

HERBERT LOCKYER

Love  
is  
Better  
THAN WINE

LEARNING TO LOVE FROM THE SONG OF SOLOMON



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HOUSE

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**Learning to Love from the Song of Solomon**

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I know not if I know what true love is,  
But if I know, then, if I love not Him,  
I know there is none other I can love.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

# INTRODUCTION

In discussing the distinction between a *type* and an *allegory*, Robert Jamieson says that the latter is “a continued metaphor, in which the circumstances are palpably often purely imagery, whilst the thing signified is altogether real.”

5

To understand the Song of Solomon correctly, we must not look for its meaning in *its* allegorical significance, but through the lens of other parts of the Bible. Burrowes views the Song in this unique fashion, “It lies in the casket of revelation an exquisite gem, engraved with emblematical characters, with nothing literal thereon to break the inconsistency of their beauty.”

Jamieson agrees with this in a descriptive paragraph:

Like the curiously wrought Middle-Eastern lamps, which do not reveal the beauty of their transparent emblems until lighted up within, so the types and

allegories of Scripture, the “lantern to our path” need the inner light of the Holy Spirit of Jesus to reveal their significance, numbers of lovely, sensible and not strictly congruous, but portraying jointly by their very diversity the thousand various and seemingly opposite beauties which meet together in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

6 Because I have not the deep spiritual insight and ability of Origen (the Greek teacher, writer, and early church father of the third century) to author ten volumes on the Song of Solomon, I am confining myself to an exposition of several of its prominent expressions. May the passages chosen whet the appetite for a more complete study of the Song, eloquent with the truth that the Beloved and His spouse, the bride and Bridegroom, He and she, the Head and the members, form but one Christ. (See Romans 12:4–11; 1 Corinthians 6:15, 12:12–27; Ephesians 4:25, 5:30.)

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1. Robert Jamieson, *Commentary*, vol. 1 (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton & Co., 1871), 415.

# Chapter 1

## LOVE IS BETTER THAN WINE

*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth:  
for your love is better than wine.*  
—Song of Solomon 1:2

7

The mystical Song of Solomon is full of Christ, but we can only extract honey out its verses if we have sweet meditation of Him whom our souls love. It is vital to cultivate a daily, fresh personal heart-fellowship with the Lord if we would rightly understand this book. It is only out of an ever-deepening love for the Lover of our souls that there can spring consecrated service and a growing delight in all our hands find to do. If we have a passionate love for Christ and His Word, necessary time will be found to show ourselves approved of God.

Let us examine the opening verse, extolling as it does the fragrant love of Him who first loved us.

## THE SOURCE OF LOVE: HIM

One cannot fail to notice how abruptly Solomon begins his poem. It has no introduction, but commences with the bride's longing for the one her soul loved so intensely. "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for your love is better than wine.*"

8 Solomon wrote of the pure and passionate love the beloved had for the bride of his choice. During his reign, the king came to experience a great deal about love for and from women—as we know, he had a vast harem. Solomon loved many women from heathen lands and "*had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines*" who turned away his heart from God and caused him to cleave to their idols in love (see 1 Kings 11:1–8).

Through such inordinate love for his heathen wives and their false gods, Solomon found himself rejected by God and his kingdom divided. He never reached the Godward application of the ideal of true love his father David expressed in his tribute to his dear friend, Jonathan: "*Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women*" (2 Samuel 1:26). If Solomon had experienced the glow of supreme, divine love he came to embody in the thrice-repeated phrase, "*Your love is better than wine,*" he could have easily added, "and women."

In this first verse, the lover does not name the one chief object of her desire. Her heart was full of longing for his embrace, for it was only his love that was better than wine, and his kisses alone she desired.

Jesus, the well-beloved Son of God, came as the personification of divine love and is ever the Lord of love, as well as of law. He not only reveals love but He *is* love.

Oh! fill me, Jesus, Savior, with Thy love;  
Lead, lead me to the living Fount above!  
Thither may I, in simple faith, draw nigh,  
And never to another fountain fly,  
But unto Thee.<sup>2</sup>

### THE TOKEN OF LOVE: A KISS

Besides the wish of the bride to be with her beloved, the verse is speaking of spiritual intimacy. The Chaldee Version says that in this verse God is speaking face to face with Israel in symbolism, an expression of the close intimacy they enjoyed. Origen paraphrased the verse:

How long will my spouse send me kisses, or prophecies, by Moses and the Prophets! Now I long to have them, personally, of Himself. Let Him assume my natural shape and kiss me in the Flesh according to the Prophecies.

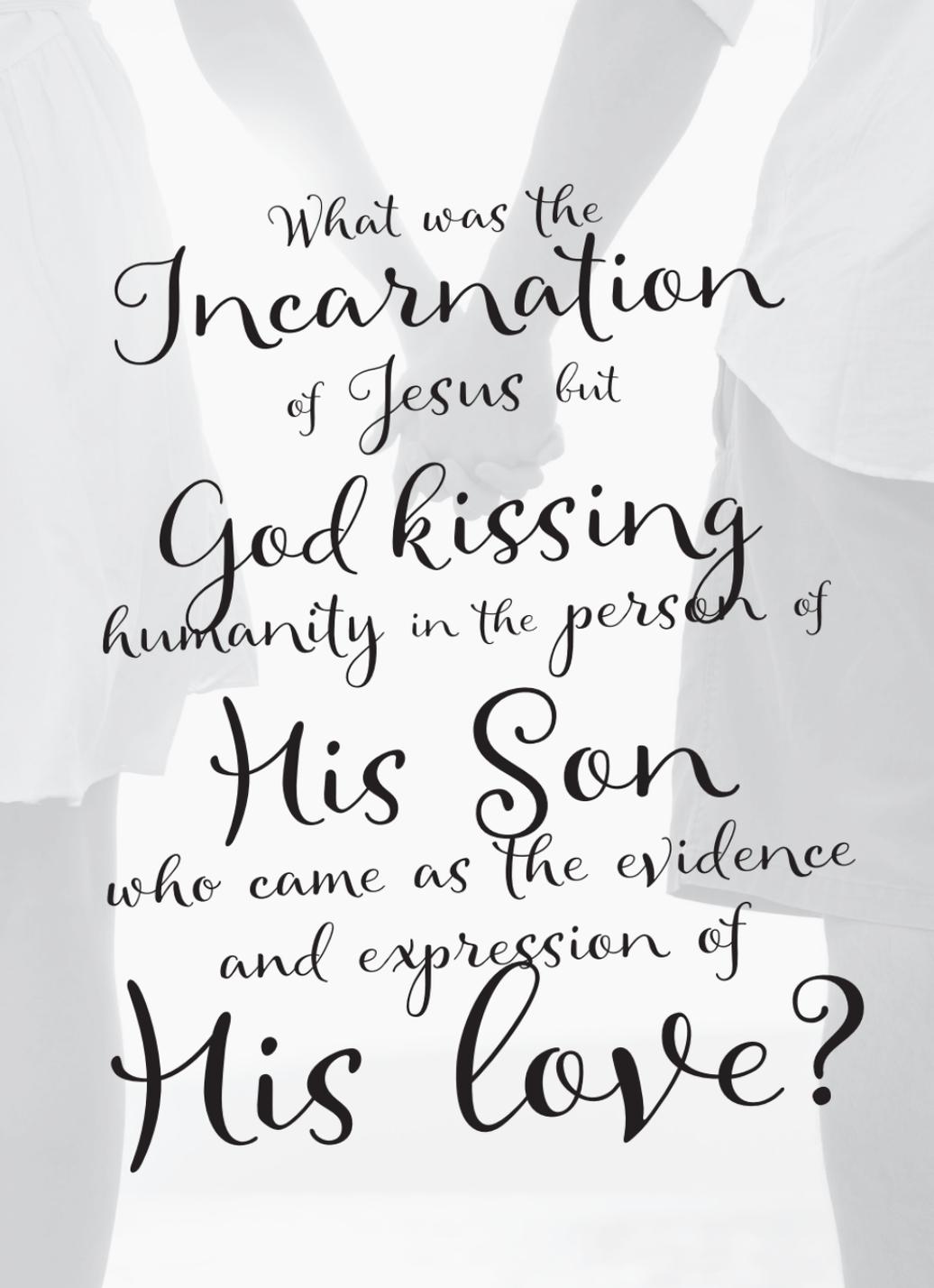
And what was the Incarnation of Jesus but God kissing humanity in the person of His Son who came as the evidence and expression of His love? In Scripture, a kiss represents:

#### *The Pledge of Reconciliation*

That kisses were tokens of reconciliation can be seen in the reunion of Jacob and Esau (see Genesis 33:4); Joseph and his

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2. Mary Shekleton, "It Passeth Knowledge," 1863.



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brethren (see Genesis 45:15); and the prodigal and his father (see Luke 15:20).

Divine reconciliation became possible when at Calvary, *“righteousness and peace have kissed each other”* (Psalm 85:10). Now it is the responsibility of the sinner to *“kiss the Son, lest He be angry”* (Psalm 2:12).

### ***The Pledge of Affection***

When Elisha was called to leave home and follow Elijah, he begged permission to kiss his father and his mother before his departure. (See 1 Kings 19:20.) David and Jonathan *“kissed one another, and wept one with another”* (1 Samuel 20:41).

Judas prostituted this love-token when he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. (See Luke 22:47.) A kiss like his was deceitful. (See Proverbs 27:6.)

11

It was the custom in the early church to *“salute one another with a holy kiss”* (Romans 16:16). The Ephesian saints *“wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him”* as he prepared to leave them, for they knew that *“they should see his face no more”* (Acts 20:37–38).

The kisses of our heavenly Beloved represent the depth of warmth in His heart-love for His own. Christ loved the church, His bride, and gave himself to purchase her. (See Ephesians 5:21–33.) It was by His death that He kissed her into existence, and His marriage with her is in the blissful future.

### ***The Pledge of Nuptial Contract***

It was a touching moment when Jacob and Rachel first met, for we read that *“Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept”* (Genesis 29:11).

In ancient times it was an honor if a king permitted his hand or garment to be kissed by his subjects. If he kissed another, mouth to mouth, this was taken to be the greatest of all honors he could bestow.

Mary kissed the feet of her Lord and King, but it is a greater honor to have the kisses of the mouth of our heavenly King, who greatly desires our beauty.

Erskine has taught us to sing: "His mouth the joy of heaven reveals His kisses from above: are pardons, promises and seals of everlasting love."

We are assured that God rests in His love, and we should be found resting in it, too. (See Zephaniah 3:17.) God's love is eternal, unchangeable, without a shadow of a turn; the rock we rest on with confidence; a pillow we may sleep on in peace.

12

## THE OBJECT OF HIS LOVE: ME

Let Him kiss *me!* Do you not marvel that God loves *you?* Paul was filled with wonder and praise as he realized that, although "the chiefest of sinners" (see 1 Timothy 1:15), divine love was focused upon him as if there were no other sinners for God to love: "*The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me*" (Galatians 2:20). The apostle knew there was nothing in his human heart meriting such wonderful love: such a love became a conducting medium to the love of the lost souls around him.

It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine,  
My Savior, Jesus: yet this soul of mine  
Would of Thy love, in all its breadth and length,

Its height and depths, its everlasting strength  
Know more and more.<sup>3</sup>

May you be found resting and rejoicing in the revelation that God has set His love upon *you* and set *you* as a seal upon His heart! (See Psalm 91:14; Song of Solomon 8:6.)

### THE QUALITY OF HIS LOVE: BETTER THAN WINE!

The margin of my Bible has the plural, “Thy *loves*”—meaning that the author is referring to the caresses and kisses of the two lovers. The bride had more pleasure in the deep love of her bridegroom than in the most exquisite delights of sense.

The deep, deep love of Jesus alone can flood the soul with joy and spiritual refreshment. As wine implies earth’s best, His love is *better* than the best. Do we esteem it so? Is it true of us?

From the best bliss that earth imparts,  
We turn unfilled to Thee again.<sup>4</sup>

Are earthly friendships and legitimate pleasures the only pure wines we drink from day to day, or is His love better than all such wines? Is the Lord high above all in our heart’s affection? Some give Him a place in life—others, a prominent place. May we be found giving Him the *preeminent* place!

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3. Mary Shekleton, “It Passeth Knowledge,” 1863.

4. Bernard of Clairvaux, “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts,” translated by Ray Palmer, 1858.



As wine implies  
earth's best,

Christ's love is  
better than  
the best.

Do we esteem it so?

## THE MEMORY OF HIS LOVE: WE WILL REMEMBER

Because of the superior quality of the love of the Beloved, it must never be forgotten. Hence, “*We will remember your love more than wine*” (Song of Solomon 1:4). We must never forget His sovereign, immutable, and eternal love, which calls for human love: “*The upright love you*” (Song of Solomon 1:4). If we are among those upright in heart through grace, the love of Jesus should be our daily meditation and constant theme, filling us with joy, peace, and love.

This ever-remembered divine love possesses and displays benevolence. It dignifies its recipients, raising them to glory, honor, and immortality. To constantly remember His love is to find our comfort amid changing circumstances; encouragement in seasons of darkness; confidence in times of trial; inspired fortitude in the hour of danger; patience when burdened and oppressed; submission in grief; and zeal and devotedness in the Beloved’s cause and service.

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Our daily obligation is to keep ourselves in the love of God and to shun all that is unholy or forbidden. This is enshrined for us in James Montgomery’s well-known Communion hymn:

Can I Gethsemane forget?  
Or there Thy conflict see,  
Thine agony and bloody sweat,  
And not remember Thee?  
Remember Thee, and all Thy pains,  
And all Thy love to me;  
Yea, while a breath, a pulse remains,  
I will remember Thee.<sup>5</sup>

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5. James Montgomery, “According to Thy Gracious Word,” 1825.