

The Song of Songs

Fruitful Wooing in the Partnership of Life

'It is critical that the church of Christ reclaim a thoroughly biblical understanding of the purity, propriety, and legitimate enjoyment of sex within its God-given bounds, as expressed in his word...The intimacy of detail describing the love relationship between a man and a woman may be regarded as the unique feature of this book of wisdom...' (O P Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom*, p341, 345)

5 Key themes the Song teaches about sexual love

1. Poetic Praise of Sexual Love

- Bride and Groom idealised as King and Queen of the earth
 - Royally in love, and revelling in the delightful fruits of a paradise love-garden (3:6-11, the 'royal' wedding; 4:12-5:1; 6:2-3, 11-12; 7:11-13; 8:13-14 etc)

2. Pleasureful Practice of Sexual Love

- Bodily delight is expressed evocatively and erotically.
 - The writer is no prude, but is not crude either. 'Descriptions are "intimate, suggestive, and even explicit; yet the use of metaphors function as much to hide the body as to display it."' (OP Robertson, *ibid*, p339)
 - 'Wasf' undressing songs: 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-9; 7:1-9; also 4:16ff; 5:2-5 etc

3. Painful Problems of Sexual Love

- But this earth is not Eden, and there are hindrances and enemies of love
 - Struggles of separation, and restraining intimacy before marriage, maintaining intimacy within marriage, and dark dangers to ruin right sexual love all around (foxes 2:15; brutal watchmen 5:7, forces of evil 'floods' 8:7 etc)

4. Protective Purity of Sexual Love

- Wisdom calls for realism: care is needed when unleashing the power of sex
 - Don't 'stir up or awaken love until it pleases' ie comes properly (2:7; 3:5; 8:4)

5. Prophetic Picture of Sexual Love

- Sexual love within the covenant of marriage points to something greater
 - Ultimately the 'Best of Songs' points us the best that is yet to be (Hosea 11:1,8; Eph 5:25; John 3:16; Gal 2:20; hence Eph 2:2ff; 1 Pet 1:22)

The Song of Songs

Outline and general shape of the book

A 1:1-2:7 **Anticipation: of the real satisfaction in marriage**

- The Romance of awakening sexual love
- But there are dangers. 'I am sick with love' (2:5). Sex is powerful!
- *So: be very careful when awakening love! 'not until desires come properly' (2:6)*

B 2:8-3:5 **Arousal: real struggles before marriage**

- The Restraint of sexual love
- Needed so as not to spoil the vineyard of love (2:15, 17 etc).
- The ecstasy and agony: right separation and growing intimacy. Searching and separation bring pain as well as pleasure in the 'not-yet'.
- *So, be very careful when awakening love! (3:5)*

C 3:6-5:1 **Consummation: real satisfaction in the security of marriage**

- The Release for sexual love
- Bride and Groom who have kept themselves, joined now like King & Queen
- The delights of paradise garden unlocked at last (4:12ff)
- Exclusive, proper sexual union to be commended and *celebrated* (5:1)

B' 5:2-8:4 **Arrival: real struggles within marriage**

- The Realities of sexual love
- In a still-fallen world where Eden is not yet restored, in love or in life
- The ecstasy and agony: wrong separation and cooling intimacy. There will be pain as well as pleasure even in marriage in the 'not-yet'. But sex heals.
- *So, be very careful when awakening love! (8:4)* Marriage isn't nirvana!

A' 8:5-14 **Affirmation: of the real security of marriage**

- The Resoluteness of sexual love
- Real and right love is passionately *possessive* – like the fiery love of God himself. It outlasts death, overcomes the floods of evil & is beyond price (8:6-7).
- Only *exclusive* love, kept jealously chaste & committed brings contentedness and completeness: 'Shalom' (8-10)
- The real Solomon had wealth and wives galore (v11 – his harem? cf 1Kg 11:3), but this Bride's love-vineyard is her own, and only for her lover-husband (12)
- So their intimacy *endures* and grows in the garden of love (13-14)
- *Chastity and commitment* leads to enduring *communion & contentment in love*.