

## THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

February 14, 2010 Husbands, Love Your Wives

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Dear Radio Friends,

Today we are going to talk about the love relationship of a man and a woman, their romance and their marriage. We are going to focus especially on a husband's love for his wife.

When a man and woman first fall in love, love seems to come rather naturally and spontaneously. The young man is very courteous. They talk about their love for one another and why they appreciate each other. Both are very giving. They avoid arguments. They are ready to take the blame simply to avoid tension. They miss one another when they are separated. They are always thinking about the other. And they are very happy. That is how it is when a man and woman first fall in love.

But with time, and as the relationship matures, a lot of these things change. If this believing young couple go on to engagement, marriage, and raising a family, many other responsibilities press in on their time and thoughts. And it is very easy for them then to ignore the communication of their love for one another, to forget why they first appreciated one another, to be demanding and ornery, to let the pressures of life smother their love.

Today, from the word of God, we want to see that it should not be this way in the Christian marriage, and that a husband and a wife ought to work constantly on keeping their love for one another alive. Now, that does not necessarily mean that all the sweet nothings of their early relationships have to be maintained. But it does mean that they ought to have a constant appreciation for one another and a deep commitment to one another, and that they continually communicate their love to each other.

The text we are going to look at is from the Song of Solomon. But before we open our Bibles to that passage, I want to read a New Testament passage that will help us to understand the passage in the Song of Solomon. In Ephesians 5:25, 26 the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, tells us: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

There are two things I want to point to in this passage. First, a husband's love for his wife ought to be patterned after and ought to reflect the love that Christ has for His bride, the church. As Christ gave Himself in love for His bride, so husbands ought to give themselves for their wives, for their homes, for their marriages. That means, complete dedication and service.

Second, this passage tells us one of the main ways that a husband is to do this. How does Christ love His bride and sanctify her and cleanse her to make her beautiful? He does it by the word. And this means not only that husbands need to be spiritual heads in their home and read the word of God with their wives and family, but it also means that husbands, patterning themselves after Christ, need to communicate their love to their wives. That is what Christ is always doing in the word to His bride, the church.

Now let us turn to the Song of Solomon, chapter 1, verses 9-11. Remember that, basically, the Song of Solomon is a real, historical love story between Solomon and his bride (called the Shulamite). It is told

in poetry. And it is a relationship of Solomon that is taken and sanctified by the Holy Spirit for our edification. This is the inspired word of God. And this relationship mirrors the relationship of Christ and His bride, the church.

So, when we read the Song of Solomon, we have a biblical pattern for the earthly relationship between a man and his wife, and yet, at the same time, we have to lift our eyes heavenward in faith to Christ and see how He loves His bride, the church.

Song of Solomon 1:9-11: "I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver."

This is Solomon speaking to his bride. Or, perhaps, at this point, she is his fiancée. He calls her "my love," or "my darling," more literally, "my female companion," or, we would say, "my girl friend." In Proverbs 30:19 we read that there is a way of a man with a maid, a way to love her, a way to win her, a way to keep her love. And there is, of course, a way to make a woman bitter and sour, too. Solomon shows us here the way of a man with a maid, the way to handle a woman.

And the way he does it is by complimenting her. In these verses, Solomon wants to give to his bride the highest praise. That is the way to love a woman—not by flattery, but by a genuine expression of love that comes from the heart. Solomon says from his heart to his bride: "You are like a mare harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot." That's the best translation here. "You are like a mare harnessed to Pharaoh's chariot."

Now, you are thinking, that is hardly a compliment. I do not think my wife would really appreciate it if I called her a mare. And you are right. It is probably not a good idea to compare your wife to a mare. But, you see, Solomon does not mean here to call her a horse. To understand this, you must enter into the mind of Solomon as a man. There are things that men admire. And for Solomon, it was horses. Solomon introduced horses into Israel. He knew them. And he admired them. He could look at them as an expert for proportion and size, muscle and strength, skill and beauty. He knew which horses were the best. And here he compares his bride to the best of the best—to the Cadillac, to the Rolls-Royce of horses—one of Pharaoh's horses from Egypt. From Solomon, this is a compliment.

Maybe to help us understand this, we should see who this woman is who is being complimented. She is a farm girl. She is not one of the pale princesses of Jerusalem. But she is a beautiful woman who grew up on a farm in Ephraim. Earlier in this chapter she says, "Look not on me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me. My brothers," she says, "made me work in the vineyard. And my own vineyard have I not kept." She means: "I'm sunburned from working in the fields." Among all the pale beauties in the palace she is rather insecure. She has not the time or the money to look after herself or to bring herself up to the standard of beauty set by the other ladies in the palace. She has not had time to keep her own vineyard.

And, you see, Solomon senses her insecurity and he responds as a man of understanding. He senses her discomfort among the confident and questioning girls in Jerusalem who want to know, "You look so different. How did you win Solomon's heart?" Solomon praises her and builds her up. He is saying, "Don't worry about what the other ladies are saying. You have the highest place in my affections. If only you could see yourself as I do. Not just any old mare from Egypt (which bred the best horses in those days), but Pharaoh's choice horse. The best of the best."

Solomon is understanding. He builds her up. He gives her time to adjust to life in the palace. And, of

course, she understands what Solomon means. She takes it in the spirit in which it is intended. It helps her and encourages her.

Then he does something else to help her, too. In verse 10 he adorns her with jewelry. "Thy cheeks," he says, "are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold." This is what he is saying: "The jewelry that I've given you makes you even more beautiful to me."

Now, we have to think of this in spiritual terms. Lift our minds to Christ and see that this is Christ complimenting His bride, the church. This is Christ speaking to you and me as members of His bride and body.

Very often our problem is exactly like this. We think like this woman. We have doubts about the love of Christ. We look at ourselves and we see our sin. We see what is ugly and unattractive. We see the corruption of our nature. We see our weakness and the ongoing struggle with sin. We tend to compare ourselves with other Christians and we never match up. The others seem far more advanced than we are in the life of sanctification. And we say, "How could He love me?" Christ comes to us, He comes to the church, He comes to the believer, He comes to the repentant sinner, and He says, "You have pride of place in my affections." Christ comes in the gospel and He speaks words of forgiveness and words of love. "You are washed, you are clean," He says. Over against our fickle feelings, He presents the facts of His love. The Husband here does not look at His bride as she sees herself, but He says, "You are beautiful to Me. I love you. It's not about how you feel or what you might see in yourself."

It is about the reality of the love of Jesus Christ.

And the doctrine that we are talking about here is justification by faith alone. Justification describes our position or standing before God. How does God look at us in Jesus Christ? In justification, God looks on His church and He says, "You are clean. Your sins are forgiven. I don't look at you as you see yourself. But I have forgiven your sins. You were black, but now you are comely in My sight."

And when we speak of justification by faith, we mean that God brings this into our consciousness, so that we know His forgiving love. As we bring nothing to Him but our sins and sinfulness; as we look at nothing in ourselves but only at Jesus Christ; God comes in the gospel and He speaks words of love. He says, "You are clean in my sight. I love you." He does not see the wrinkles and the scars of sin that make us so ugly in our own eyes. When God looks at us, He sees in us the beauty of a bride dressed in white robes—the white robes of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is the objective word of the gospel to the sinner who knows his sin and comes in repentance through Christ. "You are washed. You have pride of place in My heart. I love you," says God to the repentant sinner.

From a practical point of view, that is very important for us. Today there is a great emphasis in evangelical circles on how you *feel*. Christians feel all kinds of things. And the assurance of God's love goes up and down depending on how they feel. When they work hard in spiritual things, they feel better. When they go through trials and troubles, they feel as though God does not love them. But, you see, the truth is, that the love of God and who we are in God's eyes has nothing to do with those things—nothing to do with how we feel or what we have done.

In I Corinthians 6:11 Paul is speaking to new converts, and he says to them: "And such were some of you"—fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, Sodomites. Just think if *they* had based the love of God on how they felt about themselves and what they saw in themselves and what they had done. But that is not the foundation for knowing the love of God. In I Corinthians 6:11 Paul continues, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the

name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." He is saying to them, "Your acceptance, your beauty in the eyes of God—these things should not be evaluated according to what you've done or how you feel. But Christ makes His bride beautiful. He adorns her with His own righteousness. He washes her in His blood." That is what you must believe. And that gives you strength and encouragement in your doubts as a Christian.

Then in verse 11, back in the Song of Solomon, there is one more thing that Solomon says to his bride. He says, "We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver." In verses 9 and 10 he speaks of her place in his heart—of what he has done for her. And now, in verse 11, he goes on to tell her what he will yet do for her because he loves her so much. You see here how much he prizes her. He is going to add to her beauty with gold. "You are beautiful," he is saying. "But I will make you even more beautiful."

This is what Christ does in the work of sanctification, which is His beauty treatment of the church. According to Ephesians 5:26, 27, He sanctifies it and cleanses it with the washing of water by the word—in order that He "might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." This is Christ's goal for His bride and church—to present her spotless, without fault in the presence of His glory, to the Father, without wrinkle, without stain.

Now we need to understand sanctification. Justification has to do with our standing before God—the forgiveness of our sins and the removal of the guilt of sin. What happens after that, though, is that, even when our sins are forgiven, still there clings to us the sinful nature. We have to live with that. Even though our sins are forgiven, there are still the consequences of sin—the scars of sin remain in our life.

But it is Christ's goal to get rid of all of that. The scar tissue, the consequences, the remnants of sin—to rid us of all of it. Complete sanctification is His goal. And He starts that process in us the moment that we are wed to Him in our regeneration by the Holy Spirit. He would adorn us. Not only does He set His affection on us and say, "You are mine, I will love you even though you are sinners," but He also says, "I'm going to make you more beautiful. I'm going to give you jewelry to wear." These are the good works of sanctification. He gives them to us as jewels placed around our neck.

So that is the beautiful truth in these verses. Solomon expresses his love to his unsure bride. But the Song of Solomon is telling us about what Christ says in the gospel to His bride, the church.

Before we conclude, there is one more relationship to look at. That is the earthly relationship of marriage—not Solomon's, but yours and mine today. Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church.

Men, and I am speaking for myself too, can often be very insensitive in the treatment of their wives, giving little time to understand their life and interests. Little time to hear their personal concerns. They can give little thought to appreciating the wife that God has given them. And little effort is put into loving her as she likes to be loved.

That is not the case with Solomon here. As busy as Solomon is with the affairs of the state, surrounded by his under-secretaries, a man with great responsibility on his shoulders, who has to make important decisions every day as he rules one of the greatest kingdoms that ever existed, swamped by his work—Solomon takes time for his wife. Time to be sensitive to her needs. Here she was, taken away from her family and home, transplanted into this strange environment. How often does not a newly-

wed bride feel that way! And he takes time, he feels a responsibility for her. He is not embarrassed to tell her that he loves her, and to spend some time and some money adorning her.

There are so many Christian marriages today that need just this: a man, a husband, who loves his wife as she is and for who she is, and tells her that.

Husbands, do you love your wife? The New Testament talks about not being bitter against her. You and your wife have disagreed on something. Or she was telling you a small detail of her life. What did you think? Oh, woman—there you go again! Did you argue with her to show her how silly she was? And did you work hard to prove that you were right? Or, did you love her? Did you give her time, understanding, encouragement? Husbands, do you love your wife?

And then, husbands, do you tell your wife that you love her? That is what we have in this text—words of love for the bride, just when she needed them. Do you tell your wife that you love her? When she doubts your love because she doubts her own worth, do you let her know of the high place that she has in your heart? When she says that it seems all she does is work, work, work, and has little help and appreciation, then do you tell her how much you love her and appreciate her?

Understand, this is not just romance. It is not just teenage love. But it is communicating your love to your wife. What if you as a Christian did not have the Bible? What if Christ never told His bride that He loved her? There is the parallel. Do we not love to hear Christ's words of love and encouragement? How your wife would also love to hear that you love her! Husbands, do you tell your wife that you love her?

Then there is one more thing for husbands. Do you let your wife be a woman? Solomon recognizes here the womanly beauty of his bride. He understands that this is important to her. And he gives her jewelry and perfume. He goes out of his way to let her be a woman—to take pride in her feminine beauty. You as a man like cars or trucks or gadgets or sports or the outdoors. Do you let her be a woman? Yes, to deify beauty is idolatry and it destroys beauty. But to ignore beauty and to despise beauty is to despise God's beautiful creation of the woman. Solomon adorns his bride. Christ adorns His bride, the church. Husbands, do you let your wife be a woman?

How does a Christian man, a Christian husband, handle a woman? Very simply, husbands: love her. Love her tenderly. Love her consistently. Love her prayerfully. Love her sacrificially. Nurture and nourish her. Minister to her. Be a friend to her. Beautify her. Adorn her. Feed her and care for her, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Spend time with her. Want the best for her. Simply: love her as Christ loves His bride.

Let us pray.

Father, we give thanks for the love of Jesus Christ to us who are members of His bride, and for the gospel that reveals His love to us and that adorns us with holiness. Lord, let that be reflected in our Christian marriages. Amen.