

Public displays of affection have been frowned upon in our culture until fairly recently, especially in the church. The apostles tell us to greet one another with a holy kiss. We nod our heads and shake hands and feel extremely uncomfortable about the passing of the peace during the public worship service.

In the days of Solomon public displays of affection between a woman and her lover were apparently frowned upon. The girl in our Scripture lesson expresses a desire to take the initiative in expressing her love. "I would kiss you." In our cultural, and in that culture long ago, the woman is supposed to be passive. The man kisses the girl who pretends coyly that she doesn't really want to be kissed. But the girl in this Son of Solomon wants to take the initiative. She not only wants to be kissed. She wants to kiss. "If only you were to me like a brother, who was nursed at my mother's breasts! Then, if I found you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me." I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house."

She wishes that she were related to her lover. Then she could openly express her love for him without fear of impropriety. No one minds a brother and sister holding hands or kissing in public. We say, "Isn't that nice."

It's so good to see brothers and sisters so close and affectionate."

## II

As I read these verses it reminds me how my love for Christ is greater than what I dare to express publicly. Now, obviously, none of us love Christ as we ought. But if we are Christians we do love him as imperfectly as that love might be. I don't hesitate to speak of my love for Kay as imperfect as my love for her might be. I don't feel like I am being self-righteous or bragging when I speak of my love for her. But somehow I do hesitate to speak of my love for Christ openly. I fear that my words will be misinterpreted as self-righteousness. When I read the words of someone like Samuel Rutherford speaking of his love for Christ there is something deep within me that responds warmly.

Listen to Rutherford: This soul of ours hath love, and cannot but love some fair one; and O what a fair One, what an only One, what an excellent, lovely One is Jesus! Put the beauty of ten thousand thousand worlds of paradises like the garden of Eden in one; put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colours, all tastes, all joys, all sweetness, all loveliness in one. O what a fair and excellent thing

would that be! And yet it would be less, to that fair and dearest Well-beloved, Christ, than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes and fountains of ten thousand earths."

My heart responds positively and warmly to those words but I fear expressing my feelings in those terms. Sometimes I refrain because my cultural background has made it extremely difficult. In my home we never spoke to one another in emotional tones. We loved one another but our love was formalised in such a way that there were great inhibitions placed upon us if we desired to express our love for one another outside the ritualised pattern. Every night before I went to bed as a young boy I would say to my mother and father, "I still love you."/ <sup>It was a nightly and invariable rit</sup> What I said was true. It was no less true and real because it was ritualised. But I was unable to say, "I love you" outside of that ritual. I couldn't just climb up on my mothers knee or my fathers knee and say, "I love you."

The same is true of my love for Christ. It is easiest for me to express my love for Christ within the ritual of public worship, in songs and Scripture and sermon. The ritual doesn't destroy the reality of that love. But there are times when I want to express my love for Christ outside the ritual of public worship.

5 Sometimes I refrain from expressing my love for Christ for the sake of those who don't know Christ. For example, my brother simply would not understand my expressions of love for Christ. When I talk to him I have to restrain myself, not out of shame, but out of respect for my brother and his sense of propriety. It would be as improper for me to speak of my love for Christ before my brother as it would be improper to kiss my wife passionately before the congregation on Sunday morning. When I talk to my brother I have to express my love for Christ more discreetly.

Sometimes I refrain from expressing my love for Christ from fear and shame. I fear being thought of as an enthusiast, a fanatic, or, worse yet, a pentecostal. Some people think that anyone who believes in such things as the Virgin Birth of Christ or the inerrancy of Scripture must be a naive simpleton; uneducated and anti-intellectual. I have reacted against this stereotype so radically and vehemently at times by wanting to impress people with my intellect and learning while at the same time denigrating the emotions.

Yet in my heart of hearts there is within me a poem and a song which expresses my love for Christ in the language of the song of Solomon. "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal over your arm. His left arm is under m

my head and his right arm embraces me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."

AMEN