

E-Series Fireproof



21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. **22** Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her **26** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, **27** and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. **28** In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- **30** for we are members of his body. **31** "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." **32** This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. **33** However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. **—Ephesians 5:21-33**

Several people have asked me lately, "Have you seen *Fireproof*?" Heather and I watched it a couple of nights ago, so I can finally say yes.

Since I know that there was more to many of your questions than mere curiosity about whether or not I have seen it, I thought I would depart for one day from the *Time to Shine* theme (though maybe not entirely) and present a very brief movie review.

The storyline of *Fireproof* is that a couple, Caleb and Catherine Holt—played by Kirk Cameron and Erin Bethea—is in trouble. Their marriage is on the rocks. They've drifted apart and come to the point of bitterness, resentment, and maybe even hatred of each other. Basically, they are roommates, rather than husband and wife. When things reach their breaking point, Caleb's father shares his new found faith in Jesus with him and gives him a journal called *Love Dare*. The *Love Dare* is a forty day plan of action designed to reignite his love for his wife and her love for him.

It takes a while, but the *Love Dare* works. Not Caleb's love, but God's love shining through Caleb, melts away the bitterness and resentment. Their marriage is saved.

Now, for my assessment. Let me begin by getting the negative out of the way. Like 99% of movies, things work out a little too easily and conveniently for Caleb and Catherine. Real life is always messier and more difficult than in films. It's just like that in movies. Superman always finds a way around the kryptonite and defeats Lex Luther. Against all odds, Happy Gilmore beats Shooter McGavin to win the PGA Tour (Hey, it was on TV last night ☺). It's Hollywood. I guess I should get used to it.

The other thing that bothered me somewhat about *Fireproof* is that, even after Caleb decides to become a follower of Jesus, there is no visible faith community, other than his parents and one guy at work. We don't see Caleb worshiping with other Christians or receiving their support. It's a little individualistic for my taste (although there is one scene at the end where it looks like Caleb and Catherine are leaving home to go to worship together, and they renew their marriage vows with a community present.)

With that out of the way, let me tell you some of the things that I really did like. I love the fact that the entire movie calls into question the lie that our society engrains in us from birth. If you listen to our culture, you will believe that love is primarily a feeling. Love is the flutter of butterflies in your stomach, or a raging fire, or some other such nonsense. The problem with thinking of love as an emotion is that emotions can be quite fickle. So, according to many, if you don't feel "in love" anymore, then it must be time to move on, call it quits, look for that emotion in some other person or other circumstances. As one country song puts it, "If it don't come easy, you better let it go."

These are lies straight from the Father of Lies. Jesus never said, "Love one another, if you feel like it." When he was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying so hard that sweat and blood poured from his brow, he didn't say, "Father, I thought I loved these people enough to die for them, but now I'm not so sure. I don't

think I'm in love with them anymore." Thankfully, neither did he pray, "Father, this looks like it's going to be a lot harder than I bargained for. I think I'll cut my losses now and get out."

Instead Jesus loved us all the way to the cross. So, don't pay attention to the people who write Valentine's Day cards for Hallmark. Pay attention to Jesus as he willingly, lovingly marches to the cross for people who don't even come close to deserving his love. Listen to the Apostle Paul in the passage above when he says that Jesus' love for the Church is the example for the love of husband and wife.

I could say more, but I'll get back to the movie. Caleb accepted his father's *Love Dare*. Daily he added tasks like, "Today don't say anything negative to your spouse, only positive. If the situation arises and negative thoughts come to mind, don't say anything." Then there was, "Today contact your spouse at work with no other agenda than to ask how he or she is doing." Forty days. Forty ways to act lovingly.

For over forty days, Caleb is rejected at every turn. Many times he wants to give up. But over time, his actions change his heart. He loves his wife through his actions until his feelings follow. See that's the thing about feelings. They are fickle. They are not to be trusted. In the words of Caleb's coworker, "Don't follow your heart. Your heart can be deceived. You've got to *lead* your heart." It's the genius of our marriage service. During the Declaration of Intention to be married, we don't ask a couple, "*Name, do you love name?*" Instead the Church asks, "*Name, will you love name?*" It's a promise for the future. It's why, when people tell me, "I just don't love my spouse anymore," I can say, "But, wait; you promised to."

Caleb and Catherine rekindle the fire of their love. Despite the hurts and pains of the past, they live into their marriage vows. At the height of their conflict Catherine and Caleb might have said that it would take a miracle to save their marriage. Of course, as Christians, we believe in miracles. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. God's resurrection power has been loosed on the world. And, that resurrection power can raise even the deadest of marriages from the grave, provided that the couple wants to work on their relationship. This movie is a small reminder of that.

Fireproof is a very good movie. I recommend it. I also think that it's remarkable that a church in Georgia wrote, produced, and filled most of the acting parts. But, here are my warnings: 1) Things don't always turn out right no matter what we do. We are a broken people living in a broken world. But, we are called to give our all. And, 2) while the *Love Dare* (you can actually buy the book that was referenced in the movie at any Christian bookstore) might be a great enrichment tool for marriages that are fairing okay, it is no substitute for professional marriage counseling for couples dealing with difficult issues like Caleb and Catherine.

Pastor Michael



Time to Shine in 2009!