Key:
Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread
Blue – Explanation/Exposition
Red – Application
Green – Illustration
Brown – Quotation
Yellow – Sermon Notes

Can't Buy Me Love

Song 8:5–14

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to the book of Song of Solomon. We come to the end of this great book in 8:5–14. It's a fitting end to an amazing book. And it's the kind of ending where all the themes and ideas of the book come home to roost.

In these last few verses of the Song, we're going to see the folly of Solomon and all his wives and concubines repudiated. We're going to see the goodness of monogamous, covenantal love demonstrated. We're going to see the goodness of marital sex intimated. And we're going to see the power of love (strong like death) celebrated.

And—here's something new—also we're going to see the possibility of buying romantic love ridiculed. To quote 8:7, if anyone ever tried to buy romantic love, they would be "utterly despised." **Paul McCartney was right, so many years ago—"Can't Buy Me Love."**

So without further ado, let's look at **Song of Solomon 8:5**. Solomon writes,

[5] Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

If you remember from the previous section—it was the spiciest section in the **Song of Solomon**—the Shulamite was enjoying the goodness of sexual intimacy with her shepherd husband. **8:3** makes that perfectly clear.

[3] His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!

That is the language of lovemaking. And it's a steamy ending to the steamiest section of the Song. And as the curtains close on that scene, **verse 4** is about as stark a contrasting statement as we find in the Bible. The Shulamite stops describing the goodness of sexual intimacy that she's experiencing, and she castigates the virgin daughters of Jerusalem.

[4] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

There are no references to deer or gazelles in this oath (like previously in **2:7; 3:5**). This is a more succinct warning statement than she's given previously. But the impact is the same. Sex is good. Don't have sex until it's the proper time. End of scene.

Now in **verse 5**, there's a scene change.

[5] Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning[1] on her beloved?

Three questions to answer at the beginning of **verse 5**. Let's identify the characters here. Who's come up from the wilderness? Who is the beloved? And who is talking in **verse 5**? Let's answer those questions.

You should have this down by now. The beloved is the Shulamite's shepherd husband. The one coming up from the wilderness is the Shulamite. We know that from the grammar of the Hebrew.[2] And the people talking about it here are probably the virgin daughters of Jerusalem. They were just coached up by the Shulamite in **verse 4**. Now they are describing the Shulamite with her husband in **verse 5**.

---

[1] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 170: "The woman wants the man to hold her close, to be as much a part of himself as his seal is—closely attached to his body, merged into his identity."

[2] The Hebrew participle for עָלָה (*ʿālāh*), meaning "coming up," is feminine.

And notice what she is doing? She is *leaning* on her beloved. This is a picture of affection.[3] This is a description of one spouse deriving strength from the other spouse. **That happens in marriage. And husbands need to be the kind of men that can be *leaned upon* by their wives for strength, comfort, and affection.**[4]

And like we've seen before, the Shulamite takes the microphone in **verse 5** and starts talking.

Under the apple tree I awakened you.

The "you" there is singular. It's a reference to her husband. And this statement is another reference to the goodness of sex in the context of marriage.

Apples in the ancient world were used to describe the delight of the sexual experience.[5] And the word "awakened" is the same Hebrew word that was used in **verse 4** with the oath. There she said, **"don't awaken!"** Here she says, **"I awakened."** So **"don't arouse,"** but **"I arouse." "Don't arouse outside of marriage. Arouse inside of marriage." Got it! Thank you, Shulamite. She's teaching us!**

Under the apple tree[6] *I awakened you.*[7] *There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor.*[8]

The statement about being in labor is probably better translated "became pregnant" with you. I don't think that a literal apple tree is being referenced here where both parents and children conceived.[9] That's not plausible.[10] But at the risk of weirding everyone out in the room, let me just state the obvious—children do like their parents when they get married.[11] That's what's being referenced here. I know it's awkward to think about... but it's true.

Children do like their parents once they get older and get married. And doing *that* is how we get this beautiful thing called *grandchildren*.

This is a description of that. This woman is celebrating the passing on of the generations.[12] **And we should celebrate that. And that should happen. More often than not, parents will have children. And**

---

[3] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 425: "Her leaning upon him presents an attitude of trust and ease, which further suggests that the anxiety of 5:2–9 has ended."

[4] O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon,* 113: "A wife does not lean upon her husband for everything, but she should lean upon him for loving leadership, which includes affection, protection, and provision. That's what it means to be a husband. That's what it means to love your wife as Christ loves the Church... So, men, are you lovably leanable?"

[5] MELCHIOR HOFFMAN sees a link to the Garden of Eden: "The apple tree of which the bridegroom speaks I find in Genesis 3—the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. Under this tree our mother Eve bore and placed us into death, and also under this tree Eve the mother sickened, where she began such toil and labor as a bearer of children. So under this tree, through her defection to the devil's teaching, she came to nothing, and her children came to death." Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 411.

[6] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 168: "Apples also are the remedy for lovesickness in 2:5. If the apple tree is symbolic, we need not take literally that the lovemaking happened under an apple tree; rather, the apple tree brings together the idea of the lover and the act of lovemaking. In 2:3, a woman took pleasure from the apple tree, and here a woman takes pleasure under it."

[7] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 236–7: "As much as any other passage, such an understanding destroys a consistent allegorical interpretation. How can Israel or the church, the female, awaken Yahweh or Christ, the male? Probably for this reason the Syriac switched the gender of the suffixes so that the male speaks and awakes. The allegorical commentators followed this practice."

[8] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 426: "The woman means that she and he are now participating in the same act by which the man himself was given life. It is 'there' that she aroused him."

[9] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 146: "The apple tree where she aroused him is, she says, the same place where his own mother labored in childbirth with him (Song 8:5). This statement should not be taken literally, of course. People didn't normally give birth to children under trees in antiquity any more than they do now."

[10] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 253: "It may be that the appearance of the apple tree is significant. A peculiarity of many apple trees is that they appear gnarled and twisted and, especially in winter, have more of an aged look than do many other trees. Nevertheless, they produce luscious fruit that, with its reddish coloration, full and rounded shape, and juicy flesh, seems to be the very image of youth. The branches of the tree fork in many directions; there is nothing linear about an apple tree (in contrast, for example, to the date palm). All of this suggests that the apple tree symbolizes not merely sexuality but sexuality as it continues from generation to generation. The old give birth to the young, and the "family tree" continues to spread and grow through the years."

[11] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 253: "Under the metaphor of the apple tree she speaks rather directly of sexual intercourse and what follows it, conception and birth. Sexual union and giving birth are times of intense physical and emotional pleasure and trauma. The woman has entered this kind of intense physical relationship with her husband, and she recapitulates the experience of their mothers."

somewhere around 20-30 years later, those children will have children. And so on and so forth. And the beat goes on. And that's good.

Look at **verse 6**. Watch what the Shulamite says next. This might be the most important statement in the entire book.[13]

[6] Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal[14] upon your arm,

You know this already, but let me just tell you, the "your" in this verse is singular. This is one woman telling one man, **"it's you and me only until death do us part."**[15]

And notice the two body parts here. There's the heart. And there's the arm. The arm can be seen. The heart can't be seen. The arm is a visible, physical symbol. The heart is metaphysical. She wants a seal on both.[16] She wants something to show everyone else that he belongs to her. And she wants something deeper and internal inside of him that establishes that she belongs to him.

Why does she want this? Why is this important? Here's why...

for love is strong as death,[17] jealousy is fierce as the grave.[18]

Those of you who have fallen in love... those of you who have experienced the power of love... you know what this means. You read this and say, **"Uh-huh! Truth!"** This is not hyperbole. Love *is* strong like death![19] Jealousy *is* fierce as the grave! **Pat Benatar was right—"Love is a battlefield."**

---

[12] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 237: "In the same place and manner as the current male begins a family with his lover, so his father and mother began their family. Hence the erotic tenor of the whole Song here moves beyond the inevitably selfish tendencies of pleasure seeking to describe the broader vista of fulfillment of the goal that God wishes for his people, to be fruitful and to fill the earth (Gen. 1:26–28)."

[13] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 235: "Verses 5–7 are the longest verses in chapter 8. Together they form a climax to the entire book and provide an interpretive key for understanding the whole of the Song."

[14] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 170: "Seals, either stamp seals (preferred in Israel) or cylinder seals (preferred in Mesopotamia eventually), which bore a design and/or the inscribed name of the owner, were the ancient equivalent of identity cards. Tamar identifies Judah by his seal and his cord (Gen 38:18). When impressed on a document the seal served as a signature (1 Kgs 21:8). Seals were worn on a cord around the neck, lying close to the heart, or on a ring on the finger or on a bracelet on the hand or upper arm."

[15] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 238: "For the female to imagine herself a seal by the heart or arm of her lover suggests that she will share his identity and become one with him, both physically (as close as possible) and legally (as taking on his name and legal identity)."

[16] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 146: "In those days, if you wanted to steal someone's identity, you didn't steal his credit cards; you stole his seal. So when the woman says that she wants to be like a seal that her beloved carries around his arm, the place of his strength, she wants to be constantly beside him, publicly acknowledged as belonging to him."

[17] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 147: "Love is not merely as strong as an ox, or as powerful as a speeding locomotive: it is as strong as *death* (Song 8:6). Just as people who enter the fierce grip of death do not emerge again, so, too, having entered the equally powerful realm of love, the woman wants love to grip them both forever."

[18] O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon,* 117–8: "Two images are given here, and they are both images of permanence: (1) death' and (2) 'the very flame of the LORD.' The first image in verse 6b is an example of a Hebrew poetic device known as synonymous parallelism. See below how 'love' and 'jealousy' are parallel, and then also 'death' and 'the grave,' and how the second word makes the first word more engaging and concrete."

[19] AUGUSTINE: "When death comes, it cannot be resisted. By whatever arts, whatever medicines, you meet it; the violence of death can none avoid who is born mortal; so against the violence of love can the world do nothing. For from the contrary the similitude is made of death; for as death is most violent to take away, so love is most violent to save. Through love many have died to the world, to live to God." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 365.

By the way "jealousy" isn't negative here.[20] This is not envy or covetousness here.[21] This is a different Hebrew word that can be used positively or negatively.[22] The Lord is jealous for Israel (e.g., **Zech. 8:2; Joel 2:18**). The Lord is jealous for his people. That's not sinful. And neither is this.

for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as [Sheol]...

Love is so strong... it's so powerful... she wants assurances.[23] She wants to know that she is his one and only.[24] And she deserves to know that he has set her as a seal upon his arm and a seal upon his heart.[25] **She wants those assurances, so that when temptations come, and when marriage gets a little rocky, he's not going to start looking around for something else.**[26]

She deserves those assurances. She wants a "till death" commitment. And she is right to demand them.

Here's the way we indicate that in a modern-day marriage ceremony. This can take different shapes and forms culturally, but this is how we do it.[27] We get in front of witnesses. We exchange the rings that are made of metal. And we make vows. That's a seal upon the heart, and a seal upon the arm, so to speak.[28]

---

[20] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 147–8: "We usually think of jealousy as a negative emotion, a refusal to share something that ought to be shared... But some things in life are not meant to be shared... there is an appropriate jealousy in marriage. You belong uniquely to the other person and he or she belongs to you... Some things are not meant to be shared."

[21] The Hebrew word translated "covet" in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:17) is a different Hebrew word, חָמַד (*ḥāmad*), meaning "to desire," "to delight in," or "to covet." Interestingly, this word is not intrinsically negative either. Positive uses include Genesis 2:9, where God creates trees that are "pleasant to the sight," Psalm 19:10, where God's judgments are "more to be desired than gold," and Psalm 68:16, where God desires a mountain for his dwelling. Negative uses include Genesis 3:6, where Eve desires the forbidden fruit, Exodus 20:17, where God prohibits coveting a neighbor's possessions, and Joshua 7:21, where Achan covets the forbidden spoil. Thus, both חָמַד (*ḥāmad*) and קִנְאָה (*qinʾāh,* "jealousy") can have positive or negative connotations depending on the context. Neither desire nor jealousy is inherently sinful; what matters is the object and nature of that desire or jealousy.

[22] The Hebrew word for "jealousy" in Song of Solomon 8:6 is קִנְאָה (*qinʾāh*), a noun that can express either sinful envy or righteous jealousy and zeal, depending on the context. The same noun describes the LORD's jealousy for Zion (Zech 1:14; 8:2), his zeal to establish his kingdom (Isa 9:7), his zeal to deliver Jerusalem (Isa 37:32; 2 Kgs 19:31), and zeal for God's house (Ps 69:9). The related adjective קַנָּא (*qannāʾ*) describes the LORD as a jealous God who demands exclusive worship (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). The related verb קָנָא (*qānāʾ*) likewise expresses righteous zeal, as when God is jealous for his land (Joel 2:18), Phinehas is zealous for God (Num 25:13), and Elijah declares his zeal for the LORD (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). Thus, jealousy is not inherently sinful. In Song 8:6, the term describes the passionate exclusivity appropriate to covenantal marriage, not sinful envy or covetousness.

[23] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 170: "The sentiment is close to Virgil's *omnia vincit Amor*, 'Love conquers all' (*Eclogue* 10.69). Our passage shapes the idea slightly differently: Love cannot be conquered by any power, cosmic or earthly."

[24] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 257: "No one should lightly or thoughtlessly enter into a love or sexual relationship. To do so is to invite emotional catastrophe—love has great power over one's own soul as well as over the soul of the other. Those who think that they can lightly enter love but then quench its fires at will create turmoil within their own hearts and invite trouble from their lovers. It is hardly out of character for the woman's part to give the audience such warnings about the power of love. She has already three times called on the Jerusalem girls not to arouse love before it is ready (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)... This is not to say, however, that love is a bad thing. It is an exquisite, soul-consuming experience that humans yearn for. To have this kind of passion for another person is a gift; it cannot be bought or sold."

[25] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 171: "The parallel of 'heart' and 'hand' or 'finger' occurs in Deut 11:18: 'set these words on your heart … and bind them as a sign on your hand,' and in Prov 7:3: 'bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart.'"

[26] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 257: "It is important to observe that in Song 8:7 it is the woman who demands fidelity of the man. In the ancient Near East it was a given that adultery by a wife was a heinous offense, but expectations of men were far less in this regard. Yet here, as in Prov 5:7–23, sexual devotion is demanded of the husband. The bride makes the same kind of claim on him as Lady Wisdom does on the young man (Prov 1:20–33). Fidelity to one's bride is equated with fidelity to Wisdom; holding to the one preserves love, and holding to the other preserves life."

[27] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 254: "We do not have evidence that people in the ancient Near East had standard tokens of love or marriage analogous to the modern wedding ring. In Gen 24, the servant of Abraham gives a ring and bracelets to Rebekah as signs of his desire to take her back to be Isaac's wife, but even here it is not clear that any of the jewelry would have been understood to connote marriage in the specific way the modern wedding ring does."

[28] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 254: "The scribes who copied and preserved the Song would no doubt associate this line with the bullae with which they routinely closed up scrolls and marked them as their own. This may be the key to the metaphor.

And when we hear those vows and that commitment to "love and cherish till death do us part," we are right as witnesses to expect that couple to fulfill their vows.[29] This is not something you want to mess around with or vow involuntarily. Nobody should be coerced into making those vows!

Why? Because love is strong as death and jealousy is fierce as Sheol.[30]

Look at the end of **verse 6.**

Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD.[31]

What in the world does that mean? It means that love is a gift. And there is something intrinsic to the way that God loves that he shares with us in the marriage commitment.[32]

God places his seal on us... on our hearts. And his commitment to us is irrevocable. We see that in the OT with his people, Israel. We see that in the NT with Jesus Christ and those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit. You can't be unsealed after you've been saved. You can't be unborn again after you've been born again.

And what God did, is he took one aspect of his unyielding, irrevocable love, and he gave it to us who experience the marriage covenant. And our love is like his love.[33] Those metaphorical flames and flashes of fire are like the very flame of Yahweh.[34]

Go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes.

1) Romantic love is **powerful** and **divinely** given (8:5–7)

In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and brought it down to humanity. Zeus punished Prometheus by having him chained to a rock, where an eagle came each day to devour his liver. Each night, his liver grew back, so the torment began again the next morning.

But the fire of romantic love wasn't stolen by anyone. It is a gift God freely gives to us. It's a gift, but it's a powerful gift. Like fire, it can warm a house, or it can burn it down. It has to be used in its proper place.

Look at **verse 7**.

7 Many waters cannot quench love,[35] *neither can floods drown it.*

As a scroll is closed up and sealed tight against all but the indicated owner of the bulla, so the man is to be closed up toward every other woman."

[29] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 171: "The woman is saying that Love is an equally strong force and cannot be withstood. She is not saying that Love can defeat Death, or that it is locked in mortal combat with Death, just that Love, like Death, is an extraordinarily powerful and unstoppable force. That means that the lovers will be together as long as they live."

[30] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 426: "Love is as strong as death in the sense that its power cannot be resisted. It never releases those whom it has once seized. Even so, the introduction of death and the grave to this context surprises the reader. Even in the ecstasy of love the couple is aware that this too is transitory."

[31] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 148n5: "Translations are divided over whether take the abbreviation *yah* as shorthand for the divine name in Song 8:6 (ESV; NASB) or simply as a superlative ('a mighty flame,' NIV; see also HCSB). If this is a reference to the divine name, then it would be the only one in the entire book, but since this is the climax of the Song, such a reference is appropriate. Certainly, there are other, more direct ways of expressing a superlative in Hebrew that would not evoke the Lord's name in quite the same way. Perhaps the most elegant translation, retaining something of the ambiguity of the original, is 'an Almighty flame.'"

[32] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 240: "In the entire book this is the only direct reference to God, by any name. It may well be that here at the climactic point of the whole Song, the poet chooses to mention the name of God, a name otherwise hidden and reflective of his operation behind the scenes."

[33] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 148: "This is why proposing marriage to someone is not just a matter of calmly explaining to your intended the various strengths that you and she bring to the table and proposing a corporate merger. Marriage is intended to be a flaming, red-hot relationship."

[34] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 255 doesn't see a link to Yahweh here: "שַׁלְהֶבֶתְיָה should not be taken as an actual reference to the name of God. The ending here has virtually lost all theological significance, and it simply functions adjectivally for 'mighty' or the like."

[35] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 250: "There is a one-for-one correlation throughout the Song between the eleven appearances of the word for 'love' (*ʾahăbâ*) in the Hebrew text and the Greek rendering of it in the LXX as *agapē*. This term forms the basis for the NT understanding of the amazing love that God has given to believers. This is most emphatically and consistently argued in the works ascribed to the apostle John: John 13:35; 15:9, 10, 13; 17:26; 1 John 2:5, 15; 3:1, 16, 17; 4:7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16 (2×), 17, 18 (2×); 5:3; 2

"Waters" is a reference to the salt water of the Mediterranean Sea. "Floods" is more technically "rivers," and that is a reference to the fresh water of lakes, streams, rivers, and rainwater. Fresh water can't extinguish the flame of romantic love. Sea water can't extinguish the flame of romantic love.[36] It's that powerful. Water is the great equalizer to fire in this world, but water can't put this flame out.[37]

Look at the end of **verse 7**.

If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

In other words, water can't extinguish love, and money can't buy it. If any fool tried to offer money for love, people would despise him. The idea is utterly ridiculous.

In fact, there's this really cynical reading of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. For those of you who have read that book or seen one of the movies, Elizabeth Bennet falls in love with Darcy over time. At first, she despises him, even though he was rich. She doesn't care about him being rich. And even when asked for her hand in marriage, she refused him, even though he was the solution to all her family's financial problems. Those who have read the book and are familiar with the story know that you can't buy me love.

But here's where the cynical reading comes in. Some people assume that the moment that Elizabeth Bennet falls in love with Darcy is when she first lays eyes on his estate, Pemberley, and she sees his massive wealth. That's when she falls in love with him!

I'm sorry, that's not right. I take umbrage with that view. That's not what Jane Austen was communicating in that novel. Because she knows... and we know... and Solomon knows...

If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

In cases where men or women are coerced into marriage because of money, that rarely works out well.

Let's keep going. Look at **verse 8**.

8 We have a little sister, and she has no breasts.[38] What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for?[39]

Now, this is an interesting aside in the book. This is the first mention of a "little preadolescent sister." And some have assumed that this is a flashback. Maybe this involves those lousy brothers who were hard on the Shulamite that we saw in **chapter 1**.

If you have an ESV Bible, it says "OTHERS" for **verses 8–9**. The NIV has "FRIENDS." The NKJV and NLT have "THE SHULAMITE'S BROTHERS" and "THE YOUNG WOMAN'S BROTHERS" respectively. I think all of those are possible.

But I don't think the speaker has to change here. I think this is still the Shulamite speaking. And this is not a flashback to her younger years. This is instead a reference to her younger sister. And the "we" here

---

John 3, 6; 3 John 6; and perhaps Rev. 2:4 and 19."

[36] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 175: "The flame of Love is so intensely strong that not even all the most powerful waters in the universe combined—the cosmic salt waters (Great Waters) and sweet waters (Rivers)—can extinguish it or flush it away."

[37] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 255–6: "The fury of the fire of love is so great that even great volumes of water cannot quench it. One cannot easily escape its power after one has entered this realm. Those who have admitted this fire into their lives will find it impossible to douse."

[38] MARTIN LUTHER: "Solomon, then, is saying, 'If we look at the extent of the kingdom which Christ will institute through the new covenant, we will be right to compare our present people to a little girl who does not yet have breasts—that is, it is not yet mature enough to preach a gospel that is to be spread throughout the whole world.'" Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 413.

[39] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 260: "Although strict grammar would imply that ביום שידבר־בה, 'on the day that she is engaged,' means that they want to know what they should do on that specific day, the actual meaning may not be quite so precise. That is, instead of asking what they should do specifically on the child's day of engagement, they may be asking what they should do *with regard to* her future engagement. On the other hand, if the cultural practice in view here involves a girl becoming betrothed while she is still a small child and long before her actual wedding, the grammar can be applied more literally. Either way, the chorus appears to be asking what they should do for her in light of the fact that she will someday marry."

indicates that both she and her older brothers—who were so hard on her when she was young—they have a responsibility now to their younger, prepubescent sister.[40]

Let me say it another way. The Shulamite has been talking repeatedly in this book to the virgin daughters of Jerusalem. She's been coaching them up! But now we find out that one of her own kin, her little sister, is in fact one of the virgin daughters of Jerusalem. And so, the Shulamite isn't just going to adjure her, she's going to do some other stuff, along with her brothers, and maybe also her parents, to protect the sexual purity of her little sister.[41]

And that's why she says in **verse 9**.

9 If she is a wall,

In other words, **"If my little sister is a wall sexually speaking..."** That's a good thing.

9 If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver,

In other words, **"We will help strengthen her resolve toward sexual purity."**

Listen parents, this is the Hebrew equivalent of dad cleaning out his shotgun when some boy comes by to date his daughter. Like I said several times in this series, sexual purity is a community project. It involves family. It involves friends. It involves the community. In our day, it involves the church.

9 If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement[42] of silver, but if she is a door,

In other words, **"if she is open to exploring sexuality with some guy before the vows..."** [43]

we will enclose her with boards of cedar.

We will put the kibosh on that! **Nobody gets in until the vows get made.**

Write this down as a second point in your notes:

2) Romantic love is **worth protecting** (8:8–10)[44]

Now look at **verse 10.** And look at how the Shulamite takes ownership of her sexuality. She doesn't just pawn the protection of her purity off on others. She is not a weak and obsequious woman.

10 I was a wall,

She wasn't just a door letting guys in! She was a wall. And she was literally impregnable.

10 I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;[45] then I was in his eyes[46] as one who finds peace.

---

[40] APONIUS and other church fathers see this differently. His view is especially idiosyncratic: "This sister is undoubtedly understood to be the Jewish people (a people that we said was converted to the God of heaven in the final days), who are led out of the prophesied desert before the end of the world." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 366.

[41] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 428n197 agrees and disagrees: "The little sister is not the woman of the Song, since the woman plainly does have developed breasts (7:7). This further implies that the singers of these verses are simply the chorus and not the brothers of the woman of the Song. To read these as the brothers' lines with the 'little sister' being the woman herself leads to tortured interpretation."

[42] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 178: "טִירָה means 'encampments' in Gen 25:16; Num 31:10; Ezek 25:4; Ps 69:26; 1 Chr 6:39, but that makes little sense here. In Ezek 46:23 טירות are rows of masonry, a meaning close to the word טור at the beginning of that verse. It would seem to have the same meaning in our verse—a row of stones at the top of a wall, a rampart or battlement, here decorated with silver."

[43] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 428 sees this differently. He see the lines as synonymous parallelism not antithetical: "One should note that the two alternatives ('if she is a wall/a door') should not be taken as antithetical statements about the younger sister's personal morality (as if 'wall' = virtuous but 'door' = unchaste). Both wall and door are to be understood as barriers representing virginity. The lines present an alternative pair of metaphors for the same thing, virginity."

[44] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 157 regards this entire section differently and idiosyncratically: "The brothers' thought seems to be that even though right now the woman might be as flat-chested as a wall or a door, with a little suitable decoration (battlements of silver or adornments of cedar), she could perhaps still be turned into a marketable commodity."

[45] AMBROSE: "The wall is the church and the towers are her priests, who have full power to teach both the natural and the moral sciences." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 367.

[46] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 261: "By בעיניו, 'in his eyes,' she does not only mean, 'in his estimation' or 'in his opinion.' She also means that she has found in his eyes peace for herself."

There's that word "peace" again, Hebrew *Shalom*. She's the Shulamite and she brings "peace" to her husband.[47] She's the real embodiment of peace and strength and wisdom. She's everything that Solomon should have been but wasn't. And this woman is strong. That strength is good. Nothing wrong with that!

I heard John Piper say once that when husbands go wrong, they go wrong in two ways. They either get really weak and passive. Or they get *machismo*! So there is irresponsible and apathetic passivity on one side. And there is abusive, domineering machoism on the other side. That's how they err.

Now similarly women err in two ways too. On one hand there is brazen insubordination in marriage. "You're not the boss of me and I refuse to be led by a husband." That's not good in marriage. That's not biblical. And on the other hand there is a groveling, helpless, manipulative obsequiousness. And here's what that looks like, "Oh no, I dropped my handkerchief. I can't pick it up. Can you pick it up for me?"[48]

What is that? That is not what a strong, intelligent, powerful woman looks like. That's not the Shulamite!

"I'm a wall!" she says. **"My breasts are like towers."** And nobody comes to this body except for my husband. And he finds peace here not war.

I said several weeks ago that a woman might think she wants a weak man... until she gets one. And then she immediately regrets it. No woman wants a spineless husband or a Peter Pan who refuses to grow up.

And I think the same is true for men. Men might think they want a weak woman as a wife. But being a wife and mother is not for the faint of heart. You need strength in a woman to do those things. You need strength in a woman to love and cherish and submit to a husband.

Look, the goal in marriage should be strength under control. It should be power wielded for a purpose. We submit to God. We submit to one another. We channel our power and our energy for a good purpose. We take the fire of romantic love that some people use to burn down their lives, and we channel it to give warmth and grace and health to a home.

Write down as #3 in your notes. Romantic love is powerful and divinely given. It's worth protecting. And thirdly...

3) Romantic love is **meant** to be **exclusive** (8:11–12)

Now watch what the Shulamite does in **verse 11**, because this is literarily speaking masterclass. Let me just give you a little clue as to what's happening. Solomon through the medium of the Shulamite is going to make fun of Solomon. Everyone with me?

I told you already, I believe Solomon wrote this book. And the Shulamite is his literary creation. She is what Solomon should have been in terms of monogamous and faithful in marriage. And Solomon is going to use her, his literary creation, to point out the foolishness of his own life. This is literary genius![49]

And Solomon, despite his foolishness, his wisdom never left him. His ability to suss out wisdom and the fear of the Lord in life never left him (**Ecc 2:9**).

Look at **verse 11**... this is the Shulamite speaking.

[11] *Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.*

---

[47] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 429: "She, the female, and her lover, the male, are at peace. Instead of battle towers to *defend* her, she has breasts that *adorn* her beauty in his eyes."

[48] John Piper, "Lionhearted and Lamblike: The Christian Husband as Head, Part 1," sermon on Ephesians 5:21–33, March 18, 2007, Desiring God, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/lionhearted-and-lamblike-the-christian-husband-as-head-part-1.

[49] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 181: "Solomon in this little poem is clearly not the lover (he is not the lover anywhere in the Song). He is here the archetype of a man who has too many women—seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines, according to 1 Kgs 11:3. He is a Baal-Hamon, 'a master/husband of many.'"

Just so you know, "Baal-hamon" is not a real place in Israel. The word *Baal* means "master." And the word *hamon* means "wealth" or "riches" or "abundance" or even a "crowd."[50] So Solomon had a vineyard called "master of wealth" or "master of a crowd."[51] This is a metaphorical reference to his wealth.[52] But it is also a metaphorical reference to his many wives. Basically the Shulamite is saying, **"Solomon was a rich lothario with an abundance of wealth and an abundance of wives."**[53] It's every man's fantasy. Or is it?[54]

Look at **verse 12**.

[12] *My vineyard, my very own, is before me;*[55] *you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.*

In other words, **"You can have your wealth and your women, Solomon. You can have your excesses and abundance. But you don't own me. You don't have me. And you don't have the goodness of monogamy and exclusivity that I have."**[56]

There may even be allusions here to the cost associated with many wives and concubines in the harem. If I'm correct, then at the time of this writing Solomon had sixty queens and eighty concubines (**Song 6:8**). He would go on to have more later (**1 Kgs 11**).[57]

But even at this stage there was an excessive cost in keeping and maintaining those women. He likens them to vineyards and vine-keepers. It's like Esther and the rest of the harem in Persia with eunuchs and beauty treatments and cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching.

Several years ago I read a biography of Brigham Young. It was utterly fascinating. If any Mormon ever comes to your door looking to convert you, please read that book.[58] **It's as scary and unnerving as a Halloween movie.**

Brigham Young, if you don't know, had something like 55 wives. And it was expensive for him. It was inconvenient. It was awkward. His wives were always fighting with each other. And it was not

---

[50] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 158–9: "No such place is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, so the significance of the place is likely contained in the meaning of the name, which could literally be translated 'husband of a crowd.' Not coincidentally, the same Hebrew word for 'crowd' is used in 2 Chronicles 11:23 to describe the multitude of women that Solomon's son Rehoboam acquired as wives for his sons."

[51] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 261: "It means 'lord of uproar,' 'lord of wealth,' or perhaps even, 'husband of a mob.'"

[52] CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA disagrees: "The vineyard which, it says, was given to the spiritual Solomon is surely the church. And we have already said that Baal-hamon means 'in believers.' For who believed, apart from those who accepted his commandments?" Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 367.

[53] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 180: "Perhaps the point is that to have one woman whom you really love is better than a whole harem of women who are merely for sexual enjoyment. (In a similar vein, Song 6:8–9 also refers to many wives and concubines, perhaps Solomon's, in contrast to the unique specialness of the male lover's woman.) Or perhaps it means that a man who has found the woman he loves would not trade her for all the money or all the other women in the world."

[54] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 163: "The commercialization of sex continues apace. In our culture, one doesn't have to be a Solomon to have a harem of a thousand women. An innumerable host of women are waiting for you at the other end of your Internet connection. These days, women too often get drawn into the pornography trap. But like Solomon with his harem, what you get out of that abundance of available pseudo-sex is not richness but emptiness. When you view pornography, you sell your soul for a bowl full of ashes, buying guilt and bondage in place of the beauty and excitement that you imagined it would deliver. We end up emptier than ever, starving for the satisfying relationship and real intimacy that we were made to enjoy and for which we deeply long."

[55] JOHN COTTON: "'My vineyard which is mine, is before me.' The meaning is that when Christ has gathered together all these churches of the Jews, Assyrians, Egyptians, and neighboring nations, he will then keep his church with his mighty power, that neither dragons, nor wild boars, nor foxes shall thereafter root it up or make havoc of it, as in times past they have done. This is expressly foretold, and shall come to pass after the destruction of Leviathan, the great Turk." Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 415.

[56] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 263: "The woman responds that she would rather have personal control over her own vineyard than be in Solomon's position, that is, be the absentee landlord over vast estates. In contrast to Solomon, the woman experiences life and her one lover directly."

[57] O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon,* 130: "In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck says to Jim that Solomon 'had about a million wives' (Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899], 107) A slight exaggeration—Solomon only had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He had a thousand, not a million (but still large enough!)."

[58] John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

desirable, okay. I kind of feel sorry for him reading that book. I would feel sorry for him if it wasn't for the fact that he was such a shyster.

And to that you might say, **"Tony, you're making fun of Brigham Young**." Yes, I am. And I'll make fun of Solomon and his harem too. That wasn't God's way. We see that in the book of Deuteronomy. That wasn't the ideal of **Genesis 2**, "Man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh."

And it's not just me. This Shulamite—I love what she does here—This Shulamite makes fun of Solomon. Or, if you will, Solomon makes fun of himself by the literary vehicle of the Shulamite.

[12] My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.

"You can have your wives. You can have your riches. You can have your excesses. You can't have me. And you can't have a 'one and only' like I have a 'one and only.'"[59]

And speaking of a "one and only." Write down as #4 in your notes.

4) Romantic love is **sustained** by ongoing **intimacy** (8:13–14)[60]

Now watch how this book ends. It ends beautifully. Look at **verse 13**.

[13] O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions[61] listening for your voice;[62] let me hear it.

Now the Shulamite is going to get the last word in this book. That's fitting. But before that, her husband says something to her. He calls to her, **"O you who dwell in the gardens with companions listening for your voice."** What does that mean?

Well the companions are the virgin daughters of Jerusalem and perhaps some other peripheral listeners.[63] They have been her conversation partners throughout this book. And she has taken care of her vineyard. She has cared for her garden, which is a reference to her sexuality, and she is teaching them to do the same. She's coaching them. She's adjuring them. She's protecting them, including her little sister. And she's showing them how to care for their gardens.

And the man essentially says in **verse 13**, **"Quit hanging out with your single friends. Why should they monopolize your time? I want to hear your voice. I want to spend time with you. I'm your husband! Let's hang out!"**[64]

And notice men in the room, there is not even a hint of sexual suggestion in what he says. He just wants to spend time with her. He just wants to hear her voice, which he said already is sweet (**Song 2:14**).

But notice what she says in **verse 14**. Notice how she responds.

---

[59] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 159: "In contrast to the unbelievably valuable vineyard of Solomon, the woman, too, has a vineyard of her own (Song 8:12). Hers may not be nearly comparable to Solomon's in its monetary value, but what makes it special is the fact that it is all hers. She would rather have her own simple vineyard and the freedom to give it to the man that she chooses—a man with whom she has a real relationship—than to have Solomon's expensive vineyard, which has to be managed for him by tenants for a fee."

[60] Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 160–1: "The end of the Song is not the end of their godly love affair. It is merely the end of one chapter in an enduring relationship. Just as the Song began by shattering gender stereotypes, with the woman's passionate desire for the man to kiss her with the kisses of his mouth (Song 1:2), so, too, it ends with a similar shattering of stereotypes. The man desires conversation —he wants to hear the sound of her voice. The woman wants sex—she wants him to act like a young stag on the mountains of spices, which represent her body."

[61] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 248: "In 1:7 the female had referred to the flocks of her lover's 'friends,' using the same term as here (*ḥăbērîm*), where it now describes the female's friends in attendance. The masculine plural may suggest all males, perhaps reflecting that the shepherd's companions of 1:7 have now become acquaintances of the female. However, it more likely includes both men and women... Here, however, the friends of the female are described as true friends, those who listen and know her heart. Among them would certainly be the daughters of Jerusalem and perhaps also the young men with whom she worked while tending the garden where her brothers sent her (1:6)."

[62] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 265: "The woman responds only to the man and seems unconcerned about the chorus or the 'friends.' This stands in contrast to Song 1:7, where she was mortified at the thought of being among the companions of the man."

[63] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 249: "She takes the term for 'companion' (*ḥbr*) and interchanges the root consonants to obtain the verb 'flee' (*brḥ*). She thereby demonstrates careful acknowledgment of his words and her agreement to his suggestion."

[64] Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 249: "He wishes to hear her voice rather than the voices of her friends around her. He hints that he longs for them to be alone so that their passion may be consummated."

[14] Make haste,[65] my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.[66]

Let me paraphrase that for you... this is a fitting end to the book. She says, **"Okay, my beloved. Come to me. Take me away. Be like a gazelle or a young stag, and delight in the body of the woman who loves you."**

Let me just explain one final euphemism in this book. She doesn't say "Mount Spice," as though she's giving him directions to a geographical location. And it's not Mt. Spices either. It's the "mountains of spices." What's that? Well, this is akin to the "cleavage mountains" in **4:5–6**.

So what does she mean by saying, **"Make haste and come to the mountains of spices!"** You know what she means by that![67] And the book of **Song of Solomon** ends on a sexual note.[68] It's not prude; it's not crude. It's subtle, but it's not unintelligible. The book ends by celebrating exclusive lovemaking between a wife and her husband.[69] The End.

Now let me close with this. I want to close out this book of the Bible and this series personally by sharing with you the two great loves of my life. Someday, when I go home to glory, and maybe one of you in the room is going to do my funeral... please, please, please emphasize these two loves of mine. Maybe that sounds kind of macabre, me talking about my funeral. But I'm almost half a century old. Been married for more than a quarter century. I've lived longer than 80% of the humans who have ever lived on planet earth. When you reckon with that you inevitably start thinking about your own mortality.

And here are my two great loves. Let me start with the penultimate "love" of my life. A little over a quarter of a century ago, I asked a woman named Sanja to be my lawfully wedded wife. And together we have been through all of the highs and lows of life. And she has been my constant companion, friend, lover, and fellow parent to our son. And it's been wonderful. And I pray that every young person in this room or single person who desires marriage might experience the goodness of friendship and love that I have experienced with Sanja.

In a few weeks, Sanja and I will celebrate 26 years of marriage. We're going to celebrate by going to Puerto Rico. So if you need pastoral help the second week of December, Pastor Mike will be at your disposal. I'll be unavailable.

But this is where I need to speak of the other great love of my life. And coincidently, my love for Sanja has enhanced this other love. I want it said at my funeral... I desire for the first thing to be said

---

[65] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 185: "ברח means 'make haste, move quickly.' The verb generally occurs in the context of moving from one place to another, but not always. Depending on the preposition that follows it, it may mean 'move quickly *from*,' as in Exod 2:15: וַיִּבְרַח מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי פַּרְעֹה, 'Moses made haste away from Pharaoh,' or 'move quickly *to*,' as in 1 Sam 22:20 וַיִּבְרַח אַחֲרֵי דָוִד, '(Abiathar) made haste after David' (also 1 Sam 23:6; Gen 27:43; Num 24:11).... our verse lacks a preposition to indicate direction. The woman is not telling her lover to move in one direction or another; she is telling him to act quickly. Many translations agree that the meaning is 'make haste, hurry' (KJV, NRSVue, NASB, NJPS, NET)."

[66] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 185: "She is not telling him to leave her, nor is she telling him to leave wherever he is and come to her. She is telling him to quickly act like a gazelle over the spice mountains. Just as a gazelle moves swiftly and nimbly over mountains (1 Chr 12:9), so should the lover move over the 'spice mountains,' that is, the woman's body."

[67] Many church fathers and reformers actually don't know. They allegorize this eschatologically. For example, JOHN TRAPP: "Just as this book began with a wish, so it ends: 'The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire' (Augustine). He loves, and longs, and looks for Christ's second appearance, and even spends and exhales himself in continual sallies and egressions of affection to him in the meanwhile. He has taken some turns with Christ on those 'mountains of spice' (so heaven is called, for its inconceivable height and sweetness), he has tasted of the grapes of this celestial Canaan." Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 416.

[68] Berlin, *Song of Songs,* Hermeneia, 185: "Regardless of whether one sees the Song as a coherent progression, its final verse takes us, in its inimitably delicate metaphorical way, to the pinnacle of erotic desire."

[69] BEDE sees this differentle: "'Flee, my beloved, and be like a goat or a mule upon the mountains of spices.' This can be accepted as referring both to the triumph of the Lord's ascension and to those good deeds that are accomplished daily within his holy church... But he is likened to a goat or a mule upon the mountains of spice because he appears frequently through the grace of compunction to the hearts of his faithful, who are the mountains of spice." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 368.

about me... put it on my tombstone if I ever have a tombstone... I want it said of me, "He loved the Lord." And I can tell you with absolute confidence and assurance that my love for God is not unrequited. He loves me too. In fact, he loved me first. And he has loved me better and more faithfully than I have loved him.

And if I spend the rest of my life just talking about the good gift of marriage that God has given me and the good gift of love and salvation that God has given me through Jesus Christ his Son, I will be satisfied with that. In my mind, there's nothing better than those two things.

The title of this message is "Can't Buy Me Love." Thank you, Paul McCartney for that wonderful song. Let me close by saying two things about that concerning my two loves.

First of all, when Sanja met me, I was a poor, unimpressive, college student who had aspirations of being in full-time ministry. In other words, there weren't exactly dollar signs hovering over my head. And Sanja likewise came to America with almost literally nothing, and she worked hard to earn everything she got. And neither of us married for money. We fell in love with each other and that love is as strong as death. It'll last till death.

And the parallel with the Lord is even more stark. We don't come to the Lord with anything of value. When Simon the magician tried to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8, the Apostle Peter just about lost his ever-loving mind! We don't purchase our salvation with money or with works. And we don't buy God's love for us.

And that prompts the question, why does God love us? I don't know. We're honestly not that lovable. But he loved us. And his love was a strong as death.[70] And his love for us was embodied in his death for our sin. His love is not till death do us part.[71] There is no parting ever.

And we don't buy his love or his grace with cash or with quid pro quo works. We receive his love freely by faith. Receive that gift. Receive God's love. Receive it by faith.

---

[70] Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 257: "The comparison to death probably has another implication: to marry is to give one's life to another, and whoever marries has died to all others. Analogous to Jesus' teaching that one must 'die' in order to experience true freedom and life in the gospel (John 12:24), one must die to all extramarital sex in order to experience the joy of marital sex."

[71] AUGUSTINE: "Rightly is [love] said to be 'strong as death,' either because no one overcomes it as no one overcomes death, or because in this life the measure of charity is unto death, as the Lord said: 'Greater love than this no man has, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' Or, rather, because as death tears the soul away from the senses of the flesh, so charity tears it away from carnal passions." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 366.