

Introduction

- A. I may need to give a warning to some of the guys in the crowd.
 - 1. If you found as you went through your morning routine – getting ready, breakfast, driving to services – that your wife seemed to grow more distant and cold, it might be because you forgot that today is February 14th – Valentine’s Day?
 - 2. Now if this reality is just hitting you, you may be in some trouble.
 - 3. The history of the Valentine’s tradition is somewhat obscure. We don’t really know with certainty just how the holiday got started. But what we do know is what it means to people in our culture. It is a special day for couples to communicate their love for each other, perhaps with flowers, candy or a card (or maybe a widescreen TV).

- B. I suppose it’s up to you to decide what you want to do with Valentine’s Day. But the need to communicate love to our spouse is vital; and not just once a year, but all the time.
 - 1. Disciples must understand that love is much more than just romantic feelings stirred up by gifts of flowers or candy.
 - 2. Love is a responsibility; it is commanded by God (**Ephesians 5:25a**). When I hear a man or woman say, “I just don’t love my spouse anymore,” I’m tempted to say, “Then you better cut that out.” We are commanded to love our spouses. This is not an option.
 - 3. For disciples then, love is first and foremost a decision. It is a decision to obey God. It is a decision to behave in a certain way because it’s what God expects. Some may accuse me of taking all the romance out of love. I don’t want to do that; romantic love is important. But even when I’m not feeling that, I’m still obligated to love my spouse!
 - 4. Love is a decision to act in the best interest of others, to always seek their good and never their harm. Paul would spell it out for the Corinthians (**1 Corinthians 13**). I realize that Paul is not talking about marriage in this context. His point is about spiritual gifts. But what he says about the way love behaves has application in every relationship. It says something about how I will treat my spouse when true love is present. In this passage Paul tells us how to truly say, “I love you” – every day, in all our actions. I want us to take a closer look at some of the things he says. Ben will have more to say in his lesson this evening. How do I really say, “I love you” to my spouse?

We say it with patience (v. 4).

- A. How do you respond when life does not go according to the plan?
 - 1. We begin every day with a plan, don’t we? This is how I want things to work out today. This is what I expect from others today. Those expectations are highest when it comes to the people closest to us – like our spouse.
 - 2. But life doesn’t always go according to the plan. Maybe you’ve really been working hard to make some progress financially and you’re just beginning to get some traction. Then your spouse comes home and tells you they backed into another car leaving work. It may even be that they were being careless when it happened. Immediately your mind thinks of the deductibles that will have to be paid and the increase in your insurance rates. How do I say “I love you” at a moment like that?

- B. Paul says, we say it with patience.
 - 1. The KJV says love “suffereth long.” The point is, I need to handle it. I don’t allow myself to get all worked up and start saying and doing things that will cause a marital explosion and hurt my spouse.
 - 2. Keep in mind that this has nothing to do with temperament. To be patient is a decision, an act of the will. It may be that our habit at moments like this is to lose our cool, raise our voice and fuss at our spouse. But it is at this point that love should step in and demand that we keep our cool, control our tongue and fix the problem.

- C. This loving behavior not only helps us handle circumstances the right way, it also helps us handle people in the right way.
 - 1. If you are married, you are married to someone with flaws. Maybe your spouse struggles with spending too much money; or perhaps they are too tight with money. Maybe your spouse struggles to control their anger; or perhaps they are too passive and don’t seem to care enough sometimes.
 - 2. How do I say “I love you” when I’m dealing with the problems these struggles produce? I say it with patience.
 - a. Let me be clear. This doesn’t mean that it’s okay to be hot tempered or overspend. It doesn’t mean that we ignore the problem. It doesn’t mean we never talk about it. It doesn’t mean we don’t talk straight about it.
 - b. But it does mean that I’m going to keep my cool, watch my words and always act in the best interest of my spouse. The goal is not to get them told, the goal is to get them to heaven.
 - 3. Too many couples go to war over the weaknesses. They allow their flaws and struggles to lead from one intense battle to another. It is an absurd, destructive choice. God has a better way. He tells us to love each other, which demands that I handle my spouse’s weaknesses and failures with patience. It’s one of the ways we say, “I love you.”

We say it with kindness (v. 4).

- A. I want you to imagine for a moment that your life is a reality show. There are cameras in your house, at work, in your car and people watching everything you say and do. What impression would they have of you?
 - 1. How would they describe the way you treat your spouse? What would they say about your behavior when you walk through the door at the end of a particularly difficult day at work?
 - 2. How would they describe your tone and the way you speak to your spouse when you are wrestling with a big decision and do not agree?

3. What would people think of the things you said and did to your husband or wife when you were in the middle of some big argument and really angry? How do I say “I love you” at moments like these?
- B. Paul says that we do it with kindness (v. 4).
1. No matter what the circumstances may be or how angry I am or what my spouse chooses to do, my words and my actions should always be kind. Love restrains me from saying things, or doing things, or using a tone that hurts my spouse and derails the process of working this thing out. Love demands that I always act in the best interest of the other guy.
 2. Remember that Paul has in mind our relationships with other Christians when he says this. How much more would this apply to that one person who is supposed to be more special to me than any other.
 3. It is evil that we allow the privacy of family to remove the restraints that love requires and to say and do the most terrible things to the one person who ought to be more special to me than any other – things that I would not say or do to a stranger. If this is happening at your house – if you’re using profanity with your spouse, yelling and screaming at them, saying sarcastic and insulting things to them – it’s evil! Too many married couples behave like a couple of third graders arguing on a playground. They trade verbal punches back and forth, each trying to up the ante. This is not just childish, it is destructive! Someone needs to step up and act like a grownup, to say to their spouse, “I love you.”
 4. Paul says we do this by acting with kindness. It’s one of the ways we communicate love in marriage.

We say it with humility and forgiveness (v. 5).

- A. When we bring our sins to God and seek His forgiveness, what does He do with them?
1. In Jeremiah 31:34 the prophet promised that under the new covenant God would forgive our iniquity and remember our sins no more.
 2. In Acts 3:19 Peter told his audience that, when they obeyed the gospel, their sins would be “wiped away,” literally obliterated, erased.
 3. Even after becoming a Christian, God promises that if we confess our sins He will forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9).
 4. But not only does God do this for us, He requires that we do it for others (**Colossians 3:12-14**). Although Paul is not limiting himself to marriage when he makes this point, it certainly applies to this relationship.
- B. We will need to apply it because married couples will offend each other and sin against each other.
1. You just can’t live so closely, on the good days and bad days, and wrestle with all the important issues that go with family...without messing up sometimes. Sometimes we get angry and do hurtful things. Sometimes we are insensitive and neglect the needs of our spouse. Sometimes we are selfish and insist on having our way.
 2. When this happens – and it will– how do I say, “I love you?” Don’t miss this. It is one of the keys to making your marriage work.
- C. Love will do two things.
1. First, I say, “I love you,” with humility (v. 4). I need to be humble enough to admit my wrong and say, “I’m sorry.” This sounds so simple, but it is amazing how many marriages continue in a state of turmoil because people lack the humility to say these two simple words – “I’m sorry.”
 2. But there is a second part of this equation that is just as important. When a wrong has been committed, I say, “I love you,” with forgiveness (v. 5). Paul says that love does not take into account a wrong suffered; it does not keep a record of wrongs. To be plain, in marriage this means that when we settle a matter, it needs to be settled! Love requires that I do not keep a mental list of the wrongs my spouse has committed against me, a list that I’m constantly looking over. The choice (and it is a choice) to do this only feeds bitterness that drives a couple apart. I’ve had the unpleasant experience of over the years of talking with a few couples who decided to end their marriage. One of the things I’ve seen is that there was always a list – a list of unresolved offenses and injuries that festered like a cancer, eating away at their marriage over the years until it was finally destroyed.
 3. Love demands more than this; God expects more! One of the ways we say, “I love you,” is with the humility to say I’m sorry and the willingness to forgive. Do this and you remove from Satan’s hands one of his most effective tools to destroy our relationship.

Conclusion: and so much more could be said...

So I would give you this challenge: in addition to exchanging gifts on this Valentine’s Day, take a moment to read these few verses together and commit yourselves to the love in your marriage that Paul describes in this passage. It’s not just good for our relationship; it’s what the Lord requires.

But right in any relationship begins with being right with God. Where do you stand with Him today?

- David A. Banning