

Purity & Eschatology

Hello & thanks for listening to *Voice of the Church*. I'm Pastor Ryan Swale, & want to look at the *end* of Song of Songs today. The last 7 verses of Ch. 8. Where, after summing up the theology of the book in saying marital-love is a "flash" of divine love, we're given some application.

The speakers in v. 8 say, "We have a little sister, & she has no breasts. We shall we do for our sister on the day when she's spoken for? If she's a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she's a door, we'll enclose her with boards of cedar..." And then the bride says, "*I was a wall*, and my breasts were like towers; then I was, in his eyes, as one who finds peace. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit 1,000 pieces of silver... *My vineyard*, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, & the keepers of the fruit 200." And then the king says, "You who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice – let me hear it!" And she responds, "Make haste, my beloved; be as a gazelle or a young stage on the mountains of spices."

Another one of those passages you might find yourself wondering what exactly it means for us... I'd suggest 3 things. It teaches us about the priority, promise, & purpose of purity... At the end of a book that sings the greatest song, a love-song about the heavenly-love signified in marriage, we're given a little lesson on the importance of sexual purity.

We see its **priority** in vv. 8 & 9, where we have this description of a *wall* & *door*, where the brothers say, "We have a sister who's not yet fully developed. What shall we do for her on the day she's spoken for?" "What should we do to prepare her for the day when someone asks for her hand in marriage?" The Song is taking its teaching on the meaning of marriage and applying it concretely: *What is our responsibility to help our sister not awaken love before the proper time? To be a 'wall' and not a 'door...'*?

These are the 2 paths she could follow: to be chaste & inaccessible (**a wall**) or promiscuous & available (**a door**). The brothers determine to protect their sister by adding additional protection & honor if she's a wall, or blocking access if she's a door.

Here we see that protection of one's purity is to be prioritized, & is not a lone-ranger pursuit. But is something others take an interest in, both in the family & family of God. Talking about these things with your kids, talking about them in the church.

The world is eager to catechize our children on these very things, teaching them to be doors & not walls, offering the *wrong* kind of protection. And, so, it's necessary that the church & family address these things from God's perspective and help each other.

In fact, the Westminster Larger Catechism speaks on the 7th commandment of preserving chastity *not only in ourselves* but *also in others*. There's an obligation to cultivate communal purity... And that's one of the messages this passage brings home very clearly. That in the family & family of God, we cultivate, especially in our youth, a passion for purity. Even a passion to protect our sisters...

One of the ways young men do this is by resisting the temptation to view content where young women are objectified & trafficked... Being entertained by their exploitation, degradation, & abuse... That's not protecting your sister. Or the women who'll be affected by your view of sexuality that's shaped by what you watch... One of the ways you protect your sisters is by putting these things to death for God's glory & the honor of women made in his image... Which may require coming alongside each other to bear each other's burden & confess sin.

One of the applications of this section is that purity is a communal effort. Bonhoeffer said, "Sin demands to have a man by himself; withdrawing him from community... The more isolated he is, the more destructive is the power of sin over him. So, you must let the light of the gospel break through the darkness of your sin by confession." This passage is a call to fight sexual sin in community by confession. To cultivate chastity in ourselves *& others* in gospel-community.

And it's significant Bonhoeffer says it's the light of the *gospel* that must break through, for sometimes in accountability groups, it's not the gospel that motivates; but shame... But what do we see the brothers doing in v. 9? Not only applying the *law* to her sin, but boards of cedar! Which are mentioned 2 other times in the Song in connection with cedars of Lebanon of Solomon's temple! Meaning this mention of "*cedar*" may be an allusion to the temple, where atonement is made!

Those who come alongside fellow sinners must not only apply the law to their sin, but the gospel of forgiveness provided in the temple as a shadow of the Cross! Christopher Mitchell says, "The brothers apply the constructive fortification of forgiveness earned by Christ on the Cross, applying the Law & Gospel to those who've sinned... The *door* must first hear the condemnation of the Law... But once the Law brings them to repentance, the gospel of plenary forgiveness through Christ's sacrificial atonement, connoted by the cedar, must be applied."

We see both the Law & the Gospel in v. 9. We see both the priority of purity, & also the provision for *impurity* which motivates us to “go & sin no more...” And, as we do that, listen to the promise of vv. 10-12, where the bride says, “I was a WALL even though my breasts were like towers. I let no one in; but kept the door locked...” The same door mentioned in Ch. 4: “a garden *locked* is my sister, my bride.” No one had access to the garden of her love, but she’s well-protected.

And because she is, it says, “Then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace.” A multi-dimensional peace: referring to the inner peace she has, as one without a guilty conscience racked with shame; the peace she has with God, as one who’s kept his Law; & the ‘peace’ she has with Solomon whose name *means* peace... By preserving purity, she’s found *shalom* in the eyes of *Shelomoh* (Solomon), entering into the covenant of peace that is marriage...

Which is described in vv. 11 & 12 where she says her very own vineyard is before her – a reference to her *body*, her *love*, where the vineyard is hidden inside a wall so no one has access ‘til v. 12 when she says, “***My own vineyard is before me; & I give it to you, Solomon.*** You may have the thousand!” A number of fullness. Giving herself entirely & exclusively... And the progression of the passage suggests she’s able to do so because she was a *wall*... S, she says, “My vineyard is for you, & you alone.” There’s an *exclusivity* in this passage, by virtue of the help she’s been given from those around her who built on her a battlement of silver. Who she recognizes at the end of v. 12, giving the keepers of the fruit 200, showing gratitude to those who’ve helped her see purity’s priority & find peace...

That’s the promise of purity in Song of Songs 8: *peace*. Not to suggest God can’t restore the years the locust has eaten for those who’ve not been a wall; but the burden of the passage is to hold up as *beautiful* the peace that is enjoyed – with your spouse, with God, and with your conscience, when you save yourself exclusively & entirely for another...

And the reason this matters – the reason we should prioritize it – is because of what it represents... The whole burden of the book is to show that marital-love is a *spark* of God’s love in the gospel; that’s what the bride just said in 8 v.6. So, the reason for valuing purity is not just the enjoyment of *peace*, but the dramatic portrayal of the *Gospel*-story of *Christ*-the greater-than-Solomon receiving a *pure-virgin* as his bride. That’s what Paul says in 2 Cor. 11; that’s what John describes in Rev. 19, where we’re robed in white apparel as the virgin-bride of the Son of David.

And that reality is the purpose of the purity commended by the Song... Which we see in verses 13 & 14: that this whole thing *points* to something else... As the book ends with the last verse: “Make haste, my beloved; be as a gazelle, or young stag on mountains of spices...” It ends with the same note of desire it began with in 1 v.2 & same invitation from 2:17... The anticipation & unfulfilled desire the book ends with suggests that this is pointing to something else; that marriage is pen-ultimate; it’s not given to fulfill our deepest desires, but to point to another world.

This is why we speak of “purity & eschatology,” (eschatology meaning study of the end); because our preservation of purity is motivated by a desire to dramatically portray the gospel-reality of a pure-virgin presented to Christ, the Son of David! It’s motivated by our ultimate waiting for the bridegroom’s coming.

The reason we prioritize purity (the reason the song tells us 3x not to awaken love before the proper time) is because of what our *bodies*, & *sexuality*, & *marriage picture*: the Gospel... Which culminates in Rev. 19 with the wedding supper of the Lamb; & the bride having made herself ready, being kept pure, & dressed in white... Purity & eschatology...

That’s why the bride says in Rev. 22, “Come, Lord, Jesus!” The Bible ends in the same place the Song ends: waiting for the bridegroom... And we act out that waiting by living chastely before the Lord, prioritizing purity in our wait for marriage, picturing the bride of Christ waiting for her groom!

Where he’ll come again & we’ll dwell with him in that ‘garden’ of v. 13, the Garden-City to come, enjoying the sweet wine of his love in that eternal honeymoon that’ll never end...

An invitation given to both ‘walls’ & also ‘doors’ who’ve been boarded up by the cedar of the Cross. Who the Song now calls to act out the church’s waiting by living chastely before the Lord until the bridegroom comes... Thank you for listening, and may God bless you.