

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

THERE IS SOMETHING BETTER THAN DIVORCE AND MISERY: THERE IS GODLY MARRIAGE (PART 2)

by Wade L. Webster

In the first installment of this study, we considered that godly marriage is better than loneliness, divorce, fornication, and celibacy. Furthermore, to show the beauty of godly marriage, we began examining the love that Solomon shared with Shulamith. In this concluding part of our study, we will notice some special things about their love.

Their Love Was Shown

Not only did Solomon and the Shulamite declare their love, they demonstrated it. They showed affection to one another. In the second verse of the first chapter, the Shulamite declares, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (SOS 1:2). Solomon's bride saw these kisses as confirmation of his love. It should be noted that these were private kisses. Public displays of affection were frowned upon in that society (cf. 8:1).

In the second chapter, the Shulamite declared, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (SOS 2:4; cf. 1:4). Solomon displayed his love for his bride by bringing her to the banqueting house. In modern terms, he took her out to eat; and, I might add, he took her somewhere nice. Furthermore, the text says that he put his banner over her. In modern terms, he put his arm around her. Notice the text, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me" (SOS 2:6; cf. 8:3). I might add that they sat right next to each other on those purple seats on their way to the restaurant. They weren't hugging the doors on opposite sides of the chariot. Again, consider the text: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (SOS 8:5). I

assure you that I am not making this stuff up. She felt Solomon's favor (SOS 8:10).

Solomon and the Shulamite sought out one another's company. The relationship was not one-sided. He sought her company (2:8-9, 14; 4:8; 5:1-2; 6:13; 7:7-8) and she sought his (1:4; 3:1-3; 4:16; 5:6; 6:1; 7:11-13; 8:2, 14). A common complaint among couples today is that their relationship, whether it in the realm of talking or touching, is one-sided. Clearly, this wasn't the case with Solomon and his bride. They pursued one another.

Like Solomon and his bride, couples today need to show their love for one another. They need to kiss, put their arms around one another, and go out to eat. Furthermore, they both need to be pursuers. It is unfair for one person to always have to be the pursuer. Everyone likes to be pursued.

Their Love Was Saved

The Shulamite listed herself among the virgins and the upright in the first chapter (SOS 1:3-4). Solomon later confirmed that she belonged in this category. In the fourth chapter, he declared, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee" (SOS 4:7). Although it is possible that this passage merely has reference to an unblemished complexion, it seems to me that it has reference to moral purity also. Later in the fourth chapter, her moral purity is clearly under consideration (4:12). Furthermore, I know that this is the case in the fifth chapter. Solomon declared, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled" (SOS 5:2). Please note that he said, "My undefiled." She had kept herself pure for him.

Three times within the book, the Shulamite encouraged the daughters of Jerusalem not stir up or awake her love before her husband pleased (SOS 2:5; 3:5; 8:4). Commentators are generally in agreement that this has reference to maintaining her purity (virginity) until marriage. Those who are not married need to be careful not to awaken passions that are to remain asleep until marriage (Heb. 13:4). Those who are not married must "flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18). They must mortify their members against fornication and uncleanness (Col. 3:5). The Shulamite was careful not to awaken her passion until her wedding night.

Like Solomon and his bride, we must keep ourselves pure for marriage (1 Tim. 5:22). We must not awaken passions that cannot be quenched outside of marriage. We must avoid places settings and situations that would stir up these feelings suggestive movies, private venues, dancing, etc. Those who commit fornication are robbing themselves and their future mates of an undefiled relationship.

Their Love Was Safe-guarded

Marriage was to be "a garden inclosed," "a spring shut up," and "a fountain sealed" (SOS 4:12; cf. 8:6). Please notice the words "inclosed," "shut up," and "sealed." These words suggest that couples must carefully guard themselves against sexual sin. They must not let down their guard for a moment. They must guard their hearts and their eyes (Prov. 4:23; Job 31:1; Mt. 5:29). In the fifth chapter of Proverbs, Solomon declared:

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Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? (Prov. 5:15-20).

Those who are married have their own cistern and well from which to draw. They must be ravished with one another's love (SOS 4:9).

Big things like adultery are not the only things that can wreck a marriage. Little things can also do so. In the second chapter, we read, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes" (SOS 2:15). As the keeper of the vineyards, Solomon's bride knew firsthand the damage that the little foxes could do (SOS 1:6). She knew that they didn't just threaten the fruit, but the vines themselves. By destroying the roots of the vines, the little foxes threatened the harvest for years to come.

Sadly, couples often overlook the little things that can mar their marriage. They buffer against the big things, but are totally unprotected against the little things. Yet, in the long run, the little things can be every bit as destructive as the big things. For example, unresolved anger and lingering bitterness can poison the marriage fountain. No doubt, this is the reason why Paul instructed the saints at Ephesus not to let the sun go down upon their wrath (Eph. 4:26-27). He knew that the devil would use unresolved anger to drive the couple apart or to tempt them in other ways. He knew that over time the root of bitterness could spring up and trouble them (Heb.

12:15; cf. Eph. 4:31). Wise couples pay attention to the little foxes that can spoil the vines.

Their Love Was Selfless

Solomon's bride declared, "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies" (SOS 2:16; cf. 6:3). Solomon and the Shulamite belonged to one another. They sought the best for each other. Their love wasn't "puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4). It didn't seek its own (1 Cor. 13:5).

For sure, the phrase, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" contemplates the physical relationship that God declares honorable and undefiled in marriage (Heb. 13:4). Once married, Solomon's body belonged to his bride and her body belonged to him (1 Cor. 7:4). Each was to give mutual benevolence to the other (1 Cor. 7:3). The book clearly records that they did so (SOS 4:16; 5:1; 7:7-9). In the seventh chapter, the Shulamite declares:

I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved (SOS 7:10-13).

Solomon and his bride demonstrated selfless love by meeting one another's needs in this area.

For sure, physical intimacy was not the only place where Solomon and his bride showed selfless love. They showed their selfless love in countless acts of service.

The Shulamite spoke of the shade (protection) and the fruit (provision) that Solomon provided her (SOS 2:3). Furthermore, she spoke of her desire to

learn from her mother how to serve him better (SOS 8:2).

Husbands and wives today need to manifest this same selfless spirit. Of course, the New Testament gives us an example even greater than that of Solomon and his bride. The New Testament gives us the example of Christ. To the saints at Ephesus, Paul wrote:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-32).

In this passage, we see that marital love is supposed to be submissive (Eph. 5:21-24), sacrificial (Eph. 5:25), spotless (Eph. 5:26-27), steadfast (Eph. 5:28), sensible (Eph. 5:28), sensitive (Eph. 5:29), and singular (Eph. 5:30-

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Deuteronomy 5:32

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33). In this part of our study, we are focused primarily on the submissive, sacrificial, and sensitive aspects of marital love. As you know, this is the spirit that Christ manifested in humbling Himself and in giving Himself for us (Phil. 2:5-8). If our Lord could take up the towel to serve those He loved, surely we can do the same (John 13).

Their Love Was Strong

Two times in the Song, we find the expression, "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away" (SOS 2:17; 4:6). Solomon and the Shulamite promised to be faithful unto each other until death parted them. Their love was as strong as death. Flood waters couldn't drown it and money couldn't buy it. In the eighth chapter, we read:

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned (SOS 8:6-7).

In this discussion, we see the seal of their love (upon the heart and arm), the strength of their love (as strong as death), the singularity of their love (fiery jealousy), and the steadfastness of their love (many waters could not quench it). Of course, our focus is on the strength and steadfastness of their love. The wedding ring is the seal today. It reminds us of our promise to be faithful until death.

The love of Solomon and the Shulamite was strong because it was built according to the pattern. The winds, rains, and floods of life couldn't shake it because it was founded upon the rock (Mt. 7:24-27; cf. Eph. 6:10).

Sadly, many today do not enter into marriage with the same commitment that characterized Solomon and his bride. They enter into marriage with thoughts of it as a temporary arrangement. However, marriage is for life (Rom. 7:1-3).

Conclusion

In this study, we have seen that godly marriage is better than divorce, misery, and a host of other things. We have examined the song that God wants us to sing with our spouses. Even if you are not a great singer, the song will be beautiful, if you will follow God's direction.

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