

The Sanctifying Power of Conflict in Marriage

Preached by: Matthew S. Black

Text: Song of Solomon 5:2-6:13¹

Date: November 21, 2010, 10:30am

Series: Song of Solomon (Passion, Purity, & Fidelity)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Solomon 5:2-6:13**. We continue in a series of messages entitled “Passion, Purity, and Marital Fidelity”. The title of the message is “The Sanctifying Power of Conflict in Marriage”.

The union of two sinners in marriage can be a revealing experience. Often a godly young man and woman both think they are progressing spiritually and growing in Christ. He’s found his Proverbs 31 woman. She’s found her pious prince charming. They both think so highly of each other. On the honeymoon while the couple is experiencing the novelty of marriage, things are going well. Then the two sinners begin life together with all the pressures and hurts and even cruelties that life brings.

Reality sets in. Insecurities and selfishness begin to rise to the surface here and there. The sparkle begins to fade. The shine and superficial varnish and newness of immature love wear away, and conflict begins. The ugly reality that you are married to a selfish sinner hits you. The person you married is far from perfect. And because you love that person and marriage requires you to be vulnerable to that person, you find that the joy your spouse can give as well as the pain they can cause you is more any other relationship in your life.

Is there a purpose for marital conflict? Marriage is one of God’s tools for making us like Jesus. Husbands are told in Ephesians 5:25: “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...” He finishes in **verse 28** by saying, “In the same way husbands should love their wives...”

Marital conflict is a way that God shows us that we are not as far along in our sanctification as we thought we were. Marriage is made to sanctify you. What do you do when you are hurt? How do you react when you feel cut by the one you love? Are you really Christlike? What should I do when I have a serious disagreement with my spouse?

I want to share with you a message that I hope will help you make the most of your marriage when you feel hurt. I want to show you how not to waste marital conflict. Now this is also for single people too, because you too will be hurt in life. This is a message in how you can respond to conflict instead of being controlled by negative emotions. First we need to understand the root and cause of conflict by sinners.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

I. The **Root** of Conflict: Selfishness (vs. 2-3).

James 4:1, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” We are all by nature selfish. Our entire society is geared toward selfishness. Have it your way. Comfort is the goal. You are fundamentally selfish. The only question is to what degree. Only through the power of Christ in us can we lay down our lives and be selfless and serve as He served. Through the grace of Christ we can move from selfishness to servanthood.

We are selfish sinners by nature and nurture, by nature and by choice. Our entire society encourages selfishness. We’ve all graduated from ME University with a Master’s Degree in Selfishness. The highest goal that our culture promotes is to make enough money so that everybody else serves you. The utopia and goal of living is to make it to Paradise, which would be a place where the world revolves around me and my comfort.

Selfish people are terrible friends, terrible spouses, inconsistent Christians, terrible parents, and they leave a terrible legacy.

This leads us to the Song of Solomon 5. The honeymoon is over. Reality is setting in. Pressures weigh on both Solomon and his new princess. You know what’s happening. The fantasy world of that we created in our mind about ourselves and our spouse now has some serious cracks in it. We have high expectations for our spouse to serve us, to love us, to make us happy. They fail. They might even sin against you. Mostly there are a lot of misunderstandings. What do you do?

Let’s check out what Solomon does.

In **verse 2**, Solomon arrives home. He does not have a nine to five job. He has a lifestyle job. He’s king. In this time period it was common for husbands and wives to have separate bedrooms. Solomon gets home to his palace and he wants to spend time with his wife. It’s late at night. Her door is locked. She is half asleep, tired, and in the twilight of her mind can kind of hear her beloved husband knocking.

Verse 2a, “<SHE> I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking...” She had given up on Solomon coming home at a reasonable hour, and so she was sacked out and sleeping! Of course being a loving husband, he would want his new bride to get plenty of beauty sleep. It would be inconsiderate to bother her at this hour of the night.

But apparently Solomon missed his wife and needed to be near her. It’s very late at night, when there is dew on the ground—certainly after midnight. He’s worked long hours ruling the kingdom. He wants to enjoy the company of his wife. She is his sanctuary. And he gives his four best lines. **Verse 2b**, “Open to me, my sister, my

love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.”

Like most men, Solomon was working in the hard, cruel and cold world and he wanted to come home to some tenderness and appreciation at the end of his difficult day.

In **verse 3**, the peasant princess starts making some very lame excuses: “I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?”

What a bunch of lame excuses. She’s not descent. She doesn’t want to dirty her feet. Listen, she’s in a palace, not in a dirt floored shack! She wants him to know she is in control. She’s not going to give way to his every whim. After all she’s now a princess! She may feel a bit wronged and neglected since Solomon did not come home at a descent hour. These feelings are all very common in marriage. Both feel neglected.

And so the conflict begins! What is the root of the conflict? Your selfish, evil, unloving heart. We all think the world should revolve around my needs. But a person who truly has godly love will deny their own needs to look after the needs of the spouse.

Conflict always begins when one person is selfish and puts their needs above the other. Be careful here. The decisions we make have consequences. We are not only responsible for our actions, but we are responsible for our attitudes and our words and even our tone of voice and how we speak to our spouse. So much will get misunderstood!

II. The **Response** to conflict: rejection and remorse (vs. 4-7).

A. **Rejection** (vs. 4-6a).

Verse 4-6a, “My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. 5 I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt. 6 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone.”

1. A man and a woman speak radically different **languages**. Verse 5a is very telling. The wife observes, “I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.” The husband wanted to express his love to his wife with closeness. Myrrh is a beautiful fragrance used in the Temple. His intention was to express love, affection, and security for his wife.

The wife spoke a different language. She thought he should express his love by respecting her need for sleep! But it seems here that the wife changes her mind, and decides to let her beloved husband in. ““My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me” (vs. 4). But it is too late. **Verse 6**, “I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone.”

The man wanted to express his love, and all he got were excuses. “I’m already in bed! I’m sleeping. I don’t want to get my feet dirty”. The husband feels disrespected. He feels dishonored. He feels shot down.

The wife feels unloved because she thinks, “If he really loves me, he’ll want me to sleep.” What is the problem here? Husbands and wives speak different languages.

Until you realize this, and you learn to communicate and actually help your spouse to understand you, then you are going to be in for a lot of pain, offense, hurt, misunderstanding, and confusion.

2. According to **1 Peter 3:7**, it is the **husband’s responsibility** to learn the wife’s language first. “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Solomon thought his new wife didn’t care. Mrs. Solomon thought Solomon didn’t care that she get her sleep. Both are hurt. So the king turns and leaves. Mrs. Solomon says, “my beloved had turned and gone” (vs. 6).

3. Often newly married couples have not learned a planned response but a spontaneous negative **reaction** to the hurt. It is often true in a marriage that a man will at first not want to fight with his wife. He will give up. Why? Because he knows he cannot win. If he ends up winning, he loses. If he ends up losing, he loses. So a man tends to want to escape. He will just not say anything and clam up. He will give the silent treatment. He’s been shot down; he’s hurt and he wants to run!

It seems that Solomon is frustrated here. He leaves, but he leaves a calling card on the door! **Song of Solomon 5:5**, the wife says: “I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.”

Transition: And now the conflict carries on. It seems this next section is a dream. She doses off and has a kind of nightmarish sequence. Conflict is such that it brings unrest in the marriage and in LIFE itself. When things are going great in marriage, everything is great. When marriage is going bad, everything is really, really bad.

- B. **Remorse** (vs. 6). Solomon's bride feels the separation of conflict. **Verse 6b**, "My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer."

Her soul failed. This is a very strong Hebrew phrase. Her heart burned with remorse or dropped with regret and pain is the idea. A paraphrase was, "I nearly died when I found out he had gone".

So we see that the new Queen of Israel has a great wave of regret overcome her. I believe this regret has godly repentance at the foundation. We can always trust God to shepherd our spouse. He can show us when we sin and the pathway to repentance. Look at the good Queen's regret and remorse for her selfishness.

Application: Conflict late at night is BAD!! Be careful not to get into difficult or intense discussion very late at night. That's the time when many marital conflicts begin. Our burdens are heavier, our strength is less, and we can often feel discouraged or weak at the end of a day.

Application: A child of God cannot live comfortably in sin . We don't know how much time passed, but eventually if a person is walking with the Lord, they will begin to feel regret and remorse for selfish behavior. **A child of God cannot live comfortably in sin**. Like righteous Lot of old, sin vexes our soul from day to day.

Verse 6b, "My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer."

- C. Look at some **consequences** for handling conflict in a selfish way (vs. 7).

1. Solomon's leaving makes the new bride feel unbelievably **insecure**. We will find the man meant nothing by it, but a woman's security is messed with, and she is beside herself. The next verse may refer to a dream that Solomon's princess had. There is debate, but some awful things happen. She is beside herself. Either in reality or in her dream she goes looking for him.

When a man leaves, though he may just need to "take a walk" and "calm down", but woman is prone to feel abandoned. We may just need some time alone, but we may be communicating **abandonment**.

2. The dream of Solomon's bride reveals the toll that this conflict is having on her.

Verse 7, "The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls".

So she has a nightmare where she gets no help finding her beloved. She's half dressed so she looks like a woman of the night. She's got the veil, that makes her look like a prostitute. At this hour all respectable women are in their own beds sleeping. The elders of the city punish her and beat her. They seem to mistake her for a prostitute and give her some kind of punishment.

Application: Men can often get over conflict fairly easily and quickly, but we have to remember that our wife is a "weaker vessel", literally a "fragile vase", and though conflict can be forgiven by the wife immediately, she may struggle with insecurity until trust is rebuilt by the husband. This can last for months or years if the husband isn't careful.

So we see the root of conflict is selfishness. I want my way. We look at marriage is what we can get out of it. How can I change my spouse to my likings? That attitude will always bring with it contention and conflict! Pride and selfishness bring great pain in marriage. Conflicts may have come to some of you this morning, and you are being ripped apart.

III. The **Remedy** for Conflict (Song 5:8-6:13).

We are not called to live according to our feelings, but to live according to the Word of God. The key in conflict is to RESPOND according to your commitment to Christ, don't REACT according to your flesh.

A. Respond with **Respect** (vs. 8-17).

The newlywed wife in our story wakes up from her dream, and what do you think she does? Does she hold a grudge? No, she genuinely shows respect to her husband.

It seems she wakes up from this dream and talks to her female friends and counselors. **Verse 8**, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love."

The friends respond, **verse 9**, "<FRIENDS> What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?" In other words, what's so great about your beloved? Come on, gossip! Tell us the bad nitty gritty.

She could have disrespected him, but her heart was HUMBLE. She starts thinking about him in a godly way.

1. When you are hurt, you must discipline your mind to **think** on that which is true and good in your spouse (vs. 10-17).

She resists the temptation to gossip with her friends, and instead esteems her husband's character.

- (1.) She esteems his **character** (vs. 10-13). She respects him above ten thousand. **Verse 10**, "<SHE> My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand."
 - He's **dependable**. **Verse 11a**, "His head is the finest gold;"
 - He's **full of life**. **Verse 11b**, "his locks are wavy, black as a raven."
 - He's **trustworthy**. **Verse 12**, "His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool."
 - He's **tender**. **Verse 13**, "His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh."
- (2.) She esteems his strength and ability to **work** (vs. 14-16). **Verses 14-16**, "His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. 15 His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. 16 His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable".
- (3.) She cherishes his **friendship** (vs. 17). **Verse 17**, "This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." "My friend" is a very common word for a companion without sexual connotation. Friendship is far deeper than the superficial excitement of physical love. That's a bonus in marriage, but she reveals that she is a godly woman who has a deep friendship with her husband.

2. Even if your husband does not know Christ, you are to **respond** in respect to your husband. Peter calls wives to be respectful even to those who are being disobedient to God's Word. The key in conflict is to RESPOND, don't REACT.

1 Peter 3:1-2, "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct".

Wives can go about winning battles by attacking, criticizing, or lecturing husbands who are not doing right according the Scripture. Peter basically says, don't be manipulative. Respect him. Through your quiet and chaste life you may win him.

Your flesh is going to fear that if you let go of the control and manipulation, you will not change your husband. And that is right. It is not your place to

change your husband. You need to ask God to change you, and you pray for God to help you to be a godly wife and through your prayers, there is much more possibility that your husband will change through God working in his heart.

The newlywed wife in our story wakes up from her dream, and what do you think she does? Does she hold a grudge? No, she genuinely shows respect to her husband.

B. Seek immediate **Reconciliation** (Song 6:1-3).

Song of Solomon 7:1-3, “<OTHERS> Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? 2 <SHE> My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. 3 I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.”

When we are wronged, we need to seek immediate reconciliation. **Matthew 18:15-18**, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

C. The joy of responding to conflict in God’s way is **Reconciliation** (Song 6:4-10).

Verses 4-8, “<HE> You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. 5 Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me— Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. 6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. 7 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. 8 **There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number**”.

Kings and their many queens and concubines would visit Solomon, but Solomon at this time in his life did not need harems and hundreds of queens. He loved only his beloved peasant queen. She was unique! And everyone agreed!

Verse 9, “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; **the queens and concubines also, and they praised her**”.

The man praises his wife, as he did on their wedding day. Other kings had many concubines and queens, and the king said they would feel jealous that all he had was her. She is unique above all women. **Verse 10**, “Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?” He makes her feel so special!
The best thing about conflict is making up!

D. **Restoration** (vs. 11-13).

1. Following God’s way in restoration brings long term **fruit** in marriage. **Verse 11**, “<SHE> I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom.” Like the vines in her special garden, her marriage was bearing fruit from following God’s way of handling conflict.

Sometimes you might feel like you are not getting far if you give and give and give in marriage. But you will bear fruit if you follow God’s way. Just like Mrs. Solomon’s garden, you will always “reap what you sow” and you always “reap more than you sow”. If you sow to the wind, you will reap the whirlwind.

2. Following God’s way in restoration brings long term **joy** in marriage. **Verse 12**, “Before I was aware, my desire [SOLOMON] set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.” She’s caught up in joy—she’s been treated like a princess, and she feels like a princess!

“She wanders down to the nut garden, where she believes her beloved will be, and makes the delightful discovery that it is springtime again in their relationship. *Then all of a sudden she is placed in the king’s royal chariot, doubtless the first of his fleet, and she finds herself racing along at his side before all the people.* It is a public display of total reconciliation. They are together again, and a new spring has begun.”²

Verse 13a, “<OTHERS> Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return, that we may look upon you.” The women of the palace call after her as she flies by in the chariot, wanting to see again the look on her face that speaks volumes about the joy of a restored relationship.³ But she so busy with her King she cannot stop.

Verse 13b, “<HE> Why should you look upon the Shulammite, as upon a dance before two armies?” This is a comment from the king. Looking upon his wife is just like the excitement of watching a lively, exuberant victory

²Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (So 6:11). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: InterVarsity Press.

³Ibid.

dance where the war has been one between two armies. The two sides have signed the peace treaty, and now they should celebrate! They have been reconciled!

Conclusion: Whether you are married or single, if you have unresolved conflict in your life, you are not right with God. You need to be tenderhearted and seek to be the first to reconcile. You cannot worship God if you have not dealt with sin and misunderstandings in your life. Set your gift down, that is before the next worship service, get things right. Settle the conflict in a godly way.

There is great joy and long term stability if you will seek selfless giving instead of selfishness. Following God's path to restoration in conflict is one of God's primary tools to make us like Christ!