

"I CHOOSE TO REASSURE YOU"

GROWING AND MATURING 'AS LONG AS WE BOTH SHALL LIVE'

In London, August 22, 1651, a puritan pastor and author by the name of Christopher Love was beheaded by a nervous English government for fear that his religious conviction and his pervasive influence as a preacher might threaten the stability of the political climate in England. He was tried and executed on charges of treason at the tender age of 33. In a stunning, heart-wrenching account, his biography which is titled, *A Spectacle unto God*, contains letters of correspondence between Christopher Love and his dear pregnant wife Mary—the mother of their two living children. These letters, written from his cell in the tower, are filled with exhortation and instruction, as if it was his last, since he was to be executed at any time. It also contains Mary's response to him.

This book is a nightmare and a love story! It contains some of the sweetest and most tender counsel and affection you have ever read. He opens each letter with a different endearing name for Mary, "My Dearest Beloved, More Dear to Me than Ever, My dearest delight on earth, My most gracious beloved" – final words to his dear, sweet friend. Below is a sample of the kind of love and commitment they shared, which has survived these last 3½ centuries. Mary writes the night before he was supposed to be executed:

My Dear Heart,

Before I write a word further, I beseech thee think not that it is thy wife but a friend that now writes to thee. I hope thou hast freely given up thy wife and children to God, who hath said in Jeremiah 49:11, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in me." Thy Maker will be my husband, and a Father to thy children. O that the Lord would keep thee from having one troubled thought for they relations. I desire freely to give thee up into thy Father's hands, and not only look upon it as a crow of glory for thee to die for Christ, but as an honor to me that I should have a husband to leave for Christ.

I dare not speak to thee, not have a thought within my own heart of my unspeakable loss, but wholly keep my eye fixed upon thy inexpressible and inconceivable gain. Thou leavest but a sinful, mortal wife to be everlastingly married to the Lord of glory. Thou leavest but children, brothers, and sisters to go to the Lord Jesus, thy eldest Brother. Thou leavest friends on earth to do to the enjoyment of the saints and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in glory. Thou dost but leave earth for heaven and changest a prison for a palace. And if natural affections should begin to arise, I hope that the spirit of grace that is within thee will quell them, know that all things here below are but dung and dross in comparison of those things that are above. I know thou keepest thine eye fixed on the hope of glory, which make thy feet trample on the loss of earth.

My dear, I know God hath not only prepared glory for thee and thee for it, but I am persuaded that he will sweeten the way for thee to come to the enjoyment of it. When thou art putting on thy clothes that morning, O think, "I am now putting on my wedding garments to go to be everlastingly married to my Redeemer."

When the messenger of death comes to thee, let him not seem dreadful to thee, but look on him as a messenger that brings thee tidings of eternal life. When thou goest up the scaffold, think (as thou saidst to me) that it is but thy fiery chariot to carry thee up to thy Father's house.

And when thou layest down thy precious head to receive thy Father's stroke, remember what thou saidst to me: Though thy head was severed from thy body, yet in a moment thy soul should be united to thy Head, the Lord Jesus in heaven. And though it may seem something bitter, that by the hands of men we are parted a little sooner than otherwise we might have been, yet let us consider that it is the decree and will of our Father, and it will not be long ere we shall enjoy one another in heaven again.

Let us comfort one another with these sayings. Be comforted, my dear heart. It is but a little stroke and thou shalt be where the weary shall be at rest and where the wicked shall cease from troubling. Remember that thou mayest eat thy dinner with bitter herbs, yet thou shalt have a sweet supper with Christ that night. My dear, by what I write unto thee, I do not hereby undertake to teach thee; for these comforts I have received from the Lord by thee. I will write no more, nor trouble thee any further, but commit thee into the arms of God with whom ere long thee and I shall be.

Farewell, my dear. I shall never see thy face more till we both behold the face of the Lord Jesus at that great day.

Mary Love

Love's execution was postponed a month, during which he was able to respond and instruct his wife. In what would be as he called it, "The Day of My Glorification" Christopher wrote a lengthy letter to his wife, in which he counseled her about staying in a Bible teaching church, raising their children to love Christ, laboring in prayer for her family, striving for a gentle and quiet spirit, contemplating the mercy she has been shown rather than the loss she will suffer, battling against doubt that will attack her faith when he leaves, studying the grace of God to depose the pride she will seek to mortify, meditating daily on the doctrine of justification, finding ultimate contentment in God's will for her, and choosing to remarry wisely. At the end of this final letter, Love wrote these words:

"Dear wife, farewell. I will call thee wife no more. I shall see thy face no more; yet I am not much troubled, for now I am going to meet the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, to whom I shall be eternally married...Farewell dear love, and again I say, farewell. The Lord Jesus be with your spirit, the Maker of heaven and earth be a husband to you; and the Father of our Lord Jesus be a Father to your children. So prays your dying, your most affectionate friend till death."

When you read these letters, you realize that you are eavesdropping on an exchange that contains something divine. You realize that what they share as a couple is more important than the frivolous and trite expressions of love that commonly fill most Valentine's cards. You begin to see accents of love that belong to those who have true depth and intimacy, built on Jesus Christ.

These couples have woven into the fabric of their relationship, the unbreakable strands of commitment to Christ and commitment to each other, which cannot be undone. There is something undying in their love that is not only enviable, but also illustrative of the kind of bond God wants to produce in our relationships. After months of study in the Song of Solomon, we have considered the choices you must make before and when you say, "I do" – choices that must remain a standard and commitment throughout marriage in order for it to be truly pleasing to God.

As we have seen, in order to truly experience God's rich blessings through marriage, a couple must reject the world's idea of relationships, realizing that love isn't about emotional chemistry; it's about an a commitment to respect, trust, complete, desire, protect, celebrate, satisfy, and forgive one another. Understanding how much work marriage really is, and having seen firsthand what the awful effects of sin do to a relationship, a wise couple realizes that one final choice remains—the persistent reassurance that each couple gives to one another that they will remain with each other and endure together, no matter what may come.

In **6:4-8:14**, the largest section of the book, this couple repairs their relationship after a significant conflict, one that has been covered and reconciled, but in which they now face the awkward, unfamiliar challenge of rebuilding, well aware of the fact that they have in themselves what it takes to totally undo the marriage. *In this study, the Song of Solomon provides a final example of how to make a relationship last, by God's grace.* These principles are not only the exclamation point on this series; they are the only way that everything we have studied can continue. When you reassure your spouse of your unswerving devotion, this is what you are saying:

**1. "I STAND BY WHAT I PROMISED ON THE DAY I MARRIED YOU—DO YOU?"
(6:4-13)**

- A. As Solomon begins to speak in **6:4**, what is the context of their discussion and where are they?
- B. What is so significant about the cities of **Tirzah** and **Jerusalem**?
- C. How does "**an army of banners**" resonate with Solomon's description of his wife, especially in this context?

- D. Why does Solomon not want his wife to look at him with the eyes of **v. 5**? What are those eyes and how are they different than the last time he saw them?
 - E. In **v. 5b-7**, Solomon says something very specific and familiar to his wife—where have we heard these words before and what is the significance of rehearsing them now?
 - F. Based on your answer to the question above, can you identify anything missing from this list?
 - G. Who are the **"queens, concubines, and maidens"** in **v. 8** and why does Solomon reference them according to **v. 9**?
 - H. When these women praise the Shulamite, 1) what analogy do they use to describe her; 2) how does it fit with the present physical setting and 3) how does it fit with what Solomon has said already?
 - I. What is the controversy surrounding **v.11-12** and what is the overall point, especially in light of the apparent sudden change in the speaker?
 - J. As the daughters speak to the Shulamite in **v. 13a**, how does what they say accord with what the queens, concubines, and maidens say?
 - K. How does Solomon answer their request in **v. 13b** and what is **"the dance of two companies"** or *Mahanaim*(cf. Genesis 32)?
 - L. How is this section a reiteration of their original marriage commitment?
2. **"I LOVE YOU MORE NOW TODAY THAN THE DAY I MARRIED YOU—DO YOU?" (7:1-9)**
- A. Somewhere between the garden and the palace, Solomon offers another *wasf* (carefully composed poem designed to display intense affection and delight to a lover)—what general observations can you make about his praise that is different than what he has already said to her in the past?

- B. What do the following metaphors in **7:1-9** convey about Solomon's love for the Shulamite, which he uses to reassure her of his commitment?
- **How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter!**
 - **The curves of your hips are like jewels, the work of the hands of an artist.**
 - **Your navel is like a round goblet which never lacks mixed wine;**
 - **Your belly is like a heap of wheat fenced about with lilies.**
 - **Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle.**
 - **Your neck is like a tower of ivory**
 - **Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim;**
 - **Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, Which faces toward Damascus.**
 - **Your head crowns you like Carmel**
 - **The flowing locks of your head are like purple threads; The king is captivated by your tresses.**
 - **How beautiful and how delightful you are, my love, with all your charms!**
 - **Your stature is like a palm tree, And your breasts are like its clusters. I said, 'I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit stalks.' Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine!**
- C. How does the Shulamite respond to his expressions of love for and delight in her, according to **v. 9**, and how is it reminiscent of their relationship in the past?
- D. What does this section tell you about the maturity of their relationship, even after this serious conflict?

**3. "I WANT TO BUILD MY FUTURE ONLY TOGETHER WITH YOU—DO YOU?"
(7:10-8:5A)**

- A. As the Shulamite continues in **7:10-13**, what creative idea does she have that she and Solomon can do together, to cement the once fractured foundation of their relationship?
- B. Why would such an event be important for this couple, especially in light of all that they have been through and in light of the future?
- C. What does her language suggest in **v. 12** suggest about her desires (cf. **2:10-13**), especially in light of the statement, "**there I will give you my love**"?
- D. What is a mandrake and what is its significance?
- E. What does her commitment to bring Solomon something "**new and old**" suggest about the expressions of love which she has "**saved up for**" him?
- F. In **8:1-2**, the Shulamite expresses her desire that Solomon was, at least for this moment, her brother – why, according to **v. 2b-3**?
- G. Why does she invoke the statement of **v. 4**, which was used as accountability for their purity when they weren't married?
- H. How do the daughters reply to her in **v. 5** and what does the image they describe say about the solidarity of this couple's commitment to each other?

**4. "I WILL LOVE ONLY YOU AND BE YOURS ALONE FOR LIFE—WILL YOU?"
(8:5B-14)!**

- A. What is the significance of the apple tree in **v. 5** and how does it connect with **v. 4** (clue: the word, "**awakened**")?
- B. Who is Solomon's mother and what is the point of this statement to Solomon as it relates to their potential future?

- C. What request does the wife of Solomon make to him in **v. 6**? What is the difference between a seal on the heart and a seal on the arm?
- D. What is the point made by the imagery of love as death, jealousy as Sheol, and as fire, in **v. 6-7**?
- E. What do the brothers say in **v. 8-9** as they look back on the Shulamite, whom they had prepared for this relationship?
- F. What does the Shulamite say about her own preparedness for this union with Solomon and declare her unswerving devotion to Solomon in **v. 10-13**?
- G. How does Solomon's statement to her actually elevate her to the rightful place she deserves as his wife, and totally break from the past?
- H. How does the Shulamite respond to Solomon, before the eavesdroppers in **v. 14**, as an expression of her undying love and romantic affection for him?

The Song of Solomon is the greatest love song ever written. As the book ends, it closes with this couple in mid-stream, praising one another and expressing undying devotion and affection. The reality however is that their story doesn't end, "happily ever after." What do the following verses teach about the madness of Solomon's sin and how does this principle instruct us about the need to heed what is in this book?

➤ **1 Kings 11:1-8**

➤ **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**

➤ **Ecclesiastes 7:25-26**

➤ **Ecclesiastes 9:9**

CONCLUSION

If this could happen to Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (next to Jesus Christ) it can happen to you. Learn from his mistakes instead of making the same ones yourself. Recommit to yourself to God and to your partner, resolving to keep short accounts with each other and refusing to let the alluring, often subtle, empty-promise-making temptations near to your home. Take the lessons you have learned in this study and rehearse them to your heart over and over again – as often as is needed. And above all, let the Giver of marriage, whose love you display, be the source of your strength, until that day when you are given to Him, to be married in the bliss of eternal perfections, forever.

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