
God's Commendation of Sex - Wonder

Song of Solomon 4:1-8:14

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Introduction

<< Crassly Literal Slide – *Wittenberg Door* >>

In this Family Enrichment Conference, we have been wrestling through and unpacking a Canonical theology of Sexuality. Here are our aims in doing so.

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality.
- To counter the world's influence in this area.

The Song of Songs illuminates the wonder of marital oneness. We are dazzled by their desire and delight in one another. By God's grace, we are to be drawn out to seek this kind of relationship with our own spouses. God Himself commends to us the wonder of our marital union, its privileges and its pleasures. He does so for our good and His great glory. He does so as we see through this earthly lens the wonder of our coming union with Jesus Christ, our Groom.

Consummation – Loving Oneness

4:1 - 5:1

Chapter three ends with the marriage. Chapter four is the honeymoon, their first night together. Many commentators suggest that the way this is written does portray the initial consummation, but not in a way that makes it utterly unique in their experience. The sweetness and thrill of that first evening together may become characteristic of our times of marital oneness.

He Admires Her

(4:1-8)

In verses 1-5 we have such an eloquent expression of love and desire. Some of it sounds very strange to us, but it was sweet music to her heart. He is speaking in a way that declares his admiration of her beauty. He does so indirectly with comparisons and imagery. It is both intense and playful. It shows that he has thought a lot about her and what he loves about her body.

We need a third way here as well. We must not despise the body as though it itself were corrupt or contemptible. And we must not worship the body as though its present state is perfection. We can love our spouse's body, the way they look and move and how it thrills us. In fact, it seems that this is an imperative in the Scripture. So, husbands and wives, love your spouse in such a way that you admire and expression your appreciation for them.

Further we see how Scripture is true to life. Everyone knows in their heart of hearts the importance of admiration, affection and affirmation in initiating and

cultivating a heart and body stirring marital oneness. These two wonderful paragraphs are filled with expressed anticipation. Beloved, how often does our Groom describe His love for us and the joy of what is to come in heart thrilling, hope filling words that stir up anticipation.

Verses 6-8 are intention and invitation. It is easy to see how along the soft touches of his words are accompanied by the caresses of his hands. As he speaks, he assures her and raises her own anticipation. Then, reaching back to their courtship, he invites her to join with him knowing that where there had to be restraint before, there can be a surrender and fulfillment now.

He Arouses Her

(4:9-15)

As they move closer to consummation, he gives assurances of his total surrender and dedication to her. His words flow over the contours of her character, as well as her form. He tastes and enjoys her lips. He wonderfully speaks of her purity while tenderly and sweetly preparing her for their union. He rejoices in her response to him. Even in the imagery here, there is an amazing delicacy and gladness, urgency and patience braided together in loving words and ways.

She Admits Him

(4:16-5:1a)

These verses, with glorious charm, bring the consummation and they are one. She is a locked, watered and fragrant garden which is now open for him. She invites him in and is delighted with joy in their union.

God Approves

(5:1 b)

And then these words, marvelous and mysterious. Is this the chorus? Is this the wedding party rejoicing in this their night together? Along with a number of commentators, I believe this is God. God is hovering over their courtship and now their consummation, approving it. And it is not just the stern gavel of a rendered decision. It is the happy approval of a glad God. This is what the Proverbs mentioned and the Bible is full of. You are living your life before the face of God. His holiness guarantees that this is not just divine voyeurism, but rather divine joy that illuminates the day of consummation of His Son and His bride.

This removes any shame in loving, joyous, holy sex. Now, if this is strange or possibly even distasteful, if this sounds sinful or erotic to you, then my beloved, there is something amiss, something wrong. I know it is possible to react to the fact that this is coming from the pulpit on a Sunday Evening, but I am being even more discreet than the Bible in deference to your sensibilities. So even taking that into account, I would encourage you to see a negative reaction to all of this as a symptom of a deep heart issue. I would call on you to seek the counsel of elders or mature godly women.

The consummation in their marital oneness is approached with loving and tender anticipation, marvelous imagination, delighted participation, deep satisfaction and joyous Divine approval. The beauty and delicacy of the Scriptures anticipates our loving martial union here and our mysterious heavenly union then. "Eat, drink, be drunk with love!"

Conflict – Losing Joy

5:2 - 6:13

How quickly life can move from the good to the bad, from loving, passionate responses to casual indifference. In this next movement of the Song of Songs, we have just that. As we will see, they did not allow the wonder and intimacy of their marriage to wane, but rather had nourished and cherished it so that it grew and matured.

Yet, even in the midst of a good marriage, there can arise problems to deal with – conflict that must be addressed and dealt with. We find here a pattern, a model for solving marital conflict that is fleshed out in other Scriptures as well.

The Root of their Conflict

(5:2-3)

First, we need to see more clearly what is being alluded to here. The husband is approaching her for intimacy either very late at night or very early in the morning (v.2). As was common in their day, they had separate bedrooms. It is not clear whether he is coming in late from work or has come over to her suite early in the morning. “Honey...”

She responds with words in her heart that appear at first to be a legitimate excuse (v.3). After all, it is either very late or very early – it is very inconvenient for her. She hasn’t offered the proverbial “headache” or “too tired” excuse, but it is clearly being offered out of self-focus and indifference. So she delays. She does not respond to him. She tosses around these words in her mind. She lingers with excuses either in her own heart or possibly, even spoken out.

The Results of their Conflict

(5:4-8)

He rattles the doorknob (v.4) and she repents. Notice the change in words in her heart from “How could I?” to “my beloved, my heart thrilled...” So she gets up and in perfumed anticipation, goes to the door and opens. And he is gone. He has turned away. Ah, her soul had failed her. Her heart sank.

Now listen to me beloved. There are all kinds of reasons that we do not respond to our spouses. Many of them are “justified” – our spouses may be insensitive, ignorant or even just demanding. We may not be feeling well or tired. It may well be either 12:30 at night or 4:30 in the morning. The problem is when we are poised to respond like this regardless. The conflict comes when we lie – we say we... when we well know that is not really true, we just want something else than what is being offered or requested at the moment.

This is precisely where the Scripture is placing it. Right or wrong, at this moment of request and response, there are competing wants – here, desire for intimacy clashing with desire for comfort (notice carefully that it is comfort, not sleep and not sickness.) This is where both spouses need to consider, “look after the interests of others.” Is this a good time? Am I simply gratifying myself? Am I responding to invitation out of self-_____? Can I appeal with a promise? What would please God right now?

So she pursues him. In verse one, she is sleeping awake, in other words, she is dreaming. Now her dream becomes a nightmare. She runs out to pursue her beloved and is accosted and assaulted by the night watchmen. It is hard to tell from the text if she is actually having this experience, or if she is dreaming or if the

Holy Spirit is helping us to connect to what our conflict can feel like. It could be all three.

Isn't it true that sometimes our little "innocent" demands and responses suddenly turn in surreal nightmares. Do you ever listen to you and your spouse and think, "How in the world did we get here? What are we doing? What are we saying?" Little foxes destroying vineyards. Little acts of self-indulgence leading to large areas of difficulty and conflict.

The Response to their Conflict

(5:9-6:1)

The first response is to seek the counsel and help of friends. Now, this given in this text in its poetic drama. She appeals to the chorus now acting as friends to intercede for her. It seems to me that their response to her is calculated to cause her to overcome her indifference. "Tell us," they say, "What is your man like?"

In verses 10-16a she responds to their prompting with a beautiful description of her man. This is important. She is filling her mind and mouth, not with self-justifying words but with praise and love. Here is true repentance. Now, ladies, your man may not be this hunk (sort-of what we have described here), but he is your man. Men, your wife may not be the most beautiful woman in the world, but she is your wife. If your instinctual response to, "Tell me what your spouse is like" is a negative, critical picture, then you will simply have continual conflict. The words in your heart by which you describe your spouse to yourself and others, are the source of your emotions and actions, of your response to them.

See how she ends this? "He is altogether desirable. This is my beloved; this is my friend." I love the response, "Wow, where is he. Let's go find him together." Now beloved, how often, in the midst of conflict, would your friends admire your spouse after you described them? This isn't how we tend to respond. But this is how reconciliation is launched.

The Reconciliation after their Conflict

(6:2-13)

Now we have that reconciliation. They are together. There is mutual care and affirmation. They assure each of their love, admiration, praise and outright hunger for each other. Reconciliation is taking place in the very area in which there has been conflict. This is not just disengagement. This is not a truce. This is not resignation because the alternative is worse. This is an active pursuit of peace and reunion. The closing words of the chorus are a bit difficult. But it is a joyful, playful call for them to come back as they are reunited and riding off together.

Communion – Longing Delight

7:1 - 8:14

What follows in the book and in our lives after true reconciliation is communion. The last two chapters turn up the flame of their appreciation and acclamation of one another. There is now a sense of communion, of longing delight that is richer and deeper. I will not do as extensive an exposition over these last two chapters. But, here is what a true love looks like.

His Deepening Passion

(7:1-10)

While we return to the language of passion, his words are far more intense, personal, knowledgeable, sensuous, appreciative, and loving (v. 1:9a). He pursues and praises her with his words. He intends to use them to draw her out to him.

Her Heightened Longing

(7:11 - 8:4)

She responds to his passion and praise with a satisfied sense of belonging. I mark this as being so important. There is a belonging of surrender that responds to his love for her and his longing for her. This is something that we as men need to hear. We must observe that our heavenly husband affirms his love for us in a way meant to draw out our sense of belonging to Him, our security and satisfaction with Him. How helpful it is for us to learn this from Him for the sake of our wives. Would your wife be able to say verse 10, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me?” And if not, what will you do to begin to give her such a sense of belonging, security and satisfaction?

Their Enduring Commitment

(8:5-7)

Their maturing love deepens their enduring commitment. Much of what is going on in this chapter is remembering, reflection and response. They look back to precious times and share them again through memories. I know to describe this sounds stilted and prosaic; but, with eloquence they not only commit to one another, but revel in what that commitment means to them.

The New Bible Commentary is so helpful here. “*Seal* is a sign of ownership that can be seen by anyone. She wants it to be obvious to all that she is totally owned by him and in no way belongs to any other. The seal was to be in two places: on his heart (the seat of his affections) and on his arm (the symbol of his physical strength). He would totally own her, love her and protect her. Moreover, true love is *as strong as death* in that both are irresistible. So too, the love of Christ is all-conquering. Paul found that the love of Christ compelled him irresistibly (2 Cor. 5:14). True love has a *jealousy* about it which is a reflection of the jealousy of God (see Ex. 20:5; 2 Cor 11:2). A wife has every right to jealousy if her husband starts getting involved with another woman. Jealousy hurts and hurts badly and that is why it can be as *unyielding as the grave*. Further, true love is as unquenchable as a *blazing fire* (cf. Ex. 3:2). *Like a mighty flame* can read ‘like the very flame of the LORD’”²

²

Carson, D. A. New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. 4th ed., Is 1:1. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.

Her Declared Purity

(8:8-12)

This looks back to her own upbringing, commending her purity as a model for the readers of the Song of Songs. The text here tells of a loyal, caring family who protected their young sister from misuse of sex. From her early years, before she was physically developed, her older brothers, in particular, disciplined her and encouraged her to keep her body only for the one she was to marry. Until the time of marriageable age she can either be *a wall*, resisting all the approaches of false love, or *a door* allowing any man to pass through her defenses and so losing her virginity before God's time. This is why she has often spoken the phrase 'do not arouse ... love until it so desires'. If she keeps herself, her brothers will reward her. If she fails or falls, they will build even stronger protections around her. And she has responded enthusiastically to their training (v.12). She has now reached physical and mental maturity and she has remained *a wall*. What peace and contentment she experiences when she has please God and maintained her purity. What great joy her husband takes in this. What a great example she has been to the maidens around her.

Her Responding Invitation

(8:13-14)

The Song of Songs ends with a mutual invitations and responses that have characterized the whole book. He longs to hear her voice and she longs to see his grace and strength. In the words he asks her to invite him and she does.

We are pointed once again to our betrothed Redeemer. He seeks us and extends to us appeals to invite him. And we should. We should respond as the Shulamite does. But we often do not. Should we not be ready to respond to Him who has laid down His life for us and given us the privilege of being His bride?

Conclusion

God is interested in every area of life. He directs our lives for His glory. He does so, if we bend to Him, for our holy happiness. And it is not a cheesy, passing, frivolous giddiness; rather, it is a deep and satisfying joy.

Our hearts must be filled with praise and joy over our spouses. If there is anything that I can awaken in every marriage in this congregation it is this. Love your spouse with deeds, yes. But love your spouse with words in your heart, words of praise, pursuit and pleasure.

Indifference and self-focus will slowly erode our relationships. It will affect every part of our marriages and our relationships. How many couples drift in occasional, resigned, unjoyful, unsatisfying marital intimacy. Sadly, we often drift like this in our relationship with God – unjoyful, resigned, unsatisfying, dead.

We must work hard at reconciliation and restoration. Every marriage will have conflict. But as we work out the issues and solve them Biblically, we must not only sustain our marriages, but elevate them. I am so concerned that each instance of conflict and resolution does small damages that add up to severe difficulty. Don't just declare truces. Beloved, work hard at restoration, as well as reconciliation.

Let us joy in God in our joy in one another.