

The Family: Foundations are Shaking

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What follows is part of a series of leaflets published by the [Hudsonville, Michigan Protestant Reformed Church](#) and written by the Rev. Barry Gritters. For a set of the complete series, write:

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The pillars of our *society* are crumbling; and if radical changes are not made, our society will fall. The pillars of the *church* are crumbling. Although the Church of Christ will not be destroyed, *churches* and *denominations* will fall. The pillars are families--the church as well as the country depends on families. As the families are strong--praying, worshipping, holy, families--the church is a strong, God-honoring, God-blessed church.

Families are in danger. God's truth of marriage and the family is under relentless attack by the devil and the wicked world. Witness: The need for sexual purity is denied except to avoid the dreaded sexually transmitted diseases. Men and women live together outside the marriage bond (not long ago, San Francisco's city council approved registering live-in lovers, giving them all the privileges of married couples). Condoms are sold on college campuses and the "do-gooders" that give them away are today's heroes. Quick and easy divorce, along with easy remarriage afterwards, is common. The homosexual lifestyle is accepted, condoned, and encouraged, even by many churches. And, families are not together anymore.

(If there is one instrument that the devil is using with a success rate second to none, it is the weapon of television. By what is shown and by how much time is taken away from family fellowship and reading, the devil uses the television to destroy families. Because we love families, we show our colors early and say that we believe the misuse [which is often the *only* use] of the television and VCR is to blame for a multitude of family troubles.)

As a Reformed church, it is our hope that God will use these brief summaries of sermons to encourage God's people to pray--pray that God will maintain good family life for the preservation of His church and the glory of His name.

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1. Marriage: God's Good Creation

([Genesis 2:18-21](#))

The family is foundational because God made it that way. God created the family in paradise as the *first* institution He made. To begin our treatment of good family life *properly*, we must understand the beginnings of family life *in creation*, especially the first marriage and family.

First, God made Eve out of *Adam*, and not from the dust, as He created Adam ([Genesis 2:7](#)). Therefore, Eve was not independent, not Adam's equal, but was made a helper, and perfectly "fit" for Adam (this is the idea of the word "help-meet" of [Genesis 2:18](#) in the KJV). What a wonderful creation of God the woman is!

But now, since woman is not man's equal (except in terms of their salvation), we need to guard against thinking that women are lowly, insignificant, inferior creatures. Not so! The long history of the woman being trampled on is not Biblically founded! Let every male chauvinist hear this: God said that it was necessary for Adam to have a wife ([Genesis 2:18](#)). Remember, too, that also Eve was created in God's image, unlike all other creatures. The woman must be glorified, and her place exalted.

Second, marriage is "leaving father and mother" ([Genesis 2:24](#)). Not that children must *abandon* their parents when they marry, but that they must see marriage now as the most important relationship in their life, even above the parent-child relationship. This is amazing! The tie of flesh and blood takes second chair to the tie God makes in marriage. There are two important implications of this. First, if this is true, parents ought to let children go when they marry. More marriage problems occur either because children do not really leave, or because parents do not release them. Second, if this tie is stronger than the bond between parent and child, people should be even more horrified at a spouse abandoning another spouse, than at parents who abandon an infant in a dumpster! How sad that some have become numb to *this* horror!

Third, in marriage a man "cleaves" to his wife ([Genesis 2:24](#)). Cleaving means "clinging to, holding *dearly*." This refers to a covenant commitment by the husband and wife to each other. They are, as it were, glued together. That's the picture in the Biblical word. This also expresses the *permanence* of marriage. Jesus emphasized this in the New Testament, in answer to the Pharisee's question on divorce: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." If a man and woman are not committed to this kind of permanence in marriage, they may not marry in God's name.

Fourth, marriage is "becoming one flesh" ([Genesis 2:24](#)). Marriage is even closer than cleaving to the other; it is *two becoming one*. Jesus reaffirms this in [Matthew 19:6](#): "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh." This refers to the sexual union, but we should not limit it to that. Husbands and wives become one in their entire nature--their thinking, hopes, sorrows, joys. . . . What a wonderful, good creation marriage is!

Is this what the most television programs teach? That *God* made marriage? That *God* brings men their wives? That the woman is a helper, perfectly suited for her husband? That the woman was made the glorious image of God and ought to be *honored* for that? That marriage is leaving parents and cleaving, *permanently*, to the wife? Rather, it teaches the opposite, leading away from the Biblical foundations. Can't you just hear the Old Testament prophet sing, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" ([Psalm 119:136](#))?

God made marriage. God brought Eve to Adam. God performed the first wedding and established it as a permanent institution among men. Denial of this truth explains why marriage is corrupted so badly today. Also, any kind of evolutionism denies that God created marriage--if not explicitly, then implicitly. And if marriage is not God-made, but man-made, then man may do with it as he pleases, as is being done almost everywhere today. Then Ann Landers, Harvey Rubin, and Sally Jesse Raphael will determine the standards for right and wrong in marriage. Then anything may be done. But marriage is a creation of God. Because it is, we must obey God's regulations for marriage: one man for one woman; sex only for marriage; no divorce, except for fornication, and no remarriage unless death dissolves the bond; the man is the head of the woman, husbands loving their wives, wives submitting to their husbands. (the Lord willing, we will look at each of these more closely in future pamphlets that we send to you.)

To disobey these regulations is to invite disaster. Shall someone say that because he does not like the ordinance of gravity, he will disobey it . . . without suffering seriously? So it is with the regulations of God in marriage. No one can disregard them without suffering the most disastrous consequences, as we all know so well.

The only escape from this misery is to look at the Creator of marriage, the Creator of heaven and earth: obedience to Him, following His ways, and finding grace in His Son Jesus, Who came to deliver us from all our misery and destruction, yes, in *family* life too.

2. Marriage: A Beautiful Reflection

([Ephesians 5:22-31](#))

Almost everyone today is concerned about good behavior in marriage, because almost everyone, even non-Christians, knows that something must be done about the serious undermining of family life. So everyone is asking, "How do we shore up the foundations of our marriages, so that our society will remain solid?"

Very few, though, are willing to look in the proper places to learn, and few are willing to put the work into marriage that is necessary. God's approach to marriage is not a "Five Easy Steps to a Happy Marriage" that you might find in the Reader's Digest. God's approach to marriage is this: for a successful marriage, you work with all your might that your marriage may reflect the beautiful relationship that exists between Christ and His Church (His people). This is the plain teaching of [Ephesians 5:22-23](#).

How many young couples marry, believing that their marriage must be patterned after Christ's marriage to His Church? Yet this is the Bible's teaching.

The relationship of marriage as you and I know it -- the loving bond between a man and a woman -- exists because the relationship between Christ and the church exists. In the mind and will of God, not our marriages are first, but the marriage between Christ and the church was first. Marriage in creation was made as an illustration of, or a mirror of, the marriage between Christ and His Church. God wants us to know about *that* great marriage; so He created earthly marriages as reflections of it. [Ezekiel 16](#), [Hosea 2](#), [The Song of Solomon](#) (a book every married couple ought to read at bedtime), as well as [Psalm 45](#), all point to this truth.

It is important to see that clearly. That's why earthly marriages pass away: they are only pictures of the real marriage! If we see that, it will help us think soberly about our present marriages: they are important, but they are not the end-all and be-all of our life. Also, it will help us endure the loss of a spouse better: we are going to see that spouse again in a far more beautiful relationship than we had on earth! Finally, it will keep from despair those whose remain single.

[Ephesians 5](#) points out a number of things about this relationship. Christ is *head* of the church (see verse 23). He *rules* over His body, as every head rules over every physical body. For that reason, the church is *subject* to Christ (see verse 24). This is a willing subjection, a loving subjection. It can be a willing subjection, because Christ loves and saves the Church. Verses 25, 26: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Christ nourishes and cherishes the church (see verse 29). By His life-giving Spirit, He keeps His Church alive, consoles Her, embraces Her, and protects Her.

This is why our marriages are what they are!

1. This is why marriage is a "*one flesh*" union. [Genesis 2](#) teaches that marriage involves becoming one - - physically, emotionally, spiritually. Why is this true? Because this is

true of Christ and the Church. By faith He is one with Her, sharing His joy, telling Her the secrets of His counsel, speaking through the gospel!

2. This is why marriage is living *permanently* with the spouse - - until death! Scripture teaches that marriage is a permanent bond, broken only by death. Why? Simply because there is a permanent cleaving of Christ to His Church. Even when His people are unfaithful, He always brings them back.
3. This is why, in marriage, the wife is *not the husband's equal*. [Genesis 2](#) shows that woman was taken out of the side of man, is his helper, fit for him. Would the Church ever dare say that She is Christ's equal? In strength? In glory? In wisdom? In power? Would God's people ever dare claim to have the same *duties* as Christ, to be shared equally with Him? Nor would the wife who serves Christ.
4. This is not to say that woman is not a *glorious creation*. Just the opposite. When God created Eve, He formed her specially with His own perfections. Women are not to be trampled on, not to be ignored, to be treated as nothings. They are glorious creations of God, to be highly honored, respected, esteemed. Why? Again, exactly because God created the church as the beautiful bride of Christ. Just read [Psalm 45](#) once to see the wonderful language describing the beauty, honor, and glory of the church.

We must see this clearly: if we lose sight of the truth that our marriages are to be reflections of Christ's marriage, our behavior in marriage will be all wrong!

Now, since Christ and the church are the standard, we are taught ***how to behave in marriage***:

First, this means that we marry only in the Lord (see [1 Corinthians 7:39](#)). This comes out from the original marriage. The only reason there is a relationship between Christ and the Church is that they are united *spiritually*. For believers, the only union they may make is with one with whom they are spiritually one.

Second, this says something about weddings: they ought to be reverent occasions. Joyful, but reverent. Lately, it seems, the more ridiculous the setting, the more popular the wedding. That ought not to be if our weddings reflect the wedding of Christ and the Church.

Third, during marriage, there is *guidance* and rule of the husband with the wife. There is *submission* of the wife to the husband, and reverence. Husbands *esteem* their wives highly, treating them with highest respect: Christ wants His bride to think of herself as a queen! (Do husbands treat their wives in this way?) In marriage there is *faithfulness*, because Christ is faithful. There is *forgiveness*; there is *self-denial*; there are *children* All because this is what goes on in the marriage of Christ and His Church.

Do the marriages in churches today help the church's witness in the world? In our witnessing, we talk a great deal about Christ's love, Christ's rule, Christ's salvation; about the Church's glory, Her holiness, Her submission to Him, Her love for Him. Do our *marriages* speak as clearly as our tongues?

What a great goal we have in marriage! Husbands, is this the goal you strive to reach: "God, help me to behave toward my wife as Christ does toward His Church"? Wives, is this the goal towards which you reach: "Lord, may my behavior toward him be as the Church is called to

behave toward my Christ - -submitting, loving, honoring, obeying, helping"?

Ah, how sinful we are! How far short we fall! Let's pray for forgiveness when we fail. Look to Christ, our Husband, for salvation. There we find not only the instruction, but the strength to behave in marriage as we ought to behave.

3. The Single Life: Good!

([1 Cor. 7](#))

To the distress of those to whom God has not led a marriage partner, it often happens in churches that the singles in the congregation are neglected. Very little is said about their *goodplace* in the church, about the *propriety* of their single life. Often they are viewed as misfits because they are not married as are most others in the church. Sometimes this attitude shows when parents are horrified because their son or daughter enters their twenties with no sign of finding someone to marry, or even date.

Part of the reason singles are neglected is the emphasis (the proper emphasis) that Reformed churches place on the family. We ought not minimize the importance of the family; but we ought not so emphasize it that the single life is ignored or scoffed at. Another reason the single life is neglected is the overreaction to the Roman Catholic teaching that the single life is more spiritual and more holy than the married life. Whatever the reason, singles are often neglected by the church.

Add to this that unmarried are often left out of the fellowship of the church, and the result of all this is that the singles become discouraged and tempted to despair over their circumstances.

The testimony of Holy Scripture is that the single life is *good*. This is the good teaching of [1 Corinthians 7](#), where Paul says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (verse 1). That is, it is good for a man not to engage in those practices that belong to the marriage relationship. In other words, it is good not to marry. Paul even goes so far as to say that he wishes that "all men were even as myself" (vs.7), meaning unmarried (see [1 Corinthians 9:5](#) where he says that he was single). Now this does not mean that all must be single; but it does point out that being single is not wrong!

Sometimes God compels a young person to remain single, because He never leads to them a mate. We accept this as God's good will. If a young person chooses not to marry, he may make this choice; but his choice is a good choice only if he has certain gifts. That is, he or she must be *qualified* for this "good" life. The essential gift required for the single life is the gift of self-control, sexual self-control. When Paul says, "I would that all were even as myself," we should not miss the important qualification he adds, "but every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that."

If one does not have this gift, he or she must not remain single, but must seek to be married. Else the danger is that one who remains single, but does not have this gift, burns in his or her sexual lust. "It is better to marry than to burn," Paul said in verse 9. Those who have this gift, male or female, may remain single.

An important question for the single person comes up here: Why would God give this gift to any of His people? Why would He give this ability: to be single without "burning"? Paul's answer is in [1 Corinthians 7](#): Because the single life enables a person to serve the Lord to a greater degree

than a married person can (see verses 32-34). Freed from the calling to care for his wife and children, the single man (or woman) can devote his life (time as well as financial resources!) wholly to the service of God. This is not to say that a married man or woman cannot serve God; it is to say that some unmarried (who have the gift) can serve God better. But whoever chooses to remain single, must do so because he/she desires to *serve God* in single life!

A practical point ought to be made here. Disregarding God's Word in [1 Corinthians 7](#) and disregarding the very clear example of bachelor Paul's good ministry, churches sometimes adopt the notion that single men are not to be considered good candidates for the office of elder and deacon, or that a seminary student must be persuaded to marry before he finishes seminary. As though singles will not be able to serve well in their office unless they have the experience of marriage and family life, some in the church play matchmaker for seminary students, and refuse to place in the office of elder or deacon the single men. That ought not be. Even a casual reading of [1 Corinthians 7](#) will show the error of that thinking and practice. The single life is good because the single life is good for the service of Christ's church in the world.

Understanding this, those to whom God has not brought a mate can be comforted and encouraged. Perhaps they feel cheated; perhaps they feel pinned down by their earthly circumstance - - they have no mate; everyone else does. Then there is the temptation to rebel and be dissatisfied with their life, perhaps even by seeking to marry one not "in the Lord." But understanding that the single life is good, and that God gives to some the gift of continence, the single adult can be comforted and encouraged: God gave you the gift; God calls you to this life; God is pleased with your position; marriage is not everything! In glory, earthly marriage relationships will be no more.

What is of ultimate importance is the heavenly marriage between Christ and His Church. You are united to *Him* in a marriage that will last forever!

Single adults, have you given serious thought to what service of God's kingdom you may be called to? Young men, have you considered the ministry of the gospel, or the high calling of teaching covenant children in the Christian school? Do you aspire to and prepare for service in the offices of the church? Young women, has God also given you the aptitude to teach, so that you could consider giving yourself to Christian education? If you have the gift of continence, you ought to consider remaining single for the sake of these or other services for the kingdom of heaven.

Church of Christ, are there singles among you? Receive them as brothers and sisters in Christ. Do not feel as though you need to begin a separate ministry for them. Include them among you as you would have included Jesus or Paul in your fellowship had they lived among us today.

4. Sexual Purity: For Christ's Sake

([Proverbs 5:3ff](#); [I Corinthians 6:9ff](#).)

Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ wants all young people to go into marriage as virgins. For the peace and happiness of all young people who love Christ, we bring this message of God's Word: God wants you to remain virgins before marriage. The violation of this is called fornication.

In both [Proverbs 5](#) and 7, as well as in [I Corinthians 6](#), the warning against fornication is directed to the young men of the church. But our society has made "advances" over the society when the Bible was written, so that today the warning must be directed also to the young women. The warning must not be limited, though, to the unmarried. Fornication for the married person (sex outside the marriage bond) is always a temptation.

Fornication has been common since the beginning of time. Not the oldest profession, it is one of the oldest *sins* of any society. It was so common in Paul's time that when he wrote the letter to the church at Corinth he needed to say, "now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord." This same warning needs to be sounded in our day, where there have been advances in sin over the society in which Paul lived, so that today sexual promiscuity is even publicized and glamorized.

What makes this sin so common is its allure. Many strong men have been slain by the whorish woman ("who flatters with her words..."), and many strong women have been slain by the temptations of the amorous man, whose mouth is full of promises. The temptation to succumb to this sin is powerful, and nearly universal.

Fornication is not the worst sin, nor the only sin. We may not forget that. Some hit the roof when they hear of a teenage girl becoming pregnant, but say nothing when the truth of the gospel is corrupted or the church's unity harmed with gossip. This is not right.

But fornication is a sin. And there is something uniquely wicked and foolish about this sin. The Bible points that out when it says that whoever commits fornication sins against his own body ([I Corinthians 6:18](#)). This is part of what makes fornication a unique sin. Another aspect is the violence this sin does to the reflection of the marriage of Christ and His bride, the Church.

Since this is a sin, it must be called that. The 20th century is noted for its euphemisms, its refusal to call something by its real name. We've all heard this. That's why we hear very little about fornication or adultery, our society preferring rather to speak of being "sexually active" or "having affairs." We ought to call this sin what it is: Fornicating.

God wants us to avoid fornication because it is sin. That may sound strange, for that's no reason to avoid premarital or extramarital sex for non-Christians.

Apart from the sin, there still are reasons to avoid fornication. One reason for sexual purity is to avoid AIDS, herpes, and other dreaded diseases. Fornication causes emotional wounds, and

troubles in marriages. Think of the shame that accompanies unfaithfulness to one's husband or wife, or that comes with premarital sex.

But for the Christian, the main reason is that Jesus Christ forbids it. Jesus forbids it because our bodies are dwelling places of His Holy Spirit, and are actually "connected" with Him in heaven ([1 Corinthians 6:5-15-17](#)). The man or woman (young or old) who loves Christ for giving him salvation, for saving him from death and hell, for giving him so great a salvation, will not unite himself with someone outside of marriage, because that would be uniting Christ Himself with a harlot ([1 Corinthians 6:15](#)). This grieves the spiritually-minded Christian.

Whoever commits fornication without repenting "destroys his own soul" ([Proverbs 6:23](#)).

This must be taught our children, and taught from their youngest days: sex is for marriage; sex is ruinous outside of marriage; fornication destroys the existing marriage; fornication dishonors God.

Parents ought to teach children to fear fornication as they fear any imaginary monster. Their children must know about the deceit of fornication, the allure of fornication, the power of fornication, the destruction of it. They must hear what God says in [Proverbs 7](#): "He goeth after her . . . till a dart strike through his liver . . . Many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell . . ." Flee, youth, for your life!

Children don't learn this by listening to what most have to say today. This is one reason the Protestant Reformed Churches preach about the folly of most television viewing and movie attendance: these promote, glorify, and glamorize sex. Even the advertisements on most innocent and profitable programs are sexually oriented, so that the children's opinions about sex are warped.

The children don't learn this by listening to most music on the radio today. Most of rock music's lyrics, as well as its beat, are designed to arouse the sexual passions. The name "rock and roll" itself was coined to describe the music that fits the "rocking and rolling" of fornication. (For this reason, too, it's impossible to understand how the words "Christian" and "rock" can ever be joined.)

Children don't learn to fear fornication by dancing the dances of the world. What young person is interested in dancing that has no sexual allure? Parents who are serious about teaching their children the dangers of fornication will prohibit their children from dancing. If this sounds radical, we need to hear that the Bible calls Christians to *flee* fornication ([1 Corinthians 6:18](#)). That's more than saying "Don't commit fornication" or "Keep yourselves clean from sexual sins." It's saying, "Run from this sin with all your life; avoid everything that would lead you into it."

Fleeing fornication, the child of God will also avoid the parties where there is over-drinking, for alcohol loosens the inhibitions and restraints, and removes the fears of this dangerous foe.

Especially, parents teach their children about this sin by giving them the positive example of their own behavior in marriage: they remain married to the wife of their youth; they don't flirt with other's spouses; they show affection toward their spouse in the home; and are chaste in all their

behavior before the children.

For young people, the shelter from this destructive sin is the shelter of marriage. God says in [1 Corinthians 7](#), "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." Some three thousand years ago, God had one of the kings of Israel write: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love." This is the Christian's joyful deliverance from all the miseries of fornication!

And when fornication has been committed, there is forgiveness with God and deliverance from its great power, through faith in Jesus Christ!

5. Husbands, Love Your Wives

([Ephesians 5:23,25-28](#))

What could be more important for a body than a head? What a monstrosity to have a body running around without a head! That's how important a place a husband has in a marriage. It is possible, of course, that God takes a husband away from a family through death or some other way, and the wife must raise the children or live alone. Yet the experience the wife has living alone, or raising the children alone, only underscores the importance of the husband for the home and family.

Here, too, foundations are shaking. Many husbands simply refuse to take their God-ordained place - - refuse to be home anymore, to take part in raising the children, or to love and nurture their wives. Culture seems to point men away from their God-ordained position. Times are changing, and no one seems to know what the role of the husband is. We pray for good husbands.

The Word of God - - the Bible - - is our only authority here. What is the husband's duty in marriage? This: "Husbands, love your wives" ([Ephesians 5:25](#)).

We may be tempted to think that the calling of the husband is "Rule your wife." Over and over the Bible calls women to submit to their husbands. It would seem, then, that the husband's calling is, "Rule." But this is not the case. The Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives." So the husband who is always telling his wife, "Submit, submit, submit" is a foolish husband. He does not know how to be the head of the wife because he does not know how to love her. God's Word is, "*Love your wife. This is how you rule her.*"

Is this not how *Christ* is head of the church and rules the church? Let's not forget the comparison that the Bible makes between the husband/wife relationship and the Christ/Church relationship. This is the great pattern for our marriages. So the question becomes, "How does Christ rule the church?" The answer is, "By the sweet, irresistible power of His grace, through His Word and Spirit." That is, by love! ([Psalm 110:3](#))

The idea "love" has been so prostituted that we hardly know what it means anymore. Sometimes we think that love is something that "gets you," or you "fall into" and "fall out of," or that it is simply "animal passion." The Bible says, "God is love," but also that "love is of God" ([1 John 4:7-16](#)). God's love is His almighty arms embracing, binding, and holding us to Himself through His Holy Son Jesus. Between a man and a woman there is no real love if they do not love in Christ. There may be concern, passion, even a desire for the other's good; but there is no love. For husbands, the Word of God is this: "Exercise towards your wife an intelligent, purposeful affection, that joyfully wills and seeks her spiritual good, even at a great cost to you. This is the love of God's Son for you."

Comparing our love with Christ's, we may say that the characteristics of a husband's love must be:

SACRIFICIAL, SELFLESS. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." This is the mystery of the gospel: The Son of God gave Himself to death, to bear the burden of the Church's punishment, so that she might live. Love is selfless. "Love seeketh not her own" ([1 Corinthians 13](#)). This points out the difference between love and lust. This also points out the duty of husbands.

UNCONDITIONAL. Christ's love for the Church was not based on some foreseen goodness, nor does it depend on a loveliness that She can present to Him on Her own. Christ's love was and is unconditional (See Ezekial 16). (This is the Reformed faith!) This does not mean that a young man may marry a spiritually unlovely woman. Rather, it means that the husband, after marriage, may not say, "She is not lovely anymore; I will not love her."

TENDER. [Ephesians 5:29](#) teaches the husband to "cherish" his wife. The love of Christ for the church is a tender, gentle, love. Sometimes husbands complain about "unfeminine" wives. Husbands must be asked, "Are you *tender* with your wife?"

CLOSE. An error the husband may fall into is to think that he loves his wife because he provides well for her, but that he is rarely home with her. Then friction results and the husband is surprised. He should have known: love comes close to and dwells with the wife. [1 Peter 3:7](#) calls husbands to dwell with their wives. Christ comes close to His Bride. He speaks to Her, often. He loves Her!

NURTURING. If there is true love in the husband's heart, he will also want his wife to be healthy. He will care for her physically; he will provide for her spiritually. He will have the greatest concern for her relationship to God! She is "his own flesh" and no man ever yet hated his own flesh, "but nourisheth it and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" ([Ephesians 5:29](#)).

This points out that husbands who love their wives will have *conscious goals* in their marriage. The purpose of the love of Christ for the church is the church's perfection. He said, as it were, "I will perfect my church. I will give myself for Her so that She may be cleansed, separated from the world, consecrated to God." Christ did that by His death on the cross and now does it by "His Spirit and Word" ([Ephesians 5:26](#)). The husband's goal for his wife will be her holiness, her purity, a close relationship to her God!

This is effected by the Word of God. Husbands, comfort and encourage your wives, by the Word; teach and instruct them, by the Word; call them to holiness, with the Word; guide and direct them, by the Word.

In that way, the husband is the spiritual leader in the home. Do husbands see to it that the Word of God is read in the home, regularly? Do they see to it that prayer is offered often? Do they ensure that their wife learns to pray? Do they pray with their wives?

Husbands, *this*, this beautifies your wife! This will make her appealing to you! This is the adornment that is of great price in the sight of God ([1 Peter 3:4](#)).

Husbands, how do we fare? Is our love a selfless love, an understanding love, a gentle love? Is our goal a holy wife, nurtured up in the knowledge of God and comfort of Jesus Christ? When we measure ourselves up to the standard of Christ, we are weak, poor, husbands. Yet that is the standard. "Love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it ([Ephesians 5:25](#)). Can you do anything but confess, "God, I am a sinful husband: be merciful to me"?

The possibility of being a good husband is only through faith in Jesus Christ. Looking to Christ, the husband of the Church, and trusting in His work on the cross, is our salvation for all our failures as husbands, for all our miserable dealings with our wives.

6. Wives, Be Subject To Your Husbands

[\(Ephesians 5:22-24, 33b\)](#)

If we were tempted to change the message of the Bible at any point today because of the change of the cultural norms and standards, it would be the message that stands at the head of this paper. The National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) does not rally for husbands to stop loving their wives. The women's movement challenges the Bible's calling for the women to be subject to their husbands. Culture says, "Women are equal" or "Women need not submit to their husbands" or "Women have the same responsibilities." So culture says, "Let us change the message of the Bible." The Churches are falling like dominoes.

God's Word says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" ([Ephesians 5:22,23](#)).

Here, like nowhere else, the message of God's Word is under attack. Committees for women are appearing at astounding rates, and every biblical rule is reduced to a cultural or social oddity. "But the word of our God shall stand forever" ([Isaiah 40:8](#); see also [Psalm 119:89, 160](#)). God's Word is not dated. The culture of the day did not rule the Bible's teaching. Apostle Paul was not a chauvinistic bachelor. His writing in Ephesians, as all the rest of the Bible's teaching, were written under the reliable guidance of God's Spirit. They are based on both the creation of the human race and the salvation of the church. "For Eve was not created first" Paul says in the first letter to Timothy, "but the man" (2:13). That's creation. "As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands . . ." ([Ephesians 5:24](#)). That's salvation. God's Word comes in every age to the wives, "Be subject to your husband."

Sometimes we misinterpret this, with disastrous results. Some suppose that when a wife subjects herself to her husband, she becomes a nothing, to be treated as a servant. She may never open her mouth, never offer a suggestion, much less ever question or criticize her husband's behavior. This may be the Eastern or Muslim culture, but it surely is not the Biblical picture. Christ certainly does not treat us in this way. Yet some Christian husbands treat their wives as though this were the case. If they do, it only shows their insecurity, their own failure to love their wives. We should read what [Proverbs 31](#) says about a godly, virtuous woman.

Generally, submission is an attitude of heart and walk of life. Submitting, we put ourselves under the authority and rule of another. It may be children to parents, citizens to government, employees to employers, or wives to husbands.

When the book of Ephesians teaches the woman's submission, it does that by comparing it to the Church's relation to Jesus Christ. In doing that, it points out several characteristics of submission that help us to identify is as true:

It is COMPLETE. There is no area in which the Church is not subject to Jesus Christ. It's not true that the Church says, "In matters of doctrine we will submit to Jesus, but in matters of practice, we will do our own thing." It's not true that the Church may say, "At certain times we

will submit to Jesus, but at other times, we are free." In all things and always She is subject to Christ. So, for the wife to say, "I will submit to my husband when he is here, but not when he is gone," or, "I will be subject as long as he gives me what I want, as long as he is nice to me," is to disobey Jesus. He said, "So let the wives be (subject) to their own husbands in everything" ([Ephesians 5:24](#)).

That raises a problem, though, when the husband is not only mean, but tells the wife to do something that Jesus forbids. What then? The Bible does not say, "Obey in everything." It says, "Be subject in everything." With the same reverent attitude that we would have if we would have to disobey a king, she would say, "I cannot obey you in this matter." Submission does not always necessarily require obedience, but does require a calm, prayerful spirit. That points out that submission is:

FROM THE HEART. Throughout the Bible, God calls His people to give Him their heart. He did not and does not want outward worship only. He requires inward worship. "Rend your heart, and not your garments" was the cry of the prophets. Filled with God's grace, the Church obeys the Lord from the heart, with a love for Christ, from a heart pulsating with a feeling for His Lordship. This is the behavior of the godly wife to her husband. It is not just outward, as some make it. But, as Peter says it in his letter, "let it be that hidden man of the heart" ([1 Peter 3:4](#)). So the only marriage that will have this is a marriage where the husband and wife have had "heart transplants" by the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Submission is VOLUNTARY. The Church is not subject to Christ because She is forced against Her will, but is such because of the wonderful grace of Jesus to change Her from a rebel to a beautiful Wife (see [Psalm 110:3](#)). So the wife does not submit only because she must, but willingly. Why? Because:

Submission also PROCEEDS FROM LOVE. Does the church love Christ? Of course! And out of that love comes the Church's submission that is willing, voluntary, from the heart, and complete. God calls women to love their husbands ([Titus 2:4](#)). Out of that love flows a beautiful subjection.

The main objection to this teaching is that it degrades the honor of the woman, makes them "nothings." To this, we respond with a friendly question: "Was it degrading for His honor when Jesus subjected Himself to His parents ([Luke 2:51](#))?" Jesus was God Himself Who willingly put Himself under two of His lowly creatures. This in no way degraded His honor or made Him inferior. If Jesus could submit without giving up a speck of His dignity, so can wives. We may also ask, "Does the Church lose Her dignity when He submits to Christ? Does it detract from Her beauty, Her honor, Her 'churchness' to give Herself wholly to Him?" Of course not. Indeed, is it not exactly this that makes the Church a beautiful Bride? It is! It's a beautiful woman who places herself under the authority of her husband: willingly and from the heart.

Then the Church is subject to Christ, there is also freedom. There is unspeakable bliss for Her. Although the world cannot understand this, this is the freedom, this is the joy, this is the bliss of the Christian wife!

As with the calling of husbands to sacrifice themselves for their wives in love, this calling for the wives is so difficult. Really, it is impossible. The possibility for women to live as Christ calls them is only by the power of Christ's grace, which He gives richly to those who fear Him.

In Jesus Christ is deliverance from our natural rebellion. In His work is forgiveness for our failures in the past. For the present, in Christ there is power to overcome a sinful nature, to become the kind of wife God wills women to be. There is power in Christ. This exalts the Church and honors our great God.

7. Sex in Marriage

([Proverbs 5:15-19](#); [1 Corinthians 7:2-5](#))

There is a religious teaching about sex in marriage that says that the only purpose of sex in marriage is for procreation -- for bringing forth children -- and that all other uses of this gift of God are sinful and not to be practiced by the Christian. We take exception to this teaching. We oppose this teaching by the Bible. We believe that this teaching harms God's people to whom He has given a spouse. In this chapter, we would like to explain why.

For solid, Christian marriages, it is important to understand the Bible's teaching regarding sex; and not only regarding the Bible's prohibition of sex outside marriage, but the Bible's teaching on sex within marriage. The Bible has important and pointed instruction about this part of a husband's and wife's behavior.

Both the Old and the New Testaments have something to say about sex in marriage. In Proverbs, King Solomon instructs his son about sex. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul answers questions put to him by a young, serious-minded church, about problems in marriage -- questions about fornication, about marriage and divorce, about fathers giving away their daughters in marriage and, yes, questions about sex in marriage. God calls the church to teach her members about sex.

(This says something practical, by the way, to Christians today: If we have questions about any aspect of marriage, we should not go first to all kinds of books, but to God's Word, and to God's appointed servants who are given by God for help in these matters.)

The Apostle Paul gives instruction in [1 Corinthians 7](#) about sex in marriage, and points out that it is Necessary, Blessed, and God-Glorifying.

Sex in marriage is NECESSARY "to avoid fornication". This is a very realistic approach to sex and marriage. Realism is that we acknowledge the strong desire created in man and woman by God, a lesson the child of God forgets to his harm.

First, the apostle Paul says, "to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (verse 2). All by itself, this overthrows the teaching that sex in marriage is only for producing children. Second, Paul says, "it is better to marry than to burn" (verse 9). Paul is not teaching that one will burn in hell (although if one gives in to his sexual urges outside marriage without repenting, he will). Paul means that it is better to marry than to burn in one's *lusts*. Marriage is the remedy for that.

Sex in marriage is also necessary because it is a "debt" one spouse owes to the other. [1 Corinthians 7:3](#) says, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." "Due benevolence" is God's careful way of referring to the sexual obligation of one spouse to the other. Christian husbands and Christian wives owe it to their spouse to give themselves to each other physically. Because this is *Jesus'* command, you owe

it to *Jesus* to give yourself to your spouse.

In the next verse, Paul explains how this can be called a debt. "The wife has not power (really 'authority') of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power ('authority') of his own body, but the wife." Husbands and wives have "authority" over their spouse's body. They "own" the other. This does not mean that the husband may say, "You have a debt to be paid." The Christian viewpoint in everything is different. Each spouse must ask, "What do I owe my spouse?"

If Christian couples do not live in this way, Satan will tempt them. This is the teaching of [1 Corinthians 7](#) in verse 5. When a husband does not give himself to his wife, or the wife to her husband, the devil grabs that opportunity to tempt the other, and lead them to be unfaithful. Then the fault belongs as much to the one who withheld himself as to the one who was unfaithful. Jesus confirms this when He said, in [Matthew 5](#), that the one who puts away his wife for unbiblical grounds, *causes* her to commit adultery.

Sex in marriage is not only necessary; it is BLESSED. We do not stop with saying that it is necessary, as though that's the only reason couples give themselves to each other. [Hebrews 13:4](#) says, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled." All by itself, sex in marriage is a blessed, sanctified gift of God.

Genesis 2:24 shows that sex is not the result of sin, but was blessed by God before the fall. "God blessed them and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." They had no shame, as verse 25 shows: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." For us, the grace of Jesus Christ restores us to the right attitude and the right use of this gift of God. The Song of Solomon is unashamed in its description of this gift (chapter 1:3). Or, read how a wise father describes the blessedness of married life in [Proverbs 5:15-19](#).

However, sex is blessed only when we keep in mind the *Christian* view of it. In the thinking of non-Christians, the marriage partner is only a tool for self-gratification. The Christian perspective is different, because it flows out of a Christian definition of love. The Christian does not ask, "How can my wife please me?" He asks, "How can I please my wife?" Not: "What does my husband owe me?" but: "What do I owe my husband?" This is the uniquely Christian perspective of love that *gives* instead of *takes*.

If this is the Christian perspective, then Christian parents ought to be ready and willing, yes, even jealous, to teach this to their children. Are parents concerned only to warn their children about the sin of misuse of this gift, but never to teach its good and blessed use in marriage? This is wrong and will result in warped thinking and undue distress in the children's marriages.

How and where should they be taught? Not in school. This subject is too sacred, too private, too important to be taught in public where the children are all herded into a room and the boys snicker behind their hands out of embarrassment. This is the parent's duty and privilege. If parents, instead, let television and the movie theater educate their children about this gift, it will ruin them for their future marriages. (This is one, main reason why the Protestant Reformed

Churches still call their members to avoid most television programming. It is obedience to God's calling to us to be holy and to "flee fornication" - [1 Corinthians 6](#).) In addition to the warnings, parents have a responsibility toward their children to teach them this part of good family life, too. Good parents want to do this. Good parents are not ashamed of this.

But sex isn't everything. It isn't the main thing. It's the icing of the cake, if we may put it that way. Young people (and married adults) ought to be reminded of that, too. A cake with only frosting is no cake at all.

The main thing is the spiritual union between the husband and wife -- their love for God, their love for each other in Christ, their commitment to good, solid family life under Jesus Christ. This must be worked on -- by prayer, by family worship, by good fellowship with other Christians, by dealing carefully with sin and sin's influence in our lives.

Because the spiritual union can be severed by the physical, married couples ought to be counseled to have a Bible by their bedside opened to the Song of Solomon, for bed-time devotions. We must be so spiritually minded, that when we think of marriage we think of Christ and the church; for our love for our spouse -- our physical love -- reflects our passionate love for Jesus Christ and His powerful, saving love for us.

Remembering this, sex in marriage will be sanctified, truly pleasurable, and GOD-GLORIFYING.

8. Children: Heritage of the Lord

[\(Psalm 127:3-5\)](#)

There has never been a more evil attack on the family than the attack being launched on the family's children. It is not the *training* of the children, although that is a problem, too, but the *birth* and *place* of children in the family that are under attack. How are we to view children? Are they only a nuisance? A blessing? A curse? Increasingly, there is pressure on couples not to have children, or at least as few as possible. There are so many means not to have children - - means that the devil uses to prevent the church's children from being born - - that it makes one's head swim. What should Christians think about this? What should our attitude be towards having children? Who, really, are our children?

When the Bible praises children, it does not mean to say that children are essential in marriage. There are some who so emphasize children that they over-emphasize them. This view harms those in the church from whom God has withheld children. Apart from children, marriage is blessed, a reflection of the relation between Christ and His Church.

Even so, we must understand that children are the heritage of the Lord, the gift of the covenant God to His Church. Implied in [Psalm 127](#) and 128, and in the rest of the Bible, is that God calls His people to bring forth children. These Psalms express that children - many children - are a blessing. Yet many are tempted not to bring forth children. That is not difficult to see. Even though far fewer infants die in our age, there are less children per family today than in the history of the world.

Why? Unbelievable pressures are being put on parents not to bear children. Socially, there are pressures. Children "tie a mother down", "interfere with a career", and "hinder fulfillment". Today in the grocery store, a mother with a few children in tow is not complimented, but criticized. Planned parenthood advertises and lobbies until it becomes a way of thinking that one or two children is ideal. "The fewer children, the better reared" is a philosophy the Chinese are reaping the bitter fruit of. Now we Americans are told the philosophy is true.

There are pressures from the government to limit the size of our families for world population control. Regularly Ann Landers reports the urgency of control.

Probably the greatest pressure God's people face is financial. Although our generation is better off than any other, this pressure is more real today than ever before - - in part, because our standard of living is so high. In addition, the high cost of Christian school tuition for Christians seems to skyrocket. The conclusion is, "We'll not have children", or, "We'll have one or two".

Christians must be careful not to be swayed by man's reasoning, which is purely self-centered. "What do I want? What's good for me?" Man's reasoning does not bring blessing.

For us, God's Word is decisive. The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian perspective is seen vividly here. For unbelievers, the question begins and ends with *self*. For

Christians, the question begins and ends with God. Our marriages and families exist not for our sakes, but for God's. We may not answer the hard questions about marriage (and the question of children is a hard question!) by considering how we feel at the moment, or by how much pressure the world puts on to conform to their standards. We look to God's Word.

God's Word says, "Bear children." "Be fruitful and multiply" ([Genesis 1:28](#)) is God's powerful Word of blessing that gave Adam and Eve the gift of sex, and is the command to bring forth children by it. This was God's will "from the beginning". The New Testament carries on the same thinking. [1 Timothy 2:15](#) says that after the fall, the normal path on which women find their salvation is the path of childbearing. Theirs is not the calling to take leadership positions in the church, but to serve the church in rearing the church's children at home. [1 Timothy 5:14](#) makes plain that God's will for younger women is that they "marry, bear children, guide the house, (and, in that way, BG), give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."

We bear children, not only because we love children, but because God calls His people: "Bring forth my children." The couple that marries and says, "We don't want children," is a couple that lives in disobedience to God's will.

God motivates His people to obey this command by showing us that children are a blessing. Some consider children only nuisance, misery, and grief. They even appeal to [Genesis 3:16](#). However, God's Word says children are a blessing. [Genesis 3:16](#) does not teach that children are a curse, but that bringing them forth is chastisement for godly women: as a result of the fall, the pain of childbearing increased and (possibly) the frequency increased. The chastisement is not children, but the sorrows connected with childbearing. Besides, the entire Old Testament contradicts the teaching that children are a curse. [Psalm 127](#) says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. . . . Happy is the man whose quiver is full of them."

Children are a blessing. Many children are a blessing. Every child is a blessing to believing parents. (This is certainly not to say that every child will be a Christian, but every child is a gift, a blessing of God.) The 8th child is a blessing. The deformed child is a blessing. The difficult child is a blessing. A burden? No doubt! Difficult? Oh, yes. Humanly impossible? Certainly! But a blessing of God, nevertheless.

Why are they a blessing? Again, not because they are all elect. This would be the height of presumption, to say nothing about contradicting [Romans 9](#). But God is normally pleased to gather His children from the children of believing parents. This is why [Psalm 127](#) says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward".

In addition, children are a blessing in that they are weapons in the armory of God to protect the spiritual heritage of the Christian family of faith. "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth." Reared to become straight arrows, they are shot out into the battle of faith, fit to do war with the enemy. Pray for this kind of children, who also sit and "speak with the enemies in the gate," giving account of their faith and the glory of their God.

Is it any wonder the devil hates the church's children (see [Revelation 12](#)) and is such an advocate of birth control? If he cannot prevent their conception, he will destroy them before they see the light of day. The devil knows that children, many children, are the strength of the church.

Even when the child is a rebellious child, the mercies of God transform that distressing, heart-rending trouble, to our benefit. That hard reality drives us to depend on the undeserved grace of God and not on ourselves as the source of all our salvation, and brings us to our knees to find comfort from the only source of comfort: our Savior God. When we come to Him in faith, He shows Himself to be a God of comfort.

Understanding this, the couple asking about birth control will be guided by these principles: (1) Children are a blessing of God: [Psalm 127, 128](#), etc. (2) Many children are a blessing of God: [Psalm 127:5](#). (3) Women are saved through childbearing: [1 Timothy 5:14](#). So, keeping in mind the spiritual, physical, and emotional capabilities of the husband and wife, they will have as many children as they can. Then their quiver will be full.

Many years ago in the Old Testament, children were slaughtered by their parents, sacrificed to Moloch to worship that idol. We shudder to think of it. Today, children are sacrificed to the idol-god "money" or the idol-god "time" or the idol-god "vacation" or the idol-god "career" or "fulfillment" or whatever his name may be. Let God's people hear His warning about these cruel idol-gods.

All this is not to say that there are not many sorrows in motherhood. There is the physical toil and pain of giving birth. There is the physical and psychological burden of rearing them. The sorrow is great according to [Genesis 3:16](#). In a certain sense, the mother gives her life away for her children. God does not take away the burden.

What is the solution? Where is the joy that [Psalm 127](#) speaks of? Is it to take off the yoke, unshoulder the burden? Or is it to seek grace for help in this time of need as Christian parents have done for 600 years? There it is! Faced with the sorrows, we are pointed by Scripture to the grace of Jesus Christ to bear the burden and perform the labor. Jesus Christ is a sympathetic High Priest whose own large family qualifies Him to understand.

Parents, be encouraged. God is pleased to build His church from our children. This is the joy that swallows up the sorrows, makes the pain and toils worthwhile. Children are "an heritage of the LORD."

9. Parental Love

([Hebrews 12:6-11](#))

If children are "God's heritage," how does God want them raised, so that when they are old, they will not depart from His way? This is a question that burdens the heart of every godly parent and sometimes causes pious mothers to wring their hands in fear. "Am I really doing this right? Or am I going about it all wrong?" This is an important question because we understand the significance of God's covenant with believers and their children. Children are the "heritage of Jehovah."

The answer, though profound, is very simple. Christians raise their children as God, their Father, raises His children. If parents who desire to raise their children properly would only remember that, we would not be in a panic, thinking that if we do not read every "how to" book on the market, we will not be good parents. Parents, let us love our children as God loves us!

The whole Bible points to God's Fatherhood as the rule of our behavior towards our children. Just think of the Lord's Prayer that has us praying, "Our Father. . ." and of Jesus' teaching in Matthew that says, "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

Of all the virtues God shows to His children, love underlies them all. There are other virtues that characterize God's behavior towards us: pity and compassion, dealing with a firm hand, wisdom, justice, and more. Love is basic to them all. Love is the heart of the relationship between God and His natural Son, Jesus Christ. In love, God begot Him and now lives with Him in the blessed life of the Godhead, in God's "bosom." God refers to His Son as "my beloved Son."

This power of love is behind all God's behavior towards His adopted children (us). When Moses explains to Israel in [Deuteronomy 7](#) why God chose and saved them, the ultimate reason is, "because Jehovah loved you." The real comfort for the child of God is that he is persuaded that nothing can separate him from the love of God ([Romans 8](#)).

Now, regarding our children, this must be the essential element in our relationship towards them. This is not to say that other virtues are not important. This is to say that love is essential.

In [Hebrews 12](#) (please read this), where comfort is brought to the suffering church whose hands hang down and knees are weak, and the comparison is made between God's Fatherhood and ours, the apostle wants the people to be assured of God's love for them. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. . . ."

It is not natural for parents to love their children. Yes, there is a "natural" love, a certain affection that all parents have toward their children, seen in what they will sometimes do for their children. But a parent does not have naturally the true love that is a reflection of God's love for His children. Especially when children are showing their "bad side," parents do not love their children naturally.

Love for children is a gift from God! God puts the necessary love in the hearts of parents, gives the astounding ability to reflect the love that He has for us and to live by the power of that love. God gives that love through *His Word*. When the Word of God calls parents, "Love your children," God creates the power of that love in their hearts as really as His Word worked to create the worlds and as really as Jesus' Word recreated life in dead Lazarus. Also, God gives love through *prayer*. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." God wants parents to ask for the ability they need to be good parents. Last, God gives love to mothers through the *teaching* of the older women. [Titus 2:4](#) teaches that the older women have as their duty in the church to teach the younger women to "love their husbands and to love their children." Indeed, this is a gift, but a gift that is learned.

Part of a parent's love is that they tell their children of their love for them. Imagine, once, a God in heaven Who loves His children, but fails to tell them He loves them! Impossible! How often do parents, in this fast-paced life, tell (and show) their children how they love them? Failure here destroys them psychologically and spiritually. If God rarely told His children that He loved them, they would be spiritual wrecks, "basket cases," finding life not worth living. This is the distress of those whose sin bring them away from God and the testimony of the Spirit that they are the children of God. One of the beautiful songs from [Psalm 63](#) has us sing, "the lovingkindness of my God is more than life to me. . ." What must we think of parents who fail to tell their children of their love? All other things being equal, they have no sense of security and no knowledge of God's love. Really (except by God's grace) they will come to psychological and spiritual ruin.

The goal of parent's love for their children is the children's obedience and holy life. The ultimate goal of parents is not that their children are successful, wealthy, popular. Their goal is that their children be holy: holy in school, holy in work, and chaste in their behavior with friends. Without holiness, "no man shall see the Lord" (see [Hebrews 12:10, 14](#)). Children need this holiness, because they are sinners. "Conceived and born in sin" ([Psalm 51](#)), every child needs holiness from God.

Parents teach their children this holiness. They teach them the commandments: teach them to worship only God, to use His name reverently, to remember the Sabbath day, and the rest. They teach them these commandments, not to keep them out of trouble, nor so they can earn their salvation, but to show thankfulness to God for His covenant with them.

Failing in holiness, as children do, they are led to the cross of Jesus where they find forgiveness for their sins, as well as power to change. Repentance and faith! This is the heart of holy living for children, too. Let every parent have this mind in them: I want my children to know Jesus as I know Him, to find holiness in the cross where I find it.

For this, parents must be holy. They cannot teach their children holiness if their own life is unholy; the virtues of the ninth commandment if their tongue always wags; or the good way of chastity if they entertain themselves with immorality on TV or elsewhere. This is not to say that their life must be perfect, but that it, too, must be a life of repentance and faith, seeking strength in the cross for holiness of walk. "Be ye holy," God says to His children, "for I am holy."

For this, also discipline is necessary. A love that is lax is not the love of God. Proverbs says that a man that withholds discipline hates his children. Don't be an "Eli father" who rebukes and rebukes and rebukes, but never follows up on that rebuke. Children are ruined by this kind of parenting.

Let this discipline begin early. Let it be administered out of love ([Hebrews 12:10](#)). Let it be done with understanding, realizing their weaknesses and struggles ("As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" [Psalm 103:13](#)). Let it be done with a readiness to forgive, even as God forgives us ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). Let it be mixed with praise, for God praises His children, speaking well of them when they do well. (For a longer treatment of discipline, write or call us for a booklet by Rev. Steven Key, entitled, "The Rod and Reproof: The Loving Discipline of Covenant Children".)

What a great goal we have - - nothing less than the behavior of God Himself! Is that our goal, parents - "I am going to model my parenting after God's behavior towards us"? Is this my prayer each morning as I wake, "Lord, God, my Father, I want to behave myself towards my children even as Thou dost behave towards me"?

What sinners we parents are! We are not able to think very highly of ourselves when we understand what a perfect model we have in God. How miserably we fail in our love for them, in our desire for their holiness for God's sake. How we fail in our discipline of them - - inconsistent, unfair, poorly motivated. Where was the patience? Where the praise? Where the forgiveness? Where was God?

What a mighty Savior parents need! What a great God we have to deliver us from our self-willed discipline, from impatience, from failure to spend time. . . . What a mighty Savior we parents have in our great God, through His Son Jesus Christ.

When we pray to Him, asking strength to be godly parents and modeling our lives after Him, every pious mother and every godly father can be assured: I am doing it right. God will use it to save His children among ours.

10. Honor Required of Children

([Eph 6:1-3](#); [Deut 21:18ff](#))

Foundations are shaking here, too; but not only because children are being disobedient to their parents. This is true, too. Children seem to disobey everyone in authority, teachers as well as parents. Since the beginning of time, rebellious and disobedient children have been a problem. What is new in the 80's and 90's is the startling blatancy, openness, and popularity of that disobedience. Not only are children rebelling, as always, but they are open and defiant in their disobedience. To top it off, the media make entertainment of it for you. Here, too, foundations are shaking. God calls children to honor their parents.

Honoring parents is not the same as loving them, or even the same as obeying them. Some children who obey their parents, who say they love their parents, do not honor them. To honor is to show reverence, respect, and godly fear. Already here it is wonderful to see that the relationship of children to parents is patterned after the relationship of us to our heavenly Father. When we are called to honor God, we reverence, respect, and fear Him. We are not afraid of God, but reverence Him. Likewise, if any children are afraid of their parents, the parents would do well carefully to examine their behavior. Children respect their parents as we respect God.

Honoring parents *includes loving* them. This ought to be plain to children who know that the fifth commandment is part of the second table of the law. The heart of this second table is to love the neighbor. Since parents are the children's closest neighbor, obedience to the fifth commandment is loving the parents. This is not a natural love - - loving because the parents gave them birth and feed them. This is a spiritual love that comes from a heart that loves God.

Third, honoring parents *means submitting* to them. This is crucial. It's not enough that the children say, "I know that God put these parents over me; I love them; I honor them; I respect them in my heart." The children must submit to them. Here is where children have a difficult time. Suppose dad must rebuke his son. Son stands with his arms on his side, defiant while dad speaks. Even though son may obey dad, he shows that he is rebelling in his heart. This is not the way we behave towards our Father in heaven. Children who love their parents will submit, with an attitude that shows it.

Fourth, honor includes *obedience*. If the children honor their parents, they will obey them - - both of them. The 5th commandment says, "Honor thy father and thy mother." [Deuteronomy 21](#) speaks of a son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother. [Ephesians 6:1](#) says, "Children, obey your parents." It used to be that when pastors gave the warning about this part of the commandment that children needed to be exhorted to honor their mother. Nowadays the warning is in order that the children honor their father. From television programs to the Berenstain Bears, father is mocked as a bumbling oaf. But disrespect of father or mother is serious business. If children do not obey both parents, they really honor neither, for the parents are one.

As much as they do not like to hear it, the older children have a greater responsibility here than the younger children. It's not the case that the children can become looser in their honor of their parents when they become older; they must become more careful. Why? Because the younger brothers and sisters are watching and learning by example. Sometimes it is said that younger children show less honor to their parents because the parents become looser in their old age. That may be partly true. Is it not also the case that the younger children learn some disrespect from the older siblings?

Even though this puts uncomfortable pressure on the older children, they have an example, a powerful one, in their older brother, Jesus Christ. He obeyed the commands of God, honored His Father, submitted to His Father's will, all for the sake of His younger brothers and sisters. Nor was the will of God for Him any less difficult than our parent's will is for us. God's will for Jesus was that He become as a servant, that He suffer with all our sins on His shoulders, carry them to the cross, and allow Himself to be plunged into hell where He was abandoned by His Father. He honored and obeyed His Father's will.

Parents, encourage your children with that, especially when they are struggling with your will which is difficult for them. "I don't want to be mocked! I don't want to stay home when everyone else is having a good time. . . If I don't listen to the music you forbid, I will have no friends. . ." Then let them remember their older brother Jesus, Who didn't want to suffer the death of the cross, looked up against that terrible suffering, but said, "Not my will, but thine be done." By faith in that Jesus, they receive strength to submit to their parents' wills.

The requirement to honor applies to the children even when the parents are sinful. Here is where the comparison breaks down between God's Fatherhood of us and our parenting of our children. Our heavenly Father never flies off the handle, is never impatient, never shouts in anger or is partial. He's always kind, always fair, always wise, always level-headed. If we think that our children ought to submit to us easily, only consider the difficult time we have submitting to Him, a perfect Father! This ought to be a warning to us parents to be understanding with our children. If we have a hard time of it with our perfect heavenly Father, imagine the time our children have honoring us - - sinful, weak, parents! Yet our children must honor their parents, even when parents are sinful and unfair.

This does not mean that children must always *obey* their parents. If parents command the children to disobey God, the children must disobey them, using the same reasoning that Peter did with the rulers of Jerusalem who commanded him not to preach about Jesus: "We ought to obey God rather than man" ([Acts 5:29](#)). But children still must honor their parents, submitting to them always, just as Peter and the disciples still honored those in authority, submitting to them and not rebelling.

We parents must work our entire life teaching our children to honor us. We do this by being honorable ourselves - - by behaving honorably at home. Mother honors her husband in all things ([1 Peter 3:1-6](#)). Father loves his wife by caring for her in humility ([1 Peter 3:7](#)); by honoring those in authority over them, obeying the laws, respecting the president, police, judge, and employer ([1 Peter 2:13-18](#)).

Why must children honor their parents?

Not simply because God says so. This is part of the reason. God says, "Honor your parents". Children often do not like to hear this, but sometimes this must be the last word: "Obey because God says so." Paul brings this out in [Ephesians 6](#) when one of the reasons given for children to honor their parents is, "For this is right"! Indeed, this is the first reason given, but it is not the only reason.

Nor must they obey this commandment of God because they fear dad's punishment. Chastisement is a deterrent to disobedience, but it certainly is not the reason for obedience. And yet it's not infrequent that this is the reason given by children. Is it fear of punishment that drives us to obey God? God forbid!

Children honor their parents because they are thankful. Children of God honor and obey Him because they are thankful for their salvation. This is the beauty of the Reformed faith! I love God because He first loved me; therefore I honor Him! Children, honor your parents because you are thankful to God for everything He is for you.

Especially, they must honor their parents because their parents are over them in the place of God. The Reformed Heidelberg Catechism says, "since it pleases God to govern us by their hand". Parents are the "hand of God" upon the children.

These reasons show how serious dishonor is. First, dishonor shows that children are not thankful, do not love their parents. This is dreadful! More dreadful is that dishonor shows a failure to love God. For obedience to the second table of the law ("love you neighbor" is evidence of our obedience to the first table ("love God")).

May God forgive our children, lest His great judgments come upon them ([Deut. 21:18-21](#)). God grant grace to our children to fight against their sinful nature, to love their parents, to love God, "that it may be well with them, and that they may live long on the earth" ([Ephesians 6:3](#)), and eternally in heaven. May God grant it. For His glory.

11. God's Will Concerning Divorce

([Matt 5:31,32](#); [19: 3-8](#))

No married couple lives without experiencing friction of one kind or another in marriage. The cause of this is sin. Whether the problem is that the husband fails to live with his wife, giving himself to her; or whether the wife nags or rebels against her husband; or whether the problems are financial, sexual or child related - there are always problems. The common solution to the tough problems in marriage is that the husband or wife says, "We'll get a divorce and begin again." This is so common today that when someone, as we do here, would dare to raise a question about the propriety of divorce, the question is dismissed almost without a hearing.

We ask you to give consideration to what is written in this pamphlet. There is a wave of trouble passing over the church in the form of the breaking up of marriages. We grieve for those who know the pain of marital problems. We weep with the children who see their parents at enmity. May God's Word speak to every one of our troubles.

It's important that we guard ourselves, especially here, against the temptation to form our own opinions on the matter of divorce. It's a real danger because persons, families, and feelings are involved-often our own. As with every other question of our behavior we ask, "What is God's will in this matter?" This will help steer clear of the related temptation to say, "You aren't sympathetic to me in my troubles." If anyone is sympathetic to our troubles in marriage the Lord is, Whose will for marriage we follow.

In [Matt. 5:31,32](#), [Mark 10:2-12](#), [Luke 16:18](#), [Rom. 7:1-3](#), and [I Cor. 7:10](#), we have the New Testament Word of the Lord about divorce. That Word in these passages is: "NO DIVORCE." This is the same word Jehovah brought in the Old Testament: "For the LORD, the God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away," where *putting away* is divorce ([Mal. 2:16](#)).

The reason the Church must preach against divorce is that God hates it. However, God hates divorce because of His love for marriage. The Church must hate divorce, especially because She must love marriage.

God made marriage in the beginning as a *bond* between two parties. (Marriage is not a contract. That false notion is one reason for so many divorces these days.) Marriage is a bond made by God. [Matthew 19:5,6](#) says that husband and wife become "one flesh" and that they are "joined together." This is *Jesus'* teaching.

It makes sense that earthly marriage is a bond, because that is what the heavenly marriage is. The relation between Jesus and the Church is a bond, symbolized by earthly marriages. God's people are bound to Jesus! (See [Rom. 7:1-4](#) and [I Cor. 7:39](#)) This relation certainly is not a legal contract; it is a bond uniting us to Jesus as intimate friends. Now, as God did this binding, so He does the binding in our marriages, so that [Matt. 19](#) can say, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

In other words, the Bible says, "Since God made marriage, let not man break it"! It does not say, "Since divorce causes untold grief, don't divorce." It says, "What God joined together, let not man put asunder."

This seems to go against an Old Testament teaching about divorce in [Deut. 24:1-4](#). This passage should be read carefully, because this was the passage the Pharisees used in [Matt. 19](#) to criticize *Jesus* when He prohibited divorce. Three things ought to be said about [Deut. 24](#): First, Moses was not *approving* divorce, but simply *acknowledging* that many divorces were occurring. A careful reading of the passage shows this (see NKJV where a better translation is given than in the KJV). That's why Jesus said that "Moses suffered it." He did not approve it, but "put up with" it. Second, this was the *exception* in the Old Testament, certainly not the rule. From the beginning the word was "No divorce" (read carefully [Matt. 19:8](#) where Jesus said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so"). Third, about [Deut. 24](#), we need to see that this was *not the final say* about divorce. In light of Jesus' teaching in [Matt. 19:9](#), how anyone can appeal to [Deut. 24](#) to support divorce is amazing.

Jesus gives one exception to His prohibiting of divorce: the sexual uncleanness of one of the spouses. Note, there is *one* exception. The Pharisees asked Jesus if there might be many reasons for divorce: "for every cause?" Jesus said, "For one cause." Many today take the position of the Pharisees, so that if one would ask if divorce were permitted, the answer seems to be, "Of course, and for just about any reason."

Search the Bible through and you'll find one allowance for divorce: "except it be for fornication" ([Matt. 19:9](#)). If a man's wife is unfaithful to him (or a woman's husband to her) he may put away the unfaithful spouse, without coming under the judgment of God or the discipline of the church. Far better if these alienated partners seek reconciliation and forgiveness; but if this is not possible, Jesus says, to paraphrase Him here, "Divorce is permitted in this case."

This shows how serious fornication is! The world makes fun of this unfaithfulness, of "tomcatting," of running around. It's the stuff of television, magazine, and cartoons. The Bible sends a different message: "Adultery is so serious, it's the only ground for divorce." Adultery strikes at the very heart of marriage - - the intimate unity of a husband and wife - - spiritual, emotional, and physical.

For this reason, the church must call its members (and all who love God) to refrain from entertaining themselves with the sexual uncleanness on television and video and at the movie, in the magazine and book. In the name of Jesus we command them to be chaste in their dress, on the beach and elsewhere, calling them to "flee fornication!" ([I Corinthians 6:18](#)). We warn them from the Word of God: if they refuse to heed this call to flee fornication, even in their hearts ([Matthew 5:27,28](#)), their marriage stands in jeopardy!

The main word couples must hear (married and those looking forward to marriage) is this: "Jehovah hates divorce!"

Who does not grieve for and weep with the little children whose hearts are pierced with the terror of fighting and separating parents? Who knows better than they the agonizing results of failing to live in marriage as God commands? Pray for the children! Besides the care for the children, Jesus prohibits divorce because unbiblical divorce lures the divorced spouse to commit adultery by sex outside of marriage, or by remarrying (see [Matthew 5:32](#) and the next chapter, 12, "God's Will Concerning Remarriage"). What a misery all this causes those who live apart from God's will!

Obedience to God's command regarding marriage brings blessing and joy. This is not to say that obedience is not difficult! Every married person knows it is. Jesus never said that obedience to Him would be easy. Obedience does mean blessing and reward, in this life and in the future (see [Mark 10:28-30](#)).

To the young people, I say: be careful whom you marry. Marry only "in the Lord" ([I Corinthians 7:39](#)). When you marry, make a life-long commitment, "for richer for poorer. . .till death do us part." Nor may you forget Who stands as a witness when you make those vows. He doesn't forget.

To the married: when trouble comes, the way out is reconciliation. Pray for the grace and wisdom of God to reconcile. God brought you together. Perhaps you will say, "This was all a mistake." Remember, however, that God joined you together. What God joined together, we may not put asunder. Seek the elders or pastor for counsel. With the temptation, God will also make a way to escape ([I Corinthians 10:13](#)).

12. God's Will Concerning Remarriage

([1 Cor 7](#); [Matthew 19:9ff](#))

If divorce is a devastating problem for God's church, remarriage is as great. Divorce is an evil because of the sin it often leads to: remarriage, while one's original spouse still lives. With God's people of old, "with overwhelming grief I weep," because of this violation of God's law.

Has it come to such a pass, however, that divorce and remarriage are not considered evils? Is it so, that God's people have so wearied of the problem that they have given in? Has the church surrendered to the pressures to allow divorce for "every cause" and remarriage of any who have "confessed" their sin?

Here, more than ever, it is important not to allow our emotions guide us. There are very few who are not personally touched by these questions. For believers who have deep wounds and scars from the troubles of bad marriages, we pray that God's Word may heal, that Jesus Christ may be the Great Physician for them.

Study with me the Bible's teaching on *remarriage*.

The Bible teaches that there may be no remarriage unless one's spouse has died. This means physical death, as every person who has made the vows at marriage would admit is the meaning of the phrase, "till death do us part."

Some claim that two New Testament passages especially are grounds for remarriage after divorce, even when one's spouse is still living. [Matthew 19:9](#) and [1 Corinthians 7:15](#) both are interpreted to allow for remarriage of the "innocent party" - - the faithful or deserted spouse.

Apart from the interpretation of these texts, consider what has happened in the churches that have taken this view of these texts. All will admit that divorce is allowed not only on these two grounds - adultery and desertion - but for almost every cause. Desertion is taken to mean almost everything, from mental cruelty to being aloof. Remarriage is allowed not only for the "innocent party," but for anyone who has divorced. The floodgates have been opened, allowing to be swept away the blessed institution of marriage (to say nothing yet, about what happens to the children).

What does the Scripture say? In every other passage of Scripture, God makes it very plain that He does not allow remarriage. [Mark 10:11,12](#), [Luke 16:18](#), [Romans 7:1-3](#), and [1 Corinthians 7:39](#), all show plainly that God forbids marriage when one's original spouse is still living. If one appeals to [Deuteronomy 24](#) as grounds for remarriage, he must first read [Matthew 19](#) and hear what Jesus said about that kind of appeal. We explained [Deuteronomy 24](#) in our last paper.

[Matthew 19](#) is more important. Apart from the difficulty of judging who really is "innocent" in a divorce, [Matthew 19](#) does not allow for an innocent party to remarry. Four things make that clear:

FIRST, one must look carefully at the clause beginning with the word "except". See what the "except clause" refers to. The exception is to Jesus' prohibition of divorce, and not of remarriage. Jesus gives an exception that allows *divorce*; there is not an exception here that allows remarriage. Jesus could easily have said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, except it be for fornication. . ." Instead, He said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery." Notice *carefully* the placement of the "except" clause.

SECOND, it seems that Jesus referred to a woman who had not committed adultery here - an innocent party. About her Jesus says, "and whoso marries her which is put away doth commit adultery". If the man that marries the innocent woman commits adultery by marrying her, she certainly is committing adultery. That's plain.

THIRD, even though we might not think Jesus' teaching was very clear, His disciples did! It seems that everyone who uses this passage to support remarriage fails completely to deal with the following verses, 10-12. In these verses, Jesus' disciples privately and bitterly complained to their Teacher. They said, in effect, "Jesus, if your teaching is true, it would be better for a man not ever to marry." Why would the disciples make such a statement? If divorce were so easy, and remarriage allowable with a statement of confession of sin, why should the disciples have said that it would be better not ever to marry? There is no other explanation, except that they saw Jesus' hard, humanly impossible calling for some after they marry.

Jesus' own answer to the disciples shows that this explanation of the disciple's remarks is correct. Jesus answers the disciple's concern by teaching that there are three kinds of eunuchs (men or women who are not sexually active). Some are born with no sexual desire. Others are made eunuchs by men (it was common for slaves in a king's harem to be castrated). Others "have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it". What is Jesus saying? Very simply, some refrain from all sexual activity (remarriage) for the sake of obedience to Jesus Christ. If remarriage is permitted after divorce, Jesus would not have taught that some make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He also recognizes the extreme difficulty: "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." He is a Savior Who sympathizes with His people.

FOURTH, Jesus' apostles understood well what Jesus taught here. Paul, the chief among them, took the time to explain and apply Jesus' teaching about remarriage when he wrote [1 Corinthians 7](#). In verses 10 and 11 Paul makes a distinction between what the Lord commands and what he, Paul, commands. The difference is not between what is required by God and what is Paul's own opinion, but between that the Lord *Jesus* had explained in His earthly ministry and what Paul *adds* to that teaching by inspiration of the Spirit. In verse 10 Paul refers to something the *Lord Himself had commanded*. What was that? "Let not the wife depart from (divorce) her husband: but and if she depart (divorce), let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband". That's amazing! It is also powerful. Paul says that *Jesus* gave two options to a woman who had to leave her husband: (1) Remain unmarried; (2) Be reconciled. It would be the height of cruelty (to say nothing of wicked folly) for Paul to give only these *two* options to a divorced mother of children, if Jesus had given *another* option - remarry. Faithful to Jesus'

teaching in [Matthew 19](#), Paul does not give permission to remarry while one's spouse is living.

[I Corinthians 7:15](#) is often used to support remarriage while one's spouse still lives. Briefly, the explanation goes, if a man deserts his wife (or vice-versa) the wife is not "bound" any longer. Then, since verse 39 shows "not bound" means free to marry, this deserted spouse is free to marry. One sad aspect of this line of thought is that it is based on the NIV translation that carelessly translates two *different* Greek words with the *same* English word. Verse 15 speaks of being in bondage (slavery), and verse 39 speaks of being bound (tied firmly). Marriage *binds* a man to his wife for life; but a deserted spouse is not a *slave* (in bondage) to the dread of guilt, excommunication, etc. God calls us to peace. (For a lengthier explanation of this passage, please call or write us, and we will gladly send it to you.)

Why this strict teaching of Scripture? Because marriage is a bond made by God, to be broken only by Him. No legal contract that can be broken by the parties at their will and whim, marriage is God's bond ([I Corinthians 7:39](#)). Genesis 2 says, "They two shall be one flesh." No man can do that.

The question is, "Can anything but death break that bond?" The answer of some is, "Divorce". If that is the answer, there is no reason the *guilty* party may not remarry. Alas, this is the case in almost every church that began allowing divorce for only the "innocent party."

Those who remarry, while their original spouse still lives, are living in *continual* adultery. Repentance from that sin is to leave the new spouse and remain unmarried, or be reconciled to the original spouse ([I Corinthians 7:11](#)). Reconciliation must be prayed for, sought out, zealously, for God's sake and the children's.

Is this possible? Is it the case, as it is argued so persuasively, that "Jesus would never requires such hardship as that"? If so, Christianity has been transformed into a religion far different from what its founder taught it to be. Jesus said that the life of His disciples would be a cross - - losing life, giving up family members, perhaps even calling His people to hate father or mother. Jesus said that His followers must "count the cost" before they follow Him, lest they be mocked because they find they have not the will to continue ([Luke 14:25-33](#)). What Jesus says in [Matthew 10:34-39](#), [19:1-12](#), [Mark 10:28ff](#), and [Luke 12:49-53](#) is powerful opposition to the teaching that Jesus does not require of His people humanly impossible things.

Let God's people be motivated by this teaching to work on their marriages, warn their children, preach the truth about marriage, guard jealously God's institutions, and (especially!) pray for grace to walk in God's way, where they carry away His blessing. Be encouraged, God's people, by His Word to you in [Ephesians 3:20.21](#).

13. Family Worship

Were the disciples right when they told Jesus, "It would be better not to marry"? (See [Matt. 19:10](#).) The Word of God is strict concerning divorce and remarriage, forbidding remarriage while one's spouse still lives. Also, as we understand the difficulties attending marriage, should we avoid marriage, considering it hopeless to maintain a solid home and family?

There is one response to that which forms the backbone of a Christian home and family. How can a Christian family be maintained? By proper *family worship* of God. If a man and woman conduct family worship as the Bible teaches, they need not fear that their family will go the way of the majority of families and marriages.

I make bold to say that this is the anchor of family life. Or, to use our original metaphor, family worship brings the foundation of the family down to bedrock. No quake can shake loose the family that is built on the love and worship of God. With firm, joint commitment to family worship, we need not fear marriage.

In addition to the worship God calls His people to bring Him on the Lord's Day, there is a worship required of His people *daily*. [Deut. 11:18-21](#) speaks of a private worship of God, especially in homes, and particularly with children. Family worship is the tradition of God's church since the beginning. Noah's first act outside the ark (even though his family was the church at that point) was to erect an altar and worship God. Abraham, immediately after arriving in the promised land, built an altar. When Isaac fled famine and God appeared to him to promise to be with him, Isaac "built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord," with his family. Concerned with his family's welfare, Jacob commanded his "household and all that were with him to put away the strange gods" they had taken from the land of Uncle Laban ([Gen. 35](#)). In a marvelous, but little remembered passage, the book of Job (1:5) tells us that "continually" Job rose up early in the morning and sanctified his children, worshipping God with them. Besides, the Passover, the heart of Israel's worship, was really a family rite.

The New Testament's testimony is no different. [Acts 10](#) says that Cornelius was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house," and that with them he prayed to God always." Aquilla and Priscilla were useful in the ministry of the gospel insofar as they had been diligent in the study of the Word and worship of God. And how is it that Timothy, one of the brightest lights in the early New Testament church, was an able and faithful minister? Because his mother and grandmother had taught him to worship the Lord (see [II Tim. 1:5, 3:14, 15](#)).

Conscientious family worship remained a practice among the faithful down through the ages. Each day began and ended with prayer. All meals (and even baths) were preceded and followed by prayer because, as church father Tertullian said, "The heavenly before the earthly."

Luther's prayers and songs during family worship (conducted also for all the boarders in his home), bear witness to the faithful family worship of those who loved the Lord. Shortly after the Reformation, Presbyterians, seeing the great need to maintain family worship, wrote a "Directory for Family Worship." (For more information on this directory, please write us.)

By this article, we encourage God's people to restore the kind of family worship that has slipped from the grasp of most.

What does that include? Briefly, it includes the Word of God read, explained, sung, and prayed, with the family present and participating. "These my words ye shall lay up in your heart and in your soul . . ." ([Deut. 11:18](#)). Just as in public worship, so in private worship, God's Word, not man's, must rule.

Fathers are responsible to lead. Where there are marriages and children, father should begin by saying, "Let us worship our God." This does not mean that mother must be silent, for she often has insights into the Word and the needs of the children that the father does not have. But the father is head of the home. He makes sure worship is conducted. He is careful to study ahead of time the passage to be read, so that he can teach the family. He supervises, but also encourages the whole family to participate and be active with questions and comments. If fathers are absent, mothers take over. Those who live alone conduct their worship privately.

Let family worship be *frequent and regular*. This does not mean that the Word of God is not taught and does not rule throughout the day. It just means that formal family worship should be regular and often. Families today are busy, but are responsible before God to set aside some time each day to be together in worship (see [Psalm 55:17](#) and [Daniel 6:10](#)).

Family worship must be *diligent*. As the Word was to be bound on the hearts of believers in Israel (symbolically by binding the words on their hands, making frontlets on their foreheads, writing them on their door-posts), so the Word must be bound carefully upon our hearts in our worship. No quick reading of a few verses, hastily to pray and "get it over with," honors the Lord. This is hypocrisy. Our time with the Lord as compared to our time for ourselves - - what is it? Our diligence (or lack of it) in worship indicates who we are spiritually.

Read the Scriptures. I believe that there is a danger that "Devotionals" take over in family worship, so that one verse is read, followed by the reading of a comment on that verse by a minister who wrote the devotional. As profitable as devotionals may be, they should not replace reading of the Scripture systematically and carefully. Besides, devotionals, used for family worship, make the father spiritually lazy; he has little need to teach and explain the Word to the family. That's fundamental. The family needs the Word applied to their own specific, immediate needs.

Explain the Scriptures. God did not command parents to "read the commandments," but to "teach them (to) your children, speaking of them. . ." Only the parents know the particular needs, the spiritual maturity, the troubles in the hearts of their children. God's Word is such that it speaks to our needs so wonderfully. During family worship, we see the struggles of God's people with their sins, witness their miraculous deliverance by God's grace, and observe their lives of gratitude. Everywhere, we find Christ. During the discussion of a particular passage, a Christian family grows together, spiritually. They learn how great their God really is, and together put their trust in Him.

Sing the Scriptures. What ever happened to family singing? God must be worshipped! Let us sing! Let us put to memory the Psalms, the sound Biblical hymns, and give praise to God with our voices every day! We forget that worship is not just "what can I learn from the Bible?" but "How can I worship God?" (Our word worship comes from the old word, *worth-ship*, meaning to acknowledge the great worth of our God!) It is worth notice that in the familiar New Testament passages that speak of singing ([Ephesians 5](#) and [Colossians 3](#)), the apostle is not primarily referring to worship in the church, but to private, family worship. "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. . ."

Then *let us pray.* Modeling our prayers after the one the Lord taught us, we pray for the sanctifying of God's name, the coming of His kingdom, the doing of His will, for our physical needs, for sin's forgiveness, for deliverance from evil. At each point, we carefully consider the needs of the family and God's church.

Here, the children learn to pray. Here, we pour out our hearts to the God Who has redeemed us from sin and death, confessing our present sinfulness, our future hopes, our needs that only God can meet, our utter dependence on the Lord our God.

When we honor God in our family worship, He honors and blesses us (see [Deuteronomy 11:21-25](#)). There is no other influence so great upon children than the home. The Lord will bless families who worship Him. Children will be brought to faith and godliness. God will be praised.