

HOW TO IMPROVE

YOUR MARRIAGE

By Studying

Love and romance in the Bible

Glenn Pease

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By studying love and romance in the Bible

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Glenn Pease

and

Steve Pease

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Do you have the perfect marriage? Do you ever have problems with your spouse? Do you ever wish they would be different in how they do things? Do you wish your partner was more like when you met them?

Thinking about these questions and your answers will make you think about if things could be better, and how together you can make things great.

In this book we will discuss what God says, and what Jesus did, and what Godly men in the Bible did to make their love stronger and their marriages better. Then we will discuss some very easy to do things that you can do to show your partner you love them and that you want them to be happy. You will learn that if you praise your partner, in little things, the big things will go much easier.

Almost everyone is in love when they get married, what happens, do we fall out of love? If so why do we fall out of love? Things change when the honeymoon is over and we start living our everyday lives of work and dealing with normal things that happen in life. Many times the things that happen in a marriage are just like the news on TV. If you watch the daily news you will notice that you don't see very many good and happy things.

Remember how you first felt when you fell in love, how that person couldn't do anything wrong. You put them on a pedestal and thought they were wonderful, and you would do anything to see them and make them feel love and important? What's changed?

Happy things don't really make good news stories; most of the things that make the news are tragic or violent things. The news looks for the sensational. The weather reports are the worst. Almost every storm that is coming could be the worst storm ever.

We tend to do the same thing in our relationships, especially in marriage. One of you does something that the other one doesn't like. They could do 100 good things, but what we remember is that one bad thing.

Some people hold those things in and don't talk about them until it builds up

and builds up; pretty soon they are really upset about something that probably didn't make any difference in the first place.

We have all heard or done this. One person says something in an argument in the heat of passion, something mean, and something that is said at the time to hurt the other person. It's most likely something that they didn't really mean.

Sometimes things are said that are very hard to take back and to forget.

Then in turn the other person retaliates by saying something hurtful back, something they didn't really mean and they can't take it back either. It makes both feel unloved. Now you have two people fighting about something that's probably insignificant and they're blowing it so out of proportion, and they may never get over it.

If you think about what God want you to do, or what Jesus would do, you know he would not retaliate or even say something that would hurt another person. Unfortunately man is sinful and selfish. We want to be like Jesus, but we have a long way to go to get there.

If we look at the relationships in the Bible, the great love stories in the Bible, we see how to deal with things that would push a lot of people over the top. Because of Love, they continue to build the relationships by not saying or doing things that hurt the other.

Little things can create big conflict in relationships, but little things can also create unstoppable love and respect. Things as simple as thanking your partner for little things they do every day that are not big but important. Things like thanking your partner for doing the dishes, or taking out the trash. That little thank you lets them know you notice and that you care that they do little things for you.

I am a retired pastor, I have spent 50 years in the ministry, preaching and counseling and spreading the word of God. I have dedicated my life to helping people come to know Jesus and to help them make their lives on this earth be the path to the ultimate goal of spending eternity in heaven with the one true God.

I thank you for purchasing my book and I hope that you will get something out of it that will help you in your journey as well to heaven, and help you build

better loving relationships along the way.

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ALONE IN PARADISE

Based on Gen. 2:18

Back in the days when women were fighting for the right to vote there were a number of women speakers who could expound eloquently on the virtues and values of women. The story is told of one such speaker who brought her message to a conclusion by saying, "Where would man be today without the care and comfort of women? Where would man be today without the hands and heart of women? Where would man be today without the labor and love of women? Just tell me where would man be today without women?" Just then a little man shouted from the back of the crowd, "Paradise!"

The battle of the sexes is one in which each side seeks to reinforce its position by going back to paradise and showing that everything would have been great if it hadn't been for the other. Like the woman who said to her husband, "Our marriage would have been perfect if it hadn't been for you." He probably agreed with the philosophy, but not the application. Women delight in pointing out that man was incomplete without a woman and that even in paradise, he was not happy without her.

There is no lack of poems, to back up her claim to be the poetry of earth as the stars are the poetry of heaven. Hargrave wrote, "Clear, light - giving harmonies, women are the terrestrial planets that rule the destinies of mankind." Moore adds, "Ye are the stars of the night, ye are gems of the morn, ye are dewdrops, whose luster illumines the thorn."

Men are quick to label this as sentimental nonsense, and they insist that Adam was better off when he had paradise to himself. They also have poetic support, for

Andrew Marvell has written,

Such was that happy Garden - state
While man there walked without a mate;
After a place so pure and sweet,
What other help could yet be meet?
But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two paradises 'twere in one
To live in paradise alone.

Women retaliate with the words of Dryden,

Our sex, you know, was after yours designed,
The last perfection of the Maker's Mind:
Heaven drew out all the gold for us, and left
Your dross behind.

Man then counters with these words:
For woman due allowance make.
Formed of a crooked rib was she.
By Heaven she could not straighten be;
Attempt to bend her, and she'll break.

On and on the battle rages adinfinitum, adnauseum, or in other words, until it gets sickening. We are interested in this battle merely because it calls our attention to a basic human need, and the only adequate solution to meet that need. Man is made a social creature, and if he does not feel a part of society, or if he does not have companionship, he ceases to find value in life. One of the most unbearable conditions of life is that of loneliness. We want to examine God's relationship to this basic human problem and seek to discover what it means for our own lives. In spite of all the fighting, men and women need each other, and they know it. Josh Billings said, "Adam without Eve would be as stupid as a person playing checkers alone." In verse 18, we find two aspects of God's relationship to the problem of loneliness.

GOD'S ATTITUDE

God says it is not good for man to be alone. Man was to be a social being, and so he can never be complete alone. Loneliness is opposed to the very nature of God Himself. God is not alone and never has been in all eternity. He is a trinity of three persons in one Godhead. He has had eternal fellowship within His own being. One of the key values of recognizing God to be three persons in one, is that it explains His self - sufficiency. No other being is self - sufficient, for they are dependent upon God and other forms of life. God alone is self - sufficient, for He is Triune, and all the requirements needed for love and fellowship are contained within His very nature. God is complete in Himself, but man is incomplete in himself.

God did not intend to make man in His image with the nature of love and desire for companionship, and then not meet that need. However, for a while, Adam was alone, and it is interesting that God would say that it was not good. This means that with all the beauty of nature, and with all the abundant provision of the garden, and with a job to keep him active, and with many animals to keep him company, there was still something missing. There was an imperfection

even in Paradise. That imperfection was not in what was there, but it what was not there. Without human companionship, all of the physical blessings of the universe cannot satisfy the human heart. If this was true in paradise, how much more is it real in our world today?

Cyril H. Powell, in his book *The Lonely Heart*, tells of how an English landlady found one of her lodgers unconscious and almost dead due to gas fumes. It was discovered that he was once a well - known actor whose name had been a household word in England. Yet apparently all of his popularity and prosperity had not gained for him any true friends, and when he ceased to be famous, he was left alone. Unlike the Prodigal Son in the same situation he had no father to return to, and evidently he did not know of God's good news of acceptance, and so he wrote a note saying, "I am taking the only way out of this hell of loneliness"

If this was an isolated incident, we could ignore it, but the fact is, this is a common experience. The statistics are shouting out the truth from every land that it is not good for man to be alone. It is, in fact, a very positive evil. One of the most frequent causes for suicide is loneliness. G. Ray Jordan wrote, "Loneliness has driven far more people to nervous collapse than all the theoretical doubts of mankind added together." Erick Fromm in *The Art Of Living* wrote, "The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity."

All the facts from every field of study confirm what God stated from the beginning, and that is that it is not good for man to be alone. Man has to concede the point to the women here. Paradise was incomplete without her, and every life is lacking without someone to love, and someone to love them. This was God's attitude in the beginning, and is, no doubt, His attitude yet today. However, God does more than express an attitude. We see also in this verse:

GOD'S ACTION

God says, "I will make him a helper fit for him." God did not stop with an attitude, but went on to action. He did not make a pronouncement, and then not follow it up with performance. He was not concerned with a resolution only, but was determined to come up with a remedy. It is a failure to follow God at this point that has led to the church becoming ineffective and meeting the world's deepest needs. Paul Rees says something that we all know to be true, but he says it in a way that we need to hear it.

"One of our substitutes for basic Christian action is talk. We are beguiled by the wizardry of words. Our fault here is both collective and personal. Churchmen, meeting in Conference or synod, labor long and tediously over "resolutions" and "pronouncements" they are going to make to their constituents and the world. Often the mountain labors and brings forth a mouse! Some tame, nebulous statement is drooled out ecclesiastical jargon, which pitifully few people will ever hear or heed. We easily mistake the saying of a thing for the doing of it. And that goes for the piously woolly talk that you and I do as individuals fully as much as it does for the high - sounding "whereas" and "resolves" of professional Ecclesiastics."

It is simply another way of saying that faith without works is dead. We have told ourselves so often that there is no merit in good works that we have begun to believe it.

We have started to believe that there is merit in doing nothing. We need to realize that good works cannot save us, but they may be the means by which God can save others. Someone has divided the world into three classes of people. They are those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who do not know what is happening, and the last includes the vast majority. If we take Christianity seriously, it demands that we dare not be in any category but the first. Christians must be people of action.

The whole Bible is a history of God's great redemptive acts, and it is a challenge to his people to become Godlike in their acts. God cared about Adam's loneliness, and He did something about it. If we care, then we too must do something about the great need of lonely people. Paul Tournier in his book *Escape from Loneliness* says that practically everyone is lonely, and the root of this is in man's sin and revolt against God. Man's loneliness is basically his lack of an ultimate companion. The unsaved person recognizes that no relationship will last, for all people must die. What can a Christian do about this? That is just the point, for though we cannot provide a mate for every lonely person, nor can we create friends for everyone, but we have a Gospel that offers every person a relationship to Christ, and it is an eternal relationship. Christ is the Friend who alone can satisfy that empty place in the lives of all people.

We need to remember that it was not as a sinner running from God that Adam was alone, and that God then said it was not good for him to be alone. It was

an estate of perfect fellowship with God that he still felt alone. Jesus experienced great loneliness not because he was out of fellowship with God, but because he lacked human companionship. Jesus experienced what the great majority of people experience. There can be crowds everywhere, and still not anyone really near you, who understands you. It is not true then that a Christian needs only to trust in God to escape all the loneliness. We are still social creatures, and without friendship and companionship of others, we will still experience loneliness, even when we have good fellowship with God. It is at this point that the church plays a major role in providing fellowship. Christians must learn to accept one another with all of their differences and weaknesses, and they must seek to provide a companionship in which there is real understanding. This is the essence of what makes the church different from other groups of people. Where there is not total acceptance of persons the church is failing to be the church. We live in a world of loneliness with the only satisfactory answer to it. God has given His Son, and the Son has given his life that we might be reconciled to God and know him as Father, and Jesus as Friend. All those who are friends of Jesus are friends of one another, and this is the key to overcoming loneliness.

THE CELEBRATION OF LOVE

Based on Gen. 29:1 - 30

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, the famous medical missionary to Labrador, was a fast worker when it came to falling in love. He was on board a ship returning to England when he spotted a charming lady on deck. He was 43 years old, and so it was not as though he had never spotted a attractive lady before. However, this woman had such an appeal to him that he proposed to her shortly after he met her. She naturally resisted saying, "But you don't even know my name." He responded, "It doesn't matter. I know what it's going to be." Here was a case of love at first sight, and history is full of such romantic stories where people find their mate in a moment and live happily ever after.

Others who are equally open to God's leading have a tough time finding their life partner. Billy Graham is a prime example of this side of the coin. Graham was going steady with Emily Cavanaugh in college. He felt she was beautiful, talented, and spiritual, and he told his parents he planned to ask her to be his wife. She admired Billy a great deal, but she came to a point where she told him she had reconsidered his proposal, and she could not accept it. He was devastated and felt the world had ended.

Later, Graham developed a relationship with Ruth Bell. Their love grew, but it also hit a snag. She was a missionary kid and felt God wanted her to be missionary. But Billy felt called to be an evangelist. They became engaged in 1941, but at Wheaton College, Ruth told Billy she was unsure after all. There were tears and struggles before Ruth could make a commitment to be his wife. She realized he needed the balance she could give him. He was too serious, and she could add the lighter touch to his personality. They have had a long and happy marriage, but the point is, there was struggle and a lot of adjustments. Love stories can be romantic love at first sight, or tangled webs of struggle type stories. In one of the great love stories of the Bible, we have a case which is both. The story of Jacob and Rachel is a classic case of love at first sight. She came with her flock of sheep to the well, and Jacob became an instant servant by rolling away the stone from the well to impress her. A short time after he was negotiating for her hand in marriage. However, the story takes on the characteristics of complexity and struggle as Laban throws his oldest daughter Leah into Jacob's bed, and thus began a lifetime of conflict and

competition in Jacob's love life.

Out of this both simple and complex love story, God brought forth his people, the 12 tribes of Israel and the blood line to the Messiah, and the greatest love story of all - Christ and His bride the church. Romantic love is to be celebrated because the whole redemption plan of God's love revolves around the romance of human love. You cannot tell the story of God's love without the story of the love of husband and wife. Romance is at the very heart of God's plan of salvation, and it becomes an effort in futility to try and separate love into the sacred and the secular.

Romantic love is a vital part of the sacred plan of God to save a lost world. It is valid; therefore, to celebrate the gift of romance. God does so Himself by making romantic love such a major part of His revelation. It is exalted to the highest level in the Song of Songs where we read of romantic love in 8:6 - 7, "It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love it would be utterly scorned."

Jacob's love for Rachel illustrates this. He wanted her as his mate so strongly that he would work for seven years to possess her as his own, and verse 20 says the seven years were like only a few days because of his love for her. It was a small price to pay for such a treasure. Love was his motivation; love was his energy, and love was the fire that could not be quenched even though one obstacle after another was thrown on its flame. There is no escape from the emotional side of love. It is a passion, or an intense feeling. The story of Christ's suffering for his bride is called a passion play. His intense feelings were a passion. Passion can be a torment, and love sick people can go through torment in what they are willing to pay in terms of suffering to possess the object of their love.

I remember the risks I used to take to see Lavonne when she lived 20 miles away from me. I was a teen driving 50 dollar cars, and more than once I broke down on the highway between her home and mine. If I had a date with her, nothing else mattered but the keeping of that date. I literally risked my life to keep a date with her. Blizzard warnings were irrelevant, and I would take off in a car most people would not keep for parts, and head into the storm to get to her. In our courtship, I put 18,000 miles on an assortment of junk bound cars as I traveled that 20-mile stretch again and again. I had to get out sometimes and put snow in the radiator to keep the car from burning up. I had to get help from both her father and mine to get out of the ditch. I had to suffer the torment of

near worthless vehicles again and again, and all the pain of it was nothing for the joy of being with Lavonne. I know the power of the passion to possess. Romantic and Redemptive love has this in common, they are passions to possess. God's passions to possess fallen man, and Christ's passion to possess his lost sheep were so great that they took on infinite suffering in order to make it happen. The greatest power in the universe is the power of love. It moves and motivates persons toward more goals than any other power. It is the prime mover of God, for God is love, and because He is love he created all that is, and he provided a plan whereby fallen man can be redeemed and restored to fellowship with Himself. Love is why there is anything to celebrate at all. Love is why there is a heaven to hope for, and why there can be joy in a fallen world.

The most powerful motive for the overcoming of any problem is love. Aleida Huissen had smoked for 50 years and tried often to quit but just could not do it. Then 79-year-old Leo Jansen came into her life and proposed. He refused to set the wedding day; however, until she quit her smoking. Will power had failed her for years, but love was stronger, and she was able to quit for the sake of love. Love was the passion that gave her the power to do what she could not do without love. A. Z. Conrad said of love, "It furnishes to the world its progress passion. It is storm - defying, energy - conquering, venture - challenging, soul - awakening. It eats up the fires sent to consume it. It swallows the floods sent to drown it."

If we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, it will not be hard to give up anything that interferes with that love. If we cannot do it, we lack the love that gives us the power of passion. If we cannot give up, things that hinder our relationship with our mate, it is a sign that we have let the passion of love drain away. When we lose the passion of love, we lose the power that makes all relationships the priority they need to be.

Jacob loved Rachel, and when her father's plan was thrown into their lives, and he had to work another seven years to possess her; he did it for his love for her kept her in the place of priority. This love story is like many of the classic romance stories of literature. It is often like a tragedy. Rachel had to fight the battle of the other woman, which was her own sister. She had to watch as Leah gained status by giving Jacob children she could not give him. She eventually bore him his beloved Joseph, but she never won the competition to give him the most children. She also died before Leah, and Leah got to be buried with Jacob in the end. There were a lot of tears in this love story, but it

is still a beautiful and powerful story of passion and priority that should motivate us who have less complex lives to celebrate the joys of love.

The passion of Jacob for Rachel was persistent through all the changes of life. Rachel did not stay the cute little shepherdess she was the day they met, and the day he fell in love with her. In chapter 30, she became a jealous wife and a nag. She wanted children so badly that she became obsessed, and Jacob had to get angry with her. Later, she stole her father's idols, and she risked getting Jacob into serious trouble. It was not a trouble-free marriage at all. Both had blemishes on their character, but they never ceased to put each other in a place of priority. "Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds."

As monogamists, we think we only marry one mate, but the fact is we all marry a number of people because our mates keep changing, and we have to adjust to these changes and learn to love a different person than the one we married.

Through the years all mates change, and sometimes it can be hard to adjust, for your mate may not be the person now that you expected them to be for life. You have to fall in love again with a new person.

Those who cannot adjust to changes in their mate often get divorced. All couples go through what is called divorce periods where they are in the process of deciding if they love the new and different people they have become. This is where love is again the power that keeps them together. If love is allowed to fade, and there is no effort to rekindle the flame of passion, there is a danger that they will part. Those who make it through these periods do so because they work at rekindling the flame. Those who neglect love and just drift tend to drift apart completely. Divorce is a refusal to remarry the new person your mate has become. Long - range marriage is a commitment to keep on marrying the mate you have no matter how often they change.

Here is the other side of love that goes beyond the feelings and emotions of passion to the act of the will. Love on this level is a matter of choice. In Gen., 30:2 Jacob is angry at Rachel. He is no longer filled with passion to roll away stones for her, or to labor for seven years for her. He now has negative emotions, and he wonders how she can be so ridiculous as to hold him responsible for her barrenness.

If love was only passion and positive emotions, Rachel could have been divorced at this point, but Jacob's love was a commitment to her to love her even when she was totally unreasonable. One-sided definitions of love that stress it to be a feeling fall far short of the real thing. Some have defined love this way:

1. "A tickling sensation around the heart that can't be scratched."
2. "Love is a dizziness that won't let me go about my bizziness."

Such feeling oriented definitions lead to serious problems when people take them as the whole picture, for these feelings may be real for a time but they do not persist, and if people expect them to always be present, they will feel that love has left them and they will move on to find it again with someone else. Feeling oriented love will lead people into affairs, for people can have strong feelings, and even passion for complete strangers who are attractive. If you let this kind of feeling and passion be your guide, you will never have a lasting relationship of love. Love is commitment and choice to be loyal to one person even when the feelings are not there.

The world's advice is to find a new partner when you come to a divorce period in your relationship. This is a rejection of the other side of love, which is commitment. Commitment is what enables love to bridge the divorce period in marriage. The feelings cannot leap that gorge, and so two people are cut off from each other, unless there is some other means by which they can remain in contact. Commitment is that means. Eliminate commitment and live only on feeling love, and you can count on being a statistic, for divorce is almost inevitable where there is no commitment.

Commitment is a choice. If I commit to turning right I cannot also turn left. Every commitment means a loss of some other choice. If I choose to be faithful to one person, I cannot also choose to play the field. On the other hand, if I choose to play the field, I cannot ever again choose to have been faithful to one. Everybody has to give up something, and so the wise person looks at the record of where different choices lead. Are promiscuous people the happiest people? Are prostitutes noted for being the happiest partners in wedded bliss? Does anybody give the playboy highest marks in being the example for youth to follow? The facts are that two people committed to one another for a lifetime are always the ideal of what love is all about. This is the kind of love that continues to grow, and makes a poet like

A. Warren writes

We could not know, my dear; we could not guess
How years augment the miracle of love;
How autumn brings a depth of tenderness
That is beyond young April's dreaming of!
How there would burn a richer flame some day
Then that which first threw glory on our way.

The Bible makes it clear that God's ideal is two people who fall in love and passionately seek to possess each other, and spend the rest of their lives committed to weather all storms, and keep that passion alive until they are parted by death. This means that marriage is not a gamble. It is a sure thing that it is going to be costly. Love is a commitment to pay that cost of maintaining the relationship. The Jacob - Rachel love story shouts out for all of history to hear that bad times, conflict, and obstacles do not destroy a love which has gone beyond feelings to commitment. The reason the world is full of people who once loved each other, but are now divorced is because of a one-sided love, which is passion that never developed the other side of commitment.

The number-one secret of a strong marriage is the assurance that your mate is committed to you. You can fail them, and get angry at them, but you know they are committed to you. This is the solid rock on which marriage is built. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And Paul said, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is the foundation for security in our faith. When you have that kind of security in your marriage, you build on solid rock and not on sand. Lack of commitment leads to insecurity.

If we had no assurance that Christ's love was permanent in spite of all our sin and failure, we could have no sense of security at all. Some polls have revealed that many Christians feel spiritually divorced, for they do not have the assurance, they will go to heaven. They have a very unhappy spiritual marriage. Mates who do not feel secure are also miserable, for they feel their failure could lead them to be forsaken. Commitment is what makes mates realize their failure will not ever lead to being forsaken. It can be costly to make such a commitment, but it is worth it for those who want the full potential of love in their relationship.

When we celebrate love, we need to see it as a matter of rejoicing in the cost two people have been willing to pay to keep their relationship alive and growing. Jacob had to give up always feeling the energy of his passion to labor for Rachel, and instead feel the energy of anger at her pouting and depression. She had to give up the ideal of being the one to give him his first son, and the most sons. She had to endure the heartache of barrenness. Anybody could write a script for romance better than what reality produces, but reality is the price we have to pay for love in a fallen world. Nobody gets it without cost, and that even includes God. However, God says, and history says, and life says, love is worth the cost. Therefore, let us rejoice in romantic and redemptive love, and

celebrate love as God's greatest gift.

INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

based on Num. 12

A boy in Harvard College, many years back, got his father in Maine to come to Cambridge and see the football game between Yale and Harvard. As they sat down, the boy slapped his father on the back and said, "Dad, for three dollars you are going to see more fights than you ever saw before." The old man smiled and replied, "I'm not so sure about that Son. That's what I paid for my marriage license." Marriage is like football in several ways. It covers a lot of ground, and there are many obstacles to overcome. Whoever is not prepared to face obstacles had better not plan to play football, or get married.

The football player faces two kinds of obstacles. There are those built into the game, and which must be accepted to give the game meaning. Then there are the illegal, or unjust, obstacles, which we call dirty playing. Sometimes the dirty player is penalized, and often he gets by with it, and the innocent player suffers unjustly. Those who enter marriage face obstacles they know to be part of the game. There are natural and normal trials, struggles, and adjustments. Marriage partners also face the obstacles of dirty play as well. They face the opposition of the ignorant, the cruel, the prejudiced, the jealous, and those with numerous other evil motives.

Moses had to face this kind of dirty play when he chose to marry across the race line. He chose an Ethiopian, who was a descendant of Ham, to be his wife. His sister and brother were offended by this union, and they made it known publicly. They sought to degrade Moses because of it. Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says concerning the Ethiopian, "It is likely that a black slave girl is meant and that the fault found by Miriam and Aaron was with the indignity of such a union." Most are convinced she was black, or at least dark, but there is a possibility that she was no darker than Moses himself. She could have been a part of the Cushites who were of Arabian stock, and less dark than the Ethiopians. This is really irrelevant since the major fact is that it was an interracial marriage.

The text indicates that Miriam did not approve of the union, but it does not give the slightest hint as to why. It could have that it had nothing to do with her race at all, even though this is assumed by almost everyone. It is possible that she was jealous of the woman. There is an ancient translation that reads, "Because of the beautiful woman he had married, for he had married a beautiful woman." Jealousy could have been the problem, and not racism, for it was thought to be

a disgrace at this early stage for a Jew to marry a Gentile.

Many find a typology here. Moses is like Christ marrying a Gentile, who represents the church. Miriam and Aaron are the angry Jews who oppose this union. All of this is historically true, but we have no basis for reading it back into this text as a prophetic type. We cannot read race hatred and prejudice back into the hearts of Miriam and Aaron. All we can say is that we have here an instance of interracial marriage by one who is a great man of God, and that he was upheld by God, and the opposition was judged. Moses was not lowered in his dignity before God, or the people, but is exalted as being a servant of God. His marriage across race lines did not reduce his role in the least. God appears to be highly indifferent towards the matter of race or color in marriage. There is not biblical evidence against interracial marriage, but much that would show it to be perfectly normal and honorable.

But why would anyone marry a person from another race? Why do you suppose Moses married an Ethiopian when there were all kinds of Jewish girls he could choose from as the leader of his nation? Solomon, no doubt, had dozens, if not hundreds of dark-skinned wives, or concubines. Many were gifts from foreign governments. Moses, however, freely chose to marry one outside of his own race. The reason is likely the same as the one that accounts for interracial marriages all over the Western Hemisphere. He fell in love with her. It is a human fact that where any two races are in frequent contact, there will be intermarriage. People will fall in love with people of any race if they are in contact.

A little-known fact is that when Israel was delivered from Egypt a great many people of mixed races also went out with them. In the 400 years of captivity, there was a good deal of interracial marriage. Joseph, who brought his people into Egypt, married Aseneth, the daughter of an Egyptian priest. He could do this, even as a member of a minority race, because he rose to a high level social status. Jews and Egyptians would intermarry, but most such marriages would be between the Jews and other slaves, such as the dark-skinned people of Ethiopia to the South. There would also be a mixture of Jews and Arabs. We read in Ex. 12:37 - 38, "And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them."

It is not surprising that Moses would find one of this mixed multitude attractive, and then choose to take her as his wife. She was among his people, and romantic love knows no race barrier. This is so true that there is no such

thing as a pure race. All races have intermarried down through the centuries. For example, if we study the genealogy of Jesus, we discover that Jesus was not a pure Jew. There is Gentile blood in his blood line. The Jews were forbidden to marry with the wicked Canaanites, but Rahab the Canaanite is in the genealogy of Jesus. He had in his blood line some of the blood of Canaan who was cursed by Noah.

Intermarriage with the Moabites was not allowed either, but Ruth the Moabite is in the genealogy of Jesus. She was, in fact, the grandmother of David, Jesus, as the son of David, had a Gentile for a grandmother. Jesus was not a pure Jew, and there are few who are. The fact that Jesus had interracial marriage in His family tree makes it obvious that there is only a disgrace in the mind of the racist who makes race an idol, and pure blood a god. You might ask; however, why were these marriages allowed to be a part of the blood line to the Messiah when they were forbidden in general? This is the key to the whole subject.

The reason marriage was forbidden between Jews and others was not at all based on race or color, but on belief and unbelief. The only kind of marriage the Bible forbids is a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. If anyone of another race becomes a believer, as did Rahab and Ruth, there is no longer any reason to forbid marriage. Anyone who enters the kingdom of God by faith in Christ becomes a potential mate for anyone else in the kingdom.

The secular scholars battle back and forth on the level of brain capacity, social and cultural equality, and other such issues, which are totally irrelevant to the Christian perspective. There is only one factor that makes any ultimate difference to the Christian, and that is the factor of faith in Christ. When that is present, all else is incidental. We will look at the problems the secondary factors do cause, but these are no basis for rejecting a legitimate interracial marriage.

Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and our example. Does He practice interracial marriage? Consider His bride the church. Here is marriage on the highest spiritual level, and we can discover that Jesus chooses all races to make up His bride. His bride is red and yellow, black and white. There are millions of racial differences in the body of Christ. The body, like the Head, is not of any pure race, but is both Jew and Gentile. The Head is more Jewish, and the body is more Gentile, but everywhere it is an interracial body. Christ receives all races, and the Holy Spirit indwells all races.

Here is the union on the highest level of God and man. It is very near blasphemy to suggest that what the Holy Spirit freely does on the spiritual

level is somehow evil on the physical level. If a colored person can be a part of the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit will impregnate them so that they bear spiritual children of God, who can find an objection to a white child of God taking a black child of God for his or her mate?

Let us recognize we are dealing here with a totally Christian perspective that is unique to the body of Christ, and no other philosophy or viewpoint can see this as the Christian does. Only the believer can see race from within the kingdom of God, and through the mind of Christ. We cannot expect that non — Christians will share this view. It is an exclusive Christian view.

Practically it means this: Any marriage between two believers is acceptable to the body of Christ. Race is irrelevant. A mixed marriage is preferable to an unmixed marriage of a believer and non - believer. If a white Christian has a choice of marrying a black Christian or a white non - Christian, he is obligated to Christ and the church to choose the black mate.

It is never right for a child of God to willfully and knowingly marry a non - believer. From a Christian perspective, an interracial marriage is always superior to a marriage between faith and non - faith. The deciding factor is faith. The Christian does not stand on anthropology or psychology, or any other ology. He stands in Christ, and sees all people through the eyes of Christ. From there he recognizes that those in Christ from every race are really the only pure race, for they alone are all equally children of God. All believers are as free as Moses to choose their mate from any race, as long as the mate chosen is also a believer.

This does not scratch the surface of the problem out there in the world where the vast majority are not Christians. When this message was written a good many years ago, there were still 19 states that forbid interracial marriages. This was progress; however, for in 1957, there were 30 states that forbid it. I have no figures as to when all were changed, but at that time the United States was the only place in the world where interracial marriage was against the law. This is no longer the case because of the advancement of civil rights. Interracial marriage is going on continuously, and has been, and that is why there is no such thing as a pure race. Whenever soldiers go to war, they choose mates from among the people they are fighting. During World War II American soldiers brought back over 5000 Chinese brides, and even 752 Japanese brides. All the hate propaganda against the enemy could not stop men and women from joining in marriage. This was true back in the days of Israel's conquest also. We read in Deut. 21:10 - 13.

"When you go forth to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God gives them into your hands, and takes them captive. And you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you have a desire for her and would take her for yourself as a wife. Then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and pare her nails, and she shall put off her captives' garb. She shall remain in your house and bewail her father and her mother a full month, after that you may go into her, and be her husband, and she shall be your wife." This has happened all through history, and there has probably never been a war where it did not lead to intermarriage of the enemies. When men see beauty they desire the beautiful one for a mate, and it makes no difference that they are enemies, or that they are of different races. Those who have fought for segregation know this, and that is the main reason for their objection to the races being together. They know they will fall in love with each other and marry each other. The fear of interracial marriage is behind most racism. Where does this leave the Christian? We have already made it clear that race purity is irrelevant to the church. Sherwood Wirt in his book *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical*, which Billy Graham has said every evangelical should read, wrote, "It is the mark of original sin that men take their greatest pride in things over which they exercise no control and for which they can take absolutely no credit. Human skin color falls into this category." We cannot join the racist and remain Christian.

We do not have to encourage interracial marriage any more than we have to encourage marriage between classes, but we do have to encourage all who are married of whatever races and classes, for it is a Christian obligation to be encouragers of people in whatever circumstance, when they are not doing anything that displeases God. Miriam and Aaron made this mistake, so we can learn not to make the same mistake.

RUTH'S ROMANCE

Based on Ruth 2:1f

Nowhere does history repeat itself more often than in the realm of romance. James Madison was the fourth president of the United States, and he was the chief framer of the Constitution. He was the greatest scholar among the Founding Fathers. However, when it came to romance, he was no big gun. In fact, he was the smallest of all the presidents. He was so thin and frail that he weighed only a 100 lbs. at his heaviest. He was very slow, and he was not magnetic.

He was jilted twice. He was 43 and still single when he met Dolly, who was 24. At that young age, she was already a widow because her husband died in an epidemic. She was taller and heavier than James, and there was just so much about them that was different. They were a highly unlikely pair to ever become a couple. However, they did, and it was one of the happiest, most celebrated, marriages in the history of the White House. They were ideal for each other, and Dolly Madison added a flare and dignity to the White House that it never had before. James lived longer than any other president who served two terms until Truman came along and topped him by six years. His romance made his story with a happy ending.

Thomas Jefferson, the third president also married a widow who was considerably younger than himself. History is filled with this theme, for if love does not make the world go around; most agree it does make the trip more enjoyable.

So it is in the book of Ruth. Romance plays a major role in God's plan. I don't know what God would have done had Adam not fallen for Eve, for the whole plan of God revolves around romance. Ruth is a story of romance, and there are so many parallels with her and Boaz, and numerous couples in history. Boaz was older, and he had status and security. Ruth was a lonely young widow. The potential for cupid is great if these two could only meet, but it seems so unlikely. Boaz is a big shot, and Ruth is not even on the social register. She is not only a poor nobody; she is not even a Jew.

People have a way of meeting; however, and sometimes it is by accident. In Oslo, Norway a motorist struck a young woman at a busy intersection. He wasted no time in getting her to the hospital, and he visited her during her recovery. Eventually, he asked her to marry him, and she said yes. They went

on their honeymoon in the car that brought them together by accident. Verse 3 hints that it was by accident that Ruth and Boaz met. The KJV says, "And her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." The RSV says she happened to come there, and the Living Bible says, as it happened. The NIV says, as it turned out. The point is, there was no plot or plan. Later on, the plot thickens, and Naomi does deliberately plan for Ruth to entice Boaz into a relationship. However, here at the start, there is no plan. It is just what happened as Ruth went out to work to keep from starving.

The Hebrew word here is MIQREH, which means a chance event, or an accident. It would be a fascinating diversion to study the subject of chance here, but for now we will pursue romance, and just point out that most people in our culture who meet and fall in love do so by chance, as did Ruth and Boaz. No one but God could have known of the series of events that brought them together.

I am always impressed by the events that brought Lavonne and I together. Three of my friends and I were at a drive in on the edge of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. We were waiting for a girl to come and take our order for root beers. It was a hot summer night, and the service was very slow. We were restless and decided to take off down the highway to the nearest little town to see what we could find. Who would ever dream that decision would lead to three of us marrying three girls in the small town of Dell Rapids? It was all because of slow service at a root beer stand. We just happened to be at the right place at the right time. So it was with Ruth and Boaz. One of God's most useful tools in history is chance.

Chance does not mean that God is not in it. Margaret Hese, a writer for Scripture Press tells of how her happily married sister of 30 years met her mate.

She was on a train when a soldier on leave sat down beside her. Throughout the conversation, she noted that one of the buttons was almost ready to fall off his coat. She took out a needle and thread and sewed it on. They kept in touch over half a continent apart for several years, while dating others. He found that he could not forget her. That sewing on of his button strongly touched him. This act of kindness changed their whole lives. The door of love is huge, but it so often swings on such a small hinge. Had he not by chance had that loose button the opportunity for her act of love would not have existed, and their first meeting may have been the last as well. Chance and romance are often partners. It put Ruth in the field of Boaz, and the first thing Boaz asked his

foreman was, "Whose young woman is that? Romance almost always starts with.

THE EYES

We can't say this was a case of love at first sight, but it was a case of interest at first sight. Sometimes the eyes do not like what they see, and it takes other factors to develop a relationship. John Keats thought Fanny Browne was awful looking, but after knowing her for a while he thought she was the most beautiful creature he knew. Everyone else still thought she looked awful, but love is not blind; it just develops a vision of beauty that non-lovers never see.

Alexander Dumas thought Sarah Bernhardt had the body of a broom stick, but when he fell in love with her, he said, "If nature had somewhat neglected her body, it had richly endowed her mind." He saw the beauty of inner being, and he loved her. We do not know what attracted Boaz to Ruth so rapidly, but he wasted no time in making her acquaintance. Christopher Morley said, "Fifty per cent of the world are women, yet they always seem a novelty."

Boaz thought so about this new young woman in his field. We do not know what Boaz was doing before this. Maybe his philosophy was, the proper study of mankind is man, but all of a sudden he changed his major to the study of a woman, and especially the one out in his field.

The Hebrew does not have a word for a bachelor, for seldom did one exist in Israel. However, here is Boaz that is a middle-age man of means, and he is single. We don't know why, but we know he rapidly reversed his romance state when he saw Ruth. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "A wet rag goes safely by the fire; and if a man is blind, he cannot expect to be much impressed by romantic scenery." For some reason, Boaz spotted Ruth, and immediately he saw something romantic he had not seen before. She may not have been his first love, but more important; she was his last love, and that is true romance. The New York library has over 2,000 books on love, but man knows more about the rocks on the moon than he does about what makes certain people fall in love. Ruth and Boaz were not unusual people. They were just ordinary pleasant loving people, and they represent the majority of the romances of history.

The entire book of Ruth revolves around the romance of ordinary people. That is one of its purposes for being a part of the Bible. It is God's stamp of approval on the ordinary person as an instrument of His plan of history. It magnifies its significance of the commonplace people. From the moment, Boaz

meets Ruth the rest of the book is the story of how their romance developed and led to marriage.

This is an everyday story, and has been from the day Adam saw Eve. Ruth is considered to be a beautiful woman, and not because there is any description of her, but because the more you know of her total character the more attractive, she becomes. People become attractive to the degree that you know them.

The reason most foreigners do not seem attractive to us Americans is because we do not know them. We see only the external form and face, and it is different and unusual. If we could know them, and hear their experience, their feelings, and their ideas, we would see more and more of their beauty.

Romance is simply getting to know people well enough so that the eyes can see their beauty.

The Gospels are the revelation of the life and beauty of Jesus in His attitudes and actions. It is by what we see in those accounts that we come to love Jesus. If there is anything lovely, Paul said, think on these things, for when you see loveliness of any kind you are in a state of romance. Romance begins with the eyes, but then it continues with the :

THE EARS

Few things in life are more appealing to either males or females than to hear pleasant things about themselves. Listen to this lover's conversation.

Do you think I am beautiful? You bet.

Are my eyes the loveliest you have gazed into? Shucks yes.

Is my mouth like a rosebud? Sure is.

Is my figure divine? Uh - huh.

Oh, Elmer, you say the nicest things!

Most women would prefer less prompting and more spontaneity. This is what we see in Boaz. His immediate response in discovering who she was, was to go to her, and like a gentleman, make her feel as welcome and secure as possible. She was his guest, and not a lonely isolated stranger. She was to make herself at home and feel safe, for he had given orders that she was to be treated with respect. He made it clear that the men were not to touch her. A woman alone was open game, and had no protection, unless she came under the care of a man with some power. Boaz gave Ruth that protection.

She is, of course, overwhelmed by this sudden good luck, and she asks why he has shown her such favor. Boaz did his homework. He knew all the good things about Ruth that were matters of public knowledge. The story of Ruth and her commitment to follow Naomi, and to leave her family and homeland spread all over Bethlehem. The news traveled fast, and Boaz, who had never even seen Ruth, knew the whole account.

We need to pause here, and point out that talking about people is not the same as gossip. Gossip is the spreading of information, or disinformation, that in some way injurious to the people talked about. The talking and sharing of facts and information about people, and the events that are shaping their lives are both legitimate and good. Here we see that the spread of the story of Ruth enabled him to have the ammunition, he needed to penetrate any defensiveness she might have. He told her he knew just how wonderful a person she was, and he asked the Lord to richly reward her for her faithfulness.

Ruth responds to these delightful words with pleasant words of her own. She expresses appreciation, and she acknowledges that Boaz has been a great comfort to her, even though she is nobody to him. Here are two people who recognize the ears as keys to romance. It is true we have to beware of the

smooth talker who uses words to entice rather than to build up. Some guys really have a line, like the guy who said, "I'm sure I've seen you somewhere before. I've been to all the Miss America contests."

We need constant reminders that the abuse of anything is never an adequate reason for ceasing to use it properly. Smooth talk can be a virtue, and pleasant complimentary words can be the greatest source of encouragement we give to those we love. Spurgeon said, "I have no doubt that much sorrow might be prevented if words of encouragement were more frequently spoken, and, therefore, to withhold them is sin." James said that when we know to do good and don't do it, it is a sin. If you think you get through a day without the sin of omission, forget it. Not a day goes by but what we could have said something pleasant and complimentary that we didn't say.

The ears are a great source of romance. God gets his will done in history by people who know this and use it to kindle romance, or to keep an old fire burning. If someone you love is not encouraged through the ear gate today, you have cast a vote against romance. The eyes with their seeing are fundamental to romance, and the ears with their hearing are also basic, but there can be no doubt that any successful romance will very soon involve :

THE MOUTH

Boaz had just met Ruth, and they had a brief friendly encounter. His next move was to invite her to join him for lunch, and he provided the lunch. This was their first date. We say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, but it works for women as well, especially if they are as poor and hungry as Ruth. She kept part of her lunch taking it home to Naomi. Ruth may be the first person on a date to ask for a doggie bag. Boaz was obviously interested in more than employer - employee relations. He was really a fast mover.

He was not as fast as the famous Dr. Wilfred Grenfell the medical missionary to Labrador. In 1908 at the age of 43, he was returning from a visit to England. On the deck of the Mauretania, he saw a lady that charmed him. A few hours later, he proposed to her. She said, "But you don't even know my name!" He responded, "It doesn't matter. I know what it's going to be!" That was truly love at first sight. Boaz took the more traditional approach of at least having a meal together before the wedding.

Food and love are linked together from birth. Being given food is the first expression of love that a child understands. It is his introduction to love, and all his life he will celebrate the love of family and special events by eating together. It is perfectly natural then that romantic love will quickly be led to two people eating with each other. Dating and eating, and marriage and eating are inseparable. This is not to say there is never any unpleasantness connected with eating and romance.

Former President Lyndon Johnson tells of the time he invited Billy and Ruth Graham to the White House for dinner. He describes the scene: "I asked during the dinner if Billy would give me the name of a good vice - presidential candidate. Instead of answering my question he shot out of his chair and yelled, "Ruth, why did you just kick me under the table?" She winced in embarrassment. Then she took a deep breath and said quietly, "Bill, shouldn't you limit your address to spiritual matters?" There could have been conflict, but Billy recognized what she was saying was true. He reached across the table and squeezed her hand. He did not always heed Ruth's advice, and he came to regret some of his political involvement's.

The mouth gets involved in romance, not just because of the pleasure of eating, but the mouth is the key instrument by which people give guidance to those they

love. Boaz gave such guidance to Ruth, and in chapter 3, the words of Ruth to Boaz, which she had received from the mouth of Naomi, led to his determination to win Ruth as his wife. The mouth, or tongue, is a source of great blessing or cursing. In romance and marriage, it plays a major role. Again, we use Billy Graham as an illustration. He had constant temptations to go other directions than his ministry. He was once offered great financial support to run for president, and a Hollywood director offered him a star role in an epic extravaganza. A major TV network offered him a million dollar a year contract to host a talk show. Ruth said to him on each occasion of these tempting offers:

"You're bounded duty to the Lord is elsewhere."

We are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and sometimes these words come through the mouth of those who love us best. Romance and the plan of God are not just linked in the book of Ruth. It is a part of all of history. Romance and redemption are inseparable. God makes the male - female relationship the symbol of His relationship to man. Christ is the groom, and the church is the bride. We are Ruth, and Christ is our Boaz. He is coming again to take us to the mansion he has prepared for the everlasting honeymoon.

Heaven will begin with a great wedding and the marriage supper of the Lamb. The eyes will see what none have ever seen before; the ears will hear what has never yet been heard, and the mouth will be filled with praise as never before, and we will enjoy eating like no gourmet as ever known. Joni, who is paralyzed and cannot use her legs, says she will dance with eternal romance in heaven. And that is what heaven will be, an everlasting romance.

Ruth's romance was just one of many that led to the coming of Jesus into the world to complete the romance of redemption, and the greatest love story ever told. All of us can be a part of the world of romance by a wise use of our eyes, ears, and mouth in relation to those whom we love. These are all involved in the Gospel that leads to the eternal romance, and to the romance we enjoy in time. We need to pay attention to how we use them, and be more romantic in this world that always needs more love.

THE CLEVER COUPLE

Based on Ruth 3:1 - 4, 4:1 - 10

A young couple who had just gotten married, and who had received many valuable wedding gifts, established their home in the suburb. One morning they received in the mail two tickets for a popular show in the city. A note said, "Guess who?" The couple were amused as they tried to find the identity of the donor, but they could not find out who sent them. They used the tickets, and they had a delightful evening. On their return home, late at night, still trying to figure out the mystery, they found their house stripped of every article of value. On the bare table in the diningroom was a piece of paper on which was written - "Now you know!"

Crooks have so many clever ways of robbing people that it has given the word clever a bad name. Vincent Teresa in his book *My Life in The Mafia* tells of numerous clever schemes, he used to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from innocent people, and sometimes not so innocent people. One that shows the thought and planning of these people is one I want to share. There was a big horse race called the Constitution Handicap. They put a fortune on Flaunt Less Light to win.

Non - clever people would give their horse drugs to help him win, but the Mafia knows the winner will be tested for drugs, and so they bribed the stable boys of the other five horses in the race. They juiced those five with a depressant. Their horse won by 7 links, and they made a hundred and sixty-three grand. There was a big stink over the race, but the only horse that was checked was their horse, and he was clean. Clever schemes like this enabled them to rip off billions of dollars a year.

Because history is full of the clever schemes of con men, and because the fall of man began with the clever, cunning, and crafty scheme of that old serpent the devil, we have a tendency to put cleverness in the category of vice rather than virtue. The Jews did not do so; however, but recognized cleverness as a great virtue, and one of the most powerful weapons in the cause of righteousness.

Yes,

they said, evil is clever, but it is the task of the righteous to outwit the evil. The book of Esther is about a very shrewd man named Haman, who out of personal pride almost succeeded in getting the Jewish people exterminated. He was only foiled in his plot because Mordecai and Esther were even more clever,

and they could turn the tables on him, and he was hung on his own gallows. The whole theme of wisdom in the Old Testament deals with the virtue of being clever enough to outwit the clever appeals of evil. The fool falls for the wiles of the devil, but the clever stay one jump ahead of him. After all, what is the battle of life all about? It is about outwitting all the clever ways of the evil one to keep us from fulfilling the will of God. Cleverness is part of the image of God in us. He is the cleverest of all Persons in the universe. His wisdom is a marvel as we study his creation. His cleverness in figuring out how to outwit Satan, and save a lost world, when Satan seems to have all the advantages of a fallen free willed creature who tends toward evil.

Jesus faced the clever tempter, but he was cleverer than the first Adam, and He outwitted the old serpent and all his agents. No trap set for Him by the Pharisees could ensnare him. Jesus said that we were to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and He practiced what he preached. He lived his whole life outwitting the devil, and He died a spotless lamb of God for the sin of the world.

He was, without question, the cleverest man who ever lived.

He was a perfect man, and a perfect man by definition is clever. There are few, if any, who become key links in the plan of God who are not in some way clever, and this went for both Ruth and Boaz. They were just ordinary people, but they were clever people, and from their story, we can learn why it is important for us to strive at being clever. By their cleverness they got themselves into the blood line of the Messiah. The first thing we want to see is that :

COMPLEXITY DEMANDS CLEVERNESS

Boaz and Ruth had something of a romance going, but it was not what you would call a whirlwind romance. He watched her labor in the fields, and they ate lunch together. They both found it pleasant, but this was not going anywhere. Ruth was dressed in her old work clothes, and after a hot morning in the sun, she probably did not have an attractive aroma about her. The point is, Boaz had never really seen Ruth at her feminine finest. She was just one of the gang.

A woman has to be clever in such a situation. How can she ever convey her feminine charms while dressed like a farmer, and smelling like the farm? This is where the clever female mind has to be creative to overcome the obstacles to true romance. When two women like Naomi and Ruth put their heads together to figure out how to entice a man into a relationship, you can count on it, he is as good as hooked. Fishing for men was a female practice long before Jesus called his disciples to the task with a whole new slant.

You will observe that carrying scrolls of Moses to the field was not one of their ideas. In fact, there is nothing spiritual about their plot at all. They sound as secular as Hollywood hussies trying to entice their third husband. It seems so worldly clever to be getting Ruth all dolled up and perfumed to go and entice Boaz. The clear command of Paul was to not be conformed to the world. But if the world uses common sense and cleverness to attain evil goals, does this mean the Christian is forbidden to use common sense and cleverness to reach godly goals? Of course not. The Bible describes the temptress out to entice men into sin, and she is bathed and perfumed, and dressed to kill. Here we see two godly women trying to make a big impression on a godly man, and they are using the same strategy as the temptress. The reason, of course, is that godly men are just as attracted to nice clothes and pleasant perfume as are the ungodly. These two ladies are not trying to get Boaz to give them a loan, so they can set up a shop in Bethlehem to sell perfume and women's clothing. They are out to make Ruth look and smell so attractive that Boaz will say, "I must be out of my mind risking the loss of this beautiful creature by not taking action."

Their clever scheme of giving Boaz a vision of Ruth in all her loveliness, in the middle of the night, so that she was like a pleasant dream, worked like a charm. The next day Boaz was up bright and early resolving the legal issue that kept him from having Ruth with him as his wife every night. Now that was clever work even though it added to the complexity of their lives.

How can God bless this seemingly secular scheme? Many Christians feel that all attractive dress is worldly, and some go so far as to forbid their men to wear ties. It is a sign of spirituality to be plain, drab, and the opposite of the world where diamonds are a girl's best friend, and mink is a close second. Some have learned to be clever in just the opposite way from Ruth and Naomi. Amy Charmichael was the first missionary to be appointed by the Keswick Convention.

For 55 consecutive years, she served in India. Before she went to India, she went to Japan for training, and there she learned a valuable lesson on clothing that changed her whole life. She went with a fellow worker to visit an elderly lady who was ill. She listened to the Gospel, and seemed ready to turn to the Savior. Then she noticed the fancy gloves Amy was wearing, and she was distracted from the message. Amy went home saddened, and she removed her English gloves, and put on a simple Japanese garment, and never again wore anything but simple clothing, lest they detract from the Gospel.

Her life was blest of God, as was Ruth's, yet they were being clever in such opposite ways. One wore clothing to be attractive, and the other used clothing so as not to be attracting away from the Gospel. There is no contradiction in these two beautiful lives. They were each doing what was clever in a complex world to achieve goal's God had called them to reach. It is time to focus on definition. What is cleverness? It is the showing of great practical intelligence. It is being resourceful in attaining goals in spite of obstacles and difficulties. Ruth and Amy had different goals, and that is why each was being clever even though they were doing just the opposite thing.

Ruth's goal was to marry and bear a child. That was God's calling and purpose for her life. The use of all her femininity was wisely used to achieve that goal. Amy never married, and never had any reason to try to be attractive to the opposite sex. Her calling was totally different, and she achieved it fruitfully by giving up the need to show any feminine charm. Not all people are called to the same goals in life. Many are called to remain single. Our goal is to be as clever as possible in fulfilling our calling, and not to judge those who have a different calling because they approach some things from an opposite

perspective.

I have always been middle class, but I once heard the testimony of a man who lived and worked among the upper class. He did things I would never do because he had to in order to be a part of his circles, and be a witness there for Christ. He wore clothing and ate in places I would never dream of doing, because it was a part of his culture. It made sense, and so we need to recognize people have to be clever in different ways to do the will of God in their circumstances.

Mary Liu was sold as a slave girl to a Chinese woman, and after much abuse, she was thrown out on a trash heap to die. Throw away people have always been a part of our tragic world. A missionary walking passed heard the smothered sobs of this pathetic creature. She reached into the pile and found this mutilated mass of misery. Both of her feet were burned off. Her life was saved; however, and in the mission hospital, a pair of wooden feet were made for her. Her mangled fingers had to be amputated, but one thumb was saved. The long story of her recovery and redemption in Christ leads to her becoming the editor of two Christian magazines for women. The two were The Messenger, and The Star.

When the Japanese took over her town, she had to use her wits to preserve her precious stock of paper. She took all her trash and the junk she could afford to lose, and she stacked it all in carefully arranged bundles in a conspicuous place. Her valuable paper she threw in a dark corner, and made it look like worthless stuff. It was made to look sloppy, and with no care or order. When the inspectors came they saw how she treated the trash with concern, and they ordered it carted away immediately, and they left all her good stuff.

The World Day of Prayer Committee marveled that Mary Liu went on publishing her Christian literature month after month, and year after year, when all others in China had ceased for lack of paper. Her cleverness kept her in business for the Lord. It is not everyone's calling to be deceptively clever toward those who would hinder your ministry, but it was Mary's calling, and who would want to criticize her for outwitting her enemies, who would have shut down her ministry? David faked madness when he might have been killed, and his life was saved. She faked concern for junk, and indifference to valuables, and her ministry was spared. It is a complex world, and cleverness is sometimes essential to the achieving of good goals.

The world recognizes this. They have to deal constantly with obstacles to good profit making goals. A major oil company built five pilot gas stations near Los

Angeles, and 3 near Philadelphia, which require no human attendant. The motorist puts his credit card into an outdoor computer terminal. If the card is valid, the customer pumps his own gas. The computer issues a receipt, and later tallies a monthly total. That is clever enough, but the added touch is what makes it great. If the card is listed as stolen, or lost, the computer swallows it, and gives the motorist no gas.

Even the world is in constant battle with the evil forces that hinder good and honest goals. If you are not clever, you are a sucker for the clever schemers who will rob you blind. Cleverness is vital to godliness simply because ungodliness is so clever. If you are not clever, you will not be very effective in overcoming evil with good. If you are not victorious over evil; you will be a victim of it, and so you have to be cleverer than evil is.

Let's look at Boaz for a while, and see his cleverness in a situation where there is really no evil foe, but there is competition. The competition here is not between good and evil, but between the good and the best. It would be good for the nearest of kin to redeem Ruth, but in the light of the fact that Boaz and Ruth were in love, this good would be bad in comparison to Boaz having the right to marry her. It is sort of like; it is good to lose one eye compared to losing both, but that does not make it the best alternative. The best is to lose neither eye. The best in this setting is for the good not to happen so the best can.

We know that is just what did happen, but it could have been different had Boaz not been clever. He had to present the whole issue in such a way as to be an un - salesman. I don't know if there is such a word, but that is what Boaz was doing. He was not trying to sell his relative on a deal. He was trying to un sell him. This called for the clever use of psychology, just as selling does. I had to be an un seller myself with my grandson.

We were talking about good guys and bad guys, and he said he wanted to grow up and be a bad guy. I could see he was testing my reaction. I calmly accepted his statement and proceeded to look at whether this was a goal he really wanted to aim for. I pointed out that bad guys often have to spend a lot of time in jail, and they often lose the love of the people they care about, and they make God angry at them. He agreed it was not the best way to go. I had to un sell him on the idea of being a bad guy.

Boaz had to un sell his relative on the idea of being the kinsman - redeemer of Ruth. He does this by first being a seller, and telling him the good news. He tells him that he is first in line to buy the property of Elimelech. Boaz suggests

that he uses his option of nearest relative, and he talks as if it is a matter of indifference to him. He is as cool as cool can be. He says, "I'm next in line, but only if you don't want to buy it, I will. Why don't you go ahead?" It all seems like a mere matter of business, and the nearest kin says, "It sounds good to me. I will redeem it."

Now Boaz uses his shock strategy, and he throws in the bad news. His relative is thinking this is a good deal for me. I will have more property, expanding income, and greater status. Boaz says, "I just thought you ought to know that on the day you buy the land you also acquire the widow of the man who owned the land, in order to maintain his name." J. Vernon McGee says, "He was using some of the wisdom of the serpent here." Right away, the man felt the pressure of this demand. He was frightened to think how close he was to making a deal that would back him into more complexity than he could handle.

When it was only land it was all to his advantage, but if he has to take Ruth and raise up a child for her deceased husband, then that child will eventually get the land anyway, and not his own children. So he backed out of the deal, and he gave Boaz the right to redeem. Boaz was really doing his relative a favor by presenting the case in such a way as to un-sell him on the idea. He was clever because he got what he wanted, but he did it, not by deception, but by a shocking and overwhelming presentation of the truth with all of its implications. It was too much for the man to absorb, and the complexity made it look too risky, and so he backed out.

Cleverness is the ability to skillfully work your way through complex circumstances to a goal that is your aim to reach. Godly cleverness is aiming for a goal that is pleasing to God. Boaz was blessed with godly cleverness. This is a virtue that has changed the entire world in which we live. The example of one man's life that is astounding in its cleverness is that of Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

He died in April of 1982 at the age of 85. His career in missions started in 1917 as a Bible salesman in Guatemala. He discovered that 60% of the people could not read the Spanish Bibles he was selling, and so he, with no linguistic training, just settled down in a small Indian village, and translated the New Testament into the Indian language. He spent 11 years doing that. His philosophy was, "Do one thing and do it well." As he learned more about the fact of hundreds of languages with no Bible, he founded a school called The Summer Institute of Linguistics.

He learned another lesson in Guatemala, and that is to cooperate with the local

authorities. He was dragged before the mayor of a town for distributing Bibles without permission. He apologized and never forgot that missionaries are guests, and the government is the host. We must get their approval. This became a distinguishing characteristic of his organization. The first copy of the New Testament he sent to the president of Guatemala. He spent hours waiting to see officials to get them involved in his projects. There is no other mission movement like Wycliffe. It reports to the government, and not the national church. He gets contracts with the government, and so he is serving them. He got into Mexico where other missions were being rejected, and he even got the government to pay for part of the work. His workers had special favors not granted to other missionaries. Their visas were made permanent when all others had to get theirs renewed every six months. This pattern continued all through South America and the Philippines. While other missions were fighting for survival, they saw pictures of Townsend in the paper with the Presidents, generals, and leaders of the land. Other missionaries became jealous of this special treatment, but it was his clever strategy that enabled him to achieve his goals.

In 50 years he went from one employee to 4,255 people, and became the largest Christian mission in history. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were only 67 languages that had the Bible. Now, some portion of the Bible exists in over 2000 languages. All because of his cleverness in doing what others did not see as the key to reaching goals. Cleverness got the Word of God into the language of millions, and cleverness got Ruth and Boaz into the Word of God. Cleverness committed to God is one of the most powerful tools in history. We need to ask ourselves about what we are doing to love God with all of our minds. What are we doing to use our minds and cleverness to achieve goals for the glory of God and the good of His people? May God motivate us to learn from this clever couple to be clever ourselves for the kingdom of God.

THE POWER OF BEAUTY

Based on Esther 2:5 - 18

In its 4,000 years of history, only one woman became Emperor of China with absolute power. She was Wu tes - t'ien. She got to the throne of China for the same reason Esther got to the throne of Persia. She was a startling beauty. As a

young girl, she was renowned for her beauty, and the Emperor made her his concubine. Ordinarily, a concubine like her would be relegated to secluded quarters, after the death of the Emperor. She would live her life out in quiet retirement. She was so beautiful; however, that the son of the Emperor also desired her as a concubine.

She was not only beautiful; she was clever. She bore him several sons, and then promoted them among the leaders as the legitimate heirs to the throne. She gained many political allies, and so maneuvered behind the scenes that when the Emperor suffered a crippling stroke, she was made Empress in 655 A.D. She was brilliant as well as beautiful, and was excellent in administration. She cut taxes, won a war, and had a united prosperous country under her long reign. It is rare, but the fact is, there are many cases in history of women doing an excellent job of leading a whole nation. One thousand years before Esther, in 1520 B.C. Hatshepsut became the first woman Pharaoh of Egypt, for 21 years she reigned, and glorious monuments exist to praise her success. When Julius Caesar marched into Egypt in 48 B.C. there was a vicious dispute going on as to who the next ruler should be. Should it be Pothinus or his sister Cleopatra? Cleopatra wanted to plead her case before Caesar, but she knew if she tried to get to him her brother would have his spies kill her. Nobody would dare to interfere with a gift for Caesar; however, and so a beautiful oriental carpet was sent from her palace to Caesar. Imagine his surprise when the carpet was unrolled and a 19-year-old girl stepped out to announce she was Cleopatra, the rightful Queen of Egypt. Caesar fell in love with her beauty, and she did become the Queen.

If you want to read of how Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Spain, England, and other nations, were all ruled by greatly honored women, you can find these fascinating histories in Mildred Boyds book, *Rulers In Petticoats*. My interest in these stories for our study of Esther is that they confirm what we see to be a major theme of this book, and that is, there is power in beauty. Women know it, and that is why one of the largest industries in the world is the beauty industry. Billions are spent each year by women who know their greatest asset is in looking beautiful. Brains and other qualities are also vital, but it is beauty that opens the door for these other gifts to get a chance to function.

Many modern women admit they use beauty to their advantage in industry. They say they dress in a deliberate attempt to win favor with those who have power, and thereby they are raised to positions of power themselves. If conflict is developing between them and a male boss, they can calm the waters by coming

on with some feminine charm. In beauty contests, there is nothing subtle and hidden. They are on open display to win prizes, prestige, and power by means of beauty. Many object to the whole emphasis on beauty as a pagan perversion. They feel nothing is more secular than the parading of female bodies before the world.

The book of Esther, however, forces us to focus on this type of secular scene, for God in His providence uses just such a beauty contest to save his people. It was Esther's beauty that got her into the palace, and into a position of power where she could be used to save her people. No other quality but beauty could have gotten her there. King Xerxes was not looking for a female genius, or the best woman runner, or sports figure. He was looking for beauty. His demand for beauty was far beyond what is demanded for a Miss America or Miss Universe contest. His contestants had to spend one solid year doing nothing but beautifying themselves just to spend a night with him. After a year of using oils, spices, and ointments, they would be as soft and smooth as a baby.

Esther had to have been one of the most beautiful women to ever live. Out of all the beautiful girls of the Empire, she won the favor of Hegai, the keeper of the women. Verse 15 indicates she was also voted Miss Congeniality by the other girls, for she was favored by all who saw her. Now this really is a Cinderella story in that, aside from her beauty, Esther had all sorts of disadvantages. She was a poor orphan in a foreign land, and part of a minority group. Fortunately for her, she had a relative who took her in when her parents died. Mordecai was her cousin, but he adopted her as his daughter. Here is a rare case of cousins becoming father and daughter.

Her Hebrew name was Hadassah. That is not a name known to us, but the largest Jewish organization of women in the world is called Hadassah, and they support the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Esther was her Persian name, and this has become more popular among Gentiles. Esther means star. Estelle and Stella come from the same root. Take female beauty out of this book, and the star is gone. This poor adopted orphan would never have been heard of in history, had she not been blest with beauty. Even with her beauty would she have won the contest with all her competitors had she not spent a year using all the beauty aids available in her day?

The Bible puts you in a real bind if you are dogmatically against beauty aids, for they were part of the providential plan of God that saved the Jewish race. Dr. William Stidger, one of the great American preachers, and author of over forty books, comes on strong in favor of beauty aids. He writes, "As far as I

am concerned...there is something sacred in the everlasting passion women have for making themselves more beautiful. I have no sympathy with these reformers who find nothing more important to do than harangue women for using rouge, powder, clothes, and what have you, to make themselves more beautiful."

Certainly, we can all agree, there is nothing spiritual or superior about being unclean, unkempt, and unpresentable for public viewing. All of us enjoy beauty, but like all good things, this too is so easily perverted. Conrad Hilton, the multimillionaire owner of the Hilton hotels around the world, was once married to Zsa Zsa Gabor. He discovered that with her, beauty was a full time affair. She started at ten in the morning before her dressing table. He says it was a ritual with bottles, jars, and pots, both large and small.

It could have been the rite of ancient Aztec temple. After lunch and shopping, it was back to the dressing table for more make - up, and agonizing decisions on furs and jewelry. Hilton learned firsthand about the idolatry of beauty, and of how impossible it is to live with a woman who is obsessed with vain - glory. So what we have in the power of beauty is another paradoxical power. It can drive you to the heights of virtue, or plunge you to the depths of vice. It can lead to one praising God for this gift, or it can lead to pride that competes with God. It has the power to produce stories of victory, or stories of vanity. One of the reasons women are so effective in taking the Gospel into all the world is there beauty. Beauty attracts, and if the attracter points to God, her beauty is a stepping stone into the kingdom of beauty, and the kingdom of God. Many have the testimony of the poet -

The might of one fair face sublimates my love,
For it hath weaned my heart from low desires;
Nor death I need, nor purgatorial fires.
Thy beauty ante past of joys above
Instructs me in the bliss that saints approve,
For Lo! How good, how beautiful must be
The God that made so good a thing as thee.

It is by the power of beauty that women have had their fair share of the control of history. By beauty, the weak can master the strong, and Esther decides the course that the absolute monarch will take. The Biblical ideal of female beauty involves the mental as well as the physical. Brainless beauty is a joke. Prov. 11:22 says, "Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." In other words, a beautiful woman has to use the inside of her head

as well as the outside to have any real power in her beauty. Capito wrote, "Beauty alone, may please, not captivate; If lacking grace, tis but a hook less bait."

Beauty can be superficial, and without depth, and this is what has led to the saying that beauty is only skin deep. Prov. 31:30 agrees when it says, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." So we come again to the paradoxical nature of beauty. It can be vain, but it can also be a great value. It is the paradoxical nature of reality that leads to so much overreaction, and imbalance in our thinking. Because everything that is good can also be bad, and perverted, to become a source of evil, there is the constant temptation of abandoning what is good to avoid that danger. All through history Christians have abandoned what is good, and left Satan free to use it as a tool for evil. Just as tanks abandoned on the battlefield will be used by the enemy to fight those who abandoned them, so beauty, when abandoned by Christians, will be used by enemy forces against Christians.

The value of studying the book of Esther is that it forces us to reevaluate our views on the secular realm of life. It forces us to look at beauty as a tool in the hands of God, and it forces us to ask questions about beauty, as it did about pleasure. What we find when we search the Scripture is that beauty is no minor issue in God's plan. It is basic and vital to the plan of God, and not just for the saving of Israel, but for saving all men from the pit of hell. It is no surprise that God is portrayed in the Bible as ultimate beauty. After all, He is the author of all beauty.

Someone said, "God is not only the all - wise and all - powerful, but the all - beautiful." In Psa. 27:4 all that David longs for is to dwell in the house of the Lord and to behold the beauty of the Lord. The hope of all believers is to see the King in His beauty. When that great event takes place, we will all partake fully of His beauty, and become perfected, and be like Him.

The goal of God is that all the redeemed might be like Jesus. To be glorified is to be beautified with the beauty of Jesus. However, beauty is not just the goal, it is a powerful element of the Christian life on the way to the goal. Three times the palmist says we are to "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." The power of worship is in beauty. Beauty runs through the Bible, and we are called upon to behold it over and over. There is the beautiful robe, beautiful women, a beautiful situation, a beautiful heaven, a beautiful crown, a beautiful gate, and even the beautiful feet of those who proclaim the Gospel. There are numerous beauties in the temple, and there is the beauty of wisdom.

Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest American preachers, came to the conclusion, as he studied the Bible, that beauty was really at the very heart of all theology. We tend to think of beauty as a secular subject, but he made it the heart of his sacred theology. This man changed the course of history in America, and he made beauty the unifying theme of theology. He could see what most Christians never notice. God is beautiful, and all that he does is beautiful, and so the good and the beautiful are one.

We could not love God if he was not beautiful. If He was only powerful, He could force us to do his will, but he could not force us to love him. Love is a response we can only give to beauty. If we had no revelation of God's beauty in nature, or in the plan of redemption, we could not love God. God could only win man's love by the power of beauty.

It works the other way also. Man is ugly in sin, and so it would be hopeless for us to have fellowship with God, but Jesus became a man, and by the beauty of His holiness, and the beauty of His sacrifice, the way was opened for all to become beautiful, and, thereby acceptable to God. Grasping the loveliness and the supreme excellency of our Lord is the beginning of the victorious Christian life. Those who do not see the beauty of Christ will not have the motivating power to follow him. They will be sidetracked constantly by the superficial beauties of worldliness. All the fruits of the spirit are expressions of the beauty of Jesus in human life.

Edwards said, "God is the foundation and the fountain of all being and all beauty." Sin is a deformity and lack of beauty. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That is, no one measures up to the beauty God intended for them. They are all defective. To be saved is to be restored to the place where you have the right to begin the process of beautification. The doctrine of sanctification is really a doctrine of beautification. To grow in Christ likeness is the same as growing in beauty. Beauty is the measure of God's presence, just as ugliness is the measure of God's absence. If a man is insensitive to beauty, and can see no beauty in life, or in people, he is alienated from God. The man who sees most beauty, and is full of appreciation for it, is the man closest to God.

When all beauty is gone, and all of life is ugly, that is when people take their own life. For the loss of all beauty is hell. In hell, there will be no beauty, and in heaven, there will be nothing but beauty. One's relationship to beauty in this life is the measure of the hell on earth, or the heaven on earth, that one experiences. The only way to get heaven on earth is to see the beauty of

heavenly things, and the loveliness of God's way. Only those captivated by the power of beauty will be open to the working of God's Spirit. Edwards says that in the hierarchy of values, first is existence, and then excellence; first is being and then beauty. Anything defective in beauty is defective in being.

The ability to discern what is truly beautiful from what is only superficial beauty is the key to the abundant life. Jesus only used the word beautiful once in the New Testament record, and it was a warning about the danger of superficial beauty. In Matt. 23:27 - 28 we read, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Here is surface beauty. It has no depth, and is a mere veneer.

Superficial beauty is Satan's primary method of deception. All men chose what they feel is beautiful. The first sin of choosing the forbidden fruit was made very attractive. All sin is made to seem beautiful. Satan does not expect anybody to be tempted by the ugly. He knows God made man in His image, and so he knows man is made to select the beautiful, and shun the ugly. So he can only attract men to be evil by making it seem beautiful. People chose folly for the same reason they chose wisdom. It looks good, and seems like the best way to go. The liquor ads portray the camaraderie of the bar. Sports and sex, and all that seems adventurous are linked to this drug, for drunkenness is not attractive or beautiful. They never show the dead and twisted bodies of drunk drivers. They never show the ugliness of the vomit, and the awful agony of families ruined by drinking. Evil can only survive by using the power of beauty to attract.

God wants us to choose beauty. We are made to do so, and in Christ we are given the Holy Spirit, who will lead us to choose the highest in beauty. Christian morality and ethics are built around beauty. Whatever is truly beautiful, and by truly beautiful I mean lasting beauty, is right. What is wrong is that which may have temporary beauty, but, which leads to permanent ugliness. Christian maturity is growing in your discernment so that you can see the whole, and not just the part. Much of life is beautiful in part, but awful in the whole. A poison snake is beautiful in part, as are poison berries, but they are not wise choices, for as a whole they are ugly and destructive. The power of

evil lies in its use of superficial and partial beauty to entice men to choose the way of folly. Evil is a parasite which depends on what is good for its existence.

This brings us back to Xerxes and Esther. It is because Xerxes lives for beauty and pleasure that God could use his choice for His own purpose. Pagan people, all through history, have chosen what they feel is beautiful. This does lead to great evil because of Satan's deception, but let us remember; the world is full of true beauty as well, and even evil men often chose what is good because of its beauty. Esther was a beautiful and godly woman. Her beauty went to the heart, and was not just skin deep. Her beauty would be attractive to most all men in history, pagan or Christian. The point is, Satan is not the only one in the beauty business. God's providence also works through beauty. The beauty of women is one of the keys God has worked in history.

Esther in her day, and in our day, one of the great stories is that of Mei - ling, better known as Madam ChaingKai - shek. ChaingKai - shek was a Chinese war lord who was very successful in battle. One of the Christian families of China sent their daughter Mei - ling to America to be educated. When she returned, she was active in the political and social affairs of the nation. On one occasion ChaingKai - shek's path crossed that of Mei - ling, and for him, it was love at first sight. He could not resist the charm and beauty of this Americanized daughter of the Orient.

We cannot go into the details of the long five-year battle to win her hand in marriage, but battle it was, for he was a godless immoral warrior living with a concubine, and she was a beautiful Christian. His love for her beauty changed his history, and he became a Christian. He went on to become the Generalissimo of China, and together they did great things for the cause of Christ. It never would have happened without beauty.

What all this means is that we need to keep a dual perspective on life, and especially the secular life. Take a beauty contest for example. Yes, there is lust and perversion of beauty, but do not forget, God is not shut out of that realm of life. God is working through beauty, and often the winner of these contests is a dedicated Christian woman. She goes on to touch many lives for Christ, and all because she was beautiful.

Not all of us have the gift of beauty that attracts kings, generals, and wide popularity, but all Christians have gifts that are beautiful. All the gifts of the spirit are attractive, and they are designed to attract others. Every Christian is to be a light in a dark world attracting the lost to the Savior. Nothing is really

finished until it is fully beautiful, and that includes us. God will never be done with us until we are perfectly beautiful. Beauty is our goal, and beauty is what we need to pray for. The more beautiful we are in every aspect of life, the more likely the providence of God will work through us to accomplish his purpose, for there is power in beauty.

PRAISE AND ROMANCE

Based on Prov. 31:10 - 31

We are conditioned by life in our culture to be more conscious of the negative than the positive. The news is largely a focus on the negative, and we are made by the media to see life as tragic and full of accidents, murder, and endless blunders of one sort or another. You have to go against the grain to say to yourself, thank God for the millions who did not get murdered last night along with myself.

Praise God for all the cars that didn't get hit. I rejoice in the millions of homes that did not burn, and for the millions of children who got home safely, and for the many businesses that did not lay people off. Good news is ten thousand times more common than bad news, but it does not make the news because news is devoted to the unusual.

What this does, however, is make us a problem conscious people, and this is a hindrance to praise, both of God and of our mates. There are dozens of things we appreciate about our mates, but like the news reporter, we sniff out the real story which is the negative, the weakness, the blunder, the things that aggravate us. The husband comes home from work, and he brings home the groceries his wife asked him to pick up. However, he brought home the wrong kind of beans. Now here is a wife who appreciates her husband. She appreciates his working and his willingness to go out of his way to pick up groceries along with dozens of other good points, but when she sees the wrong kind of beans, what is the news flash?

Idiot husband blows it on beans.

That is not what their lives are all about at all the kind of beans they eat. However, all the dozens of valued characteristics are pushed out of sight, and this minor blunder becomes the Rock of Gibraltar sitting on their kitchen counter. That is the news, and that is where we focus. Not on the 142 times he came home with exactly the right order, but this present atrocious blunder. So what if it represents a mere fraction of life? It is now the headlines for the day. She makes a federal case out of his stupidity, and he forgets all he admires about her and says she never appreciates anything he does. In seconds, they have an honest-to-goodness news worthy conflict.

This is what news is: the unusual exalted to the level of such prominence that it dominates your consciousness. This is what people are made to do, and mates often do it for nothing. Has your mate ever said, "You never do anything to help

me!" This comes right after she has asked you to pick up a piece of lint off the floor. Because you have a high chair and a lamp in your hands you say, "I'll get it later." That lint becomes the news. It is all that matters now. The sun, the moon, the stars, and all your labor of love over the years are blotted out, and you are nothing but a non-picker up of lint. It is not all lint for all time, but that particular lint which is now the news.

What I am trying to illustrate is that as mates, we become problem oriented rather than praise oriented, and this distorts our perspective so that we see life like the news. The mini negatives stand out like an eclipse of the sun, and the maxi positives fade into the background like a sliver of the moon. Reversing this perspective is not easy, but it is the Biblical goal, and Christians need to work at the praise perspective if they want the blessing of Christ in their union rather than the burden of the culture. The question is, what do you focus on in your marriage - the newsworthy or the praiseworthy?

The difference is that the praiseworthy partner has their focus on the usual and the typical and the commonplace which is in no way newsworthy, but, which is what their lives are all about. The positive values they share day by day that make life enjoyable. The massive number of little things you appreciate, but tend to take for granted. The Bible authorizes us to be people of praise, not just in our worship of God, but in our relationships on the human level. In our text of Prov. 31 we see a marvelous wife and mother, and this is a hymn of praise to her. In verse 28, her children bless her and her husband praises her. In verse 30, it states that a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Verse 31 says, "Let her works bring her praise at the city gate."

In the space of four verses this woman; this wife, and this mother is praised three times with the same Hebrew word that is used for the praise of God all through the Old Testament. No other person in the Old Testament receives this much praise, and what this leads to is another example of how the romantic, and the religious are linked. The nearest thing there is to the love of God is the love of a man for a woman. That is why marriage is used in the Bible to illustrate the love relationship of God and His people. The nearest you can get is the love of a husband and his wife. The language of praise to God cannot be matched except by the praise of a man for the woman he loves.

This same Hebrew word *halal* is used of the pretty woman in the Song of Solomon 6:9 where it says that even the Queen, and all the other women praise her. Then in 6:10 she is described: "Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in the procession." That is

the wild extravagant language usually only acceptable in reference to God, but allowed by God on the lips of a man in love with the girl he considers the most beautiful of beings on earth. It would seem that God permits men to come close to idolatry in their love for, and praise of, their wives. The language of human love uses the same vocabulary as is used for the love of God.

I adore you.

I worship the ground you stand on.

You are my angel.

You are the light of my life.

It's heaven to be in your arms.

Even knowing that men would often choose their love for a woman over their love for Him, God still permits this kind of love to be acceptable. Adam chose Eve over God. David chose Bathsheba over God's will. Many others in the Bible did the same thing, all of which has led to a vast literature of an anti — feminine nature blaming women for all the evils of the world. They can even sound valid until you look at the attitude of God. In spite of all the risks, God promotes the devotion of men to women, and especially their wives. Prov. 5:18, using the same Hebrew word for rejoicing in the Lord, says, "May you rejoice in the wife of your youth." Paul went as far as language can go when he wrote in Eph. 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." It is shocking, and it would border on blasphemy if it was not clearly biblical that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices unto our wives. We are to rejoice in our wives always just as we are to rejoice in the Lord always. We are to offer unto them also the sacrifice of praise.

God will not tolerate any rival among the gods, yet he will tolerate and even encourage you to treat your wife like a goddess. God has exalted romance to the highest level in His Word. The essence of worship is praise, and the essence of romance is praise. It is the beauty of God's being and His loving acts that motivate us to praise Him, and it is the beauty of the female and her loving acts that motivate us to praise her. Just as we are happiest in our relationship to God when we are praising him, so we are happiest in our relationship to our wives when are praising them.

The formula for revival and a renewed fire in our love for God is praise. The same formula is the key to renewing the fires of romance in our marriage.

Praise is a form of power that works wonders on all levels. The secret to keeping the fire of romance alive is praise. Those mates who cease to praise can plan on living with a lot of cold ashes, but those who practice praising will be kept warm, for as long as they live. To praise is to love. Anything, or anyone, you love you will praise. If I love a certain kind of candy, I will praise it, and let others know of my appreciation. If I think Estes Park, Colorado is a place I love to visit, I will praise it and tell others of its beauty. Love is expressed by praise.

Those who do not love the one I love will see their defects. They will focus on the news worthy aspects of their being and doing. The matters that have gossip value. They talk too much, or they are too shy, or they lack maturity, or they lack depth, and on and on. But love is blind to the defects because of the light of what is praiseworthy. It blinds them to the minor defects, but reveals to them the beauty of the major values. The highest level of romance is when all the negative realities are as nothing, and you are overwhelmed by all that is praiseworthy.

This is what we call falling in love, for when this happens you seem somewhat crazy to everybody else. Your parents see all the defects and weaknesses of the one you have fallen in love with. They will try to subtly warn you of these negatives realities. However, it is like trying to get you to feel bad that there is a spot on the sun. You do not care, for there is light and warmth to meet your every need. This is the state where people say you are walking on air, and your head is in the clouds. It is so heavenly that you care nothing for earthly realities. This is the height of the love state of romance, for it is totally praise dominated. This is the state that the great love song of the Bible is all about. The Song of Songs is eight chapters of almost continuous praise. And the good news is that the male is praised by the female also, and so praise is a two-way street.

The Song of Songs is a book where rejoicing, delighting, and praising are the theme. The romantic and religious lives are so intertwined that all through history this song has been applied to both the love of man for God, and the love of males and females. It is the Song of Songs the greatest song of all, and there can be no separation of the romantic and the religious, for they both thrive equally on praise.

The male is always saying, "How beautiful you are my darling." Then he goes into a rapture of praise as he describes the loveliness of every part of her body.

The female returns the praise by saying, "How handsome you are my lover, oh how charming!" Then she launches into a song of adoration of all his body parts, and ends up, "He is altogether lovely."

The bottom line is this: God is revealing through this great romantic song that the key to romance is praise. The female gets most of the praise, and the words for praise are used most often for her, but the fact is, it works both ways, and it becomes a basic principle of life that praise is what kindles love, and it is praise that keeps love glowing in any relationship. The praiser is the true lover. Now this has implications for all of life, for if love is the highest virtue without which, as Paul says in I Cor. 13, all other virtues are worthless; this means the single most important part of our personality is our spirit of praise. To be spirit - filled means to be filled with a spirit of praise. To be Christ like means to be ever seeking for ways to praise. To praise is to love. How do you love your children? There are many ways, but you will fall short of the best if you do not learn to praise them. That is the basic need children have. They need to be loved for who they are, and praise can give them that assurance that they are worthy, even if they are not superior and able to do all things well. A child raised with praise will be a love child with a strong sense of self — esteem.

How do you love people that you may have no depth relationship with? Maybe they are people at work that you know only in that setting. The latest management booklike *The One - Minute Manager* is telling managers all over the country to look for what people are doing right and give them a one minute praising. Production will go up, and the atmosphere of the work place will be much better, and everybody wins. This is a Biblical principle being applied in daily life. The news worthy will tear you down, but the praiseworthy will build you up. Look for all the mistakes and errors, and there are always more than enough in a fallen world, and you will destroy relationships. However, if you look beyond them to the praiseworthy, and let people know what they are appreciated for, you will build relationships and a positive atmosphere. A praising personality is the greatest asset in any relationship.

Tracy Cabot in her book *How to Keep a Man in Love with You Forever* stresses the need for praise. She says the secret of long married women is they flatter their husbands and tell them they are wonderful. Drug addicts, she points out, come back again and again to their drugs because they get predictable and repeatable pleasure on demand. The goal of a wife is to get her husband addicted to her praise. He will keep coming back to her again and again, for he

will feel she is a dependable source of pleasure.

If all he gets is, "You lazy bum," in his face, there will be a lessening of that magnetic attraction. The fact is, he may at times be just that a lazy bum. But the question is, is this a newsworthy fact - that is a small part of his total lifestyle, and if so, is that what you desire to focus on and be miserable, or will you focus on the larger picture, the praiseworthy, that which made you fall in love with him?

A focus on the negative will depreciate your relationship and make it of less value. However, a focus on the positive will appreciate it. Your home appreciates in value so that it is worth more this year than last year. The best investments are in those things which appreciate. Marriage can go either way, and the deciding factor is the power of praise. If you want your marriage to appreciate in value, then you have to focus on what you appreciate about each other and praise your mate for those praiseworthy values. The alternative is to start your marriage like a Cadillac and let it depreciate by being critical until all that is left is the junk value. You determine by praise, or the lack of it, whether your marriage is a house appreciating in value, or a car depreciating in value. Is your mate most often in a cave of criticism, or on a pedestal of praise?

Gary Smalley in his book *The Joy of Committed Love* tells of the crisis he had to go through to see the light. He is watching the Saturday afternoon football game, and his wife goes into the kitchen and comes back with sandwiches for his three children, and there he sat a few feet away, and he gets nothing. In a matter of seconds, he is fighting resentment. After all, he is the bread winner in this home, and if anyone deserves a sandwich, it is him. He in anger went and made his own sandwich, but he could not get rid of the resentment. After letting it burn a few days he decided to confront his wife on the issue. He asked her why she did not make him a sandwich last Saturday during the game. He was not prepared for how fast the pieces of this puzzle were put together by her response.

"Are you serious," she asked? "Do you realize that every time I make you a sandwich, you say something critical about it?" "Norma, you didn't give me enough lettuce. Is this avocado ripe? You put too much mayonnaise on this...Hey, how about some butter? Well, it's a little dry'.... "Maybe you've never realized it, but you have had a critical statement for every sandwich I ever made. I just wasn't up to being criticized the other day. It wasn't worth it. I don't enjoy being criticized."

Now he was not sure he didn't like it better when he was in the dark. The light hurt, and he realized it was true. He had sown criticism, and now he was reaping an empty plate. From that time on he began to praise Norma for every sandwich she made, and his pleasant observation is that he has never been left out again. Praise is a powerful tool of positive productivity. Deprive any relationship of praise and you will suffocate it, for praise is the oxygen that keeps it alive and burning. The number one way to rekindle the flame of romance is to stop looking for the newsworthy, and start looking for the praiseworthy. Give up on your critical spirit, which is our fallen nature's way of trying to bring about change, and follow the ways of praise, which leads to change for the better.

Secular studies confirm what the Bible says. It is a principle that God built into human relationships. The praising teacher has the best students. The praising boss has the best workers. The praising leader has the best followers. The praising mate has the best marriage. It is not a gimmick, but it is a law of life, and Christians are to obey this law to the highest degree, for this is the key way by which we please God and find happiness in all relationships.

This is such an obvious and universal law that even many secular authors have discovered it. Why is it that many Christians fail to live by it, and praise their mates often? For the same reason, they neglect the praise of God. They are too preoccupied and just do not take the time to think about what they have to be thankful for, both to God and the one they love. Charlie Tremendous Jones, the Christian motivational speaker and author, says that nobody can be completely positive about all of life all the time, but all of us can be engaged in a process of learning, growing, and developing positive attitudes.

If we are not so engaged, we are being self-centered and deserve the poor relationships we have. Charlie Shedd, one of America's most famous marriage enrichment authorities, says that most people spend most of their time thinking about themselves and just don't bother to consider the role that others play in their lives. They seldom express praise for all the ways they are benefited and enriched by others. This ideal wife and mother in Prov. 31 is praised to high heaven. She is on a pedestal of praise. However, many wives who do their best never receive a compliment. We know this because case histories are in most every book written about marriage problems of Christian mates.

If I, who have read several hundred books on the subject over the years, and who has taught a number of marriage enrichment classes dealing with the importance of complimenting your mate often, still neglect this area of praise,

then I know it is almost universally neglected. Jesus knew our weakness, and knew it was possible for His disciples to even forget and neglect to praise him for His sacrifice on the cross that made their eternal salvation possible. That is why he gave us the ordinance of communion. He said, do this in remembrance of me, and by doing this made it clear that we can't rely on our own will and memory to be a praise - ful person. We need a reminder to keep us aware of the need to never forget and forsake praise.

Applying this to marriage, we need to set aside a time, once a week, once a month, like we do communion. The frequency depending on the degree of your weakness, but periodically reading the love portions of the Bible. Prov. 31, the Song of Solomon, and I Cor. 13. We need perpetual reminders that the essence of life is love, and the essence of love is praise, for both romantic and religious love. God expects us to be ever growing in both realms, and be praisers of Him, and be praisers in romance.

THE PRAISES OF LOVE

Based on Song of Songs

A neurologist was flattered when a patient in a mental hospital said to him, "We like you better than any other doctor we have ever had." "But why?" asked the doctor, with a smile, showing his delight. "Because," replied the inmate, "You are more like one of us." Sometimes flattery can be a flop. Even if it is sincere, it can come out wrong. Like the woman who said to her pastor, "That message was like water to a drowning man." He thought she meant it as a compliment, but he could never be sure. Flattery can be used to deceive people in so many ways that it usually has a negative meaning. The Jewish Talmud says, "A community where flattery prevails will end in exile."

Almost every reference to flattery in the Bible shows it to be a tool of evil. Paul wrote in I Thess. 2:5, "We never used words of flattery..." When Paul said he was all things to all men; he did not mean he was even a flatterer. Paul considered this to be deceitful and not an acceptable tool in evangelism. It could be so used; however, for we all like to think well of ourselves, and we are always delighted with anyone else who can perceive our good points. So we are all susceptible to flattery. Benjamin Franklin said,

A flatterer never seems absurd:

The flattered always takes his word.

In the realm of romance flattery is a dangerous weapon, for it is possible to so love the nice things that are said that one soon believes he, or she, loves the sayer of them. The sayer is even himself deceived, and many people get married, not because they love each other, but because they love themselves, and enjoy being told how wonderful they are. Flattery can be used to deliberately deceive for the sake of immoral gratification as well, and many a foolish girl let sweet talk her life sour.

Shakespeare said, "You play the Spaniel and think with wagging of your tongue to win me." A dog wagging tail is an honest expression of love, but a wagging tongue of flattery is more often a tool of deceit. David portraying a society which is totally corrupt says in Psalms 12:2, "Everyone utters lies to his neighbor with flattering lips and a double heart they speak." Lying and flattery are like partners, as we see in Prov. 26:28, "A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin."

Groucho Marx was an expert at using flattery in a negative way. He was leaving a party he felt was exceedingly dull. He said to the hostess, "I've had a

wonderful evening, but this wasn't it." Sometimes the truth does need to be told subtly. Samuel Johnson said to an author, after reading his book, "Your manuscript was both good and original, but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good." That is telling it like it is, and is not really a negative use of flattery. The person to be wary of is the person who agrees with everything you say and do. Such flattery will hinder, rather than help.

How can we reconcile the negatives of flattery with the positives of compliments and honest appreciation? If I tell a person, they look sharp, am I guilty of flattery, and using my tongue for evil? If I see value, talents, and gifts in people, must I keep silent because of the danger of flattery? Definitely not. The Song of Solomon is filled with constant compliments coming from the mouths of lovers. They flatter each other, as most lovers do. As being the two most beautiful people on the planet. The complimentary language of lovers is essential to their love. Without beautiful words, they would have a hard time expressing their love. However, they may use all the same words that are used by the flatterer. What is the difference?

The difference between good and evil in so many areas of life is in love. Love makes the difference. If I have the tongue of men and of angels, but have not loved, I am sounding brass and a clanging symbol. All the evil of flattery is a matter of nice words without love. When hate and deceit speak, they may use the best words for their evil ends. Evil needs good words to get anywhere. The evil of flattery could not exist without the use of good words, and so evil uses the very vocabulary of love.

When love speaks, it looks for the best in everyone. It looks for a way of being constructive and encouraging. Jesus was a master at the art of complimenting. Instead of blasting sinners with words of condemnation, He said, "Go and sin no more," expressing confidence in their ability to do so. He even said to the Gentile Centurion, "A greater faith have I not seen in Israel." Jesus even complimented His enemies. He knew the Pharisees were good students of the law. He taught that what they said was good, even if they didn't follow it, so he said to do what they say, but not what they do. He complimented sinners by eating with them, and He did the same with the Pharisees. Jesus could find good points in all people. Jesus was not opposed to any man, or any group, but only to the falsehoods that corrupted them.

A legend is told about Jesus walking through the gates of Jerusalem. He saw a crowd gathered around a dead dog. The Scribes passing by kicked it with

contempt, but Jesus stopped and said, "Behold the pearly whiteness of its teeth." Jesus could find something to compliment even in a dead dog. The reason He could is because He loved all men, and all creatures. Love makes the difference.

Lust, however, uses the same words. In Prov. 7:21 - 22 we read of how the harlot ensnares a man. "With much seductive speech, she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once, he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter..." We see that smooth talkers can be female as well as male.

When words are an expression of true feeling, they are beautiful and positive. When they are used as a method of getting our own way, they are negative and ugly.

Someone said there is really nothing remarkable about love at first sight. It is after people have looked at each other for years that love is really remarkable. True love goes on giving appreciation of the one loved. Therefore, compliments and praise are a perpetual aspect of the lover's language. When lovers cease to complement one another, they are losing their admiration, and taking each other for granted. Healthy love never stops singing the praises of the lover.

In the Song of Solomon, we have a song of lover's praise. The Shepherd and Shepherdess are constantly complimenting one another on their beauty. We also have the flattery of King Solomon; however, who tries by sweet talk to persuade the Shulemite girl to forsake her lover and become his.

In verses 9 - 11, many feel we have an example of the king's flattery. It does differ from the language of the Shepherd lover. Solomon's flattery revolves around the externals and deals with the man-made adornments of beauty.

Solomon compares her to a mare of Pharaoh's chariots, and speaks much of jewelry. The compliments of the Shepherd and the Shepherdess to each other all revolve around natural beauty. The contrast is between the beauty of the king's palace, and all the man-made objects, and the beauty of nature so precious to these two country lovers.

These two have no love for the adornments of the city. Their hearts are filled with the pleasant realities of God's creation. In verse 12, she tells of the context she is in: The king is on his couch. A couch of fancy gold embroidery, no doubt, but she dreams only of the green grass of the field, so precious to the sheep, and so beautiful for the Shepherd lover, who rests on it under the shade of a tree. The couch is green for them, and not gold, like that of the palace.

It is green and natural, and to them this is far superior. In verse 16 the

Shulamite girl says to her lover, "Our couch is green." In verse 17 she says, "The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters are pine." Again, she imagines looking up from the grass at the trees around them, and she longs for that kind of roof over her head, rather than the fancy roof of Solomon's palace. God's natural roof was her delight.

The contrast in this song between the natural and the manufactured is one that men struggle with constantly. It is always a danger for men to become so enamored with the products of their own cleverness that they live in an artificial world, and love only the handiwork of their own creation rather than that of the Author of all natural beauty. If we truly love Jesus Christ, we will love his handiwork, and enjoy with Him that which he has designed for our pleasure, as well as his own. Those who get so involved with the creations of man are allowing themselves to be flattered away from full devotion to the Creator. If a Christian gets so taken up with jewels, furs, clothes, and all the externals of man's inventions, he will tend to let the internal beauty of the soul slide, and become a conformer to the world.

This was the temptation of the Shulamite girl, but she had no ear for the flattery of the world. She longed only for union with her true love. In 2:16 we see the theme of her song:

"My beloved is mine and I am his, he pastures his
flocks among the lilies." The poet puts it:
Yes, He is mine! And nought of earthly things,
Not all the charms of pleasure, wealth, or power,
The fame of heroes, or the pomp of kings,
Could tempt me to forgo His love an hour.
Go, worthless world, I cry, with all that's Thine!
Go, I my Savior's am, and He is mine.

This is the theme running through the whole song as we see love's compliments win out over enticing flattery. In verse 7 the Shulamite girl refers to her Shepherd as you whom my soul loves. She loves him internally and intensely, and her flame burns for Him alone, and that is why she so desperately longs to be out of the palace, and in His presence. To us it may not sound very romantic to forsake a palace for the environment of a flock of sheep, but true love desires the presence of the lover whatever the environment.

Our Shepherd lover is preparing a palace for His bride that where He is we may be also, but it is the person and not the place that is primary. The Shulamite girl dreamed of the flocks, tents, grassy fields, and open forest,

because that is where her true love was. Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Most girls would feel obligated to yield to the king in such a setting. He was offering her everything that wealth could buy. He tells her in verse 11, he will make her beautiful jewelry with gold studded with silver. It seems almost rude to turn down such an offer. What good is the grass and trees and flowers? They fade away, but jewels are lasting, and diamonds are supposedly a girl's best friend.

The Shulamite, however, chooses to be rude and sings nothing of the joys of jewelry. She has no praise for the palace, but longs only for her true love, the Shepherd. She does not indulge in any flattery of Solomon and his offer, but rejects it by rude neglect. Andre Maurois, the French writer who has much to say about love, says that a true lover must often be rude to be wise. He tells of a young man who was invited to an estate in Normandy, and the daughter of the house showed an obvious liking for him. He could tell that the parents hoped he would marry her, but he did not find her beautiful, and had no desire to be tied to her for life.

One evening as the stars were shining, and the apple blossoms were in bloom, he expressed a wish to take a moonlight stroll. "What a lovely idea," said the hostess, "Mariewill go with you." He was half - trapped already, but as they walked through the orchard she stumbled, and instinctively he caught her. She was in his arms and their lips were close. "Ah," she said, "I always knew you loved me." To undeceive her he needed to be ruthlessly rude, but he could not. Their lips closed in the fatal kiss. When they went in they were engaged, and he spent the rest of his life with a woman he did not really love. Maurios says, when it comes to love, whenever you think it necessary, be savagely rude.

It is folly to become enamored with one you do not love. The Shulamite girl was too wise for that, and did not let the wealth and flattery of Solomon sway her from her true love. So the Christian must sometimes be rude to the appeals of the world. All that offers to win our love and loyalty is vanity of vanities. The world can be an enticing lover, but those who really love the Lord Jesus, and have set their affections on things above, will not be flattered into its arms.

What is the world with all its store?
'Tis but a bitter sweet;
When I attempt to pluck the rose,
A pricking thorn I meet.
Here perfect bliss can ne'er be found,
The honeys' mixed with gall:

Midst changing scenes and dying friends,
Be Thou my all in all.

Author unknown

The Shulamite girl ignores the king's offer of precious jewels, and she sings the praises of her Shepherd lover in verse 13, and says, "A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me." Myrrh was carried by women of the East in little bags on their bosom to perfume themselves. It made them feel good and smell fragrant. Right below their own nose they were ever conscious of its presence, and the Shulamite girl says that her Shepherd lover was just like her bag of myrrh to her. What a compliment: To be ever in the mind of your lover. Myrrh was a very precious perfume. It was one of the gifts given to Christ at His birth, and was symbolic of His own preciousness.

In verse 14 the Shulamite says her beloved is to her a cluster of camphire, or henna blossoms, as other versions have it. These were clusters of beautiful white and yellow flowers that women used to adorn their homes and their own persons. This girl paid her lover the highest compliment she could in the language of her culture. Her lover was everything pleasant and precious to her. Whenever we sing a song in which we praise God for what He is to us, we are joining the Shulamite girl and turning her solo into a chorus of spiritual flattery, which we call praise. Praise is positive because it is flattery from a heart of love. It is an expression of true feeling. Those who truly love Christ and feel loved by Him will be people of praise. You cannot love Christ and not praise Him.

C. C. Colton adds another perspective when he says, "Imitation is the sincerest flattery." If we truly feel that our Shepherd lover is the fairest of 10,000, we will strive to be like him, and imitate him. We will want the beauty of Jesus to be seen in us. It is only flattery if we sing of His glory, and then continue to walk in darkness. It is like saying to someone, "I just love your new suit," and then turning to another and saying, "I wouldn't be caught dead in that." What we really think is beautiful, we strive to imitate. True love for Christ does not just praise Him for what He is, it strives to become what He is. Lovers long to be alike. William Kirkpatrick put the true lovers' desire in poetry, and it fits so well the conflict of the Shulamite girl.

Oh, to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer.
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

Oh, to be like Thee! Oh, to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art!
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness,
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.
May God help each of us to resist the false, but subtle, flattery of the world,
and to offer up to our wonderful Lord the true praise of love.

THE FRAGRANCE OF LOVE

Based on Song of Songs 1:1 - 17

Napoleon and Josephine adored violets. She often wore the extremely expensive violet-scented perfume as her trade mark. Only the wealthiest people could afford it. When she died in 1814, Napoleon planted violets at her grave, and just before his exile to St. Helena, he made a pilgrimage to it. He picked some of the violets and put them in a locket which he wore around his neck to the end of his life. Here were lovers who were linked by their noses, and a special fragrance kept that memory of their love alive even after death. Solomon would not be surprised by this, for his love song is filled with the fragrance of love. From the beginning to the end, the nose is playing a prominent role in the romance. Solomon may not have known that we breathe about 23,000 times a day and move 438 cubic feet of air. He may not have known that man is capable of detecting over 10,000 different odors, but Solomon knew that the sense of smell has more to do with love than most people ever dream of. His love song is filled with perfume, incense, fragrant spices; flower and Spring Garden smells of all kinds, and also the smells of trees, plants and fruits. I doubt if there are so many references to romantic smells, in so short a space, in any literature on earth.

Rather surprising is the fact that the first reference to perfume refers to the male. In verse 3 the female lover says pleasing is the fragrance of your perfume. Not only is his wearing of perfume surprising, but it is plural, perfumes. The male lover has more than one kind, and he is giving her multiple pleasant sensations. The mystery is easily solved by a study of the role of perfume in the ancient world. We use deodorants, after shave, and cologne today, but we are conservatives compared to the ancient world where men use more perfume than women do in our day.

John Trevenar in, *The Romantic Story of Scent* writes, "The men of the ancient world were clean and scented." Keep in mind, we are talking about the Biblical world where it was hot and dusty, and you could perspire at the drop of a toga. Smelling good was so much of a part of that world that we have detailed records of how they perfumed themselves, and even washed their clothes in perfume. Two of the three gifts the wise men brought to Jesus were frankincense and myrrh. These were two of the oldest and most expensive perfumes in the ancient world. When Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt, they were

hot, and Joseph would have used as much of the perfume as Mary, for it was vital to a man to smell good.

We could spend hours just looking at the evidence to confirm the reality of Solomon's song, but let me just share one paragraph from Diane Ackerman's, *A Natural History Of The Senses*, which was published in 1990.

Ancient he - men were heavily perfumed. In a way, strong scents widened their presence, extended their territory. In the pre - Greek culture of Crete, athletes anointed themselves with specific aromatic oils before the games. Greek writers of around 400BC recommended mint for the arms, thyme for the knees, cinnamon, rose, or palm oil for the jaws and chest, almond oil for the hands and feet, and marjoram for the hair and eyebrows.

Egyptian men, attending a dinner party would receive garlands of flowers and their choice of perfumes at the door. Flower petals would be scattered underfoot, so they could make a fragrance stir when guests trod on them. Statues at these banquets often spurted scented water from their several orifices. Before retiring, a man would crush solid perfume until it was an oily powder and scatter it onto his bed so that he could absorb its scent while he slept. Homer describes the obligatory courtesy of offering visitors, a bath and aromatic oils. Alexander the Great was a lavish user of both perfumes and incense, and was fond enough of saffron to have his tunics soaked in its essence.

Her elaborate research has led to dozens of pages of this kind of information, yet she says, as a world authority on odors, "The most scent - drenched poem of all times is the Song of Solomon." This song makes the fragrance of love a major issue, and Christians, who do not heed this revelation lose a valuable tip. For centuries, Christians ignored this book and did not take it seriously. They developed the idea that it was worldly to use perfume and smell good. They felt it was holier to be dirty. The Puritans did not go that far, but they did reject perfume as worldly. To this day, the nose is not honored in romance, and the result is many a Christian couple damages their love life.

If God says the nose is part of His design for love, who are we to ignore the Designer's plan? In some cultures, lovers kiss with their noses, and their word for kiss means smell. They get great pleasure in breathing in the odor of the one

they love. In Madagascar, they believe that every soul has its own unique scent. And when they kiss they breathe in that single odor of their loved one, and mingle their souls. They experience a spiritual and physical intimacy. In the Philippines, some have so refined their sense of smell that by sniffing a pocket handkerchief they can tell if it belongs to their lover. They send bits of linen to each other when they are separated so they can keep each other in mind by inhaling each other's scent.

We laugh at nose kissing, but it is because we have little awareness of the role of the nose in romance. When Ruth went to meet Boaz and stimulate his interest as taking her as a wife, her mother-in-law Naomi gave her good advice in Ruth 3:3. She told her to wash and put on perfume. A bad impression on the nose is a sure way to quench the spark of romance. William Erb put it in poetry.

The shades of night were falling
Around us thick and fast:
I stood beside Matilda
The first time and the last.
I tried to give her kisses
According to etiquette,
But she had eaten onions,
Me thinks I smell them yet.

If he kissed you once, will he do you again, is not a modern question. That poem was written in 1897, and similar thoughts go back into ancient history. On the other hand, it has also always been true that, "Aroma is beauty, and beauty is the stimulant to passion." The question, of course, is what does this obvious truth in the realm of romance have to do with our religious and spiritual love? The Bible makes it clear that the nose is important in godly love, just as it is in the realm of romance. The Jews were proud of their Semitic noses. Levi Haytha said, "The Supreme Architect created man with a spout over his mouth, and it constitutes his beauty and his pride." The nose was important in the worship of God, and still is to the Jews today. Zohr wrote, "What would the world do without fragrance? We would pine away without it, and so we burn myrtle at the conclusion of the Sabbath."

If we go back to the Old Testament days, we see that the sacrifice of animals was a major part of their worship. If you enjoy meat cooking on a grill, then

you can imagine the delicious odors as cattle and sheep were cooked on the altar by the hundreds and even thousands. The smell was magnificent. We know this for Scripture indicates that God enjoyed the smell of the offerings. When Noah left the ark, and made his sacrifices to God, we read in Gen.8:21, "And Jehovah smelled the delicious odor and said I will never do it again." He promised at no time to destroy the world again with a flood.

All through the Old Testament sweet and delicious odors were to fill the temple. Incense was to mingle with the sweet - smelling offerings. The reason we enjoy a good roast cooking, and sweet perfume, is because we are made in the image of God who also delights in pleasant fragrance. He is the author of sense of smell, and all the fragrant aromas in the world of nature. He is also the author of the very first perfume recipe known to man. It was a very exclusive secret formula to be used in the temple, and for anointing holy objects, and the priests. The formula and the description of its uses can be found in Ex. 30:22 - 28. It was a sacred formula that could only be used for the special purposes that God stipulated. Any other use was strictly forbidden. Worship and pleasant smell were linked together. When the Jews went after other gods, they would burn incense to them. They could not conceive of any truly religious love and devotion without the presence of pleasant fragrance. There are hundreds of text in Scripture dealing with various kinds of perfume and aromatic materials. The main point of it all is, pleasant smell is associated with religious love just as it is with romantic love. Prov, 27:9 says, "Oil and perfume rejoice the heart." All relationships are made better with the presence of pleasant odor.

When we move into the New Testament, we discover that Paul had a real nose for nice smells. He expressed his thanks to the Philippian Christians for their support by writing in Phil. 4:18, "I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." Paul connected spiritual love, and the sacrifice of Christ, with a sweet smell in Eph. 5:2. "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a scented offering and sacrifice to God." Our great Shepherd lover was never more fragrant than when he breathed out his last breath and said, "It is finished." God did not let His Son see corruption in the tomb. Lazarus was stinking after four days in the tomb, but no foul odor was permitted to come upon the body of our Lord. He became, by His death, the endless lover, whose fragrance is like that of an eternal rose.

When Jesus came to the home of Mary and Martha just shortly before the

crucifixion, we read of this unique event in John 12:3, "Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment."

Here was a pronounced act of love, with great symbolic meaning. Jesus said it was for the day of His burial. Many other spices and perfumes were put upon the body of Christ when he was buried, but this event hints that death would never leave its ugly smell on Christ, for He was the very embodiment of love and fragrance.

In Him, all excellence is found.
His name a fragrance sheds around,
Like that most costly oil of nard,
Which Mary poured upon her Lord.

The Shulamite girl says her lover's name is like perfume poured out. That is exactly how the church, the Bride of Christ, feels about Him and His name.

Bonar wrote,

I love the name of Jesus,
Immanuel, Christ the Lord,
Like fragrance on the breezes,
His name abroad is poured.

The most significant passage in all the Bible which relates to smell, love, and the Gospel of Christ, is II. Cor. 2:14 - 16. "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life." In this passage, Paul links the very issues of heaven and hell to the nose. To spread the Gospel is to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ. Has anyone ever told you, you smell like a Christian? How is a Christian supposed to smell? According to Paul, he is to smell sweet and pleasant, like the perfume of God in Christ.

Billy Graham has every one of his counselors put a mint in their mouth, just as he gives the invitation, for it is hard to lead a soul to love Christ if you smell like onions, or have some other foul odor. Religious love is aided by pleasant smell.

Delightful odor was very important to Paul, for he was dealing with people in Greek culture, and if you study how the Greeks love perfume you will understand Paul's concern. Listen to Antiphones as he describes the bath of an

Athenian man of fashion.

In a large gilded tub, he steeps his feet.
and legs in rich Egyptian unguents.
His jaws and breast he rubs with thick palm oil,
and both his arms with extract sweet of mint,
his eyebrows and his hair with margoram,
his knees and neck with essence of ground thyme.

Descriptions of a Greek banquet are unbelievable in the costly perfume used. Xenophones describes a unique method by which all were showered with it.

He slipped four doves, whose wings were saturate
With scents, all different in kind - these doves,
Wheeling in circles round, let fall upon us
A shower of sweet perfumery, drenching, bathing
Both clothes and furniture and lordlings all.

The Romans were also fanatics for perfume, but time does not permit us to explore. In a world like that, Christians had to have a pleasant appeal to the nose of people in order to win their attention. The delightful appeal was, of course, the name of Jesus. His was, and is, the only name on earth that rid men of the foul odor of sin. All though the Bible the word stink, and the word stank, are used to describe sin and its consequences.

Hate is linked to a stench in the nostrils. Every man either stinks before God, because he is a sinner, and has no deodorant that can cleanse him, or he is like perfume before God, because by his faith in Christ, he has covered himself with the sweet - smelling sacrifice of the cross. A rotten breath can hurt romance, and a putrid soul hurts your relationship with God. Jesus Christ is God's only remedy for the foul breath of the sinful soul. If you put your trust in Him, you can come out of this offensive world smelling like a rose.

ROMANTIC AND RELIGIOUS FRAGRANCE

Based on Song of Songs 1:3

In the tale of the Beauty and the Beast, the horrible looking creature with seven horns on his forehead begs the beautiful young maiden he has carried off to kiss him. She, of course, refuses to kiss such ugliness, and the beast goes away. She

saw it no more until one day she found it lying dead under a bush in the garden. She wept and cast herself down on the beast and kissed it. Suddenly, it returned to life and was transformed into the handsomest prince her eyes had ever beheld. He then explained that he had been bewitched, and could never be delivered unless a maid fell in love with him and kissed him. That kiss she gave him removed the curse, redeemed him from death, and restored him to his original state.

What a fantastic story of the power of a kiss. It is only a fairytale, but the truth it relates is the very truth of the Christian Gospel. The beast represents man under the curse. He became ugly as he fell from his state of perfection. He was restored and transformed by the power of God's kiss, which was the cross. Jesus reconciled God and man by the power of His kiss of peace at Calvary. In this Song of Songs, we see the Shulamite girl longing for the kisses of her Shepherd lover, and God answered that longing in the souls of men to be united with the lover of their souls by sending His Son in the flesh.

God reached down and embraced his people in Christ. "He touched me and now I am no longer the same" is the testimony of those who have responded to His love. However, there is more to a kiss than touch. All the senses are involved in romance and kissing as we see in this song. Many lovers may never think of it, but the ears are important in kissing, for no kiss is complete without sound. Most married people have been in situation where they have tried to be quite as they kiss, and they have discovered that it is hard to kiss right without noise.

A kiss without sound is like an egg without salt. Most kisses in a marriage ceremony are not up to par because the atmosphere is such that the nervous couple feels conspicuous, and they want to keep the whole thing as quiet as possible. They aim for a silent kiss, and they quickly learn that a quiet kiss is a crippled kiss. Shakespeare refers to a groom who took full advantage of his wedding kiss, but he was an exception. In the Taming of the Shrew, he writes,

This done, he took the bride about the neck,
And kissed her lips with such a clamorous smack
That at the parting, all the church did echo.

Sound is a part of a good kiss, and this is true in the spiritual realm as well. Faith comes by hearing. It is by the ear that we receive the good news, and the sound of that kiss of reconciliation whereby we are united to Christ. This kiss is the means by which we become a part of His bride.

The sense of taste is also involved. The Shulamite girl says, "Your love is

better than wine." We just want to point out here that love and kissing like all enjoyable things should taste good. Psa. 34:8 says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." Psa. 119:103 says, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste." Romantic and religious love is to be sweet to the taste, and be sweeter than wine.

The poet writes,

O lady, there be many things
That seem right fair, below, above;
But sure not one among them all
Is half so sweet as love.

The sense we want to focus on in greater detail is one that we seldom think of, but it is a primary factor in both romantic and religious love, and that is the sense of smell. Your nose has much to do with love. Even taste is largely a matter of smell. Some of you may recall that when you first kissed the one who is now your mate, there was a distinct smell involved. A kiss, like food, is not as good when you have a cold, and it is because the smell is cut off or diminished. Even wine is enjoyed, not just for the taste, but for its smell. In Hos. 14:7 God promises this blessing to His restored people. "...they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom as the vine; their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon."

References to the fragrance of love run all through the Song of Songs. Here is verse 3 in the Amplified Version. "The odor of your ointment is fragrant; your name is like perfume poured out; therefore, do the maidens love you." Then in verse 12 to 14 we read, "While the king sits at his table, she said my spikenard (my absent lover) sends forth his fragrance over me. My beloved is to me like a scent bag of myrrh that lies in my bosom. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna flowers in the vineyards of Engedi. (Famous for its fragrant shrubs). The Bible is literally filled with references to perfumes, aromatic gums, oils, and woods. Two of the three gifts the wise men brought to Jesus as the new-born king were frankincense and myrrh, which were two of the oldest and most expensive perfumes in history.

We need to remember that the biblical world was a hot world. The climate was one in which perspiration would be a daily problem. The result was that they were even more concerned about perfume and deodorant than we are today. The Shulamite girl said her Shepherd lover smelled so fragrant that he was a real hit with all the girls. If you attract the attention of the nose and the nose is given pleasure by what it smells, you have begun the first step in

kindling the flame of romantic love. Studies show that a man notices a woman's perfume even if he doesn't notice her dress or hair.

Fishermen are using a type of bait that attracts the fish by odor. Women have been doing this for thousands of years with men. A

nd men, likewise, with women, for in the ancient world perfume was used as much by men as by women. Never underestimate the role of the nose in love. In many parts of the world lovers actually kiss with their nose. This is not just among the Eskimos, but it is a custom in other parts of the world as well. In these cultures, they do not say give me a kiss, but they say, smell me. Their very word for kiss means smell, and they get great pleasure in breathing in the odor of those they love. Visitors to Madagascar laugh at this custom, but, there is a very fine idea behind it. They believe that every soul has its own unique perfume, and, when they kiss they breath in the odor of their loved one, and, they are mingling their souls. This is to them a very intimate experience by which they achieve a oneness that is more spiritual than that which comes by the mere physical touch of the lips.

In the Philippine Islands, the sense of smell is so refined that by sniffing a pocket handkerchief they can tell if it belongs to their lover. When they are separated, they send bits of their linen to each other, so they can keep each other in mind by inhaling each other's scent. This is far more meaningful to them than an x on a piece of paper, for the odor of a lover is a real part of the lover. What appears foolish to us is really not so foolish after all, but a rather refined romantic use of the nose.

The Bible gives evidence to support the idea that each person has a unique odor. In Gen. 27:27 after Jacob put on the clothes of his brother Esau, he went to deceive his father Isaac. Isaac was somewhat skeptical, but finally he called him closer and sniffed him and said, "The smell of my son is the good smell of the earth and fields that Jehovah has blessed." By tricking his nose Jacob got the blessing. Smell plays a greater role in life and love than we realize. There is even a science of smell called Osmics. This is a vast and fascinating subject, and so I have a more complete study of the Fragrance of Love in another message. Hopefully, this brief introduction will make you want to sniff out the deeper message and get a more powerful whiff of the perfume of love.

ROMANTIC AND RELIGIOUS LOVE

Based on Song of Songs 1:1f

Love makes the world go round, says the one-time popular song, and there are very few who will deny it. History reveals that one of life's greatest tragedies is to die unloved. During the Civil War, Charles Sumner was assaulted in the Senate chamber, and was seriously ill for months. He regretted he had to leave his battle against slavery unfinished, but this was not his deepest pain. He wrote, "But in the midnight watches, my keenest heart - gnawing regret was that, if I were called away, I had never enjoyed the choicest experience of life, that no lips responsive to my own had said, I love you."

He expressed the minds of millions who would agree. It would be terrible to live and die and never hear anyone say to you, I love you. Love may not make the world go round, but it makes men happier as they go around with it. Love has enabled men to die with heroic valor. During the great battle of Gettysburg, Pickett was ordered to charge the Union artillery.

As he went to the head of his lines, Wilcox, another commander, rode up to his side, and taking a flask from his pocket said, "Pickett, take a drink with me. In an hour, you will be in hell or glory." He refused the drink saying, "I promise the little girl who is waiting for me down in Virginia that I would keep fresh upon my lips until we meet again, the breath of the violets she gave me when we parted." Faithful to his love, he rode off to die without whiskey on his breath. No one can calculate the power of human love in overcoming evil.

Love is the major theme of the Bible. The two great commandments that sum up the whole Old Testament are love commandments. Love of God and love of man are the highest values of life. In the New Testament, love is not only the highest virtue and the first fruit of the Spirit; it is the very foundation of the Gospel. God so loved, is the beginning of the Gospel, and the result is, we love him because he first loved us.

It is of interest to note that love is the greatest theme of man's songs, whether they be sacred or secular. The world revolves around romantic love, and the church around religious love. The one appeals to the flesh, and the other to the spirit. It is a serious mistake; however, to conclude that the two are opposed. They are not necessarily in conflict, for spiritual people also enjoy the experience of romantic love. In fact, it is only as Christians that we can experience the best of both worlds.

The Christian can love on the physical level and the spiritual level. In Scripture the two become one, and are linked as closely as the body and spirit. Each affects the other, and; therefore, romantic love is everywhere in Scripture used as a symbol of religious love. In other words, God has taken the most common and universal experience of mankind and used it to illustrate the ideal relationship he desires to have with man.

The Song of Songs is a great love song that deals with love on the level of the physical. All the delights of an ideal romance and marriage are dwelt with in beautiful poetic language. The Bible would be sadly lacking if it had nothing to say about one of life's most important realms, the realm of romantic love. Few, however, have been content to leave it as a romantic song. It is true that God is not mentioned in the song, and there are no religious words.

However, Jews and Christians alike have always seen the secular language of the Song as symbolic of the sacred. Just as the physical Temple was representative of the heavenly Temple, so earthly human love is symbolic of the eternal love union of God and man. It is no mere accident that eternity begins with a marriage banquet of Christ and His bride. Heaven is seen as an eternal honeymoon.

This is the Song of Songs; that is, the supreme Song. Like the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. The ultimate in songs does not deal with romantic love only, but with the love of God and man. Religious love does not eliminate romantic love; however, but exalts it. According to I Kings 4:32 Solomon wrote 1,005 songs. No doubt many of them dwelt with the theme of love, but this one is the Song of Songs and became a part of Scripture because it deals with love on all levels. It is the world's greatest love song.

Some Christians have been embarrassed by the romantic and physical love of the Song of Solomon. They have attempted to explain it away as if romantic love was the devil's invention. The New Testament says in Heb. 13:4 that marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled. If the Song of Solomon is seen as a pure and honorable love relationship, there is no reason whatever to be embarrassed by its frankness. It is true the language of the Song is usually reserved for the privacy of the lovers and is not uttered in public.

But the fact the Bible makes it public shows true and honorable love if God ordained is nothing to be ashamed of. Man's big problem is he cannot adequately distinguish between love and lust, and the result is confusion.

Love's words can make us think lustful, for they both use the same language, and this can be shocking to our minds.

If there is great confusion over love and sex, then it would be tragic if the Bible did not give us a description of what true love is all about. It does, however, and we have it right here in this Song of Songs. Like most poetry dealing with love it is not always easy to understand. In fact, sometimes it is very difficult, just like actual love in real life.

Poetry tends to lend itself to a variety of interpretations, and there has been a great deal of variety in interpreting this book. Most everyone agrees it is hard to expound on this song, but Bernard of Clairvaux, in the middle ages, preached 86 sermons on it.

From the more liberal perspective, the Interpreter's Bible says, "Of all the books in the Old Testament none is so difficult to interpret as the Song of Songs." From the conservative side we read from Dr. James M. Gray, for many years' president of Moody Bible Institute, "Of all the books of the Old Testament, I feel myself least competent to speak of the Song of Songs.

I am not ignorant of what others have thought and written about the book, but personally I have not grasped its contents." Only a person who has done little study, or who has a great deal of pride, would claim to fully grasp this great love song. My own approach will be eclectic. It will attempt to see the truth and the values of the different interpretations held by men of God, both ancient and modern.

The most commonly held modern interpretation is that the Shulamite is a beautiful shepherdess girl in love with a young shepherd. They are engaged to be married, but one day King Solomon traveling by spotted this lovely creature. When he inquired and found she was not yet married, he ordered his noblemen to bring her to the royal pavilion.

Solomon woos her and treats her like a queen, but all the glory and splendor of Solomon the mighty king could not take the place of her love for her shepherd. She longs to return to her true love, and forsake the riches of Solomon's palace. This view is spelled out in detail in the Amplified Bible.

The Song is largely her song of love, and her desire to be true to her shepherd lover, and him only, in spite of all the appeals to forsake true love. She urges the ladies of Solomon's court to stop trying to divert her love from the shepherd to the king. She is persistent in resisting the charms of Solomon, and dreams only of her lover.

When the ladies of the court ask why she is so loyal to her shepherd, she describes him in eloquent poetry. Finally, true love triumphs, and she is released, and goes to meet her shepherd lover. In 8:7 she sums up her

experience with these words: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned."

True love is permanent and cannot be bought. She would rather be the wife of a simply shepherd she loved, than number 701 among the wives of King Solomon. Here was a girl who could say no, even to the king, because she had surrendered herself to her one and only love.

I love thee
I love thee!
Tis all that I can say;
It is my vision in the night
My dreaming in the day.

It is not difficult to see how this interpretation has a spiritual application. Love, loyalty, and faithfulness to the Savior is what the Christian experience is all about.

As part of the bride of Christ, every Christian goes through what this young girl of the Song goes through. Every Christian is tempted by the glory of the world to be unfaithful to Christ. Israel was lured away time and time again by other lovers than her husband Jehovah. She became an adulterous wife and the whole book of Hosea is about how God in His great love sought her out to forgive and restore her. The Song of Solomon, however, is a song where the ideal love is maintained. The bride does not go astray, but remains faithful, and that is why it is the Song of Songs.

Paul LeBotzwrote, "The Song of Solomon is the world's greatest love song, because it is an allegory of the world's greatest love story, that of Christ and His Bride." The romantic experience of falling, and growing in love is the most intense and interesting experience of life. It is the nearest thing to a religious experience, and that is why romance and religion are linked all through Scripture. Paul used the language of love to describe the relationship of Christ and the church. He says that every Christian is engaged to be married, and it is his hope that they will be virgins when the time comes, and not be unfaithful to the Bridegroom. Listen to II Cor. 11:2 - 3 in the New English Bible.

"I am jealous for you with a divine jealousy; for I betrothed you to Christ, thinking to present you as a chaste virgin to her true and only husband. But as

the serpent in his cunning seduced Eve, I am afraid that your thoughts may be corrupted and you may lose your simple hearted devotion to Christ." Paul fears they will follow false Christ's and be untrue to their true Lover , the Good Shepherd.

Sex and satisfaction go hand in hand. The Bible makes it clear that your sex life can either help or hinder you in your spiritual life. If you are loyal in your love to your mate, the chances are very good you will be loyal to Christ in the spiritual realm. If you allow Satan to lure you into an immoral relationship, the chances are very good he will succeed in luring you into spiritual infidelity. Romance and religion are as close as body and spirit, and what happens in one realm affects the other. In the final analysis of life, according to the closing chapters of Revelation, every person will fit into one of two categories. They will either be a part of the Bride of Christ, or part of the Great Whore, who is judged and condemned. God uses sex symbolism to describe the ultimate destiny of men. It will be an eternal marriage or everlasting divorce.

If Christians ever needed to stress the importance of, and the beauty of, a pure sex life, it is today. We live in a world where the greatest competitor with Christ is sex. The world does not have idols of wood and stone, but living idols who seek to lure us from our Lord. It is a constant repetition of the story of the Song of Songs. Romance, love, and sex need to be diligently studied from a Christian and Biblical point of view, if we expect Christians to be faithful to Christ, as the Shulamite was to her shepherd lover.

Even a pure and noble sex relationship can be embarrassing, however, because we are stuck with a fallen nature which is far short of the ideal. Adam and Eve could look upon nakedness, before the fall, and feel no shame. This is no longer the case, and the result is, not all the Songs of Solomon can be expounded in public. There are many things that are pure and beautiful between mates who are inexpressible in public. Some of these intimate things are found in this great love song, and should be read in the privacy of your home.

Someone may object, and insist that every Scripture is given by God, and is profitable, and therefore, every Scripture should be publicly expounded. This objection fails to take into consideration the fact that the Bible was written for adults. There is no part of the Bible, to my knowledge, that was written for children. The Bible is an adult book, and some parts of it are such that only an adult can handle it without being affected in a negative way. Remember, the devil used the Scripture to tempt Christ, and he continues to do so. An immature person could even be led into immorality through the reading of some

Scriptures. I do not say this as a theory, for I have read the history of how the Bible has been used for the promotion of immorality.

Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, preached many sermons on the Song of Solomon, but he said, "The song is, in truth, a book for full - grown Christians." It was one of his favorites, but he recognized it would be a blank to many Christians who had not gone far more deep in their love for Christ. He said, "It's music belongs to the higher spiritual life, and has no charm in it for inspirited ears. The historical books I may compare to the outer courts of the temple: The Gospels, the Epistles, and the Psalms, bring us into the holy place or the Court of the priests; however, the Song of Solomon in the holiest place: The holy of holies, before which the veil still hangs to many and untaught believers."

Many Christians fail to grasp the beauty of this Song because of personal problems in their own lives. These make it impossible for them to link the sexual and spiritual. The great expounders of the book were men who loved their wives and their Lord, and could see the beauty of both, and how one illustrated the other. G. Cambell Morgan wrote, "It is, first, a revelation of the true nature of human love. It is, secondly, an unveiling of the highest religious experience." Then he said, "The cool, calculating, mechanical man who dislikes this book has never been in love, and probably at no time will be." According to Morgan, the reading of this part of Scripture can be a good test of your capacity to love. If it is disgusting to you, you are wired wrong, and could use some counseling. If it is delightful to you, you have the capacity to attain to God's ideal for both romantic and religious love.

The value of studying this book is that it can lead us into the depths of the two most important love relationships of life: Love of a man and woman, and love of man and God. We will better grasp the intensity of Christ's love for us as we see how it relates to the passionate love of human lovers. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And here is the part of the Bible that tells it in powerful romantic poetry.

All love songs are an attempt to express the inexpressible. There are no ends to them, for none ever succeed in saying it all. The Song of Songs says it better than any other; however, and gives expression to numerous values we will be considering. We need to keep in mind that we are dealing with the love of Christ, the most intense love that can be known. The poet put it -

One there is above all others,
Oh, how He loves!

His is love beyond the brother's,
Oh, how He loves!
Earthly friends may fail or leave us,
One day soothe, the next day grieve us;
But this Friend will ne'er deceive us,
Oh, how He loves!

If we expect to enter into the experience of this Song of Songs, then our prayer should be that which Dr. Chalmers prayed when he began his study of this book:

"My God, spiritualize my affections, give me intense love to Christ."

ROMANTIC AND RELIGIOUS KISSES

Based on Song of Songs 1:2

The Italians say, "A kiss is like a grain of dust which anyone who would be rid of it can wash away." The Germans looking deeper respond, "A kiss may indeed be washed off, but the fire in the heart cannot be quenched." Kissing is so directly linked with love that to engage in it without love is certain to open the door to lust. A kiss awakened Sleeping Beauty, and it can awaken sleeping lust in anyone. There are many different kinds of kisses, and we will be looking at the most significant of them. The true romantic kiss is to be reserved for that one you desire to one with you on all levels.

What is a kiss? Why it is this -

It is the cement, it is the glue

Of love that makes me one with you.

There are all kinds of definitions of a kiss. Scientifically, it is the "The anatomical juxtaposition of two orbicularis oris muscles in a state of contraction." From the negative view, it is the mutual interchange of salivary bacteria. More romantic is the view that a kiss is a secret told to the mouth instead of the ear. More passionate is the definition of Paul Verlaine, who defines the kiss, "As the fiery accompaniment on the key board of the teeth of the lovely songs which love sings in a burning heart." However, you look at it; one thing is sure, kissing is a pleasant reminder that two heads are better than one.

The Song of Songs begins with the problem of a deep desire for kissing, but only one head. The Shulamite girl longs for the kisses of her lover, but she is separated from him. The Song does not begin calmly and build to a climax, but it begins with a burst of passionate frustrated love. "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!" When people have been separated for a long time, and then reunited, the first thing they do is kiss. Lovers often take the kiss for granted until they are separated, and afterwards they realize how much they long to embrace and kiss the object of their love. The Shulamite can think of nothing better than the kisses of her lover. She dearly misses her lover's kisses.

With kisses of his mouth, said she,

Let him, now reconciled, kiss me.

Thy love, said she, when it is mine,
Is better than the choicest wine.

Anyone who has ever been separated from a loved one can enter into the intense craving of this young girl, but the question is, what is the spiritual significance of her longing? There is a direct parallel to this romantic longing in the realm of the spirit. Many times the believer's soul feels separated from God, and longs for the good old days of close and loving communion. We sing, every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before, but in reality we know this is not so. Many days we can look back and long to return to a former day when our loves seemed sweeter and stronger, and when we sense the presence of Christ more intimately in our lives.

From a spiritual perspective this Song begins with an intense need for the lover of our souls to draw near, and give satisfaction to the longings of our heart. It is a lovers cry which reveals a desperate need to be loved. It is appropriate that this opening cry for love should come from the girl. Studies indicated that women feel the need to be loved more than men. Spiritually it is fitting as well, for the church, the Bride of Christ, feels the need for love more than does Christ. He is self-sufficient, and does not feel the loneliness or the hunger for love that we do as believers.

Believer's, like this lonely shepherd girl, cannot be happy and satisfied until they experience the kiss of the Shepherd. This was true for the Old Testament saints who looked for the coming of the Messiah. They looked at this lover cry and said, that is us, Israel crying out to God to come down. We have been kissed by the mouth of Moses and the prophets, but we want the Messiah Himself, for this would be the very kiss of God.

Alady took her nephew to her church one Sunday. He had not been in church before, and was very observant. When the service was over, he was busting with excitement. He said, "Auntie - did you see God's kiss?" "Whatever do you mean by that?" she asked. "I saw it, God's kiss on the window of the church. I make my kisses crooked when I write my letters, but God's kiss is straight up." Then she realized he was referring to the cross. It was no childish mistake. It was a profound theological insight.

The cross was indeed the kiss of God. A kiss is a means of reconciliation, and that is what the cross was in God's plan of redemption. Is it just a coincidence, or is it providential that our symbol for a kiss is a cross? God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, is equivalent to saying; He so loved us that while we were yet sinners, He kissed us. He came to us with a kiss of peace

and reconciliation. The cross is the greatest love symbol in the world, and to the Old Testament saints, it was the fulfillment of their desire for the kiss of God.

For New Testament believers, the longing is for the Great Shepherd and Lover of our souls to come again. We can look back to the incarnation and the great love of Christ, but, like the Shulamite girl, it is the very love of the past that makes her long for more. One who has never known the joys of love, and the kisses of a lover, cannot crave for them, as can those who have already enjoyed them. The New Testament believer, therefore, has a deeper desire for union with Christ than did the Old Testament saints.

Religious love, like romantic love, varies in its intensity from day to day, depending upon health, energy, and many circumstances. However, when a Christian is feeling his best, he should long to be possessed by the love of Christ, and kissed into ecstasy by His indwelling presence. He should feel something of what the poet expresses:

Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongues declare;
Oh, knit my thankful heart to Thee,
And reign without a rival there!
Thine wholly, Thine alone I am,
Lord, with Thy love my heart inflame.
Oh, grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell, but Thy pure love alone!
Oh, may Thy love possess me whole,
My joy, my treasure, and my crown!

The kiss has been called love's great artillery, and by the kiss of the cross, our Shepherd lover defeated the divorce plan that Satan had set in motion, and He reconciled God and man. Sin still separates us; however, and we can still have lover's quarrels, and division, which leaves us feeling cut off from the love of Christ. In the spirit realm, as in the romantic, we need to learn to kiss and make up. In fact, Psa. 2 ends with this verse, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all

they that put their trust in Him."

The kiss had a very religious significance all through Bible times. To kiss can mean to acknowledge one as Lord. The picture of kissing the Pope's foot, and kissing idols, goes way back in history. When the kiss had a religious meaning. Listen to what God said to Elijah in I Kings 19:18, "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." To have kissed Baal was to have submitted to him as Lord. And so, to have kissed Christ is to have submitted to Him as Lord. Kissing the Son, therefore, is the only way to escape the wrath of God, and enjoy the romance of eternity. Kissing is a very serious religious matter.

Kissing and idolatry went hand in hand all through the Old Testament.

Worshippers of the sun and moon would express their loyalty to these false deities by kissing their hands and pointing to the sun or moon. Job refers to this practice, and he denies he was ever guilty of it in Job 31:26 - 28. "If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, and my heart had been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand; this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I should have been false to God above." If men do not kiss the true lover of their souls, they will be kissing some deceiver. Idolatry is simply kissing a false lover. It is a giving of your soul's affection to something, or someone, who cannot love and save your soul. The point is, religious kisses, like romantic ones, must be kept exclusive. Men have always gone astray when they kissed any other than the one and only lover of their soul. It fits the whole pattern of Old Testament history that Judas should betray Jesus with a kiss. God's people have always betrayed him with a kiss. They offered their love to Him, but then went after other gods and kissed them as well. That is what Judas was doing.

He kissed Jesus, but then longed to kiss the thirty pieces of silver that he got for betraying him even more. True love keeps its kisses exclusively for the lover. Spurgeon wrote, "The kiss is a mark of worship; to kiss Christ is at the same time to recognize him as God, and to pay him divine worship." Those who never kiss the Son in this religious sense will never experience the love of God, and the salvation that comes because of it.

Because kissing had such a religious significance in ancient history, and in Biblical culture, it became a part of the everyday life of the early Christians. Peter closes his first Epistle by writing, "Greet one another of the kiss of

love." Paul in Rom. 16:16 writes, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." He says the same thing in I Cor. 16:20, and in II Cor. 13:12. In I Thess. 5:26 he writes, "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss." There was obviously a lot of kissing going on in the early churches, which is foreign to us today.

We still kiss in the church, but only after weddings, and even there you had better be careful. One guy said to another, "How did you get that black eye?" He said, "I kissed a bride after the wedding." "Why everyone does that," the other guy said, mystified. "Yeah," responded the injured man, "But this was two years after the wedding." Kissing the bride has to be timed right, or else. The New Testament seems to indicate, however, that the Bride of Christ was to be almost continually engaged in kissing one another as a form of greeting. This practice has had quite a history. In the 13th century, it was practiced in France where women kissed women, and the men kissed men. It developed in many areas that men would kiss women on the hand as a greeting. In England, in the 13th century, a special instrument was used to help the faithful obey Paul's command. It was a metal disc with a holy picture on it, and it was passed around the church for all to kiss. This did not prove to be very helpful as a kiss of peace, since it started a lot of quarrels as to who deserved the honor of kissing it first. It also led to youthful shenanigans in church, for the boys tried to sit next to pretty girls and kiss it after them. An old poem says,

I told the maid that she was fair,
I've kissed the Pax just after her.

The reformation abolished all this type of thing. The Greek church still practices the kiss of peace on Easter Sunday. Kissing as an act of respect and reverence was common in days past, but this is no longer the case. Men kissed each other all the time in Biblical days, and it was a normal part of life. In the middle ages, knights kissed before a duel, just as boxers today shake hands before a fight. The hand shake has become to us what the kiss was to the early Christians. A hand shake today is equivalent to a holy kiss.

We ought not think that the kiss is no longer important. A kiss has always been a sign of acceptance as well as reconciliation. Jacob and Esau kissed when they met after a long separation. The father of the Prodigal Son kissed him when he returned. The kiss that expresses love and acceptance should never be out of style. A pastor told of an 83-year-old woman who had been bed ridden for over 20 years. He visited her, and when he rose to leave he felt a flow of

affection go through him. He bent over and kissed her on the cheek. A look of amazement came to her face, and she said, "Why, I'm not ugly after all. I'm not unattractive after all." The kiss gave her assurance of being accepted. That kiss was truly a holy kiss, and a kiss of peace. It was Christ expressing his love and acceptance through a member of His body.

The desire for acceptance makes kisses very important on the romantic level also. Studies show that if a man comes home and does not kiss his wife, it can stir up negative thoughts and emotions, which can lead to a fight later. She unconsciously wonders if she looks terrible, and doubts her attractiveness. This negative mood can have a very negative effect on the rest of the evening. Kissing is the fuel that keeps the flame of love burning, and true lovers never tire of it. Shelly wrote,

See the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea;
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me.

This is how all lovers feel - both romantic and religious. If sin has led us to a separation from God, then we need to look again to the cross, the kiss of heaven, and let God deal with that sin as only He can. Beecher said, "God pardons like a mother, who kisses the offense into everlasting forgetfulness." Bret Harte wrote,

Never a lip is curved with pain,
That can't be kissed into smiles again.

Kissing is a powerful reality in both romance and religion. The greatest kiss of all is God's kiss of peace, which He gives to all who receive His Son as Savior. By that act of faith, they become a part of the Bride of Christ, and they will enjoy His kisses forever.

LOVE AND LUST

Based on Song of Songs 1:4

A French pilot, by the name of Guillaumet flew over the Andes regularly. One time he disappeared for a week, and hope that he would be found was given up. He was eventually rescued; however, and his first intelligible sentence was, "I swear that I went through what no animal would have gone through." For two days and two nights he lay helpless. Then he walked five days and four nights through deep snow.

When he was found his hands and feet were frozen. He had no food and no tools. He had to crawl up walls of ice in 20 degrees below zero. Many times he said it would have been pure pleasure to give up and go to sleep, yielding to the cold hand of death. He had not read the Song of Solomon 8:6 which says, "Love is strong as death." However, he was demonstrating it, for it was love that kept him going.

All he could think about was his wife. He knew that when a man vanished, his death was not legally acknowledged for seven years, and so if he died where no one could find him, his wife would be left in poverty. He had to get to a place where his body could be found so she could get the insurance. It was this loving concern for his wife that drove him to super-human efforts, and it saved his life. He lost his memory, and was little more than a frozen vegetable stumbling through a wilderness, but still he kept going, because of love. Had he not been a loving man, he would have been a dead man.

Very few ever have to put their love to that kind of test, but there are enough such examples to prove the truth of what the Shulamite girl said, "Love is strong as death." This is the kind of love that the Song of Songs is all about. It is not about wishy washy sentimental infatuation; and not about superficial lust, which when satisfied forsakes its object, but true love, which can overcome all obstacles which threaten to detour it off its course of faithfulness and loyalty. In verse 4 the Shulamite girl gives us the first hint as to her predicament, and why it is she is separated from her true love, and why she so desperately longs for him to come to her. She says, the king has brought me into his chamber. King Solomon has brought her to his chamber to try to persuade her to be one of his wives. Many would be flattered, and would have forsaken their country lover without a tear. It was the chance of a lifetime, but here was a rare girl who wanted love rather than riches in a royal harem. That is why she cries out

for her Shepherd lover to come and make haste, for it is his love alone in which she rejoices.

Solomon, no doubt, sought to weaken her resistance to his charms using wine, but she is not taken in by this, for she has tasted love, and what is wine compared to love? Love is what she will sing about. Let those who give up love to be in Solomon's harem sing songs of the glory of wine, for that is all they have to keep them warm and happy. The choice between love and wine is one that is the theme of thousands of love stories and films. Four times the word love is used in the first four verses of this song, and two of them refer to the conviction that love is better than wine. This conviction is a challenge to the values of many in both the ancient and modern world.

Wine was as a god all through ancient history, and every nation had its wine songs, including Israel. Wine was the source of joy and happiness. It was the means by which sorrows were escaped, and burdens endured. It even helped cure physical problems. It was to the ancients what the doctor, psychiatrist, and TV are to the modern man. It is entertaining, exhilarating, and a means of escape. Spurgeon said, "The fruit of the vine represents the chiefest of earthly luxuries." The Shulamite girl says, however, what good is all of life's luxuries without love. To wine and dine and live like a princess is no match to goat's milk, lamb chops, and the Shepherd man I love.

Love is personal, but wine and the luxuries it represents are impersonal. Those who try to find fulfillment in the impersonal, pervert their own nature, which was made for love. They turn to drugs and sex, and in their search for what only love can provide, they develop love's greatest counterfeit which is lust. Love and lust not only begin with the same letter; they are very much alike. Sometimes the difference between good and evil is very slight.

In fact, often they are identical twins, but just going in different directions. Angels and demons, for example, have the same origin. They were once identical, but now are radically different because one resides in the will of God, and the other rebels against it.

The noble lover and the brutal rapist are both governed by passion, but one is expressing love, and the other lust. The pure sex relationship and the immoral one cannot be distinguished by observation. The mechanics of love and lust are the same, but one fulfills God's will, and the other violates it. Lust is like love going in the wrong direction. Most evil is a good gone wrong, or to an extreme. The same sun that helps produce a lovely garden can also produce a barren desert. So it is with love and lust. Ella Wheeler Wilcox put it in poetry.

Passion is what the sun feels for the earth,
When harvest ripens into golden birth.
Lust is the hot simoan whose burning breath
Sweeps o'er the fields with devastating death.

Solomon sought to persuade the beautiful Shulamite girl to yield to lust, but she remains steadfast in her loyalty to love. This is a story of a great temptation, and a powerful testing of love. We see love and lust in combat seeking to win the maidens heart, and we learn to distinguish between the two. We want to examine the main characteristics of love which make it different from lust. The first is :

LOVE IS EXCLUSIVE

True love, be it romantic or religious love, can only have one lover. God is a jealous God and will not tolerate men saying they love Him, and then bow down to other gods. This was the conflict all through Israel's history, and it still is today. You cannot serve God and mammon. God, and nothing else, must be your first love, or you are not a true lover. So it is on the romantic level. A sailor was looking at some valentine cards, and the clerk said here is a good one, to the only girl I've ever loved. The sailor said it is a good one; give me a dozen of them. Here is a good illustration of lust in contrast to love. The person who is tossed about by every wind of affection does not understand love.

I will be true. The fickle tide, divided
Between two wooing shores, in wild unrest.
May to and fro shift always undecided;
Not so the tide of Passion in my breast.
With the grand surge of some resistless river
That hurries on, past mountain, vale, and sea,
Unto the main, its water to deliver,
So my full heart keeps all its wealth for Thee.

This loyalty of love to one lover, even in the face of a charming enticer like Solomon, is what makes love so different from lust. Lust does not feel any particular need to limit itself to one partner. Lust is not exclusive; it is promiscuous. Love is fire, which is confined, but lust is fire uncontrolled. Fire under control is a great power for good, but once out of control, it is a great power for destruction. Love and lust are not two different emotions, but the same emotion, either under control, or out of control. An unknown author wrote,

This fire from God's altar, this holy love flame,
That burns like sweet incense forever for you,
Might now be a wild conflagration of shame,
Had you tortured my heart, or been base or untrue.

The emotion that is a precious gift of God when kept under control, and directed exclusively toward one's lover, can suddenly become a negative emotion when it forsakes exclusiveness, and is directed toward more than one.

The Song of Solomon is designed to inform us of the subtle temptation toward letting love go out of control, and to inspire us with an example of love that resisted that temptation and maintained control. The Interpreters Bible says, "This book, without mentioning it, frowns upon polygamy, upon infidelity, and sings of the ardor and unalloyed passion of a love that is stronger than death." The fact that the Shulamite girl had to go through this testing reveals that true love is often under pressure to turn to lust. Evil is so effective in the world because it seems to be good. The difference between a feast and gluttony is so slight that it is easy to go from good to evil and not be aware of it. God commands feasts, and He is the author of the joy and fun in eating, but once this blessing is not kept under control you end up allowing a good thing to become evil. Gluttony is simply allowing the pleasure of appetite to go to an extreme. Too much a good thing is a bad thing.

Perfume we saw was good, both for romantic and religious purposes, but it can be used to promote evil also. In Prov. 7:10 - 27 we read of how prostitutes use perfume to entice men into lust. Evil uses the same means as good. Evil often camouflages itself as good, for men do not deliberately choose what will injure them. Most choose evil because it looks like a very appealing good. Good and evil are potential in everything we do, and that is why it is essential to have standards by which we determine if we have things under control or not. Not understanding this leads many who want to promote love ending up falling into lust.

The world makes great error judging these things,
Great good and great evil are born in one breast.
Love horns us and hoofs us - or gives us our wings,
And the best could be worst, as the worst could be best.

Author unknown

A good machine is a machine under control. That same machine out of control can be exceeding dangerous. The sexuality of man is a good thing, a gift of God. Out of control, however, it becomes a threatening power. The more loving a man is the more dangerous is his potential for lusting, and that is why Christians must know God's standards, and take every precaution to keep the fire of their love within the bound of marriage. Because the Song of Solomon is a poem about true love, rather than impure lust, its frank and passionate descriptions are beautiful and not obscene. The very same words could be impure in a context which is describing lust. Passionate language for love is good and right, as we see in this poem.

Her beauty stirs my heart to maddening strive,
And all the tiger in my blood is rife;
I love her with a lover's fierce desire,
And find in her my dream, complete, entire,
Child, mother, mistress - all in one word - Wife.

Author unknown

Some may be wondering, why is it necessary that a poem of pure passion and love be in the Bible? Simply because every age is an age of lust, and men of every age need a reminder that all that lust offers can be gained and maintained on a far superior level through love.

LOVE IS EXALTING

Lust degrades, but love exalts. The Song of Solomon by its promotion of love over lust was a radical step in the exaltation of women. When lust reigns, as it did in Solomon's world, women are mere toys. When love reigns, as in this Song, women rise, not only to the level of men, but higher, where they become an inspiration to lift men's vision toward the love of God. A beautiful and pure woman is called an angel because she is like a heavenly being whose love can lead a man to spiritual heights. Most of the ancient world had a low view of women. A good one was rare, and the question of Proverbs was, who can find a virtuous woman? They were degraded, and used like work animals. They were mere sex objects, and few would ever think of praising a woman in the ancient world. An ancient Arab said it in poetry:

Whenever you're in doubt, said a sage I once knew,
Twixt two lines of conduct which course to pursue,
Ask a woman's advice, and whate'er she advise,
Do the very reverse, and you're sure to wise.

Most women were thought to be immoral, and not to be trusted. Bathsheba, the wife of a lowly soldier, submitted to the enticement of the king. It was no shock to people. They doubtless would expect as much. However, here in the Song of Solomon, the very son of Bathsheba is trying to repeat the folly of his father David, but instead, he finds resistance, and a woman whose loyalty to love is unbreakable. This Song is in great contrast to the songs of the ancient world. It says, in effect, that if men loved women, rather than use them as mere objects of lust, they become a part of God's plan to exalt the whole race through the lifting power of pure love. Where love is real, women are God's greatest creation.

O woman, lovely woman, nature made you
to temper man: we had been brutes without you;
Angels are painted fair to look like you;
there's in you all that we believe of heaven,
Amazing brightness, purity, and truth,
Eternal joy, and everlasting love.

Author unknown

The Song of Solomon, by exalting true love, exalts women, and by exalting

women it raises the level of men from lust to love, and true love on the romantic level opens the door to the possibility of experiencing the love of God.

Sex is the frosting on the cake of love. Like frosting, it is to make the whole cake attractive, so we will eat it. Children will often scoop off the frosting, and leave the cake. This is what immature people do when they separate sex from love. After a while the sweet frosting gets nauseating, and they fear they are not in love. They haven't even really tasted love, but have only skimmed the surface, and have stayed on the level of lust. Lust we have in common with the animals, and love we have in common with God. If we do not add the Godly dimension of love to our relationship, we miss God's best of what he intended for us on the level of romantic love. Lust leaves people feeling let down, but love lifts and makes them feel fulfilled. Roy Craft wrote,

I love you,
Not only for what you are,
But for what I am,
When I am with you.

If we move from the romantic level of life to the religious level, we see the same characteristics are true of love for God. A true love for God is exclusive and exalting. We are commanded to love God with our whole being. We are to love him so exclusively that nothing outside of the will of God can find any room in our lives. The drive that leads people into the occult, and all sorts of weird man made religions, is spiritual lust. It is the desire for unworldly reality and power solely for the sake of the self. Men like the supernatural to serve them and meet their needs, and this is simply spiritual lust and not love. Lust only wants the other, not for the sake of the other, but for the sake of self. Many want God for what He can do for them, not because they love him for Himself, and desire to serve Him, and be like Him.

True love on any level cries out with the Shulamite girl to her lover, "Draw me; we will run after thee and rejoice in thee." Here is a desire to be with the lover and delight in him for himself. Love exalts the lover, and true spiritual love for Christ will acknowledge him as Lord of life, and desire to let him be sovereign over one's life.

Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongue declare;
O knit my thankful heart to Thee,
And reign without a rival there.

Author unknown

Submissive love like that leads to exaltation, and those who so yield to Christ prove their love is real. They have the joy of knowing the truth that love is better than wine. Paul said we are not to be drunk with wine, but to be filled with the Spirit. You can be filled with the Spirit by being filled with love for the Lover of our souls. We ought to begin each day with these loving words of longing to Christ - "draw me."

WHAT IS BEAUTY

Based on Song of Songs 1:15 - 16

Every woman wants to be beautiful, and that is why the beauty business is a seven billion dollars a year industry, and the largest advertiser in America. American women actually worship beauty. They will do almost anything to attain it, including fasting if it is necessary. They will try anything, and the result is sometimes tragic. In his book, *Love in America*, David Cohn writes, "These martyrs to physical beauty are buried or hustled to hospitals while millions of their sisters, quite undaunted, continue their fanatically persistent search for the perfect figure, grimly making their way through tasteless diets, gymnasiums, dancing classes, and plastic surgeon's offices with a fatalistic tenacity unmatched except by lemmings marching to destruction."

Why do women have this drive to be beautiful? The answer is very simple, men. A woman's deepest desire is to be attractive to men, and her greatest fear is to lack that attraction. This leads to all kinds of vanity. A woman came to a pastor and confessed she had a problem with the sin of pride. She said, "Sometimes I sit before my mirror for hours admiring my beauty." The pastor responded, "That is not the sin of pride. Your problem is, an over active imagination."

Many women imagine they are beautiful because they try all the gimmicks, and use all the products that promise beauty. Arlene Dahl has taken a more logical approach.

She wrote a book titled, *Always Ask a Man*. She spent years asking men what they felt made a woman beautiful. She says that by listening to men you can learn what qualities every Adam looks for in his Eve. She learned that the ideals of men vary, but she writes, "But without exception every man put one quality above all others in describing his ideal. That one essential attribute which all men seek and admire in a woman is femininity." She then quotes a host of famous men on the subject, and shows that they all agree. Yul Brynner summed it all up, "Simply femininity is the most important thing about a woman, and it is a quality a great many women are in jeopardy of losing. Women are being emancipated out of their femininity in this modern age." It is not just modern men who feel this way about feminine beauty. We can go

back to Washington, the father of our country, and discover the same feelings. We so often see George Washington in cold stone, or metal statues, that we seldom think of him as a man with warm affections, and a love of beauty. From his youth, he struggled with his passions for pretty girls, and he wrote a poem about it.

O ye gods, why should my poor resistless heart
Stand to oppose thy might and power,
At last surrender to Cupid's feathered dart,
And now lays bleeding every hour.

He fell in love several times, but his proposals for marriage were refused. We have other poems he wrote to his sweethearts. When he fell in love with a widow, Martha Custis, he finally found one who would marry him, and they had a powerful love, and a great life together. So passionate was their love that before she died Martha Washington destroyed all his letters to him, for she felt such love deserved to be kept secret.

The Song of Solomon, however, records for us the all-embracing experience of love, and the universal love of beauty. The Shepherd lover of this great song feels toward his shepherd maiden just like men have always felt about the women they love. Throughout the song, he praises her feminine charms, and expresses delight in every aspect of her beauty. He makes it clear that beauty does include the physical, for he describes how he adores her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck, and breasts. All of these are described in the first few verses of chapter 4.

Beauty is not only in the eyes of the beholder, but is an objective reality visible to all. Someone said the average man can tell all he knows in 2 hours, and after that, he begins to talk about women. Men do not claim to understand women, but they do understand beauty. A man does not need to know anything about flowers to appreciate and enjoy them. So also, ignorance cannot rob men of the one thing they do know about women, and that is their beauty.

Abraham loved Sarah, and she was beautiful to him, but he knew other men could see her beauty as well, and so when he went to Egypt, he said to her in Gen. 12:11. "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife, then they will kill me, but they will let you live." He persuaded her to say she was his sister.

The text goes on to say the Egyptians thought Sarah was so beautiful, so they told Pharaoh, and he took her into his harem. She was spared; however, and God saw to it; she was returned to Abraham undefiled. Beauty, we see here,

was objective, and could be the cause of a great deal of trouble in the life of a woman, or in the life of a man who marries her.

Confucius was at least partially right when he said, "She who is born beautiful is born with sorrow for many a man." Uriah got himself murdered because he married the beautiful Bathsheba. I remember an old Abbott and Costello film in which Lou Costello was determined to marry a homely girl. He said, "If I marry a pretty girl she may run away." Abbott thinks that is stupid logic and says, "But a homely girl may run away too." "I know," said Costello, "But if a homely girl runs away, who cares?"

Beauty can be a problem, but it can also be a blessing. In Esther 2:7 we read of her, "The maiden was beautiful and lovely." In her case, many lives were saved because of her beauty. The Jews would have suffered a great slaughter had it not been for the king's love for this beautiful woman. The Jews celebrate to this day a yearly feast in remembrance of their deliverance because of a beautiful woman. The Jews have always had a very positive attitude toward the beauty of women. Ibn Ezra said, "Rather little with beauty than much without it." Ben Sira said, "The beauty of a woman maketh bright the countenance," and "As the lamp shining on the holy candlestick, so is the beauty of a face on a stately figure."

We could go on stressing the importance the Old Testament gives to beauty in a woman, but to relate it all to our passage in the Song of Songs; we need to see that beauty is not limited to the feminine. Males can also be beautiful. In I Sam. 16:12 we read of David, "Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome." His son Absalom was even more so, for we read in II Sam. 14:25, "Now in all Israel, there was no one so much to be praised for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him."

Beauty is a two-way street, and covers both male and female. This is what we see in the 15th and 16th verses of this first chapter. In verse 15, the Shepherd says to the Shulamite girl, "Behold you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful." The repetition is a method of expressing superlative and surpassing beauty. In verse 16, most commentators agree; we have her response, and she returns the compliment, behold; you are beautiful my beloved." Leigh Hunt said, "The beautiful attracts the beautiful."

Here are two beautiful people trying to outdo each other in expressing their adoration. This is the kind of mutual love and admiration we see between the lovers in this greatest of songs. Beauty is one of the themes that runs all through

this song, because beauty and love go together, and that is why beauty, like love, is a great power.

Beauty can motivate both men and women to live lives of loyalty and sacrifice. When Paul wrote to the Philippians he said in 4:8, "Whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Paul probably did not have lovely looking people in mind, but the fact is, the power of positive thinking is aided by the beauty of people. Power can be used for good or evil, and so the devil himself uses the power of beauty, for he can be an angel of light. The world is full of beautiful lights and beautiful places to lure people into the ugliness of sin. Evil cannot succeed on its own. It must make use of something good to get anywhere, and that is why beauty is one of its primary resources. Nevertheless, it is God who is the author of beauty, and it is a great power for good.

Joanna Bailie wrote,

To make the cunning artless, tame the rude,
Subdue the haughty, shake the undaunted soul;
Yea, put a bridal in the lion's mouth,
And lead him forth as a domestic cur,
These are the triumphs of all - powerful Beauty!

Michael Angelo said of his love, that her beauty led him up from low desires and made him want to strive for heaven's best. He said, "How good, how beautiful must be the God that made so good a thing as thee." History is full of great men of God whose greatness, in part, was due to their love of one they felt was beautiful. Johnathan Edwards, the giant intellect, had some awful burdens to bear. Without his wife Sarah it is doubtful he could have survived his trials. He was so captivated by her beauty that he wrote to her concerning a speedy wedding, "Patience is commonly esteemed a virtue, but in this case I may also regard it as a vice."

The beauty he saw was physical, but love does deepen the beauty of lovers so that it is far more than a mere matter of the skin. That beauty is only skin deep is a skin deep saying. External beauty is for attraction, but it is internal beauty that will bind two people together even when age or circumstances rob them of the external. Lasting beauty is inner beauty, and that is why Peter urged Christian women not to labor for surface beauty, but to beautify the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit. Sir Hunt wrote,

What is beauty? Not a show

of shapely limbs and features. No.
These are but flowers
That have their dated hours
To breathe their momentary sweets, then go.
Tis the stainless soul within
That outshines the fairest skin.

The French say, "Beauty without virtue is a flower without perfume." Capito said, "Beauty alone may please, not captivate; If lacking grace, tis but a hook less bait." We must recognize that the real power of beauty depends upon its depth. If it does not go into the very heart of the person, then however enchanting the external beauty, it will not have a lasting effect. This is not just a Christian teaching, but has been recognized by all wise men. The ancient Greek poet Euripides said, "More precious in a woman is a virtuous heart than a face of beauty." Not only is the virtuous heart a vital element, but intelligence is also an important part of a truly beautiful person. The surface specialist forgets this aspect of beauty.

Margaret Fishbeck wrote,

"Women are wacky. Women are vain.
They'd rather be pretty than have a good brain."

If the internal aspects of beauty are neglected, and only the externals are emphasized, beauty becomes a negative thing, and a source of vanity. That is why Prov. 31:30 says, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." The beauty that has the power to please God is the beauty of mind and soul.

It is still true, however, that external beauty is a great value and power. The Shepherd lover says to the Shulamite girl that her eyes are doves. He repeats this again later. He is deeply moved by the beauty of her eyes. In love poetry the eyes are a key focus of attention. Heine wrote,

Two sapphires those dear eyes of thine,
Soft as the skies above thee;
Thrice happy is the man to whom
Those dear eyes say: I love thee.

The reference here to eyes like a dove refers to their gentleness and purity. The dove has meek and gentle eyes. They are very feminine, and not like the fierce eyes of the hawk or vulture. The dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit because of its affectionate nature and fidelity of its mate. The spirit of a woman is reflected in her eyes. Byron wrote,

She walks in beauty like the night
of cloudless climes and starry skies;
and all that's best of dark and bright
meet in her aspect and her eyes.

All Christians should have beautiful eyes. If the spirit of Christ is allowed to fill us, then the dove - like gentleness of the Holy Spirit should fill our eyes with love. As we look at the love language of this song, it is so easy to forget that though it deals with literal lovers, it also has reference to the spiritual love of Christ and His church. This means that beauty is an important aspect of the Christian life. Jesus is the author of all beauty, and He loves beauty, and especially the beauty of people who are being conformed to His image. He became ugly for a while as He went through the agony of the cross that we might become beautiful forever.

Jesus was a beautiful person himself. Many people fail to realize this because of a misunderstanding of one passage in Isa. 53:2 which says, "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him." Some have concluded that Jesus must have been homely, but the context makes it clear that this refers to Jesus only in His hour of rejection when he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Before the cross, all the evidence points to Jesus as being one of the most handsome of men ever to live. John Gill, the great Puritan commentator, referring to the virgin birth of Christ, "As it was free from sin, so was no doubt free from all the blemishes and defects of nature, and in this sense, may. May He be said to be fairer than the children of Adam." No sacrifice could be offered to the Lord if it was not perfect and without blemish. Jesus was the perfect once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world, and He, therefore, had to be a perfect specimen of mankind.

The body of Jesus is the ideal toward which we all move, for we shall ultimately be like Him. When we sing, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me," it is true, we think of His internal beauty, but the fact is, in glory, when we are like Him, it will be a likeness also to His external beauty. Jesus was the brightness of His Father's glory, and the expressed image of His person. It is not likely Jesus had any defect in His body, or anything that would be inconsistent with the image of God. All people were drawn to Him.

Women and children, and great husky fishermen were moved by His charm and personality. He was an ideal man, and nothing in Scripture indicates otherwise. If I see a person known for their beauty who has been in an accident, and I

come and tell you they look terrible, you would not conclude that that person was ugly. You would know that the accident had marred them, and made them ugly to behold. So it is with Christ on the cross. His beauty was marred by man's cruelty, but He was a beautiful person before the cross, and a beautiful person after His resurrection.

We do not have a homely lover of our souls on the throne of majesty. One day we will see the King in His beauty and behold His glory. Even now Paul says the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is given us in the face of Jesus Christ. There is great power in the beauty of Christ to move us to acts of love, and to transform us into His likeness. The hymn says,

Jesus! I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, and Thy beauty fills my soul;
For, by Thine transforming power Thou hast made me whole.

Whether it be a romantic or a religious love, there is no escaping the importance of beauty. Men must be attracted by beauty before they can love. If Jesus can look at us like the Shepherd looked at the Shulamite girl, and say we are beautiful, and our eyes are doves, then we are beautiful people. We are people whose life and attitude express the gentle love of the Holy Spirit. If we find the fire of love is going out, and we do not care for those for whom Christ died, then we need to get a spiritual beauty treatment, and pray,

Come Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers;
Kindle a flame of heavenly love
In these cold hearts of ours.

We can get by without beauty of body, but there is no substitute of beauty of soul. D. L. Moody in his book, Secret Power said, "A man may be a very successful lawyer and no love for his clients, a man may be a very successful physician and have no love for his patients. A man may be a very successful merchant and have no love for his customers, but no man can be a co - worker with God without love. We cannot work for God without love. It is the only tree that can produce fruit on this sin - cursed earth that is acceptable to God." George Pinwell painted a famous picture he called, The Elixir of Love. A charlatan is standing in the village square offering for sale a love potion which he guarantees will awaken love, and make you beautiful to your lover. Young lovers are crowded around wondering if it can be true. Older people purchased some in expectation that it will bring back the glow of love's

younger days. People of all kinds are portrayed as being hungry for a taste of that which will make them beautiful.

With keen spiritual insight the artist represents the charlatan standing at the foot of the village cross. Above him the arms of the cross are stretched out, symbolic of the all-encompassing love of Christ who longs to make all men beautiful before God, by forgiving and cleansing from sin. None give heed, however, but go on buying that which will not satisfy.

Beauty is possible for all, but what is beauty? It is Christlikeness, and can only be attained by those who love Christ and adore Him as the Shulamite girl did her Shepherd lover. A loyal love is not only beautiful in itself, it is the key to growth in beauty. Loving people are beautiful people. Just as we have an obligation to be loving, we have an obligation to be beautiful, and being loving and beautiful means to be like Christ.

ROMANTIC AND RELIGIOUS ROSES

Based on Song of Songs 2:1

Ernest Hemmingway wrote about the experience of Mungo Park, who, on one of his travel adventures, got lost in the vast wilderness of an African desert. He was all alone, and so dead tired, he could not go on. His legs were numbed, and he gave up, and laid down to die. He opened his eyes, and right by his face was a small wild flower of extra ordinary beauty. The whole plant was no bigger than his finger, but it forced new thoughts into his hopeless mind. He said, "I could not contemplate the delicate conformation of its roots, leaves, and capsules without admiration."

He went on to reflect, "Can the Being who planted, watered, and brought to perfection in this obscure part of the world, a thing which appears of so small importance, look with unconcern upon the situation and suffering of creatures formed after His own image?" He concluded, surely not, and then thoughts generated by that little wild flower brought him out of his despair. He got the adrenaline flowing in his veins again, and with new hope, he traveled forward, and found relief, and his life was spared. He was saved by a flower. Here was one man who believed in flower power.

Jesus Christ also believed in flower power, and He used flowers to encourage his followers to positive thinking. "Behold the lilies of the field," he said, "They do not toil or spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Jesus was saying, if God so cares for the flowers, which so quickly pass away, how much more does he care for you, who are his children, and who will live forever. Do not worry about clothing, but let flowers keep you ever conscious that there is never a lack of beautiful clothing in the kingdom of God. Jesus said flower power is a part of God's plan. Someone wrote,

“Our outward life requires them not, then, wherefore had they birth?

To minister delight to man, to beautify the earth,

To comfort man - to whisper hope, when'er his faith is dim,

For He who careth for the flowers, will care much more for him.”

It is no wonder that our Lord is identified with flowers. He is called the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valley. He is a saving flower that gives encouragement and strength to all who behold Him, and He adds beauty to all of life's deserts. The land where Jesus grew up was the land filled with flowers. A British botanist recognized 500 species in Israel, common to that

native soil, and almost another 500 that are unknown beyond Bible lands. Flowers blossomed on a variety of trees, and their images were craved in many places in the Temple.

In spite of all the flowers, only three garden varieties are mentioned in the Bible: The rose, the lily and the henna blossom. It is of interest that all three are in this context. The rose and the lily in verse 1 of chapter 2, and the other in verse 14 of chapter 1. This song of love is also the song of flowers, because flowers and love are closely linked. We want to examine the most popular of all flowers, the rose. We want to see it in the light of its romantic and religious significance.

THE ROMANTIC USE OF THE ROSE

It would be easy to spend all of our time looking at the romantic use of roses. This has been the flower of romance all through history. Botanists speculate much about the Biblical rose. Some feel it was the tulip, or some other flower, but most refer to it as the rose. There is hardly a people of the past who have not used roses to represent love. If you rearrange the letters of rose by taking the e off the end, and putting it in the beginning, you get eros, which is the Greek word for romantic love.

The rose can be a symbol of either the male or female lover. The ancient Greeks called it The King of Flowers. However, Sappho, The Greek poetess, urged that it be called the Queen of Flowers. The fight for equality has been a long battle. In a sense, she won, in that many women are named Rose, but seldom or never does a man bear that name. In her ode to the rose, which she wrote in 600 B. C., she said,

Would Jove a Queen of Flowers ordain,
The Rose, the Queen of Flowers, should reign.
What flower is half so lovely found,
As when, with full - blown beauties crown.
The fame magnificent will all agree,
The Rose, the Queen of Flowers should be.

Shakespeare said, "Fair ladies masked are roses in their bud." The beauty of the rose cause men to use it to identify with the beauty of the one they adore. Volumes of poetry and songs could be filled with the references to roses and love.

Is it the beauty of the rose
Unfolding to my view,
That stirs again this heart of mine

To gentle thoughts of you.
Along the garden ways just now,
I heard the flowers speak:
The white rose told me of your brow,
The red rose of your cheek.

Roses became a part of marriage customs all over the world, including those of the American Indian. We cannot take the time to elaborate, except to say, more things are done with roses than most men ever dreamed of. A partial list would include rose wine, rose jelly, rose pudding, rose oil, rose water, and you name it. You can eat them, smell them, sleep on them, decorate with them, and do many

things to make a more pleasant environment. Almost everyone agrees, however, that Cleopatra over did it when she received Mark Anthony. Among other extravagant things, she had the floor of the banquet hall strewn with rose pedals eighteen inches deep. Nero was also a great user of roses. In that period of history, the rose was so popular that some feared there would be no land left for raising crops.

It is of interest to note that the rose was never used in black magic, but only in white magic. That is, it was used to make love potions to insight romance, or rekindle the love of a mate. It was not used for curses. It became so popular as a potion that it was believed to be good medicine. If it helps love sickness, why not all sickness?

When pain afflicts and sickness grieves,
Its roses' juice the drooping heart relieves.

History has kept this belief alive, and roses have been consumed by millions for medicine. When William Penn came from London, he brought 18 roses to Pennsylvania where he raised them, and wrote recipes for how they could be used. Here is one: "To comfort ye brains, and for ye palsy, and for ye giddiness of the head. Take a hand full of rose flowers, clover, nutmeg, all in a powder, quilt in a little bag and sprinkle with rose water....and lay it in ye nod of ye neck."

We might laugh at such a use of the rose, but in 1856 it was discovered that the rose does have food value and minerals. During World War II, when citrus fruit was scarce, British chemist discovered that rose hips have 400% more vitamin C than oranges. In 1941, the greatest medicinal use of roses in modern times began, as hundreds of tons of rose hips were converted into syrup. This fascinating side line could be pursued, but it would take us far afield. Its value

is in the fact that it reveals how anything that God makes has many values. The healing value of the rose only adds to its value as a symbol of the Great Physician.

We cannot even mention the numerous love stories and operas that use the rose as their theme. Before we look at the religious use of the rose, however, let me share one more romantic use. Swedish folklore says, if two lovers are buried in the same grave, a rose will grow from the mouth of each. There are many stories of this type of thing being found. The grave tree is what it is called. Oscar Wilde's famous poem of a burial of a prisoner in a prison yard suggests it is God's way of revealing something.

He wrote,

Out of his mouth, a red, red rose!

Out of his heart a white!

For who can say by what strange way,

Christ brings his will to light.

The best-known example of this belief is the ballad of William and Margaret.

Margaret was buried in the lower chancel,

And William in the higher;

Out of her breast, there sprang a rose,

And out of his briar.

They grew till they grew up to the church top,

And then they could grow no higher;

And there they tied a true lovers knot

Which made all the people admire.

Strange as it sounds, there are even stranger ideas connected with the rose and romance. Song of Songs would have been lacking a universal concept had it left out all reference to the rose. There is much debate as to whether this first verse is a reference to Christ, or to the Shulamite girl. Is it, the male or the female speaking? The ancient commentators said it is the male, and modern commentators tend to think it is the female. I am convinced the modern interpreters see the story more accurately, but one does not need; therefore, to forsake the insights of the old view.

The Shepherd girl is really putting herself down here. She is saying, I am a mere flower of the plain, and a common flower of the valley. I am not to be compared with the beauties of Solomon's court. I am a wild flower, not one of these frail and delicate hot - house blooms. Her lover responds with a great compliment to knock that nonsense out of her pretty head. He says that she is

such a beautiful flower that she makes all the beauties of the court look like thorns in comparison. Neither of the lovers magnify themselves, but each is magnified and adored by the other. So it is to be with Christ and His Bride, the church. The rose, then, is a reference to the girl, and so also the lily, but for centuries the rose was symbolic of Christ, and it has developed a vast amount of symbolic significance, and so we want to look at -

THE RELIGIOUS USE OF THE ROSE

Let us keep in mind that the rose already had a strong place in religion before Jesus came into history. There is hardly a god, goddess, or great person of antiquity, who is not in some way identified with the rose. Greeks have dozens of stories, and the Mohammedan tell of how their great prophet once rode swiftly to Jerusalem on his sacred steed Al Barak. Both, he and the horse were sweating profusely, and perspiration falling to the earth from his forehead brought forth white roses, and that from his horse brought forth yellow roses. Numerous are the legends of how the rose became red. Most of them involved blood. For example: Venus, the goddess of love, was weeping over the slain Adonis, and she turned and stumbled:

Her naked foot a rude thorn tore,
From sting of briar it bleed,
And where the blood ran evermore,
It dyed the roses red.

The point is, the whole ancient world was full of stories, songs, and poems of roses, and they were a part of the religious rites of most all pagans. Therefore, the hierarchy of the Christian church rejected any use of the rose as a Christian symbol. Clement of Alexandria felt it was abhorrent for a Christian to use roses or lilies. In his culture, they were used constantly to beautify the immorality of the pagan religions. It seemed the best approach to reject the use of the rose.

The church soon learned a lesson; however, we all must learn. You cannot cease to use a beautiful gift of God just because others abuse it. Christians loved roses, and felt they were a beautiful part of God's creation. They felt they were worthy of a place in Christian symbolism. The totally negative approach had to be forsaken. If you can praise God for anything, and use it properly, you should do so. The Christian does not stop taking medicine with

alcohol in it just because millions make fools of themselves with alcohol. If some mad scientist is caught using sour milk to develop bacteria to wipe out the human race, I do not have to give up eating cottage cheese.

The evil abuse of something is no valid reason for abandoning the proper use of it. Such logic finally persuaded the church to use the rose as a symbol. A rose crown was given to martyrs, and numerous churches were built with rose symbolism. Roses became the symbol of heavenly joy. Artists painted both angels and the redeemed wearing roses in heaven. The rose came to represent divine love, and stories of saints and roses became numerous. Theodore Parker said, "Every rose is an autograph from the hand of God on His world about us."

In England, the Order of the Rose had its knights with three rose pedals on their sleeves as symbolic of the Trinity. Coins and jewelry also bore the image of the rose. From the cradle to the cross stories developed about Jesus and the rose. One popular story was that of the Shepherd girl Madelon, who followed the shepherds to Bethlehem, and stood outside weeping. The angel Gabriel asked her why, and she said because she had no gift for the Christ child. Whereupon, Gabriel touched the ground and there appeared a bouquet of Christmas roses, and these were the first gifts of a female to Jesus. Christians told of how the thorn crown on the brow of Christ on the cross burst into beautiful roses after he died. The rose became symbolic of both the beauty and the horror of the cross. Its thorns remind us of the suffering. He endured, and the blossoms of the beautiful salvation he purchased by that suffering. The rose is an excellent flower to symbolize what Jesus did on the cross.

Men saw the thorns on Jesus's brow,
But angels saw the roses.

Men could see the roses later; however, and they interpreted the five petals of the red rose as symbolic of the five wounds of Christ. Rutherford spoke frequently of Christ as Gods rose. "Christ is His Father's Noble Rose casting a sweet smell though heaven and earth. He is a Rose that beautifies all the upper Garden of God." Whatever Jesus is, He is the best of it, and Isaac Watts sang,

Is He a Rose? Not Sharon yields
Such fragrancy in all her fields;
Or if the Lily He assume,
The valleys bless the rich perfume.

Hans Christian Anderson, one of the great story tellers of all time, has a deeply symbolic tale called The Loveliest Rose in The World. It is about a Queen,

who loved flowers and had a glorious garden full of them. Some grew so high they began to creep through the windows of her chamber where she lay dying. The wise men said there is one thing that can save her. Bring her the loveliest rose in the world, a symbol of the purest, brightest love, and she will not die. Young and old alike search the hills and valleys looking for such a rose. After many failures, one day her little son came into the room and said, "Look at what I have read," and he read to her of one who suffered on a cross. A glow came into the Queen's cheeks, and a rose blossomed from the leaves of the Bible. It grew out of the passage dealing with the blood shed for sin. The Queen said, "Now I see. He who beholds this, the loveliest rose on earth, will live and never die."

No preacher ever preached more eloquently about Jesus, as the loveliest rose in the world, then Charles Hadden Spurgeon. We don't have time to quote him as much as he should be heard, but this one paragraph gives you a good taste. "Christ is lovely to all our spiritual senses. The rose is delightful to the eye, but it is also refreshing to the nostril, so is Jesus. All the senses of the soul are ravished and satisfied with Him, whether it be the taste or feeling, the hearing, the sight, or the spiritual smell, all charms are in Jesus."

None among the sons of men,
None among the heavenly train,
Can with Sharon's rose compare,
None so sweet none so fair.

All of this eloquence and poetry may sound far removed from practical everyday living, but this is not so. Flowers are not only beautiful; they are useful, because their beauty and aroma have a positive effect on the mind, and nothing is so practical as a positive mind. That is why Paul said, "If there is anything lovely think about it." When Martin Luther was engaged in his great controversy with Eck, the learned champion of the Catholic church, he kept a bunch of flowers in his hand. As his adversary denounced him with fierce arguments, he smelled the flowers and maintained calmness and confidence with positive thoughts of God. Flowers can encourage the whole man through the nose. Let the aroma of every rose remind you of Christ, and a rose can be a wonderful friend.

The Rose that Bethlehem saw bloom
Out of a heart all full of grace,
Gave never forth its full perfume
Until the cross became its vase.

On May 20, 1918, the best American aviator in France was shot down by a German plane. Major Lufbery had won 18 battles with the German planes, and he was a greathero in France. The funeral procession included 200 American and French officers. As this large group stood around the grave, one American plane after another flew over, shut off the engine, and as they glided by, threw out bunches of red roses. They floated down over the coffin, and the bowed heads of the crowd. These roses from heaven were symbols of their love for this man. The Rose of Sharon is that rose from heaven that is the symbol of God's love for us. We can be saved by the power of this flower from God.

Our fellowship with Christ is to bless us, but also to make us a blessing, as the sweet aroma of His Spirit brings forth in us all the fruits of that Spirit. A Persian fable tells of how a potter selected a piece of common clay to work with, but it smelled so pleasant; he asked it, "O clay where hast thou thy perfume." The clay responded, "I once was a piece of common clay, but I was laid for a time in the company of a rose, and I drank in its fragrance, and now I am scented clay." The fragrance of the rose clings to all in its presence.

You may break; you may shatter, the vase if you will, But the scent of the rose will hang around it still. May God make us willing to be clay in His hands that absorbs the fragrance of Christ; that others might see the beauty of Christ in us, and smell the scent of the Rose of Sharon.

THE GIFT OF MARRIAGE

Based on I Cor. 7:1 - 7

The most famous twins in history were Chang and Eng Bunker born in Siam in 1811. They toured Europe and America repeatedly. They became so well known that all twins whose bodies are physically connected have ever since been called Siamese twins. By their early thirties, they had traveled the world, and amassed a fortune. They decided to settle down in North Carolina and become farmers. One of their neighbors, David Yates, was a Quaker, and a part-time clergyman. He had a 19-year-old daughter Adelaide, and a 20-year-old daughter named Sarah Ann. Believe it or not, these two girls started courting Chang and Eng. Everybody thought it was insane, and both families were threatened by

town folk who were sure it was evil.

Nevertheless, there was a double wedding in April of 1843. Naturally, they moved into the same house, and unbelievably; they had happy and fruitful marriages. Eng fathered seven boys and five girls. Chang fathered seven girls and three boys. All 22 children were normal except for a son and daughter who were deaf mutes. Chang and Eng lived to age 63, and they were buried in the cemetery of the Baptist church of White Plains, which they helped to build, and where they and their family worshiped for many years. Many of their descendants still attend this church today, and over one thousand people trace their descent from these original Siamese Twins.

You would think if anyone should remain single it would be people like this, who had such an enormous handicap. However, the fact is, Frederick Drimmer, in his book *Very Special People*, reports that 90% of human oddities, who use to be called freaks, marry normal people, and have normal children, and very few of these marriages end in divorce. How can these people make it, and have happy marriages, when so many people without their handicaps cannot? We can only conclude with the Apostle Paul. These people have the gift of marriage. In verse seven Paul states that each person has a special gift. His is the gift to be single and satisfied, but if one does not have that gift, then he has another, and that is the gift to be married and satisfied.

Just as some people can be happy and fulfilled single, so others can be happy and fulfilled married. Paul nowhere forbids marriage to anyone, for he writes to Timothy that it is heresy and the doctrine of demons to forbid marriage.

Paul's concern is to prevent those with the gift of singleness from entering marriage. We will see why as we continue our study.

Since the key element in each of these gifts is the sex drive, there is no way Christians can escape examining their sex drive, and still be obedient to God. One's sexual motivation, or lack of it, is a gift of God. If you have the gift of self-control, and can abstain from sex, you have the gift of singleness. It is foolish to be intimidated by all the clamor of the world that life and sex are synonymous. Consider yourself gifted to pursue other goals for the kingdom of God. If, however, you have a strong sex drive, consider yourself ungifted to remain single, but gifted to make a happy marriage. The rule here, says Barclay, is, "No man should attempt a way of life for which he is naturally ungifted."

The key theme of this whole chapter is prevention. Paul's advice here is to prevent those with the gift of singleness from marriage, and to prevent those with the gift of marriage from staying single, and to prevent in all cases the immorality that the sex drive can lead to, if not brought under self-control. Paul is no ivory tower mystic who responds to all problems with the pious advice that Christ is the answer. Of course, Christ is the answer, and obedience to His will is the key to all of life's problems, but the question is, what is his will, and how do I submit to His Lordship in specific cases?

It is too general to say Christ is the answer, or pray about it. Paul is getting very specific, and actually deals with the issues of sex so practically, that it has taken centuries of study to bring the world up to the point where they recognize this old bachelor knew more about sex than most of the married people of history.

Most of the blunders of church history were caused by Christians not taking Paul seriously as a sex counselor. This one paragraph could have prevented centuries of darkness and heartache in millions of Christian's lives. When Christians do not walk in the light that God gives, they are condemned to walk in darkness, and make the same mistakes over and over. If we are going to let the light of God's Word guide us, we need to lay aside a false spirituality that tries to hide the reality of lust. A retired pastor was once asked by a friend, "How old do you have to be to stop struggling with lust?" He responded, "Why ask me? I'm only 70." That is realism, and Paul was a realist.

Paul is trying to help Christians to be moral people in a very immoral world, and to do that he has to focus on the sex drive. In chapter 6, he makes it clear that the Corinthians were still visiting prostitutes. He writes in verses 15 and

16, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I. Therefore, take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who gives himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her?"

Prostitution was a way of life in Corinth, and Paul is fighting to change the lifestyle of these pagans who have become Christians, and who did not realize all the implications of what it means to be a Christian. This is why Paul is not dealing with marriage on the level of the mystical union of Christ and the church. He is on the level of lust and the sex drive, because that is where the people are he is trying to help.

If it seems unspiritual to you, it is because you have a limited view of spirituality. True spirituality is being able to deal with people where they are, and to help them bring every aspect of their lives into conformity with the will of God. Sex is a major part of life; therefore, to help people deal with their sex life is being spiritual. The question is often asked; how do I know if it is Gods will that I marry? Paul says the answer may be very simple, as simple as this: Know thyself. Examine your makeup. Do you have a strong sex drive that is constantly pushing you toward fornication? That is a sign you are made for marriage. If the temptation is easy to handle, that is a sign you may be gifted for singleness.

It may sound like a very low motivation to get married, only to satisfy the sex drive. You find a wife or husband just to prevent your sex drive from leading you to prostitutes and others outside of marriage. This makes marriage a sort of corral to tame and limit the wild horses of passion. That may seem like a low motivation, but the fact is, the difference between ordered civilization and anarchy is the control of the sex drive. Marriage provides men with a means by which they keep their power under control, and thus maintain a stable society. There can be no orderly moral society without marriage, which limits the sex drive.

Every time a civilization has tried to ignore this God - ordained principle, that civilization has lost its foundation, and crumbled. Sex is not a mere side issue. It is vital to regulate it for survival and success in any society. Doctor J. D. Unwin, of Cambridge University, studied 80 civilizations covering 4000 years, and he concluded that any society which chose sexual promiscuity declined, and those that chose sexual discipline developed creative energy. Sex is like fire, under control it is a wonderful resource of energy, but out of control, it is a most destructive power.

Paul is saying, if you can regulate your sex drive, do not feel the pressure to get married. So many young people panic because they see their friends getting married, and they feel left out. Their family and friends add to the pressure by suggesting they may not be normal by staying single. This kind of social pressure forces many to marry, who ought not to. They marry out of the desire to conform to a public image, and not because of sexual passion. This lack of passion leads to a cold and mechanical relationship that often leads to an affair or divorce. Paul is right, and one should not get married just because it is the popular thing to do. You should get married when you do not see how you can live a normal life without a mate.

The question of the Corinthians was, how can we live in a sex saturated society, where the sex drive is constantly stimulated, and not be immoral? Paul says, get married. Doesn't that make marriage a sort of legal lust? Yes, it does, but legal and controlled lust is far superior to illegal and uncontrolled lust. It is the only way to build an orderly society, and the lone way to develop a Christian lifestyle in a pagan world. However, notice, Paul is not so superficial as to assume that marriage would end the problem of lust. He did not say, get married and all your problems are over. On the contrary, he recognized that married people still struggle with the temptation to be immoral. He goes on to give married people advice that will help them prevent lust and promote love.

Here is the Pauline sex manual, written almost 2000 years ago. If contemporary Christians heeded it, it would take care of their needs. This is just what all the modern books are saying. If you want to prevent sex outside the marriage, make sure there is so much within the marriage that there is no left-over energy for Satan to work with. No Christian can be effectively tempted to get into an affair if all the sex energy he or she has is regularly released within the marriage bond. Marriages may be made in heaven, but their upkeep is done here on earth, and sex is the oil that keeps the machinery of marriage from breaking down. This gives us a clue as to why Paul did not want those with the gift of singleness to get married. They have little interest in sex, and; therefore, they make their mate a target that Satan's fiery darts cannot miss. Imagine one of these Corinthian young men who have grown up following the pagan custom of going to a temple prostitute. He now becomes a Christian, and decides to marry this sweet Christian girl he met at church. She became a Christian at a young age, and has been pure sexually. In fact, she has no interest in sex at all. She is, in other words, a gifted single. These two get married, and

very quickly the husband begins to feel rejection, because he is extremely active sexually, and she is trying to avoid it as much as she can. You can see the tremendous tension this puts on the marriage.

That man is going to go through enormous conflict, as to whether or not he will go back to visit the temple prostitute. In other words, the act of marriage, or merely becoming husband and wife, is not the cure for immorality. The cure is in sexual satisfaction, and if a person marries who does not have this gift, it only makes matters worse. Those gifted to be single are a curse to their mates, who are gifted for marriage, and need sexual satisfaction.

So you can see why Paul urges people to stay single if they do not have the gift of marriage. Lacking this, if they get married, they just change the sphere of temptation from fornication to adultery, and this is hardly an adequate motivation for marriage. The principle is simple: If you can't carry to tune, don't join the choir. If you are faint at the sight of blood, don't become a nurse. If you can't add, don't become an accountant. If you don't like sex, or don't feel the need of sex, don't enter a partnership where sex is basic to its success. Paul knows a lot of problems can be prevented if gifted singles stay single, but this is hardly the end of the complexity of the issues involved. Paul is as up to date as books rolling off the presses today. The first thing he deals with in marital sex is, the equality of the sexes. For centuries, the church ignored Paul's insights, and developed the view that only males have sexual rights. The male is the aggressor, and female is the passive vessel designed to meet his need. Wives were trained to believe it was wrong for them to enjoy sex. Millions of Christian girls were warned by their mothers that sex was a necessary evil, and they should be prepared to endure it, but not enjoy it. The sex revolution broke us out of that prison of man's own making, and has revealed what Paul was stating centuries ago. Sexual satisfaction is the equal right of the wife as well as the husband. They are mutually obligated to satisfy one another. Women have looked down on Paul, assuming he was a male chauvinist, but they failed to see that he is really the father of women's equality in marriage. There is not the slightest hint in this passage that the wife is secondary to the husband. Equality is all you see, and if mates honor that equality, they will experience the full joys of married life. The more you know about the history of sex in the church, the more you can appreciate the Apostle Paul's realism. Never once in this passage, dealing with marital sex, does Paul even mention reproduction.

I am amazed as I read Christian history, to see how many Christian leaders

were afraid to admit that sex had any other function than that of producing babies. The thought that it had psychological values, and could even be a means of entertainment, was never allowed to enter Christian theology. The Catholic church refused to let Paul play a role in their theology of sex. They said sex was for reproduction, period! This being the case, any form of birth control was a resisting of the will of God. They said it was unnatural to prevent child birth. Of course, it is unnatural to cut your grass, and your whiskers also, but grass and whiskers never became a theological issue like sex. Because of this limited view of sex, millions of Christians have had to endure all kinds of guilt.

All of it could have been avoided by listening to Paul. Paul says sex is an appetite, and like hunger and thirst, it needs to be satisfied. Mates do not decide we want to have a baby, and so let's engage in sex. Mates have the hunger for sex hundreds of times more frequently than they have a desire for children. The sexual appetite has no connection with the number of children you hope to produce. Animals are built to have a mating season in which the sex drive functions for reproduction.

Man is not made like this at all. There is no mating season for man. He has a sex appetite all the time, and the sexual function of mates are not just to have children, but to satisfy this perpetual hunger. If children are the only reason for sex, then after you have the children you want, sex should end. Unfortunately, some mates feel this way, and it destroys the marriage. Sexual pleasure is meant to be enjoyed just as long as the pleasure of eating is meant to be enjoyed.

Paul says there are occasions when you can interrupt the regular release of sexual tension. He gives the example of devoting yourself to prayer. In our day it would be for the sake of going on a retreat, or visiting loved ones, or being in the hospital, or being in a job situation that demands separation. Even so, Paul says to let this be by agreement. In other words, Paul expected mates to talk about sex and their needs in terms of frequency. The only time it is legitimate to refuse sexual satisfaction is by mutual consent.

One of the major problems in marriage is the tyrannical role of each mate over their own body. They developed a dictatorship, and say; I alone decide what happens to my body. Paul says this is the wrong form of government in marriage. Marriage is to be a democracy with each mate having an equal voice in what is done with each other's body. Marriage not only makes two into one, it makes each one into two. You can lose 50% control over your body when

you marry, for now it belongs, not just to you, but to your mate equally. Refusal to submit to this arrangement has hurt millions of marriages.

Those who give heed to Paul, however, find in this old bachelor's advice the key to marital bliss. They are those who can live in a sex saturated society and not worry about the stimulus to lust all about them, for they know they have a mate who will release all tension, and eliminate the dangers of temptation. Mates, like Paul's ideal, will be like two scientists who worked together in a laboratory to seek a solution to a problem.

They will be open to experiment to keep the sexual flames alive in their marriage, knowing they have an obligation to each other to prevent Satan from getting a foothold in their lives through lack of self - control. Mates who give heed to Paul will be aware of sexual needs, and will take the necessary steps to meet those needs.

Prevention is the name of the game when it comes to sex. The only cure for bad sex is good sex. To avoid doing it wrong, do it right. The whole history of the church could have been different, and history can yet be different, for those Christians who will listen to Paul's wisdom, and look upon marital sex, not as dirty, but as duty - delightful duty that provides mates escape from the enticing power of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those who do so demonstrate to the glory of God the blessedness of the gift of marriage.

THE SINGLE SAINT

Based on I Cor. 7:1 - 7

John Woolman, the Quaker, demonstrated the power of the question to change lives. In the 18th century, many of the wealthy Quakers were slave holders. He was convinced this was inconsistent with Christian compassion, and he vowed he would rid the Quakers of this terrible blight. His strategy was not to picket, or hold rallies. He did not publish vindictive sermons against slavery, and those who practiced it. Instead, he spent 30 years traveling up and down the length of the land visiting the slave holders. He would accept their hospitality, and ask them questions about how it felt, as a child of God, to own slaves. He did not condemn, but just kept asking disturbing questions. What does owning slaves do to you as a moral person? What kind of an institution are you passing on to your children? These honestly asked questions sensitized the conscience of the Quakers, and brought forth something noble in their hearts. The result: One hundred years before the Civil War not a single Quaker held slaves. By means of questions, Woolman changed the course of history for his people.

Robert Louis Stevenson was right when he said, "You start a question and its like starting a stone from on top of a hill; away the stone goes, starting others." Questions are the key to education. Every student needs to ask questions to learn. Every teacher needs to ask questions to teach effectively. The Bible is full of questions that have changed lives and history. Paul asked on the Damascus Road, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The answer has changed the entire world. The Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ led him and millions since into the kingdom of God.

Jesus was a Master at the art of using questions. To the group of His disciples, he would ask, "Who do men say that I am?" Then He would draw from them what they had heard, and by so doing keep his finger on the pulse of the times. To Peter, He asked, "Lovest thou me more than these?" And by this got Peter's personal commitment. After His parables, He would often ask the Pharisees questions like, "Who then was truly a neighbor to the one who fell among thieves?" Or, "Now which of them will love Him more?" Jesus was using questions all the time.

The point is, questions are vital to growth. They get us into new territory. This whole chapter of I Cor. 7 is the result of questions the Corinthian Christians asked Paul. Paul is here being the Ann Landers, and Dear Abby of the early church. They are constantly being asked questions about the male and female relationship. It just goes to show you, no matter how much things change; they are still the same. The questions asked of Paul 2000 years ago were the same questions that are asked every day in advice columns. The reason for this is simple, no matter how much technology changes human life; it does not change the basic problems of the male - female relationship. The computer does not change the fact that they still love each other, lust for each other, and in varying degrees, hate each other. Progress has not changed this one iota.

The major theme of social questions has always been, and will always be, how do I relate to the opposite sex? You cannot escape these issues, for they are like the air we breathe, and are everywhere present. It is part of the human environment, and even monks who live in the desert discover that one of their biggest problems is the battle over the issue of sex. Nobody escapes. I Cor. 7 leads us into the universal topic man is capable of considering. It is the battle of the sexes. This is one of the most complex battles of life, and the result is, we see Paul being more flexible and more cautious in this chapter than anywhere else in his epistles. He makes clear the distinction between what is God's command, and what is his own conviction.

Paul was an idealist, and he could conceive of ways that life could be better, but he was also a realist who knew life was not that way, and so we see him operating on two different levels right from the start. His first piece of advice sets the tone for the whole chapter. He starts off with this lofty statement, "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." He is not referring to Typhoid Mary either, but to all women. But then, as if to say, I know that is like asking a fish not to touch water, he goes on to deal with how men ought to touch women, and vice versa.

In other words, Paul is saying, it would be great if we did not have to struggle with all the complex issues of sexuality. Just think of all the social issues that would be resolved if men did not touch women. It would end prostitution, rape, abortion, population explosion, child abuse, wife beating, and divorce, just to name the most obvious. The world could be changed by this simple formula. The major weakness of it is simply; nobody is interested in applying the formula. This is the primary reason all simple solutions do not work. Paul knows it is an ivory tower formula, and that is why, even though he really

means it, he goes on to deal with the issues of sex.

Paul has an extremely high view of marriage and sex. There is no higher view anywhere. Therefore, let us not think that Paul urges singleness because he has a low view of the union of the sexes. He even warns about the heresy of those who forbid marriage. Paul is just pointing out that singleness has a place in God's plan, and some Christians would be better off to remain single. Paul had the gift for being single, and he knew others had it also. They might all be able to ride in a chariot at the same time, but they are there in every church. Some people are gifted to be single, and not just to grin and bear it, but to love it like Paul.

In verse 7 Paul wishes those who had this gift were the majority, but he knows it isn't so, and he recognizes the variety of gifts in the body. He will not try to impose his gift on those who do not have it, for he knows it is a mistake for a Christian with a strong sex drive to try to live the single, or celibate life.

History reveals the terrible battles Christians have fought who tried to follow Paul's example without his gift of a fully controlled sex drive.

Henry Martyn, the famous missionary, is a powerful illustration of the ungifted trying to imitate the gifted. As a young single pastor Henry could perform weddings, and be grateful that he did not feel any need for a wife. Then Lydia Greenfell came into his life, and he lost his certainty. He could not get her out of his mind. He would toss and turn in his bed at night, trying to keep this idol out of his mind, so he could pray and not think of her. He was soon to leave for India as a missionary. Some felt he should marry before he left, but others said no, and in spite of the fact that he loved Lydia, and he could not stop dreaming of her, he listened to those who urged celibacy.

He was so miserable in India, and so lonely without her, that the leaders on the field agreed he should marry. He wrote to her and asked her to come to India.

It was agony waiting for her reply. It took 18 months for a letter to get to England and a reply back. Meanwhile, he was in torment as he fought off lust for the women in India. He begged Lydia to come and be his wife. He had no gift for singleness at all. He was like those of whom Paul wrote, "It is better to marry than to burn." Paul was talking of the very lust that Henry was battling.

Henry Martyn became the first missionary to live in Persia. He had a gift for languages, and was an excellent translator of the New Testament. He laid the foundation for the church in several languages. He died trying to get back to England, and to his Lydia. He died at age 31. He died single, but not successfully so. The evidence would indicate that his life would have been

more effective for the glory of God had he married. Singleness is not for everyone. John Fletcher, another preacher, came to realize this.

For years, he remained single, for he believed it was the best, but then he got to think about Enoch in the Old Testament. He was a man who walked with God, yet he bore sons and daughters. He reasoned that if a man can attain the highest degree of holiness, and still be married, why couldn't he to be both spiritual and married? So he did marry. Most all the Protestant reformers were celibate priests, but when they got the freedom to do so, they married.

Would Paul be disappointed in them? I am sure not. Paul makes it clear, all through this chapter; he would like to see everyone stay single, but only if they can handle it. If they do not have the self - control to do so, he expects them to marry. Paul is not trying to contradict God. In Gen. 2:18 God said, "It is not good for a man to be alone." Paul knows marriage is ordained of God. He knows it is the highest illustration he had for the relationship of Christ and the church. Nothing in this chapter can be interpreted in a way that degrades marriage. All Paul is doing is emphasizing that there is a valid alternative for many Christians. No Christian needs to feel obligated to get married, as if that is the only way to have a full and meaningful life. This is a truth that needs to be heard in our day, for there are millions of singles who have little chance to ever marry.

Singles and married people alike need to know about what Paul is saying. You do not need marriage to give life meaning. Life can be complete, and fulfilled to the glory of God without it. It is just not true that never having sex and babies, and never having a mate means never having a complete life. Peter had a wife, but Paul did not. Was Paul's life less meaningful? History is filled with very successful people who never married, and never had children. They are not the majority, but they are a powerful minority, and they have made a difference in history.

So the first lesson we need to learn from Paul's response to the questions of the Corinthians is this: Reject the myths about singleness.

1. The myth that singles cannot be complete and happy. The fact is, there are many singles that do not even have the gift who are able to live very meaningful and effective lives. Many of these do burn, as Paul says they will. They have a terrible battle with the sex drive, but they do manage to keep it under control, and make their lives count for the cause of Christ.

2. Another myth that needs to be shattered is that singles must not be as normal, or as attractive as those who marry. The facts are that some of the most

beautiful, handsome, educated, and well-rounded personalities in the world are single. Singles often keep themselves looking good longer than married people, who often lose interest after years of marriage. Singles get satisfaction out of being liked and appreciated by both sexes, and this keeps them trying to be attractive, for they are more aware of the need to do so in all relationships.

3. Another myth is that singles are anti - children. It is false, for singles make up a large part of the professions of teaching, nursing, and social work. It is singles who are constantly striving to overcome the problems created by married people who have children they do not want. It is poorly adapted married people and not singles, who are anti - children.

4. Another myth is that singles live a life of sexual frustration. It is true that this is a major battle for many, but it is for married people as well. The degree of their frustration is not necessarily any greater than that of married people, and for many, the battle is far less severe.

A good case can be made for selective celibacy. There are people so gifted that they can live very complete and useful lives as singles. Paul is making it clear; it is a good thing for those so gifted to discover the joys of voluntary singleness. In the Old Testament, there is not a real place for singles. The priests had to marry, and the concept of bachelorhood did not even exist. There are hints of singleness, but nowhere is it encouraged. It was very near disgrace to remain a virgin as an adult, and a definite disgrace not to bear a child. Old Testament saints could not dream of giving heed to Paul. Their whole perspective on life demanded marriage, sex, and children.

Why does the New Testament change this whole value system? Because it is no longer earth centered. In Christ, the kingdom of God has come, and now the focus is on the eternal, rather than the earthly. Now one can give up earthly values, and still find fulfillment. You don't have to bear children now, for you can, like Paul, bring forth children on the spiritual level. The new birth makes it possible to be a single parent, and not by sex, but by the Gospel of salvation. You can bring forth new life for the kingdom of God. There will be singles in heaven with large families of children they have brought into the kingdom. Now that the bridegroom has come, singles can be married on a spiritual level.

Yes, there is the sacrifice of the pleasure of sex, but for those who do not burn to satisfy the desire, there is an anticipation of even greater pleasure. The pleasure of loving forever all those who will be in heaven, because of their

sacrificial labors. For all we know, the pleasure of hugging each of his converts in heaven will far surpass the pleasure of sex. The point is, in an earth centered religion like Judaism, sexual pleasure is vital, and children are essential. In a heaven centered religion, sex and children are no longer essential to completeness. Jesus, Paul, and John, lived beautiful fruitful lives without marriage.

Each of them had close relationships with the opposite sex, however. We need to get the idea out of our heads that singleness means sexless. Singles are sexual beings, and they still relate to the opposite sex in many positive ways. Love is the greatest virtue for singles, as well as for married people, and love includes relating to the opposite sex.

Paul had numerous women he related to. He loved them, and appreciated them, and they loved him in return. The same was true for Jesus and John. Women played a major role in their lives. They were not hermits who ran off to avoid contact with the world of sexuality. The single person with the gift of celibacy can actually be more loving, and more intimately related to more people, than the married person. A single person with self - control can hug and kiss and touch and make many people feel they are loved. Paul may have kissed more women than we could imagine, and with him, it would truly be the holy kiss, that could express love without lust.

I do not pretend to know how many people can live like Paul. All I know is that Paul felt there were more than most of us would guess, and he appeals to them to examine their lives to see if they have the gift. The single Saint is not sexless, but one who can be satisfied with psychological sex. Physical sex is reserved for the married, but psychological sex is for everyone. This is simply the enjoyment of the opposite sex. Conversation with them, activity with them is pleasant and enjoyable.

Jesus enjoyed the presence of Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene, to name a few. Paul also had a close friend named Mary, and the dear sister Phoebe was special to him, and also the married woman Pricilla. He has a whole list of girl friends in Rom. 16. John writes his second epistle to the elect lady whom he loved in the truth. There is no escaping it, for the New Testament opens up a whole new possibility in the male - female relationship. They can now, in Christ, be very loving to each other, and devoted to each other, without the commitment to sex and marriage.

It is rare, but history does record some famous examples of this kind of relationship.

1. St. Jerome, who translated the Vulgate. This was the Bible the church used for a thousand years longer than any other Bible. He had St. Paula, a wealthy widow who abandoned everything to follow him, and help him in his translation.

2. St. Francis of Assisi had his Clare, who left her family to be his disciple.

3. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila loved each other, and wrote books together.

4. Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal served the kingdom together, and were buried

together.

Here were singles with deep love relationships that did not demand physical union. They were sexual in that they were of the opposite sex, and they met needs only the opposite sex could meet, but they were relationships free from scandal, and full of fruitfulness for the kingdom of God. Rare indeed, but like all rare things, very valuable, and that is why Paul is searching for them in this chapter. Christians need to take Paul seriously, and examine their lives to see if they might be gifted to be a single saint.

The complete personality is one who can love self, love others, and love God. The single is just as capable of this as is the married person. Married people do not have a monopoly on love. They actually limit their freedom to express love by their commitment to the exclusive love of their mate. The gifted single can be far freer to expand the outreach of their love. The great love chapter of the Bible was written by Paul, the single Saint. This means we need to recognize that in Christ, the best is possible for both married and singles. Both can live a life of love, and be channels of God's love in a world dying for lack of it.

Single or married life finds its highest meaning, and fulfillment, in love - the agape love of God, which is found only in Jesus Christ. All other relationships are secondary to one's relationship to Christ. If He is your Lord and Savior, you can live a life of meaningful love regardless of whether you are married or single. Paul recommends it because he knows by experience it is possible to be a single saint.

HOW TO LOVE YOUR WIFE

Based on Eph. 5:22 - 33

A minister was visiting a state asylum, and was being shown around by the superintendent. On the first floor, a man sat in a rocking chair moaning, "O Mary, why did you do it?" The superintendent said, "This is a very sad case of a man jilted in love." Continuing on the tour, they finally came to the top floor, and they walked down the corridor lined with padded cells. As they passed one, they heard a man screaming and knocking his head against the wall. "That," commented the superintendent, "is the man who married Mary." This is a joke, of course, but the facts are not very funny when you discover that people are not just going crazy about each other, but are going crazy because of each other. Dr. Hadfield, a writer in psychology, said, "I have personally known many neuroses precipitated by marriage; indeed, I am sometimes tempted to think that half of my patients are neurotic because they are married." There is just no doubt about it, marriage is a gamble. It is a leap of faith. You can never know the future, and so any act of commitment in the present must be an act of faith. It is unrealistic for two imperfect people to think that the uniting of their imperfections will produce perfection. Gray mixed with gray never makes white.

Imperfections are an inevitable part of marriage, and there is only one antidote to the poison of imperfection, and that is love. That which is the ultimate in God's relationship to man is also the ultimate in a man's relationship to his wife. Harold T. Christensen said, "Love is the magnet that brings people together and the cement that holds them together; it is the most essential element in pair unity." Without love, all other factors will fail to make marriage a success. Kepler, the great astronomer, failed in his first marriage, and so he decided to put the next one on a soundly scientific basis.

He made a list of all the women he considered available. Then he listed all their good qualities, and all their bad ones. He gave each item a value, and by exact mathematical calculation, he made his choice. His second marriage turned out worse than the first. Science can never find a substitute for love. Match making machines can pick two people that ought to be ideal for each other, but the machine cannot make them love each other, and without love, there can be no lasting unity. This is obvious, but what is not so obvious is what Paul implies by his command that husbands love their wives. The

implication is that husbands have a tendency to neglect this most important factor in marriage. The two major problems that Paul puts his finger on are, unsubjective wives, and unloving husbands. This means that husbands who do love their wives fail to express it, and so lose the benefits of it in making a happy marriage.

This is due in part in our culture to the modern male's misconception about the nature of love. All the mass media convey the concept that it is something like being struck by lightning. It is a matter of mere chance. It just happens to you. Your eyes meet across a crowded room, and it happens - you fall in love. The only problem is that this kind of love is as easy to fall out of as it is to fall into. With this view of love, which makes it a matter of stimulus and response, one is on the lowest level of love.

If the love of Christ were on this level, there would be no cross and no salvation, for there is nothing in man to stimulate God to sacrificial love. His love is agape love, which means it is objective rather than subjective. It is a matter of the will. It is an act of choice. This is the way men must view love if they are to be on the highest level. Anyone can love on the level of eros, for this is the natural response to what is pleasing. But only those who work at it, and strive to make it a matter of the will can love as God loves, and as Christ loved the church.

Eric Fromm in *The Art of Loving* says, "Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one's capacity to love." This means that men are constantly striving to be successful, powerful, and rich in order to be loved, when they ought to be striving to develop their own skill in loving. Dr. Popenoe said, "If we gave as little time to the training of our intellect as we do to our emotions, very few would rise above the level of idiocy." Men must cease to think of love as just happening, and instead recognize it is a gift that can be and must be trained as any other faculty if it is to be effective. Love is a talent that too many husbands have buried.

Paul could not command husbands to love their wives if love was only a passive experience, and a matter of chance. He could only do so if love is a skill, and an act, and something one can develop by practice. The skeptic defined married love as, "The insane desire to squeeze orange juice out of a lemon." Paul, however, says that no wife would be a lemon if her husband loved her as she was meant to be loved. This love of which Paul speaks is so precious, and on such a high level, that the only example adequate to illustrate it is the love of Christ for the church. Paul also illustrates this love by the

natural self - love of each person for themselves. Using these two illustrations Paul tells us how a husband is to love his wife. First of all, he is to love her -

SACRIFICALLY

The husband is to love as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Jesus was never a husband, and yet, even in this aspect of life, he is to be our example and ideal. The church is his bride, and never was there a greater romance. Jesus left his palace in eternity to fight and slay the dragon that held his bride in bondage. No knight was ever bolder, and never did a king fight so bravely for His queen. He laid down his life for her, but he conquered the dragon, that old serpent the devil, and He set the prisoner free. He then returned to His throne in glory, and He took with Him that part of His bride already dead to this world. The vast majority of those He died to save, however, were yet to live in history.

Jesus continues to guide and intercede for His bride on earth. He never leaves her nor forsakes her. He is just as concerned now to rescue her from the power of sin as He was on the cross to rescue her from the penalty of sin. His sacrificial love does not change. He is still giving himself up for His bride whom he might sanctify and cleanse her, and bring her to a state of perfection, so he can take her to His mansion where they shall live happily ever after.

There is no greater love story than the love of Christ for the church. Paul says this is the standard for a husband's love for His wife. When you have loved your wife as sacrificially as Christ loved the church, then you can say you have done your best.

You can see now why love on the level of mere feeling and sexual stimulus is wholly inadequate. Christian love is not a getting love, but a giving love. It is not a love that falters when it alternation finds. Your wife may not be all you expected when you married her. If she was, you would not need to have a sacrificial love. Just as Jesus would not need infinite patience if the church was perfect. It is a wife's imperfections that call for a sacrificial love on your part. If Christ gave himself, it seems quite petty for men to complain because of having to give up a ball game, fishing, or a night out bowling in order to be with her. If there are any objections, do not voice them to me, for Jesus set the standard, and Paul is the one pointing to it. Like all the rest of the Bible, it can be ignored, but the consequences are far costlier than obedience. A love that is not willing to sacrifice is a love that will never qualify as Christian love. A word to the wives is seldom sufficient, but don't be foolish enough to try to

enforce this yourself by demanding sacrifice.

To make this realistic and practical we must get down to the level on which we live. It is not likely any of us will have to die for our wives. We will not have to give an arm or a leg, or even an eye. We will not have to sacrifice our car, golf clubs, or even our love for cashews, or some other luxury. Marriage experts tell us that wives can take a crisis quite well, but it is the little things that drive them to despair. They are seldom miserable because we won't die for them, or make some colossal sacrifice. They are usually miserable because their husbands will not sacrifice some small, insignificant, but annoying habit. Most people end in the divorce court because of a mole hill which was not removed, and it grew into a mountain. An example of this is illustrated by the cartoon where the wife is standing at the door with her arms full of coats, and four little children standing at her side. The husband comes running down the stairs with a look that says, "What are you standing around for?" She responds, "This time you put the coats on, and I'll go honk the horn."

A college professor had a beautiful wife, and she was very talented. He was not very handsome, and it puzzled the other professors. They couldn't figure out how he could capture the affections of such a woman. He didn't have looks, power, or money. Finally, someone asked her why she married him, and she said it was his brain. "His brain!" exclaimed the inquirer. "Yes," she said, "It's the little things in life that count." Another joke illustrating a very real truth. Little things really do count, and a husband cannot love his wife as he ought until he sees this. Roy Burkhart has written a lot of books on love and marriage, and one time he asked a thousand wives what they thought were the marks of a good husband. Listen to the top answers :

1. He is not bored to stay home in the evening.
2. He never reminds me what a good cook his mother is.
3. He helps with the dishes.
4. He tells me interesting things about his work.
5. He notices little changes I make in the house.
6. He always cleans the tub after washing.
7. He appreciates new dishes I make.

There is not what could be called a major item in the list. A husband looks at the home, car, appliances, and the paycheck he earns, and he feels these provisions make him a good husband. However, these are expected by the wife; she sees no real love in all that. Love to her is shown in little things. Love is seen in what is freely done, and not in what one is compelled to do.

Jesus said, "When you are compelled to go a mile, go two." It is the second mile that counts, for it is a mile you have chosen to go, and only that mile is an act of love.

The husband is compelled by his own needs to work and provide for his family. He doesn't have a great deal of choice if he wants to remain an accepted member of society. This does not mean it is not important. It is vital, but it is not the second mile, and it is not a sign of sacrificial love. Sacrificial love is in the little things you do to show your wife you appreciate her.

Someone has said, "A flower given to your wife for no reason at all is worth a car load of Easter lilies." It is the act of doing something for her, or with her, for no other reason than you desire her happiness that expresses agape love.

Christopher Morley wrote -

The man who never in his life
Has washed the dishes with his wife,
Or polished up the silver plate -
He still is largely celibate.

It Christ only loved the church enough to die for her, but did not care about many lesser matters; we would be a sorry bride. However, notice how Paul stresses that Jesus is concerned that his bride be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. He is aiming for perfection that she might be holy and without blemish. He not only does the major things like lifting her out of the miry pit, but he goes all the way in taking care of every spot and wrinkle to restore her to perfection. Justification is vital, but the greatest joys and blessings of the Christian life are in the realm of sanctification, for here the love of Christ is demonstrated to us personally.

Providing a home, protection, and food and clothing, are major tasks of the husband, but it is in the secondary realm of thoughtfulness, and the doing of little things for and with his wife that brings to marriage the greatest joys. This is sacrificial love because it calls for real effort, though, and discipline on the part of a husband to do it. By nature, he will miss almost every opportunity, or will think these little things crazy or meaningless. Jesus does not think anything is too small or insignificant in His love for the church. The husband who wants to love his wife as he should, and as God wants him too, will consider nothing too small for his attention.

One area where husbands consistently fall short is in simply telling their wives that they love them. A woman needs to hear words of endearment. Her very nature craves for assurance. It is one of the factors that explain why more

women come to Christ then men. Women need the assurance and security that only Christ can give more than men do. A husband is never crueller than when he does not give his wife the assurance of his love. Often a wife in frustration accuses her husband of not loving her just because it is the only way she can get him to say he does.

According to Margaret Johnstone, a woman is often unreasonable because she is starved emotionally, and this is her way of forcing her husband into expressing some kind of concern for her, even if it is only a concern that she is cracking up. It is a poor way of getting the love she needs, but the folly is the husbands for not satisfying her need for affection in the way he ought. Those three little words might seem trite to you, but your wife needs to hear them often. The poet has said,

A woman never tires of hearing
I love you said in tones endearing.
She'll hear it when she first gets up,
And then above the breakfast cup,
And yet again, by phone, at noon,
And later, underneath the moon.
Although she hears it day and night,
She never comes to think it trite....

Author unknown

How many times a day do you lift your wife with words of love? We have only scratched the surface on how to love your wife, but any man who applies the few insights we have covered could make his wife feel like a queen. God has not called many to be great statesmen, scholars, or scientists, but he calls all who are married to be great husbands, and if you succeed at that, you are a great man in the eyes of God, and, by the way, in the eyes of your wife.

MAKING MARRIAGE MARVELOUS

Based on I Pet. 3:1 - 7

Some little girls were having a great time playing wedding. They had a couple of bridesmaids, a bride and a maid of honor. The mother of one of the girls observed that the groom was conspicuous by his absence, and she asked, "What about the groom?" One child quickly replied, "We don't need a groom. This is just a small wedding."

There is many a wedding where the groom feels left out, and many where he wishes he was left out, but the fact is, there is no way to get a wedding so small that you do not need a groom. The smallest wedding on record took place without any attendants or guests, and there was no preacher, but even Eve had a groom. When you have cut all the corners possible, and you are down to the bare minimum you still have a groom. The groom is not in limelight like the bride, and his role is very minimal. He gets only a fraction of the published publicity, which is not much more than the ushers get, but he is no mere appendage, which can be cut off if necessary. You can eliminate everyone else in the list below the bride, but the groom must remain.

God in His all-wise providence ordained that every wedding must have a groom. It is important to man's ego that it is so, for if he was not a necessity he might very well be ignored all together, and the fantasy of the little girls might become fact. It is said with as much truth as humor that some Hollywood brides keep the bouquets and throw the groom away. But why all this rambling about the necessity of a groom? It is because he does play second fiddle when it comes to the wedding, and the fact is, he plays a secondary role in the marriage.

The wife plays the leading role in marriage even though she is to be submissive to her husband. When the biblical view of marriage properly understood, no woman can ever complain that she is treated unfairly. Nowhere is a woman's role as wife and mother so exalted as it is in the Bible. The Bible is almost like the newspaper. It magnifies and glorifies the bride and wife, and just mentions the husband. Proverbs 31 gives the greatest description in literature of the role of an ideal wife and mother. Nowhere in the Bible is there such a description of the ideal husband and father.

Peter was a husband, and he had a great opportunity to write at length about husbands, but in our text of seven verses of marriage counseling, he devotes 6

of them to the wife, and only 1 to the husband. It looks like typical coverage for the husband, and possibly 6 to 1 is even better than what he gets in the paper. But the question is, why? When the groom is just as essential as the bride, why does he get so little attention? It is not only because he is less beautiful than the bride, but also because his role is less difficult and demanding than that of the bride. Generally speaking it is much more difficult to be a good wife than to be a good husband. It takes so many more virtues, and that is why the Bible and books on marriage are filled with so much more advice for wives than for husbands. One of the reasons is that wives read more on improving their marriage than husbands do. Both Peter and Paul deal with the wife before they do the husband, and they say more about her role.

What a wife is and does determines more in a marriage than any other factor. She is the star at the wedding, and must go on being the star, for when she falls the sky is dark indeed. Don't ever fall for the folly that the scriptural role of women makes her second class. If women's lib wants freedom from the biblical role for women, then they want to be free to be less and not more, for the biblical role makes her the primary factor in marriage and the home. It is true that man is dominant in business, government, war, and politics, but when it comes to the home and marriage, the wife is the leader.

The analogies of Scripture illustrate what I am saying. Jesus is pictured as the groom, and the church is the bride. It is not hard for the groom to be loving and loyal to his bride, but the bride is constantly struggling to be faithful, and to keep unspotted by the world. The battles of the bride are what the Christian life is all about. The bride's side of the union of God and man is the hard side. Husbands, of course, cannot be so easily Godlike, as God was with His bride Israel, nor as easily Christ like as Christ is with His bride the church.

Nevertheless, I am convinced from Scripture, and from history, and from life, that it is easier to be superior than it is to be submissive. The wife has the harder role, but also the most significant. As in the relationship of Christ and the church, it is the bride who determines the success of the relationship. If the church fails, it is not because Christ has not loved enough. He is the perfect husband, but if the bride fails to be submissive and obedient, the union is not a happy one. Spiritually and literally the role of the wife is the key role in marriage. That is why Peter devotes the majority of his advice on marriage to the wife.

This advice is far from being obsolete. It is becoming more relevant everyday. Anyone who can read knows that marriage is in big trouble today. It is not that

it is less popular, for everybody is still doing it, but the problem is they are doing it more and enjoying it less. The quantity is greater than ever, and people are getting married two and three times, but the quality is sadly deficient. People look upon marriage as an experiment, and if nothing develops they move on to another experiment.

This approach is fine in the laboratory, for it is the scientific method, but marriage is not designed by God to fit into the scientific method. Marriage is closer to religion than science, and it is a matter of faith and commitment. One must enter marriage with a religious attitude rather than a scientific attitude to make it work.

The world is flooded with advice for those brave adventurers embarking on the sea of matrimony. The advice varies according to the experience of the so - called expert giving the advice. If some have been wrecked on the rocks and sent to the bottom because of a stormy marriage, they will not encourage you to believe it is a blessed blissful journey of sailing into the sun. In fact, they will offer you some such advice as this -

I would advise a man to pause
Before he takes a wife.
In fact, I see no earthly cause
He should not pause for life.

All too often the negative attitude dominates even in the Christian mind. He begins to think like Elijah, and feel that he is the only one left. Although marriage failure is a major social problem, there are still millions of happy marriages where the mates have not bowed the knee to Baal, and the other idols who break up the marriage duet. For them, marriage is a joyful journey, and not a tragic trip. The sun may not always shine, but they know it is always there even if the clouds are covering it for a time. They can appreciate the truth of what Middleton writes concerning marriage.

The Treasures of the deep are not so precious,
As are the concealed comforts of a man
Locked up in woman's love. I scent the air
Of blessings, when I come but near the house;
What a delicious breath marriage sends forth.
The violet - bed's not sweeter. Honest wedlock
Is like the banqueting - house built in a garden
On which the spring's chaste flowers take delight.
To cast their modest odors.

Marriage can be so wonderful that it even smells good. It can be all that God intended it to be if we obey the principles he gives us. Making marriage marvelous is a matter of making sure the ingredients that Peter mentions in our text are mixed well into the relationship. As we inspect these ingredients take note of any that you lack, and do some shopping soon in the supermarket of God's abundant grace. Keep them on your prayer shopping list until you are well supplied. We want to concentrate on the ingredients which the wife is to add to the recipe for a marvelous marriage. One is a matter of external action, and the other is a matter of internal attraction. The visible and the invisible are both important. Let's look first at -

EXTERNAL ACTION

Peter says that what you do as a wife is far more important than what you say. A woman's behavior has a powerful impact on a man, even if he is an unbeliever. Peter knows he is writing to many women who are married to men who are not Christians. He says that by beautiful behavior, they can win their husbands even without saying a word. Nowhere is it truer than in marriage that actions speak louder than words. So often wives try to convince their husbands by arguments that the Bible is true. They are very seldom successful because it is hard for any man to admit that his wife has a better sense than himself. He will not be overly impressed if a religious experience changes his wife's vocabulary, but he will be impressed if it changes his behavior.

Many women do not like the action and behavior that Peter recommends, but when it is understood it is not hard to swallow. Submissiveness frightens a lot of women. They often think this is degrading for a wife. It seems to deny her equality, and it makes her a slave to the male chauvinist. This is a total misunderstanding of the principle involved. Jesus did not grasp at equality with the Father. He humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant. He was obedient even unto the death of the cross. The result was that God highly exalted Him, and gave him a name above all names who at His name every knee should bow. The way of submission is the way to sublime exaltation. The wife who fulfills God's role, and is submissive to her husband will soon be on a pedestal of admiration. He will not treat her as mere equal, but as a precious gift far superior to what he is worthy to possess.

The principle of submissiveness is far more effective than the strategy of women's lib. Peter says that even a non - Christian husband will find it hard to remain an unbeliever if his wife lives with him in submissiveness. Peter is not guilty of a blind and unrealistic optimism. He does not say this is fool proof and will work in every case. He says wives should so live that some may be won by this means. Paul was all things to all men that by all means he might win some. Not all are saved because Christ died for all, and not will be won even if Christian wives obey Peter's advice, but the Christian wife is obligated to try.

It is of interest to note that Peter does not say anything about husbands with non - Christian wives. The implication is clear that right from the start it was

easier for women to become Christians than for men. Women can respond to the Gospel based on hearing. Faith comes by hearing to the feminine mind, but men are more skeptical and demand evidence more than women, and that is why the actions of Christian women are such a vital part of evangelism. Satan knew that the best way to influence a man was through a woman, and that is why he went to Eve first. In God's plan, women are also leaders who influence men to follow Christ by being living examples of the power that comes through yielding to His lordship.

Jesus said that the servant is the greatest of all, and if women could only see that submission is the means by which they take first place, they would not resist the role that makes them the key to God's best. The more the church, as the bride of Christ, submits to Christ, the more power she has to fulfill the will of God. The call to submission is not to degrade but to enrich and exalt. This same principle operates in marriage. Of course, there are abusive husbands where submission can be a participation in their evils, but this is not to make the normal marriage be one where this principle is neglected, for it is the way to victory. A wife is not to strive for mere equality, but to aim for a much higher goal where she is exalted because of her submission. When she is pleasing to her husband by her actions, which make him happy, he will exalt her and follow her leading even into the kingdom of God. Shakespeare's Katherine, who was the tamed shrew, finally came to this realization and said,

I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.

The idea of obey rubs women the wrong way, but it is only because of the false image of a master and slave. This is not the image of the Bible. Jesus did not obey the Father out of necessity as one who was bound to do what he did not want to do. He chose to obey the Father, and we are to choose to obey Christ, and the wife is to choose to obey the husband as an act of love. There are many exceptions where the wife ought never to obey the husband when he wants her to disobey God, or her own conscience. We are dealing here with the issue of cooperation where the wife gladly goes along with the husband's goals and seeks to be a helpmate.

She is a helper and not one who hinders his goals, and the result is he is happy

with her, and will honor her for this role. Jesus was not degraded by His obedience to God, and we are not degraded by obedience to Christ, and any idea that a wife is somehow degraded by obeying her husband is contrary to all that the Bible means by obedience. To obey is to be exalted, and that is the only kind of obedience the Word of God expects of a wife. Any obedience and submission that degrades her is not God's will.

Peter holds up Sarah as an example of a submissive wife. She was married to Abraham, who was a very godly man, but it was not easy. He pulled up stakes often and was a wandering man. He got her involved in some foolish lies to protect himself and almost had her ending up in another man's harem. He did some foolish things, but still became a great man because of having a submissive wife. The facts of history make it clear that most great men of God are that because of the partnership they have with submissive wives. We can paraphrase the well-known poem and say,

Wives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

Take Emma Revell Moody for example. Who ever heard of her? Her husband was D. L. Moody who turned both England and America upside down for Christ. People all over the world know of and read the works of Moody the great evangelist. But what would he have been without his partner Emma? He met her when she was just 17, and she became a Sunday School teacher in a mission he was starting. She got a good education and was a public school teacher. Moody never finished his education; however, and had handicaps because of it. His wife was a major helper and instructed him all his life. They had three children, and one of the two sons paid her this tribute: "To you, father owed such an education as no one else could have given him." The other son, who was a Presbyterian pastor wrote, "My father's admiration for her was as boundless as his love for her. Until the day of his death, he never ceased to wonder two things, the use God had made of him despite what he considered his handicaps, and the miracle of having won the love of a woman he considered so completely his superior."

She did everything for Moody. She wrote all of his letters, and handled all his money. She paid the bills and dozens of things that he might be free to do what God called him to do. Her submission to her husband's authority and goals, even though she was superior to him in many ways, did not degrade her, but

made her one of the greatest influences in Christian history. She made her marriage a marvelous tool for the kingdom of God, and millions were added to the kingdom because of her submission.

Submission is not always easy even with a godly man, and it can be near torture with an ungodly man, but the principle is universal. The hope for a happy marriage lies in a wife's ability to be a good vice - president. Sometimes a president is absent, sick, or unable to function, and the vice - president has to be able to take over the duties of the president. The vice - president has to be equal to the president, and be ready to take over, but also have the added virtue of being a servant of the president. Such is the role of the wife in marriage. She is capable of being president, but her primary task is to help the president be successful in his task, and her submissive behavior is the means to this end. To be equal and yet submissive is exactly what we see in Christ. This means the wife has the most Christ like role in marriage. Let's look briefly at the second point which is -

INTERNAL ATTRACTION

Peter urges wives to focus on the inner beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit. To be gentle and quiet rather than aggressive and loud is to be submissive. But where is the power in that to change life for the better? Gary Smalley in his book *The Joy of Committed Love* tells of Mike and Gail. Their only competition was who hates who the most. They had no love for each other, or their two children. Mike went to a bar after work, and spent his night with other women. He came home late at night drunk, and he and Gail would have violent fights. Gail's only dream was to save up enough money to leave him. A friend got hold of Gail and showed her this idea of Peter's about a gentle and quiet spirit. She was persuaded to try it. The first week nothing happened, but the second week she saw Mike begin to change in response to her radical change in behavior. They began to fall in love all over again. And now for over two decades, they have helped many hundreds of other couples make the same discovery of the power of gentleness and quietness. These feminine qualities of life are not weak, but very powerful. Submission can conquer where aggression can never win. It is the tool by which a wife becomes a queen and not a slave. Submission is power, and it is folly to avoid it by thinking it is a form of weakness. It is the very power that is the basis for our salvation.

Jesus taught that the one who wants to be the greatest will need to learn how to be a servant. The wife who learns the power of submission, and service will be the greatest leader in the marriage. All the ideas that make this issue of submission negative to women are a distortion. It is simply being Christ like in a way that will lead to exaltation. When seen in relation to Christ's spirit of submission, it becomes the noblest of virtues. If a husband does not respond to a wife's submission by exalting her and making her delighted to submit, then he is the one failing to fulfill his role as a husband.

He is in the place of God the Father in the relationship, and just as God exalted Jesus for His submission and obedience, so the husband is to do for the wife. If he does this, he fulfills his role and makes the marriage marvelous. If your marriage is not marvelous, one of you, or both of you, are not playing the role that God has ordained. Each partner doing their part, as Peter commands, will be daily making their marriage marvelous.

HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL HUSBAND

Based on I Pet. 3:7

The question was asked of a class of Catholic girls - "What is matrimony?" One girl confidently stood and said, "Matrimony is a state of terrible torment which those who enter are compelled to undergo for a time to fit them for heaven." "No, no," said the priest, "You have given the definition of purgatory." "Let her alone," said the Archbishop, "Maybe she's right." Her definition of the word was wrong, but her description of the experience of many in the state of marriage was right. Matrimony can be a purgatory rather than the paradise God intended it to be.

Marriage can produce a paradise, or it can produce a paradise to ashes by the fires of conflict. Marriage is a paradox. It can be the best or the worst state. We commit ourselves in marriage for better or for worse because both are equally possible. Conflict is just as real a potential as cooperation. There are those who tell us that even conflict can have its values, and there is truth in this perspective. What of the couple who reached the height of their argument, and the wife exploded, "I wish I'd taken mother's advice and never married you." The husband said, "Do you mean to say your mother tried to stop your marrying me?" She nodded. "Well now," sighed the husband, how I've wronged that woman." Whatever value was gained; it is doubtful that the quarrel can be counted a positive factor in marriage bliss, even if there are poets who claim it is so.

O we fell out, my wife and I,
O we fell out, I know not why,
And kissed again with tears.
And blessing on the falling out
That all the more endears,
When we fall out with those we love,
And kiss again with tears.

The only reason there is any truth to this poetry is because some mates only show affection to each other when they make up. Just like some children can only get attention by causing a disturbance, or by getting in trouble. It is not the conflict that is of any value, but the peace settlement, and the kiss of peace. Anyone with a taste for kissing, however, knows that it's better without any salty sauce from the eyes. Kissing again with tears is not a gourmet delight. Far

superior is the relationship where affection does not depend on conflict. I read of a wise man who quarreled with his wife during their 50th year of wedded life. He tucked this note under his wife's pillow. "My darling bride, let's put off quarreling until after the honeymoon is over. Your devoted husband." Here was a husband who took the high road to marital bliss by avoiding quarrels instead of the low road of squeezing some value out of conflicts. Carlton could write -

And if ever we meet in heaven
I shouldn't think it queer
That we loved each other the better
For the way we quarreled here.

My response is -
When we meet in heaven
I should think it odd
If we loves each other better
For disobeying God.

It is always true that God can bring good out of evil, but it is never wise to do evil in the hopes that good will come of it. Our objective as Christians and as mates is to live in harmony and never desire discord. What Paul says to Christians in general applies to mates in particular. In Eph. 4:31 - 32 he wrote, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Following this path will lead to successful marriage and Peter tells husbands how they can be successful in seeing that their marriage follows this path. Any husband who will follow Peter's advice will not only be a successful husband, but he will be an exceedingly happy husband. Any wife whose husband treats her with the respect involved in what Peter says in this one verse will lavish upon him more devoted love than all the harem of Solomon. What does Peter say a husband must do to be successful? He must first -

RESPECT HER EXISTENCE AS A PERSON

Peter says the husband is to be considerate as he lives with his wife. This means that a husband is to care about what his wife needs as a person to make her life fulfilled. She is a person who has special needs and desires, and it is a husband's obligation to know what they are. To ignore another's needs is to lack respect for them as persons. Wives need to be treated as people worth understanding. Phillips translation puts it, "You husbands should try to

understand the wives you live with." The NEB has it, "You husbands must conduct your married life with understanding."

Peter clearly implies that it is possible for a man to understand a woman. Peter has a high view of the perceptive powers of the male. He says these powers are to be applied in marriage. Someone said there are two periods in a man's life when he feels it is impossible to understand a woman. One is before marriage, and the other is after. Peter does not agree. It may take more than a grain of faith to remove the mountain of doubt that has accumulated in the minds of men on this issue, but it can be removed. The Gospel according to Peter is that wives can be understood, and not only by experts who study them and write books about them, but even by their husbands.

This opens up a great hope for marriage from a Christian perspective. For most of history men have not been able to treat women as equals because they could never accept them as persons. They never tried to understand the needs of wives, but only the function whereby wives met the needs of husbands.

Christianity raised the level of women from possessions to persons who are created in the image of God, and endowed with intelligence, and great potential as children of God. Understanding this makes a Christian husband desire to treat his wife in a manner worthy of a person made in the image of God.

D. H. Lawrence in one of his assorted articles wrote, "Man is willing to accept a woman as an equal, as a man in skirts, as an angel, a devil, a baby - face, a machine, an instrument, a bosom, a womb, a pair of legs, a servant, an encyclopedia, and ideal or an obscenity; the one thing he won't accept her as is a human being, a real human being of the feminine sex." Peter says a Christian husband is obligated to rise above this historical hang up of men.

Before marriage, men tend to see women as persons, and they treat them as such. They are aware of the needs of the female to be appreciated. They are free, with compliments, and they give them undivided attention. Marriage, however, often causes a man to regress. He ceases to think of his wife as a real person. He ceases to live with her with a considerate attitude. He takes her for granted as part of the total machinery of life. She keeps the wheels of life rolling in the home. He forgets that she is a person who needs to feel loved and appreciated. She needs to talk and be heard. Helen Rowland complained, "Before marriage, a man will lie awake all night thinking about something you said; after marriage, he'll fall asleep before you finish saying it. It's as hard to get a man to stay home after you've married him as it was to get him to go home

before your married him."

When husbands do this, it is because they have ceased to be considerate. They are not thinking of their wife as a person but as a possession. Peter says don't do that, but respect her as a person. Everything you gain in terms of fulfillment in the world of your job, she must gain through you, and this is often just as true for wives who work. A wife needs a husband who makes her feel important. She needs compliments and encouragement. She needs to feel she has value, and only a husband can adequately meet these needs. Listen to the tribute of a wife to her husband who succeeded in doing this. Jessie Rittenhouse wrote,

My debt to you, beloved,
Is one I cannot pay,
In any coin of any realm
On any reckoning day:
For where is he shall figure
The debt, when all is said,
To one who makes you dream again
When all the dreams were dead?
Or where is the appraiser
Who shall the claim compute,
Of one who makes you sing again
When all the songs were mute?

When we respect individuals as persons, we make an effort to be interested in them, and in their interests and problems. Often a husband tends to lose interest in anything his wife does. It is often just boring to him. He's like the man standing at a fork in the road when a woman tourist stopped and asked if it made any difference which road she took to Vermont? He replied, "Not to me." Indifference like this towards one's mate is a common fault of husbands. The saying is true that a wife with good horse sense doesn't nag, but often her nagging is a desperate attempt to break through her husband's wall of indifference.

If a husband lives in respect for his wife as a person, he will avoid many of those problems that develop because of indifference. In a moment of bitterness, a husband said to his wife, "You should have married a better man." She replied, "I did." If a husband respects his wife the way he did before they married he will be a successful husband. The way to get ahead is to go back to how you were when you first met. The second thing he must do is -

RESPECT HER EQUALITY AS A PARTNER

Peter says you are joint heirs of the gracious gift of life. There is equality of the sexes as partners in the business of life. A husband cannot produce life by himself, nor does he receive more grace from God than does his wife. She is an equal partner in both. The inequality she has of being the weaker sex physically is not a disadvantage for her, for Peter says that her weakness is to call forth greater honor from the husband. Just as you treat your China better than you do your everyday dishes, so a wife is to be treated with greater care because of her delicacy. Peter says that wives are marked as fragile, and husbands should handle them with care. The greater strength of a man is for the protection of the female, and not for domination.

The inequalities of the sexes are only temporary, and are for fulfilling different functions, but the equalities of the sexes are permanent. It is like the trinity. Each of the three persons in the Godhead has different roles to play in the plan of salvation. Jesus took on the weakness of human flesh, and He gave up equality with the Father. This was only temporary; however, for He was then restored again to the equality that is eternal. In the things that really matter for eternity husbands and wives are equal. When a child is born, they are parents as equal partners. They are equal as joint heirs in the kingdom of God. In Christ, there is neither male nor female. God does not have one standard of salvation and rewards for wives, and another for husbands. They are one in Christ, and husbands are to respect this equality and treat her as an equal partner.

When two become one in marriage they become a new whole. It is not a 50 - 50 relationship, but each is a 100% partner. There is no division for you cannot divide a living thing. Solomon was going to cut the baby in half and give each of the feuding mothers a half. That was a 50 - 50 compromise. If you are dealing with butter or milk or anything that is a matter of quantity you can divide it, but qualities of life are indivisible and cannot be divided. The true mother knew that half a baby is no baby at all, and so she prevented the division. In marriage, the partners must see they are one in such a way that there can be no division. Mathematics does not apply in the realm of quality. In marriage one plus one does not equal two, but one. As in the trinity there is a oneness of unity where one plus one plus one equals one, and not three. If two people enjoy the same music, they do not share it 50 - 50. The husband does not enjoy 50% of it, and the wife another 50%. They each enjoy the whole of it, and are 100% partners in the qualities they enjoy. Their oneness and partnership is such that any failure in the marriage is a failure of the whole,

and not just of one partner. If a fuse burns out, you do not try to figure out which side of the seal is to blame. It is a one piece and only has two sides because it burned out. If husbands respect the equality of their wives as partners, and treat them accordingly, there will be greater communication and a deeper sense of oneness. A wife who is respected as a person and as a partner will not find it hard to obey her role of being submissive. It will, in fact, be a pure pleasure. A successful husband is one whose wife enjoys her role in the partnership of marriage. If she doesn't there is something missing that robs her of that joy, and likely it is the lack of respect she receives from her husband.

Thirdly, Peter says,

RESPECT HER EXCELLENCE AS A PRAYER PARTNER

Peter implies that mates are so much one that a husband cannot even be successful in his spiritual life without his wife. A husband who assumes that he can serve God and go forward in the service of Christ without reference to the way he treats his wife has an inadequate concept of marriage. Peter says a right relationship to your wife is essential to a right relationship to God. If you do not communicate with your wife, and live with her according to these principles, God may refuse to answer your prayers. God will not listen to the prayers of a man who will not listen to the pleas of his wife.

God is a God of justice, and He does not reward injustice. If you refuse to meet the needs of your wife as a person, and as a partner, it would be wrong for God to reward you by meeting the needs you look to Him to meet. You need your wife as a prayer partner to be effective in prayer. Marriage is not a mere secular matter unrelated to the spiritual life of the believer. Marriage is a religious experience, and it affects your relationship to God. Prayer is no automatic matter like a machine where you put in your money and get what your request with no questions asked. Before God responds to your requests, He takes a look at your relationship to your wife. If you disrespect the image of God in her, it will hinder your prayers.

God may want to grant many requests of men, but he will not do it because their home life is not worthy of such favor. Unanswered prayer is not always because God does not want it to be, but because it would be unfair to grant it to one who has little or no respect for the needs and desires of his wife. If, for example, you refuse to forgive your wife for some folly whereby she has offended you, you have no ground of hope in Scripture to believe that God will forgive you as long as you withhold it from your mate.

God will not put his stamp of approval on the husband who lives like the man

in the moon. The moon shines bright on one side, but is dark and cold on the other. If a man is all bright and smiles before the world, but dark and cold toward his wife in the home, he injures his relationship to God, and is the stumbling block in the road to having his own prayers answered. Few husbands ever think of it, but Peter says a good relationship to your wife is essential to a good relationship with God. The bottom line of all that Peter is saying is that a man who respects his wife in the same way that he respected her when they first met will be a successful husband.

Conclusion

As you can see the key to a better marriage is not something that is easy to figure out. The key to love, praise, and not be selfish. The problem is that getting there is not easy. It takes work on both sides to really make it work, but it is worth it.

Who doesn't want to have a happy life, be happy to come home and have your wife be your best friend and lover?

Love and praise will keep the love strong and help you remember why you fell in love in the first place.

Thank you so much for reading my book.

If you would take a minute to go the [Amazon site and leave a review](#) so more people will read the book. Reviews are very important to self-published writers to help spread the word.

I have several other books that you may enjoy reading.

[Amazing women of the Old Testament.](#) How many times have you read through the Old Testament in the Bible, and read about the women in the Bible who were important in Gods plans? Have you thought about how critical they were in making sure that Gods plans were carried out? Most of them don't get talked about much, or seem very significant, yet they were crucial in the plans of God.

[Amazing women of the New Testament.](#) Many of the stories we read in the Bible, we read about the women that God used to do the work he needed done. Most of the stories are small parts that if we skip over, we don't get the real meaning of why the stories are in the Bible.

[The Ten Commandments.](#) The Ten Commandments are a big part of your life, even if you don't think they are. Most of the laws of man are based on the laws handed down from God that are the Ten Commandments. Without the law there is no sin, there is no breaking the law. We have to have something to base our laws on. All modern societies in the world, Christian or not, base most of their laws on these laws from God.

[The Christmas story you may not know.](#) Mary finds out she is going to give birth to the savior of the world. Joseph finds out after that his soon to be wife is pregnant, but she never was unfaithful to him. When it's close to the time for Jesus birth, the couple has to travel to Bethlehem to be taxed by the government. Then they have to flee to another country because their baby may

be killed by soldiers.