

Loving The Jesus Who Loves His Church

Dr Stephen Myers

Many modern commentators dismiss the idea of interpreting the Song as “allegorical.” In an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, every detail in the biblical text is assumed to represent something else, and thus we can read elaborate meanings into seemingly straightforward passages. The obvious problem with such interpretations is that it is easy for the reader to make a passage mean whatever he wants it to mean.

James Durham, a seventeenth-century Scottish commentator, anticipated this criticism. He made a distinction between “an allegoric interpretation of scripture, and an exposition of allegoric scripture.” In the first, a man takes Scripture that was never intended to be allegorical, and he interprets it as an allegory. He has abused the Scriptures and read his own ideas into God’s Word. But there is, correctly, “an exposition of allegoric scripture, ” because some Scripture was written allegorically and meant to be interpreted allegorically.

In the mind of Durham and other Reformed interpreters, the Song of Solomon was of this second variety. To them, the Song clearly was an

allegory. Given the pervasive biblical connection between Jesus’s relationship with His people and marriage, the proper interpretation of the Song had to be an interpretation that saw the Song speaking about Christ and His church.

Understood in this way, the Song of Solomon became a powerful and popular instrument for Reformed devotion. Particularly among the Puritans, there was an intentional desire to present biblical truth in such a way that it both ministered to the mind and penetrated into the heart, impacting not only the intellect, but the affections, as well.

The Song of Solomon did precisely that. The Song was uniquely able to speak to the hearts of God’s people and stir them up to warm love for their Savior. As a result, the Puritans wrote treatises on the Song, preached sermons from the Song, and bathed their conversation and writing with imagery drawn directly from the Song.

Today, we should allow our Reformed ancestors to challenge our understanding and our use of the Song of Solomon. Undoubtedly, the Song has much to teach us about human love and marital intimacy,

and we should not neglect that very “practical” use of God’s Word.

However, we must also realize that marriage is meant to reflect the love between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:32). The Song of Solomon is discussing marriage, so the Song of Solomon is ultimately about the love between Jesus and His blood-bought Bride. If we miss that meaning, we have emptied this book of its greatest theme and impoverished our own spiritual lives. Under the imagery of a king and his beloved Shulamite woman, God is painting in vivid colours the love between Jesus and His people.

The imagery reminds us that being a Christian is not, first and foremost, about believing a set list of truths. It is about loving and being loved by a Person. The Person of the Husband. As a person, you do not fall in love with doctrinal statements and systems; you fall in love with a person. Your heart gets wrapped up, and your soul gets entwined with a person. Not a list of attributes, but a person who makes those attributes sing.

That Person is Jesus. In the Song of Solomon, we are reminded that Jesus is radiant. We are reminded that our greatest duty dissolves into our greatest joy as we pursue after Him, and as we love Him.

As our Reformed ancestors remind us, in the Song of Solomon, God has given us a book that helps draw us out to love not only the Truth of God, but also the God of Truth. May God be pleased to fill all of us with love for Jesus.

Adapted from The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth, MARCH/APRIL 2017, Vol. 25, No. 2, pages 64–65. Used by permission.

Dr Stephen Myers is a professor of Historical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.