

THE "LOVE" IN THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Rev. Juan B. Cabanting

Bible Lesson: The Song of Solomon 1:1-17

If we shall study this particular book of the Bible- the Song of Solomon, we shall find out that the word "love" is extravagantly used. If my study on this book does not deceive me, I think there are eight chapters in this book, and the word "love" is used thirty times.

Many scholars on this book- the Song of Solomon, have contended that the main theme is "love". In fact, this is evidenced by the fact that the word "love" is prevalent from the very beginning up to the end of the book. And the use of the word for thirty times is also a legitimate reason that the main theme of this book- the Song of Solomon, is "love".

There are some scholars who advocate that the word "love" in the "Song of Solomon" could be interpreted as a secular love. They base their claim on the idea that this book- "Song of Solomon"- is a collection of secular love songs. But this idea that this book is merely a collection of love songs was greatly objected. It was objected on the ground that if this book would be just merely a collection of love songs, how did it ever get into the Canon? In other words, how did it become a part of the Bible if it was just merely a collection of love songs?

So, it was not rejected because scholars finally came to the conclusion that this book is a "love poem" picturing the love of God to Israel as a nation and to every individual Israelite.

But whatever others say concerning this book, I would like to say that our main concern here is to find out the meaning of "love" as used in this particular book in relation to the Christian faith. I would like now to submit to you some of my observations on this book in relation to its main theme "love".

1. My first observation is found on Chapter 1:2 which says: "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth." Right from this verse, two lovers are pictured to us. They are on the process of their romantic conversation. And the word "kiss" in the Holy Scriptures has a very significant meaning. An author has said in relation to the word kiss. "Kiss is the token of dearest affection, it is more than a sign, it has a language all its own".

As we ponder on this verse, the bride here is pictured as one who desires the kisses of the bridegroom, because perhaps, she feels and realizes the need of her bridegroom's warmth and affection. She is hungry of his affection and warmth, and so she says, "O that would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth."

Is it not true that sometimes, or most of the time, or all of the time, the wives always wish and desire the warmth and affection of their husbands? And that to make their husbands believe that they need their warmth and affection, they desire their kisses. "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth." This is a truth.

In relation to the Christian faith, is it not true that the greatest need and cravings of the Church, the people of God which is the Body of Christ, are the kisses from the mouth of the

Lord? Or in other words, is it not true that the greatest need of the Church of God is the warmth and the power of the Holy Spirit?

Is it not true that we can receive the warmth and power of the Holy Spirit only when we desire of it? And desiring for it means the giving- the total giving of ourselves to Him? Oh! May the prayer of our hearts today be the coming of the kisses from the mouth of the Lord, which is the warmth and power of the Holy Spirit.

2. The second observation that I would like to share with you is found on the second part of the same verse which says, " For your love is better than wine."

In this statement, the bride or say the wife is stating the fact that the love of the bridegroom is better than any other kind of loves. And this implies that the bride is not a harlot, or is not one who deceives her husband by fooling with other men. Her heart and soul is totally committed to her husband, which is an affirmation of a pure and spotless love. She has totally committed herself to her lover-her husband.

It could be denied that there is what we call parental love, friendly love, brotherly love, and sisterly love. But what are these love compared to the love of a bridegroom to his bride? No wonder why we read in the Bible that when a man and a woman get married they" become one flesh".

My friends, if we try to relate this truth into the Christian faith, we can see a great message in it. The Bible says," For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that all who believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The existence of the Church amidst this wicked world is a divine and concrete indication that men and women, young and old, have already felt, realized and accepted the fact that the love of God is far better and much better than any other kinds of love. The existence of the Church of God is also an affirmation that men have desired and lived this great love of God, so that now they could love God with all their heart, mind and soul. And if anyone who says he or she is a member of the Church but doesn't love God with all his heart, mind and soul, he must be loving some other gods. His heart must have been directed to some other gods. But what does the commandment say? It says," You shall have no other gods before me." The New Testament also says, "You cannot love God and serve other gods at the same time." Whatever we love more than we love the living God is our idol. To love God with all our heart, mind and soul is to cast away all other gods.

Again may I repeat to say, that the existence of the Church is a concrete indication that men and women have already accepted the truth that the love of God is much better than any other kinds of love. May I say that, according to the Bible, the Church is the Bride and the Lord Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom and the existence of the Church is a confirmation that it has already desired and accepted the love of God in Jesus Christ. Now, the principle and life of the Church is to love God with all its heart, mind and soul. It loves God, because God has loved it first through Jesus Christ.

Now, let us go back to the verse from the Song of Solomon. It says,"Your love is better than wine." Have we said also to God, "Your love is better than any other kinds of love" ? Have we already received this love offered by God through His Son Jesus Christ? Have we desired it

more than anything else? If these questions would be directed to all the Filipino people, I am sure, some would say, that they have already received God's love because:

- a) they go to church fairly regularly
- b) they attend Mass every Sunday
- c) they do not speak bad words
- d) and they give alms to the poor, etc.

My friends, all these are good to be exercised in the life of any Christian but these are not all the proof that a Christian has already received God's love. I believe that the real proof that we already received God's love is when we no longer serve the world and do the things that are against the holy will of God. At this time, and from this time on, our capacity to love is no longer to serve the self first but to God with all our heart, mind and soul. The capacity to love God is primarily rooted on the fact that God loved us first. The Bible says ",Herein is love not that we love God, but that God loved us first." God came to us in the flesh just to make us or help us capable of loving Him in spirit and in truth. It is a wonderful thing to realize. In John 3:1 we read, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God, and so we are." then in John 4:11. it says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. "

3. There is a third observation from the "Song of Solomon" that I wish to share with you this morning. This observation is taken from the fourth chapter. This chapter gives us the description of the bride. The bridegroom describes romantically the bride. The opening of the chapter says, "Behold, you are beautiful my love, behold, you are beautiful."

The bride as described by the groom in this chapter is seen to be so beautiful that, I am sure, almost all sons of men are tempted to offer their love to her.

The first thing mentioned by the groom as he described his bride is her eye. He likened her as a dove and we know that a dove is a bird. The dove as we read in the Bible is a bird which is ceremonially clean and the only bird offered in a sacrifice. An author says. "The dove is an acknowledged emblem of humility, chastity, harmlessness. If we try to study this bird, some people say that it has two significant and special characteristics. First, is its farsightedness. It has a wonderful power of distant vision. It could see an object even it is far from it. In this connection, and in relation to the Christian faith, I have already said that the bride here is referred to as the Church in relation to the New Testament understanding. As the dove is endowed with the power of farsightedness, the Church too is endowed with the power of farsightedness. It can envision what would happen in the future basing upon human relations and the will of God. That is why, the Church, in a sense, is a prophet, for it has a prophetic ministry.

Another special characteristic of the dove is a characteristic that symbolizes a heavenly nature. It is a characteristic that symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Think about what happened at the time of Jesus' baptism. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the Bible says, "Behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove." (Matt. 3:10)

The life of the Church is not bread alone. Without the Holy Spirit - the love of God upon and within the Church, the Church is dead. It maybe surviving outwardly, but inwardly it is decaying.

The bride in "The Song of Solomon" described by the groom is so beautiful because her eyes are like of dove's. In relation to the Christian faith, the Church is beautiful only when her life is the Holy Spirit and the Church has the power of farsightedness only when her life is endowed with the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit of God dwell in the Church, in our Church today and evermore.

Another thing which is mentioned in the bride by the groom is on the teeth. It says on Chapter 4:2, "Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing," This is a beautiful description of the bride. The words "even shorn" is rendered in 1 Kings 6:25 as of "one size". In this regard, one author says, "The idea is symmetry, evenness, washed, cleanliness of habit, and nothing wanting." I think the very language- the language of this supposes maturity. Why? Because babies and children do not have such kind of teeth and so this idea here suggests maturity.

Relating this truth to the New Testament understanding, we could say that the Church needs to mature. And we, the members of the Church, need to mature. And may I say that, our lives, our habits, our dispositions, tempers and performances should be governed by the creative working of the Holy Spirit. This, I believe, would make our individual lives wonderful and beautiful.

In conclusion, may I quote the words of Paul which have the idea of husband-wife, and Christ-Church relationship. It says: "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might consecrate her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it, so Christ does the Church,..." (Ephesians 5:25-28) Amen.