment to the Lord and to marriage itself

Two years ago, my wife and I embarked on a journey to fix our broken marriage. It became the number one priority in our lives, which is what it should have been all along. We took a one-month sabbatical from the church. We began to read books about marriage together, and, more importantly, we began to read the Bible and pray together. We began to study one another and re-examine our relationship. We began to communicate love in the right language.

It's been nearly two years, and I can honestly tell you now that our relationship is better than it has ever been. I can truly say that I love my wife more today than I ever have, and I believe she would tell you the same thing about me.

Conclusion

I don't know which stage you are in. If you are in the pursuit stage – you don't need much advice except to say that if you are not yet married, you need to make sure your affections and passions for each other don't go beyond the will of God.

If you are in the Maintenance Mode, I want to encourage you to not let the distractions of life keep you from focusing your attention on the most important relationship you have besides your relationship with the Lord. Keep doing the things that you did when you were in hot pursuit.

If your marriage is broken, you need a renovation. Let me encourage you that there is hope – don't quit - but you will need to make some major changes in the way you do things; and, you will probably need to get help. (Illustrate – Couples Gathering at Phil's house)

Marriage can be the most awesome and fulfilling institution on the planet, but it can also be miserable. You will get out of your marriage what you put into it. But, it is well worth it.