

God's Consecration of Sex - Waiting

Song of Solomon 1:1-3:14

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Introduction

This is Canticles – the Song of Songs. Just as the holy of holies is the innermost, the superlative place of God's dwelling, this is the song of songs. It is the superlative of songs, the highest, best and innermost song. It is superlative in its eloquence and movement. It is superlative in its passion and purity. It is superlative in its ultimate object of affection and adoration, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this Song of Songs is most difficult for us. Fallenness and sinfulness and impurity picks up the intimacies of consecrated, consummated and commended marital oneness and takes its beauty and make it base, its wonder and make it wanton; its glories and make it gross; its purity and makes it perverse. Many, with hearts unable to comprehend that God has designed the purity of marital oneness and sexuality, turn away from the plain meaning of this text and create fanciful allegories.

Yet, as we have seen from our last chapter, this design of God for marriage is not an end in itself. Now that Christ has come, now that He is portrayed to our eyes as our groom, now that we have this grand mystery of the union between Christ and His church, this Song of Songs now has a greater object than Solomon and the shepherd maiden, but the great King and his Bride. James Dennison writes, "Solomon's Song contains a retrospective, introspective and prospective dimension. It returns us to the garden where we realize how God created our sexuality ("good"). It reminds us that in our marriages, we are invited to experience a union that surges to rise above a fallen creation. It testifies of an eschatological arena where love is perfected in blessed, mystical union with our Heavenly Lover, Jesus Christ."

As with how we handle the graphic language of this wonderful poetry, we must also find the third way in our approach to this book. We must not go down slope and arrive at the conclusion that Canticles is *merely* a sex manual (or, as some, a guide for married love) thus ignoring both the context of godly communion and the centrality of Christ. And, we must not go down slope the other side and so allegorize and spiritualize the book that we lose the use of the Song to illuminate both our human marriage oneness and our union with Christ. No, just as marriage is a lesser reality portraying a greater one, so marital oneness portrays a greater union.

This is because we find that Jesus Christ Himself could take three disciples from Moses through the Prophets and show how all the Scriptures are fulfilled in Him. So Jesus is in the Song of Songs. He is its first reality and its final fulfillment. Marriage portrays Christ and the church and we are to read the Old Testament through that lens. Christ fulfills the law, the wisdom, the songs, the narratives of the Old. He is

the grand end and aim and object of all. At the end of days, He is our Groom and we are His Bride and the marriage feast is laid and consummation is coming.

This Song of Songs is about companionship, communion and consummation. It is about how the soul moves toward the object of its love. It is about the importance of words and wants as giving direction to affections and actions. It is about how the husband courts his spouse and how the wife charms her husband. It is about how we guard ourselves and preserve our purity until the day of union and consummation. It is about how self interest and self focus can mar oneness at all levels and how the responsibility for reconciliation is placed on both. It is about how the providence of God is to be seen in the weaving of life stories as a shadow of the weaving of redemptive history.

And it is all this at both the human and divine levels. It is about our companionship with Christ. It is about our growing communion with Him. It is about that longing for day of glorious consummation. When we are to worship our King, there is to be fealty; when we are to walk with our Father, there is to be fear; and when we are to love our Groom-Husband, there is to be fire.

The divine Author, the Holy Spirit of God, filled each section of this book with the ebb and flow of relationship. There is separation, longing and union. There is mutual initiation and marvelous imagery. There are expectations, expressions and experiences of whole-souled devotion, of vibrant delight, of vital desire.

So as we hover over this Song of Songs may its truth at all dimensions sing in our souls.

Companionship – Growing Admiration (1:2-7)

The book opens with its title and author. It is the Song of Songs by Solomon. This is dramatic poetry written to be read and recited. It is about the love between Christ and His Bride as is seen in the love between Solomon and the Shulammitte maiden.

His Attractions (v. 2-4)

She begins by expressing her attraction to him. There is attraction to him in the physical contact of kisses and in his character and reputation. His kisses and his name are sweet and tasty. While many may admire his character, his chambers are for her alone.

She is not alone in extolling his virtue. This “chorus” that appears several times provides a sense of responsive song – she sings the solo of her admiration and they respond with the chorus of theirs. They will exult and rejoice in him and his love. Thus they commend him to her.

Her Anxieties (v. 5-7)

But she is concerned as she contrasts herself with the women in the court who surround him. She is tanned and they are alabaster. She has worked out in the sun in the family vineyard, being forced to do so by her step-brothers. She is concerned that he will not prefer her duskiness. Yet, she is aware of her own beauty and charms.

She describes him in the simplest of terms: the one whom I love. She wants to be near him and have his love for her publicly declared. She wants to be recognized and acknowledged, not hidden away among the ladies who move through his life.

What emerges here is what we would think of as admiration, of holding our loved one high in our regard. There is a call for exclusive and focused attention and affection. This is at the heart of Biblical sexuality. Each spouse must have eyes and heart only for their spouse, even in the competing attractions of others in our lives. This is where we begin. Do you have a single-minded focus on your spouse? Do you acknowledge and declare your sole devotion to them privately and when needed, publicly? Does your spouse sense that they are competing for your attention and affection?

O how we ought to reflect this kind of admiration and affection for our heavenly Groom. He is utterly perfect – His character is without flaw and His reputation, spotless. While we know that we are not perfect in His eyes, yet He has set His heart on us.

Courtship – Guarding Purity (1:8 - 3:5)

The lovers move from the longing of separation to expressions of delight and desire for each other.

Their Description of One Another (1:8-2:7)

They begin with wonderful descriptions of one another. There are words of praise (1:8-2:6) to one and about one another.

This is how they think of one another. Our affections and attractions to one another flow from the way we think. If we cultivate words in our souls that describe our spouses to ourselves like this, we will fan the flame of one another's love.

This is also how they speak of one another. We can either build or destroy our relationship and the joy of our marital oneness through the way we speak to one another. All through this Song, we find tender and loving words framing and filling their relationship. I am deeply concerned that we learn to speak to our spouses with words that are full of love and grace. Further, we must learn to become skillful in the language of our love. I know many men who would say that they are not able to talk like this about their wives and especially to their wives. Yet, you wax eloquent over sports, computers, cars, whatever.

You see, you can talk well and a lot about what you treasure. In fact, you just do. What you value and esteem, your affections go out to and your words will describe with praise and proficiency. I would encourage you to begin with cards or a simple note expressing your love for your spouse. Men, shame on you if you are embarrassed or you think this is for sissies. God declares and affirms His love for us through words all through the Scriptures. He is not embarrassed to express His love for us. Most of you are unskilled because you are unpracticed. You may not be a Solomon or a Shakespeare, but you can learn to express yourself.

Notice too how she describes him to herself in verses 3-4. Her words describe a deep sense of satisfaction and security. These ways of thinking about him and

words in her soul are very important to sustain her attraction to him. Thus, her desire for him grows (v.5-6). His affirmations of love and desire for her and her thoughts about him fuel her desire for him. Like much of this poetry and what it describes, this exotic culture seems overwrought and overdone to us. She is feeling faint from desire for him. She is beginning to imagine them in bed together.

But, their restraint protects them (2:7). This is most important. As a couple are courting or dating one another, as there is a growing awareness and admiration and even desire for one another, there must be godly commitments to purity. This phrase, "Do not stir up love until it is appropriate," is a very important principle in sexuality. It should guide us in when and how we introduce the subject to our children. It must guard us when we are dating, to know how to possess our bodies in sanctification – to know what entices and enflames and tempts. The more you give away and get in dating and engagement, the less you have to give away and gain in marriage.

One other observation – notice the power of thinking, of imagination, of fantasy. Most often we think of it as being a power to evil, to lust, to sin. But here, it is being used, as it will all through the Song, to awaken, elevate and sustain passion for our spouse. Brothers and sisters, it is right and I believe, important, that you delight and desire your spouse in your thoughts, in your imagination. That leads to two exhortations: you must not have these thoughts and imaginations over any one other than your spouse and you must have them about your spouse. Failing either way will seriously harm the frequency and joy and pleasure of your sexual oneness.

Are you faltering in your affections and your desire for God? This is the power of our praise and worship – it is songs and expressions of description and delight and adoration of God that stir up our hearts to want Him and to wait for Him and to serve him. And when you have little desire to so worship God, is that not because you do not really prize Him and treasure Him?

Their Desire for One Another

(2:8-3:5)

In the language and analogy of the "hind" and stag", love deepens and their passion awakens.

HER AWAKENING PASSION (2:8-15) is a response to his loving invitation. Here is here reflection on and recall of his call to her. The language here is rich in imagination as they are described as a stag and deer. She is in her home and he is calling to her and inviting her to join him out to walk with him in the country. The description of spring portrays the beauty of their awakening love and passion in the language shared in almost every culture. His invitation and affirmation delights her and draws her out to him. Here is the power of his words to affect her as a whole person.

He is aware of all the little things that can enter their lives and ruin the sweetness of their love. The little foxes were destructive pests in gardens and vineyards. He does not merely want them fenced out, but caught and dealt with and destroyed. There are all sorts of little things that need to be addressed and dealt with during courtship and during marriage. Often, the slow build up of small hurts, minor

disagreements eats away at a relationship until there is massive decay and destruction. In my counseling over the years, I have found over and over again that marital oneness and sexual vitality are ruined by all the small foxes running through the vineyard of marriages.

HER ASSURED LOVE (2: 16-17) is spoken of in terms of mutual ownership and lasting commitment. This is somewhat hard for us today – but this language of mutual ownership in marriage runs all through the Bible and reflects that mutual commitment in our relationship with Christ. Esther and I just as gladly say this to one another as we can say, “I am the Lord’s and He is mine.” In this is a sense of safety, security and well-being.

HER ADAMANT SEEKING (3:1-4) pursues him from her country home to his city dwelling. She leaves her comfort zone and goes after him in response to his invitation. This is the Bible way. This is God’s way. The man initiates with heart drawing out invitations. And the woman responds with active efforts and initiatives. This also reflects that Jesus seeks us first and all our pursuing of Christ is upon His gracious invitation to be sought and pursued. We love Him because He first loved us.

HER APPEAL FOR RESTRAINT (3:5) comes when she has brought into her home, and into her mother’s bedroom. Here we have moved from the temptation in thoughts (2:7) to the temptation of a place. Before, it was love moving toward lust in the heart. Now it is love moving toward passions of the body. And once again, restraint and caution are appealed for. There is a constant need for care and caution that we be pure before marriage. God has a time and place for marital oneness and it is reserved for marriage. When courting, be careful about the places and times that would open you to temptation so that your growing love is not stained by sin and shame.

If only our long years of waiting for Christ could be filled with such yearnings of the soul and movements of the heart. We are now engaged to Him, His betrothed. We are waiting with joy and anticipation until He comes and we are married to Him. We respond to His invitations to be sought and pursued even as He affirms to us that we are His and He is ours. And our longing for that final union with Him is savored in our anticipation of and participation in earthly marriage.

Covenant – Glorious Union

(3:6-11)

Ah, what a day this is. This is the day of the wedding. The culture is very different from ours. The groom comes in a procession and takes her from her parent’s home to their new home. There, they begin what was often a week long wedding feast. During the first night of the feast, the couple would consummate the marriage.

Its Sanctity

(v. 6)

From the perspective of the narrator, the groom approaches – but what a groom. Here is the power and majesty of Solomon in all his rich array. Today, all the attention is on the arrival of the bride – in that day, on the arrival of the groom. The language here is intentionally evocative of pillar of cloud in the wilderness. Here is Solomon arriving to claim His bride. Here is Yahweh leading the procession

through the wilderness to arrive at Canaan. Here is Christ in triumphal procession arriving to claim His bride. What glorious smoke and incense. What fragrance of beauty. What awesome majesty. But these terms also indicate the holiness and sanctity of marriage and marital union. It comes through the way and at the time and in the context God has ordained.

Its Security

(v. 7-8)

When her groom comes with such an awesome train of soldiers and servants, she has no fear. Here is the great safety and security her husband brings to their marriage. While this is opulent and extravagant, many a wife would take heart from a husband's providing safety and security under the gracious hand of God.

Its Splendor

(v. 9-10)

Her groom also comes to escort her in the best chariot of the day. It is custom made and meant to show how much he cares for her and that all his wealth is brought to their marriage. Notice that it is what he himself made and fashioned. He arrives in it and it seems that it is his gift to her. She who has come from lowly means will arrive at her new home in grand ceremony and procession.

Its Satisfaction

(v. 11)

When the king arrives, his mother comes out to place the wedding crown on his head, signifying the seal of his marriage. All the maidens are summoned to look upon him and to be reminded that he is now married. This is his wedding. This marriage to this woman is a great and glad day. They must honor that union. They must not compete with her for his attention. They must rejoice with the King in the day of his covenant union with his wife.

What is there to say? I cannot even begin to describe the sanctity, security, splendor and everlasting satisfaction on the day our King arrives from the far country of heaven's home. On that day He will be admired and adored. On that day, all will acclaim His fame and worth. On that day, all that we have waited for and longed for will come true.

And we must do all we can to flesh that out with our spouses. Most cannot bring the wealth and magnificence of Solomon to our marriages. But we can be extravagant in our demonstrations of love, care, provision and protection of one another. Men, treat your wives with royal regard. Honor her. Uphold her. Be a living demonstration of the lavish care and loving provision of God for His Bride.

Conclusion

Learn the importance of your thoughts – the words in your heart carry your beliefs and wants. This is so important in your relationship with your spouse. The words of your heart will give rise to holy and loving affections. Or the words of your heart will destroy them and generate responses and emotions that are not pleasing to God and do not sustain your marriage.

To the unmarried, guard your purity, even in courtship. Impurity in thought and want will wage war on the soul, harming your walk with God and hurting your present and future relationships.

Grow in your ability to express your love to one another. Learn to say, “I love you” in all kinds of ways. Learn to share yourself in words and actions. Be extravagant in your commitment to both give yourself and draw out your spouse.

Each of you, be poised to respond to the other. We see this all through the Song of Songs. Sometimes, he takes the initiative and leads in their loving. Sometimes, she takes the initiative. But there is that dance of invitation and response. Don’t make the other feel foolish for their initial attempts – always warm to them and respond to them.

Is there a connection between a man who has little romantic skill with his wife and his having little passionate communion with his God? It may well be that cultivating one will bear fruit in the other.

Aim your marriage at all levels and in all ways to reflect our union with Christ. The joys of marital oneness with our spouses are but a small foretaste of the consummation of our great, spiritual union with Christ.

May these words ever be true, “I am His and He is mine.”

