

Date : 26 January 2025
Theme : Building a strong foundation for the family
Topic : The Marriage and Family God instituted
Key Passage : Song of Songs 1 - 8
Key Verse : *I am my lover's and my lover is mine... Song of Songs 6:3*

Introduction

It is unfortunate that the divorce rate in Singapore is high, common and widespread. Disorder in homes seems to be the order of the day. God has set in place roles and responsibilities for husbands and wives, parents and children. For families and societies to thrive, authority and submission must be spelt out to avoid confusion and chaos.

From courtship *chapters 1 & 2*, to the wedding *chapters 4, 5* and marriage *chapters 6 - 8*, to the assurance of love, Song of Songs reminds us that both marriage and the physical union originate in God; and that self-interest and fears threaten even the strongest of relationships.

1. A Portrait of the marriage relationship in the Song of Songs 2:3 - 6,16

a) The role of the husband

The wife sees her husband as her protector 2: 3 (providing shade), provider 2: 4 (bringing her into the banquet) and as her sustainer 2:5.

b) The relationship is exclusive *My*.

In terms of their relationship; it is mutual ownership. ...*My beloved is mine and I am his 2:16* and mutual submission. (This is not master and servant relationship, so the language is about mutual submission, not obedience). This exclusive relationship is about attitude rather than action.

c) The reign of love

The overarching atmosphere is love or *beloved*. Love is a choice. The beloved one is the one whom I have set my heart to love. It is about me making that choice; and not how attractive she is.

d) The challenge of submission

- What problems could arise which cause mental barriers to submission so that we begin to take each other for granted? In *Chapter 5*, we get an example of when submission becomes inconvenient. In her dream, she dreams her husband is home late in the night. She has gone to bed (her warm bed on a cold night). She has washed her feet and she is tired. Getting up to attend to him is not only disruptive but she questions whether it is necessary. She is not in the mood to show any enthusiasm for her *beloved*. *Must I?* He walks away. This causes her to panic. ...*I sought him but I could not find him... chapter 5:6*. The point is that we only wake up from complacency when we lose something precious. We do not realise the value of someone until we lose him / her because we take for granted he or she will always remain with us.
- The husband and wife relationship is precious, one they have invested vast amounts of time and effort to build. Do not allow complacency and neglect to kill the marriage. Mutual submission takes effort.

The Shulamite woman in the Song of Songs presents a sharp contrast between her weathered outward appearance and inner worth. Though she is darkened by the sun due to her labour in the vineyard *chapter 1:5-6*, yet she is also liken to the curtains of Solomon *chapter 1:5*, known for their craftsmanship and beauty.

Despite her self-description, the King finds great beauty in her. Our worth is not defined by our outward appearance or the hardships we have endured. The King's love mirrors Christ's love for us – a love that sees beyond our flaws and imperfections. Although she is reluctant and not attentive to her husband *chapter 5:2-8*, grace is the theme here. Even when we feel unworthy or tarnished by life's difficulties, through the eyes of Christ, we can see ourselves worthy and deeply loved despite our imperfections.

2. What would be considered mutual submission?

- a) Acquire expert advice where both lack expertise
(eg home keeping functions, as child care, laundry).
- b) Consider one another's needs
- c) Compromise in background habits
(eg. wife from background of neat home and husband from messy home).
- d) Effected by good communication
- e) Shared wisdom and knowledge (based on God's Word).

Q: How does submission look like in the home?

- Respect for his / her person and views
 - Not dismissive behaviour
 - Not quarrelsome
- Quiet and gentle spirit *1 Peter 3:4*
- Conscious of God's help to exercise grace and forgiveness
- Keep marriage vows
 - Submission to own husband (final responsibility rests with him)
 - Protection (home security, outside dangers, provision, finance)
...If any provide not for his own, ...worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8

3. Questions addressed.

Q1 What if one spouse breaks the marriage covenant and refuses to fulfil his part, what recourse can the other spouse resort to?

Q2. Meaning of submission and are there exceptions?

- a) What if there are dysfunctional relations between husband and wife?
- b) What boundaries must not be crossed?
 - If they are crossed, what recourse can the injured party resort to?
- c) What principles should the injured party follow?
 - Principle of fairness that God will not allow any one to be suffering unjustly.
 - Situation of violence
 - Situation where husband takes away all the money
 - Situation where husband takes drugs and leave her high and dry
 - Principle of covenant keeping

Application

What can we learn from the relationship (Shulamite woman and her beloved) regarding grace in marriage?