

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Galatians 5:1

The Song of Solomon and Human Sexuality

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY
Dean of North Portland Bible College

The text for the Sunday School lesson (International Series) for next Sunday is Song of Solomon 2:8-17. This passage deals with a wonderful, but delicate subject. I welcome readers' responses to the views presented, but let me emphasize that I'm most interested in presenting the Bible's position and how it relates to our community.

In our series of studies on the songs and prayers of the Bible, we are only taking one week to take a sampling of the beautiful, sensual poetry of the Song of Solomon. And that is really too bad, because these poems about human love are hard to analyze objectively. The song of Solomon teaches a lot about married love, and about sexuality, but it does not relate its principles like a high-school health class, or a modern sex manual.

Background. The Song of Solomon claims to be the work of King Solomon, his "song of songs," his greatest writing. Solomon was famous for the vast number of wives and concubines he supported in his court (1 Kings 11:3, and Song 6:8). The wives in particular were royal princesses, and the marriages were arranged for political purposes--running contrary to the warnings the Lord (Yahweh) had given Israel (1 Kings 11:2). The prophet, writing in 1 Kings, emphasizes Solomon's disobedience and the disastrous consequences for his nation (read all of ch. 11 for the details). The failures of Solomon serve as an eloquent warning for those leaders today--both civil and religious--who think that their personal life (e.g., sexual morality, family life, financial integrity) should not affect their public image and leadership.

But the Song of Solomon gives us another view of Solomon, which some-

what softens the harshness of the prophet. Most likely we should understand this song as a set of "idylls" or love songs, sung by Solomon and his bride at their week-long wedding feast. They relive the joys and passions of their courtship, and the wonderful pageantry of their wedding. This bride he married for love, not political expediency. Solomon recognized the beauty and purity of their love surpassed anything he had known in his previous encounters.

Leland Ryken summarizes the "plot" of the book as follows: "King Solomon, visiting his vineyard upon Mount Lebanon, comes by surprise upon the fair Shulamite maiden; she flees from him, and he visits her disguised as a Shepherd and wins her love; then he comes in state to claim her as his queen; they are being wedded in the royal palace when the poem opens" (The Literature of the Bible, p. 207). Solomon does not develop this plot in chronological order, but in separate incidents tied to the rural home of the Shulamite or (in a few cases) the court of Jerusalem.

Purpose. The song of Solomon makes no clear reference to God, or to religious faith, and so some have felt the need to look below the surface meaning of the song to find the "real" or "larger" meaning. The early Jewish traditions interpreted the Song as an allegory of the Lord's love for the nation Israel; the church often takes the bridegroom and the bride as types of Christ and his church. Both these images can be found in the Scripture (Ezek 16:1-14; Eph 5:25-32; and several others), so the concept is not impossible.

But there is no explanation of the Song of Solomon, either in the book or elsewhere in the Bible, to indicate that this is an allegory for anything else. For this reason, I take the Song as it stands, a celebration of sexual love under the

standards of faithfulness and purity which the Lord had already established in the Law.

It is said that Jewish rabbis before the time of Christ forbade youth under 30 from reading the Song of Solomon. However, in the preserved history of the Jews and their religious practices, we read that the Song was read aloud every year by each family during the Feast of Passover. The children would hear these love songs at least once a year, and as they grew older the meanings would become more clear from their experience. They would learn naturally that sexual love is a wonderful, mysterious part of life, and it's not to be taken lightly. There is nothing coarse or vile about the language used; the lover and his beloved frankly describe the beauty of each other's bodies, and affirm their longing and commitment to each other.

Young women are addressed repeatedly as "daughters of Jerusalem," and the message to them is explicit: there is a right time for this kind of love--don't get aroused for love until that time arrives (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Young men are taught an equally important, practical message in Proverbs (Prov 2:16-19; 5:15-20; 6:24-29; 7:1-27): don't chase after other men's wives; be faithful to the wife of your youth; and run from those wayward women who would gladly chase you.

Application. We live in a sexually saturated society, where the very idea of self-control in sexual conduct is laughed at. The answer is not just to give up or give in. And it is surely not going to help to hide our children from any knowledge of our sexual nature, as if it is somehow dirty or lewd.

The Song of Solomon gives us some great guidelines for our own lives, as well as the instruction of our teens and young adults. Here are a few thoughts I would suggest, knowing that there is a

lot more in the Bible on this important subject.

(1) God created humans as male and female, and he called it very good (Gen 1:31). So we can be thankful to God for our sexuality, and enjoy it fully, without shame or guilt. (2) For our own good, and for the full enjoyment of our sexuality, we must follow God's plan for love, marriage and family. This means a period of self-control, waiting for the right time and the right person to give all one's love to (read 1 Cor 6:18; 7:2). And then it means lifelong faithfulness and respect for that lover, which is the whole point of the marriage vows (read 1 Cor 7:3-4; 1 Thess 4:3-7).

(3) Those who transgress God's plan for marriage will fall under the judgment of God, which is the natural result of their sin. This includes fornication (sexual relations prior to the public marriage vows) and adultery (unfaithfulness to one's spouse) and all homosexual acts (for all these, read 1 cor 6:9-10).

In today's American society, we can see the effects of the "sexual revolution." Diseases, including AIDS, but also including many other painful and permanent conditions, are spreading at epidemic rates. [The "safe sex" myth must be abandoned; in practice, the only safe sex is within marriage. Emotional and social upheaval also follow in the wake of sexual promiscuity.]

The prevailing attitudes toward sexual relations promise freedom, but produce emptiness, pain, and disappointment. God's standards may seem too limiting--they do require commitment and self-control--but his ways lead to real freedom, the freedom to enjoy our sexuality without fear or regret. It's that freedom that the Song of Solomon celebrates.

10th Annual Black Womens' Gathering

Volunteers are needed to help plan the 10th annual celebration of Portland's Black Women's Gathering. Help is needed on the following committees:

Fundraising & booths, public relations & media, program, entertainment, childcare, hostess, food, and brochure. For more information call D'nordia Price at 286-9089 or Deborah Marshall 236-9687.

Bethel A.M.E. Church Celebrates 'Annual Day'

The Senior Usher Board of Bethel A.M.E. Church, cordially invites you to attend our "Annual Day," Sunday, January 19, 1992, at 4:00 p.m., "featuring" Dr. Scholastica Ibari Njoku, noted African speaker, author and poet. For more information please call Bethel A.M.E. Church, (503) 288-5429 or 288-5420.

Jesus Christ Is Salvation Union Avenue Baptist Church

5029 N. E. MLK Jr. Blvd.
Portland, OR 97211
Telephone Number - 287-8344

He that is too good to realize that he need to be saved, cannot be helped. But he that recognize he has a need, can be helped.

What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Are you a friend of Jesus?
Do you want Jesus to be your friend?
We want to be your friend and would love to have you as our friend.

Everyone is welcome to this church, (the body of Christ).
There is a place and a work here for you.

Rev. A. G. May, Pastor

Mallory Avenue Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

God's Presence promises Power through Jesus Christ in Good Times and Bad Times
Matthew 11:28

"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest"

9:45am Sunday School
11:00am Morning Worship
7:30pm Tuesday Bible Study and Prayer

Inter-racial Congregation

126 N.E. Alberta † Portland, OR 97211 † (503) 288-5173



Denise A. Bell, Pastor

VANN & VANN FUNERAL DIRECTORS



Cleodius Vann

Family Owned and Operated Since 1954

Serving the City of Portland for over 37 years

In your hour of need Vann & Vann are there to serve

503/281-2836

5211 N. Williams Portland, Or. 97217

FRANKLIN'S READY RIBS

Catering for Holidays

Monday thru Thursday
11:30 am - 8:00 pm
Friday and Saturday Noon - 10:00 pm
Sunday Noon - 8:00 pm

Under New Management

281-1993 • 445 NE Killingsworth

MALLORY CHURCH OF CHRIST

3908 NE MALLORY AVENUE



Minister Gregory Fobbs

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

Bible Study
9:30 am.
Morning Worship
10:45 am.
Men's Training Leadership
Women's Bible Class
5:00 pm.
Evening Worship
6:00 pm.
Attended nursery for all services
Wednesday prayer meeting and bible study
7:30 pm.

Radio Ministry Each Sunday, 11:00 AM - KBMS

288-1092

RESTORING
NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

Oregon Mother Of The Year

The search is on for the 1992 "Oregon Mother of the Year." The qualifications are:

1. At least 45 years of age.
2. Married in a legally accepted ceremony.
3. Youngest child must be at least 15 years of age.
4. Qualified to represent the Mothers of America as an exemplary role model.
5. Understanding, patient, compassionate, loving, courageous, and skilled in homemaking arts that are highly regarded as essential for mothers.
6. A successful mother and home-

maker as evidenced by the character and contributions of her individual children in the religious, educational, civic, and governmental or business worlds.

7. An active member of a religious body.
8. An active participant in community, state, national, or international activities.

If YOU or someone YOU KNOW qualifies, please call Sandy or Sharon at 286-0782 or write Leah Sauer, 10626 E. Burnside, Portland, Oregon 97216. Act NOW because the deadline for the return of applications is February, 1, 1992.

Jesus Loves You!

Allen Temple CME Church

Psalms 34:3

4236 NE Eighth Avenue
(corner of 8th & Skidmore)

Portland, Oregon 97211

(503) 287-0261

Phillip S. Nelson Pastor

St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church

8101 N. Fiske Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97203

Church Phone: 289-0147

Study Phone: 289-1911

Sunday Service
10:45
Sunday School
9:30
Bible Study
6:00
Evening Service
7:00 P.M.



Pastor, Rev. James C.E. Faulkner

Theme: Whatever you're going to do for the Lord, do it now

I Peter 4:11



MT OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH

WE ARE MOVING
SUNDAY SERVICES
TO

Stone Tower Church,
N.E. Sandy Blvd. & 30th

Worship Services 8:00 A.M. & 11:00 A.M.
Church School 9:30 A.M. to 10:30 A.M.
Bible Study, Wednesdays, 116 N.E. Schuyler
10:30 A.M. and 6:30 P.M.

Radio Ministry each Sunday, 8:00 A.M.-KBMS

A Teaching Church With A Reaching Ministry
Dr. James E. Martin, Senior Pastor

Church Office 116 N.E. Schuyler,