

The Christian Family

[Brian Schwertley](#)

Chapter 1: Biblical Communication

All relationships are established and developed by means of communication. Even God used verbal and then written communication to establish a relationship with His bride, the church. The church can only grow spiritually as it studies and implements God's word. When Christians do not read the Bible or pray, their relationship with Jehovah stagnates. They need divine revelation if they are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Communication and sanctification go hand in hand. "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). Similarly, the marriage relationship (which is a small picture of the church's relationship to Christ [Eph. 5:23ff]) is dependent on continuous biblical methods of communication for growth in grace, love, helpful companionship and godly dominion.

Why is biblical communication so important for a godly marriage? There are many reasons. (1) It is needed if there is going to be intimacy and cooperation in the marriage relationship. Christian marriage should be an edifying and pleasurable experience. "Can two walk together unless they are agreed" (Amos 3:3)? (2) It enables the husband and wife to work toward the same goals (i.e., raising a godly seed, mutual sanctification and building the kingdom of God). Communication is to be used daily to apply God's word to the family, thus helping each other become better servants of Christ. "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Pr. 27:17). (3) Christian marriage should be a godly witness and example to the world of Jesus' relationship to the church (Eph. 5:23ff) and the power of the Holy Spirit to radically transform people and families. All these things are dependent on biblical communication. (4) Most marital problems today are a direct result of a failure in this area. If a husband exercises biblical leadership in this area, then nasty quarrels and miscommunications will be extremely rare. As the leader the husband is responsible to set the tone of communication and direct discussions and disagreements so that unbiblical, unproductive arguments cannot develop.

Although the Scriptures require all believers to follow biblical methods of communication, it must be emphasized that the husband as the head of the household carries the primary responsibility in ensuring that these principles are followed. If there are problems in the home (including communication troubles) then the husband must take charge. He must take the initiative, search the Scriptures, seek godly counsel if necessary and put into practice a plan to solve the problem or problems.

Honesty

The first biblical principle for effective communication in the home is honesty. Communication must be truthful: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). Paul says that we are to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). John says that our love must be expressed "in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:18). "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:25). Lying is a

contradiction in a number of ways. It is a sin against God and brings His displeasure and chastisement. Lying destroys the trust between husband and wife.

Everyone knows someone who is a habitual liar. What happens when the liar does tell the truth? People do not trust such a person, even when he is telling the truth. A husband and wife are supposed to have the most intimate human relationship possible. But if one or both parties are lying, useful communication is clouded by doubt. Communication under such circumstances degenerates into pleasantries, small talk and saying what one thinks the other person wants to hear. The deep, intimate, searching communication necessary to a deep, intimate marriage are lost. The wife loses respect for her husband and the husband cannot depend on his wife as a biblical helpmeet when deception occurs in his speech.

Furthermore, lying hurts the feelings of the one who is lied to. Lying implicitly says, "You are unimportant. I cannot trust you to help me with this problem in my time of need." It implicitly says, "I don't want to be open and intimate with you. There are areas of my life that are off-limits to you."

"Deception is a serious barrier to communication. Lying obviously destroys credibility and violates trust. But more subtle means of obscuring the truth may also prevent effective communication. When we begin to play hide-and-seek in marriage, the most important context God provided for openness, we are in trouble. The marital game of deception is established on the false premise that 'What she [he] doesn't know, won't hurt her [him].'"¹

Christian marriage requires total honesty. If the husband and wife are working together for the same biblical goal of dominion, godly children and helpful companionship, then lying makes no sense. Lying implies separate goals and agendas. Often lying is a sign of deeper problems. It is often used to cover one's tracks. If a man is spending money illicitly (e.g., gambling, pornography, booze, etc.), and the wife asks where that fifty dollars went, the unrepentant husband lies to hide his sinful behavior from his wife. Under such circumstances a spouse should get help from a Christian friend and, if necessary, go to the elders of the church.

Openness

Effective communication in a marriage also requires openness. Communication must be honest. But there must also be a willingness to communicate. The best way to get to know one another and avoid misunderstandings is to have open communication. Christians are not mind readers. Husbands and wives should not have to guess what each other is thinking. Paul says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of a man which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11). The only way for us to reveal our thoughts to one another is to speak, to communicate. Although both the husband and wife are responsible to communicate and be open with each other, it is the husband's responsibility, as leader of the household, to ensure that the channels of communication are continually open. If necessary, the husband must take the initiative to ensure that a spirit of openness exists in the relationship. He should make sure that time is spent each day in one-on-one conversation with his wife. In order for this to occur, the husband may find it necessary to restrict the amount of television the family watches (while a certain amount of relaxation is necessary for one's health, the average American watches inordinate amounts of T.V. and watches the wrong kinds of T.V.). He may have to restrict the amount of time he

¹ R. C. Sproul, *The Intimate Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986 [1975]), 13.

spends with his friends. The husband, who comes home from work, sits in front of the T.V. every night for hours and then spends his weekends hunting and fishing with his buddies, certainly is not communicating effectively with his wife. He is not loving his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). The husband may find it necessary to restrict his wife's extra activities. The wife who spends several nights out a week with friends, playing bridge or even attending church activities, is not going to have the intimate, open communication that Christian marriage requires.

The husband and wife should work at open communication until it becomes a habit in the relationship. This will involve putting into place a number of simple principles. An important element in open communication is listening to each other carefully. This means paying attention—no daydreaming. Husbands and wives should not give the impression that what the other has to say is unimportant or stupid. It also means asking questions. If a spouse does not understand what has been said they should ask questions until the other's thought is fully understood. If one is married to a person who is very quiet and not naturally open, one should gently ask questions to stimulate conversation.

Another important element in open communication is the need to be clear and direct in one's speech. Husbands and wives must avoid being vague and indirect in communication. Beating around the bush and speaking ambiguously leave one open to misunderstandings and mis-directions. For example, a woman who is about to go to the hairdresser asks her husband how he would like her to have her hair styled. The husband would like it styled a certain way but says, "Have it done however you want, dear." If, when his wife returns from the hairdresser, he is disappointed, whose fault is it? It is his. The wife communicated effectively but the husband did not reveal his true thoughts. Spouses who do not reveal their thoughts on an issue because they do not think it is important (or are afraid to offend) create problems. Miscommunication can lead to anger, resentment and arguments over issues that really are inconsequential. When couples are not open and honest with each other, minor problems fester and develop into major blowups. Unresolved issues pile up in the marriage relationship until the problems seem unmanageable. Marriage counselors are constantly hearing husbands and wives say to their spouses: "Why didn't you tell me about that?" "Why didn't you tell me that bothered you?" "Why didn't you just ask me to do such and such?" The principle of open communication is so simple, yet it is commonly violated in our day. It is tragic that many marriages have failed over something so simple yet necessary. Husbands and wives should not be afraid to speak openly and clearly, as long as they do so in a gentle, loving manner. It's time to stop the guessing game, trying to read each other's minds, trying to read in between the lines. Marital communication should not be a puzzle or enigma; it should be open and clear.

With open communication husbands and wives will not only avoid misunderstandings and unnecessary arguments but will also get to know each other more and more as time progresses. The focus for couples in our pagan society has been on entertainment and sensuality. Couples are dancing, going to movies, partying and having a lot of sex. As a consequence, many American newlyweds know a lot about each other's anatomy but little about each other's mind. Couples need to study each other; getting to know each other is a top priority. "The television series *The Newlywed Game*, and other shows that match husbands' and wives' answers, seem funny, but really they are tragic. They reveal not the rare or unusual but the commonplace. They provide an ominous warning that couples simply do not know each other. People are not doing their homework."²

² Ibid., 16.

Biblical Speech

Husbands and wives must not only be honest and open, they must be honest and open in a biblical manner. A person can be open and honest, yet hurt others with his speech. Paul says, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). The Christian has a responsibility to speak in a way that promotes healing and leads to edification. What kind of speech is more biblical for the man whose wife is overweight: “You’re a fat, bloated pig. You look like a cow.” or “Honey, I’m concerned about your health; I think it would be a good idea for you to lose some weight.” The answer is obvious. “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (Pr. 12:18). “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” (Pr. 16:24). “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Pr. 25:11). The Apostle Paul had much more in mind than curse words when he said, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what as is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). “Paul is talking about words that tear people apart. Such speech consists of unkind words, words that cause and complicate problems rather than solve problems. These are words that cut and slice, the kinds of words that were natural to the former manner of life....Instead of using unwholesome, rotten, cutting words, a Christian must speak words that ‘edify’ (build up). They should be constructive rather than destructive words; they should build up instead of tear down....Wholesome words are those which are directed toward the problem that has arisen (literally, ‘the present need’) in order to help those who hear. If a brother has been doing something wrong he needs help. He doesn’t need tearing down, he needs building up.”³ When husbands and wives are honest, open and speak biblically, real communication occurs. The misunderstandings, irritations, sins and problems that occur in the marriage relationship are dealt with and eliminated daily, because couples are attacking problems—not each other.

Anger

One of the greatest hindrances to communication in the home is uncontrolled anger. The unwholesome words that Paul condemns are usually the result of anger. “Anger is a problem for every Christian: sinful anger probably is involved in 90 percent of all counseling problems.”⁴ Jay Adams describes the woman married to a man who cannot control his temper as living at the foot of an active volcano: one never knows when it’s going to blow. D. James Kennedy describes people with a short fuse as those who “may speak the truth, but they are about as loving as a bucketful of hydrochloric acid.” Uncontrolled anger destroys communication and problem solving in the marriage relationship. When couples attack each other, instead of the problem, the lines of edifying communication are severed.

³ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 228-29.

⁴ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 359.

Righteous vs. Unrighteous Anger

When dealing with anger in the marriage relationship one must keep in mind that anger in and of itself is not sinful. Jesus was angry with those who sold merchandise in the temple. He was also angry with the Pharisees. Yet He never committed sin. The Psalmist says, “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day” (Ps. 7:11, KJV). The Apostle Paul exhorts Christians to “be angry and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). Anger is a God-given emotion that is good if used biblically. It is sinful if it leads to unrighteous behavior or speech. It is also sinful if it is based on a false standard of righteousness.

One way of avoiding sinful anger in the marriage relationship is to make sure that you are not holding your spouse up to a false standard. One of the main reasons why Jesus was hated by the Jewish leaders in His day was because the Jews had a false interpretation of God’s law based on human tradition. When Jesus was the object of the Jews’ seething hatred because He healed a man on the Sabbath, He said: “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24). The obvious implication of His statement is that if the Jews truly understood the law of Moses they would not have been angry with His actions. Anger that is not based on a violation of God’s law is arbitrary and unjustified. Thus it is important that husbands and wives study and understand God’s Word, so that they are not guilty of unjustified anger. The husband who is angry with his wife because she is not a gourmet cook, has small breasts, or doesn’t like to play golf is guilty of unrighteous anger. The wife, who is angry with her husband because he is not wealthy, six foot four, or the smartest person in town, is guilty of unrighteous anger. God gave man the ability to become angry in order to motivate him to biblical action against sinful behavior. Anger based on self-law, covetousness and pride is sinful and must be repented of.

Avoid Pre-judging

Another form of unrighteous anger is that based on inadequate information. Often husbands and wives become angry at one another because of perceived wrongs that never even occurred. A spouse will judge his mate falsely because he lacks the necessary information to properly assess the situation. The Bible condemns this behavior as judging a matter before it is heard: “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (Pr. 18:13). The biblical injunction to be slow to anger has a two-fold application. First, a person must be slow to anger in order to control his temper: “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly” (Pr. 14:17). But there is also the element of taking the time to properly assess the situation. This involves being “quick to hear.” “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath” (Jas. 1:19). Husbands and wives need to be slow to speak and quick to hear in order to receive the information necessary to respond biblically to the situation. How many husbands have become angry, lost control and yelled at their wives over totally imaginary offenses? If your wife goes shopping and comes home an hour late for an important dinner engagement, don’t immediately blow your stack and start yelling at her. Remain calm and ask questions until you have the necessary information to ascertain what occurred. If she had a flat tire or got stuck in traffic, your anger is completely unjustified. Even if your wife is guilty of some offense, anger must be controlled and directed at the problem. “Do not go hastily to court; for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor has put you to shame?” (Pr. 25:8). “He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit” (Pr. 17:27).

Never render a judgment in your mind against your spouse unless you know all the facts regarding the situation. Do not assume you know what your spouse is thinking. Do not assume that you know your spouse's motives or opinions regarding a situation without first communicating and receiving the necessary information verbally. Do not pre-judge. Remain calm, ask questions and give your spouse the benefit of the doubt. "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). Remember, only God knows the heart. "For I know their works and their thoughts" (Isa. 66:18). We should never play God by assuming we know our spouse's thoughts.

Controlling Anger

Husbands and wives should never hold up their spouse to an arbitrary standard of righteousness. They should never pre-judge each other's actions or motives. But how should they deal with anger that is justified? What should you do when real sin occurs, and righteousness indignation follows? The Bible teaches that Christians must control their anger. The anger should be used to motivate you to right action. Instead of losing your temper and blowing up (or clamming up and giving your spouse the silent treatment), you should focus your attention on the problem. "Christians must learn to attack the problem at hand, not each other."⁵ If anger is controlled and directed at the sin (and the problems that arise from sin) then the sins will be acknowledged and confessed. This is followed by forgiveness and reconciliation.

Husbands and wives who do not control their anger end up attacking each other instead of the problem. Uncontrolled anger leads to strife, contentions and other serious problems in the marital relationship. The biblical portrayal of man who vents his anger is truly abysmal. The man who does not have control his anger does not have understanding (Pr. 12:17; 14:29). He is defenseless (Pr. 25:38). He doesn't have discretion (Pr. 19:11). He acts hastily. He stirs up strife and contentions (Pr. 30:33). He abounds in transgression and will inevitably suffer punishment (Pr.19:19). Uncontrolled anger is what turns minor disagreements into shouting matches (Pr. 17:14). It is not only the cause of serious verbal abuse but also the starting point for physical abuse and even murder. Uncontrolled anger is sinful and foolish because its purpose is not to heal and edify but to hurt. Raising one's voice, yelling, screaming, name-calling, hasty generalization, bringing up past sins and threats—all are used to hurt one's spouse. Christian marriage is not a debating society where husbands and wives win points by trying to win arguments, whatever the cost. Those who want to avoid a breakdown in communication, bitterness and resentment must control their anger.

The first step in controlling anger is to remain quiet and avoid the urge to blow up in order to consider a biblical response to the situation. People given to blowing up have often been told to remain quiet and count to 10 (or 20, if necessary). The husband or wife who is tempted to respond to anger in an unbiblical manner should memorize all the passages in Scripture that discuss controlling anger. (Even before all the passages are memorized, write them down on 3-by-5 cards for quick reference in time of need. When you are tempted to blow up, you should quietly meditate on appropriate passages of Scripture). The husband that is given to emotional outbursts should explain to his wife that he is learning to replace blowing up with dealing with the situation biblically; therefore, she should understand that he needs some time to meditate on Scripture in order to avoid a blowup. Likewise, the wife who is given to clamming up (i.e., the

⁵ *Competent to Counsel*, 230.

silent treatment) should also memorize the anger passages. She must learn that cutting off communication is not the way to solve problems and bring healing to the relationship. The first step should be faithfully practiced until remaining quiet and looking toward the Scriptures for solutions becomes a habit. The goal is rehabilitation. One must put off blowing up or clamming up and put on a quiet, well-reasoned, scriptural response to the situation.⁶

The second step is to direct the energy from one's anger toward solving the problem. When husbands and wives get angry, they often direct the anger at each other, instead of at the problem that causes the anger. The result is an argument in which the problem is ignored, while the husband and wife attack each other with bringing past sins, hasty generalizations (e.g., "You always," "You never," etc.), outright insults (e.g., "Yea, well you're a fat, bloated pig," etc.), and so on. Such argumentation is useless and counterproductive because it does not lead to growth in the marriage relationship. Instead of losing one's temper and trying to punish and hurt one's spouse, or attempting to win an argument that is going nowhere, the husband or wife should focus their attention on the problem. The unbiblical word or actions that led to the anger should be dealt with calmly, directly and biblically. For example, Bob asked his wife to run an important errand for him, but his wife decided that she had other things to do that were more pressing. Thus, she deliberately disobeyed her husband. Bob was very angry. Not only did his wife disobey him but she had a habit of disregarding his instructions when she believed more important things needed to be done. Bob's wife sinned against him, and he had every right to be angry, but instead of blowing his stack and yelling at his wife in an attempt to punish her and hurt her feelings, he responded biblically. He sat down and calmly explained why what she did was sinful; that she must obey her husband, and that she needs to repent and ask for forgiveness. Anger should not be used to attack one's spouse in order to punish and hurt. What is needed is to identify the sinful behavior and discuss what can be done to put it off in order to replace it with godly behavior. When a husband or wife does something to anger the other, the result should not be a fight but a discussion of which biblical principles apply, and what can be done to put off the sinful behavior in order to replace it with godly behavior.⁷ Attacking one's spouse is sinful and self-centered. Real love helps one's partner eliminate irritating sinful behavior and gives God the

⁶ *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 356. Those Christians who claim that they simply cannot control their anger should be reminded of the fact that virtually everyone (even rank heathen) has learned to restrain their outbursts under certain circumstances. It is indeed quite rare for married couples to engage in verbal assaults and shouting matches in public (e.g., the shopping mall, post office, restaurant, etc.). But people often "let it all hang out" in front of their families. When Christian couples control themselves in public yet refuse to control themselves in private they prove that their claim not to be able to control their anger is untrue. It is sinful and shameful that some Christians will act "civilized" in front of unbelievers and then act like raving idiots in front of their families. They lack self-control at home because they refuse to control themselves. They need to repent.

⁷ One of the greatest examples in the Bible of a person using biblical principles to defuse anger is the case of Abigail (1 Sam. 25). Her husband Nabal greatly angered David by refusing a just request and insulting David's house. David was so angry that he intended to kill Nabal and all his men (although he was justly angered, his planned response of committing murder was totally unjustified). What did Abigail do to appease David's wrath? First she went out to meet David—the situation required direct personal contact. Then she humbled herself in David's presence and admitted that he had been wronged. She agreed with him that Nabal was wrong. She did not make excuses or attempt to shift blame but confessed openly that David had been wronged. How could David disagree and argue with Abigail when she placed herself on his side? She spoke kindly and gently to David. She did not sweep David's unbiblical response to anger under the rug but gave glory to God for preventing him from taking sinful vengeance. She gave David and his men a gift ("A gift in secret pacifies anger," Pr. 21:14). Then she asked him for forgiveness and complimented him and his house. David was so amazed at Abigail's wisdom that he blessed God and Abigail. In this one chapter, practically every biblical technique for dealing with anger is demonstrated.

honor due Him. The husband is commanded to love his wife just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). He must do everything he can to help his wife be a better Christian. Hurtful arguments must be replaced with problem-directed communication that leads to mutual sanctification and reconciliation.

The third step involves a genuine confession and reconciliation. After discussing the problem, one party should admit guilt, make restitution if necessary, and apologize without making excuses or blame-shifting. The other party should accept the apology and promise to help in any way possible with the problem. Since all sin is ultimately against God, confession should also be made to Him. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). A common error committed during this third step is to engage in excuse making or blame-shifting: "I didn't get enough sleep last night." "Things are really tough at work and I'm under a lot of pressure." "The kids were getting on my nerves." "I really didn't mean it." "I was so hungry I couldn't help it." "If you didn't ask me to go to the store, I wouldn't have wrecked the car." These are destructive of a real confession because they imply that a person is not responsible for his bad behavior. If the individual is not really responsible, then there is no such thing as sin, only environmentally caused accidents. Making excuses and blame-shifting destroy real repentance because, if a person could not help himself then repentance is impossible. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Pr. 28:13).

While it may seem kind to accept an excuse and move on, in reality it hinders growth in the marriage relationship. When sins are swept under the rug, they are not dealt with properly. If your spouse is mingling excuses and blame-shifting with his confession, you must politely remind him that God does not accept excuses for sinful behavior. "Sin disrupts relationships. Sin never 'blows over.' If the mere passage of time could deal with the problem of sin, the Son of God died for no reason. Christian men must confess their sins to their wives. Christian women must confess their sins to their husbands."⁸ "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (Jas. 5:16).

After the problem is discussed and genuine confession takes place the husband or wife must be forgiven. Forgiving a repentant spouse is not optional; it is required by Jesus Christ: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Mt. 18:21-22). "But if you do not forgive, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11:26). Genuine forgiveness is crucial; for without it, reconciliation has not occurred. The problem is left unresolved. Paul says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph. 4:26). The Bible clearly teaches that husbands and wives must be reconciled the very same day that the problem occurred; it cannot be put off until the next day. True forgiveness must be extended to your spouse, even when the offense was great. If forgiveness is not extended, then all the preceding steps were in vain; reconciliation has not taken place.

When you forgive your spouse you must no longer hold the sin against him. That means you don't dwell on it, you don't hold a grudge. You don't bring it up again to your spouse or anyone else. When Christians develop the habit of constructive, problem-solving discussion, followed by confession and forgiveness, they nip more serious problems in the bud. They also grow spiritually, and have peace and joy in their relationship. "When a couple is in fellowship with one another, there is, in principle, no problem too great for them to work through together.

⁸ *Reforming Marriage*, 58-59.

It is therefore necessary to keep the marriage free of those sins which are a hindrance to fellowship.”⁹

Clamming Up

There can be no biblical discussion of anger without considering the spouse who clams up after becoming angry. While virtually everyone recognizes that blowing one’s stack is unacceptable behavior, many people do not recognize that clamming up (commonly referred to as the silent treatment) is also highly destructive of relationships. Clamming up (like blowing up) does not lead to constructive problem-solving; in fact, it is often used to punish one’s spouse. When a spouse locks his anger inside, he not only cuts off constructive communication but also harbors a reservoir of resentment against his spouse. When someone internalizes anger and refuses to deal with the problem that caused the anger, unresolved problems pile up. The unresolved problems and the bitterness and resentment they cause destroy fellowship and joy in the marriage relationship.

Serious marital problems are often the result of minor problems piling up. When problems multiply and bitterness increases, the husband and wife sometimes do not even know where to begin. It is not uncommon for biblical counselors to encounter couples who are fighting over unresolved issues that are six and more years old. The resentment from the unresolved problems has poisoned the relationship. Therefore, it is often necessary for couples that are having difficulties in the present to deal with unresolved problems from the past. This will include confession and forgiveness. “When sins are confessed, it is like picking something up that was dropped on the carpet. If a person learns to pick things up immediately, a thousand things can be dropped on the carpet, and the home will still remain clean. But if things are only picked up once every six months, the result will be an overwhelming house-cleaning job. To continue the illustration, some homes are so messed up that those responsible for cleaning simply do not know where to start. They do not necessarily like the way it is, but they are simply overwhelmed. But such things always accumulate one at a time. If they had been picked up as fast as they had been dropped, then the home would have remained clean.”¹⁰

The Bible forbids holding anger within. The spouse who clams up must learn to direct the anger toward problem solving and reconciliation. Paul says, “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26-27). Paul warns Christians that if anger is not dealt with immediately and resolved biblically, then believers are giving the devil an opportunity.¹¹ How many people have done things in anger that they later

⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., 55.

¹¹ A biblical example of internalizing anger and giving the devil an opportunity is set forth in Gen. 4. “But for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why had your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.’” God had no regard for Cain’s offering, for God required a blood sacrifice. Cain became very angry. He internalized the anger and became depressed. Cain was angry at God and his brother. God who is rich in mercy went to Cain and spoke gently to him. He told Cain that the way to get out of his depression was to obey God and do the right thing. Cain gave God the silent treatment. God went to Cain and communicated in a kind way. Cain refused to listen and ignored God’s advice. The result was the murder of his brother, righteous Abel. It is interesting that often after an employee goes berserk and shoots several fellow-employees, his neighbors often say, “He was such a quiet, mild, friendly guy.” Yes, but only on the outside!

regretted? The spouse who has the habit of clamming up must put off the silent treatment and start communicating until the problem is resolved.

The spouse who is guilty of clamming up must be asked to speak. He or she must be gently reminded that problems can only be solved through biblical communication. He must be reminded that clamming up leads to other sinful activity (e.g., bitterness, hatred, etc.). If your spouse has become angry and clammed up, you should communicate in a calm and gentle way that you are aware of the anger, and that clamming up is an unbiblical way to respond to anger. Sit down with your spouse and ask a series of gentle questions to elicit communication. For example, “Honey, I know that you are angry and you are giving me the silent treatment. I want you to know that I love you, and that we cannot effectively deal with the problem until you are willing to communicate. God wants us to work on the problem together. Don’t you think that is a good idea?” “The wise in heart will be called prudent: and sweetness of the lips increases learning” (Pr. 16:21). Once the channel of communication is open, the problem can be dealt with. Then confession, forgiveness and reconciliation can follow.¹²

Avoid Useless Arguments

If you are married to someone who does not control his temper, there are biblical principles that you can use to avoid useless arguments. The worst thing a person can do is to respond to uncontrolled anger with uncontrolled anger of his own. This leads to an escalation of hostilities between both parties. Such arguments increase both in volume and in hurtful speech. C. H. Spurgeon says, “It is useless to try to end a quarrel by getting angry over it; it is much the same as pouring oil on a fire to quench it, and blowing coals with the bellows to put them out.” Anger-driven arguments have a tendency to spiral out of control. “The beginning of strife is like letting out water” (Pr.17:14). “One hot word...begets another, and that a third, and so on, till it proves like the cutting of a dam; when the water has got a little passage it does itself widen the breach, bears down all before it, and there is then no stopping it, no reducing it.”¹³ Therefore it is crucial to respond to uncontrolled anger biblically, before the dam breaks.

The biblical way to respond to uncontrolled anger is to give a soft answer. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Pr. 15:1). A gentle or soft answer refers to the sound level of an answer, as well as the content of an answer. “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Pr. 12:18). You must answer in such a way as to subdue the anger of your spouse. This means taking the time to answer carefully. Don’t blurt out the first thing that comes to mind but carefully reflect

¹² Another example of a soft answer turning away wrath is as follows: Bob and Nancy are having company over for dinner. The house needs to be vacuumed and groceries need to be brought. Bob promises Nancy that he will vacuum the floor while she does the shopping. After Nancy leaves, Bob remembers that an excellent college football game is in progress. He becomes glued to the tube and completely forgets his promise to vacuum the floor. When Nancy arrives she notices that the floor is not vacuumed and Bob is watching T.V. Nancy loses her temper and raising her voice says, “Thanks a lot, you lazy bum. You never help around the house.” If Bob was to respond in a loud, angry manner, a bad argument would follow. But Bob cuts an argument off at the pass with a soft, conciliatory answer. “I’m sorry, Dear, I’ll shut the T.V. off and do it right now.” Bob’s soft answer makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for an argument to develop. Because of Bob’s gentle, reasoned response, Nancy calms down, and they both communicate effectively. Bob’s promise-breaking and Nancy’s uncontrolled anger are confessed, and a full reconciliation occurs. Bob and Nancy avoid a nasty, prolonged argument; instead, they communicate, “make up” and have a nice dinner with their friends. “It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarreling” (Pr. 20:3, RSV). “Leave off contention, before it is meddled with” (Pr. 17:14).

¹³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, 3:889.

on a biblical response. “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil” (Pr. 15:28). One method of subduing wrath is to find a point of agreement (if possible) within your spouse’s accusation or verbal attack. If you agree with a point of accusation made by your husband or wife, it makes it very difficult for your spouse to continue the argument. For example: “Yes, Dear, you’re right; I should have removed that dead tree before it had a chance to fall on the car. Let’s sit down and discuss ways I can learn to not procrastinate in the future.” The point is not to sweep one’s spouse’s uncontrolled anger under the rug but rather subdue it, in order to facilitate genuine communication instead of a useless argument. Uncontrolled anger cannot be dealt with until problem-solving communication is restored.

There are times when a spouse becomes angry because of a genuine misunderstanding. Even if your spouse’s anger is not based on reality (e.g., he thought you said or did something, but in fact you did not), you must maintain control of your anger. It is easy to lose your temper or become defensive when the accusations made against you are false. Obviously, under such circumstances, you cannot confess and apologize for something you did not do. Instead of blowing up, clamming up or going on the defensive, in a calm manner make it clear that your spouse’s anger is misdirected. Tell your spouse the truth regarding the situation, but do so with a soft answer (one that diffuses anger and avoids an argument). For example, “I’m sorry, dear, that you misunderstood what I said regarding such and such. My real intent was....” Or “I’m sorry that I did not make myself clear regarding such and such; let me clarify that for you. There is no reason to be upset, dear.” You should not sweep uncontrolled anger under the carpet; couples must first control their anger before discussing any problems. If anger is not brought under control, a harmful, hurtful argument will follow.

Miscommunications and misunderstandings are inevitable in a marriage relationship; therefore, it is important that spouses learn to give each other the benefit of the doubt. “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue, keeps his soul from troubles” (Pr. 21:23). “Scoffers set a city aflame, but wise men turn away wrath” (Pr. 29:8). You must regard your spouse as more important than yourself (Phil. 2:3). You should give your spouse the benefit of the doubt and drop the issue, unless there has been clear pattern of deception in the past regarding the same issue. If an obvious pattern of deception has occurred, you may find it necessary to seek help from a third party (e.g., your pastor or an elder in your church).

There are Christians who are married to unbelievers and there are Christians who are married to professing Christians who act like unbelievers. What should a Christian do who is married to someone who doesn’t care what the Bible says about anger and hurtful speech? What should a husband or wife do whose spouse rejects a soft answer? What if you are married to someone who likes to argue? What if an argument seems unavoidable? No matter how obnoxious your spouse is, you must still exercise self-control and answer in a soft manner. It takes two to tango; it also takes two to maintain an argument. When you find yourself in a situation where your spouse tries to engage you in a hurtful argument, you must simply refuse to argue. Gently make it clear that you are unwilling to argue and engage in hurtful speech. For example, “Bob, I would like to discuss this issue with you, but if you insist on raising your voice and making insults, then I will not discuss the issue until you are willing to do so in a calm, biblical manner. We cannot solve the problem if we are attacking each other. Let’s sit down and work on the problem. God doesn’t want us to fight.” “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” (Pr. 16:24). If you refuse to quarrel because you are guilty of an offense, then you should confess your guilt, apologize, and ask for forgiveness.

Once you have sincerely confessed your guilt and asked for forgiveness, your spouse must forgive. Real forgiveness involves reconciliation not a tongue-lashing.

If you are married to an unbeliever, resolving conflicts becomes more difficult because your spouse may reject or even hate the Word God. Yet even in such difficult circumstances you are responsible to obey God. The key to winning over an unbelieving husband is not to nag him but to be a good Christian wife. “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Pet. 3:1-4). Although Peter is not specifically dealing with anger he does apply the same principles in order to win over one’s spouse. A soft answer is used to win over an angry spouse. A wife must be submissive, chaste in conduct, with a gentle and quiet spirit, to win over her unbelieving husband. The Proverbs deal with the circumstances of anger while Peter discusses a continuous lifestyle geared to win over an unbelieving husband. A meek and quiet wife pleases God. A loud, argumentative, intemperate wife will turn her husband away from the faith because she is a hypocrite. “Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman” (Pr. 21:19).

Developing Godly Habits

The purpose of replacing sinful and unwise habits of communication with biblical habits of communication is to glorify God and sanctify the marriage relationship. Greater intimacy, love and joy are just some of the benefits that will follow. One must keep in mind that sinful habits of communicating and dealing with anger have usually been practiced for many years; therefore, one must not expect instantaneous change in these areas. It will take time, effort and practice to replace years of habitual sin patterns with godly patterns of behavior. You must be patient and not give up. These changes are required by God; they are not suggestions. You must change your sinful behavior. “A Christian sins if he becomes a static, sedentary person who fears positive biblical change and frantically clings to the past, either in his personality growth, in his life decision, or in his manner of living. To resist sanctifying change is to resist and grieve the Holy Spirit. The scriptural doctrine of sanctification necessarily involves growth in holiness. Christians must change in order to become more like Christ. In principle it is true that believers have been declared perfect in Christ, but now they must grow more like Christ in practice. New truths discovered in the study of the Scriptures must become new practices woven into the fabric of one’s daily life.”¹⁴ You must continually study God’s Word, memorize Scripture and put into practice the principles you have learned, seeking God’s help in these areas. The goal is to develop and practice godly methods of communication to the point where obedience to God’s Word is second nature to you. Then when an opportunity arises to lose control of your temper you automatically obey God without even thinking about it.

¹⁴*Competent to Counsel*, 77.

Summary and Conclusion

How do unbiblical arguments usually develop? An argument begins with a disagreement or accusation regarding an event, behavior or plan. In an unbiblical argument the husband and wife engage in a verbal contest. Instead of attacking the problem objectively and dispassionately the husband and wife attack each other, make accusations and become defensive. The argument becomes heated and then the husband and wife begin blame-shifting, bringing up past offenses, name-calling and in extreme cases making threats (e.g., "I'm going to get a divorce."). This type of verbal sparring very quickly spirals out of control and soon husbands and wives are shouting and acting like idiots. Such arguments are often so heated and prolonged that when the shouting subsides the original problem is forgotten. Instead of dealing with the problem biblically, the husband and wife have buried it under a pile of excuses, blame-shifting, accusations, insults, etc. In a Christian home such arguments should never occur. If the husband is doing his job as the leader in communication, he will not allow unbiblical arguments to develop. Since it takes (at a minimum) two people to argue, the husband can nip arguments in the bud. If he can control himself, focus and direct the conversation in a biblical manner, arguments will not take place.

What should a Christian husband do to stop bad arguments from developing? First, if necessary the husband must turn down the heat. If the wife is upset, angry, defensive and in a quarrelsome mood, the husband must set the tone of communication by remaining calm and collected. He needs to respond to his wife with a soft, disarming, reasoned answer. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Pr. 15:1). "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Pr. 16:24). For example: "I'm sorry dear that my actions offended you, or I'm sorry that you think that, let's remain calm and work on the problem biblically." It may even be necessary for the husband to calmly and politely remind his wife that as the leader of the family he is responsible to keep communication biblical. For example: "I know you are very upset dear. But as the leader I cannot let this conversation develop into a useless unbiblical argument. Please calm down so that we can focus on the problem together. Remember we are a team. We are to direct our energies on improving our marriage for God's glory. Let's attack the problem instead of each other."

Second, the husband and wife must work together to solve the problem. Problem solving necessitates privacy; therefore, if necessary send the children outside, or upstairs, or to the basement. It is important that a husband not contradict his wife's decisions in front of the children (unless of course they are dangerous or clearly sinful). The husband must deal with his wife in a manner that does not make her look foolish or damage her authority in the presence of the children. Privacy is essential. Also, it is important that a husband does not treat his wife in a condescending way as if she were one of the children.

Problem solving will involve discussion, study and homework; therefore, get a pad and pencil, Bible, concordance, counseling materials and sit down at the kitchen table. Then after a prayer for illumination, guidance and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit begin to analyze the problem or problems. Remember the husband is to take the lead by setting the tone, asking questions, and offering solutions. Jay Adams offers some excellent ideas on replacing bad sinful behavior with good godly behavior. He writes, "There are at least seven separately definable elements involved in biblical change. These cannot be viewed merely as successive steps, since most of them must be introduced into the counseling process and pursued simultaneously. The elements are as follows:

1. Becoming aware of the practice (pattern) that must be dehabituated (put off);
2. Discovering the biblical alternative;
3. Structuring the whole situation for change;
4. Breaking links in the chain of sin;
5. Getting help from others;
6. Stressing the whole relationship to Christ;
7. Practicing the new pattern.”¹⁵

Third, the husband is responsible to make sure that solutions are put into practice so that the particular problem is not repeated in the future; or, at least when the problem does arise it is dealt with immediately and biblically. When there are deep-seated problems it is important that husbands make sure that appropriate Scripture verses are memorized; that fervent prayer for godly change takes place every day; that appropriate counseling materials are reviewed and learned; that sinful habits are replaced with godly habits. A husband who waits for his wife to admit the problem or tackle it before he takes charge is not leading and is responsible for the lack of progress in sanctification in the marital relationship. This author is aware of professing Christian couples that have made no progress in dealing with problems even after being married for over 25 years. This sad fact is the direct result of husbands who are unwilling to lead in communication and spiritual progress. God has promised believers victory over the power of sin in us by virtue of our union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:1-23). There is simply no good excuse for a lack of growth in holiness in the marital relationship.

But (someone may ask), what should a husband do if his wife refuses to submit to his authority or refuses to repent? If a wife obstinately refuses to obey her husband's authority and simply refuses to repent of sinful behavior (e.g., Sabbath desecration) then the husband must turn to the church for help. The husband must explain to his wife in a calm rational manner that her refusal to repent of sin will lead to the implementation of Matthew 18: 15-20. The husband needs to confront his wife a second time with a witness. The witness should be a mature believer who is wise and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. If the wife does not respond to godly counsel she must go before the session (the court of elders) to receive admonition. If repentance is not forthcoming, then such a woman must be excommunicated. Then if she (the rebellious, unrepentant, excommunicated wife) departs, the husband is free to get a divorce and remarry a Christian woman. It is very important that husbands deal with difficult problems within the context of the local church. The steps of discipline in Matthew 18:15-20, when done in a competent Reformed church, will insure that the husband is being biblical in his dealings with his wife. It will lead either to repentance or biblical justice.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 191.

¹⁶ In evangelical churches it is very common for couples to go into counseling for very long periods of time (a year or more) without any progress or resolution. The reasons for such lengthy periods of time with little or no progress are simple. First, many churches are using secular counseling methods (psychobabble) instead of a biblical based methodology. Second, the counselors in these churches refuse to demand repentance for sin. This point is related to their acceptance of secular psychology. In biblical counseling progress is usually very rapid. Because all problems are dealt with biblically, a lack of progress means that one or both parties are refusing to repent of their sin. If repentance is not forthcoming discipline must follow. When "evangelical" counselors do not identify and require repentance for specific sins then their counseling sessions degenerate into human advice on how to live in harmony with rebellion against God. One often hears counselees in such cases saying things like, "Oh well I guess my wife is never going to change. I will just have to learn how to cope with her as she is;" or, "The counselor has taught me how love my wife just as she is without forcing any expectations of what a good wife is upon her." This author has

Chapter 2: The Duties of the Husband

In present day America it is common for Christians to complain about the state of society. People complain about this country's evil, lying politicians and the arbitrary statist laws that continue to be made in Washington. Professing believers also complain about the state of the church: modernism, feminism, hedonism, pop-psychology, gimmicks, unbiblical pietism and syncretism, etc. Because society has degenerated rapidly since the 1960s, Christians have increasingly become involved in politics and social reform. While the desire to reform both church and state is necessary and commendable, it is unlikely that believers will make notable progress in these areas without first a Christian reconstruction of the family. After all, is it not family members (in particular the fathers and mothers) who vote these wicked politicians into office; and who repeatedly choose pastors in skirts who are theologically and homiletically incompetent and perverse? Although one must recognize the reciprocal relationship between the family and the church and thus the simultaneous need for the reformation of both, one must also recognize that parents (especially fathers-the covenant head of the family) control (from a human perspective) the future.

The husband is the head of the household and the household is the nursery of both the church and the state. Husbands and fathers have an incredible responsibility. If they are not good leaders and are weak, irresponsible and incompetent then the family, church and state will suffer the consequences. As we examine the biblical teaching regarding the duties of husbands we will note that husbands are responsible to lead their wives and children. This leadership, however, is to be modeled after Christ's loving, humble leadership of the church. As Paul says in Ephesians 5:22-33, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

In order to understand the leadership responsibilities of the husband one must examine three main categories: the responsibility of leadership, the biblical methodology of leadership, and the areas of leadership.

The Responsibility of Leadership

Before one examines how husbands are to lead, one first must examine the biblical reasons for the covenant headship of the husband. The biblical evidence for the leadership of

heard such comments from effeminate husbands who are married to women who refuse to submit, lie, break the Sabbath, commit adultery, etc.

husbands over their wives and children is so clear and abundant that conservative Christians may consider this point as too obvious to merit attention. The fact that this point is now almost universally rejected by secular humanists, modernists, neo-evangelicals (and some deluded feminists within Reformed denominations), informs us that this teaching can never be neglected or taken for granted. Thus one must examine the many ways in which the Scriptures teach the authority of the husband over his own wife and children.

(1) There are many passages in the Bible that directly teach the headship of the husband. Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” 1 Corinthians 11:3, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” What does Paul mean when he says that “the husband is the head of the wife”? The word “head” (*kephal*) in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22, 4:15, 22-24; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 18-19) means “ruler,” “leader,” “the one who has authority over.” The husband is the “leader” or “the one who has authority over” his wife. Feminists have attempted to circumvent the clear meaning of these passages by arguing that *kephal* does not mean “authority over” but rather means “source.” This argument has been thoroughly refuted by conservative Bible scholars.¹⁷

The apostle Peter also speaks to this issue. He writes, “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives” (1 Pet. 3:1; cf. Eph. 5:22). The word submissive (*hypotassomenai*, a present participle used as an imperative) presupposes the leadership of the husband. In this passage (and in Eph. 5:22ff.) submission has two aspects: obedience (v. 6) and respect (v. 2).

¹⁷ For an outstanding and exhaustive refutation of the idea that *kephal* means source one should read “The Meaning of *Kephal*” by Wayne Grudem. He writes, “1. The evidence to support the claim that *kephal* can mean ‘source’ is surprisingly weak, and, in fact, unpersuasive. a. All the articles and commentaries depend on only two examples of *kephal* in ancient literature: Herodotus 4.91 and Orphic Fragments 21a, both of which come from more than four hundred years before the time of the New Testament, and both of which fail to be convincing examples: Herodotus 4.91 simply shows that *kephal* can refer to the ‘end points’ of a river—in this case, the sources of a river, but elsewhere, the mouth of a river—and since ‘end point’ is a commonly recognized and well-attested sense of *kephal*, we do not have convincing evidence that ‘source’ is the required sense here. The other text, Orphic Fragments 21a, calls Zeus the ‘head’ of all things but in a context where it is impossible to tell whether it means ‘first one, beginning’ (an acknowledged meaning for *kephal*) or ‘source’ (a meaning not otherwise attested). b. A new search of 2,336 examples of *kephal* from a wide range of ancient Greek literature produced no convincing examples where *kephal* meant ‘source.’ 2. The evidence to support the claim that *kephal* can mean ‘authority over’ is substantial. a. All the major lexicons that specialize in the New Testament period give this meaning, whereas none give the meaning ‘source.’ b. The omission of the meaning ‘authority over’ from the Liddell-Scott Lexicon is an oversight that should be corrected (but it should be noted that that lexicon does not specialize in the New Testament period). c. The search of 2,336 examples turned up forty-nine texts where *kephal* had the meaning ‘person of superior authority or rank, or ‘ruler,’ ‘ruling part’; therefore, this was an acceptable and understandable sense for *kephal* at the time of the New Testament. d. The meaning ‘authority over’ best suits many New Testament contexts.” (“The Meaning of *Kephal* [‘Head’]: A Response to Recent Studies” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, editors, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991], 425-426.) Grudem goes on to prove that those who argue for source (or “preeminent”) must ignore or redefine: (1) The Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) (e.g., *kephal* meaning “authority, or leader over” in the LXX are found in the following passages: Dt. 28:13, 44; Jg. 10:18; 11:8-9, 11; 2 Sam. 22:44 [LXX-2Ki.]; 1 Ki. 8:1 [LXX-3 Ki.]; Ps. 18:43 [LXX.-17]; Lam. 1:1-5; Isa. 7:8-9; 9:14-16; Jer. 31:7). Not only does the Septuagint use *kephal* to translate “head” in the sense of “leader,” or “ruler,” or “one who has authority over,” but *kephal* is not used to translate the Hebrew word *ro’sh* “source” or “beginning” in Genesis 2:10. The word *arch* is used. (2) The New Testament examples. (3) All the New Testament Lexicons. (4) The Apostolic Fathers and virtually all the Patristic evidence. (5) The examples from Plutarch (ca. 50 - ca. A.D. 150) and Josephus, etc. (See Grudem, 425-468).

Respectful obedience is due to the husband not because of some intrinsic superiority on the part of the man but because submission is commanded by God.

The headship of the husband is also taught in the requirements for holding church office. Paul says that an elder must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12). The word for rule (*proistemi*) in the secular Greek literature of Paul’s day had three basic meanings: a) To preside over in the sense of to lead, conduct, direct and govern. b) To stand, place or go before. This meaning entails leadership with the purpose of protection, representation, caring for, to help and to further. c) In Greek society it could also be used in the sense of managing, arranging, handling or executing an estate. In the New Testament the elements of leadership and caring for are preeminent. Note how Paul sets up a parallel between “ruling” and “caring for” in 1 Timothy 3:5, “if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” (emphasis added). The word house in Scripture denotes the whole family (wife, children, servants) not just the children (cf. Gen. 17:12-13; Ex. 12 12:48; Dt. 14:26; 23:8; Josh. 8:35; 24:15; Ac. 10:2, 16:30-34, 18:8; Phil. 4:22; Col. 3:18-22, 1 Tim. 3:12, etc.).

(2) The headship of the husband is taught by the meaning of the words for husband. In both Hebrew (*ish*) and Greek (*aner*) the main word for husband is the generic word for man. One must determine the proper translation by examining the context. Other words that are used for husband are the head or leader of the household. One such word is used as a proper name of a Canaanite fertility god. It also is used as a surname to the different gods of various localities (e.g., Baal-Peor [Nu. 25:3], the master or god over Peor). The reason this word is used for husband is because the husband is regarded by God as the lord or master of the household. This word indicates that the wife is to obey or submit to her husband-her lord. 1 Peter 3:5-6, “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (*kyrios*). She obeyed Abraham in a respectful manner acknowledging his position as head of the home.

Another word for husband (*hupandros*) which is used only once in the New Testament (in Romans 7:2) means literally “under (i.e. subject to) a man.” This word means that the husband is the one above, or the one who has authority over his wife. As a Bible believing Christian one must keep in mind that these words were chosen by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the idea that these words merely reflect a patriarchal sexist culture must be rejected.

(3) The headship of the husband is taught by creation ordinance. A creation ordinance is an ethical norm that is based upon the work of God in creation. Such ordinances are based on pre-fall creational realities and are binding on the whole human race prior to the second coming of Christ. These types of ordinances explain why Paul points to Genesis 2 as proof that wives are under the authority of their husbands. He writes, “For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:8-9). “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:12-13). Fairbairn writes, “Thus did God in the method of creation give clear testimony to the headship of man-to his right, and also his obligation, to hold directly of God, and stand under law only to Him; while woman, being formed for his helpmate and partner, stands under law to her husband, and is called to act for God in him. And simply by inverting this relative position and calling-the helpmate assuming the place of the head or guide, and the head facilely yielding to her governance-was the happy constitution of paradise

overthrown, and everything involved in disorder and evil.”¹⁸ “[I]n his sovereign wisdom God made the human pair in such a manner that it is natural for him to lead, for her to follow; for him to be aggressive, for her to be receptive; for him to invent, for her to use the tools which he invents. The tendency to follow was embraced in Eve’s very soul as she came forth from the hand of her Creator.”¹⁹

In order (man first, woman second) and purpose (the woman is created as a helper suitable or corresponding to the man), Adam and Eve are archetypes of what God intended marriage to be for all marriage relationships throughout human history. “The appeal to what God does (or says) with Adam and Eve in the creation account as an indication of God’s will with reference to men and women in general is similar to the argument Jesus uses in demonstrating that God intends permanence for marriage between men and women (Mt. 19:4-6).”²⁰ Because Paul appeals to Genesis 2:18-25 as a creation ordinance, feminists and irresponsible husbands cannot argue that Paul was simply reflecting the sexist notions of Hebrew, Greek or Roman society. What Paul says is based upon the constitution of things as created by God and is binding upon all cultures: past, present and future.

(4) The leadership of the husband is also taught in God’s law. The law teaches and presupposes the covenant headship of husbands and fathers. Paul says, “Your women are to be submissive, as the law also says” (1 Cor. 14:34). Although it is likely that Paul is using the word in a broad sense referring to the five books of Moses (and therefore has in mind the creation ordinance of marriage in Genesis 2:18-25) the laws of Israel clearly present the father as the leader of the home. Here are some examples: Exodus 22:16-17, “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.” Note, that the father has the final say regarding this matter. In Numbers 30:3-15 we read that husbands and fathers have the authority to confirm or disallow vows made by their daughters and wives as long as it is done on the day that he hears the vow. Verse 13 reads, “Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void.” Obviously this authority entails headship over the wife and children (cf. Ex. 21:1-11).

(5) The covenant headship of the husband is taught by the analogy of God’s covenant relationship to Israel and Christ’s relationship to the church. Note the following passages: Isaiah 54:5, “For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.” Jeremiah 31:32, “My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them” (Cf. Jer. 3:20; Ho. 2:2, 7). 2 Corinthians 11:2, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church.” Revelation 21:2, “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Why is the relationship between a husband and wife analogous to the relationship between Christ and the church? There are a number of reasons. First, both involve covenant headship. Christ is the covenant head of the church (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). Believers are saved and sanctified by virtue of their union with Him in His life, death and resurrection. Jesus, the resurrected Lord, is the first born, the head of a new redeemed humanity (Col. 1:15-18; 1 Cor.

¹⁸ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 [1874]), 128.

¹⁹ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 143.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

15:20, Rom. 8:29; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:14). In the marriage relationship the husband is the covenant head of the wife. According to the Bible marriage involves a covenant before God (Pr. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). In this covenant the husband promises to lead, love, defend, protect, nurture, etc., while the wife promises obedience. This covenant is made before God in the presence of witnesses (the covenant community). As Christ is head of the church in a loving way (for her own protection and spiritual growth), the husband is to love his own wife (Eph. 5:25). No relationship on earth should better mirror the relationship of Christ to the church than that of Christian marriage.

Second, the marriage relationship (like the relationship between Christ and the church) involves a mystical union. Paul says, “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ [Gen. 2:24] This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:28-32). “Christ loves His church because it is His body. Husbands should love their wives because they are their bodies.... The marriage union is not merely one of interests and feelings. Husbands and wives are in such a sense one, that the husband is the complement of the wife and the wife of the husband. The marriage relation is necessary to the completeness of our nature and to its full development in the present state.”²¹

Given what the Bible says about the covenant headship of Christ over the church and the covenant headship of the husband, those who intrude their feminist egalitarian presuppositions into the marriage relationship are also perverting people’s understanding of Christ’s headship. Such thinking and practice not only destroys the biblical concept of Christian marriage but also leads to feminization of the church and (in the long run) the worship of pagan female deities. This scenario has occurred in virtually all of the modernist main line denominations. After all, if church authority teaches that Christian wives do not have to obey their husbands and submit to their authority, then how can they consistently teach that the church must obey Jesus Christ and His word. Is anyone surprised that modernist denominations trample the word of God under foot?

(6) The headship of the husband is reiterated and underlined as a consequence of the fall. Genesis 3:16, “To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” Rather than adding anything new to the creation ordinance discussed above, this passage describes the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin in the post fall order. Before the fall, Adam was the head or leader and the marriage relationship was harmonious. Without a depraved nature, Adam was naturally a loving, humble leader while Eve was naturally submissive and happy in her role of subjection. After the fall, however, there begins to be a sinful desire of the part of the wife to usurp her husband’s authority (3:16 should be interpreted in light of 4:7).²²

²¹ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 243-244.

²² Some evangelical feminist apologists have used Genesis 3:16 to argue that the submission of the wife to her husband is only the result of the fall. In other words, before the fall Adam and Eve were economical equals. Adam was not the head and Eve was not in subjection to his authority. The whole purpose of this assertion is to argue that now Christ has come and set things back in order (The passage used is Galatians 3:28: “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”), Christian husbands and wives are back to their pre-fall condition of absolute equality of roles. The problem with this argument is that whenever Paul discusses the roles of husbands and wives he always goes back to what occurred before the fall (e.g., Adam was created first [1 Tim. 2:13]; Eve originated from Adam [Gen. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 11:8]; the woman-wife was created as a help-meet to the man-Adam

What was once natural and satisfying will now be difficult and often frustrating. Also, as a result of the fall man's naturally loving, humble, sacrificial leadership will be tyrannical and domineering. This sad truth means that believers are totally dependent upon God's grace in the marriage relationship. What was once easy and natural requires diligence in prayer, study and practice.

Some Biblical Implications of Covenant Headship

Before one examines how the husband is to lead, there are a number of things that merit attention regarding this headship.

(1) Note that, from cover to cover, the Bible assumes the covenant headship of the husband. In fact there are no divine imperatives ordering husbands to lead anywhere in the Bible. God's word simply says, "The husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23). The Holy Spirit describes a creational reality. What this means is that the husband is in a place of inescapable leadership. No matter what the husband does, even when he is totally irresponsible and sits in a bar getting drunk, the husband is still the leader of his family. Even when there is an empty chair at the dinner table or an empty seat on the couch during family devotions, or, when the husband allows his wife to lead and "wear the pants" in the family, that irresponsible husband is still the head of the family. While it is a bad, absentee, irresponsible leadership, it is still a form of leadership. Because the leadership of the husband and father is inescapable, no matter what the husband does he is responsible for what occurs in the home. All husbands need to face this fact. Men that seek escape through neglect, television, drugs, drunkenness, work, etc., will be held personally responsible for the negative consequences to their wives and children by God Almighty Himself.

(2) According to Scripture responsible, hands-on leadership is not optional. This means that the man who allows his wife to act as the leader of the family is in rebellion against God. There are two primary ways that men disobey God in this area. The most common form of poor leadership is when the man doesn't want to deal with the day-to-day issues and problems that arise at home. Such a man ignores his family in order to focus upon himself. The irresponsible man wants his wife to rule the household so he can watch television, go camping, sit in a bar, or be a workaholic. This type of man is very common in American society. Such men are self-centered, egotistical and (according to Proverbs) hate their own children. As noted above, a father leads in a certain manner even when he doesn't lead. Even in the so-called matriarchal ghetto culture (where men go about impregnating women and are not involved in raising their children) fathers still have a life-long effect on their children by their absence. The high crime statistics and prison population are testimonies to this tragic fact.

A second example of disobedience in this area is the man who refuses to lead his family because he is afraid of confronting his domineering wife. Such a man is married to a woman who insists (either explicitly or implicitly) on ruling the household. She may be a feminist, or a spoiled brat, or self-centered, or egotistical, or used to having her own way or all of the above.

[Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:9]). Paul refers to Eve's being deceived into sin in 1 Timothy 2:14 as a secondary reason why women are not permitted to have authority over men or to teach in the church. The first reason is that Adam was created first (1 Tim. 2:13). Given the clear nature of the biblical evidence that husbands have authority over their wives because of a pre-fall creation ordinance, one can only conclude that feminist apologists are either deliberately twisting Scripture to support their own agenda or are living in a self-imposed sinful cloud of self-destruction. It is rather ironic that Genesis 3:16 itself predicts such a sinful, unbiblical egalitarian method of argumentation.

She may think that she is smarter and more capable than her husband. (Indeed she may be.) The irresponsible husband in this situation when confronted regarding his lack of leadership may say that he would like to be the leader that God's word requires but he just can't control his wife. He may plead saying: "Look, if I was the biblical leader that Scripture says I ought to be, my wife would leave me. She just wouldn't stand for it. Isn't it better that I let her call the shots than end up in a divorce court?" A man with this kind of attitude and behavior is in rebellion against God. Why? Because he is placing his obedience and relationship to his wife above his obedience and relationship to God. He basically is saying, "God I refuse to obey your word because I don't want to offend my wife." When a person puts any created thing or person above God and obedience to His word he is an idolater. A husband does not have the option of refusing to lead his wife and children.

The man who submits to his rebellious wife and refuses to obey God is a terrible example to his children. He very likely will have children who rebel against God and get into all sorts of trouble. No matter what such parents may say, their actions are teaching their children that submission to lawful authority is not necessary. The daughters have a rebellious witch as their model of motherhood and the sons have a spineless, pitiful wimp as their model of fatherhood. When parents trample God's word underfoot everyday in front of their children, they destroy their own families. They also cause great harm to the church and society.

(3) Christian husbands have a moral obligation to provide a biblical picture of Christ and the church by their behavior. The marriage relationship is an analogy of Christ's relationship to the church. When a husband refuses to lead or leads in a tyrannical manner, he is setting forth a false picture of Christ to his own children and the world. The Christian husband who is irresponsible or mean and dictatorial is lying about Christ. Although a believing husband can never lead, love and serve in the sinless, perfect manner that Christ did and does, nevertheless he still must strive to as Christ-like as possible in his loving leadership over his family.

A solid Christian marriage can be a great agent of change in society. When a Christian man is a solid biblical husband and father he not only extends the dominion of Christ into the future with a godly seed but he also exhibits to the world the love of Christ. Obedient Christian families in our lawless degenerate culture stand out as islands of grace, peace and joy in a sea of chaos and decay. One of the main reasons the evangelical churches are so impotent and salt-less today is the simple fact that they are feminized. They do not recognize the importance of covenant headship and its effect on families, the church and society. When many evangelicals do recognize a problem in this area they have a tendency to resort to show-time para-church gimmicks and shallow unbiblical theology (e.g., the Promise-Keepers movement). There is a great need today for husbands to present a biblical picture of Christ to families, churches and neighbors.

(4) A husband must be a genuine biblical leader (i.e. the indicative) before he can properly obey the imperative to love his wife. Proper leadership can never be divorced from the creational imperative and biblical law. One of the greatest problems we have in the church today is an unbiblical, sentimental, Hollywood, romance-novel concept of love in the church. In the Bible, true scriptural love is always rooted in obedience to God's law (e.g., Jn. 14:15; 1 Cor. 13:4-7). Because modern professing Christians often define love according to our pagan culture (i.e. primarily as an irrational emotional state; infatuation; feelings), they are susceptible to psychological and evangelical gimmicks. One can find professing Christian husbands who are irresponsible; who allow their wives to lead; who are in rebellion against God with an antinomian household; who know that the household is not what it should be; yet, who think

that buying flowers, washing the dishes and taking the wife out to dinner will solve all the problems that arise out of a failure to lead biblically. While buying flowers, washing the dishes and taking the wife out to dinner are good, they are not a substitute for love rooted in biblical law. The modern American concept of love is like a gold ring in the snout of a filthy pig. It is the adornment of rebellion and lawlessness. Rushdoony writes, “[A]lthough Scripture repeatedly assumes and cites love as an aspect of a woman’s relationship to her husband, love is not cited here by St. Paul with reference to the wife and her reaction to her husband. The primacy is given to submission by the wife, and love by the husband. The husband’s love, however, is defined as service, and it is compared to the redemptive work of Christ for His Church (Eph. 5:22-29). Thus, the husband’s evidence of love is his wise and loving government of his household, whereas the wife demonstrates her love in submission. In both cases, submission and authority are governed, not by the wishes of the parties involved, but by the law-word of God. Where the submission and authority are premised on God’s law, the submission and authority interpenetrate. The husband submits to Christ and to all due authority, and the wife submits to her husband and thereby furthers his exercise of authority in every realm and becomes her husband’s help-meet in his authority and dominion.”²³ When husbands refuse to lead biblically and wives refuse to submit, their actions reveal their true colors. They show that their lives are not founded upon God’s word but on a form of relativistic humanism.

(5) A society in which the biblical leadership of the husband is rare is a society that will degrade and exploit women. In modern America we are constantly bombarded with the idea that biblical religion leads to the oppression of women; that the worst thing for women is the Scripture’s teaching on the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife. The truth of the matter, however, is the exact opposite.

The alternative to covenant headship (biblically defined) is not liberty or freedom, but lawlessness, anarchy and exploitation. The husband and father, by his loving leadership, nurtures and protects his wife and children. In the post-Christian society of today where authority and submission are denied, many men and women live only to serve themselves. Relationships are no longer viewed in terms of obedience to God’s law in order to serve the interests of Christ’s kingdom. Instead they are viewed through the lens of hedonistic self-fulfillment. “What does this relationship do for me?” “Does this relationship make me feel good?” Although relationships still begin with warm feelings, sentimentality and talk of love, commitment and caring, the truth of the matter for many is that men exploit women and women exploit men. When men get bored with sex and strong emotions fade away, women are abandoned. It is ironic that as modern culture has turned away from the Bible, women are more and more viewed merely as sex objects that can be tossed aside for younger, more exciting partners. This attitude of narcissism has led to the disintegration of families and great suffering on the part of men, women and especially children. The abandonment of covenant headship has carried with it judgment and misery. America’s only hope is to return to Christ and His infinite wisdom.

In Europe and America marriage used to be defined in terms of biblical faith. However, today (for many) that is no longer true. Instead of a convenantal institution with a husband, wife and children under rules made by God, modern society views the family as a group of people who decide to live together for an undetermined amount of time. Today if sodomite, lesbians, adulterers and fornicators live in the same house with romance, sentimental feelings and some type of commitment to each other this group is considered a family. This societal recognition of

²³ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 338.

lawless perverts as a family shows that the shift from biblical law to humanistic positive law has already (for the most part) taken place.

(6) The feminist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are the primary result not of women but of disobedient men. “While it is true that the feminist movement is represented by female spokesmen, they are really nothing more than shills, fronting for a male lie. At the foundation, feminism is the handiwork of two kinds of men-destructive, overbearing men on the one hand and wimps on the other.”²⁴ Because leadership in marriage is built into the very fabric of creation it is men who set the direction of culture. When men do not lead properly, rebellious women are happy to fill the void.

When men are tyrannical, abusive or neglectful, their wives often seek fulfillment outside of the home. When one examines the various women’s (do-gooder) groups (such as the anti-slavery, temperance [in reality-the total abstinence movement], socialism, feminism or equal rights [in reality-the “women are superior to men who are oppressive jerks” movement] movements) one often will observe single or divorced women who are very lonely, or women who are married but neglected and unloved. An excellent example is Eleanor Roosevelt who became a socialist do-gooder and lesbian who neglected her own children after she discovered that her husband was having an affair and really did not love her.

(7) Because men are the covenant heads of the household they are completely responsible for all the various problems that occur in the home. This of course does not mean that the husband is guilty for the sins of the wife. However, it does mean that if there are any problems in the home it is the husband who must deal with them. For example, when arguing and fighting occurs, it is the husband’s job to learn biblical principles of communication in order to stop such behavior. This principal applies even when the wife is the instigator and is being obnoxious. The husband must deal with every contingency and problem in a biblical manner. Are there financial problems? Is the roof leaking? Is the wife breaking the Sabbath? When a husband leads in a loving biblical manner and takes responsibility for what occurs in the home needs are met, problems are solved, decisive actions are taken and serious marital problems are not given the opportunity to grow. Husbands, God has placed you in a position of inescapable leadership: you must lead and take responsibility so the whole household will grow in wisdom and grace.

The Biblical Methodology of Leadership

When it comes to the husband’s leadership of his wife and children Christianity is truly unique. Virtually all societies acknowledge some form of male headship. But the type of male leadership one finds in non-Christian cultures is usually tyrannical and oppressive. Wives are often not viewed as equal co-workers in the task of godly dominion but as property. Wives are worked and exploited like slaves so that the men can play and experience leisure. The pagan world-view produces men who are irresponsible, arbitrary, unethical, cruel, tyrannical and even violent.

Unlike paganism which enslaves women, biblical Christianity has been the greatest force of liberation, health and happiness of women the world has ever seen. Why? The first reason is that Jesus Christ sets women free from sin and its consequences by His sinless life and sacrificial death. The second reason is that God has given His people the sacred Scriptures, which frees both men and women from arbitrary and unbiblical human requirements. The third reason (which

²⁴ Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1995), 26.

brings us to the present point of discussion) is that the husband is commanded by God to lead his wife in a loving manner. The husband's leadership is to be modeled after Christ's love of the church. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25).

The Ephesians passage (5:22-33) is crucial in understanding the nature of leadership in the Christian family. Paul not only sets forth the central command that husbands are to love their wives, he also defines this love. It is the kind of love that Christ has for the church. Why does Holy Spirit focus on the need for wives to live in subjection to their husbands and for husbands to love their wives? The reason is that since the fall women have a sinful tendency to want to dominate the husband and usurp his authority, while men have a sinful tendency to lead in an unloving dictatorial manner. In this passage God directly addresses our needs. Christians who are involved in marital counseling will immediately recognize the truth and wisdom in this passage. Husbands, if you want to imitate Christ, please Him and have a happy, godly household then heed the words of Paul. Chrysostom writes, "Hast thou seen the measure of obedience? Hear also the measure of love. Wouldst thou thy wife should obey thee as the church doth Christ? Have care thyself for her, as Christ for the church; and if it should be needful that thou shouldst give thy life for her, or be cut to pieces a thousand times, or endure anything whatever, refuse it not; yea, if thou hast suffered this thou hast not done what Christ did, for thou doest this for one to whom thou wert already united, but He for her who rejected Him and hated Him...He brought her to His feet by His great care, not by threats nor fear nor any such things; so do thou conduct thyself towards thy wife."²⁵

What does God mean when He says that husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church? The only way to answer this question is to examine how Christ loves the church. Paul tells us that "He gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25). Jesus lived His whole life and died a sacrificial death on behalf of His people. There are many things that we can learn about biblical leadership by examining our Lord's love of the church.

(1) Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself involved humility. "Christ Jesus.... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). The husband's leadership must not be mingled with pride or arrogance but rather must be rooted in humble service. When a husband acts arrogantly and orders his wife around as if she were a robot or a slave, he makes his wife's submission an unpleasant and difficult task. Husbands, are you practicing the humility of Jesus in your leadership?

(2) Christ's love of the church involved grace and mercy. Jesus did not love the church because it deserved His love. He loved her in spite of her deficiencies, sin and unworthiness. One of the main reasons families are breaking apart today is that husbands have adopted a selfish and pagan concept of love that says, "I love my wife because she is young, beautiful and thin." But when the wife grows older and gains weight she is regarded as a boring nuisance. Frequently she is cast aside like an old car.

A Christian husband must imitate Christ and be forgiving, forbearing and kind to his wife. He must not only forgive (and never ever bring up) his wife's sinful past he also must forgive his wife in the present when she repents and seeks reconciliation. Husbands should learn to overlook the little offenses and faults and not be negative, harsh and overbearing. A believing

²⁵ Chrysostom as quoted in T. K. Abbott, *The Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 166.

husband who nags his wife because her figure is not what it was when she was twenty-five years old is being unreasonable and is acting like a pagan. The husband has a duty to show his wife favor and kindness. Do you tell your wife that she is beautiful? Does she know how important she is to you? Does she sense the intensity of your love? A wife that is loved in the biblical manner is truly beautiful. She knows that she is loved and adored. She has the kind of love that the world is unaware, a love that mirrors the precious Savior's. "When a believing husband loves his wife in this fashion obedience from the side of his believing wife will be easy. Illustration from life: 'My husband loves me so thoroughly and is so good to me that I jump at the opportunity to obey him.' That was putting it beautifully!"²⁶

(3) Christ's love of the church was characterized by service. When the disciples were contemplating their own greatness and future exalted status in God's kingdom, Jesus corrected them by setting forth the true essence of Christian leadership. "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'" (Mt. 20:25-28; cf. Lk. 22:25-27). Jesus, who in Himself was infinitely great and had authority over all men, could have lived as a monarch with attendants and an army of servants. Yet "He who is greatest and chief among us has set us the example of the utmost love-service. No servants waited on Him. He was Master and Lord; but he washed his servants' feet. He came not to be served, but to serve. He received nothing from others; his life was a life of giving, and the giving of a life."²⁷

A husband who thinks that covenant headship means that he gets to order his wife and children around while he watches television or plays poker with his buddies does not understand biblical leadership. While it is true that the wife must submit to her husband in the Lord, she should be submitting to a loving humble, servant leader. The husband should take great care to manage the household and make leadership decisions for his wife's own benefit. A loving husband always places his wife's welfare about his own. Is the wife tired and feeling under the weather? A biblical husband asks his wife to lie on the couch and relax while he makes dinner and cleans up the mess. If feminists really understood the teaching of Scripture regarding the headship of the husband, they would have to abandon (if they were honest) the egalitarian propaganda that portrays Christian marriage as slavery to a tyrant. The feminist caricature of Christian marriage is one of the greatest lies of all time. Sadly, hypocritical professors of religion have given credence to this lie by their sinful harsh treatment of their wives. Husbands, are you giving the heathen cause to blaspheme the cause of God and truth by the dictatorial, unloving manner in which you treat your spouse?

(4) Christ's love of the church involved sacrifice. Not only did our Lord leave the glory of heaven behind to be born in a manger to live a life of rejection and suffering, he also paid the ultimate price by dying a sacrificial death for His bride. In imitation of Jesus, a Christian husband must often set aside his own interests for the sake of his wife. The man who spent a lot of time with his friends playing pool, camping, fishing, hunting, etc. before marriage, now spends that time with his wife and family. This point does not mean that a husband can't have friends or get involved in various male activities. It does mean, however, that the vast majority of time is focused on his family. He is there for them and lives to serve and nourish them. A man

²⁶ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967, 68), 250.

²⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1987), 382-284.

who treats his family as a side compartment of life, who puts in an appearance here and there to soothe a guilty conscience is not placing his family first. He does not love his wife as Christ loved the church. “Because Christ is the head of the church, he is its Savior; therefore, as the husband is the head of the wife, he should not only rule, but protect and bless.”²⁸

An implication of this passage (Eph. 5:25) is that husbands must be willing to defend their wives and even die if necessary in the process. Hodge writes, “As their relation to their wives is analogous to that of Christ to His church, it imposes the obligation to love them as he loves the church. But Christ so loved the church as to die for it. Husbands, therefore, should be willing to die for their wives. This seems to be the natural import of the passage, and it is the interpretation commonly given to it.”²⁹

(5) Christ’s love of the church involved a perfect obedience to God’s law (Heb. 4:15). It is very important that Christians understand that love (biblically defined) is never antinomian. When Scripture speaks of love it emphasizes not an emotional state but duty. Biblical love is first and foremost the treatment of others in accordance with God’s holy law. Jesus says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15). Note how Paul equates love with obedience to the law. He writes, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:8-10). “Love without law is a contradiction; while love and law are not identical, the one cannot exist without the other. If a man claims to love a woman, and then asks, in the name of a more personal and existential relationship, that they live together without marriage, the woman is justified in questioning his love. Love cannot be separated from law without denying love, nor can law be separated from love without denying law.”³⁰

Why is it so important that believers understand that love is a biblical duty, a fulfillment of the law? A major reason is that it frees Christians from the whim of their emotions. Emotions are often fickle. They can come and they can go. A man who has been married thirty years may not always experience the strong feelings towards his wife that he did when they were first engaged. When people are led along by their emotions instead of God’s word their lives are characterized by lawlessness and chaos. The humanistic idea of love as a self-serving, irrational, emotional experience leads inescapably to a love of what is evil. When God commands husbands to love their wives it is rather obvious that he is not commanding them to somehow change their emotional state. Love is a duty, a way of living. This means that Christian husbands must always keep their emotions subservient to Scripture.

It also means that the biblical model of love is not something that just happens to us; that is, we are not passive creatures waiting for an experience (e.g., falling in love). The biblical pattern is lawful, responsible commitment that leads to biblical action towards one’s spouse. Note that the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 focuses not on emotions, but on having biblical attitudes and behavior. “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (vs. 4-8). What husbands need to do

²⁸ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 229.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁰ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 432.

is place their wives first, serve them, treat them lawfully and then (if lacking) the emotional aspect of love will inevitably follow.

When Christ commands us to love our enemies He does not mean that we are to sit around and try and develop good feelings towards them. On the contrary, He expects us to treat them lawfully and to do good unto them. By treating our enemies with kindness, (e.g., giving them something to eat or drink) we invest our time and resources in that person or persons. This type of behavior will cause a change of emotions. When you invest yourself in another, you begin a different attitude toward them. Such an attitude that develops and grows out of serving and giving is genuine and lasting.

When a husband finds himself in a marriage where good emotions and excitement are lacking, he has the responsibility to lead and act in such a manner that will rekindle proper emotions. If a husband wants his wife to have emotional love toward him, he must first love his wife biblically. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). The covenant head is responsible for nurturing love in the household. If the home is a cold, loveless place then he must take action. He must give of himself, serve, sacrifice and admonish to remedy the situation. If the wife is cold-hearted and does not love in return the husband must not give up or try to punish his wife by reciprocating in kind. A husband’s obedience to the Word must never be based on the behavior of his wife. Remember the husband is responsible for what occurs in the home. If he disobeys God and uses his wife’s ungodly behavior as an excuse, he only hurts himself and the whole house. God will hold him personally responsible for his sinful behavior. Calvin writes, “Now when a husband has well considered and examined his own faults thoroughly, he will hold his peace, and patiently bear with his wife’s faults, until God gives her the grace to correct them. And meanwhile, whatever happens, let him not cease to act like a husband in applying himself to his wife’s interests, to win her to God. For he is not set in a position of superiority, except for the benefit and welfare of his yoke fellow.”³¹

(6) Jesus’ love of the church involves patience and forbearance. When Christ’s disciples were slow to believe and were unable to understand His simple teachings, He admonished them gently. Our Lord was very patient with his thick-skulled disciples. Paul refers to this aspect of biblical love in first Corinthians: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy...does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (13:4, 5, 7).

A Christian husband should not expect the instantaneous sanctification of his wife. Sanctification is a continuous process that takes a lot of hard work (By this statement I do not intend to imply that Christ is not the author and enabler of sanctification. I am only emphasizing our responsibility in this area.). Husbands need to set both short term and long term goals. Obviously, blatantly sinful behavior must not be tolerated. However, there are areas of attitude and behavior that will take both the husband and wife time to replace with godly habits. Husbands that are perfectionists; that expect an instantaneous entire sanctification; that have little or no patience, often become frustrated and give up. A Christian marriage should never stand still. The husband must lead the family forward in corporate sanctification. Such leadership requires planning, action and patience. If the husband keeps in mind the overall picture, that the goal of Christian marriage is the glorification of God and not serving the needs of and glorifying the husband then patience and perseverance will be much easier to maintain.

If a husband is to imitate Christ in His patience and forbearance then he must learn to think the best of his wife and not the worst. He must learn to give her the benefit of the doubt. A

³¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973 [1577]), 574.

Christian husband must never attribute evil motives to his wife's behavior when it is not clear if her intent was innocent or malevolent. As Paul says, love "thinks no evil" "believes all things" and "is not provoked." Much useless arguing in marriage is attributable to husbands and wives that are trying to read each other's minds and read between the lines. In such situations spouses become angry and contentious over matters that may or may not even exist. Husbands and wives are sinners. If they begin to attribute evil motives or assume malevolent meanings "between the lines" then severe contention is inevitable. The husband in such situations must lead by example and admonitions; and, make sure that such unchristian, non-productive communication does not occur in the home. Believers are never to attempt to read the hearts of other believers. That is something that only God can do.

Husbands, Love Your Own Bodies

After Paul sets forth the imperative for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church he elaborates on this teaching by saying, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church" (Eph. 5:28-29). Christian husbands who follow the example of Christ do so only by loving their wives as their own bodies. The husband should love his wife because she is his body.

The reference to loving one's wife refers to two realities. First, we are reminded of the fact that Eve was made from Adam's own body. A marriage covenant places a man and woman in such a close personal relationship that they are to be viewed as one entity and not isolated individuals. Once a man understands this fact he should realize that mistreating his wife only hurts himself. Calvin writes, "An argument is now drawn from nature itself, to prove that men ought love their wives. Every man, by his very nature, loves himself. But no man can love himself without loving his wife. Therefore, the man who does not love his wife is a monster. The minor proposition is proved in this manner. Marriage was appointed by God on the condition that the two should be one flesh; and that this unity may be more sacred, he again recommends it to our notice by the consideration of Christ and his church...Whoever considers seriously the design of marriage cannot but love his wife."³²

Second, Paul points to the mystical union of all believers in Christ. Jesus is the head and we are members of His body. "There is never a moment that Christ does not tenderly watch over his body, the church. We are under his constant surveillance. His eyes are constantly upon us, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year (cf. Dt. 11:12). Therefore, we cast all our anxiety upon him, convinced that we are his personal concern (1 Peter 5:7), the objects of his very special providence."³³

In verse 29 Paul elaborates on what it means to love one's body. "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church." The word "nourish" means to feed, to bring up to maturity. Its common usage refers to providing food or sustenance to the body. With Christ and the church, however, it is used in a spiritual manner to refer to our Lord's spiritual care of the church. Jesus expresses His love for us by providing us with the spiritual food we need. The Lord Himself nourishes us by His word, the sacraments and ministries of the church all effectually applied by His Spirit.

³² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 322.

³³ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: 1967-68), 255.

Nourish Your Wife

The husband has a biblical responsibility to nourish his wife. How then is this to occur? To what does it apply? Taking into account the etymology of the word and the context of verse 29 (especially verses 26 to 27), the husband must take care of his wife's physical and spiritual well-being. The husband must not only be the provider for the household, he must also lead in spiritual matters. He should help his wife progress in sanctification. Regarding both these areas there are a number of things to consider.

(1) A husband is to nourish his wife by providing the food, clothing and shelter that she needs for the household. A husband has a moral obligation to provide his wife with enough money to buy groceries, clothing, furnishings, transportation, etc. for the family. The husband must enable his wife to put good healthy food on the table. In 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul says, "But if anyone does not provide for his own [i.e. his near relatives], and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." In very strong language Paul says that fathers who do not provide for their own are wicked apostates. They are even worse than an unbeliever who by natural affections fulfills his responsibility upon fathers to their own immediate family. This point is highlighted by the phrase "and especially." A husband who refuses to provide for his family should (after proper procedures, Mt. 18:15ff.) be excommunicated by the church.

The law of God also teaches that husbands have to provide for their wives. In Exodus 21:10-11 in a law regulating polygamy, God says that if a man takes a second wife he is not permitted to neglect the needs of his first wife in the process. "If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money." The word translated "food" literally means meat and indicates that the wife is not to be given simply a subsistence diet but is to be given the best food that the husband can afford. The wife has a God-given right to the necessities of life. The implication of this passage is that the husband who refuses to provide for his household should be excommunicated by the church and the wife should be granted a divorce on the basis of desertion by an unbelieving husband.

Providing food, clothing and shelter involves more than simply bringing home a paycheck. It also involves the wise, responsible management of money and resources. There are professing Christian husbands who make plenty of money to run a household, but who are so irresponsible and selfish in their spending that the wife and children are poorly dressed and fed. Some husbands are very materialistic and waste thousands of dollars on cars and trucks that are not really needed. If a man is not making a lot of money he does not need to buy a new car every three years; and, he certainly does not need a fancy new SUV when a good used car will do. Some men are so self-centered that they spend so much money on their own interests (e.g., fancy cigars, European beer, clothes, guns, golf, camping equipment, eating out with buddies, etc.) that the wife is left serving children hot dogs and white bread. Such behavior on the part of the husband is blatantly unbiblical and sinful. The wife and children are always to be placed first. The responsible management of money is necessary if the wife is going to stay at home with the children and fulfill her domestic duties. Most money problems that occur in American families today are not a result of a lack of cash, but rather are the result of spending beyond one's means. Christian husbands must avoid the poverty mentality that demands instant gratification (on a credit card if necessary) at the expense of a family's future financial gain and freedom. Responsible family leadership will bring a family out of excessive materialism and debt in order

to have the time to spend raising and training children to work for Christ's kingdom. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt. 6:19-21).

(2) A husband is also biblically required to provide for his wife's sexual needs. With reference to sexual relations in marriage, Paul insists that both husbands and wives have a duty to be there for each other. He writes, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor. 7:3-4). The verb translated "render" is a present imperative that indicates a habitual duty. Here is a place in Scripture in which we are told that a wife has authority over her husband. When she requests sexual affection he is not to deny her. Paul says in verse 5 that the only time married couples are to abstain is for special periods of prayer. But even this period of abstinence must only be by mutual consent and must not be prolonged lest Satan tempt one or the other party to adultery.

This passage is very offensive to many in our pagan culture. Note how Paul completely refutes the feminist notion that a woman has control over her own body. Paul says that the husband has control over her body. Also, the idea that both husbands and wives cannot deny sexual relations to each other is viewed by many as slavery and not romantic spontaneity. Paul's inspired injunctions may be unacceptable to a post Christian society. However, given our fallen states, sexual desires and the manifold temptations of life in this area Paul's instruction are exactly what married people need.

Wives, are you placing your husband in a situation of temptation by your sinful refusal to fulfill your marital obligations in this area? Husbands, are you making every effort to satisfy your wife in this area? Are you picking a time convenient for her? Are you grooming yourself properly? Are you providing a friendly, emotionally pleasing setting? Are you taking your time for her sake? Placing your wife first in this area has great rewards.

Husbands also have a biblical duty to be content with their wives in the sphere of sexual intimacy. In our sex crazed culture scantily clad beautiful women are used in advertising, magazines, billboards, TV programs, movies, etc. as enticements to buy products, magazines or to watch television, movies and/or videos. Men are constantly being told by our pagan culture that women are supposed to look a certain way (e.g. Pamela Anderson). However, since very few women actually have such "perfect features and perfect figures" men are implicitly being told that what they have is defective; that they are being cheated in this area. When men allow themselves to be manipulated by our hedonistic culture they are no longer content with what God has given them and seek sexual satisfaction in sinful, unauthorized ways. The result is that sexual immorality (e.g. adultery, the use of pornography, etc.) and divorce is at epidemic proportions among professing evangelicals. Christian husbands have a duty to be fully content with their wives. This means that husbands should avoid anything that tends to destroy sexual contentment with their wives (e.g. the Sports Illustrated swimsuit editions, inappropriate TV programs, movies or internet sites). They must learn to appreciate their own wives; to be fully satisfied with them. Husbands are to rejoice in their wives and be enraptured by them. "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should you fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful

doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love” (Prov. 5:15-19). The husband who is not seeking sexual satisfaction from his own wife on a regular basis is living in disobedience and is setting himself up for a great fall. If it takes romantic dinners, fancy undergarments, candles, etc., then so be it. If the husband and wife have to schedule time for intimacy when the children are asleep and the phone is off the hook, then they should do so. This is an area in which many men fall short. Remember, God says, “You shall not covet your...neighbor’s wife...nor his female servant...nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (Ex. 20:17).

(3) The husband must also feed his wife spiritually. The husband is to lead by example and by theological direction and instruction. He must lead in daily family devotions which includes Bible reading, prayer, praise and discussion. He must lead in making sure that the wife and children attend and join a truly Reformed Bible believing church, in which God is worshiped in Spirit and in truth. In talking to various professing Christian families this author is amazed at how many families attend a particular church not at the direction of the husband (who has chosen to remain passive in the matter) but at the direction of the wife. One will also be shocked by the reasons given by typical evangelicals for joining a local church: “they have a great youth group,” “the entertainment is exciting,” “The pastor is so funny,” “I like the pews, they are so soft,” “what a wonderful nursery.” The husband is to choose a church because it is faithful to the Bible and reformed standards, the pastor faithfully exposit and applies the word of God, and the worship is biblical. If a family is exposed to mediocre, semi-reformed preaching and worship each week it is the husband’s fault.

If a husband is to lead his wife and family theologically he must first know and understand orthodox Reformed theology. This means that a husband has a responsibility to read and understand the Bible and good solid Reformed theological books. He must be able to discuss theology with his wife in an intelligent, knowledgeable manner and he must be there to answer her theological questions. Paul writes, “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Does Paul direct wives to go to the pastor or elders after church and ask them about doctrine? No. He directs them to their own husbands. The apostle’s concept of covenant headship assumes that husbands are the theological leaders and teachers of the family. “Note, As it is a woman’s duty to lean in subjection, it is the man’s duty to keep up his superiority, by being able to instruct her; if it be her duty to ask her husband at home, it is his concern and duty to endeavour at least to be able to answer her enquiries.”³⁴ “Woman belongs to the domestic hearth, so that a simple question on her part would alone be an impropriety; for by putting her on a public stage, as it were, such an act would go contrary to the modesty of her destined sphere. To be remarked is the adjective *idiuous*, their own husbands; they ought to do nothing to affect the bond of dependence which unites each of them to her husband.”³⁵

Why is it so important for husbands to have a solid grasp of Reformed theology? One major reason is the simple truth that wives and children often follow the head of the family theologically whether the husband’s theology is good or bad. In fact, it is very common for wives to become doctrinally identical to their husbands. This following of the husband even occurs when the husband becomes a damnable heretic (e.g. Scott and Kimberly Hahn). Husbands, you have a solemn duty to instill biblical doctrine in your wives and children in such a manner so as

³⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (McLean, VA.: MacDonald, n. d.), 583.

³⁵ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 741.

to insure their orthodoxy, so that the covenanted Reformation will continue generation to generation.

What if a husband is a brand new believer and knows very little theology? Obviously, in such a situation the husband should be asking the elders a lot of questions. He should (with the advice of the elders and mature believers) build up a good library (e.g. concordance, dictionaries, commentaries, theology books, encyclopedias, etc.) and learn how to look things up. Calvin writes, “When he say husbands, he does not prohibit them from consulting the Prophets themselves, if necessary. For all husbands are not competent to give an answer in such a case; but, as he is reasoning here as to external polity, he reckons it sufficient to point out what is unseemly, that the Corinthians may guard against it.”³⁶

The husband is not only to lead by example, teaching and answering questions, he also is to guide his wife theologically. A good Christian husband will make sure that his wife has solid biblical-theological reading materials.³⁷ If a wife likes to read novels, magazines and other fiction and fluff she should be directed to better reading materials. Although there is nothing wrong with reading good novels and magazines, a wife will do better spiritually and be more useful to the children if she studies her Bible and theology books every day. A wife does not need to be a theological expert. However, she should be grounded in Reformed theology, to guard against false doctrine and satanic assault, to answer children’s questions, to grow in grace and knowledge, and, to lead properly in the event of her husband passing away.

Cherish Your Wife

Paul instructs husbands to cherish their wives. The Greek word for “cherish” means to keep warm or to cherish with tender love. A husband is to take tender care of his wife. By the word cherish Paul conveys the idea of caring for, looking after and guarding in a tender manner. Paul’s use of this word has a number of implications for the husband’s leadership.

(1) A husband is to cherish his wife by guarding and protecting her from harm whether physical or spiritual. Regarding protection from physical or spiritual harm, husbands should do many things. First, a husband must defend his wife from direct physical attacks. If there is a threat from an intruder, or robber, or stalker the husband must be willing to die to protect her. He is to do whatever it takes even if this involves taking a bullet to ensure the safety of his family.

Second, the husband should protect his wife and family by planning ahead defensively. A husband should pick a place to live that has a low crime rate. If a man wants to minister to gang

³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:469.

³⁷ In order to lead theologically and provide solid Christian reading materials a husband must develop a family library. The following list of books is recommended as a starting point for such a library: Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*; Calvin’s commentaries; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenetic Theology*; Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*; *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*; *Christian Living in the Home*; Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*; Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage, Standing on the Promises, Federal Husband*; The Westminster Divines, *The Confession of Faith*; *The Larger and Shorter Catechism*, etc. [Free Presbyterian Publications edition]; Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*; G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes and The Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*; Cornelius Van Til, *Defending the Faith*; Greg Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*; Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy in the Church*, etc. There are hundreds of books that should be on this list. This list is just a beginning. (No significance should be assigned to the order of this list.)

members in the inner city or to headhunters in South America he should do so as a single man. A husband should also set household policies that forbid unnecessary dangerous activities on the part of the wife and children. A husband should not allow his wife to travel into dangerous parts of a city alone at night. If she needs to be in a dangerous place he should accompany her or make arrangements for her to travel in a group. If a husband can afford it, his wife should have a dependable late model car and a cell phone.

Third, men should not allow wives to go into situations of possible temptation. It does not take a spiritual genius to realize the danger of sending wives alone to co-ed health, aerobics, golf, tennis or swim clubs to mingle with single and married (but alone) non-Christian men. In a post Christian society of harlots and predatory whoremongers such a move is asking for ethical confrontation. To modern ears this admonition sounds Victorian or even medieval. However, the Scripture says to flee temptation. (1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim 2:22)

(2) In order to cherish your wife you must deal with her according to her nature as the weaker vessel. Peter writes, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Pet. 3:7). A Christian husband has a continuous duty to live with his wife "according to knowledge" (the literal translation of the Greek). The husband is to study what the Bible says about women and wives in general and is to study and learn the peculiarities of his own wife. Only then will he be able to understand and deal with his wife in a biblical, knowledgeable manner. Luther writes, "You must proceed here just as with other instruments with which you labor. For example, if you wish to have a good sickle, you must not hack upon the stone with it. On this subject no rule can be laid down. God leaves the matter to each individually, to treat his wife according to knowledge, according to the circumstances of each woman. For you are to use the authority you have, not according to your own will, because you are her husband for this very purpose, that you may help her, conserve and support her, and not be her ruin. Hence none can lay down a rule for you with exact limitations; you must understand yourself how you are to proceed according to knowledge."³⁸

Peter says that a husband is to honor or show special regard to his wife because she is the weaker vessel and she is a co-heir of God's saving grace. (An added practical reason is that mistreating his wife will hinder his prayer life). What does Peter mean when he says that wives are the weaker vessel? He does not mean that women are morally or spiritually inferior to men for such a proposition would contradict Scripture and the immediate context. When Peter says that wives are "joint heirs of the grace of life" he is teaching that: a) they are not spiritually inferior to their husbands; b) they have the same (i.e. equal) status in Christ's kingdom. When Peter designates the woman as the weaker vessel his is referring to her natural physical and emotional differences as a woman. Women, generally speaking, are not as strong physically as men. Also, they are different in the manner in which they deal with the various contingencies of life. They have a distinctly feminine, sensitive perspective. The husband is to take into account his wife's different make up and is to honor her weakness. When there is a problem or disagreement in the home the husband is not to exploit his wife's weakness physically or verbally (e.g., the one-two verbal punch). He is not to act as her adversary in order to show off his intellect or win an argument. Instead he is to be kind, gentle, patient and loving as he deals with his wife. As a person is much more careful in protecting the more sensitive delicate parts of the body (e.g., the eye) a husband will learn all about his wife so that he can be more sensitive and loving towards her.

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), 140.

Sadly, pagan men often do the exact opposite. Lenski writes, “The wife is the weaker vessel. Paganism always tends to abuse her on this account. Her rights are reduced, often greatly. Her status is lowered, often shamefully. Heavy loads are put upon her. She is made man’s plaything or man’s slave. The fact that she is weaker is always exploited. That is why Peter inserts the phrase regarding “knowledge.” Christian knowledge will accord the wife all the consideration and the thoughtfulness which God intends for her ‘as a weaker vessel’ in her ‘wifely’ relation.”³⁹ “Many men treat their wives as they would an old tin garbage can. ‘Not so’, says Peter; ‘you must treat her as you would treat a fragile vase, Ming dynasty!’ This call for gentleness parallels Paul’s exhortation to nourish and cherish wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:28, 29).”⁴⁰

When Peter refers to the fact that wives are joint heirs with their husbands in all the blessings of salvation, he is reminding husbands that husband and wife are to work together for the kingdom as a single entity, a team. Just as Paul reminded husbands that they are one body with their wives, Peter wants husbands to understand the absurdity of working at cross- purposes to each other. Husbands and wives are on the same side. Therefore attacking, arguing, insulting or hurting each other is foolish and counter-productive. Communication and behavior are to be directed to solving problems and kingdom victory, and not winning arguments. Regarding the union of husband and wife, Tertullian writes, “What a union of two believers, with one hope, one discipline, one service, one spirit, and one flesh? Together they pray, together they prostrate themselves, and together keep their fasts, teaching and exhorting one another, and sustaining one another. They are together at the church and at the Lord’s supper; they are together in straits, in persecutions, and refreshments. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids the other; neither is a burden to the other; freely the sick are visited, and the needy relieved; alms without torture; sacrifices without scruple; daily diligence without hindrance; no using of the sign by stealth; no hurried salutation; no silent benediction; psalms and hymns resound between the two, and they vie with each other which shall sing best to their God. Christ rejoices on hearing and beholding such things; to such persons He sends His peace. Where the two are, He is Himself; and where He is, there the Evil One is not.”⁴¹

(3) If a husband is to cherish his wife his behavior must flow from a proper heart attitude. Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them” (Col. 3:19). For the apostle, bitterness is set in opposition to love. Paul says literally “be not embittered” toward your wife. Men are not to have a bitter state of mind toward their wives. The reason for this injunction is obvious. When husbands allow themselves to become bitter toward their wives their speech and behavior will reflect this attitude and will be unloving. A bitter spirit leads to a lack of consideration, anger, irritability, fault finding, unkind thoughts and words, harsh treatment and in some cases an unloving avoidance of the wife.

(4) Cherishing your wife involves saying and doing things that make her know that she is loved, needed and appreciated every day. When the wife makes a meal the husband and the children should thank her during or after dinner and tell her they liked it. A wife who is deeply involved in home-schooling and is doing a good job should be told that her work is greatly appreciated and that her work is crucial in building the kingdom of God. A husband should tell

³⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing Houses 1966), 139.

⁴⁰ Jay E. Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1988), 101.

⁴¹ Tertullian (ad Vxorem, ii.9) in John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1884]), 254.

his wife that she is beautiful. He should tell her that he loves and adores her. After she has had a hard day of work the husband should do things to show his love and appreciation, even something simple like making her popcorn and giving her a foot massage. Learn to give your wife little compliments. These things are simple, but important.

Husbands can avoid bitterness by being kind, patient and forbearing. Men need to give their wives the benefit of the doubt and stop blame-shifting. If husbands are bitter it is usually because they are not doing their job. They are not leading effectively. When a husband does not deal with the day-to-day problems that arise and does not communicate effectively with his wife, he lets problems get out of hand. When problems accumulate and tempers flare the husband can become embittered toward his wife. If the husband was thinking biblically regarding his role as the leader this bitterness would not occur. Rather than dwelling on the faults of his wife and becoming upset, the biblical leader takes action. He deals with the problems through biblical communication and loving service towards his wife. Instead of feeling sorry for himself he tackles the root of his bitterness—his own incompetent and unloving leadership.

What Headship Is Not

Given the fact that the loving leadership of the husband is often misunderstood we need to consider a few errors common among evangelicals. One error is that the loving, gentle leadership spoken of by Paul means that husbands should not be strong leaders. The scriptural passages which speak of loving leadership, service, sacrifice, gentleness, etc. are sometimes twisted in such a manner that biblical leadership is turned into a passive, feminized, sentimental (“wimping out”) style of leadership.

Being a humble servant leader should not be interpreted to mean that husbands are to be effeminate leaders. Husbands must never adopt a feminine model of leadership. The husband is to be the wife’s best friend, not her best girlfriend. Being a servant leader does not mean that the husband is to give in to his wife’s demands. It also does not mean simply washing dishes and taking the wife out to dinner once in a while. It still means real leadership. The husband has real God-given authority. Although the husband is a servant leader he is still responsible to issue commands and manage the household. He does not water down, feminize or abdicate his authority. Many professing Christians today confuse love and being nice with permissiveness and a lack of discipline. We must never make this mistake. Although a husband should consult with his wife over important decisions, he must make the final decision. The husband has the final say in the matter and his decision must not be questioned (unless of course it contradicts Scripture). A loving servant leader must also be a strong, decisive leader. Husbands, never confuse being a loving, humble, servant leader with permissiveness, indecisiveness, a lack of authority, “wimpiness” or giving in to your wife’s desires. Hagopian and Wilson have eloquently rebuked evangelicalism’s accommodation to feminism in their book that deals with “Promise Keepers”. They write: “Whenever ‘real masculinity’ prances around in a skirt and blouse, it must be attacked and attacked by Christians with a warm enthusiasm. The secular doctrine of the ‘sensitive male’ must be criticized, wherever it appears, and soundly, with a baseball bat. Psychological and theological flimflam merchants, with all their estrogenic supplements, must be hooted off the public stage....The Promise Keepers movement is in deep tension with itself. It doesn’t want a church full of sissies, but then turns around and encourages men to become a bunch of crybabies. It wants men to lead the home, but then wants them to follow the lead of their wives. Perhaps this tension is what led one astute reporter to conclude that Promise

Keepers, as reflected in the typical conference, is ‘both a reaction against feminism and an accommodation to it.’⁴²

Another manner in which the leadership of the husband is abused is the man who leads his wife as if she were a brute beast. Such a man not only refuses to consult his wife when making important family decisions, he also does not permit her to exercise her God-given talents and gifts. Although a husband must know what is going on in the home and is responsible for what takes place there, he does not need to make every single decision that occurs in the home. A good leader, who has a godly wife well trained in Scripture and theology, doesn’t smother his wife’s gifts and abilities but encourages her to make decisions and rule within her domestic sphere. A husband manages the household and delegates important tasks to his wife. A good leader encourages and aids his wife in her gifted areas. The wife is a helpmeet, not a slave or mindless robot. A wife who is free to use her gifts will benefit the whole household. This author has observed various Anabaptist house church types who had a very stifling concept of headship. Wives in such a situation are often treated as if women are supposed to be stupid and cannot be trusted. In one of these groups women were not even permitted to speak without their husband’s permission. A good leader trains and enables his wife to flourish in her God given task. The “Christian” feminist movement of the nineteenth century was in part an over-reaction to the idea that women were not to be educated and improved mentally but were to remain illiterate house servants. Husbands, do not neglect or stifle your wife’s abilities. Rather, help her develop them to the fullest for God’s glory. Further, keep your wife intimately involved in all important decisions.

Areas of Leadership

The Bible teaches that the husband is to lead the household in every area. Paul writes, “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:23-24). Wives are to be subject to their own husbands in everything. There are no areas in which the husband is not responsible to lead and manage. The “in everything,” however, does not mean that the husband can demand anything that is contrary to Scripture (e.g. lying, theft, Sabbath violation, idol worship, etc.). Calvin writes, “Now St. Paul, in saying ‘as to the Lord’ does not mean to make men equal with God or with our Lord Jesus Christ, for that would be altogether too great an excess, but he shows that the fear and

⁴² David Hagopian and Doug Wilson, *Beyond Promises: A Biblical Challenge to Promise Keepers* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996), 60-61. “Any discussion of the appropriate standard for Christian husbands in marriage raises a very real concern with what may be called an emphasis of the Promise Keepers movement. Throughout ‘Strategies for a Successful Marriage,’ an assumption is made that the feminine expectations for marriage are accurate, and that the masculine expectations are not. The man must learn to conform his behavior to the expectations of his wife. In the words of E. Glenn Wagner and Dietrich Grien, ‘I should find out what my wife’s expectations are and then commit myself to doing everything within my power to meet them....’ But a Christian man should first ask, are the expectations of my wife biblical? Why should we try to accomplish something which God has not instructed us to accomplish? If we obey God with regard to our wives, then their needs will certainly be met. But this is not necessarily the same thing as meeting their expectations. A marriage exists in order to glorify God through evangelical obedience on the part of both husband and wife. Neither spouse is to submit to the other’s standards for marriage; they both are to submit to Christ’s” (Ibid. 191-192).

reverence that a woman ought to bear to God, and the subjection she owes to her husband are two inseparables.”⁴³

Conclusion

The headship of the husband over the wife is inescapable. Husbands, you are the leader of your family whether you like it or not. Therefore, you must be obedient to God’s word and lead in a specifically Christian manner. You are to be a loving, humble, servant leader who places the welfare (both spiritual and physical) of your wife above your own. You are to provide for your wife all the material things that are necessary for her to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother. You are to be the spiritual leader of the household. This means daily family devotions, answering theological questions, choosing a truly Reformed church, praying daily for the family, guiding the education of the children, providing a Christian family library, etc. You are responsible for all the problems that occur in the home. Therefore, you must take the lead in communication and problem solving. Husbands, God has given you a great responsibility. If you are obedient and diligent in your duty as a husband and father the church and society will greatly benefit from it and most important of all God will be glorified. May God enable us by His grace and mercy to fulfill our covenant responsibilities.

Chapter 3: The Biblical Duties of Wives

If a wife is to be obedient to God, she must first understand her God-given role in society and the family. In our post-Christian culture with its rejection of divine revelation and ethical absolutes, women have become increasingly misguided. The God-given urge for family and children still exists. However, this creational reality is sublimated to an autonomous, sinful, hedonistic, selfish view of life. Many pagan women put off marriage and children into the distant future to concentrate on careers, fun, and sexual fulfillment. Even marriage itself has been redefined in a pagan manner. Marriage is no longer seen as a glorious God-ordained method of serving Christ’s kingdom. It is now viewed as a purely human institution that is convenient for increasing romance and/or one’s own selfish needs. When the relationship is no longer “romantic” or “fulfilling”, one’s partner is cast aside even though the children involved in a divorce will suffer for many years, perhaps for a lifetime.

Many women today have accepted the lie of feminism that portrays being a homemaker, placing the husband and children first and rejecting the career path to stay home for the sake of the children as a form of slavery. Feminism teaches that true fulfillment lies outside the home in a challenging and lucrative career. Sadly, the rejection of the biblical concept of marriage in favor of secular humanistic nonsense has been a disaster for woman and families. Not only do we now have rampant divorce, adultery, illegitimacy, spousal abuse and marital abandonment, we also have a generation of children who are being raised by disinterested minimum wage daycare workers. Further, because women cannot deny creational reality (i.e. their God-given nature as woman), those who have based their lives on the lies of feminism are unfulfilled and often miserable. The rejection of God’s word for secular humanism and feminism carries with it its own sanctions by God. Given the importance of wives and mothers in God’s plan for society and culture; and given the disaster that the rejection of the Christian world-view has meant for

⁴³ John Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973 [1577]), 568.

families and nations, the study of the biblical duties of wives is very important. Women will only find true freedom when they believe in Christ and submit their lives to God's holy law.

As we study the duty of the wife, we must keep in mind that although many commands are directed to wives in Scripture, husbands are still responsible for the behavior of their wives. This means that husbands have a responsibility to make sure that wives understand their biblical duties and put these duties into practice. In other words, Christian wives can never be considered in isolation of their husbands. Therefore, all the injunctions to wives in Scripture are in a sense directed to both husbands and wives.

In our consideration of the duty of wives we will examine three main areas: the central command to wives (to be subject to their own husbands), the biblical reasons for this submission, and the nature of the wife's submission. Because the scriptural reasons for the submission of the wife to her own husband mirror the reasons already given in the chapter on the duty of the husband this section will be brief and will focus on areas not previously considered. After we examine the submission of the wife, we will consider other duties (e.g., bearing children, sexual duties, etc.).

The central command to wives is submission to their own husbands. Paul writes, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything... Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33). The word (*hupotassesthe*) translated "submit" in verse 22 (the Majority and Received text)⁴⁴ is a present middle imperative of *hypotass*. This verb when used of the military means to place or rank under (Plybius).⁴⁵ When it is used by Paul in the middle voice it means "to subject one's self, to obey, to submit to one's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice."⁴⁶ Most modern versions (ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB) prefer the translation "be subject" or "be in subjection." Webster's unabridged dictionary defines the verb subject as: "to place under... to bring under the authority or control of."⁴⁷ Christian wives are commanded to submit to the authority of their own husbands in the Lord. The same command is repeated in Colossians 3:18: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." "The expression 'as is fitting' (*hs anken*) means that the submission of the wife to her own husband is appropriate Christian behavior. It is as it should be for it is proper as a Christian duty. The wife who in accordance with Scripture submits herself to her own husband is living her life in accordance with proper Christian behavior. Paul's fitting, points to the time of their entrance upon the Christian life."⁴⁸ The apostle clearly expects every professing Christian wife to immediately begin to submit to their own husbands in the Lord the moment they become a believer. Submission on the part of the wife to her own husband is not optional, but is a necessary aspect of Christian behavior.

⁴⁴ The verb *hupotassesthe* (v. 22) is not found in the early manuscripts. Even if one rejects the TR reading of verse 22, the meaning of the passage remains the same because the verb is easily supplied from the preceding *hupotassomeni* (present middle participle) in verse 21. Such constructions are common in Greek and are often used by Paul.

⁴⁵ See G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1977 [1937]), 463.

⁴⁶ J. H. Thayer, *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Apya, 1979 [1889]), 645.

⁴⁷ General Supervisor, Jean L. McKechnie, *Webster's New Twentieth Century of the English Language Unabridged* (New York: Collins World, 1978), 1813.

⁴⁸ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946 [1887]), 3:507.

Some Common Questions

Before we turn our attention to the biblical reasons for the wife's submission to her husband, there are three common questions regarding the wife's duty that need to be addressed. First, shouldn't the passages which teach the wife's submission be interpreted in light of Ephesians 5:21? Second, doesn't the submission of the wives as taught by Paul indicate that in the apostle's mind women are inferior to men? Third, wasn't the apostle Paul in his teaching on the submission of the wife merely reflecting the commonly held views of Greek, Roman and Jewish society?

(1) Does Ephesians 5:21 ("submitting to one another in the fear of God") imply that husbands also must submit to their wives; that the husband does not have a God-given authority over his wife; that marriage and the church are totally egalitarian in the modern sense of that term? No, absolutely not. To argue that the explicit teaching of Paul in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 regarding wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters can be ignored of the basis of Ephesians 5:21 is Scripture twisting of the worst sort. It is obvious that in the section dealing with the Christian household (5:22-6:9), that wives are subject to their husbands, children to parents, slave to masters and not vice versa. Given this fact, and given the teaching of both Old and New Testaments on this matter, Ephesians 5:21 must be interpreted as teaching a general submission to the rights, needs, and wishes of the others.⁴⁹ Did not our Lord wash the disciples' feet (Jn 13:14-15), and then instruct the disciples to do the same for one another? Similarly, Paul instructed Christians to live "in humble mindedness each counting the other better than himself" (Phil. 2:3). He also says in Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Believers are to place other Christians' welfare above their own. This means that we must be willing to subordinate our own personal interests to those of others in the church. This mutual submission is needed in the church for cooperation, peace and the overall sanctification of the body. This interpretation is supported by a very similar passage in I Peter where subjection to each other is coupled with humility. "Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility" (5:5). Using Ephesians 5:21 to overthrow the Biblical structure of authority in the Church and family would not only contradict several clear portions of Scripture, it also would make Paul on anarchist.⁵⁰ Such a view obviously is incompatible with evangelical Christianity.

(2) But doesn't the submission of the wife clearly imply the inferiority of women to men? No, this was not the apostle's intent. Paul refers to a functional subordination of wives to husbands that is ordained of God and built into the very fabric of creation. He is not making a statement regarding a woman's personal value or ontological being. The death-blow to the popular feminist conception that Paul was a sexist is the biblical teaching regarding the economic trinity. The economic trinity refers to the triune God's division of labor in creation and redemption. The Father sends the Son who voluntarily humbles Himself in coming to earth to suffer and die as the divine - human mediator. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit who then applies Christ's perfect redemption to the elect. The fact that Jesus submits Himself to the Father's will does not mean (and theologically cannot mean) that He is inferior in any way. Therefore, the fact that God has placed wives in a place of functional subordination to their own husbands should never be interpreted as denigrating to women. To do so is to denigrate

⁴⁹ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967, 68) Part 2, 244.

⁵⁰ A common and perfectly acceptable interpretation of this passage among older commentators is that Paul is simply telling believers to submit to other Christians in all the natural, civil and church relations that occur in life.

(indirectly) Christ Himself. Further, when one understands how Christian husbands are to treat their wives, all conceptions of a wife's inferiority immediately vanish. Because feminists have an axe to grind, they ignore the plain teaching of Scripture.

(3) The most common view held today by secular humanists, modernists and many neo-evangelicals is that Paul's teaching on the wife is merely a reflection of ancient Greek, Roman and Jewish culture. The implication of such a position is that Paul's injunctions to wives are culturally conditioned and thus do not apply to our modern, more enlightened time. Is it biblically possible that conservative Christians have been duped into following outmoded sexist customs from patriarchal cultures? No, not at all! There are a number of reasons why such a view must be rejected by all Bible-believing Christians. First, the idea that Paul was issuing moral imperatives based on arbitrary, sexist, unjust customs presupposes that the Bible is not divinely inspired and infallible. If Paul was teaching things that were culturally conditioned (in an unethical or unjust way), wrong or immoral, then the Bible is a book liable to error and cannot be trusted at any single point. Such a view would mean the death of biblical religion and should not be entertained for one moment by any Bible-believing Christian.

Second, the Bible gives many reasons for the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife and not one is based on custom, culture or personal opinion (e.g. [1] God's ordained order of authority [I Cor. 11:3]; [2] Adam was created first [I Tim. 2:14]; [3] the woman [Eve] originated from the man [Adam] [Gen. 2:21-22, I Cor. 11:8]; [4] the woman-wife was created as a help-mate to the man-Adam [Gen. 2:18; I Cor. 11:9]; [5] Eve was deceived and fell into transgression [I Tim. 2:14]; [6] the covenant headship of the husband [I Cor. 14:34-35]). When Paul looks back to the marriage relationship as set up by God before the fall and before the development of sin as a justification for the headship of the husband and submission of the wife, it is crystal clear that the Greek, Roman, or Jewish cultures of his day had nothing to do with his injunctions to husbands and wives. Further, if the biblical teaching regarding husbands and wives is culturally conditioned, sexist and immoral then what are we to make of Paul's comparison of Christ and the church with the relationship of husbands to wives. Would Paul set up a parallel between Christ and that which is sinful and based on corrupt pagan cultures? No, obviously not. Marriage (with Adam as head and Eve as help-mate) was made by God from the very beginning to reflect and teach humanity about the relationship of Christ and the church. Feminists can complain all they want regarding the biblical teaching on marriage and the family. Their attempts, however, to circumvent the teaching of Scripture on this matter are themselves culturally conditioned, immoral, unbiblical and anti-family.

Biblical Reasons for the Submission of the Wife

Before one examines the nature of biblical submission, one must first consider the biblical reasons for the wife's submission to her own husband. Since most of the reasons given in Scripture are the flip side of the covenant headship of the husband and thus have already been discussed in a previous chapter, this section will be brief and will focus on areas not previously considered.

Note that the first four reasons are all related to marriage as a creation ordinance of God.

(1) The Bible teaches that Eve is to submit to the husband because Adam was created first by God. Paul, writing under divine inspiration, gives significance to the fact that Adam was created before Eve. He writes, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God... For man is not from woman, but woman

from man” (1 Cor. 11:3, 8). “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 1:12-13).

(2) Closely related to the previous point is the fact that the creation account says that Eve originated from Adam. Paul says, “For man is not from women, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:8-9). “Adam was not in any way derived from (*ek*) a woman; he was created directly by God. The opposite is the fact regarding woman. Eve was derived from (*ek*) Adam: ‘bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.’”⁵¹

The Genesis narrative reads, “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place, Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:21-23). Eve’s origination from Adam shows: the absolute unity of the human race from one ancestor (a crucial doctrine, cf. Rom, 5:18 ff.); that woman is not of inferior substance to man, therefore she is equal to him as a creature of God; that the marriage relationship creates a special unity relationally, sexually and as to purpose. Matthew Henry writes, “That the woman was made of a rib out of side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”⁵²

(3) The last two points (Adam is created first; Eve is created second and originates from him) lead directly to the next reason for the submission of the wife. Eve was created for her husband to be a helpmate unto him. Paul says, “Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:9). The creation narrative reads, “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him’” (Gen 2:18). The placement of this verse in the creation account is very significant. Immediately after verse 18 it says (in verses 19 to 20) that God brought all the animals to Adam to see what he would call them. In the Hebrew mind-set, names are assigned to animals on the basis of the animals’ character. Therefore, for Adam naming the animals was not arbitrary but was based on empirical observations and careful analysis. Assigning names to each animal was a scientific endeavor. As all the animals passed before him, he would examine them closely. After careful thought, he would assign a name to each animal. It was during this time of study and reflection that Adam became very aware that of all the creation he was unique. In every species except man there was both male and female. It is likely that at this time Adam realized that he was incomplete in and of himself, that he needed a mate, a female counterpart. God providentially enabled Adam to understand his incompleteness and prepared him to meet his helpmate, his wife.

Adam’s need of a wife, a counterpart, is clearly seen in the dominion mandate. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:27-28). God gives two assignments to Adam and Eve: procreation and dominion. Adam and Eve are given the responsibility to develop a worldwide, God-glorifying culture. They are given dominion over the creatures for their improvement and development under God. Keep in mind that at this time, dominion does not involve killing animals for food. Only after the flood (Gen, 9:3) is dominion extended to include animal consumption. It is obvious that Adam could not fulfill the cultural mandate without a wife.

⁵¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 443.

⁵² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.) 1:20.

Procreation and the raising of children (a godly seed) are necessary to fill up the earth. The wife is necessary as a helpmate in the task of dominion. In procreation and raising a family, the wife plays a crucial role. She completes what is lacking in the man.

The word “helpmate” (KJV) or a “helper comparable to” (NKJV) expresses the notion of complementarity. The wife Eve is a helper matching or corresponding to her husband Adam. She is suitable for him. Together they make a perfect pair because they are both designed by God to complement each other, to form a perfect whole, a harmonious team. The man and the woman are different; yet these differences are designed by God to complement each other, to work together in such a manner as to make them stronger and more effective together than if they were apart. When feminists interpret this creation narrative as teaching that women are created second as mere servants of the man, they are totally missing the point of this passage. Adam and Eve need each other. While it is true that there is a God-ordained order of authority in the family, the story of the creation of Eve exalts the role of wife and mother. Matthew Henry writes, “Yet man being made last of the creatures, as the best and most excellent of all, Eve’s being made after Adam, and out of him, puts an honour upon that sex, as the glory of the man, I Cor. xi. 7. If a man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double-refined, one remove [sic] further from the earth.”⁵³

When Adam saw Eve, he knew that she was perfectly suitable to answer his needs and desires. The wife is to be a helper suitable for her husband. She is to compliment him and make up what is lacking in him. Together in marriage God makes them a complete whole and together they are perfectly suited to carry out the dominion mandate. The submission of the wife is rooted in the very fabric of creation. Eve was made for Adam to help him and complete him. Therefore, the only way that a woman can find true fulfillment and meaning as God created her is to become a loving submissive wife to a man who is under the loving lordship of Christ.

(4) The submission of the wife to her own husband is part of God’s ordained order of authority in creation. (This point is a theological statement that affirms everything we have already discussed). Paul writes, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3). The apostle says that God has established a certain order of authority in creation. There is God the Father, God the Son; then there is the husband (the man) and the wife (the woman). When Paul speaks of the Son submitting to the Father, he of course is referring to what theologians call the economic function of the persons of the Godhead in creation and redemption. The fact that the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife is part of God’s ordained order of authority means that when husbands refuse to lead or when wives refuse to submit, they in a sense are rejecting the authority of God Himself. There is nothing in God’s creation that is beyond the authority of His law-word. To deny God’s ordained order of authority for husbands and wives is to deny reality. It is to deny the very meaning and fabric of our existence.

(5) Another reason that Scripture gives for the subjection of the wife to her own husband is the historical fact that Eve was deceived and fell first. Paul writes, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:11-14). The apostle first appeals to the creation ordinance of marriage (v.13; i.e. the God-given purpose and roles of the husband and wife). Then Paul underlines and illustrates the necessity of these God-given roles by

⁵³ Ibid. 1:19.

pointing to the fall narrative in which the wife ignored her God-given role by acting as the leader of the household. Eve ignored her role of submission; did not consult with her husband and led her husband into transgression. Note God’s rebuke of Adam in Genesis 3:17, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife...” Although Adam was fully responsible for his transgression because he sinned willfully, his sin did not come about because of deception but because he submitted to his deceived, sinful wife. “Eve usurped the headship in the fall; Adam, who was the head, became the feet and followed Eve in the *parabasis*, in the stepping aside.”⁵⁴ “God had given her, not for authority and rule, but for kindly ministrations; to be a helpmate by his side, not a directress to control his judgment or determine for him the course of life.”⁵⁵ (A number of other reasons for the submission of the wife [e.g., the plain teaching of Scripture regarding covenant headship; the etymology of the words for husband and wife; the analogy of the marriage relationship and Christ and the church; the requirements for church office; the teaching of God’s law.] have already been considered in the chapter regarding the duties of the husbands).

Some Implications of the Submission of the Wife

The Bible is crystal clear in its teaching that the wife has a different and subordinate role in the marriage relationship. Although created in the image of God and equal to the man ontologically, the wife was created as a helpmate to the man. This teaching has many implications for understanding the roles of husbands and wives.

One thing it teaches us is that the woman is to assist her husband in the task of godly dominion. The husband is to glorify God and extend dominion over the earth by means of his calling in life and the wife is to help her husband be the best he can be (in a biblical manner) in his particular calling. This means that the wife’s “career” and calling in life is not found outside the home but is centered on her husband and children. Note how this teaching is assumed by the apostle Paul writing under divine inspiration. “Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim. 5:14). The natural God-given calling of women is to get married, bear children and manage the house. “‘To rule the house’ means as the wife and mother in the home, to manage the household affairs. This is the domain and province of women in which no man can compete with her.”⁵⁶ Calvin writes, “And St. Paul rehearses it now again. As if he said, that a woman should give herself to be at the church all the day long and to pray and sing, this kind of life would not God so well like of, as if being married, she were with patience very willing to do her duty in nourishing her children, in watching for them, in nurturing them, and taking all pains and care to instruct them. If a woman gives herself to this, and makes this her end to serve God, knowing that it is he that hath called her to such a charge, St. Paul says, that this shall be greater, and better liked of, for God requires obedience”⁵⁷

Note also Paul’s pastoral teaching to Titus on this issue. He writes, “The older women likewise, that they be...teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love

⁵⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, and to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1937), 568-569.

⁵⁵ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I and II Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 [1874]), 130.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 676.

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (Carlisle, PA.: Banner of Truth, 1983 [1579]) 494. The spelling has been modernized by this author.

their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (Tit. 2:3-5). Contrary to modern feminized culture, the word of God gives top priority to home life. Not only does Paul have more to say to young women than any other class, he instructs the older women to teach the younger women regarding their domestic duties. “So much depends on the women, in great part on the young women, of the church. The world will to a great extent judge the churches by the character which the gospel produces in women.”⁵⁸

Paul says that wives are to be dedicated to their husbands and children (“loving husbands” and “loving children”). They are to be “keepers at home” (*oikourous*). Einwechter writes,

This word is derived from two Greek words. The first, *oikos* means a house, a dwelling, or, by metonymy, a household or family. The second, *ouros*, refers to a keeper, watcher or guardian, i.e. one who has the oversight and responsibility for something. Thus, the basic significance of *oikourous* is that of a “housekeeper,” that is, one who watches over a household and family, seeing to it that all members are cared for, and all things maintained in good order. *Oikourous* is used only in the New Testament in Titus 2:5; therefore, in seeking to accurately discern its meaning we must look to the Greek literature of the New Testament era. There, the word *oikourous* meant watching or keeping the house. It was employed in reference to a watchdog and to a rooster, but more germane to the context of Titus 2:5, indicate the mistress of the house. Furthermore, it was specifically used in praise of a good wife. Interestingly *oikourous* is utilized contemptuously of a man who refused to go out to war, designating him a “stay-at-home” man. “The verbal form, *oikoureo*, meant to watch or keep the house. It was used of men to indicate those who stayed at home to avoid military service. Other closely related words such as 1) *oikourema*, meant keeping the house and staying at home, and was used to refer to women as the “stay-at-homes”; 2) *oikouria*, referred to women as those employed in the work of housekeeping; 3) *oikourios*, meant the wages or rewards for the work of keeping the house, but also designated, significantly, keeping children within the doors of the house, i.e. keeping them at home.”⁵⁹

“The ancients, both Jews and Gentiles, esteemed the stay-at-home wife.”⁶⁰

The modern ideal of the career woman who works outside the home and places her children in daycare or with a teenage babysitter is clearly unbiblical. Such a notion is a product of modern feminism and is anti-children and anti-family. The wife’s kingdom or domain is the home. Being a “stay-at-home” wife is a Christian woman’s God-given calling and, contrary to

⁵⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and Philemon*, 913.

⁵⁹ William Einwechter, “Keepers at Home” in *Chalcedon Report* (Vallecito, CA: May, 1999). Einwechter’s source for his analyses of the Greek word *oikourous* is: Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1940), 1205. The Greek variant for *oikoureo* (the Received Text and the Majority Text [or the Byzantine/Traditional Text]) is *oikourgous* (modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament) which means “workers at home.” Following this variant, modern translations such as the NIV render this word “to be busy at home.” This translation, however, can give the false impression that women can pursue a career outside the home as long as they are busy when they are at home. The Greek word *oikourgous* does not teach anything that contradicts the application of the better reading *oikourous*. Both Greek words teach that women are to fulfill their God-given responsibilities in the home. Obviously a woman who works outside the home is not a “home worker.” The NIV translation is defective and misleading. Being busy at home is a good application of being a “home worker” but by itself is liable to misunderstanding and abuse.

⁶⁰ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1960), 241.

feminism's egalitarian propaganda, there is nothing more important, needed or fulfilling than staying at home loving, nurturing, teaching, and disciplining the next generation of Christians. What possibly could be more important than that? "Women's greatest service to the race is that of motherhood. She may still do voluntary work that does not interfere with her duty to her husband and children; but she is not free to assume another life-work."⁶¹

Paul says that the older women who are battle tested and experts in the domestic sphere are to teach the younger women to stay at home in order to be diligent homemakers. The apostle is not instructing young married women to stay at home and watch soap operas and game shows while the children are off being indoctrinated at the state school. This means that a wife who is lazy, who does not keep a clean and tidy house, who is lax in her home schooling duties is disobeying God. Being a good wife and mother is hard work, especially if there are many little children. Therefore, it is very important that believers reject the statist feminist social conditioning rampant in our culture that denigrates the role of wife and mother. The Christian wife has a very important job to do in the family and society. Any attempt to portray this role as a waste of time, or unimportant, or as a state of patriarchal oppression is nothing but the lie of Satan. The reality is, it is the career women (who has moved up the company ladder and made a lot of money but who has no children) that is sad, unfulfilled and often exploited by men.

The biblical concept of the stay-at-home wife and mother raises a few important questions. First, in a modern culture where there are single mothers and divorced women with children that become Christians is it not impossible for such women to stay at home and focus on the domestic sphere? While it is true that women in such situations do not have any choice but to work to support their household, there are biblical principles that come into play during such a crisis. A Christian woman with children who does not have a husband should, if possible, move in with believing relatives. Paul says that one's extended family has a moral obligation to provide for their close relatives (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8). If one's extended family does not have the means to support a woman with several children then at least if the woman has to work the children will be nurtured by other Christian family members. If there are no Christian relatives but only hostile or indifferent pagan relatives then a woman in such a situation should be able to turn to the church for help. If the church is able to, it should provide the woman with food and shelter, so that she can stay home with her children. During this period of time, the elders should be actively helping her find another believing husband to support her and her children. If the church is small and struggling itself, effort should be made to provide godly women (preferably an older woman as in the order of widows) to watch over her children while she works. The church has a moral obligation to make sure that covenant children are not being warehoused in heathen day care centers. This diaconal ministry is much more important than financing a fancy new church building. The fact that we live in a wicked culture with many family problems does not negate Paul's teaching regarding the wife as a "keeper at home". When problems arise because of sin they must be dealt with biblically and compassionately.

Second, doesn't the Bible's teaching regarding the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 contradict Paul's requirement that wives are to be "keepers at home"? Doesn't this portion of Scripture encourage women to engage in a career outside the home at least on a part-time basis? The answer to these questions is no. A careful reading of Proverbs 31 actually supports the teaching of Paul for it presents the ideal wife and mother as a woman who works out of her home under the authority of her husband to provide extra income for the family. The woman of

⁶¹ D. S. Faris, "The Female Deacon, Animadversions on the Arguments of Synod's Committee," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVII:5 (May 1889), 140.

Proverb 31 does not have a job or career outside the home. She doesn't go to a factory or office to punch a time clock and work while others raise her children. The virtuous wife is an expert at providing good and clothing for her household (vs. 14, 21). She not only is a wise shopper but she also works hard with her hands (vs. 13, 15, 17-19, 22, 24). She works at home making products for the marketplace (linen garments and sashes, vs. 24). She uses the profits wisely. She helps the poor (v. 20), buys real estate and even plants a vineyard (v. 16). Bridges writes,

The standard of godliness exhibited here is not that of a religious recluse, shut up from active obligations, under the pretense of greater spirituality and consecration to God. There aren't any habits of monastic self-denial set forth here that have often been extolled as the highest point of Christian perfection. One half, at least, of the picture of the virtuous woman is occupied with her personal and domestic work. What a rebuke this also conveys to self-pleasing inactivity! Her many tasks show her praiseworthy and genuine simplicity of manners, and practical, yet liberal, thrift. This is indeed a difficult and rare attainment; economy without a miserly spirit; seen and felt as little as possible, and conducted with all care and consideration for the comfort of her family.⁶²

But let us look in greater detail at the features of the portrait before us. Her personal habits are full of energy. Manual labor, even menial service, in the old days, was the occupation of women of all ranks. Self-denial was a main principle, with the excellent wife leading her servants in hard work, no less than in dignity; expecting nothing from them, that she wouldn't do herself; ruling her household most efficiently through self-discipline. And so, she rounds up her tools and materials and puts them to work for her family. Instead of murmuring at some inconvenient demand, she sets a worthy example and delights in the work of her hands. She works early and late. The fruit of her work she turns to good account. In the days of Proverbs she sold the work to merchants. She puts her whole being into her work, ready to do any work befitting her sex and station.

The Bible teaches that the wife's top priority is the home. Running it wisely for God's glory under her husband's authority is her chief concern. The biblical paradigm of motherhood, however, does not mean that women are confined to the home. It is obvious from the Proverbs that wives were active in both buying and selling. Yet there is a major difference between making products at home as time permits and marketing them at one's own convenience and making a commitment to work for a corporation outside the home. With the Proverbs' model, the woman is in control and her family is never neglected. The wife in Proverbs 31 is in control of her schedule. Her home-based business affords her great flexibility. With the modern industrial and corporate model, there is no flexibility. The family must be placed on the back burner while the wife goes off to work. The biblical model rejects both modern feminism and the strict Islamic model in which women are not even permitted to go out in public. The wife of Proverbs 31 is an excellent biblical model of what it means to be a "keeper at home."

Perhaps the most common objection by professing Christians to the biblical doctrine that wives are to be "keepers at home" is that it is simply impossible to live in a modern (welfare-state, high-tax situation) society without two incomes. Although high taxes, real estate prices, transportation costs, etc. make it more difficult to make ends meet on one income alone it does not make it impossible. Christians can do quite well with the mother at home if they handle money wisely and biblically. If families stay out of debt and live simply much can be

⁶² Charles Bridges, *The Book of Proverbs*, Revised by George F. Santa (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1978), 735.

accomplished on a modest income. The problem with many professing Christians today is that they have bought into the American hedonistic materialistic concept of living which says: buy the biggest house you can; get a new car every two to three years; take an expensive vacation every year; run up your credit cards on dining out and various luxuries. The priority for Christian families must be extending godly dominion by raising a godly seed instead of seeking affluence, personal pleasures and unnecessary possessions. On your death bed will you be thinking about your shiny Lexus or your flesh and blood posterity?

The fact that the wife was created for the husband as a helpmeet unto him teaches us that women have a natural (built in by God) desire to fulfill their family function. This means that all attempts by modern society to eliminate gender differences and “stereotypes,” to teach sex role reversals, to indoctrinate women to be like men, to establish an androgynous society; to redefine marriage in a secular humanistic egalitarian manner will not only ultimately fail but will cause untold harm to families, especially women and children. No matter how much women buy into feminist conditioning and no matter how perverted women are by sin, they still in most cases want a husband and children. The rush to have children by corporate career women, Hollywood leftists, and even lesbians (in their late 30s and early 40s) is not an accident. Women cannot deny creational reality without bringing misery upon their own heads.

Modern feminism and the sexual revolution has been an incredible disaster for American women. On the one hand society (e.g., through the public schools, universities, the media, the civil government, the major corporations, etc.) is telling women that men and women are basically the same and that women should become like men (e.g., career orientated, aggressive, sexually “liberated,” etc.); and, on the other hand society is telling women to be totally autonomous, to seek out perfect self-fulfillment and sexual freedom. The result of such indoctrination is that women are working much harder than before trying to satisfy both feminist propaganda and the creation imperative (i.e. being a wife and mother). Women have increasingly been treated with less respect and dignity for doing their most important task in life which is helping their husband and raising a family. Further, the so-called “sexual liberation” of modern society has basically been used by pagan men to treat women as sex objects and then toss them aside when boredom begins. Feminists have dug a large pit, shoveled in a layer of cow manure and jumped into the pit while praising their own accomplishments. They are victims of their own success. They do not understand that in rejecting the biblical paradigm of the family they are destroying their own lives. They are eliminating, or at least making much more difficult, their own happiness and fulfillment. Gallagher writes,

Here are some of the changes of the last twenty years: women are more likely to be abandoned by their husbands, to have to raise their children alone, to slip into poverty and to experience all the consequent degradations, to live in crowded apartments in dangerous parts of the city, to experience bad health and poor medical care, to be beaten, stabbed, raped, and robbed. Domestic violence is on the rise. So is sexual abuse of children while the sexual abuse of women has become the social norm. Reversing historic trends, women today work longer and harder than their mothers did and, under the stress, are more likely to collapse in nervous breakdowns. Fewer women can find suitable marriage partners and many who do marry will never have the children for which they long...⁶³

⁶³ Maggie Gallagher, *Enemies of Eros: How the Sexual Revolution is Killing Family, Marriage, and Sex and What I Can Do About It* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1989), 14, 16.

When society fails to protect the family, it fails to protect women. Though motherhood is an increasingly dangerous proposition, women still want children and society still counts on us to bear and nurture the future generation. But regardless of whether our determined love for our children is a consequence of nature or nurture, it is very clear by now that men cannot be counted upon to share it. Why is it that the sexual freedom of the last twenty years hasn't produced hordes of impoverished single fathers? The answer is that the absence of strong cultural pressures to the contrary, men as a group do not find it impossible to abandon their children when the task of supporting them becomes very difficult or very unpleasant. This comes as a particular shock to a generation of women raised by men who were dependable, at a time when reliable husbands and fathers were the norm.

It is only in a society that is based on biblical law that women are protected socially, legally and economically. Laws against fornication and adultery (Ex. 20:14, 16-17, Dt. 22:13-21, 29; 23:17; Lev. 19:29; 21:9) protect women (and men) from exploitation and abandonment. In a Christian society there is a powerful social pressure placed upon both men and women to live within their God-ordained roles. Men are tied to their families by law and social conditioning. Wives and children are respected and loved. Men know that if they use and mistreat their wives they will be social outcasts. They will be considered failures and cowards. Women in such a society who play the harlot and mistreat or neglect their children will suffer dire consequences. The Christian world and life view is the glue that in the past and present has held families together. It is ironic that husbands, wives and children are most happy and fulfilled when they place Christ first and work for His kingdom: and, most miserable when the self is placed on the throne. A society that rejects God and biblical law and defines marriage in terms of sexual appetites, arbitrary statist laws and feminist presuppositions will come under judgment and ruin.

The Nature of the Submission of the Wife

The Bible not only teaches the submission of the wife to her husband but also defines the nature of this submission. This fact is very important because men and women have a sinful tendency to twist the imperatives of Scripture to allow either greater human autonomy than delineated or greater human control over others. Paul gives a number of specific instructions regarding the nature of biblical submission.

(1) Note that the apostle teaches that the submission of the wife is singular. "Wives submit to your own husbands" (Eph. 5:22). Wives are not commanded to submit to all men in general but specifically to their own husbands. There are churches in which this command to wives has been misunderstood as saying that all women are subject to all men in general. There are also oriental and Islamic cultures that teach that all women in general must be subordinated to all men. In some societies one can even observe women walking behind their husbands as if they are an inferior class. The Bible does not at all teach such subordination. Christian wives have a responsibility to submit to their own particular husbands.

There is a general submission required between all believers that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5:21. This general submission is necessary for the peace, edification and proper functioning of the body. Note, however, that this general submission transcends gender boundaries. Both women and men are to place the needs of the others before themselves. The Bible also teaches that there are vocations that are forbidden to women. For example women are not permitted to teach or have authority over men in the church and women are not to serve in a fighting capacity in the armed forces. These facts do not mean or should not be taken as logical

inferences that all women are in a state of subjection to all men. God's law word recognizes the differences between men and women and honors women as the weaker vessel. Scripture also orders things so that women are not taken away from their responsibility as a helpmeet to their husbands and as "keepers at home" for the children.

The fact that the wife is required to submit to her own husband and not other men means that wives must first go to their own husbands for counsel and advice before they seek knowledge from others. The wife is to look up to her own husband as the theologian, counselor, Bible teacher and problem solver of the family. Paul writes, "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Even if there are other men in the congregation who are more knowledgeable in theology and counseling Paul says "go ask your own husband in private." By asking the husband at home the wife shows her submission, gives her husband the opportunity to lead and honors him. To ask another man or woman without first consulting with her own husband is dishonoring to her husband. She is implicitly saying I cannot trust my husband's leadership skills in this particular area. Therefore, I must seek leadership elsewhere. If a wife goes first to her husband and her husband says, "Elder Bob is an expert in this area;" or, "Let's go ask elder Bob who has already thoroughly studied this topic," then she has submitted to her own husband's leadership and honored him. A wife must be careful to speak and act in ways that honor her husband's position of authority. Further, by going to her husband first and relying on his judgment, the wife gives him the opportunity and impetus to grow and be the kind of leader she needs him to be. By going to others, the wife is limiting her husband's potential.

There are churches which violate this biblical principle by encouraging wives to first go directly to the pastor or elders before they have spoken to their own husbands. Churches must function in ways that encourage the biblical order of authority in the family. Wives must not be encouraged or allowed to set up counseling sessions with anyone without first asking for permission from their own husbands. (Obviously, if a husband is beating his wife, threatening to kill her, molesting the children or any other such thing, the wife should immediately consult with the elders of the church and if necessary the civil authorities). Also, wives should not attend church women's groups that permit women to complain about their husbands or seek direct counsel from such a group without first going to the husband. The husband must always be given the opportunity to solve family problems before others are brought in for advice. "A woman must cultivate a very high view of her head, both the position God has given him over her, as well as the authority God has given him. When women adopt this high view, submission is seen in an entirely different light. Submitting to someone whom God has placed over you with loving authority is a relief, not a burden."⁶⁴

(2) The wife's submission to her husband is to be done as unto the Lord Jesus Christ. "[H]er obedience to her husband is to be regarded as part of her obedience to the Lord...It terminates on him, and therefore is religious, because determined by religious motives, and directed towards the object of the religious affections. This makes the burden light and the yoke easy; for every service which the believer renders to Christ is rendered with alacrity and joy."⁶⁵

The wife must look upon her submission to her husband as an act of obedience to Christ and not merely to her husband. Why is this principle so important? A major reason is that in a

⁶⁴ Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands: Respect and the Christian Woman* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997), 17.

⁶⁵ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856], 227-228).

number of cases wives are more educated, smarter, have better taste, are more decisive, etc. than their own husbands. A Christian wife in such a situation who may disagree with the decision of her husband will still gladly submit because she knows her actions are pleasing to Christ. The basis of a wife's submission is not because the husband is superior or because of some arbitrary social custom, but because it is a religious duty to her Savior and Lord. Although it may be difficult to submit to a thick-skulled sinful human, it is very easy to submit to the sinless Son of God. After a husband and wife communicate in a Christian manner about something and there is a disagreement, the wife must yield to her husband's decision in a cheerful respectful manner. Even if the wife is totally convinced that her idea was better she must submit with joy because she is obeying Christ and pleasing Him.

A wife who refuses to submit to her husband is rejecting the authority of Jesus Christ. A woman that continuously and obstinately rejects the authority of her own husband tramples underfoot the holy Scriptures and Christ's lordship. By her behavior she is declaring to God: "I reject your created order, your law, your authority, Your Son. I'm going to call the shots around here. I don't care what your word says." Such a woman is setting her seal of approval on the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden. A woman who purposely continues upon such a path is giving concrete evidence that she is not truly regenerate.

Therefore, wives, if you want to gauge your obedience to Christ and your love toward Him, then examine your own behavior toward your husband. Are you submissive? Do you obey cheerfully and quickly? Do you obey in a respectful manner? Or: Do you ignore your husband's instructions? Do you obey only when you think it is important or a good idea? Do you obey with a disrespectful attitude, with grumbling comments, complaints, stalling and/or a rolling of the eyes? If this has been your behavior then you need to repent, confess your sins to God and reconcile with your husband.

Wives, keep in mind that your children are watching. They are being instructed by your example. Are they watching an Eve in her rebellion or a faithful Sarah? Are they learning the nature of true biblical submission by your actions and words; or, are they learning to disrespect proper God-instituted authority? When you observe the disobedience, rebellion and disrespect to your own authority by your children, are you watching a reflection of your own behavior to your husband? While it is true that a wife's submission to her own husband is rooted in creation and is God's revealed will for all marriage relationships and, therefore must be obeyed without reservation, the obedience of the wife to her own husband is for her (and her children's) benefit. It comes with great blessing and is imminently practical. An obedient Christian wife is an excellent example of proper submission and devotion to Christ. Children raised in such a home will be obedient and respectful to their parents. "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rotteness in his bones" (Pr. 12:14).

If a wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord then it is rather obvious that the biblical submission of the wife must be founded upon faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter mentions this necessity when he points women to the Old Testament examples of obedience. "For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands" (1 Pet. 3:5). Old Testament holy women lived out their faith in God by their godly behavior toward their husbands. When a woman believes in Christ and places her trust in Him her obedience to her husband is no longer founded upon social custom or the worthiness of her husband but upon her relationship to Christ. No matter how her husband acts, her commitment to obedience is not shaken because it flows from her devotion to Jesus. By focusing upon the Lord a wife's anxieties, doubts, troubles and fears

dissipate because she knows that Christ is sovereign. He has “all power and authority” (Mt. 28:18). He rewards obedience (1 Cor. 3:14; 2 Jn. 8) and has the power to change a husband’s heart (Phil. 2:13). Such a godly wife obeys Christ, prays and waits upon the Lord. A wife who trusts in Jesus does not try to force her husband to act in a certain way. Instead she places her faith in God’s word, stops worrying and waits patiently for God to answer her prayers.

(3) The wife is to be subject to her husband in everything as the church is subject to Christ. There is no area of life and activity in which the wife can disregard her husband’s decision. The wife does not have the option of submitting to some requests while ignoring others. Although a good husband will discuss important decisions with his wife because he highly regards her godly counsel, the final decision is always the husband’s. The husband has the final say in where to live, what house to buy, what kind of car to drive, the education of the children, etc. Obviously this does not mean that in every little day to day decision that needs to be made (e.g., buying groceries, paying bills, disciplining bad behavior in the children) the wife must act like a child and ask permission from the husband. There are many areas in which the husband delegates authority to his wife for the efficient functioning of the household. However, it does mean that the husband is ultimately responsible to oversee everything that takes place in the home.

The submission of the church to Christ is to be total and comprehensive. The submission of the wife to her husband is comprehensive only within the parameters of God’s word. In other words, the wife is to obey her husband in everything except that which contradicts the word of God. This point is very important for certain teachers who have been using Ephesians 5:24 as a proof text for an absolute submission on the part of the wife—even if the husband asks his wife to sin! Such an interpretation ignores a very fundamental principle of biblical interpretation that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. The idea that a wife can sin with impunity under her husband’s authority is a form of ethical relativism. One is reminded of the famous “don’t blame me” sentence used repeatedly at the Nuremberg trials: “I was only following orders.” When anyone asks a Christian to commit sin (even when they are in a position of authority over a believer) the only appropriate response is: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Ac. 5:29). Gordon Clark writes, “The previous verse states the basis of Christian subordination: It must be in fear of Christ. Neither a husband nor an emperor should have absolute authority. They are both bound by the law of God, and we, men, women, and citizens, must obey God rather than men.”⁶⁶

If a Christian is married to an unbeliever she must respectfully disobey her husband if he asks her to lie, steal, commit adultery, worship idols, go to an apostate church, etc. She must explain in a respectful, submissive, non-contentious manner her biblical reasons for disobedience. If the unbelieving husband is threatening, the wife should seek help from the elders in her church.

Although a husband does not have the authority to ask his wife to violate Scripture in any way, this principle does not give the wife the permission to start arbitrarily labeling things she does not like to do as sins. If a Christian wife is going to disobey her husband it must be over a real violation of God’s law and not legalistic, subjective pietism. When a wife believes she must disobey her Christian husband she must be able to prove her point from the Bible alone. In such a situation it is advisable to get counsel from the church elders. If a husband and wife disagree over an issue that does not involve the wife in sin yet is not based on a sensible interpretation or application of Scripture (e.g., the husband requires the wife wear long dresses in the house [in

⁶⁶ Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1985), 183-184.

other words he forbids pants or shorts even in private]) then the wife should defer to her husband even though she thinks his opinion is silly.

There are some women who have convinced themselves that a partial obedience to their own husbands is acceptable. They submit to their husband's authority in some areas yet stubbornly refuse to submit in others. They set up areas of autonomy over which no one, even their husbands are to tread. By continually refusing to obey in certain areas they hope that their husbands will give up and relinquish control. It is important that husbands in such situations remain strong and do not permit their wives to usurp their authority. A partial obedience is disobedience. Given the sinful inclination toward circumventing the imperatives of Scripture, the Holy Spirit emphasizes that submission is required in all areas.

It is also important that wives do not manipulate their husbands to get their own way. A wife who manipulates her husband by crying, nagging, complaining, making deals (e.g., I'll do this if you let me do that, etc.) begging or even intimidation (e.g., I will not be a happy wife if I do not get such and such) is obviously not fulfilling the spirit of this requirement. This author has known professing Christian married couples in which wives were constantly manipulating their husbands into obeying their desires. Such women were totally convinced that they were submissive and obedient when in reality they were deceitful, disrespectful and domineering. When the apostle Peter discusses the submission of the wife he notes the importance and beauty "of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4). A woman's outward adornment and behavior should reflect a godly, submissive interior character. Obviously a woman who is self-willed, manipulative and plotting does not fulfill this requirement.

Given the comprehensive nature of the submission of the wife to her husband it is extremely important that women who are contemplating marriage only consider Christian men who they are prepared to submit to in a biblical manner. If the Christian man is immature, unintelligent, impulsive and, overall, a poor leader, then a woman in such a situation would be wise to wait and seek a mate elsewhere. Once the marriage vows are complete the wife must obey. Picking a life-long partner is one of the most important decisions a person can make. Therefore, it is imperative that decisions are made based on biblical principles and not emotion, infatuation or sexual attraction.

(4) The submission of the wife to her husband is to be done in a respectful manner. Wives are commanded to respect their husbands. "Let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph. 5:33).

The verb respect (Greek, *phobe*) means that the wife is to have a high regard for her husband. She is to have an attitude of reverence and honor toward him. George Knight III writes, "The respect asked of a wife recognizes the God-given character of the headship of the husband and thus treats him with dutiful regard and deference. Just as husbands have been asked to display their headship through likeness to Christ's headship over His church, that is, through a love that cherishes and nourishes (verse 25, 28, 29), so now wives are asked to render their submission in a way that is most like that of the submission of the church to Christ, that is, a truly respectful submission because it is rendered voluntarily from the heart. A wife's respecting her husband and his headship therefore involves not only what she does but also her attitude in doing."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ George W. Knight, "Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church," in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 175.

A wife's respect for her husband should be displayed in both what a wife does not do and what a wife does toward her husband. Respect involves many things that a wife must avoid in her speech and behavior. Wives should never submit to their husbands with anger, stubbornness, irritation, grouching, nagging, complaining, smart remarks and so on. Wives should not criticize their husbands by saying their decisions are stupid, wrong or unwise. A respectful attitude does not focus on a husband's defects. When a husband does make a mistake a respectful wife will not rub it in with a "see I told you so." Also, a wife should never make comments that are intended to hurt her spouse and tear him down. Telling a husband that he doesn't make enough money, or that she shouldn't have married him, that if she had been more patient she could have found a better spouse, is clearly off-limits.

Respect also involves a proper attitude and speech when the wife is away from home. This means that Christian wives do not criticize or put down their husbands in front of others: parents, friends, acquaintances, strangers or anyone. Even if a wife's remarks are 100% true she must never tear down her husband's reputation before others. She should speak to her own husband privately, humbly and respectfully about his problems. If his problems cannot be dealt with privately then biblical counseling is needed with his consent. (Obviously if sin is involved Matthew 18:15 ff. comes into play.) Women's groups and Bible studies that allow gossip and disrespect to spouses must be avoided. Women must respect their husbands even in their absence. They should not even make disparaging remarks about their spouses to their own children.

A wife who shows disrespect to her husband behind his back to others is simply feeding her own bitterness and disrespect instead of dealing with the alleged offense biblically. "Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Pr. 10:18-19). A Christian wife should focus on good positive things regarding her husband when talking to others. The husband who is respected can trust his wife with others. "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Pr. 31:11-12). "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rotteness in his bones" (Pr. 12:4).

Respect is not merely avoiding certain behaviors. It also has a positive side. A wife must show respect to her husband by complimenting and building him up. As a help-meet she is to encourage him in his God-given calling. Even when the husband does a good job mowing the lawn or building a shed, the wife should complement his work. When a wife respects her husband biblically she helps him do more for the kingdom of God than if he was alone. There is an element of truth in the phrase that it is a woman who makes the man. A man who is married to a godly wife can often attain a greater level of sanctification and achievement.

When wives are told that they must respect their husbands they often raise the following questions. "Yes, that is what the Bible says, but, what if my husband does not deserve respect? What then should I do?" The Scriptures teach that the wife must still respect her husband. The respect of the wife is not contingent upon the respectability of the husband. How do we know that the wife's respect is not to be dependent upon the respectability of the husband? There are two reasons. First, the command to respect comes with no qualifications or expectations. Second, the Bible teaches that the respect of the wife toward her husband is the best method of rendering him respectable. If a woman is married to an unbeliever or a mediocre Christian she must find ways to respect her husband. Her submissive respectful attitude can be used of God to win over a stubborn husband.

When the apostle Peter addresses Christian women who are married to unbelievers he does not say to nag one's spouse into the kingdom but rather to win them to Christ by being submissive, chaste, godly and respectful like Sarah to Abraham. He writes, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

Peter does not sanction the idea that women should show disrespect to lousy or unbelieving husbands. On the contrary, he says that submission, respect and inner beauty is the best method for converting unsaved husbands. "A Christian must respect the uniform with which God clothed husbands, even if they poorly fit it. The respect is directed toward God and His authority, not fundamentally toward the man in who it is invested."⁶⁸ This principle clearly applies to women who are married to disobedient Christian husbands. When a woman's life corresponds to her verbal witness, her words are far more effective. When a believing wife is married to a Christian who is sloppy in his walk, who is a poor leader, the best thing she can do for his sanctification is to be respectful, and submissive. Godliness on the part of the wife is used by God to convict and sanctify the husband.

Some Christian women have the idea that respect and submission should only be given as a reward for respectability and love on the part of the husband. There are woman who are in such situations who will outwardly obey a husband's instructions yet do so with a respectful, bitter spirit. They believe that they must punish their husband's bad behavior in order to see positive change. Such an attitude not only violates 1 Peter 3:1-6, but also the teaching of Paul that we are not to fight evil with more evil. The apostle says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). Speaking of 1 Peter 3:1-6 Jay Adams writes, "Submission is not passive but active. She seeks to win her husband to Christ. The word win (vs. 1) is a military term. She is to declare war on her husband and attempt to take him captive for Christ. But the weapons she uses are to be obedience, respect, gentleness and quietness, and her basic strategy is to overcome his evil by doing good....Such submission is not doormatism. It is aggressive, violent submission bent on defeating evil by doing good! No Christian wife need sit still, having nothing to do about the situation; God has given battle orders. To sit in self-pity is sin!"⁶⁹

Peter and Paul's point about overcoming evil by doing good often raises certain questions by women who are married to unbelievers or believers who are poor leaders. For example: "How am I supposed to respect my husband when I don't feel like it, when I don't see anything respectable in his behavior? There are a number of things that should be noted in response to such inquiries. First, a Christian's obedience to God's word is never contingent upon the feelings or subjective state of the believer. When God issues a command He expects obedience whether we feel like it or not. If believers obeyed God's word only when they felt like it, they would continually be guilty of all sorts of offenses. If we encounter situations in which we do not feel like obeying God's word, we must still obey and pray that God would give us a heart that loves obedience, that has the proper feelings and emotions. Further, when Christians continually obey

⁶⁸ Jay Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1978), 96.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

in a particular area that has been particularly difficult for them, they will (with the Holy Spirit's enabling power) eventually develop patterns or habits of righteous behavior and the proper biblical feelings will follow.

Second, it is very important that wives understand that the motivation for obedience is not one's feelings but a desire to please Jesus Christ. Luther writes, "It is a high, noble blessing a wife may have when she so conducts herself as to be subject to her husband, in that she is sure that her works please God. What can be a happier experience for her?"⁷⁰ The idea that feelings are the basis or motivation to obedience is egocentric and pagan. Our motivation must always be Christocentric. Martha Peace writes, "Few wives naturally have the right heart's attitude to be submissive to their husbands. Even if a woman desires to please God by being submissive, she will not always feel like being submissive. Also in a conflict, when feelings are intense, it may be difficult for her to submit. Regardless of her feelings, she should honor Christ by developing a mind-set or a resolve to do the right thing in the right way with the right motive whether she feels like it or not. In the process, her feelings will eventually improve."⁷¹

Third, Christian wives must learn to be content in their situation in life. They must understand that God is sovereign and has placed them in a particular marriage. This point of course does not mean that wives should not work to improve their situation by biblical means. It means that wives should not complain and wallow in self-pity. "Therefore whoever wishes to be a Christian wife is to reason in this manner: I will not have regard as to what sort of husband I have, whether he be a heathen or a Jew, righteous or wicked; but I will have regard to the fact that God has placed me in the marriage state, and I will be subject and obedient to my husband. Then all her works are golden if she stands in such obedience."⁷² Wives who complain and disrespect their husbands are exhibiting a discontentment with God's providence and care. Such an attitude and behavior must be banished because it is both selfish and sinful.

Fourth, wives should not focus on their husbands' shortcomings but rather should look for ways to respect them. In other words, they should stop worrying about themselves and start obeying God's word. When wives stop focusing on the negative aspects of their husbands' behavior and start looking to the positive, they will find many areas in which they can show respect. Is your husband a good provider? If he is, then tell him how much you appreciate his hard work. Does he spend time playing with, helping and instructing the children? If he does, then thank him for his fatherly concern. Show him your appreciation. Nancy Wilson writes, "Most women can find many things to respect about their husbands; they merely need to be reminded of the many good qualities that they have been taking for granted.... Emphasize his work (or job) first, and then move on to other things.... God has designed your husband to need respect, and He commanded you to be the principal source of it."⁷³ When wives build up their husbands biblically through giving them proper respect, they build up the whole household. They help their husbands become better leaders, more effective in dominion work and are used of God to make their husbands more respectable. It is usually the case that, the more obedient the wife is to this command (i.e. respecting her husband), the more her marital circumstances improve. As her circumstances improve, the easier it will be for her to obey this imperative.

Likewise, when a wife is disobedient to this command it often becomes harder to obey. What often happens is that a husband who does not receive respect will feel depressed or angry

⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982), 135.

⁷¹ Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1995, 99), 175.

⁷² Martin Luther, 135.

⁷³ Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands*, 36-37.

and will purposely avoid his wife. He will stay longer at the office or go off by himself engaging in hobbies or watching TV. This behavior in turn will lead the wife to have even less respect for her husband. This wife may nag him and treat him worse than before. Such a woman is literally tearing down her household by her disobedience. Ideally the Christian husband (who is both the leader and is ultimately responsible for what occurs in the home) would lead and communicate in such a situation. However, if he does not lead biblically or effectively, Peter says that wives are to turn things around by their respectful godly behavior. Wives are not to wait until their husbands get their act together. They are to take the initiative. They are to obey and build up their house. "Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her own hands" (Pr. 14:1).

Other Duties

Being a good Christian wife involves many duties and responsibilities. In this section we will consider some of the duties that are very important that have not already been considered. Due to the multifaceted nature of the marriage relationship and the need to keep this book relatively short, we will only scratch the surface. Wives would do well to consult other Reformed works on this subject.

(1) One of the main reasons that God created Eve was for Adam to have meaningful companionship. "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen. 2:18). Adam could have had animals as companions such as a dog or cat. However, in such a case he would have still been alone in a sense because animals cannot engage in meaningful conversation. Eve was created as a helper suitable for the man. A wife is there not merely to keep house, raise children and satisfy her husband sexually. She also is to be her husband's best friend and soul mate. It is very important that husbands and wives communicate about all areas of life on a daily basis. They both need to be there for each other, to encourage, comfort, give praise, laugh, cry and so on. It is wise for husbands and wives to set time aside for good conversation. It can occur over dinner, a pleasant walk or simply sitting around the family room after dinner. If a woman is married to a man who is not talkative or is distant, she must communicate her need of biblical companionship. Husbands and wives may not have the same hobbies or secular interests. They do, however, have children and the Lord Jesus Christ to talk about. Our precious Savior alone can generate interesting, edifying conversation for eternity. Be a companion to your spouse.

In a fallen world Christian husbands and wives are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). Their task of godly dominion now has a redemptive focus. This means that their companionship is to be directed toward mutual satisfaction. This involves family worship, praying for each other, theological discussion and mutual admonishment. Husbands and wives are in a unique position of knowing virtually every intimate detail about each other. Therefore, they not only can pray for each other according to knowledge, but they can lovingly point out each other's sins and faults. When married couples have a close biblical relationship, they are not defensive regarding this type of communication but encourage it. If a husband has a behavior that is offensive to others that he is not aware of then he should be thankful to his wife for helping him improve his character. Mutual support in sanctification is an important aspect of companionship.

(2) The wife (if able) is to provide her husband with children. Wives should not succumb to the modern secular humanistic propaganda which says that children are a nuisance to be

avoided; or, that the world is overpopulated and therefore, we all need to limit the size of our families. God commanded fruitfulness to Adam and Eve as an aspect of world-wide dominion. “Then God blessed them, God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply [Hebrew, *rabah*-“to increase exceedingly”]; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). This command is repeated after the fall to Noah and his sons. “So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1). The Holy Spirit says specifically through the prophet Malachi that one of the purposes of marriage is to provide a godly offspring. “Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring” (Mal. 2:14). Unlike our modern post-Christian culture, the Bible always view an abundance of covenant children as a great blessing. “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Ps. 127:3-5).

If God commands believing husbands and wives to “greatly multiply” and says that He seeks a godly seed and teaches that an abundance of covenant children is a great blessing, why would professing Christians limit their family size to two or three children? Could it be that evangelical and Reformed churches have been influenced by our anti-family, anti-children culture? Could it be that many modern believers are more interested in material pursuits (e.g., fancy houses, shiny new cars, exotic vacations, new clothes, etc.) rather than filling up a quiver full of children for the purpose of godly dominion? When the heathen are limiting their families to one or two and are murdering millions of their own children in abortion chambers each year, Christians have a great opportunity to increase as unbelievers decrease. It is simply a matter of obedience to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Although procreation is an important purpose of marriage, it is not the central purpose. “Certainly the command to ‘increase and multiply’ is very important, but a marriage does not cease to exist if it be childless.”⁷⁴ In God’s providence some Christian married couples are unable to have children, while others struggle to have one or two. This must not be viewed as a curse of God but as God’s particular will for that couple which must be accepted as ultimately for the good of both husband and wife. If a couple are without child they should pray for healing and consider adoption. Romanist theology which says the central role of marriage is child-bearing and which allows for annulment in the case of infertility, is clearly unbiblical. Adam and Eve were married and one flesh before they had any children. A woman who cannot bear children can still faithfully complete her task as a help-meet to the man. “God Himself defined Eve’s basic function as a help-meet; important as motherhood is, it cannot take priority over God’s own declaration.”⁷⁵

(3) A wife has a biblical obligation to be there for her husband sexually. “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:2-5). This verse teaches that one of the purposes of marriage is to protect both husband and wife from sexual immorality. This point was very important for believers in Greek

⁷⁴ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 353.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and Roman society with their rampant sexual immoralities and perversions. In our own sex-obsessed culture it is equally important.

The Christian wife must take this responsibility seriously. Apart from the period of the menstrual cycle (Lev. 20:18; Ez. 18:5-6) and mutually agreed upon times of prayer and fasting (1 Cor. 7:15) the wife should never refuse her husband's advances. It is not enough, however, that the wife simply engages in the act in a cold mechanical way. She must give herself to her husband in a happy, warm, affectionate, joyful manner. This does not mean that the wife must climax every time. For many women this is a physical impossibility. Men and women are different physically. It does not mean that the husband should sense that this is something the wife wants to do. The husband should sense happiness and joy from his wife and not get the impression that she believes sex is a nuisance; that she should like to hurry up and get it over with. As an act of obedience to Christ, the wife must learn to set aside the cares, work and concerns of the day and focus her attention on giving her husband the joyful, meaningful, fantastic, sexual pleasure that should be a part of every biblical marriage. (The husband must also put his wife first in this area by picking times when the wife will not be distracted by the children. Further, he should do everything he can to satisfy his wife before he considers himself.) A wife who neglects this area and refuses to fulfill her responsibility is behaving in a manner that is leading her husband into temptation. This area requires diligence.

Anyone who has been married for any length of time and has had children will understand that fulfilling this responsibility is not always easy. There are hormonal changes associated with childbirth that can drastically reduce a woman's libido. Also, taking care of small children can be exhausting physically and mentally. Further, some women have a decreased sexual drive as they age and go through the change of menopause. All of these things can lead to wives who if they had their choice would have sex less frequently. What can be done about these common experiences by Christian wives? The wife should be open and honest about these things and ask her husband for help and understanding. Perhaps the husband could set aside time for his wife to take a nap during the day. If there are hormonal problems they should research the problem and consult a doctor. The husband and wife must examine the various problems and make the necessary changes together so that both will heartily fulfill their marital responsibilities. It is important that wives do not let the contingencies of life interfere with their biblical responsibilities to be there sexually for their husbands. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

Chapter 4: The Importance of the Biblical Training of Children

In the modern age one of the greatest needs for professing Christians is a biblical understanding of family religion. By family religion we mean the primary religious obligations that God has placed upon Christian families as covenantal institutions. This involves the duties and responsibilities of the father (the covenantal head of the household), the parents, the children and in rare instances live-in servants of a household. Although our examination of family religion will involve a variety of topics, the focus of this study will be on the biblical training of children.

Why is the spiritual training of Christian children by parents so important? There are many reasons. First, the initial covenantal and governing institution in creation was the family. God created Adam out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). Then He made a covenant with Adam (Gen. 2:15-17) the covenant head of mankind and the first family. After this, God took

one of Adam's ribs and made him a helper, Eve his wife. Adam and Eve as a family, as husband and wife were given the dominion mandate. They were to have children in order to fill the earth and subdue it. The dominion or cultural mandate which was given to the first parents before the fall clearly implies that the training of children in godly dominion was crucial to this task of developing a world-wide God-honoring and glorifying civilization. After the fall the dominion mandate continues through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ-the second Adam. Gentry writes, "It is important to realize that the Cultural Mandate was not withdrawn with the entry of sin into the world. The mandate appears in several places in Scripture after the Fall: Genesis 9:1ff; Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:6-8. But the new factor of sin did necessitate divine intervention and the supplementation of the original Mandate with the new factor of redemption."⁷⁶

Immediately upon the fall of Adam into sin, God established the covenant of grace, which secured man's redemption. Genesis 3:15 promises the coming of a Redeemer ("the seed of the woman"), who will destroy Satan ("the seed of the serpent"). This verse is often called the "protoevangelium," or the "first promise of the gospel." The gospel of God's saving grace began at this point in history.

Before there was civil government or even an institutional church, God put a family in charge of all creation. Note also that for a great period of time after the fall before the establishment of church officers and distinct ecclesiastical assemblies the worship of Jehovah was apparently conducted only privately and in families. The head of the household acted as the priest of the family. Noah offered sacrifice for himself and his family (Gen. 8:20-22). After Noah offered sacrifice, God blessed him and his sons and then restated the dominion mandate (Gen. 9:1). Both Abraham and Jacob offered sacrifice as the heads of their households (Gen. 22:13; Gen. 31:54; 46:1, 5, 6). Job's role as the covenant head of the family in worship is also evident. "Job...would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did regularly" (Job 1:5). Not only were the heads of the households (the husband and father) responsible for family worship, Jehovah Himself dealt with families through the heads of households. "God's covenants are made with heads of households. The heads of households act as representatives of their entire household. In the case of the covenants with Adam, Noah and Abraham, one man represented his household."⁷⁷

Second, the family is the nursery of both the church and the state. Family government and instruction is foundational to thriving churches and peaceful communities. Parents (under normal circumstances) have the greatest role to play in the development of a child's world and life view. Rushdoony writes, "The family is man's first state, church, and school. It is the institution which provides the basic structure of his existence and most governs his activities. Man is reared in a family and then establishes a family, passing from the governed to the governing in a framework which extensively and profoundly shapes his concept of himself and of life in general."⁷⁸ Therefore, it is of the greatest importance (for the church and state) that Christian parents take their covenantal responsibilities seriously. The heads of families are obligated to use their God-given authority to instill in their children a love of God and a thorough training in the true Reformed religion. They are to raise up a godly seed. If fathers neglect this

⁷⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 10.

⁷⁷ Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* (Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1997 [1994]), 7.

⁷⁸ R. J. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), 331.

responsibility, then pulpits by and large will be filled with false prophets and the offices of civil magistrates will be filled with liars and whore-mongers.

Third, the biblical training of the children of believers is a crucial aspect of covenantal continuity. Contrary to American baptistic, atomistic thinking, God in the covenant of grace deals not just with individuals but whole families as covenantal persons (cf. Gen 17:1-14; 18:19; Ex. 10:9; Dt. 6:4-7; 29:9-15; etc.). The children of believers are not little heathens but are a part of the visible church. Booth writes,

The households of believers in the Old Testament, including their infants, received the special privilege of God's redemptive covenants. These "little ones" of believers were marked out by God and set apart or sanctified from the rest of the fallen world. This inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant of grace was not a mere footnote in redemptive history. Rather, the children of God's people played a central role in God's redemptive plan from generation to generation. They continue to do so.

God commanded that even the infants of believers were to receive the covenant sign (circumcision) and be numbered among God's covenant people (i.e. the church). Baptism will have this same function as the new covenant unfolds the final redemptive revelation of the covenant of grace. The children of believers have always been included in God's redemptive covenants. The children of believers who are faithful to God's covenant will know the individual blessing of personal salvation. Covenant breakers will be cut off and receive the curses of the covenant.⁷⁹

This does not mean that the children of believers are born regenerate or even that they are presumed regenerate by their parents. However, it does mean that the believing parents (especially the heads of households) have a moral responsibility to bring up that child (who is a precious gift from God and who has been set apart by God [1 Cor. 7:14]) in the Christian faith (i.e. the true Reformed religion). Consequently, the practice of Reformed churches is for parents to make a vow before God (at the baptism of their child) to bring up their son or daughter in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). It is important to emphasize that the children of believers do not automatically become Christians. When parents are bad examples and neglect family worship and send their children to public (i.e. state) or Arminian schools they should not be surprised when their children reject the faith. One cannot overemphasize the importance of the spiritual training of covenant children. Our goal should be that every Christian family would leave behind a number of solid Christian families for dominion work and kingdom expansion. When parents are faithful and a child is unfaithful and departs from the faith, he or she must be disinherited. Sutton writes,

Continuity is in the covenant, and it is very important to the being and well-being of the family. In our house, for example, we teach our children that if they really love us, then they will love the God that we love. They are warned that if they ever leave the covenant into which they have been baptized, then they will be cut out of their inheritance. In a Christian home, "blood is not thicker than (baptismal) water!"

Is this cruel? No. This is precisely how God treats us, and how the families of the Bible treated their children. When a son left the covenant, he was removed from the family inheritance. When Cain killed his brother and deserted God's covenant, he was cast out (Gen. 4:9-15). Of course, to apply this concept of marriage and family, one must love the covenant

⁷⁹ Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 46.

more than he loves his children. Family continuity should be built on the covenant. Children should be taught to see the connection between covenant faithfulness and inheritance, both spiritual and material. Christians are not to subsidize evil, which is what unconditional inheritance does in a world of sin and covenant-breaking.⁸⁰

Fourth, the two other primary covenantal institutions—the church and the state are not qualified, nor have they been given, the task by God of the day to day spiritual training of children. This is the responsibility of Christian fathers. If the spiritual training of children is given over to the state or even the church by parents the end result will be a disaster. The history regarding this point is clear. At the close of the twentieth century it is obvious that the attempts of secularized civil governments (communist, socialist, fascist, welfare statism, etc.) to instill solid ethical guidelines in children have been a colossal failure. Serious Christian parents do not expect the public school system to teach their children anything about Christianity. Many professing Christian parents, however, have wrongly assumed that the spiritual training of their children is something that the church exclusively or primarily should do. Therefore, it is not uncommon for evangelicals to neglect family worship altogether in favor of Sunday school programs and church youth groups. However, an hour of instruction on Sunday morning cannot replace or compare to daily family worship and daily biblical instruction that is integrated into all of life (cf. Dt. 6:7). Further, the spiritual instruction of children rests squarely upon the shoulders of the father (the covenant head) and therefore should not be passed on to others without biblical warrant. (Other reasons will be considered under the section “motivations for discipline.”)

The Starting Point for Discipline

The starting point for the discipline or training of Christian children is the fear of the Lord or the faith and obedience of the parents. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 says, “Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you – ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

It is not uncommon today for parents who do not believe in Christ and who do not obey God’s commandments to get sort of “religious” after having their first child. The parents will have their children baptized or “christened” and when the child reaches a certain age they will drop off that child at a vacation Bible school or at a Sunday school program. In stark contrast, the biblical approach to child-rearing starts with the parents. The parents are commanded by God to

⁸⁰ Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 145.

observe the law (Dt. 6:1), fear the Lord (6:2), keep all of God's statutes (6:2) and be careful to observe them (6:3). Parents are to love God with all their hearts, soul and strength (6:5) and must learn God's law and place it in their hearts (6:6). The parents are to love God with their whole being and they are to express that love by learning and obeying God's precepts. They in turn are to pass their total devotion to God to their covenant children.

What this means is that biblical child-rearing starts with covenant faithfulness on the part of the parents. The covenant promises that apply to the children of believers are not unconditional. The Jews of Jesus' day and dispensationalists today are wrong when they assert that covenant blessings flow to the people automatically because of their race. God in the second commandment warned Israel saying: "...For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Ex. 20:5-6). If parents want blessings from God for their children, grandchildren and beyond they must love God and keep His commandments. The Psalmist concurs, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17-18). These passages do not mean that God saves people based on their keeping the law or human merit. They simply point out that true faith in Jesus Christ results in good works. In other words, justification leads to sanctification. The reason that covenant continuity is associated with faithfulness on the part of the parents in Scripture is the simple fact that parents who habitually disregard God's law do not exhibit the outward signs or fruit of regeneration in their own lives. Such parents pass their unfaithfulness down to their children by their example and defective doctrine. God blesses the children of faithful parents because: a) He promises to do so; and b) faithful parents are the normal means by which children are taught the "sum of saving knowledge." The parents introduce their children to the doctrines of God, Christ, the law, gospel and so on. Faithful parents exhibit the truth of the gospel every day before the eyes of their children. Of course God can and does (by His sovereign grace) sometimes save the children of wicked atheists. This fact, however, does not at all mean that professing Christians can neglect biblical principles and expect a good outcome. We must heed God's commandments and not play Russian roulette with our children.

There are a number of important truths that should be noted in relation to the fact that biblical child-rearing starts with the parents and their relationship with God. First, Christian parents need to recognize that they are under the direct authority of God and His infallible, all-sufficient word. Parental authority is not arbitrary, dictatorial or autonomous. It is rooted in divine revelation. Therefore, it is ministerial, loving and limited. Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). Parents do not have authority to command their children to do anything contrary to God's word. Consequently, they also must not use child-rearing blueprints and guidelines derived from an unbelieving, apostate or pagan worldview. Parents should never turn to modern psychology, psychiatry or heretical gimmicks for ethical advice or tips on child-rearing. To do so reveals a lack of faith in the sufficiency of Scripture. Dependence on these so-called scientific, secular vocations is akin to Israelites seeking counsel from the priests of Baal. It is a dangerous and destructive form of syncretism. Parents are to derive their standards solely from the Bible. This however, does not preclude orthodox (i.e. Reformed) Christian materials on the family.

Second, parents must be diligent regarding their own personal sanctification. They are to be doers of the word and not hearers only. It is the husbands' and fathers' responsibility as the

head of the household to make sure that they are members of a Bible-believing truly Reformed church and that they regularly attend the means of grace. He is responsible for the spiritual training of himself and his wife. Therefore, he must make sure that there is regular family worship and that both he and his wife are engaging in daily Scripture reading, prayer, the study of good Reformed books and so on. Every Christian father has a responsibility to learn the Bible and theology in order to be a good spiritual leader of the household. While the church is a great help to families, God has not delegated a father's responsibility towards his family to the pastor or elders of the local church. Paul tells us that if a wife has a question (which in context obviously regards doctrine or spiritual matters) she must ask the question to her own husband at home (1 Cor. 14:35). The apostle speaking under divine inspiration assumes that the husband is the biblical expositor and theologian of the family. This makes sense from a biblical perspective for two reasons. First, it is obvious that adequate training in theology, self-government and sanctification cannot be achieved in only a few hours each week on Sunday. Second, Deuteronomy 6:7 teaches parents that the spiritual training of covenant children is to occur both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day. In other words, God's law-word is to permeate every sphere of life. Therefore, it is crucial that parents (especially fathers) have their spiritual life in order. Biblical Christianity is to permeate every area of a child's existence. Asaph tells us that covenant continuity is dependent upon faithful fathers. "For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers [i.e. ancestors], a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Ps. 78:5-9).

The Necessity of Discipline

A very popular concept of child-rearing today says that children are basically good and that what they need to thrive as a child and later as an adult is autonomy and freedom. This philosophy tells parents not to interfere with the child for that would impede the child's growth and creativity. In line with this type of thinking many argue that spanking a child is barbaric; that one should praise the child when he does something good but ignore the child when he does something bad (i.e. behaviorism). One must be very careful (we are told) not to do anything that might erode the child's self-esteem. All such thinking is founded on an unbiblical pagan anthropology. Note, also that all such thinking blatantly contradicts the reality of everyday life. The only reason that secular psychologists ignore the obvious (i.e. the sinful nature of children) is their spiritual blindness.

The Bible teaches that children are born depraved, corrupt, with a bias toward evil, with rebellious hearts and sinful natures. This is the doctrine of original sin, that all men (except Jesus Christ) are born with the guilt and pollution of Adam's sin (cf. Rom 5:12). Because of the federal headship of Adam, we are all brought forth in iniquity and conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). All are born "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) and all "go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it" (Jer. 17:9)? Babies are not born good or even neutral (i.e. blank slate) but are born

bad. All children are “naturally” sinful, selfish, cruel, destructive, scornful, rebellious and foolish.

The reason God informs us of our own and our children’s inherent depravity is not so that we would despair and give up hope. God tells us the reality of what we are so that we will believe upon Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and deal biblically and effectively with our covenant children. The fact that parental instruction and discipline are the normal, God-ordained means used to regenerate covenant children should give us great hope and spur us on to diligent action. Christian parents have the responsibility to restrain sinful behavior in their children so that they will trust in Jesus Christ and develop life-long habitual patterns of righteous behavior.

The Proverbs contain many passages which speak to the need and urgency of parental correction, training and discipline of children. Proverbs 23:13-14 says, “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.” Most parents have a natural affection for their children. They do not like to see their cute little ones suffer pain and cry. Therefore, God warns us that the proper merciful and loving thing for a parent to do is inflict the pain of discipline at the proper time in the here and now, rather than raise up undisciplined rebels who will burn in hell for eternity. A lack of biblical discipline (which includes inflicting the pain of the rod) has negative eternal consequences. Children are born rebellious and sinful, therefore, if they are not taught biblical doctrine and ethics with the loving chastisement of the rod they will go right down the broad path that leads to destruction. “What parent then that trembles for his child’s eternal destiny, can withhold correction?”⁸¹ Many of the so-called experts in the field of child psychology argue that spanking is cruel. They argue that it is a remnant of a barbaric pre-scientific past; that it is a form of child abuse. God, however, says the exact opposite, that withholding the rod is cruel, irresponsible, and an act of hatred (Pr. 13:24). To those who teach that spanking is uncompassionate, God says, “The compassion of the wicked is cruel” (Pr. 12:10, NASB).

The Bible contains some sobering examples of what happens to covenant children when they are not disciplined or biblically restrained by their parents. There is the example of Eli and his wicked sons. From a reading of Scripture one gets the impression that Eli was a genuine believer in Jehovah who himself was upright in character. Yet Eli was deficient in one crucial area, the restraint of his own children. In 1 Samuel chapter 2, we are told that “the sons of Eli were corrupt and did not know the Lord” (v 12). They were even guilty of committing sexual immorality with women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting (v. 22). When Eli heard about all the evil activities that his sons were engaged in, he warned his sons that God would not tolerate such evil (vs. 23-25), yet did not restrain their actions. As a result Eli was judged along with his sons. Indeed, his whole house was judged and cut off forever. “Then the Lord said to Samuel: ‘Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.’” (1 Sam. 3:11-13). Poole writes, “He restrained them not; he contented himself with a cold and gentle reproof, and did not severely rebuke, and punish, and effectually restrain them from their

⁸¹ Charles Bridges (revised by George F. Santa), *A Modern Study in the Book of Proverbs* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1978), 508.

abominable courses, nor use that authority which God had given him, as a father, as a high priest, and as a judge, or chief magistrate, against them, as by the law of God he was obligated to do.”⁸²

King David and his failure to deal with his wicked sons also serve as a concrete example of Proverbs 23:13-14. David’s first born son Amnon deceived and forced himself sexually upon his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:6-14). Then he treated her with hatred and contempt. How did David deal with this serious transgression? He became very angry (2 Sam. 13:21), yet did not punish Amnon. If David had dealt with Amnon, then perhaps Absalom (David’s third born son) would not have been filled with hatred toward Amnon and planned revenge against him. But tragically Absalom in a premeditated plan had Amnon murdered (2 Sam. 13:28-29). What was David’s response to this death penalty offense? David did virtually nothing. Absalom had to live in exile for a few years after which he returned (with David’s permission) to Jerusalem. After returning to Jerusalem Absalom rebelled against David’s kingship and was killed by Joab the command of David’s forces. David’s fourth son Adonijah also came to an ignoble end because of David’s parental negligence. Note, David’s refusal to rebuke his son when he set his heart on the throne that had already been promised to Solomon. “Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king’; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. (And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, ‘Why have you done so?’)” (1 Kgs. 1:5-6). After David had died and Solomon was king, Solomon had Adonijah executed because he still desired his throne. David repeatedly refused to discipline his sons and the end result were sons who were out of control, who died by violence and went to hell.

A further reason for prompt biblical discipline is seen in Proverbs 19:18: “Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.” The phrase “while there is hope” clearly implies that if diligent discipline is not applied to children by their parents there will come a time (from a human perspective) when the child or young adult is beyond hope. The God-given opportunity to shape the child’s character in a biblical manner has forever been lost. Christian parents who have neglected discipline and thus have lost their children to heathenism carry a heavy burden. They know that they have missed a one-time opportunity. If they could, they would go back in time and do things differently. But sadly, they cannot. The Holy Spirit warns us that there are serious, deadly and eternal consequences to parental neglect of discipline. Withholding correction is no different than setting one’s heart upon the destruction of one’s own precious child.

In the same vein, Proverbs 13:24 equates a lack of discipline to hatred: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” This passage does not mean that a neglectful parent actually has feelings of hatred toward his children. It rather refers to the fact that such a parent is turning his own child over to ethical chaos, destruction and misery. “Doesn’t he at least act as if he hated him-by bypassing a duty so necessary for his welfare; overlooking his vicious habits and wayward will, which must surely issue in bitter sorrow. Isn’t this delivering him up to his worst enemy? Better that the child had been trained in the house of strangers, than that he should be the unhappy victim of the cruelty of parental love.”⁸³ It is tragically ironic that our culture which is obsessed with the young and which is constantly passing laws to “protect the children,” is by and large a society that by its permissiveness actually hates children.

⁸² Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1962 [1685]), 1:522.

⁸³ Bridges, 202.

Hebrews 12:6-8 states positively what Proverbs 13:24 states negatively. It says, “For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.” The author of Hebrews says that God’s chastening of believers is proof of His love for them. A father who refuses to discipline his children treats them as unwanted bastards. Many children who live in households with no discipline know intuitively that their parents really do not care. Often such children have a longing for discipline. True love and biblical discipline go hand in hand.

A passage that speaks to the necessity of biblical child rearing that is often misunderstood is Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This verse is almost always regarded as a promise to parents that if they are diligent regarding the biblical training of their children, their children will not depart from that training when they are adults. Although the common understanding is (generally speaking) a legitimate application of this passage, it is based on the translation of the King James Version (that virtually all English translations have followed-NASB, NIV, RSV, etc.) and not a literal rendering of the Hebrew text. A literal translation reads, “Train up a child in the mouth of his way; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” There are basically two different interpretations of the literal rendering of the Hebrew. The first interprets “in the mouth of his way” in the sense of “conformably to his way.” That is, the biblical training of children needs be conformed to the age or intellectual ability of the child. A child’s degree of development must be carefully considered by parents so that they are catechized at the proper level, according to their own mental capacity. A second interpretation regards this passage as a promise that is a solemn warning. Parents are warned that if they allow their child to determine his own path that child will never depart from his rebellious autonomy from God. Jay Adams writes,

The verse stands not as a promise but as a warning to parents that if they allow a child to train himself after his own wishes (permissively) they should not expect him to want to change these patterns when he matures. Children are born sinners and when allowed to follow their own wishes will naturally develop sinful habit responses. The basic thought is that such habit patterns become deep-seated when they have been ingrained in the child from the earliest days.⁸⁴

Proverbs 22:6 is a negative promise. If parents allow their children to call the shots, to determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong, then those children will never learn biblical discipline. The Bible once again reminds us that our cute little children are sinners. They are natural born rebels. A child in many ways is like a garden. One turns the soil and plants the seeds. However, that freshly turned earth is also full of weed seeds. If the garden is left to itself and is not watered and weeded early and often, then one will not have a lovely useful garden but an ugly, useless patch of weeds. If children are left to themselves and are not given the biblical nurture that they need, then they will absorb the surrounding pagan world-view. When professing Christians leave their children to themselves and these children go to state schools; watch anything they want on television; listen to popular music and hang out with the so-called cool crowd; is it any wonder that their adult years are wasted as unregenerate rebels?

⁸⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 158, footnote no. 1.

Children need stern discipline in order to drive the innate ethical foolishness out of their hearts. Proverbs 22:15 says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” The Hebrew word for foolishness does not simply refer to stupidity, stubbornness and a flippant attitude. It refers to a bad spiritual condition, to moral insolence. It does not refer to the fact that small children lack knowledge, but to a child’s inborn sinful obstinacy. “[F]oolishness is the mighty tendency to evil-imbibing wrong principles, forming bad habits, entering into an ungodly course. It means the very root and essence of sin in a fallen nature-the folly of turning away from a God of love. It includes all the sins of which a child is capable-lying, deceit, willfulness, perverseness, want of submission to authority-a fearful tendency toward evil and revulsion against good. It is not a sheet of pure white paper; not the innocent, or even the easily controlled creature, easily guided by proper means, that we are looking at; but a little heart full of sin, containing all the seeds of future evil, multiplying to a fruitful harvest.”⁸⁵ What is needed to remove foolishness? The only answer is parental discipline biblically applied. Today in our post-Christian culture, sinful foolishness is not only tolerated in children, it is accepted as perfectly normal and even celebrated in sitcoms, movies, magazines and pop music. God does not tell Christian parents to accept foolishness, or to medicate it with Prozac or Ritalin®, or to coddle it with psycho-babble, but to drive it out with the rod of correction. Children will not drive it out. Parents in the context of love must use the divinely-appointed means to rid their children of this ethical poison.

The passages considered thus far regarding the necessity of discipline have been primarily negative. That is, they warn parents of the consequences of a neglect of their duties. There are also passages that speak to the necessity of biblical discipline from a positive perspective. One such passage is Proverbs 29:15, “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is loaded with meaning and should not be confused with a mere moralistic theism. It involves not only learning God’s precepts but a loving reverential relationship to Jehovah Himself. Wisdom is founded in the fear of the Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck” (Prov. 1:7-9). “The controlling principle of life, which crowns a man and enriches his days with wisdom, is the fear of the Lord, and this fear is inseparable from the law, instruction, or direction of God.”⁸⁶ The goal of biblical discipline is not just to impart ethical guidelines or “family values.” Also, discipline is not applied merely so that parents will have a well-ordered, peaceful household. The children of believers need wisdom (ethical and doctrinal knowledge, Christian character, biblical discernment, sanctified shrewdness and discretion) that is inseparably connected with and flows from a saving relationship to Jesus Christ. Anything less is just moralism. Heathen wisdom is foolishness for it is anthropocentric. Its focus is not upon the true God but the glorification and exaltation of man. That is why moralism degenerates into a self-righteous Pharisaical arrogance. Matthew Henry writes, “In order to the attainment of all useful knowledge this is most necessary, that we fear God; we are not qualified to profit by the instructions that are given us unless our minds be possessed with a holy reverence of God, and every thought within us be brought into obedience to him.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Bridges, 488-489.

⁸⁶ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 692.

⁸⁷ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 3:793.

Some object to the idea that parents can teach the fear of the Lord. They argue that only the Holy Spirit imparts a love and fear of God in regeneration. Although it is true that regeneration is an act of the Holy Spirit, one must not forget that regeneration (in the broad sense, e.g., 1 Pet.1:23, Jas. 1:18) always accompanies a knowledge of revelational truth. Once again one must be reminded that Christian parents are the normal God-ordained means of imparting the knowledge that is used by the Holy Spirit to cause conviction, conversion and devotion to God in covenant children. Believing parents are to impart knowledge of the divine character, the precepts of the law and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Children need to learn the nature of true religion, in its principles and in its practice. “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Pr. 6:23).

Conclusion

In this chapter we considered the importance, starting point, and necessity of biblical child-rearing. The biblical training of covenant children by their Christian parents is important because: (1) The family is the first covenantal and governing institution in creation. God has given the family a crucial role in the task of godly dominion over creation. (2) The family is the nursery of both the church and the state. Solid Christian families are needed for thriving churches and peaceful, well-ordered communities. (3) The biblical training of covenant children is crucial for covenant continuity. The normal God-ordained means of a covenant child’s salvation, sanctification and spiritual maturity comes by means of parental instruction and discipline. (4) The two other primary covenant institutions, the church and the state are not qualified and have not been given the task by God of the day to day spiritual training and discipline of covenant children. This is the responsibility of Christian fathers and parents.

The starting point of Christian child-rearing is parents who love the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength; who are faithful to God and keep His commandments. If Christian parents want to be good at biblical child-rearing then they need to: (1) Recognize that they are under the direct authority of God and His infallible, sufficient word. The sole standard for biblical child-rearing is Scripture. (2) Be diligent regarding their own personal sanctification. Fathers especially need to lead the whole family in godliness. The father must be spiritually mature and must have a solid knowledge of Scripture and theology.

The Bible also gives many reasons why covenant children need to be diligently disciplined by their parents. (1) Biblical discipline is necessary because of the fall of Adam. All children are born depraved, corrupt, with a bias toward evil, with rebellious hearts and sinful natures. (2) Covenant children need to be disciplined in order to save them from hell. A lack of biblical discipline has negative eternal consequences. (3) Discipline also delivers covenant children from destruction or a life of violence, chaos and evil. (4) Discipline drives foolishness out of children. (5) Discipline imparts wisdom to children so that they are equipped for a life of service to Christ. (6) Discipline and instruction are the ordinary means used by the Holy Spirit to cause conviction, conversion and devotion to God in covenant children. The Bible says that parents who do not discipline their children hate them. Biblical discipline is a true expression of biblical love.

Chapter 5: The Necessity of an Explicitly Christian Education

The Bible is very specific regarding the manner in which Christian parents are to bring up covenant children. Paul tells Christian fathers, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Deuteronomy 6:6-9 reads, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

In the Old Testament (especially in Proverbs) there are a whole series of words that are directly used in the sphere of the biblical training of children. These words are translated as teaching, instruction, reproof, chastisement, correction and discipline. The most common Hebrew word is *musar* which is a comprehensive term that is translated as instruction, admonition, discipline and correction. The Septuagint usually translates this word as *paideia* which is the word used by Paul in Ephesians 6 translated as “nurture” (KJV), “training” (NKJV, NIV), “discipline” (RSV, NASB), “instruction” (NEB) and “correct” (JB). In Hebrews 12:5, 7 and 8, the same word is translated as “chastening.” Although the word is often used in the narrow sense of chastening or discipline for bad behavior, the term also has a very broad sense; that is, the overall general biblical education of a child and all that it entails (instruction, reproof, chastisement, etc.).

The general overall picture of godly child-rearing that is presented in Scripture is as follows. God has given Christian parents (in particular fathers) His divine revelation (or covenant law-word) which they are responsible to learn, believe and obey (Dt. 6:1-6). They in turn have a covenantal obligation to “diligently teach” the Bible to their children (Dt. 6:7). This teaching, however, is not merely an intellectual affair but is enforced, reinforced and habituated through example, verbal reproof, correction and admonition coupled with physical chastisement at appropriate times. This covenantal training process is used by God to justify and sanctify the children of believers. Further, this training process imparts true biblical wisdom. The children learn discretion, discernment, insight, practical wisdom or in modern slang terms “biblical street smarts.” Covenant children are prepared for a life of truly satisfying dominion work under Christ. Under the biblical leadership of a Christian father children are to develop Christian character. They are to be “cultured” in a distinctly Christian sense. The goal of teaching is “to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Prov. 1:2-4).

Before turning to specifics regarding discipline, one must consider the important role of teaching in the home. God commands all Christian parents to “diligently teach” their children (Dt. 6:7). Parents have the responsibility to teach their children to love the Lord with their whole heart. They are to teach the fear of the Lord, a total loving devotion and submission unto Him. Consequently, parents must teach their children the whole counsel of God. If parents focus on biblical ethics without teaching their children the many other important doctrines (e.g., God’s nature and character, creation, providence, regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc.) then those children will often have a very distorted understanding of the faith. Such lopsided teaching can lead to Pharisaical self-righteousness or a secular “do-gooder” type of pragmatism.

There are a number of things that parents should do to insure a theological balance in the home. First, fathers should read straight through the Bible on a daily basis during family worship. When parents haphazardly pick and choose Bible readings for the family devotions there is a tendency to focus on certain portions of Scripture at the expense of others. Parents also should require all children who are capable of reading, to read systematically through the whole Bible in their personal devotions. Parents should ask their children questions regarding each day's Scripture reading to encourage meditation and analysis of what was read. This will discourage a cursory reading where little scriptural knowledge is actually absorbed. Further, fathers should acquire Christian books and commentaries in order to answer questions from their wives and children regarding difficult portions of Scripture. (A good book on biblical interpretation is Louis Berkhof's, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, Baker, 1950. Some recommended commentaries on the Bible are Matthew Henry's, John Calvin's, Matthew Poole's, and John Gill's. A good New Testament commentary set to start off with is William Hendriksen's and Simon J. Kistemaker's.) A father should encourage his wife and children to ask questions regarding the Bible. If the father cannot answer a particular question adequately from his own personal library he should call a friend or elder who can.

Second, parents should take advantage of the theological works produced by the church for the purpose of balanced instruction. The greatest tool yet produced for the theological training of children (and new believers) is the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Not only is the *Shorter Catechism* theologically balanced, comprehensive and thoroughly biblical, it is specifically designed for children or those of "weaker capacity." The *Shorter Catechism* should be used in family devotions, home schooling and Christian schools. Children should not only be required to progressively memorize the questions and answers to the catechism, they also need to be taught the meaning of the answers so that they can explain the various theological points in their own words. Most young children are not very excited about the study of theology. It is important that parents emphasize the necessity and importance of theology, that such training is something that pleases God. Also, fathers need to maintain discipline and teach in a patient, loving manner so that the children are not turned off by formal instruction. One should fervently pray that his children will love the Bible and theology so that they will have a deeper love of God and will be better able to serve man. Causing one's children to hate devotions by acting like a mean tyrant is obviously counterproductive.

Parents should also incorporate Christian books into a child's home schooling and "leisure" reading. There are biographies written for different reading levels on various Protestant Reformers and notable missionaries. There are also some excellent historical novels that are written from a Christian perspective (e.g., G. A. Henty). When children are old enough they should learn church history and should read some of the standard Reformed works on theology (e.g., L. Berkhof, Hodge, Calvin) and counseling (e.g., Jay Adams). Many children who were raised in Reformed homes and churches have apostatized and joined themselves to Arminian churches because they did not have a solid grasp of the Reformed faith. Their fathers did not do their job adequately as teacher and theologian of the family.

Formal Bible and theological instruction during family devotions and home schooling is not enough. Deuteronomy 6:7-9 indicates that biblical instruction is to permeate the whole of each and every day at each and every location. It reads, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on

your gates.” This passage contains a very comprehensive view of Christian child-rearing. Its directions and implications for family religion are manifold.

American evangelicalism for the most part has a very compartmentalized view of a child’s education and training. For the so-called “secular subjects” (math, history, reading, writing, science, etc.) most professing Christian parents send their children to the public or state school. For “religious subjects” (e.g., creation, Noah’s ark, Daniel and lion’s den, etc.) there is Sunday school and the youth group. When serious disciplinary problems arise there is the school guidance counselor, the local psychologist or the youth pastor. The Bible presents a very different picture of child-rearing. It does not treat biblical religion as a little side compartment to life. It does not regard doctrine as a little sphere of spiritual material that is added on to the secular sphere. Deuteronomy 6:7ff says plainly that scriptural precepts and principles are to permeate every area of life. Christian parents have a responsibility to pass on to their children a comprehensive biblical world and life view. Therefore, God expects parents to integrate a study of His word into every sphere of a child’s life. Patrick D. Miller writes,

The picture is that of a family continually in lively conversation about the meaning of their experience with God and God’s expectations of them. Parental teaching of the children by conversation about “the words,” study of God’s instruction, and reflection on it (cf. Ps. 1:2 and Josh. 1:8) is to go on in the family and community. Whether at or away from home, “these words” are to be uppermost in mind and heart; parents should teach their children in such a way that their last thoughts before falling asleep and their first words upon getting up are about the Lord’s command. The text is clear that “these words” are not simply to be recited or repeated. They are to be talked about—that is discussed, studied, and learned. The practical implications for life are to be thought out and discussed with the children as much as they are in the Book of Deuteronomy itself.⁸⁸

Parents need to integrate biblical teaching into a household’s everyday activities. During meals the father should direct the conversation theologically. Current events, whether the news of the day or a recent fad, can be discussed from a biblical perspective. Questions can be asked regarding school or personal Bible reading. Husbands and wives can discuss doctrine and analyze current theological debates in the Christian community. The children should see a passion for God and theology on a daily basis. When gardening or doing outdoor chores, the wonders and beauty of God’s creation should be a frequent topic. It is also important to discuss the importance of the Christian work ethic. When the family watches a TV program or a movie, the parents can discuss the theme, message and world view presented in the particular program from a Christian perspective. If a parent is not used to integrating biblical teaching into everyday mundane activities (such as grocery shopping with the children) then one should think of discussions, comments and questions that can be used ahead of time. Parents need to work at this theological integration until it is both natural and habitual. If one is looking for ideas in this area the book of Proverbs is ideal. The Proverbs are full of applications and warnings from God’s law—in short, memorable sayings taken from nature and everyday life.

If parents are to play the key role in integrating biblical teaching in their children’s lives, then they have a responsibility to organize their lives in such a manner that they have adequate time to spend with their children. This means that one’s children take priority over material things such as owning a new car, expensive vacations, fancy clothes and so on. There is nothing

⁸⁸ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 107-108.

wrong with having nice things as long as one does not neglect one's own children to have them. A father who works two jobs and is never home in order to buy a fancy SUV is clearly violating Scripture. Also, under normal circumstances (in a two-parent household) mothers are to be home with the children. The modern feminist idea that mothers need to work outside the home in a shop, office or factory to have true fulfillment is satanic nonsense. Mothers who place their children in a day-care center for the sake of a career, or in order to maintain an upper class lifestyle are self-centered and materialistic. Further, when husbands are home from work, they are not to spend all their spare time with their buddies or in front of the television. They must spend time with their own children, discipling them. After a hard day's work the couch and TV are very inviting. However, fathers have a higher calling; that is, a God-given duty to engage their children in godly conversation. Many Christian fathers will have to answer to God for wasting years of opportunity to obey Deuteronomy 6:7ff.

Churches should support parents in their desire to practice theological integration by providing solid teaching and materials on the family (e.g., Jay Adams, Doug Wilson, Bruce A. Ray, etc.) as well as treating families as covenantal bodies instead of isolated individuals. Churches should encourage whole families to attend public worship together as was practiced in Scripture (cf. Ex. 10:9, Dt. 12:18; 29:10-13; 31:10-13; Josh. 8:35). Also, churches must avoid various programs that atomize the family. The trend of large Evangelical churches is to have a separate program for husbands, wives, girls, boys, teens and so on. Such a practice works at cross purposes to Deuteronomy 6:7ff. Christian children need solid leadership from their own fathers. They do not need youth pastors and silly gimmicks. Children need to see the godly interaction of their parents with other Christians. There are many Bible passages (e.g., Ex. 12:26-27; Dt. 6:20-21; 32:7; Josh. 4:6-7) that assume that children learn the meaning of biblical religion directly from their parents. Remember, the imperatives of Deuteronomy 6:7ff are given to fathers and parents and not to youth pastors or youth group leaders.

Deuteronomy 6:7ff and the Public School Question

There are some important applications of Deuteronomy 6:7ff that need to be considered. The first application regards the question of public or state schools. Do the commands of God in this portion of Scripture give parents the option of placing their children in a public school? There are a number of biblical reasons why the answer to this question is an emphatic no. One reason why this portion of Scripture rules out the use of public schools is that it requires the true Christian faith to be integrated into every area of life. Every subject under the sun (e.g., math, geography, economics, art, literature, science, medicine, agriculture, political science, etc.) must be taught from a distinctly Christian perspective. Deuteronomy 6:7ff tells fathers that every part of every day and in every place there must be a discussion of Jehovah and His word. If God requires theological discussion at home, outside in the garden or park, in the supermarket, in the car or even at the ball park then certainly He requires a discussion of God and His ways during the many hours of education at school. Deuteronomy 6:7ff simply assumes that there are no areas of life that are neutral or purely secular. Yet public schools as a distinct policy leave God, Christ and the Scriptures outside of the classroom. Schools that separate God and Christ from the classroom are schools that are founded upon anti-Christian, atheistic unbelief. Such schools are not designed to promote obedience to Christ and His law-word but are designed to produce allegiance to the state. The apostle Paul agrees with the teaching of Deuteronomy when he tells fathers to bring their children "up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The

entire training process of a covenant child is to be “of the Lord.” Every bit of training, discipline, education and knowledge is to converge in total devotion and obedience to Jesus Christ as every beam of light leads to the sun.

According to Deuteronomy 6 the purpose and goal of education is love and obedience to God. The parents are not merely training children to make money but to be faithful to the covenant. The central command of Scripture is to love God with the whole heart (Dt. 6:5). That is the chief reason why theology is to permeate all other subjects. Any educational system that does not have a love of God through Jesus Christ as its chief goal is anti-Christian and implicitly satanic. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt. 23:37). How can public schools promote the greatest commandment when they purposely keep God away from children’s minds?

Another reason why Christians should not send their children to public schools is that state schools violate the first commandment by adhering to the educational philosophy that no religion should be favored above another religion. In a nation of many diverse religions, the educational establishment believed the best policy was to establish religiously neutral schools. However, because religious neutrality is impossible, public schools opted for agnosticism, secular humanism, and naturalism all of which are religious beliefs that are antithetical to Christian theism.⁸⁹ Indeed, many within the educational establishment waved the flag of neutrality and fairness as a guise to de-Christianize the schools in America. Sadly, most Christians have succumbed to the neutrality ploy.

Public schools refuse to confess Christ before men (Mt. 10:22). They are teaching by precept and example that God, Jesus and the Bible have nothing to do with education. The word of God, however, says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Pr. 1:7), that human philosophies are not according to Christ (Col. 2:8). God has given Christ “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mt. 28:18). There is no area of life that is outside of His control and domain. Public schools are in open rebellion against Jesus Christ for they reject His authority over the class room. Gordon Clark writes, “How does God judge the school system which says to him ‘O God, we neither deny nor assert thy existence; and O God, we neither obey nor disobey thy commands; we are strictly neutral.’ Let no one fail to the point: The school system that ignores God teaches its pupils to ignore God; and this is not neutrality. It is the worst form of antagonism, for it judges God to be unimportant and irrelevant in human affairs. This is atheism.”⁹⁰ Jesus said, “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Mt. 12:30). Are public schools with Christ? Are they faithfully serving Him? No, they are against Him. When Christian parents send their children to public schools they are in essence handing their children over to the enemy (anti-Christ statist idolaters) to be indoctrinated in the modern state religion-secular humanism. That many such children reject the faith of their fathers and embrace the world spirit and heartily give themselves over to the lust of the flesh (fornication, adultery, drunkenness, drugs, etc.)

⁸⁹ R. J. Rushdoony writes, “If education is in any sense a preparation for life, then its concern is religious. If education is at all concerned with truth, it is again religious. If education is vocational, then it deals with calling, a basically religious concept. It would be absurd to reduce preparation for life, truth and calling to an exclusively religious meaning in any parochial sense, but it is obvious that these and other aspects of education are inescapably religious. As Whitehead observed, ‘The essence of education is that it be religious.’ The public or state schools have thus been inescapably religious. Their ‘common faith’ has been described as ‘made up of elements provided by Rousseau, Jefferson, August Comte, and John Dewey. ‘Civil religion’ is an apt designation for this faith.’ As one educator observed, ‘America’s faith in education has been called by a European visitor the “national religion of America...”’” (*The Messianic Character of American Education* [Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1963], 315-316).

⁹⁰ Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1988 [1946]), 73.

should come as no surprise. Would anyone be surprised if a child that spent several hours each day for several years at a Hindu school eventually converted to Hinduism as a teenager? No, of course not! Yet countless Christian fathers have bought into the myth that public schools are neutral and send their children to hell in the process.

A third reason why Christian parents should not send their children to public schools is that the purpose of educating covenant children is to promote obedience to Jesus Christ and His law. Christian parents have a responsibility to pass on to their children a distinctly Christian world and life view. A covenant child's education must be permeated with Christian ethics or values. Every subject must be taught in accordance with the Christian world view and must be "Christocentric." Paul writes, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ..." (2 Cor. 10:4-5). In public schools every subject and discussion is an anti-Christian stronghold that needs to be pulled down.

Public schools teach that man evolved from pond scum. The Bible teaches that God created all things in six literal days. Is it proper for a Christian father to expose his seven or eight year old child to a dogmatic, organized attack against the foundational doctrine of creation? Public schools teach that ethics are evolving; that society or the majority determines what is acceptable behavior. The Bible says that the moral law is based on God's nature and is unchanging, absolute and non-negotiable. Public schools teach that man is basically good and that many bad behaviors are the result of bad genetics, or environment, or disease (e.g., alcoholism, drug addiction). The Bible teaches that man is born with the guilt and pollution of sin and that every transgression of God's law is evil. Public schools identify many evil activities as permissible and even virtuous (e.g., fornication, homosexuality, witchcraft, idolatry, rebellion against parents, etc.). They also strongly condemn many fundamental doctrines of Christianity such as Christ's exclusive claim to be the way to God, the biblical view of the family and so on. Public schools have no real foundational basis for teaching ethics. Only the Bible gives sound, logical reasons why cheating, theft, rape, sexual immorality and murder are wrong. Public schools espouse a secular humanistic, naturalistic, pluralistic, relativistic anti-Christian philosophy that contradicts Scripture at every fundamental point. Parents simply cannot be faithful to the biblical commands to instill in their children a Christian world and life view if they send their children into the satanic lion's den of public education. Every thought is to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, not to the obedience of the heathen state.

A fourth reason why Christian parents should not send their children to public school is that "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33 NASB). The word translated as communications (KJV) or company "means a bringing together, companionship. It is contact, association with evil, that is declared to be corrupting."⁹¹ It is totally irresponsible to send covenant children into a society of evil teachers and evil-doers. "Spiritual life is quenched in the atmosphere of carnal society, and a sort of intoxication quickly comes over him who frequents it."⁹² Children are often very gullible and susceptible to peer pressure and to the influence of people in positions of authority (i.e. teachers). A covenant child in a public school is assaulted from every side by demonic doctrine, profane disputations, coarse jesting, satanic music, exaltation of fornication and rebellion, hatred of lawful authority and all sorts of deadly

⁹¹ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857, 59]), 240.

⁹² Frederic Louise Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977 [1889]), 824.

temptations. How many covenant children have had their minds polluted and their morals corrupted at the public school? Sad to say-multitudes!

A fifth reason why a covenant child should not attend public school is that a Christian child's education must always be accompanied by biblical discipline. Biblical education is never purely an intellectual affair. It is always to be accompanied with verbal reproof, correction and admonition and physical chastisement when necessary. The fact that children need admonition presupposes that children have violated some ethical standard and therefore need to be confronted verbally regarding "bad" behavior or speech. It also presupposes that the goal of such admonition or correction is an acknowledgment of wrong-doing and a change of behavior in a right direction. That is, there is to be repentance leading to a personality and behavioral change. This point raises a few questions regarding public schools. First, are public schools including discipline with a child's education? Second, if public schools are using discipline, what is their standard? It is common knowledge that discipline in public schools is very lax if not virtually non-existent. This fact should come as no surprise for four reasons. First, the spanking of children is now regarded as child abuse. Second, rebellious behavior (especially in teenagers) is considered a normal and even a beneficial aspect of growing up. Three, state schools are not really interested in instilling "old-fashioned values" but are primarily interested in producing young adults who are in love with statism. One must keep in mind that state schools are an establishment of religion (secular humanism) and their main job is not education but the promotion of that religion. Fourth, many modern public school teachers do not regard misbehavior as an ethical problem but as a problem of environment. Rambunctious children are medicated with Ritalin®, and when children and young adults commit murder we are often told that such persons were themselves victims of society.

However, the main reason why covenant children should never attend a public school is that the discipline that occurs in a state school is not based on Scripture or biblical ethics but on secular humanism. Therefore, covenant children who are in a public school will receive satanic admonition. For example, they will receive rebuke, correction and chastisement for godly behavior (e.g., starting prayer groups, speaking up for Christ in class, witnessing to others, telling the truth regarding premarital sex and homosexuality, warning others of false religions, etc.) and they will receive praise for ungodly speech (e.g., speech that accepts and promotes human autonomy, relativism, cross-dressing and homosexuality, evolution, polytheism, racism [e.g., affirmative action], multiculturalism, feminism, statism, etc.). The satanic admonition that children receive in public schools is designed to promote a personality and behavioral change in an explicitly anti-Christian direction. Furthermore, even if a public school teacher or administrator disciplines a child for something that is truly unethical (e.g., lying, stealing, name-calling, fighting, etc.) they (as a set policy) cannot give biblical reasons for discipline but must rely on pragmatism, or some concept of loyalty to humanity or the state. To say to a child "do not lie because you need to be a good citizen" or "do not steal because it violates the brotherhood of man" tells a child something far different than, "do not lie or steal because such behavior is a violation of God's moral law and displeases Him," or "John, do you know that the Bible says that liars will not enter the kingdom of heaven?" Public school discipline is given in terms of utility to the state rather than in biblical terms of service and glorification to God.

A sixth reason why covenant children should not attend public school is that God has not given the civil government the authority or biblical right to establish a tax-financed public school system. The Bible gives the civil magistrate a limited authority under God. The civil government has been given the task of protecting society by bringing negative sanctions against public evil.

The civil magistrate is a minister of God “to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Rom. 13:4). The civil government has every right to collect taxes in order to fulfill its negative role of protection. It, however, does not have biblical warrant to intrude upon the God-ordained covenantal institutions of the church or the family unless a crime (biblically defined) has been committed. Few professing Christians would argue that the civil magistrate has the right to administer the sacraments or exercise church discipline. Most professing Christians, however, do not have a problem with the state collecting taxes by means of coercion in order to do something that Scripture explicitly says belongs to fathers (Dt. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4). The state has no more biblical right to collect taxes for public education than it does to set up Buddhist temples or Hindu shrines. The only people that God has given authority to set up schools for children are parents. “The Christian school, properly seen, is an extension of the Christian home. The school exists for no other purpose than to supplement and not replace a parent’s instruction at home. The school and home work closely together in educating the child.”⁹³ When the civil government sets up public schools it sets itself up as the father of all children. Such a civil government views all the children as property of the state. “This view is basic to the philosophies of statist education. It is especially pronounced in all forms of Marxism, national and international socialism alike. The child is a state resource, to be developed and used for the welfare of the state.”⁹⁴ When parents put their children in a state school they in essence are supporting the state’s messianic claim of total jurisdiction over the family. Such parents are contributing to the Molech-state’s power religion. They also are guilty of stealing from their neighbor, for taxation without divine authorization is theft. Their children are going to school at the taxpayer’s expense. Many of these taxpayers are elderly people who do not have any children and are on fixed incomes. Benefiting from the civil government’s unlawful collection of property taxes for state schools is sinful. If all professing Christians pulled their children out of the public schools the public school system would collapse. Then the greatest institution of statist control and the spread of irreligion, socialism, atheism and nihilism would be put out of business. Why don’t professing Christians take the leading role in shutting down the public school system? The answer probably is a love of mammon. How many professing Christians have sent their children straight to hell to save money?

Common Arguments for Public School Use Refuted

Christian parents who send their children to public schools have a number of arguments that are used to justify their practice. One argument is that covenant children can avoid evil peer groups and spend their time with other Christians. Parents should simply instruct their children regarding proper companionship at school. There are a number of problems with this type of thinking. First, even if a child was extremely careful regarding forming friendships with others at school he still cannot avoid the evil influence of the teacher. Second, a covenant child may not seek out the pierced, tattooed, pot-smoking, fornicating crowd. However, there is nothing stopping the heathen from seeking out a covenant child in order to attempt to influence, corrupt or tease that child. Why place a child in harm’s way when it is not necessary? Are not Christians told by Christ to avoid temptation (cf. Mt. 6:13; 26:41)? Third, even if a covenant child does

⁹³ John M. Otis, “The Necessity for the Christian School” in *Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on the Education of the Core Group* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon, 1987), Vol. II, no. 2, 29.

⁹⁴ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1985), 141-142.

attempt to form a bond with other professing Christians at school, it is almost certain that in modern America such children will be Arminian, charismatic heretics who deny some of the essentials of the faith. Parents need to heed the words of the Proverbs. “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Prov. 12:26). “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Prov. 13:30). “Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them” (Prov. 22:5). “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul” (Prov. 22:24-25). “Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of trouble-making” (Prov. 24:1-2).

Christian parents must never forget that public schools by law are required to teach every subject from an autonomous satanic perspective. Every school hour of every day, public school teachers spout forth lies. Furthermore, public schools are cesspools of immorality. Children in public schools have a virtual smorgasbord of wickedness available to them every day. Virtually any drug, any form of sexual perversion, every form of religious Satanism and so on is readily available. Christian parents have a covenantal obligation to protect their children from such an anti-Christian environment. Sending one’s children to a propaganda center for atheism and nihilism is not the proper, wise or loving thing to do. Even when Christian adults (who are spiritually mature and ready to do battle) spend time with the wicked, they are to do so on their own terms, not on the terms set by the wicked. Hodge writes, “It is only when men associate with the wicked with the desire and purpose to do them good, that they can rely on the protection of God to preserve them from contamination.”⁹⁵

Another argument that is often used to justify public school use is as follows: “Well, Pastor Dave’s children all went to public school and they turned out just fine.” Although one can point to many examples of covenant children who attended public school without going apostate such an argument is fallacious for the following reasons. First, the fact some children who are placed in unbiblical, dangerous situations and escape without serious harm does not prove that public schools are virtuous or biblical. It merely proves that God is merciful when Christian parents do stupid, unbiblical things. If a soldier in Vietnam makes his way through a deadly mine field without serious injury, it does not prove that mine fields are safe. It does not mean that one should recommend walking through mine fields to others. Second, although many covenant children make it through public school without rejecting the faith, it does not mean that such children did not miss the superior opportunity of an explicitly Christian school or home education. There are many professing Christians that have been partially corrupted and negatively influenced by the propaganda they received in state schools as a child. The influence of feminism, statism, evolution, ethical relativism, existentialism, anti-intellectualism and so on are strongly evidenced in churches where children have attended public schools. A non-Christian education is a bad education. When Christian parents put their children in public schools they are missing a one-time opportunity to give their own children a good Christian education. No one who takes the Bible seriously can argue that a Christ-less education, or an agnostic-atheistic education is a good education. From a biblical standpoint it can’t be.

A third argument that is used to justify sending covenant children to public schools is that the Christian schools are no better than public schools. While there are many mediocre Christian schools in America, there are some excellent Christian schools as well. People who are unwilling to home school their children need to be willing to either form a solid Christian school with other

⁹⁵ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians*, 340.

Christian parents or they should be willing to move to an area where a good Christian school exists. A good Christian school must: be Reformed in doctrine; have high academic standards; be strict in the area of discipline; and, must integrate the Christian world and life views into every subject. Schools that call themselves Christian yet use secular public school textbooks, or teach Arminianism, or lack academic rigor and moral discipline, or regard the Christian faith as an add-on to the “secular” fields of study must be avoided. They are Christian in name only.

A fourth argument is that covenant children need to be exposed to the ways of the world in order to be properly prepared for adulthood. In other words Christian fathers should not overly shelter their children, for a time will come when they will be sent out in the world. There are a number of problems with this argument. First, this argument assumes (without any biblical proof) that children need to spend a lot of time among the wicked in order to learn to function in society. The biblical method of preparation for adulthood is not to send covenant children over to Canaanite villages to spend time with the heathen, but rather for parents to diligently instruct their children regarding life and the temptations of the world so that they can deal with all contingencies of life, identify sinful foolish behavior and avoid it. The biblical method of preparing covenant children for life is a training in biblical wisdom. This is achieved by teaching them the Scriptures and praying to God for wisdom. Proverbs chapter 2 says,

My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths (vs. 1-15).

There is nothing in Scripture regarding the necessity of having one’s covenant children hang out with pagans. The book of Proverbs is full of instructions that are specifically designed to prepare young people for life out in the world. There are instructions and warnings regarding drunkenness (20:1; 23:20, 21, 29, 31, 32, 35), adultery (2:16, 5:3, 20; 6:29; 22:14; 30:20), the immoral seductress (2:16ff.), anger and self-control (14:16, 17; 15:1, 18; 29:11), prostitutes (6:20-35; 7:6-27; 23:36-27; 29:3) and so on.

Second, the “children need to mingle with pagans” argument assumes that children have a spiritual maturity level that is capable of sustaining repeated attacks and temptations. Children, especially young children, are very susceptible to satanic assaults. There will come a time when the children move out of the house and live and work among pagans. However, this will occur when they are no longer young or naive. They will establish their own household after they are thoroughly trained, spiritually mature adults. This will occur after they have been taught knowledge, wisdom, discretion, understanding and Christian discernment. Third, it assumes that parents will be able to counteract all the false, unethical nonsense that children are taught in public schools. But how we ask can Christian parents counteract teaching of which they are for the most part unaware? The fact that many Christian parents recognize that their children need to

be deprogrammed or depaganized every day after school is a tacit admission of the danger that public schools pose to Christian children.

A fifth argument that is used to justify sending covenant children to public schools is that Christian children need to be in the public schools in order to witness to young unbelievers. This argument is refuted by two points. First, there is no biblical warrant for the concept of child evangelism. There are no biblical commands or examples in Scripture regarding little children witnessing to unbelievers. Jesus did say “Let the little children come to Me” (Mt. 19:14). However, the context indicates that these children were brought to Christ by adults (Mt. 19:13), who were very likely their own parents. The normal pattern of evangelistic ministry that one encounters in the Bible is for churches to send out adequately trained mature adult male believers. If Christians want to reach children with the gospel, then they should witness to whole families instead of sending young covenant children into spiritually dangerous situations. Fathers can train their children in apologetics and evangelism by personal instruction and having a child come along when tracts are passed out, or door to door discussion takes place. Covenant children are young disciples of their own parents. They are not yet adequately trained or spiritually equipped to debate with the heathen or to disciple others. Second, a Christian child at a public school is not in a position where he can witness effectively anyway. Since public schools are officially agnostic, pluralistic and anti-Christian, covenant children are forbidden to discuss God, the law, sin and salvation in class. Public schools do not even allow Bible study or prayer groups at the facilities during school hours. Therefore, even if one accepts the premise that covenant children should be little evangelists the public school environment is not conducive to effective ministry. The “covenant child as an evangelist” argument is a transparent excuse for an unbiblical decision.

A sixth argument for sending covenant children to public schools is: “I am not able to home school my children and cannot afford a Christian school. I simply have no other choice.” There are situations with single mothers and poor two-parent households where a Christian school is not an option (financially) and where home schooling would be very difficult if not impossible. In these types of situations the church should step in and assist the parent or parents. Families could volunteer to assist in home schooling or money could be raised by the church to help pay for a Christian education. This is an oversight and diaconal matter that Reformed churches need to work out. The church should make a concerted effort to keep all covenant children that are part of that particular community out of public schools. Churches need to make Christian education a priority.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches that the overall training of covenant children which includes education and discipline is the responsibility of Christian parents (in particular Christian fathers). This includes both formal and informal instruction. A biblical world and life view is to permeate a covenant child’s existence. The biblical passages that speak to the issue of a child’s education and training (e.g., Dt. 6:6-9; Eph. 6:4) teach that an explicitly Christian education is mandatory. It is not an optional issue or a matter of preference. This teaching requires Christian parents to keep covenant children out of public schools. Public schools must be avoided for the following reasons. (1) They do not integrate the Christian faith into every area of life or every academic discipline. (2) They violate the first commandment by adhering to political polytheism, secular humanism and agnosticism or “polite” atheism. (3) They do not promote obedience to Jesus

Christ and His laws but to the pagan state. (4) They corrupt the morals of covenant children by false, dangerous teaching and contact with a wicked student body. (5) They do not have biblical discipline. Their discipline is lax and founded upon anti-Christian principles. (6) They violate the biblical principle that places a child's education in the hands of parents and not the state. (Further, they violate the eighth commandment because they are financed by state theft.)

Churches should help Christian parents be faithful to the child-rearing imperatives of Scripture. Parents need to be told the truth regarding their many responsibilities. They also need training and guidance. As churches implement biblical policies regarding Christian education they should keep in mind that new believers and most professing Christians have been influenced by years of statist propaganda and years of unbiblical instruction from the evangelical community on this issue. Therefore, when a church repents and sets in progress a transition from being a church where many or most church members have their children in public schools to a church where no children are in state schools, the transition should be achieved with careful instruction and patient, loving admonition. Once a faithful Christian parent has a solid grasp of all the biblical arguments and issues involved in the debate regarding Christian education he will gladly obey God's word in this area.

Chapter 6: Applying Biblical Discipline

The biblical training of children involves much more than a mere transmission of knowledge from a parent to a child. There must also be correction which involves chastisement and admonition. Earlier we noted that biblical correction, which often involves the pain inflicted by spanking, is absolutely necessary for the proper spiritual development and well-being of covenant children. The rod, biblically applied, drives out foolishness (Pr. 22:15), delivers from hell (Pr. 23:13-14), saves from destruction (Pr. 19:18), gives wisdom (Pr. 29:15) and is an act of love (Pr. 13:24; Heb: 12:6-8).

In our modern permissive culture where the so-called experts on child-rearing are constantly condemning spanking as a form of child abuse, many Christian parents have abandoned this practice in favor of time outs, grounding, toy-bribery, yelling and other sanctions. Other Christian parents have greatly curtailed spanking by restricting its use to only the most severe infractions. The modern tendency is toward leniency and substitutions for the infliction of physical pain. This tendency is unfortunate for it reveals a negative cultural influence on the church and a lack of faith in the principles of discipline set forth in God's word. Christians must trust the Bible in matters of discipline, for biblical discipline works and secular methods do not. One reason that the Bible contains so many warnings regarding the necessity of applying the rod to children is the fact that fathers and mothers often are lax in this area. Because parents are often reluctant to use the rod, the Bible encourages parents to inflict the pain of spanking. Proverbs 23:13-14 says, "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell." God says that one's child will not only survive discipline, he will survive because of it. What should a Christian parent prefer for his child, the pain of discipline now or the lake of fire in the future? Christian parents must inflict the pain of spanking upon their disobedient children if they want to please God, love their children and achieve results. They must not be fooled by modern, antinomian concepts of tenderness. "[D]on't let the rule-discipline-spare not-be a hard saying. Isn't there a false tenderness for the child which is a cover for our indulgence of weak and foolish affections? There is much more mercy in what seems to be harshness, then in false tenderness. Let the child

see, that we are firmly determined; that we are not to be diverted from our duty by the cry of weakness or passion. Isn't it far better that the child should cry under healthful correction, now, than that parents should afterward cry under the bitter fruit to themselves and their children of neglected discipline?"⁹⁶

Once parents understand the necessity of discipline, that God requires spanking for the proper training of covenant children, they often start asking questions such as: "What do we do?" or "How do we apply biblical discipline in our home?" This brings us to a discussion of the mechanics or procedures of biblical discipline. There are many principles of biblical discipline that need to be considered.⁹⁷

First, biblical discipline must occur in a context of love. It must occur in a consistently Christian home atmosphere. Thugs, drunks, and cruel and neglectful fathers sometimes spank their children. Such discipline, however, is not Christian discipline. When we speak of a context of love we do not merely mean a context of caring, compassion, tender emotions and so forth, but also an atmosphere where God's law-word is paramount. It is a home, where Christ is Lord and God's word reigns, where the parents are providing for their children physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is a home where the principles of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 are practiced. Such a home is a Christian culture, a society of biblical love. When covenant children are disciplined within a context of love, they will understand that discipline is not insincere, arbitrary or dictatorial but is an act of love and obedience toward God on the part of the parents. They will also understand that discipline is an act of love toward them, that it is a good thing, done for their own welfare and spiritual well-being. Children who are raised in homes without biblical love who are neglected by their parents will often misbehave in order to receive attention. Such children are so starved for affection that they would rather receive angry attention than no attention at all. In order to avoid all such problems parents must make the home a pleasant, loving, secure place for their children. Discipline will be much more effective in such an environment. When the home is an unpleasant place to be with fighting, neglect, constant nagging, bitterness and so forth the pain and unpleasantness of discipline loses its edge. In a loving, pleasant atmosphere the pain of discipline is more of a contrast to the overall environment. Pain in such a situation is more memorable. There will also be a stronger desire on the part of the children to repent and restore fellowship.

Second, discipline must be done in a loving manner. As parents discipline their children for disobedience they must do so in a manner that is itself obedient to God. This means that parents must not discipline in anger. There are many reasons why parents must never discipline in anger. (1) Anger does not produce righteousness. "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). Why use a method of discipline that is ineffective, that does not lead to the desired result? (2) When one is teaching a child to control himself, he must not set a bad example by losing control himself. Angry discipline is hypocritical discipline. When a parent disciplines in an angry, uncontrolled manner he, by example, is saying to his child: "Do as I say, but not as I do." One does not want to teach his child to become a hypocrite. (3) When a parent does not discipline in anger the possibility of abuse or "over-doing it" is removed. Discipline must be done in a calm, rational manner. The pain that is inflicted must be appropriate to the offense committed. If a parent is extremely angry he needs to pull himself together, calm

⁹⁶ Charles Bridges, 383.

⁹⁷ For a fuller discussion of the principles enumerated in this chapter, see Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978). See also Douglas Wilson, *Standing on the Promises: A Handbook of Biblical Childrearing* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997).

down and act rationally before he does something stupid. Correction must occur with a spirit of gentleness. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). (4) Paul orders Christian fathers not to provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4). When a parent loses control, he is tempting his children to become angry, or to harbor resentment, or to lose respect for parental authority. Although covenant children never have any excuse for disobeying their parents (except when they are told to violate Scripture), parents should never act in a manner which may cause their children to stumble.

Loving discipline is never tyrannical. A covenant child is under a Christian parent who is under God. The Christian parent is not a dictator who barks out orders as if his children were slaves. In discipline a parent’s attitude should reflect God’s love (Heb. 12:6-8; Rev. 3:19). A father who acts as an autocrat to his wife and children can cause anger and discouragement (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Parents “are not to excite the bad passions of their children by severity, injustice, partiality, or unreasonable exercise of authority. A parent had better sow tares in a field from which he expects to derive food for himself and family, than by his own ill conduct nurture evil in the heart of his child.”⁹⁸ There are many pagan fathers who after a hard day’s work of taking orders from an unreasonable boss, like to come home and throw their weight around. They use their superior strength to terrorize their children with severe scoldings and physical beatings. Such should never be the behavior of a Christian father. Jesus instructed His disciples that Christian leadership involved humble, loving, service and thus was not to mirror the prideful, arrogant, cruel leadership of the heathen (Mt. 20:25-28).

Loving discipline is never cruel. When parents chasten a child they want that child to admit fault, repent, reconcile and learn from that experience how properly to act in the future. Parents who are cruel in discipline, who publicly humiliate their child in front of others take the child’s mind off the biblical admonitions they need and focus it on their embarrassment. Christian parents should never tease, mock, make fun of, denigrate or insult their children in the disciplinary process. How many children have heard comments such as “John you are an idiot. You will never amount to anything” or “Mike you’re really stupid!” or “Billy, why did you do that? Are you a moron?” Christian parents should never act sarcastic, flippant or vengeful during discipline.

In the Bible there is a great difference between chastisement and wrath or vengeance. When God punishes the wicked, He pours out His wrath upon them (2 Th. 1:6-9). When God metes out vengeance upon unbelievers He is not doing so out of love in order to make them more holy but is simply meting out justice. They receive the destructive blows of hatred (e.g., Ps. 37:2, 9, 13, 15, 17, 20, 38) and not the loving chastisement of correction that the elect receive. God as a loving father chastises His children for their own good, for their growth in sanctification. Christian parents should reflect God’s method of loving chastisement when they discipline their own children. Biblical chastisement is medicine not poison.

Third, discipline must be for real infractions and not for accidents, normal rambunctiousness and immaturity. Little children are clumsy. They often do things such a spill their milk, knock over things, trip and fall and so forth. All such things, however, are not ethical violations but are merely a result of a lack of coordination from a young, underdeveloped brain. God does not discipline His people for accidents but for violations of His holy law. Earthly fathers can instruct their children to be more careful, but they should not spank a child for an accident. One also should not discipline a child for being a child. Young children (in particular

⁹⁸ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 264.

boys) are full of energy and like to play aggressively. Parents do not need to allow their child to play wild games in the living room. However, they should allow their children to have fun as long as sin is not involved. It is not wise to expect a five-year-old boy to act like an adult and sit around reading books all day.

There are two types of rules that can be violated by children. Children can violate the express teaching of God's law by lying, stealing, hitting, disrespect to parents, coveting and so forth. They also can violate the various house rules that have been set up by their parents for a well-ordered household. House rules receive their authority from the fact that children are commanded to obey their parents. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). Since discipline occurs for these two types of infractions, covenant children should be taught from the earliest possible age the Ten Commandments. It is a good idea for parents to have their children memorize the Ten Commandments and the questions dealing with the moral law in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Covenant children need to know the difference between right and wrong and why there is a right and wrong. They need to understand that all violations of the law are against Jehovah and that God requires Christian parents to chastise their children for all such infractions. Covenant children also need to be taught that all challenges to parental authority are serious offenses that will lead to swift, certain and stern chastisement. When parents determine house rules they should use biblical wisdom and sanctified common sense. If a father makes unreasonable demands upon his children he is tempting them to sin. For example, if a father asks his eight-year-old son to get up at 5:00 am and mow the lawn, rake the leaves, wash the car, etc. he is asking too much from an eight-year-old. The boy will easily become frustrated and discouraged. Although house rules should be designed in a manner that reflects the maturity and ability of children, God's moral law is absolute and non-negotiable. Children must never be allowed to violate God's law.

Fourth, discipline must be proportional to the offense committed. Just as there are different levels of bad behavior, there must be a proportional level of chastisement to fit each situation. There are relatively minor infractions that often result from ignorance. Such matters can be dealt with by means of a verbal reproof. In a covenant home that has a pleasant loving atmosphere, the displeasure and seriousness of a parental rebuke is often sufficient to achieve a biblical change in a child. Many infractions merit a normal spanking and admonition while serious violations merit a more severe spanking. There are four reasons why discipline should be proportional to the offense. First, parental discipline is patterned after God's discipline of the church. Throughout Scripture God deals with His people according to the offense committed (e.g., not every crime is a capital offense in the Law). The Old and New Testaments, for example, make a clear distinction between sins of ignorance and high-handed sins (e.g., Nu. 15:30, 31). There is a major difference regarding the gravity of an offense between two boys who during a football game call each other names and a son who tells his father that he is a stupid idiot. There also is a difference between a child who forgets to do a chore and a child who says to his parent "I will not do that!" Obviously such a child needs a strong spanking. Second, if a child receives the identical chastisement every time then he will not learn to distinguish between serious and minor infractions. Every infraction is wrong and must be dealt with. However, the chastisement for throwing rocks off the overpass should be far more memorable than forgetting to take out the garbage. Third, if the chastisement is identical every time then discipline becomes robotic. Fourth, if a child receives a severe paddling for every single infraction then a strong spanking will lose its effectiveness. A child who is seriously paddled for everything will become desensitized to severe discipline. Strong discipline is much more effective if it is reserved for

more serious offenses. Children should fear the rod and not their own fathers. When severe chastisement is meted out upon children for every offense, children can become angry, frustrated or discouraged.

It is also important that parents consider the different dispositions of their children when administering discipline. Some children are very sensitive and respond immediately to a simple verbal reproof. If a stern look coupled with an admonition causes a child to break out in tears, admit guilt, confess, repent and reconcile then a spanking may not even be necessary. (One of course is assuming the child is not putting on an act to get out of being spanked.) Other children (usually tough little boys) do not even flinch during a spanking. Therefore, the pain level of administering the rod should be increased or decreased according to the nature of a child. However, this point does not mean that one must inflict pain until a child bursts into tears. Some children are much better at controlling their emotions and do not like to cry or get emotional in front of others. This is often the case with boys as they get older. The goal of discipline is repentance and a change in behavior. If that goal is effectively achieved with a relatively small amount of physical pain then there is no need to inflict severe spankings. Every child is different. Parents usually have a good understanding of the different dispositions of their children.

Fifth, discipline or chastisement must be painful. When the author of Hebrews describes chastisement he writes, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11). Chastisement is supposed to produce painful and not pleasurable emotions. “It is the nature of all discipline to seem painful rather than pleasant, otherwise it would fail of its purpose, which is to head one away from what is unprofitable for holiness. But it seems to be so only for the moment, that is, at the time when it is experienced; for he who benefits from discipline invariably finds that the pain of it is followed by joy, and to this consummation of bliss the man of faith looks forward with eager anticipation.”⁹⁹ If discipline is going to be effective then it must cause pain. That is why verbal correction often needs to be accompanied by a good spanking. Solomon writes, “Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart” (Pr. 20:30). “The diseased body needs medicine no less than food, both for healing and enablement to receive nourishment from its food; the diseased soul needs chastening no less than consolation, and as the main preparation for consolation.... Miserable beyond measure is the untamed stubbornness of self-will. A gentle stroke is first tried. When this remedy fails, then the stripes are needful.”¹⁰⁰

How are parents to inflict the pain of discipline upon disobedient children? The Bible repeatedly refers to the use of a rod in discipline. “A rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding” (Pr. 10:13). “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Pr. 13:24). “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Pr. 22:15). “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell” (Pr. 23:13-14). “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Pr. 29:15). The Hebrew word for rod (*shebet*) refers to a thin stick or branch. A spanking rod is not thick but thin like a switch. Most books on discipline emphasize that whatever one uses as a spanking tool, it should cause pain but not damage. It one uses a paddle it should be flat and fairly thin. One wants to sting the skin without causing injury or bruising. If one wants to use a switch like an instrument, one can purchase a thin dowel (1/6 to inches in

⁹⁹ Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary On the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 532.

¹⁰⁰ Bridges, 431.

diameter depending on the age of the child) or craft a switch from a thin, smooth, flexible branch from a tree. One's hand can be used to administer chastisement, however, a switch or paddle is generally better. Hands are not as effective in bringing a good sting without causing bruises. Further, with a strong spanking one may cause more pain to the hand than to the bottom. When the Bible says to discipline with a rod, there is no reason why these passages should not be taken literally.

Why is the infliction of pain necessary? The rod is indispensable for instilling in children a biblical world view and the wisdom that comes with it. In Christian discipline the rod is always accompanied with biblical reproof or admonition. Spanking takes what is theoretical and makes it very concrete and practical. It teaches covenant children that sin and disobedience always have negative consequences. Rebellion leads directly to pain and displeasure. In the universe that God has created there are ethical absolutes and there is a responsibility of obedience. A spanking reinforces ethical instruction. A child will remember the pain that was inflicted from a certain bad behavior and will remember the why that came with the pain. That child will think twice before committing the offense again because he does not want to receive the pain that was inflicted before. Therefore, it is very important that spankings really hurt. A spanking that does not cause memorable pain is useless. It will not achieve the desired result.

Today, many parents have bought into the idea that inflicting the pain of the rod upon children is barbaric and outmoded and thus have substituted other forms of correction such as standing in the corner, groundings, going to one's room and so forth. Are such forms of correction biblical or useful for discipline? No. They are contrary to Scripture and are not effective forms of discipline.

The biblical pattern of discipline is the pain of the rod coupled with admonition, confession, repentance, reconciliation and restitution if necessary. Grounding does not follow the biblical pattern because: (1) It does not involve physical pain. Sitting in one's room reading a good book, or talking on the phone, or sitting at the computer is not a memorable chastisement. (2) The Bible does not teach a prison system for corporal chastisement but pain, correction and restitution. If a child has stolen a toy he should be required to make restitution. If a child cannot make money then he should be required to do some yard work or house work to pay for the toy (or the broken window, etc.). Biblical discipline teaches responsibility. It teaches that sinful behavior has immediate consequences. Grounding teaches a child to sit around and mope or feel sorry for himself. Physical correction is quick and when completed the child immediately goes back to a productive Christian life. Grounding is very slow and leaves the child out of the day to day tasks of normal Christian dominion living. (3) With grounding the disciplinary process which includes a complete reconciliation with the parents is not finalized for a lengthy period of time. This lengthy process allows disharmony in the relationship between parents and children. It tempts children to form bitter thoughts regarding their parents. With biblical discipline everything is dealt with immediately. There are no emotional loose ends. After chastisement and repentance occurs there is a complete reconciliation. The devil is not given the opportunity to stimulate bitter thoughts.

Sixth, discipline must be swift and consistent. Slow discipline teaches children that obedience can be stalled, that parents can be manipulated. Slow obedience needs to be seen for what it is: disobedience. A parent says to his child, "Bobby go up to your room and pick up your toys." Bobby ignores his father and continues playing with his toys. Then the father says, "I'm warning you, you better get upstairs and get to work right now or you're in big trouble." Bobby continues to play while slowly moving to a more distant part of the living room. Then Bobby's

father raises his voice and says, “I’m going to count to three and if you’re not on your way I’m going to spank you.” Then as the father counts to three in a progressively slower manner, the child begins to move during the word three. Children must be trained to respond immediately to every command. There should not be a need to raise one’s voice, or give warnings. Instant, cheerful obedience should be expected every time a command is given. When parents do not require immediate obedience, they are indirectly training their children to be manipulators of authority, to see what they can get away with before they obey. We certainly do not want our children to be slow and manipulative in their obedience toward God. Therefore, if children do not obey when asked the first time in a normal tone of voice, they need to be disciplined immediately.

Children also must be disciplined in a consistent manner. Parents need to adhere to and apply biblical standards of discipline every single day. Parents who are very strict on some days and then very permissive and lax on other days are sending a confused, schizophrenic, arbitrary message to their children. Children should not be taught that there are ethical holidays when biblical standards can be ignored. For the effective biblical training of children, parents need to show their children that they are reliable and trustworthy; that they are accurately and consistently applying God’s authority in the home. Inconsistent discipline implicitly teaches a form of ethical relativism. It teaches children that sin does not always have negative consequences. Parents are biblically obligated to enforce God’s righteous standard in the home. Discipline is not a matter of personal preference. Parents are often lax in discipline because they think that swift and consistent discipline is hard and time consuming. Although strict discipline is hard work, it is not nearly as hard as dealing with the chaos that results when biblical discipline is not applied.

Seventh, discipline must be strictly applied from a very young age. Many Christian parents unwittingly take a very Pelagian approach to child-rearing. Children in such a situation are basically given free reign until they get old enough to shock their parents through blatant rebellion. Then, the parents decide it’s time to get real strict. After years of transgressing with impunity and developing habitual patterns of intentional evil-doing, such a child will be very difficult to train and restrain. Proverbs instructs parents to get on the ball early before it is too late. “Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction” (19:18). Charles Bridges writes,

But the great force of the rule is its timely application-while there is hope. For the case becomes truly hopeless, if the remedy is delayed. The cure of the evil must begin in infancy. Not a moment can be lost. Now is the time, when the good can be accomplished most easily and with the least physical discipline. The lesson of obedience should be learned at the earliest possible moment. One painful struggle and victory in very early life, may, under God, do much toward settling the point, then and there, and for all the years ahead. On the other hand, even harsh chastening later, may fail to accomplish, what an early slight rebuke might have accomplished.¹⁰¹

Any gardener knows that the time to shape a tree is when it is young. A young tree is easily bent and pruned. The pruning of a young tree done properly has magnificent results. A professional gardener never waits until a tree is seventy years-old and one hundred feet tall before he tries to shape that tree because such a tree cannot be bent or effectively shaped.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 383-384.

Covenant children need the strictest of discipline not when they turn 13 but when they are infants, toddlers, and little boys or girls. Because all babies go forth from the womb as depraved little liars (cf. Ps. 51:5; 58:3) who want to determine their own rules and who have a nature that loves human autonomy, it is foolish to put off stern discipline precisely at the time when children are forming habits.

If children are dealt with strictly from a tender age they will become accustomed to discipline and obedience. They will grow up expecting discipline when they do wrong. They will develop habitual patterns of obedience from the very start. When parents waste those early formative years the children become accustomed to laxness and disobedience. Then when the parents finally decide to crack down and get strict they've got a huge battle on their hands. The practice of doing almost nothing, until children get older and rebel, is very common among non-Christian families. In such families the parents discover that their child is getting drunk, smoking pot, taking drugs, fornicating, etc. and are shocked and distressed by such behavior. As a result they crack down with groundings, take various privileges away and yell a lot. By this time, however, their child has already developed a self-centered, hedonistic, "youth culture," satanic world view. The response of the teenager is to argue, yell, complain, lie a lot, sneak out, run away and lead a double life: one in front of their parents and one in front of their so-called friends. Such children disrespect and often hate their own parents. They can't wait to move out of the house so they can party and fornicate without sneaking around. This scenario is very common in America.

Christian families which adhere to the infallible word of God should function far differently and have radically different results. Parents must be strict with discipline and training from the earliest years. "It is easiest plucking up weeds as soon as they spring up, and the bullock that is designed for the yoke should be betimes accustomed to it."¹⁰² Covenant children under such circumstances will develop godly habits. They will learn to obey immediately and cheerfully. Then as such children grow older the parents will not need to attempt to hedge in their children with a bunch of rules. They will not need to engage in pitched battles with their children because their children have already learned to habitually obey God and submit to His rule. Such children are so permeated with Christian ethics and a biblical world and life view that they would never even consider partaking of the sins that are popular in today's "youth culture."

Eighth, discipline (i.e. physical chastisement) must always be accompanied by reproof, correction or admonition. Paul tells fathers to bring up their children "up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The word admonition (*nouthesia*) means literally a "putting in mind." Physical chastisement is never enough by itself. In fact it is useless if a parent does not also correct or counsel the errant child by applying God's word directly to the situation. Jay Adams tells us the purpose of the verbal admonition:

[T]he word *nouthesis* focuses on both confronter and the one confronted. *Nouthesis* specifically presupposes the need for a change in the person confronted, who may or may not put up some resistance. In either case there is a problem in his life that needs to be solved. Nouthetic confrontation, then, necessarily suggests first of all that there is something wrong with the person who is to be confronted nouthetically. The idea of something wrong, some sin, some obstruction, some problem, some difficulty, some need that has to be acknowledged and dealt with, is central. In short, nouthetic confrontation arises out of a condition in the counselee

¹⁰² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 3:901.

that God wants changed. The fundamental purpose of nouthetic confrontation, then, is to effect personality and behavioral change.¹⁰³

The parent as God's representative must explain to the child what exactly was done that was wrong. He then must explain from Scripture why the behavior was wrong. Then he must teach the child how to replace the bad behavior with godly-wise behavior by applying God's word to the specific situation. When a child misbehaves he is just not spanked and told that his behavior was wrong. He is told why God says his behavior was wrong and given instruction in righteousness. "The rod and rebuke give wisdom" (Pr. 29:15). "The rod without words fails to teach our children the difference between right and wrong. Words without the rod become shallow, empty air. We must be certain that our children always understand the exact reason they are being disciplined."¹⁰⁴ Bridges writes, "Some give the rod without reproof, without trying to get the conscience to respond. This is either tyrannical or whimsical and no matter which, nothing can be expected from it. But the two together not only drive 'foolishness' far away, but, as a positive blessing, give wisdom."¹⁰⁵ The word reproof or rebuke in the original language means to speak to the child in a manner that brings conviction. This can only be done in a biblical manner by applying Scriptures to their specific situation. Parents need to find and use passages of Scripture that condemn the bad behavior and that help the child replace sinful behavior with godly behavior. This process teaches the child biblical discernment.

In order to understand how this aspect of discipline is applied let us examine a Christian father in action. Bob observes his son lose his temper and call his sister a stupid idiot. The first thing Bob must do is help his son to understand what he did that was wrong. Bob asks, "John, do you know what you did wrong?" His son's answer may be anything from, "I don't know" to "I called my sister a name." Once it is clear that Bob's son understands what he did wrong, then Bob asks his son why it was wrong from a biblical perspective. "John, why does God condemn name calling?" At this point the father is to bring out passages that reveal God's attitude toward such behavior. "John, God says in Leviticus 19:17, 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart.' Jesus said that name calling is a serious sin. 'But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.' You see, John, God requires that we love our brother and our neighbor. Is name calling an expression of love or of hate? Do you understand now why your behavior is wrong?" After John understands why God condemns his behavior, the next step is to bring out some passages that will help John replace the bad behavior with godly behavior. Bob points out the following passages. "A soft answer turns away wrath" (Pr. 15:1). "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6). In this whole process John has learned what he has done wrong. He has learned why it is wrong according to Scripture. And he has received biblical counsel regarding the proper response in the future.

When the procedure is repeated over and over again for each offense a covenant child will learn to recognize bad behavior on his own. He will learn to apply Scripture himself and will become wise and discerning. Then when he is tempted to sin he will know how to respond. For example, a boy who lives down the street wants to ride his bike to the local fast food hamburger stand. He asks a covenant child to go with him. The child responds by saying that he is not permitted to ride his bike that far away. The boy then counters by saying, "Why don't you just lie

¹⁰³ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 45.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Bridges, 675.

to your parents?” The covenant child says, “I can’t do that. Lying is a sin. And God says that I must obey my parents. I would rather please God and my parents by telling the truth than sin for a hamburger and French fries.”

Parents are not always in situations in which they have the time to quote and apply various passages of Scripture. However, they can still follow the biblical procedure by setting forth the teaching of Scripture from memory (e.g., “John, the Bible says that lying is wrong. That it is a sin. God says that we are to speak the truth to our neighbor, etc.”).

As parents discipline their children it is important that the children understand that: a) Discipline is something they need. It is not simply punishment. It is done for their own good to change their behavior in a biblical direction. b) Parents discipline because it is their biblical duty. God requires it. Biblical discipline does not occur because parents are mean, unloving, and harsh or because they enjoy it, but because they are being obedient to God’s word. When children are old enough to understand they should be told that they belong to God and that they are being trained to serve God and expand His kingdom. Children should see discipline in its overall context as necessary training for a life of godly dominion.

Ninth, biblical discipline always leads to a restoration of fellowship. This means that fellowship must be restored with the parent who administered discipline and if the infraction involved a sin against another person such as a brother or sister, then a restoration of fellowship should also be required there. A child should never be permitted to run away from a spanking and wallow in anger or self-pity. The restoration of fellowship involves a confession of wrongdoing on the part of the child, the asking of forgiveness of the offended party, the giving of forgiveness by the offended party and a reassurance of love and acceptance on the part of the parents. Parents should hug their children and give them loving words so that they will understand that the discipline was an act of love and that there is a full restoration of fellowship. There, of course, should also be prayer to God confessing sin (Ps. 32:5), requesting forgiveness (Ps. 51; 1 Jn. 1:9), and asking God for the grace to overcome this sin in the future. The whole process of restoration is very important not only because it restores peace and happiness in the family, and shows the child that biblical discipline is an act of love on the part of the parents, but also because it teaches the child how to resolve conflicts in the future. Many professing Christians sweep conflicts under the rug and hold unbiblical grudges toward each other. A covenant child raised properly will develop a godly habit of seeking immediate biblical restoration when sinful conflicts arise.

Summary and Conclusion

In our brief consideration of principles that are necessary in the application of biblical discipline, we noted that discipline must:

1. occur in a context of love;
2. be done in a loving manner;
3. be for real infractions;
4. be proportional to the offense;
5. be painful;
6. be swift and consistent;
7. be applied strictly at a very young age;
8. be accompanied by admonition;

9. lead to a restoration of fellowship.

A father must make sure that the household is a loving, pleasant place. Parents must apply discipline from the earliest age and not wait until a child has developed ungodly habits and autonomous thinking. When a child does something that needs discipline the parent should make sure that he does not discipline in anger. When a parent applies discipline he needs to spank in a manner that causes real pain but does not damage. He also needs to instruct or counsel the child. The child must understand what he was disciplined for, why that behavior is unbiblical and how to take biblical steps to put off that behavior and replace it with godly behavior. Finally, there needs to be a full restoration of fellowship. The child needs to know that discipline is an act of love and that now that it is over and confession has been made, there is forgiveness from both God and the parents. All of these principles have been derived from Scripture and are required by God. They are not optional. Parents must put these principles in practice and must apply them over and over until they are habitual. Biblical discipline works. Covenant children who are raised with these principles applied will be greatly blessed and will praise their parents for their diligence.

Chapter 7: Dating Versus Biblical Courtship

An area in which many Bible-believing churches (and consequently many professing Christian families) have blindly accepted pagan practices is the area of dating. Because the abandonment of biblical courtship in favor of modern recreational dating has been a disaster for families, churches and society, we need to examine dating from a biblical perspective and analyze the scriptural alternative: father controlled courtship. In this chapter we will define dating, note its recent origin, give reasons why its practice is unscriptural and in the process present the biblical alternative: father (parent) controlled courtship. For those of us born and raised in America (especially those raised as unbelievers) there may be a temptation to dismiss this topic as “obviously antiquated and absurd.” But, as you read this chapter you may be surprised at the clear and abundant biblical evidence for courtship (as scripturally defined).

The Modern Dating Game

What is dating? By the word dating we are referring to the twentieth century phenomenon known as modern recreational dating. It works something like this. A boy meets a girl, decides that she is pleasing in some sense (e.g., cute smile, sexy body, nice sounding voice, cool friends, groovy car, etc.) and then asks her to go out on a date. If she accepts, the boy will pick her up at a certain time and then (typically) will take her out to dinner, and/or to a movie (or concert, etc.) and then in many cases will park the car in a secluded area and engage in necking and heavy petting. In today’s culture “nice girls” will not allow the necking and petting until the second, third or fourth date. In modern America, dating among high school and college students frequently involves booze, drugs and sexual intercourse.

If a boy and girl date for an extended period of time and agree not to date other people then they are “going steady.” Going steady (as it is called) is in many ways an adolescent imitation of marriage (e.g., the boy often even gives the girl a ring or necklace). It, however, does not have the protection and real commitment of a marriage covenant and is therefore

arbitrary and fleeting. Boys and girls who “go steady” become attached romantically, emotionally, and often sexually. Then when the boy or girl gets bored with the relationship, or get caught cheating or simply decide that someone else is more desirable, the relationship is ended. Breaking up often involves heartache, anger and has many negative emotional consequences. After a string of failed relationships young men and women can become hard-hearted and distrustful of relationships in general. Thus modern recreational dating leads to a high rate of divorce in society. It trivializes intimacy and supports the hedonistic idea that men and women are play things that can be tossed aside at will. In modern culture (generally speaking) the person that one marries is simply the last person in a string of relationships that involved emotional and sexual “commitments.” Thus marriage is often viewed as basically a romantic add-on to what has occurred before. Modern recreational dating is not only unbiblical but it has its own negative consequences. The specialness and sacredness of the marriage covenant for many has been lost. It has been cast aside for the sinful foolish pleasures of the modern dating system.

While professing Christians who through ignorance, bad teaching and syncretism with pagan culture are involved in the dating system usually have better motives and intentions than their pagan counterparts (e.g., their goal for dating is not “to score”), all the unbiblical negative aspects of dating (e.g., a lack of real parental oversight; no chaperone; a certain amount of physical intimacy is accepted and expected; emotional, romantic and physical relations are occurring outside of the marital relationship, etc.) still accompany so-called “Christian dating.” Therefore, one should not be surprised that rates of sexual immorality among “evangelical” college students are almost identical to pagan college students. Or that rates of adultery and divorce among professing Christians is also about the same as the general pagan population. The dating paradigm has been a total disaster for American evangelicals.

Why is Dating Wrong?

The reason that the modern recreational dating system has had such negative ethical and social consequences for evangelicals is that it contradicts many biblical principles. In fact the modern dating paradigm is not at all based on the Bible but is rather a by-product of an apostatizing and post-Christian culture. In the nineteenth century (and before) most men and women were brought together and prepared for marriage through a father-controlled process called courtship. By 1930 a cultural paradigm shift occurred by which young adults came to control the process with little or no supervision from parents. Dating and petting became the norm.

The reasons for this shift are manifold. There were socioeconomic factors such as industrialization. Many young men and women moved from small agricultural towns to large cities to work in mills, factories and offices. There was the rise of the motion picture industry which promoted an unbiblical concept of romance and sexuality. Another important factor was the development of the affordable automobile. Automobiles provided young couples with a fast and easy escape from the eyes and ears of their parents. They provided boys and girls with a weather-proof, mobile, private, couch on wheels. As such, cars became the chief necking centers for teenagers during the twentieth century. The main reason, however, for the shift from courtship to dating was that most churches stopped preaching the whole counsel of God (e.g., God’s moral law, covenant headship, etc.) As a result fathers abdicated their biblical

responsibility to oversee the relationships of their children and guard them from pagan culture, from acting foolishly and committing evil.

As we consider specific biblical reasons why dating is unscriptural and dangerous we of necessity will be presenting the case for biblical courtship. Although it may appear that dating is the norm for evangelicals today, there are a number of reasons why the Bible condemns such a practice.

(1) Modern recreational dating is unbiblical because it tempts the parties involved to commit sexual immorality and often leads to fornication. Because of our sinful natures and because of natural sexual appetites believers should never place themselves in situations that can cause temptation and sin. Believers cannot trust themselves to be alone with an attractive person of the opposite sex especially when that person has a commitment and strong emotional attachment to the one they are with. “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Th. 4:3-7).

Recreational dating presupposes that a certain amount of kissing and touching are acceptable outside of the marriage relationship as long as things do not go too far (e.g., second, third and fourth base). Such thinking, however, is totally contrary to Scripture. Paul says, “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Cor. 7:1-3). Paul says unequivocally that it is morally good for a single man not to have sexual relations with a woman. Sexual affection is strictly limited by the apostle to the marriage relationship. Kissing and rubbing various parts of the body are clearly foreplay; they are the normal prelude to sexual intercourse. Although a Christian man would never allow someone to conduct themselves in such a manner (i.e. foreplay, sexual touching) with a wife or daughter they convince themselves that such behavior is somehow acceptable when they are single and the hormones are flowing. He is also ignoring the fact that he is touching someone else’s future wife, while at the same time expecting his own future wife to be chaste. “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (Prov. 6:27-29). Sexual touching is forbidden before marriage. Therefore, modern dating is a form of rebellion against God.

Recreational dating (which nearly always involves necking and petting) is condemned by God because it causes illicit lust. Even when a professing Christian couple “make out” but stop while dressed and go their separate ways, they have still filled their minds with unlawful desires. Paul says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). “That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22). Jesus Himself warned that sexual lust is a violation of the seventh commandment. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit

adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt. 5:27-28). Solomon writes, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Pr. 4:23).

To engage in recreational dating is to draw one’s own mind and heart away from obedience toward seduction and sin. It is purposeful entering into temptation, a deliberate jumping into a pit of lust and a snare of evil desire. Our Lord commanded us to pray that we not be led into temptation (cf. Mt. 6:13). Can we pray this prayer with sincerity while we deliberately pour gasoline on the ember of lust? All sin begins with an entering into temptation. Therefore, if you fear sin, then you must also fear temptation. You cannot have the fruit while you delight in and partake of the root. The reason that dating is so destructive of believers is because when men and women make peace with sinful desires and stimulate them with necking they have already consented to sin in the heart; and, sin in the heart often breaks forth into evil acts. An inner consent with lust always occurs before sinful deeds take place. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (Jas. 1:14-15). Instead of following the modern dating paradigm, we should heed the words of Peter. “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1Pet. 2:11). Lust is such a danger to Christians that Paul even warned Timothy, a man of God, to avoid it like the plague. “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22.).

How many young Christians have fallen into great sexual sins because they blindly accepted the dating system; because they did not consider the danger of entering into temptation and the sinfulness of inward lust? How many believers have been scarred for life by following the world’s method instead of Scripture? There have been many Christians who have backslid, fallen into grievous sexual sins, repented and been restored. Note, however, that the pain, suffering, and trauma that are the consequences of sin can last for many years, even a lifetime. “You will never find David dancing after his sin with Bathsheba. Not he; there was not dance in him after that! He limped to the day of his death” (C. H. Spurgeon). Sexual attraction is natural and normal. God made us with the ability to respond in this way. So, those raised in Christian homes shouldn’t be fooled into thinking they won’t be tempted in a dating situation. “Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov. 22:3). “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered” (Prov. 28:26).

(2) Another particularly troublesome aspect of the dating paradigm is that believers are trained to confuse lust and strong emotions with genuine biblical love. When a Christian young man takes out a young woman and causes her to lust and sin by necking and so forth he is not expressing biblical love, for true love obeys God’s law. “Love...does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:4-6). “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments” (2 Jn. 6). When a Christian couple engage in “making out” and “heavy petting” they are stepping outside of lawful behavior, imitating the pagan world, and are not acting in each other’s best interest which is to serve Christ with the whole heart. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.... Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:9-10, 13-14).

The Bible gives us a vivid picture of lustful passion as a substitute for true biblical love in the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. In this chapter the Bible uses the word love in the common cultural sense to describe a strong infatuation based upon irrational, youthful, sexual lust. Tamar is an exceedingly beautiful virgin, but she is a chaperoned and well-guarded daughter of the king. Amnon, her half-brother who is consumed with sexual lust, comes up with a scheme to remove his sister's guardians and force her to have sexual intercourse. When they are alone, in the heat of passion Amnon reveals his wicked intention to Tamar. She is appalled. She says to him, "No, my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing! And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you" (2 Sam. 13:12-13).

There are a number of important things to note from this chapter regarding our discussion of the unbiblical nature of modern recreational dating. First, note that Tamar properly assumes that in the area of sexual conduct there should be a clear distinction between God's covenant people and the surrounding pagan nations (v. 12). She also properly identifies any Israelite who engages in premarital sex as a fool (v. 13). Second, note the great difficulty that it takes to get alone with a young virgin in Israelite society. The Bible assumes that young men and women should never be alone together until they are married. Unmarried virgins in biblical society are protected from predatory men. They are guarded by competent moral chaperones. Such protection is the responsibility of the father.

Third, note that an infatuation which flows from sexual lust is impatient and fleeting. Amnon did not follow lawful procedures of biblical courtship because he wanted immediate gratification. Once his sinful lust was gratified, Amnon's infatuation turned into revulsion and hatred (v. 15). He used her for sexual pleasure and then cast her aside. Blaikie writes, "If anything more was needed to show the accomplished villainy of Amnon, it is his treatment of Tamar after he has violently compassed her ruin. It is the story so often repeated even at this day, -the ruined victim flung aside in dishonour, and left unpitied to her shame. There is no trace of any compunction on the part of Amnon at the moral murder he has committed, at the life he has ruined; no pity for the once blithe and happy maiden whom he has doomed to humiliation and woe. She has served his purpose, king's daughter though she is; let her crawl into the earth like a poor worm to live or to die, in want or in misery; it is nothing to him."¹⁰⁶ Note that the so-called love of the world with its lust, sexual immorality, deceptive words of affection and defrauding of gullible young women is antinomian to the core. In reality, it is hatred, humiliation and degradation masquerading as love. The modern dating paradigm serves the false worldly concept of love to a tee. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world- he lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-16).

(3) Modern recreational dating is unbiblical because it trains young people to take male-female covenant relationships lightly. With modern dating the goal of the relationship is first personal pleasure (i.e. having a lot of fun); then second, developing romantic feelings and strong emotions; then third (in some cases) the making of some sort of commitment (e.g., going steady). At this point in the relationship, however, the commitment is only one of restricting pleasurable activities (going out, sexual gratification, etc.) to each other. Engagement or betrothal is only a future possibility at best. Note, that this so-called dating commitment can be dissolved by either party at any time for any reason whatsoever without any negative civil or social consequences.

¹⁰⁶ W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock, 1978 (1893), 197-198.

Given the fact that the goal of dating is essentially self-centered and hedonistic and that the dating commitment can be broken for any reason at any time, we should not be surprised to find that Americans may have had five, ten, or even twenty “serious” relationships before they become married. Someone might ask, “What is wrong with that?” “Isn’t it a good policy to test drive the many cars before making a decision to buy one?” The problem with the modern dating paradigm is that: (1) It trains young people to have a pleasure-oriented, selfish (self-fulfillment) concept of marriage instead of the biblical God-centered, kingdom (dominion) oriented, service-oriented concept of marriage. When men or women make their own self-fulfillment through emotions and pleasures the foundation of the marriage relationship there is no solid foundation for a lasting (truly satisfying) godly marriage. (2) When people are married after several relationships in which the commitment was broken for any reason no matter how small, men and women are trained (habituated) to deal with problems in the marriage relationship (even petty things such as sexual boredom, a lack of strong emotions, putting on some weight, etc.) by getting a divorce. The dating system is one of the main reasons why America has such a scandalously high divorce rate. Young people have been trained to treat divorce as not a big deal, as an easy and acceptable solution to marital problems.

(4) The main reason that Christians must reject the modern dating paradigm is that it violates the biblical teaching regarding covenant headship. The Bible teaches that the father (and parents) has a biblical responsibility to guard and preserve a girl’s virginity until marriage. The father also has a responsibility to exercise oversight regarding finding a suitable Christian mate for a son or a daughter. The dating system leaves both of these responsibilities in the hands of a son or a daughter. As dating is practiced in modern America the most a father may require is to meet the boy who is about to take his daughter on a date. Thus, a father turns his own daughter over to a complete stranger on the basis of external appearance, a greeting and a handshake. Only the daughter really knows what kind of person she is dealing with. If this daughter is emotionally, romantically and sexually involved with a wicked, worthless fellow she will do everything she can to withhold the truth about him from her parents. The dating paradigm takes the process of finding a life partner out of the hands of Christian parents who are experienced, wise, spiritually mature and the guardians of a covenant child’s virginity and places this process in the hands of inexperienced, (often) naive, spiritual babies or children with raging hormones (i.e. adult bodies with adolescent minds). Recreational dating violates and destroys the foundation of the biblical family authority structure.

Parental Authority

The idea that parents (in particular fathers) are to exercise authoritative hands-on oversight over a son or daughter’s courtship process is so foreign to evangelicals today that an examination of the biblical evidence for this assertion is in order. There are many sections of Scripture that deal with a father’s authority in this area, particularly when discussing daughters. The Bible teaches that fathers are to give their daughters in marriage. The giving of a daughter presupposes that a father has the authority to either approve or forbid the marriage of a daughter to a certain man. In other words choosing a spouse is not an autonomous decision on the part of the daughter. Even in the very first marriage God the creator and Father of Adam and Eve “brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:22). Obviously God’s giving of Eve to Adam served as a divine pattern for earthly fathers. This truth is confirmed by passages such as Psalm 78:63, which

speaks of God's judgment by killing daughters before they can be given in marriage by their fathers. "The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given in marriage."

When Paul takes up the subject of virgins in a time of distress (i.e. persecution) in 1 Corinthians, he instructs fathers that allowing daughters to marry is not sinful. He writes, "But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin [daughter], if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better" (7:36-38). Hodge writes, "Though the apostle regarded marriage at that time as inexpedient, he tells fathers that they were perfectly free to exercise their own judgment in giving their daughters in marriage or keeping them single."¹⁰⁷ The word translated as improperly or unseemly (*aschmone*) can be translated as passive thus meaning that the father believes his decision not to allow his virgin daughter to marry (thus far) brings disgrace to him or even more likely his daughter. The point of this passage is that Paul (under divine inspiration) places the decision to give or not to give in marriage squarely in the hands of the father. Therefore, one can not argue that such a procedure was only an ancient Jewish custom or one that belonged to a former dispensation. It applies to all new covenant believers.

The teaching of covenant headship is clearly presented in the discussion of vows made by women in the book of Numbers: "Or if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by some agreement while in her father's house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will release her, because her father overruled her" (Num. 30:3-5). Unmarried girls living at home are subject to their father's authority even in the area of vows or religious obligations. "The unmarried female child was under the special care of her father, who would protect her interests until she had a husband to care and provide for her. A man's oversight of his daughter's activities included ensuring that she did not make rash promises or enter into agreements that she was unable to honor."¹⁰⁸ It even extended to vows or disagreements that the father considered unwise or imprudent. Although this section of Scripture would be viewed as dictatorial and sexist by modern culture we must not lose sight of the fact that headship laws are an expression of God's love and concern for girls and women. They are to receive protection under the wise, knowledgeable direction of a loving father or husband. "It is only an emasculated modern liberalism which would reverse this divinely appointed order of nature...."¹⁰⁹

In verses 6 and 7 the exact same rules apply to a woman who has taken a husband. The convenantal authority that the father exercised over his daughter is transferred to her husband the day they are married. If the husband hears his wife's vow (the text implies an obligation on the part of the daughters and wives to reveal vows and agreements to their convenantal head.) he has one day to either nullify it or ratify it. Note that Scripture does not allow the convenantal head to abandon his responsibility for even his silence shall suffice to ratify a daughter's or wife's vow.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857, 59]), 132.

¹⁰⁸ R. K. Harrison, *Numbers* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1990), 377.

¹⁰⁹ John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical Doctrinal Homiletical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 2:163.

“The clear implication of these laws about women’s vows is that a wife’s duty to submit to her husband is comparable to the child’s duty to obey his parents (cf. 3-5). Neither wives nor children may substitute self-imposed religious obligations for God-given duties.”¹¹⁰

In verse 9 we learn that divorced women and widows are considered independent heads by God. “Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her” (Num. 30:9). This means that a lawfully divorced woman or a widow is not required to seek permission and guidance from a father if she desires to remarry. Paul’s teaching is in total agreement with the law. “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). Lydia is an excellent example of a woman who is either divorced or widowed that is treated as a head of a household by Scripture. “She and her household were baptized” (Ac. 16:15). What this means is that children raised by a divorced or widowed mother that have not remarried must submit to their mother as the covenant head. In such cases the mother is responsible to oversee biblical courtship procedures.

The main purpose of this discussion of covenant headship is to prove from Scripture that daughters (who are not married, divorced or widowed) do not have a period of independence from their fathers after turning eighteen or twenty-one prior to being given to a man in marriage. The implications of this teaching for Christian families are manifold. First, it meant that daughters should live at home until they get married. A young unmarried woman who leaves home to get her own apartment is leaving behind the protection of her covenant head. Although her motives may be noble and her reasons well-considered such a move is clearly unscriptural. Second, the common American practice (even by Christian parents) of sending daughter off to colleges or universities to live in dormitories is unbiblical. Such practices not only open young women up to exploitation and various temptations, but also teach young ladies to live and act independently before marriage. The practice of sending out unmarried daughters has resulted in multitudes of professing young Christian women losing their virginity before marriage and has trained many thousands of women to become implicit (and even explicit) feminists through unauthorized independence. That many Christian girls have survived independence and college life successfully does not detract from the fact that such behavior is contrary to Scripture. As believers we must think and behave biblically, not pragmatically. Further, the statistics for premarital sex among the men and women who attend evangelical Christian colleges are appalling. They are only slightly less than secular institutions.

Another passage which sets forth the father’s responsibility to guard, protect or fence his own daughter from sexual immorality by acting as a covenant head is found in Deuteronomy 22:13-21:

If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, “I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,” then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman’s virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman’s father shall say to the elders, “I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, ‘I found your daughter was not a virgin,’ and yet these are the evidences of my daughter’s virginity.” And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; and they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of

¹¹⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 208.

the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days. But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

This passage sets forth the legal process and penalty in a case in which a husband accuses his wife of "shameful conduct." Specifically the man accuses the woman of not being a virgin at the time of consummation of their marriage. This would mean (if the charge was true) that the woman was guilty of two serious offenses. First, she would be guilty of sexual immorality before marriage (i.e. She committed fornication in her father's house, v. 21). Second, she would be guilty of fraud (i.e. she convinced her suitor that she was a virgin when she knew that she was not). We are told that if the man in such a case is found to have lied that he is to be punished (The Hebrew word [*yissr*] probably indicates the man is to be whipped or flogged.)¹¹¹; and, then fined one hundred pieces of silver. This amount is twice the required amount of one who seduces an unbetrothed virgin (cf. Dt. 22:29). The money is to be given to his wife's father. The man also forfeits the right of divorce. This severe punishment reflects the wickedness of slandering one's own wife. If, however, the wife is found guilty she is to be stoned to death in front of her father's house.

This section of Scripture tells us a number of things regarding the role of fathers (and parents) as the custodian and protector of their children. First, note that the father of the woman presents to the court the tokens of his daughter's virginity. The "tokens of virginity" refers to the bloodstained cloth resulting from the first sexual union of the married couple.¹¹² A daughter of Israel was expected to remain chaste until marriage. The fact that the parents were responsible to preserve the tokens of virginity indicates that they have a biblical duty to raise their children in a manner so as to preserve their chastity. Second, the fine of 100 shekels of silver is paid to the father of the accused woman. Why is the money paid to the father and not the slandered woman? Although the charge was brought against the woman, it is her father's reputation (as the one responsible to protect and preserve his daughter's virginity) which is particularly at stake. Thus, the guilty man must pay for the scandal and dishonor brought upon his wife's former covenant head.

Third, the woman (if guilty) is executed in front of her father's house. Why in front of her father's house and not by the gate of the city? The answer is that the father, as the woman's covenant head prior to her marriage, is held in some sense responsible for his daughter's wicked behavior. "The location of the execution points to the shame resting on the family.... By committing fornication in her father's house-the sense is not that the act was done literally in the house (though it could have been), but that the woman was guilty of fornication while still

¹¹¹ According to Josephus, *Antiquities* (iv 8.23), "he received the legal 'forty stripes save one'" (Samuel Rolles Driver, Deuteronomy [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986], 256.)

¹¹² Some more recent commentators have taken the position that the evidence of a girl's virginity was blood stained cloths proving menstruation immediately before marriage; thus, indicating the bride was not pregnant at the time of the wedding. Given the quite fallible nature of such evidence and the fact that the practice of parents saving the blood-stained linen sheets after the first sexual union of a bride and groom was the general practice throughout the Middle East (e.g., Syria, Palestine, the Arabs and the Moors), the older more common interpretation should not be abandoned (see John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979] 2:95-96; and Samuel Rolles Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 255]).

resident in the family home, before her marriage. Her act was tantamount to making the family a 'house of ill-repute.'"¹¹³ The place of punishment presupposes that even though the father was very likely unaware of his daughter's sexual activities while living at home, he must still bear the shame because he failed to properly protect and fence his daughter from such behavior. Therefore, one can infer that fathers who allow their daughters to engage in recreational dating are (according to Scripture) guilty of gross negligence.

The responsibility of the father is also set forth in Exodus 22:16-17: "If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins." The virgin in this case is both unmarried and unbetrothed (i.e. unengaged). Since her behavior does not involve the breaking of a covenantal vow, her punishment does not merit the death penalty.

There are a number of things to note in this passage which relate to the serious nature of fornication (as a sin and a crime) and the father's central role in dealing with such behavior in a daughter. First, premarital sex between unbetrothed parties according to biblical law has virtually the same effect as making a private vow of betrothal. North writes, "The consent of the girl to her seduction is the equivalent of her private betrothal. She takes a binding covenant vow with the seducer by means of her body. The seducer does the same with his body. She implicitly agrees to marry the seducer, and he implicitly agrees to marry her. Neither of them has the option of breaking the vow."¹¹⁴ Second, God's law requires the male seducer to take full responsibility for his behavior. He must either marry the girl or if her father refuses, pay a large cash settlement (*mhar*-the bride price) to him. The bride price was such a large monetary penalty (fifty pieces of silver) that it is likely that the guilty man in such a case would end up serving a few years doing hard labor as an indentured servant, unless his parents were able and willing to put up the money. Such a law (if strictly enforced) would suppress sexual immorality in society. Men involved in fornication would either immediately become married or they would have to pay (in today's dollars) around thirty thousand dollars to the girl's father. Such a law would virtually eliminate the predatory male from society. Note that biblical law, unlike feministic and secular humanistic law, does not allow the exploitation of women by men.

Third, this law requires the girl to immediately tell her father of her fornication. God's law leaves her no other choice. She must either inform her father or suffer dreadful consequences. A woman (according to Scripture) who does not tell and thus accepts sexual intercourse outside of marriage is biblically designated a whore. North writes,

The daughter's original consent to the act of seduction does not itself constitute whoredom. Her failure to tell her father immediately of the seduction is what constitutes her whoredom, for whoredom (as distinguished from adultery) is defined biblically as sexual bonding apart from a marriage vow. If she accepts the legitimacy of her sexual union apart from a marriage vow, then she has become a whore. She had taken the vow implicitly by her consent to the act, but her unwillingness to tell her father of the act constituted her vow and thereby establishes her covenantally as a whore.

She remains "in her father's house" (Num. 30:16), and under his covenantal jurisdiction, yet she is no longer a virgin. The presence of this unannounced non-virgin daughter brings a disgrace on her house and on Israel when she is discovered. Because she has willfully broken

¹¹³ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 293.

¹¹⁴ Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 645.

her covenantal bond with her father, but has refused to acknowledge her implicit vow with her seducer, biblical law considers her a whore. The capital penalty can subsequently be imposed if she marries another man who has been asked to pay a bride price to her father, if the new husband immediately decides to prosecute her (Dt. 22:13-19).¹¹⁵

While modern American culture has largely accepted premarital sex as a normal part of dating and growing up, God regards such behavior as wicked and criminal. Unrepentant fornicators are to be excommunicated from the church (1 Cor. 5:1-7, 9-11) and treated as habitual incorrigible criminals by the state (Dt. 23:17; Lev. 19:29; 21:9).

Fourth, the father is the lawful prosecutor of the seducer and determines the fate of his own daughter. No matter how much the daughter may proclaim her love and devotion toward the seducer, the father is the one who will decide whether the sinful act will result in marriage or the payment of the bride price. Unmarried daughters are under the covenantal jurisdiction of their fathers. The father is to act in the best interests of his daughter, family, church and community. God places this crucial decision in the hands of the covenant head, who is to be objective, wise, and discerning. The father is not influenced by infatuation, sexual attraction, romantic feelings or emotions. His sole concern should be the glory of God and Christ's kingdom. If the seducer has a prior record of sinful behavior and is not a solid Christian the father will be detached and wise enough to send the young man away.

The biblical teaching regarding daughters is explicit: all women who are not lawfully divorced (i.e. their husbands are covenantally dead through adultery or desertion) or widowed are always subordinated to a man, either a father or husband. The father is responsible to oversee, guard and direct his daughter into a lawful, godly marriage. This procedure involves fencing her chastity by providing God-fearing chaperones so that his daughter is never in a situation where fornication could occur.

The biblical teaching on this subject raises some important questions regarding our modern culture and certain unusual exceptions. First, what are Christian women to do who do not have Christian parents and who are already independent? In our post-Christian pagan culture it is assumed that young ladies will get to a certain age, get a job, move out of the house and form an independent household. There are many thousands of young women who converted to Christ after they moved out and became independent. This is a difficult question. If a young believing woman has Christian parents or parents who through common grace lead outwardly moral lives and are not openly antithetical to Christianity (cf. Mt. 10:35-36), it would be wise (from a scriptural standpoint) to move back home while seeking a Christian husband. If a woman's parents are obviously evil and would attempt to prohibit a Christian daughter from attending a truly Reformed church or from marrying a Christian man she should not move home and should turn to the church for help. The idea that an unbelieving father can prohibit his Christian daughter from attending a good church or from marrying a godly man is blatantly unscriptural. Fathers are not Popes. All earthly authorities are required to submit to Jesus Christ and His law-word. Under such circumstances a Christian woman should move in with other believing women or with a Christian family who can serve as chaperones. If available, a good solution would be for young unmarried women to live with a godly servant widow of the church (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9-10). The widow would serve as a surrogate head under the authority of the elders of the church. In today's situation the church needs to repent of its blind acceptance of unbiblical family and marital customs and return to the covenantal model of

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 646.

Scripture. Without Christian parents, men and women must turn to the church as the covenantal screening agent and guardian in the search for prospective marriage partners. This will not occur until there is a reformation in covenantal thinking and a return to biblical law.

A second question involves whether there are women who have the gift of remaining single. Paul certainly leaves open this possibility in 1 Corinthians. “There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world — how she may please her husband. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction” (7:34-35). In this passage the apostle is not advocating asceticism or asserting that virgins are somehow spiritually superior to married women. He is simply pointing out that women who are unmarried do not have divided interests. Therefore, they can devote more of their time to Christ’s service because they are not distracted by household duties. “The present excellence of celibacy for the virgin arises from the greater facility of life which will procure for her; and to this advantage another is added, which belongs to the state of celibacy in general: the perfect simplicity of the task for which the unmarried Christian lives.”¹¹⁶ Apparently, if a young woman has a desire to remain unmarried and her father concurs (cf. 1 Cor. 7:36-38) the woman can stay single her entire life. Although some scholars argue that Paul is only discussing a situation applicable to the present crisis at Corinth (i.e. persecution, economic hardship, etc.) and that marriage is a normal preferred state for all men and women, the apostle’s statement does have application outside of crisis situations. Further, it is a historical reality that there are some Christian women who never do marry.¹¹⁷ Such a woman would remain under the father’s authority until he died and would live with Christian family members or other believing women. It is unseemly and somewhat dangerous for an unmarried woman to live alone. In any case, we are dealing with rare exceptions that the Scriptures do not explicitly address. The best we can do in such situations is to make logical inferences from clearer portions of Scripture. The worst thing we can do is to uncritically accept modern humanistic customs.¹¹⁸

When the Bible discusses parental authority as it relates to daughters it is very clear. A daughter is under her father’s authority until she is “given in marriage” and moves into a new household with her husband, her new covenant head. We have noted that the practice of young single women moving out of their parents’ homes to set up independent households is unscriptural. In fact there is not a single historical example from Scripture of a godly virgin woman living out on her own in the entire Bible.

¹¹⁶ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 387.

¹¹⁷ In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul instructs younger widows to get married, bear children and manage the house. This passage has been used to argue that all younger women should get married and raise a family. This would appear to contradict Paul’s advocacy of the unmarried state for virgins in 1 Corinthians 7:34-35. The Timothy passage could be used to support the contention that the 1 Corinthians passage is limited to periods of crises. Such a view, however, is unnecessary when we consider the fact that young widows and virgins are not the same thing. Widows were at one time married and thus do not (at least at a younger age) have the gift of remaining celibate. Virgins on the other hand have never been married and thus in extremely rare cases can remain single without the natural desire for a husband and children.

¹¹⁸ Some scholars have argued that the fact that the girls are baptized in the New Covenant era while only boys were circumcised under the Old Testament dispensation means (that apart from women holding positions of authority in the church and speaking during public worship) girls and boys now have identical status. This position should be rejected because: (1) It is based on an assumption without any solid inferences. (2) The Old Testament laws concerning covenant headship and the status of women and daughters reflects creational reality (i.e., creation ordinances). They are not arbitrary or positivistic.

This discussion brings us to the question of the status of adult non-married sons. What is their status? Is it different from that of adult daughters? Should adult sons move out of the house and set up independent households before they get married? These questions are not as easily answered as the ones regarding daughters. The word of God is not as explicit in its treatment of sons as it is for daughters. There is genuine disagreement among scholars in this area.

Although this is a difficult topic, it is our contention that the Scriptures give sons a certain measure of parent sanctioned and directed freedom that is not given to adult daughters. Before we examine the biblical evidence for this claim it would be helpful to note some of the likely reasons that the Bible treats young men and young women differently. First, unlike sons, daughters under normal circumstances will always function under a covenant head. In Numbers 30:3-16, special attention is given to the fact that husbands and father can disallow vows made by wives and daughters. Nothing is said regarding sons. Second, the Bible identifies women as the “weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7). Therefore, it is logical that they receive greater care and protection than men. Further, given the nature and role of men as initiators and the sexual predatory nature of pagan men as a result of the fall, women receive greater protection under biblical law. Suitors are to approach the father of the girl. They can only court a woman within the father’s covenantal fence. In Scripture we never encounter women approaching the parents of a man. It is always the other way around.

The idea that adult non-married Christian men have a certain measure of parent-controlled freedom is based on the fact that God-fearing parents can send their son away to find a godly spouse. In Genesis we read that Jacob was ordered to go to Padan Aram to find a wife by his father, Isaac. “Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother” (Gen. 28:2; cf. 29:15-20). Does this passage teach or imply that Christian sons should move out of the house and set up an independent household when they reach adulthood (e.g., 18 or 21)? No, not necessarily. Note, that Jacob was ordered to go for the purpose of finding a godly mate. The trip was made because of the need to marry a believing wife to perpetuate a godly seed. Therefore, the circumstances are at least partially extraordinary. Also, when Jacob arrives in Padan Aram he does not set up an independent household, but rather moves in with his uncle Laban. He served Laban and in a sense became part of his household. Although Jacob was given a certain amount of freedom by his father (e.g., the choice of a believing spouse is placed squarely in Jacob’s hands), he still lived and functioned under his parents’ authority. He did not constitute an independent covenant head until he married Leah. After his marriage to Leah and Rachel, his service to Laban was rendered as the payment of a debt (the bride price).

The idea of the single man out living on his own is foreign to both biblical revelation (with possible rare exceptions, i.e. a eunuch) and Puritan Christian society. Edmund S. Morgan writes, “Furthermore, since God had ordained that men live in families, the new government required them to do so. The selectmen of every town in Massachusetts had orders to dispose of all single persons ‘to servise, or otherwise.’ If a single man could not afford to hire servants and so set up a household or ‘family’ of his own, he was obliged to enter another family, either as a servant or as a boarder, subjecting himself to the domestic government of its head. His only freedom lay in the choice of families, and if he failed to make a choice, the selectmen would make it for him.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Edmond S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966 [1944], 27. The biblical concept of covenant headship may even be reflected in the Hebrew word translated as “children”- naarim. “Naarim actually refers to a broader category than children. All males who had not formed their own households are likely in view.

The proper time for the son to become an independent covenant head is clearly set forth in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.” This passage teaches that sons are under the authority of parents until they get married. It assumes that the ordinary pattern is for men to leave home when they get married, not before. “Genesis 2:24 makes clear that a man shall leave his parental home and cleave unto his wife.”¹²⁰ “Marriage calls for a move forward by the man and his wife; they break with the old families to create a new one.”¹²¹ John Gill writes, “...not that a man upon his marriage is to drop his affections to his parents, or be remiss in his obedience to them, honour of them, and esteem for them, if they stand in need of his assistance; but that he should depart from his father’s house, and no more dwell with him, or bed and board in his house; but having taken a wife to himself, should provide an habitation for him and her to dwell together: so all the three Targums interpret it, of quitting the house of his father, and his mother’s bed, and shall cleave unto his wife; with a cordial affection, taking care of her, nourishing and cherishing her, providing all things comfortable for her, continuing to live with her, and not depart from her as long as they live.”¹²²

The Hebrew word translated “will leave” (*ya’azobh*) is not simply referring to a change of location but also emphasizes a change of covenant loyalty. Many Hebrew scholars believe the Hebrew word *ya’azobh* should be translated “forsake.” Hamilton writes, “Perhaps the most crucial element in this verse is the verbs it uses: forsakes and clings. The verb forsake frequently describes Israel’s rejection of her covenant relationship with Yahweh (Jer. 1:16; 2:13, 17, 19; 5:7; 16:11; 17:13; 19:4; 22:9; many other examples from the Old Testament could be cited). By contrast, the verb cling often designates the maintenance of the covenant relationship (Dt. 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:5 [Eng. 4]; 30:20). Thus, to leave father and mother and cling to one’s wife means to sever one loyalty and commence another.”¹²³ Given the fifth commandment and the biblical teaching regarding children’s responsibility toward their parents in their time of need (e.g., old age; cf. 1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16), the forsaking of father and mother is to be understood in a relative, not an absolute sense. (This point explains English translators’ preference for the translation “shall leave” over the more literal rendering “forsake.”) “On marriage a man’s priorities change. Beforehand his first obligations are to his parents: afterwards they are to his wife. In modern Western societies where filial duties are often ignored, this may seem a minor point to make, but in traditional societies like Israel where honoring parents is the highest human obligation next to honoring God, this remark forsaking them is very striking.”¹²⁴

According to Scripture the unmarried son is still under the covenantal authority of his parents. However, unlike daughters, adult sons have more parent supervised freedom. Given the Scripture passages which speak to this issue, the Puritan practice of sending adult sons to live with godly friends or relatives to attend college or study a trade is much more in accordance with biblical teaching than the modern practice of unmarried sons setting up an independent household. (This statement is not an endorsement of the New England Puritan practice of sending children [e.g., ages 12 to 15] off to live and learn a trade as an apprentice. Such a practice was harmful to children and led to declension in Puritan society.) As Bible believing

However, the term also is used commonly for male servants” (Kerry Ptacek, *Family Worship: Biblical Basis, Historical Reality, Current Need* [Greenville, SC: The Southern Presbyterian Press, 1997 (1994)], 15).

¹²⁰ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 344.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹²² John Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1810]), 1:21.

¹²³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 180-181.

¹²⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 71.

Christians we must base our courtship practices, laws and marriage customs upon Scripture alone and not our modern pagan culture.

Lastly, there are some practical reasons for the son to stay at home until he is married. He can save money for a home of his own instead of throwing away money on rent. During courtship, the young couple will not have the temptation of going to the man's apartment unsupervised. It is also easier for the woman he is courting to evaluate the young man's family and his relationship to them when he is still living at home.

Basic Principles of Courtship

In biblical courtship, the Christian father has a responsibility to oversee the process of finding a mate for a son or a daughter. This process is a rejection of both the modern dating system and arranged marriages where a son or daughter have no say or input whatsoever in the selection process. Although the parents clearly have the authority to say no to a relationship there is no biblical evidence for a father ordering a daughter or son to marry someone. Rushdoony writes, "Marriage in Scripture is the voluntary union of two persons, a man and a woman, in wedlock; although marriages were commonly arranged, consent was also secured. Without consent, the union is always in effect rape. Calvin and Luther both stressed the fact of mutual consent as necessary to a valid marriage in their discussion of the Jacob-Leah episode. The question can be raised then as to why Jacob accepted Leah. The answer is clearly that he was in a coercive situation. He had been shamed and taken advantage of by Laban, who knew that Jacob had no legal recourse as a stranger. In a sense, it was rape of Jacob, who could do nothing except protest or run away, but could not exert his legal rights successfully."¹²⁵

Fathers can only order a marriage in the case of fornication between unmarried/betrothed persons of the opposite sex (cf. Ex. 22:16-17). A possible exception to the statement that the Bible does not condone arranged marriages (in which a son or daughter has no input) would be the case of Abraham's involvement in finding a wife for his son Isaac (cf. Gen. 24). A careful examination of this story, however, reveals that the circumstances surrounding finding a mate for Isaac were very unusual and thus necessitated improvisation on Abraham's part.

Abraham and his family were living in a strange land completely surrounded by a grossly heathen culture. Therefore, Abraham recognized that the only suitable place to find a wife for his son Isaac would be among his God-fearing relatives in Aram-Naharim. The patriarch, however,

¹²⁵ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 401. The Westminster Standards' (1647) *Directory for the Public Worship of God* emphasizes that the parties involved in a marriage must be fit and free to make their own choice in the matter. It also emphasizes the importance of obtaining (under normal circumstances) parental consent. It reads, "Marriage is to be betwixt one man and one woman only; and they, such as are not within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity prohibited by the word of God; and the parties are to be of years of discretion, fit to make their own choice, or, upon good grounds, to give their mutual consent. Before the solemnizing of marriage between any persons, their purpose of marriage shall be published by the minister three several sabbath-days, in the congregation, at the place or places of their most usual and constant abode, respectively. And of this publication the minister who is to join them in marriage shall have sufficient testimony, before he proceed to solemnize the marriage. Before that publication of such their purpose, (if the parties be under age,) the consent of the parents, or others under whose power they are, (in case the parents be dead,) is to be made known to the church officers of that congregation, to be recorded. The like is to be observed in the proceedings of all others, although of age, whose parents are living, for their first marriage. And, in after marriages of either of those parties, they shall be exhorted not to contract marriage without first acquainting their parents with it (if with conveniency it may be done), endeavoring to obtain their consent. Parents ought not to force their children to marry without their free consent, nor deny their own consent without just cause."

does not send Isaac back to his native land but rather sends his servant. Abraham was guarding his own son from both intermarriage and emigration to his native land. “If Isaac is to inherit the land, he must not marry among those destined to disinherit the land. Nor must Isaac disinherit himself [from God’s covenant promises] by repatriation to Mesopotamia.”¹²⁶ The extraordinary circumstances surrounding finding a mate for Isaac are indicated further by Abraham’s declaration of faith/prophecy that Jehovah “will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there” (Gen. 24:7).

The biblical evidence for courtship over dating or an arranged marriage without the child’s consent is found in the following: (1) Contra modern dating, Abraham considers it his responsibility to find a good wife for his son, Isaac. (2) However, (contra arranged marriage) Abraham assumes the woman has a choice in the matter when he says, “If the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath.” (3) Biblical courtship is supported by the fact that permission from this girl’s father is first sought and obtained before the girl (Rebekah) proceeds to Canaan (cf. Gen. 24:50-51). Godly Abraham did not leave the finding of a suitable mate for his son to chance, dating or romance, but took an active role in finding a godly mate for his son and thereby ensured continuance of a godly seed.

As we examine the courtship process there are certain principles or rules that need to be considered.

(1) Courtship procedures are not to begin until a son or daughter is ready and expresses a desire to get married. Fourteen, fifteen or sixteen year-olds should not be concerned about courtship or having boyfriends or girlfriends or finding dates. They should be preparing for marriage, studying, training and working on personal sanctification. Once a Christian family rejects the unbiblical concept of recreational dating they understand that finding a mate for a son or daughter is serious business. They are looking for a life partner not a temporary friend or playmate. Given these considerations, there is simply no reason for a young teenage boy or girl to concern themselves with having a one-on-one relationship with the opposite sex. There is nothing wrong with families having fellowship and young boys and young girls getting to know each other in a public family setting. However, there should be no pairing off, emotional commitment or romantic ideas until young men and women are ready to get married. Godly families can network with other dedicated Christian families in order to consider potential mates for a son or a daughter. However, they don’t get down to business until the time is right.

Although biblical courtship is a process that should only begin when a son or daughter are ready to get married, Christian parents should be preparing their children for marriage throughout their childhood and young adult life. The training of boys and girls in many areas will be quite different in order to reflect the different duties between husbands and wives.

A son must receive training regarding the nature of marriage and his biblical duties as a husband and father. This training will involve many areas. First, a son must be instructed in the scriptural teaching regarding headship. What does it mean to be a loving leader? What are the responsibilities of husbands and fathers? A son must be taught and equipped to lead a family. Although because of sin many women may desire a man that refuses to lead and who is irresponsible, godly parents must instill in sons covenant masculinity. This will involve careful instruction and setting a biblical example. As we noted in our discussion of the duties of husbands, a failure to teach and lead by example in this area has resulted in a feministic influence on the church and society.

¹²⁶ Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* Chapters 18-50, 140.

Second, a son must be trained to support a family financially and must receive instruction in financial responsibilities. This responsibility is exhibited even before the fall. Note that Eve is created “only after Adam had proven himself responsible by discharging his duties faithfully and well. Responsibility is thus clearly a prerequisite to marriage for the man.”¹²⁷ Rushdoony writes, “Man was required to know himself first of all in terms of his calling before he was given a helpmeet, Eve. Thus, not until Adam, for an undefined but apparently extensive length of time, had worked at his calling, cared for the garden and come to know the creatures thereof, was he given a wife. We are specifically told that Adam named or classified all the animals, a considerable task, prior to the creation of Eve. However general and limited this classification was, it was still an accurate and over-all understanding of animal life. The Adam of Eden was thus a hard-working man in a world where the curse of sin had not yet infected man and his work.”¹²⁸

This responsibility is also taught by the dowry system. In the Old Testament a man had to give a girl’s father a bride price (the *mhar*) before the marriage took place. The bride price was a large sum of money that served a number of purposes. (1) It was a sort of insurance policy for the wife in case the husband died or turned out to be irresponsible and left. The father kept the money for his daughter so that she would not be impoverished if calamity occurred. (2) It also served as a sign of man’s financial responsibility. Today it would be the equivalent of a man having thirty thousand dollars in the bank as a down payment on a new house. Men who are slackers, who are irresponsible with money do not have that kind of money in the bank. The principle of the bride price is that a man must have his economic act together before he gets married. If a man would like to get married he needs to: a) determine his calling; b) finish his education; c) get a job; d) acquire a good amount of capital (i.e. savings, stocks, bonds, or real estate). Only then is he really prepared for marriage. The common occurrence today of women working their husbands through school is contrary to the biblical pattern. If a young man’s desire for marriage is strong then he should apply himself diligently to the task of financial responsibility (e.g., young Christian man can graduate from high school early, finish his bachelor’s degree in three years, get a Master’s degree and be ready for marriage by the age of twenty-four).

In our post-Christian culture unbelieving husbands and wives frequently fight regarding financial matters. This should not be the case among Christian couples. A believing wife should be able to focus on her responsibilities without worrying about money. Christian sons need to learn about the biblical teaching concerning debt. Although we do not want our sons to be selfish or misers they do need to understand the poverty mentality (i.e. the philosophy of instant gratification by spending or going into debt at the expense of future capital building and prosperity). Fathers should instill wisdom in their sons in this area and should protect daughters from financially irresponsible men.

Third, a son must be trained to lead a family theologically. It is a great mistake for fathers to leave the theological training of their children solely in the hands of the local church. The Bible places the chief responsibility of the doctrinal instruction of children in the hands of fathers (cf. Dt. 6:7 ff.). When parents train up a son they must keep in mind that they are training up a leader of the next generation. A man who does not have a grasp of the Scriptures, who cannot lead his family theologically is not ready for marriage. Believers must abandon the mentality which leaves doctrine and the task of godly dominion solely in the hands of church officers. The church officers (i.e. elders and pastors) are to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph.

¹²⁷ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 343.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

4:12). Only a son who is equipped theologically will be able to handle all the various contingencies of marriage.

Fourth, a son must be trained to be responsible sexually. This point is an aspect of a child's over-all training in sanctification. Sons must be taught self-control. Failure in this area is one of the major reasons for divorce today. We live in a culture obsessed with sexual images and sexual immorality. A son who is trained properly in this area should be automatically repulsed by fornication and adultery. Sons need to understand that truly great, satisfying sex is restricted to the marriage bed. Nothing should be engaged in (i.e. premarital sex, pornography, etc.) which can interfere with and detract from married sexual pleasure as it was intended to be by God. Men must be happy and content with their marriage partner.

Given the fact that marriage is for life and husbands are to be content with their wives and only derive sexual satisfaction from them, sons need to understand that physical attraction is desirable in a mate. One extreme places a great emphasis on looks without a proper consideration of other key areas such as personal godliness, intelligence and personality. Some professing Christian men, through the influence of our culture, think that they should only marry a ravishing beauty. The other extreme is that physical appearance should not even be a consideration. If a woman is godly and would make a great wife and mother then (according to this view) it would be wrong not to marry such a woman. The biblical view (which lies in between a self-centered hedonism and an implicit neo-platonism) is that physical beauty is a creation by God and is good. However, it must be something that is weighed in the overall context of a person's Christian character. It is very clear that God views physical beauty as a blessing by the manner in which the Bible repeatedly informs us of the great physical beauty of the wives and daughters of men favored by God (e.g., Abraham's Sarah, Gen. 12:11, 14; Isaac's Rebekah, Gen. 24:16; Jacob's Rachel, Gen 29:17; David's Abigail, 1 Sam. 25:3; Mordecai's cousin Esther, Esth. 2:7; Job's daughters, Job 42:15). Sons need to be trained to consider the beauty of women in its proper context. Given the choice between a ravishing beauty who is a lukewarm Christian and a modestly pretty woman who is very godly, the second choice should always be preferred. A son who waits and waits for a stunning beauty will usually end up passing by many wonderful opportunities.

A son who has been trained for marriage (who is godly, theologically competent, financially prepared and responsible, who understands the nature of marriage and covenant headship) is a man who will be very attractive to a properly trained godly Christian woman. Such a man will rejoice in the wife of his youth, instead of spending a great deal of time figuring out how to make a living and be a Christian husband.

Parents also have a responsibility to prepare daughters for marriage. The preparation of daughters will reflect the duties of wives. There a number of areas that ought to be emphasized. The first area is more a preparation for the courtship process itself. Daughters need to be instructed in Christian discernment. Young women need to be instructed in a way so that they will not be naive and gullible when it comes to the trickery and deceit of men. Young women need a certain amount of sanctified street-smarts in order to deal with all the contingencies of courtship. Although the father is to be a screening agent for his daughter, this does not mean that daughters have nothing to say in the process. They need to be familiar with common tactics of single men. They need to learn detachment and objectivity as they gather and analyze information regarding a potential suitor. Men who are very attracted to a young woman physically may attempt to by-pass a woman's fact-gathering process by appealing to her emotions. They may use flattery or romantic speech or physical attraction to attempt to

disengage a woman's patient objectivity. A woman who has been properly trained will not be taken in by irrational appeals. A properly trained young woman will also know when to defer to her father if her emotions get ahead of her objective analysis. A daughter must know that she can immediately appeal to her father if she is confused or if she thinks something is not right. The father is there to protect, direct and instruct his daughters through the process. This covenant protection should be a great comfort to her. It becomes a godly habit. It becomes something that a young woman does not have to struggle with. A Christian woman who is submissive to her father will attract godly single men. Women who are unsubmissive and rebel against proper authority will drive away wise, godly suitors. "The contentions of a wife are a continual dripping" (Pr. 19:13). "Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (Pr. 21:9).

Third, daughters need to be trained in house management skills. Young women should not wait until they are married to learn about cooking, cleaning, babies, children and husbands. There is no greater or more important job on earth than raising children and managing a household. Although women are created by God with certain female desires and nurturing skills they do not learn homemaking by osmosis. They need guidance and instruction as they are growing up. This instruction is also to be learned through experience by observing a godly mother at work. If young mothers need instruction they can learn from older more experienced women at church. "The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit. 2:3-5).

Fourth, daughters need to be instructed in how to be attractive without being seductive. Our culture instructs young ladies to dress inappropriately. Many girls and young women dress themselves as sex objects, as females that are to be lusted after. If a young Christian woman imitates the world with a lot of make-up, mini-skirts, low-cut blouses and so on, she will likely drive away the most godly suitors and instead will attract men who have the wrong priorities. Parents must only permit their daughters to dress in a modest fashion, and must clearly explain the biblical reasons for proper attire. Peter writes, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 3:3-4). If a woman wants to win a godly man, she must not dress in an ostentatious manner but rather must focus on inward beauty. She must work on making herself attractive within.

This point does not mean that women must wear sackcloth or dress themselves in black or grey. We know from other portions of Scripture (cf. Ez. 16:6-14; Gen. 23:47, 53; Song 4:10; Is. 49:18; 61:10; Jer. 2:32; Rev. 21:2) that God permits and even praises outward female adornments. The Bible speaks in a favorable manner of perfumes, jewelry, nose rings, and beautiful attire. He does not expect Christian women to look ugly or to dress like orthodox Muslims. What God condemns is a woman who focuses on the outward, without giving proper consideration to inward sanctification. Jehovah condemns covenant women who imitate the world and dress like harlots.

Fifth, daughters need to be loved by their parents especially their fathers. Daughters that are neglected, that are starved for attention and affection often seek attention from men in unbiblical ways. When a daughter is small this seeking of attention from others may appear to be a minor nuisance. But when a daughter (who has not received proper affection or love) matures

physically she may seek attention from unsavory young men (i.e. “lewd fellows of the baser sort”). Girls usually get their impressions of what a husband may or must be like from their own fathers. Therefore, it is very important that fathers model Christ by their loving leadership of the family and give proper affection to their children. This caution does not mean that daughters who have lousy parents have an excuse to sin. They most certainly do not. It also does not mean that the grace of God cannot overcome a neglectful pagan or hypocritical Christian household. Many churches have scores of wonderful godly Christian couples who came from “dysfunctional” pagan households. But, in general, daughters (as well as sons) need love and affection for proper development.

(2) Parents must only consider like-minded Christians as potential mates for a son or a daughter. This point means first of all that unbelievers should never be considered as potential mates for a covenant child. This is a common, prominent, explicit teaching of Scripture. In Genesis 24 we read that Abraham sent his servant to another country to find a God-fearing mate for his son. Leupold writes, “[T]he patriarch’s chief concern was to find a wife for Isaac who with him knew and believed in Yahweh and so would share with her husband a common faith and so allow for the deepest of all harmonies in the home, spiritual harmony. For again, only in a home where true spiritual harmony prevailed would the special heritage of Abraham be jealously guarded and faithfully transmitted to coming generations.”¹²⁹ In Deuteronomy 7:3-4 God warns the covenant people of the consequences of mixed marriages: “Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.” God warns us that intermarriage with unbelievers is unlawful and dangerous. Such behavior led to the destruction of the pre-deluvian world (cf. Gen 6:2); and the syncretism of religion under Solomon which resulted in the division and eventual destruction of the Jewish nation (cf. 1 Ki. 11:4-14).

The New Testament reiterates this same teaching that Christians are to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). Paul writes, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:14-16). This passage applies to all unlawful alliances with unbelievers and therefore prohibits marriage (the most permanent and intimate relationship possible) between Christians and the heathen.¹³⁰ Under such circumstances Christian harmony cannot flourish because two completely contrary and antithetical world-views will exist under the same roof.

¹²⁹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1942), 660.

¹³⁰ H. Krabbendam writes, “Unless the husband and wife are believers in Jesus Christ, their marriage will shipwreck in the eyes of God. This is not only so because without Christ they will not be able to overcome the power of indwelling sin. This is the clear teaching of John 15:5 and Rom. 7:1-25. It is also because without the Christ they have no focal point for their conduct. Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as an act of worship of and love to Christ! If you do not submit, do not tell me that you worship and love Christ. See also 1 John 4:20. Husbands, love your wives and show that by your sacrifice for them and your edification of them. If you refuse to do so, do not tell me that the love of Christ is in you. See also 1 John 4:17.

But furthermore, unless husband and wife are both members of his church, their marriage will equally shipwreck in the eyes of God. This is not only because in the church the husband sees a pattern of sacrifice of and edification by Christ and the wife a pattern of submission to Christ. It is also because in the church the husband and wife are under the rule, authority, provision and protection, of elders who will train them in the understanding of sacrificial and edifying love and leadership as well as in the understanding of cheerful and loving submission and obedience” (*A Biblical Pattern of Preparation for Marriage* [Lookout Mountain, TN: self-published, n. d.], 5).

Also, the intimate fellowship involved with a pagan would almost certainly compromise a consistent Christian walk. Robert Shaw writes, “The Christian who unites himself to such a partner exposes himself to many powerful temptations. He must necessarily mingle in the society of those whose views and pursuits are of a character entirely opposite to his own. His opportunities of religious improvement will be greatly lessened. Family worship can scarcely be maintained. His endeavors to train up his children in the fear of God will be counteracted by the example and instructions of his unbelieving partner. Instead of a help-meet for him in his Christian warfare, she will prove a snare to his soul. From this cause, many have apostatized from the faith, and others who have maintained their integrity have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”¹³¹ “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed” (Am. 3:3). Further, children raised in such a home will be thoroughly confused regarding which parent’s world-view to follow.

The predominance of mixed faith marriages (e.g., Judaism and Romanism) in America is a reflection of the ethical relativism in our culture. Even though many people who marry come from different cultural and religious backgrounds, as public school indoctrinated Americans they often share a core world-view commitment to hedonism, materialism, and idolatrous self-worship. Therefore, their world and life views are really as not as far from each other as they appear.

This command not to be unequally yoked also applies to apostate and heretical forms of Christianity such as Roman Catholicism and Arminianism. The Westminster Confession speaks clearly and correctly regarding this issue. “[I]t is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And therefore such as profess the true Reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies” (24:3). Although it is possible for a papist or Arminian to be inconsistent with his or her own church’s teaching and still be a genuine Christian, it is our responsibility to act upon a person’s outward confession and walk. If a person truly believed in the gospel of God it is extremely unlikely that such a person would remain in a church which denies the biblical doctrine of salvation.

When people in Reformed churches marry Arminians (and such behavior is actually quite common), they are allowing the poison of false doctrine into their households. They are saying by their actions that biblical doctrine and even the truth of the gospel are really not that important. As Reformed believers who have professed the true gospel as taught by Christ and the apostles we should be obsessed with maintaining purity of doctrine in our households and churches (cf. Is. 8:20; Ac. 20:28-31; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:16; 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; Tit. 1:9; 2 Jn. 9-11; Col. 2:8, 20-23; etc.). It is our duty to pass sound doctrine on to our children and future generations.

The father should protect his son or daughter by never permitting the courtship of unbelievers, Roman Catholics, Arminians and other dangerous heretics. Believers should never fall into the trap of thinking it is ok to court heretics and unbelievers with the hope that such people may change down the road. Like so-called “evangelistic dating” what often happens in such situations is that professing Christians get emotionally attached and comfortable with someone they have no business marrying and end up making a wrong decision based on feelings instead of the Spirit-guided (i.e. through the study of the Word) intellect. Another great danger is

¹³¹ Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confessional of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Water Revival Books, no date [1845]), 256.

that the unbeliever or damnable heretic may pretend to be a Christian in order to get married. The only biblical and safe policy is to stick to strict Reformed believers.

When a father considers potential mates among Reformed Christians it is important that the person being considered be like-minded theologically. Reformed “conservative” denominations are not what they used to be. Many issues need to be discussed before a betrothal takes place. For example: What are a person’s views regarding public schools, home schooling, Christian schools? If a potential husband believes that public schools are fine and intends to send his children to a state school, he should be rejected by a father immediately. What are a person’s views on worship? Obviously someone who holds to a strict interpretation of the regulative principle of worship (and therefore does not sing uninspired hymns, celebrate extra-biblical holy days or partake of human innovations in public worship [e.g., musical instruments, performances, children’s church, etc.]) should not marry someone who rejects biblical worship. What is a person’s view of God’s law? Many Reformed people today are implicitly dispensational in this view of the Old Testament moral case laws. One could multiply examples of issues that should be discussed. The point of raising the issue of theological like-mindedness is that fathers must take an active role in the screening process of potential mates in order to insure theological harmony in a marriage relationship. People who ignore this process can have serious disagreements and problems after marriage has already taken place. Christian women can end up being pressured to submit to things they regard as unlawful. The historical pattern has been for most women to eventually become virtually identical to their husbands theologically for good or ill. Many men also will end up doing things they regard as wrong in order to please their wives (e.g., immersing their children in non-commanded pagan-papal holy days). Parents must be diligent in the theological screening process not only because it is their job, but also because they have the wisdom and theological training necessary to do the job right.

As a parent considers the doctrine and like-mindedness of a potential mate for a son or a daughter he should attempt to determine if a potential spouse’s doctrine is a dead orthodoxy or is expressed in a living faith. There are people who have an intellectual understanding of Reformed theology yet who don’t apply it to their own lives. If a man or a woman is dishonest, sexually immoral, can’t control his or her temper, worships money and material things, doesn’t place Christ first in all areas, etc., then such a person should not be considered no matter how orthodox his or her creed is. Further, there are young people who were raised in Christian homes that attend church each week who take Christ and truth for granted and thus are exceedingly lukewarm or even unregenerate. Such people go through the motions because of the love of family traditions rather than a zeal for the cause of God and truth. Parents should seek out mates that have a holy zeal for Christ’s kingdom. “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ...Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jam. 2:14, 17).

(3) Biblical courtship involves the covenant protection of a child by the father and parents. This means that a father has a responsibility to make sure that a son or daughter is never alone with a prospective mate. This point is important because some people have an unbiblical view of father-controlled courtship. That is, he screens a prospective marriage partner yet still allows unchaperoned dating. Such a man may have good intentions and may even send a daughter to a public place such as a restaurant or shopping mall. However, once the daughter gets in the car and the car drives away, there is no chaperone. The father in such a situation can only hope and pray that his daughter’s “date” will behave himself and keep his hands to himself.

With biblical courtship a couple is never allowed to spend time together in empty apartments, cars or parks.

A father who practices biblical courtship will allow a daughter or son to spend time getting to know a prospective marriage partner in a chaperoned setting. For example, a young suitor can come over for dinner and then sit on the porch and discuss various issues with a daughter. He can take the daughter for a walk in the park as long as a chaperone or chaperones are following close behind (e.g., the scene in the movie *The Godfather* in which the character played by Al Pacino goes for a walk with a girl he wants to marry, followed by around 30 relatives). A couple can interact verbally and get to know each other easily even when the parents are close by. It is rather ironic that people who insist on complete privacy and thus spend a lot of time necking and petting are actually learning very little about each other (except perhaps each other's anatomy).

Covenant protection also means that prior to a covenantal commitment (i.e. engagement or betrothal) couples are not permitted to become emotionally involved. The goal of the biblical courtship process is not romance or physical affection but marriage. The courtship process is a largely an intellectual endeavor. It is primarily a data-gathering mission. Obviously there are personality and physical attraction considerations. However, these things do not at all necessitate touching of any kind or romantic expressions. Once an engagement occurs, romantic poetry and speech is appropriate. But, physical sexual touching is not to occur during the betrothal period. It is only to occur after the marriage covenant takes place. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

(4) Once a believer in consultation with his/her parents, decides it is time to seek a mate, he/she should take an active approach in the search for a partner. Some people are of the opinion that one should pray and simply trust God to provide the right partner. While prayer is a necessary and an essential aspect of seeking a spouse that does not mean that Christians are to be passive and wait for a mate to drop out of the sky. Jesus says that we are to pray for our daily bread (Mt. 6:11) and Paul says that if we don't work we should not eat (2 Th. 3:10).

The Bible contains examples of fathers, sons and even daughters using lawful means to bring about a godly relationship. In Genesis 24 Abraham takes the initiative and sends his most experienced servant to his homeland to find a mate for his son Isaac. In Genesis 28 Isaac sends his son Jacob to Padan Aram to find a godly wife. There also is the example of Ruth and Naomi. Ruth places herself in a position to be observed by and meet a godly eligible man-Boaz (Ruth 2:2). When Ruth's mother-in-law discovers that Boaz is godly, eligible and a possible kinsman redeemer for her, she instructs Ruth to conduct herself in a manner that will most likely lead to marriage. "And her mother-in-law said to her, 'Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, 'The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz.'Ruth the Moabitess said, 'He also said to me, "You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest."' And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field.' So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law. Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?'" (Ruth 2:19, 21-23; 3:1). Matthew Henry writes, "Naomi's care for her daughter's comfort is without doubt very commendable, and is recorded for imitation. She had no thoughts of marrying herself, Ru 1:12. But, though she that was old had resolved upon a perpetual widowhood, yet she was far from the

thoughts of confining her daughter-in-law to it, that was young. Age must not make itself a standard to youth. On the contrary, she is full of contrivance how to get her well married.”¹³²

In a time of general apostasy and serious declension when solid Reformed churches are scarce in our land, parents (with their sons and daughters) should think of ways to find potential mates. Some possibilities are: attending Reformed conferences and seminars; making friends through the internet (and telephone) with people in other Reformed churches; visiting college age groups at larger Reformed churches; advertising in Reformed match-making services, etc. Some may argue that such a pro-active approach reveals a lack of faith in God’s providence. Historical examples in Scripture, however, teach us that while we are to pray and trust in God’s sovereign good pleasure we are to put to use our minds and plans as valid secondary agents. Abraham, Isaac and Naomi did not sit on their hands and hope for the best. They took action. They helped their children find godly mates.

5. In biblical courtship a man must recognize the authority of a prospective woman’s father by approaching him and asking his permission to court his daughter (Gen. 2:22; 24:50-51; 29:19-20; Ex. 22:16, 17; 1 Cor. 7:36-38). It is unbiblical for a man to seek to win over a Christian woman without her father’s oversight and then if he is unsuccessful have her put pressure on her father to cave in to her autonomous decision. When a suitor approaches a Christian father and asks his permission, he gives the father the opportunity to exercise loving oversight on behalf of his daughter. If the young man is already well-known by the family and church involved, the father may (after consulting with his daughter) give permission quickly. However, if the man is not well-known or is a recent convert, the father will have to interview the young man extensively and do some serious investigating on behalf of his daughter. The father will want to investigate the man’s family, work experience, financial situation, recent past (e.g., what does the man’s family, friends, and co-workers think of him), conversion, doctrinal positions, future plans and so on. Given the fact that approaching a young woman’s father can be intimidating, fathers should be courteous and gracious to potential suitors. They should engage in the screening process in a friendly manner. He should set the young man at ease by explaining the biblical reasoning behind these procedures. A father does not want to scare off potential suitors by being arbitrary, intimidating or unnecessarily harsh.

As churches return to the biblical practice of courtship, young men will understand the importance and necessity of such procedures. A man who seeks to circumvent this biblical process or who takes great offense at the screening process by fathers should obviously not be allowed to court a daughter. Such a man does not have a proper respect of lawful authority and does not want to submit to the Scriptures on this matter. A godly man will cooperate with a father and will encourage him to do his biblical duty. A Christian woman with a father who takes his responsibility seriously will be even more attractive to godly men. Such men will understand that this woman comes from a household that cherishes biblical law and applies the word of God to all areas of life.

6. Once the courtship process begins, it is important that all parties involved understand that a father’s permission to court a daughter does not involve any promises or covenants. In other words, any of the parties involved may cease and desist from the courtship process at any

¹³² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co., n. d.), 2:266. “Apparently it was an Israelite but not a Moabite procedure, for Naomi had to explain to Ruth what she must do to show Boaz that she was interested in marriage with him. Though Ruth carried out the plan readily enough there is no indication that she knew anything about the custom until Naomi outlined it” (Arthur E. Kendall & Leon Morris, *Judges & Ruth* [Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1968]), 284.

time. A father may discover a serious defect of character in a potential suitor and stop the process. A daughter may decide that the man involved does not really interest her anymore and cut off the procedure. The young man involved may also decide the woman is not right for him and move on. People involved in the courtship process are not in a covenantal relationship. They are involved in a fact-gathering mission—a screening process. Once it is understood that a person involved is not the right one, there is no reason to continue the process. One of the great advantages of biblical courtship is that it eliminates the desire or temptation to stay in a useless relationship because of feelings or an unbiblical concept of commitment outside of betrothal and marriage. Time is not wasted and any hurt feelings are kept to a minimum.

The Biblical Engagement or Betrothal

Because the goal of courtship is betrothal and marriage, it is important that believers understand what a biblical betrothal entails; and, understand the differences between the modern American concept of an “engagement” and betrothal (scripturally defined). Although the word engagement means a promise of marriage between a man and a woman and thus is a synonym for the word betrothal,¹³³ its modern cultural usage means a promise that can be broken at any time for any reason. As Bible-believing Christians, we must reject the modern antinomian concept of engagement and return to the biblical practice of a binding betrothal. Some may object to this plea to return to a scriptural definition of betrothal as an ignorant acceptance of non-binding cultural traditions. Such an objection ignores the fact that the biblical teaching regarding the betrothal is not based on culture but arises from the Bible’s teaching on binding oaths and covenants. It is part of the moral law and is an application of the ninth commandment.

The betrothal is a legally binding promise of marriage. A man and woman who are betrothed have entered a binding covenantal relationship. Although they are not yet married, they are no longer regarded as single persons by their families, church and society. They have a new covenantal relationship that is recognized and dealt with in biblical law. In a biblical society a betrothed man is not permitted to go to war. “And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her” (Dt. 20:7). Further, God’s law regards a betrothed woman to be the wife of the man to whom she is espoused. If an unbetrothed or unmarried man and women engage in sexual intercourse they are not put to death but are forced to marry and/or the man pays a large fine to the girl’s father (cf. Ex. 22:16-17; Dt. 22:28-29). However, if a betrothed virgin lay with another man, both the woman and man are to be put to death (cf. Dt. 22:23-24). “The betrothed (but not yet married) woman is treated under the law as if she were married. The reason for this is clear when it is remembered that the crime consists not only in the act, but also in the lack of faithfulness signified by the act. Both the married woman and the betrothed woman were committed to a particular relationship with a man; the crime involved breaking that relationship

¹³³ “What is Engagement, Betrothal, and Espousal? **Engagement** comes from gage, a Middle English word meaning ‘a pledge’ Thus engagement is a solemn pledge into which a man and a woman enter. **Betrothal** is derived from the Middle English word troth which means ‘truth, truthful, faithful’. ‘I plight thee my troth’ has the sense of making a solemn promise to be faithful to the betrothed one alone. **Espousal** is the act of giving oneself to another as a spouse. The Latin verb from which espousal is derived, spondere, means ‘to pledge oneself to, promise solemnly, vow.’ What we learn from the derivation of these words is that in each case a solemn promise, vow, or covenant is given to become the faithful husband or wife of the one loved” (Greg Price, *Christian Education in the Home: Help! My Daughter Wants to Date* [Internet: 1994], 6).

through an unfaithful act.”¹³⁴ According to Scripture the betrothal covenant is to be taken just as seriously as the marriage covenant itself. In Matthew’s gospel narrative Joseph and Mary are identified as husband and wife during the betrothal period while Mary is still a virgin (cf. Mt. 1:18-25).¹³⁵ When Joseph discovers that Mary is with child he being a righteous man decides “to put her away secretly” (Mt. 1:19). This means that the espousal covenant could only be dissolved by means of a legal divorce. “Joseph’s attitude is indicated with great naturalness and delicacy, and the necessity for divorce, although the marriage had not taken place, is clearly shown. With the Jews, espousal was much more serious than an ‘engagement’ is with us, and could be severed only by divorce.”¹³⁶ The Bible teaches that God considers couples who have made an espousal covenant to be husband and wife in a certain sense before the marriage ceremony takes place.

Although modern society generally views engagements as non-binding agreements that can be broken at will, believers ought to recognize a betrothal covenant (unless unlawful, e.g., incest) as a binding agreement before God. Therefore, entering into a betrothal agreement is very serious business. Espousal covenants should only be made after a considerable amount of fact gathering, prayer, counsel and thought. Once the parents of the parties involved assent to a betrothal, a covenant should be made in front of witnesses and the espousal should be made public. Once again we must emphasize the truth that the biblical manner of betrothal is not cultural but flows from God’s law. Obviously, a covenant that can be broken for any reason without sanctions is not a biblical covenant. It is an antinomian promise. “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?...He who swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Ps. 15:1, 4).

The biblical teaching regarding betrothal is reflected to an extent in seventeenth century English law. Edmund S. Morgan writes, “When the Puritans left England, several steps were necessary to the proper accomplishment of a marriage in that country: (1) espousals *per verba de futuro*, or a contract to marry, made in the future tense, corresponding to a modern engagement but more binding; (2) publication of the banns, or announcement that this contract *de futuro* had been made; (3) execution of the espousal contract by a contract of marriage in the present tense, *per verba de praesenti*, solemnized at church and followed by a special service; (4) a celebration of the event with feasting and gaiety at the home of the groom; (5) sexual intercourse.”¹³⁷

The New England Puritans had a much more biblical concept of betrothal (or, as they called it, espousal) than we do today. The espousal was treated very seriously. Espousals were publicly announced (i.e. published) at least eight days in advance so that if a man or woman were hiding any serious defect of character it could be discovered. The parties involved would enter into and sign a contract (i.e. an espousal covenant). The espousal was a public event in which ministers often would preach espousal sermons. Once an espousal was made the parties involved were treated the same as betrothed couples in biblical law. Morgan writes, “In Plymouth, Massachusetts, and New Haven, as well as in Connecticut, a couple espoused were set apart;

¹³⁴ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 294.

¹³⁵ Joseph Addison Alexander writes, “...Many having been espoused, i.e., before the discovery here mentioned, as implied in the past participle (*mnasteutheisai*). The Greek verb strictly means to court or woo, but in the passive form to be engaged, betrothed (as in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, compared with the active voice in Dt. 20, 7.) There are frequent allusions in the Old Testament to the marriage vow as a religious contract (Pr. 2, 17. Ez. 16, 8. Ma. 2, 14), but the first mention of a written bond occurs in the Apocrypha (Tob. 2, 14). According to the later Jewish books, the bride continued in her father’s house for some time after her espousal” (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker 1980 (1860)], 11).

¹³⁶ Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982 [1915]), 4.

¹³⁷ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944, 1966), 30-31.

they were married as far as other persons were concerned even though the final ceremony had not taken place.... If after becoming espoused to one person, a man or woman had sexual intercourse with another, the act was considered adultery; and if either party broke the contract without just cause, by refusing to marry the other or by marrying someone else, he might be sued for breach of promise.”¹³⁸

Although a biblically defined espousal is much more serious than today’s shallow non-binding engagement promises, the betrothal is not the marriage covenant itself. A woman who is betrothed is still under the authority of her father and is not obligated to submit to her future mate. A man who is betrothed is not obligated to financially support his future spouse. Indeed, at this point she is still living under her father’s roof. Further, both parties involved are not permitted to engage in sexual intercourse or sexual touching of any kind.

While the betrothal agreement is not the same as the marriage covenant itself, it does serve some important functions. First, it gives the couple and their families a period of time to plan the day of marriage and the great celebration that attends a wedding. Second, (if necessary) it gives the couple time to choose a place to live and buy or rent a house. Third, it gives a couple additional time to seek counsel regarding the marriage relationship. Fourth, it gives the couple time to develop warm emotions and romantic thoughts regarding their future partner. This point was particularly important to the Puritans. Morgan writes, “Marriage then, or at least proper marriage, resulted not from falling in love, but from a decision to enter a married state, followed by the choice of a suitable person. But since love formed the chief duty of marriage and since the unruly affections of fallen man might sometimes fail at once to knot themselves to the chosen object, a period of trial was necessary in which to bring the affections into the proper direction. That period was furnished by the custom of espousals. ‘By this means,’ said William Ames, ‘the minds of the betrothed, are prepared and disposed to those affections, which in matrimony are requisite.’”¹³⁹The espousal period is a great time for love letters, poetry, song and romantic speech.

A question that often arises concerning an engagement is: How long should an engagement last? There are very long engagements (e.g., two years) and short ones (e.g., one month). The word of God does not speak specifically to this area. However, there are biblical principles and practical reasons for favoring short engagements over long ones. First, given the serious nature of a biblical espousal covenant and the fact that all the parties involved should have done their analysis and preparations prior to the betrothal, once an engagement occurs there are no practical reasons for a long betrothal period. If a couple have doubts and want a lengthy engagement period to attempt to work things out, then they simply are not ready to get engaged. Important issues are to be resolved before the espousal covenant, not after. Note, a biblical concept of courtship and betrothal forces people to do their homework up front before a binding covenant is made. A sloppy non-binding concept of engagement tempts people to make agreements they are not ready to make with the hope that things can be ironed out later on. Unfortunately, in many cases issues and problems are not resolved before marriage and the days which should be times of great happiness, fun and bliss are spent arguing, fighting and fretting. Second, given the nature of man and the strong physical desires that young couples who love each other have, short engagements are to be preferred over long ones. Is it not better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor. 7:9)? Engaged couples are often tempted to touch one another in inappropriate ways. A short engagement will lessen this area of temptation. Third, given the

¹³⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 59.

nature and seriousness of the espousal covenant there are no practical reasons for having a long delay before the actual marriage takes place. Planning a ceremony, a party and a honeymoon are not very difficult.¹⁴⁰

Extraordinary Cases

In our discussion of courtship we have dealt primarily with normal circumstances. That is, with young Christian men and women who are living in Christian homes, who have the loving oversight and counsel of believing parents. Given the fact that churches today have many people who were raised in heretical or unbelieving homes; or, who are older and living independently of parents; or, who are divorced, a brief discussion of such extraordinary cases is in order. What is a person to do when they are living apart from their parents? The answer to this question really depends on a person's own particular situation. If a man or especially a woman has believing parents and has moved out because of ignorance of biblical teaching, they should move back home. (The scriptural teaching on this issue is very clear when discussing the status of daughters.)

If a person has heathen parents, they must turn to the church for help with courtship while respecting their own parents within biblical parameters. Presupposing a person's church understands biblical courtship, a couple could approach the elders of the church for assistance in this area. The elders could open their own home as a chaperoned environment and offer counsel and screening advice; or, they could assist in finding a godly family who would be willing to fulfill this function. Greg Price writes, "All male-female relationships should pass through courtship and engagement on their way to marriage. God's plan is that all male-female relationships be governed by these biblical principles. All people (regardless of age) are in need of godly oversight in their relationship with the opposite sex. We must be careful that we not deceive ourselves into believing we have matured beyond the need of supervision in male-female relationships. Sexual thoughts and desires are not exclusively the lot of the young. We are taught by God to view the heart of man as deceitful and unworthy of trust, especially when it is our own heart (Jer. 17:9; Is. 55:7-9; Is. 65:2)."¹⁴¹ Even people who are widowed or lawfully divorced (and therefore function as independent covenant heads), need to follow biblical principles in this area to avoid sexual sin and find a suitable Christian spouse.

What should a Christian man or woman do who has believing parents who have an irrational, arbitrary or unbiblical approach during the courtship process? For example the father will only consider rich suitors or the mother will only allow suitors who are extremely handsome. A person who finds himself in such circumstances should respectfully reason with his or her parents regarding their unpractical expectations. Parents should not go beyond the standards set by Scripture. If parents are absurd and obstinate in their expectations it is appropriate for the elders of the church to give the parents counsel and a rebuke if necessary. One thing Christians should never do is to completely cast aside their parents' authority and

¹⁴⁰ This teaching (i.e. engagements should be short) is set forth in the Westminster Standards-Directory for the Public Worship of God: "After the purpose or contract of marriage hath been published, the marriage is not to be long deferred. Therefore the minister, having had convenient warning, and nothing being objected to hinder it, is publickly to solemnize it in the place appointed by authority for publick worship, before a competent number of credible witnesses, at some convenient hour of the day, at any time of the year, except on a day of publick humiliation. And we advise that it not be on the Lord's day."

¹⁴¹ Greg Price, 10.

elope with someone without their parents blessing. Competent elders should be able to straighten out such situations.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have critiqued the modern dating system and set forth the biblical alternative-father (or parent) controlled courtship. Many reasons why believers should reject the dating paradigm have been noted. (1) Dating is a recent phenomenon that developed in the soil of an apostate secularized culture. (2) Dating tempts the parties involved to commit sexual immorality. In fact, modern dating presupposes privacy and a certain amount of kissing and sexual touching. (3) Dating trains people to confuse infatuation, lust and strong emotions with genuine biblical love. (4) Dating trains young people to take male-female covenant relationships lightly. Its practice has contributed to a high divorce rate in society. (5) Modern recreational dating violates the biblical teaching regarding covenant headship. Fathers (and parents) have a God-given responsibility to oversee the courtship process. The modern dating paradigm has been an ethical disaster for evangelicals in America. It is time for Christian families and churches to repent of this unscriptural practice.

In examining the biblical alternative (father-controlled courtship), we have noted the following. (1) Parents have a duty to train and prepare a son or daughter for courtship and marriage. (2) Biblical courtship involves the covenant protection of a son or a daughter by the father. (3) The courtship process should not begin until a son or a daughter is ready to get married. (4) Fathers (and mothers) must get to know potential suitors. The parents are to be intimately involved in screening potential mates. (5) Parents must only consider like-minded Christians as potential suitors and mates for their children. (6) Potential suitors must recognize the covenantal authority of a woman's father. Men must approach the woman's father and get permission to court; and, to get engaged and married. (7) Parents should take an active approach in the search for a mate for a son or a daughter. (8) Fathers need to be friendly, courteous and non-threatening to suitors and potential suitors. (9) The decision to get engaged is to be made in conjunction with Christian parents. Betrothal cannot be forced upon a son or a daughter and son or daughter should not get engaged without their father's consent. (10) Biblical betrothal is a binding covenant that should be taken much more seriously than modern society's concept of an engagement. (11) Biblical courtship is not optional. It is rooted in the biblical teaching regarding covenant headship, the nature of covenants, God's holy law and the fabric of creation.

Biblical courtship is a great blessing. It takes the extremely important process of finding a life partner out of the realm of human autonomy (irrationality, fleeting emotions, lust and romance), and places it squarely upon God's infallible word. It frees men and women from temptation and peer pressure, con-artists and hasty, ill-informed decisions by protecting them by means of a covenantal fence. It brings men and women together with their Christian parents and their decades of sanctified experience. It also gives young adults a genuine opportunity to really get to know one another. It is our hope and prayer that God's people would return to this biblical practice.

Chapter 8: Family Worship

In a day when modern culture is hostile to the Christian family and when most evangelical churches have long ago abandoned household devotions we would do well to consider the need, importance and practice of the biblical duty of family worship. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “God is to be worshiped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence calls there unto” (21:6).

Before we examine the parts of family worship, we first need to set forth the biblical reasons why this practice is a Christian duty. Given the fact that in the twentieth century family worship has largely been set aside and replaced by age-segregated Sunday school and youth groups, an examination of the divine warrant for this forgotten practice is in order. There are a number of scriptural reasons why family worship must be the practice of every Christian family.

(1) Fathers, who are the covenant heads of families, are responsible to lead, teach, set an example and command their families in the way of the Lord. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Dt. 6:6-7). “Remember the days of old, Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you.... Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe all the words of this law” (Dt. 32:7, 46). “Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Ps. 78:1-8). “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Pr. 6:4; cf. Pr. 4:1-4). These passages do not specifically mention family worship. Father led household devotions, however are an aspect or subset of these general commands or principles. (More specific injunctions and examples will be considered in a moment.)

(2) There are a number of historical examples in Scripture where godly covenant heads carefully maintained family religion. After God called Abraham out of his native land He promised the land of Canaan to his descendants (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 14:18-21). When God made a covenant with Abraham, it included his household and descendants (Gen. 17:7-8). Abraham as the covenant head of the family was to apply the covenant sign (circumcision) not only to himself, but to his entire household, including babies (Gen. 17:10-14). Why did God establish a covenant relationship with Abraham? A major reason was so that Abraham would give godly instruction to his family. “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Gen 18:19). “Now

God did thus acknowledge Abraham as His intimate friend, not for Abraham's sake only but, as He specifically says, that what is thus conveyed to him might be passed on to posterity. In fact, it was to be delivered as a solemn injunction (*yetsawweh* = 'he may enjoin') to his own children as well as to the entire household."¹⁴² Calvin writes, "And the simple meaning of the passage is, that Abraham is admitted to the counsel of God, because he would faithfully fulfill the office of a good householder, in instructing his own family."¹⁴³

Jehovah is very concerned with generational covenant faithfulness. This faithfulness cannot be achieved through a mere externalism, but flows through the faithful spiritual instruction of the family. God places Abraham, and by implication all covenant heads, in the roll of a prophet. They are to teach "righteousness and justice" to their households. Covenant heads must instruct in "the righteousness which is by faith" as well as covenant obedience to God's law word as the fruit of saving faith. "Let God by His providence dispose of the affairs of my family, and by his grace dispose the affections of all in my family, according to his will to his own praise. Let me and mine be only, wholly, and for ever His."¹⁴⁴

Both Isaac and Jacob followed the godly example of Abraham. "They, as well as he, built an altar to the Lord wherever they pitched their tents; an altar, then, being a necessary utensil for divine worship. This you will find repeatedly in the short history we have of these patriarchs, particularly in Genesis 26:25; 28:18, and 33:20."¹⁴⁵ These godly men of old worshiped the Lord Jesus Christ through ceremonial types and shadows as covenant households. We who have more light, who look back to the perfect-completed work of Christ must also worship the Savior in and with our families.

Family worship was also the practice of godly Noah. In Genesis we read that God made a covenant with Noah, his household and every living creature (Gen. 9:12, 14-15). As soon as Noah and his family departed from the ark, he built an altar and offered a burnt offering of every clean animal (Gen. 8:20). Through the topology of animal sacrifice Noah worshiped Jehovah and set before his family a glimpse of the coming redeemer Jesus Christ.

We are given even more information regarding family worship in the life of Job. "So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did regularly" (Job 1:5). Earlier we noted that Abraham was a prophet to his household, instructing them to do righteousness and justice. Here we encounter Job interceding on behalf of his children; acting as a priest, praying and offering sacrifices on their behalf. Matthew Henry writes, "Job, like Abraham, had an altar for his family, on which, it is likely, he offered sacrifice daily; but, on this extraordinary occasion, he offered more sacrifices than usual, and with more solemnity, according to the number of them all, one for each child. Parents should be particular in their addresses to God for the several branches of their family. 'For this child I prayed, according to its particular temper, genius, and condition,' to which the prayers, as well as the endeavours, must be accommodated. When these sacrifices were to be offered. (1.) He rose early, as one in care that his children might not lie long under guilt and as one whose heart was

¹⁴² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Warburg Press, 1942), 545-546.

¹⁴³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 481.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1855]), 1:250.

¹⁴⁵ Samuel Davies, "The Necessity and Excellency of Family Religion" in *The Godly Family: Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 18.

upon his work and his desire towards it. (2.) He required his children to attend the sacrifice, that they might join with him in the prayers he offered with the sacrifice, that the sight of the killing of the sacrifice might humble them much for their sins, for which they deserved to die, and the sight of the offering of it up might lead them to a Mediator.”¹⁴⁶

The father’s responsibility to lead his household in the true faith of Jehovah is exemplified in the life of Joshua. Joshua did not hold up to a philosophy of headship whereby he held his finger up to the wind and followed the backsliding church. On the contrary, he regarded the covenant loyalty toward God of his whole family to be his responsibility even if the whole nation did slide into apostasy. “Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:14-15).

The heads of households are to rule as a king over their little flock for good. Covenant faithfulness is not something that can be delegated to a youth pastor or a Sunday school teacher. Covenant heads are not to put up with a mixed religion. When denominations were casting aside biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, the vicarious atonement of our Lord and biblical ethics, heads of households should have been teaching their families the truth and separating themselves from apostasy. When Reformed denominations were corrupting the worship of God with human additions and were embracing feminism, covenant heads should have done their job to stop declension. Fathers must not neglect their convenantal duty. They must insure purity of doctrine, worship and ethics among their own parish-the household. Matthew Henry writes, “It is a good thing when a man hath a house of his own, thus to convert it into a church, by dedicating it to the service and honor of God, that it may be a Bethel, a house of God, and not a Bethaven, a house of vanity and iniquity.... Look upon your houses as temples for God, places for worship, and all your possession as dedicated things, to be used for God’s honour, and not to be alienated or profaned.”¹⁴⁷

The Bible teaches that fathers (the heads of households) must consider themselves to be the prophet, priest and king of their own particular households. As a prophet they are obligated to read God’s word and instruct the family concerning the whole counsel of God. As a priest they are to pray for and with their families. They are to intercede on behalf of the household every day. As a king they are to govern and direct them to obey the word of God. They also are to protect and provide for them. All three of these duties come together when a father leads his family in household worship. “[H]owever indifferent some governors may be about it, they may

¹⁴⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n. d.), 3:5.

¹⁴⁷ Matthew Henry, “On Family Religion,” 250-251. William Garden Blaikie writes, “For his absolute and supreme loyalty to his Lord he is entitled to our highest reverence...Among the reformers, the puritans, and the covenanters such men were often found. The best of them, indeed, were men of this type, and very genuine men they were. They were not men whom the world loved; they were too jealous of God’s claims for that, and too severe on those who refused them. And we have still the type of the fighting Christian. But alas! It is a type subject to fearful degeneration. Loyalty to human tradition is often substituted, unconsciously no doubt, for loyalty to God. The sublime purity and nobility of the one passes into the obstinacy, the self-righteousness, the self-assertion of the other. When a man of the genuine type does appear, men are arrested, astonished, as if by a supernatural apparition. The very rareness, the eccentricity of the character, secures a respectful homage. And yet, who can deny that it is the true representation of what every man should be who says, ‘I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?’”

be assured that God will require a due discharge of these offices at their hands. For if, as the apostle argues, he that does not provide for his own house in temporal things has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel, to what greater degree of apostasy must he have arrived who takes no thought to provide for the spiritual welfare of his family?"¹⁴⁸

There is no neutrality regarding this important matter of family worship. A father who neglects this duty, who does not have a family that worships the true and living God must question the character of his own faith in Christ. Note the categories of peoples that will receive the wrath of God. Jeremiah the prophet says, "Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, and on the families who do not call on your name" (Jer. 10:25). One should not be surprised to read that the heathen who do not know Jehovah and thus are idolaters will receive God's fury. But what of those who make a profession of faith and join the visible church yet whose families are not calling upon Him? If God judges the heathen who do not know God what will He do to those who know the word of God yet refuse to obey it? Calvin writes, "Invocation then is ever the fruit of faith, as it is an evidence of religion; for all who call not on God, and that seriously, prove that they have never know anything of religion."¹⁴⁹ Is there anything more sad and terrifying to a father who professes Christ, than observing his own children apostatize because they were trained in the neglect and forgetfulness of God at home? Fathers, if you neglect this most important family duty now, then you will suffer upon a bed of tears and affliction later.

(3) A father's responsibility to lead his household in family worship also flows from the biblical concept of the family itself. When the apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian church he tells them that the children of believers holy (1 Cor. 7:14). As children of a believing parent they are set apart in a consecrated position before the Lord. Malachi the prophet says that one reason that God instituted marriage and the family was "to seek a godly seed" (2:15). In other words God wants His people to raise up godly children. The whole Bible views families organically. His covenants that were given to the heads of families applied to the whole family: babies, children and even slaves (Gen. 9:12ff; 12:3; 17:1-11; Ps. 89:26-29, etc.). Charles Hodge writes, "In the sight of God parents and children are one. The former are the authorized representatives of the latter; they act for them; they contract obligations in their name. In all cases, therefore, where parents enter into covenant with God, they bring their children with them....It is vain to say that children cannot make contracts or take an oath. Their parents can act for them; and not only bring them under obligation, but secure for them the benefits of the covenants into which they vicariously enter. If a man joined the commonwealth of Israel he secured for his children the benefits of the theocracy, unless they willingly renounced them. And so when a believer adopts the covenant of grace, he brings his children within that covenant, in the sense that God promises to give them, in his own good time, all the benefits of redemption, provided they do not willingly renounce their baptismal engagements."¹⁵⁰ In the Bible, circumcision and baptism have virtually the identical meaning (Col. 2:11-12; Rom. 4:11). Thus, we are not surprised to find that in the book of Acts whole families are baptized and included in the visible church (Ac. 10:24ff; 16:14-15, 30-34; 18:8; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14-16).¹⁵¹ Does this mean that the children of believers are

¹⁴⁸ George Whitfield, "The Great Duty of Family Religion" in *The Godly Family*, 33.

¹⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 2:67.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3:555.

¹⁵¹ For an excellent exposition of the Reformed understanding of infant baptism, read: Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970). For a broader societal analysis of the Baptist position, read James B. Jordan, editor, *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture* (Tyler, TX: Geneva

born regenerated and automatically become Christians? No. it does not. However, it does mean that parents, especially fathers (covenant heads) have a special responsibility to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). God promises faithful parents a godly heritage. “And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them” (Is. 65:22-23).

As a result of the biblical view of covenant families, Bible-believing Presbyterian churches require parents to publicly agree to raise their children according to Scripture. Parents make a covenant to faithfully fulfill their covenant duties with regard to their children. Note the following example: “Do your promise to instruct your child in the principles of our holy religion as revealed in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church; and do you promise to pray with and for your child, to set an example of piety and godliness before him, and to endeavor by all the means of God’s appointment to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?”¹⁵² Even Baptist churches implicitly recognize this duty when they engage in dedication ceremonies for the infants of Christian parents (i.e., covenant recognition without the covenant sign). All of this points to the duty and need for family worship. Can believing parents be faithful to the covenant vows taken at the baptism of their children who do not pray, praise and study God’s word with them? The answer is obviously not. Parents, you know that the most precious thing that God has given you is your children. Therefore, love them, nurture them and instruct them daily. Do not neglect family worship. Make it a top priority in your home.¹⁵³

What to Do in Family Worship

Family worship should be a simple affair consisting of three basic elements: Bible reading and instruction, prayer and the singing of praise. As we briefly consider these three areas, keep in mind the following principles. First, it is very important that family worship be conducted on a regular basis. Therefore, it is wise to set a specific time for the whole family to meet every day; that must be kept except only in a time of a dire emergency. Fixing the time of family worship and making it a non-negotiable daily event will eliminate the temptation to skip days and procrastinate because of various excuses (e.g., illness, fatigue, sporting events, TV

Divinity School, 1982). Regarding historical examples from Scripture, Robert Shaw writes, “But those who defer the baptism of the children of professing Christians until they arrive at adult age, have no precedent or example for their practice; for, though the Book of Acts contains the history of the Church for upwards of thirty years, in which time for the children of those who were first baptized by the apostles must have reached maturity, yet we have no record of the baptism of a single individual born of Christian parents. From this silence, we justly infer that they must have been baptized in their infancy; and we defy the advocates of adult baptism to adduce a single scriptural example of their practice” (*An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* [Edmonton, Canada: Still water Revival Books, n. d. (1845)], 290).

¹⁵² *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995), 146-147.

¹⁵³ When discussing family worship our emphasis has been on the duty of fathers toward their covenant children. We do not want to fail to mention that family worship is also an expression of a husband’s love and faithfulness toward his wife. Family worship contributes to the sanctification of the wife. It gives a wife an opportunity to ask questions and interact theologically with her husband. This theological interaction is great for the children. It shows them a zeal and love of Christ and His word by their own parents. It exhibits to them, that in this household Christianity is not merely theoretical, or esoteric, or only something for Sunday, but is very practical and meaningful-everyday. Indeed, family worship blesses the whole family.

programs, movies, etc.). Older books and sermons on family religion teach that family worship should be conducted twice each day. Such teaching is based on passages which speak of morning and evening prayers (e.g., Ps. 92:1-2; 141:2). Given the fact that such passages are speaking directly to private worship, fathers should commit themselves minimally to daily worship.

Second, the father (or in the case of a single parent household-the covenant head) is responsible to lead family devotions. This duty is not to be delegated to the wife, or adult child or house servant. The wife and children must be taught and directed by the covenant head of the household. The father is the prophet, priest and king of the family. He must read the Scriptures, ask questions, teach doctrine and lead in prayer.

Third, family worship should be simple, pleasant and not excessively long or formalistic. We are not gnostics or ascetics. Family worship should be something that the family looks forward to; thus, it does not need to be a theological marathon. Fifteen to twenty minutes each day should be sufficient for reading, discussion and prayer. Families that turn devotions into a lengthy, intricate affair often get worn out and end up skipping worship altogether. It is far better to be concise and consistent than excessive and irregular.

The Basic Elements

(1) Fathers should read the Scriptures to their families. Knowledge of God's word is necessary for salvation, faith and life. The Bible is the foundation for meaning and ethics. It is a light that guides our path (Ps. 119:105). The Holy Scriptures are able to make a child wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). We should search the Scriptures daily in order to learn and test doctrine (Acts 17:11), for God's word is truth itself (Jn. 17:17). It is our guide for living that sanctifies our hearts and lives (Jn. 17:17). Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31-32). God's word is to be in our hearts and it is to be diligently taught to our children (Dt. 6:6-7). Everything that we are required to believe and everything we are required to do is to be found within its pages. "It is better to be without bread in your houses than without bibles, for the words of God's mouth are and should be to you more than necessary food."¹⁵⁴ J. W. Alexander writes, "The daily reading of God's holy word, by a parent before his children, is one of the most powerful agencies of Christian life. We are prone to undervalue this cause. It is a constant dropping, but it wears its mark into the rock. A family thus trained cannot be ignorant of the Word. The whole Scriptures come repeatedly before the mind...No part of juvenile education is more important."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:251.

¹⁵⁵ J. A. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991), 62-63. A parental duty that many fathers include in family worship is the catechizing of children. The best catechism available teaching children and new believers is the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Although the memorization and discussion of the Shorter Catechism is something that all Christian families should do every day, it is not necessary to incorporate it into family worship. "Oblige them to learn some good catechism by heart, and to keep it in remembrance; and by familiar discourse with them hold them to understand it, as they become capable. It is an excellent method of catechizing, which God Himself directs us to, Deut. vi. 7, to teach our children the things of God, by talking of them as we sit in the house, and go by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up. It is good to keep up stated times for this service, and be constant to them, as those that know how industrious the enemy is to sow tares while men sleep" (Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:252). In order to keep family devotions relatively short it would be wise to ask only a few catechism questions during family devotions and do the bulk of catechizing at another time. As children get older, going over the catechism can take twenty minutes, especially if more than one child is involved.

How is the Bible to be read unto one's children? There are a number of things to keep in mind regarding this crucial duty. First, the Bible is to be read with authority and solemnity for it is the very word of God. Such reading instills in children a respect and holy reverence for the Scriptures. They learn that the Bible is not just any old book; or just another school book, but that it is truly unique. It alone has absolute authority. It alone merits an unqualified trust and obedience.

Second, the Bible is to be read in a manner that focuses the children's attention upon it. This means that fathers should read the Scriptures with a certain love, excitement and fervor. If a father exhibits boredom and sluggishness in his reading the children will sense it. By such an unenthusiastic example the father is implicitly teaching his children that the Bible is a dry, boring book. Our children should sense our love, joy and excitement of God's word by our reading of it. Further, a father should frequently pause and ask his children questions regarding the Scripture reading. The questions serve some important functions. a) They force the children to pay attention to what is being read so that they will not daydream and fail to learn the section of Scripture. b) They also enable a father to emphasize important doctrines and applications within the passage (e.g., "John, why does Paul say that no one can be saved by keeping the law?" or, "Susan, why did Jesus Christ have to suffer and die on the cross?"). Remember, the father is the prophet of the family: reading the Scriptures, rebuking sin, emphasizing doctrines, making applications, guarding against error and immorality. It is not surprising that a father who is diligent and applies himself to family worship will himself be a better father for it.

Third, a father should focus on quality not quantity. In other words a short reading (e.g., one chapter) with questions and comments is better than a long reading with no attention or application. Remember, family worship should be concise, to the point and regular. Readings that are very long without analysis can lead to daydreaming and restlessness in small children.

Lastly, the Bible should be read straight through from beginning to end in order to get the whole counsel of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

(2) Fathers must pray with their families. As the priest of the family the father should approach the throne of grace and intercede for himself and his wife and children. "Families, as such have many errands at the throne of grace, which furnish them with matter and occasion for family prayer every day; errands which cannot be done so well in secret or public, but are fittest to be done by the family in consort, and apart from other families."¹⁵⁶ It is primarily through family worship that young children learn the importance of prayer and the biblical methodology of prayer. In prayer the whole family comes to God through Jesus as a covenantal body dedicated to the cause of Christ and truth.

There are a number of important things that should be a part of family prayer. First, families should acknowledge a total dependence upon God and His providence. In prayer we honor God and glorify Him for His infinite perfections. We acknowledge God's sovereignty and recognize the mediatorial kingship of Christ. Christ is the owner and master of this family. We acknowledge our dependence upon Him for salvation and all good things.

Second, families must confess their sins to God. In the Bible households are treated organically. When a part has engaged in wickedness and sin it can affect the whole. There are numerous examples of the iniquity of covenant heads bringing disaster upon families (e.g., Achan, Josh. 7:19-26; Baasha, 1 Ki. 16:3-4, 12; Ahab, 1 Ki. 21:21). There are even the sins of

¹⁵⁶ Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:254.

sons that bring calamity upon a whole family (e.g., the sons of Eli, 1 Sam. 3:13-14). Families must come together and confess their daily sins in thought, word and deed. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). We must strengthen each other's hand toward holiness, sincere repentance and a confession of guilt before God. "How sad is the condition of those families that sin together, and never pray together!"¹⁵⁷ Families often say and do things to each other that are contrary to God's word. A daily confession will reconcile a family with God and one another. It will instill in children the seriousness of sin and the great need of a daily repentance. Whitfield writes, "[T]here are no families but what have some common blessings of which they have been all partakers to give thanks for; some common crosses and afflictions which they are to pray against; some common sins which they are all to lament and bewail. But how this can be done without joining together in one common act of humiliation, supplication, and thanksgiving is difficult to devise."¹⁵⁸

Third, families must thank God for all the blessings of life, especially the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ. All the blessings of life—the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, even the air we breathe—comes from the beneficent hand of Jehovah. Should we not continually offer thanks to Him for these great gifts? Does He not also continually protect us from the evil one, from calamity and from our own foolishness (cf. Job 1:10; Is. 4:5)? The greatest gift of all to our families is Jesus Christ Himself. God has chosen us in Him and has united us with His life, death and resurrection. He has regenerated our hearts enabling us to believe in Christ. Because of Him we are Christian families. Jesus has had mercy upon our household. Emmanuel lives with us. "At the same time," says the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:1).

Fourth, families must pray to God for their physical and spiritual needs. Jesus instructed us to pray for our daily bread (Mt. 6:11). As families we are to jointly ask for physical prosperity, not so that we can live worldly lives and neglect our religious duties, but, so that as families we can better serve Christ and extend His kingdom. If we are to pray for our daily bread, then how much more ought we to pray for sanctification, the putting off of sin and deliverance from the evil one. As families we must pray "do not lead us into temptation" (Mt. 6:13). Households often suffer from similar infirmities and temptations. Children often imitate the bad habits and sinful tendencies of their parents. Families ought to identify problems, sinful habits and common temptations and pray together for deliverance and sanctification as a household.

Fifth, families must pray for the well-being of others. They must pray for all sorts of men. There are relatives, friends and acquaintances who need to be saved. There are believers who are suffering under various trials (sickness, injury, financial problems, etc.). There are Christians who are backsliding who need to awaken to their condition and repent. There are various missionaries who could use family intercession. There are civil and denominational conflicts and declensions that should be placed before the throne of grace. There are believers who are suffering severe persecution in far off lands at the hands of tyrants. "The benefit of prayer will reach far, because he that hears prayer can extend his hand of power and mercy to the utmost corners of the earth, and to them that are afar off upon the sea."¹⁵⁹ "Therefore I exhort first of all

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ George Whitfield, "The Great Duty of Family Religion" in *The Godly Family*, 38.

¹⁵⁹ Matthew Henry, "A Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:256. Henry adds: "Praying families are kept from more mischiefs than they themselves are aware of. They are not always sensible of the distinction which a kind providence makes between them and others; though God is pleased sometimes to make it remarkable, as in the story

that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

(3) Fathers must lead their families in the singing of praise. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). The singing of a Psalm or two to God is a proper response to the reading of Scripture and prayer. By doing so the family glorifies God and admonishes one another. Samuel Davies writes, “As to family praise, it is a duty because thanksgiving is so often joined with prayer in Scripture; Philippians 4:5; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; and psalmody must be admitted to be the most proper method of expressing thankfulness by such as accept it a part of divine worship. ‘The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous,’ Psalm 118:15; an expression that my properly signify praising God in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, as we are commanded, Colossians 3:16.”¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

Fathers, consider the important duty that God has placed in your hands, the raising up of a godly seed. Consider your own precious covenant children; impress upon them the great truths of biblical Christianity when they are young and impressionable. Teach them to honor God with their hearts, minds, lips and hands from the most tender of years. Consider that your children are gifts from God made to serve the Lord. They are to carry forth the banner of Christ to the next generation. Do your job diligently so that while you are praising Christ in heaven your children will be serving and praising God on earth.

While it is true that only God can give grace to a soul, it is also true that He uses secondary means—the teaching of God’s word—to give the sum of saving knowledge to the elect. Fathers, consider your pain and misery if through carelessness and neglect your children learn the warp of the world instead of the way of the Lord. If you fulfill your covenant obligations by loving, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, encouraging and warning your children to trust in Christ and obey His law then you have done your part and with peace of soul you may comfortably leave your children in the hands of God. Covenantally faithful parents can rest upon God’s promises. May God enable us to fulfill our covenant duties to our children that Christ would be glorified in them.

which is credibly related of a certain village in the Canton of Bern in Switzerland, consisting of ninety houses, which in the year 1584 were all destroyed by an earthquake, except one house, in which the good man and his family were at that time together praying. That promise is sure to all of the seed of faithful Abraham, ‘Fear not, I am thy shield,’ Gen. xv. 1. Wisdom herself had passed her word for it, Prov. i. 33. ‘Whoso hearkeneth to me,’ wherever he dwells, he ‘shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from’ all real evil itself, and from the amazing, tormenting fear of evil. Nothing can hurt, nothing needs frighten those whom God protects. (Ibid. 1:259).”

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Davies, “The Necessity and Excellency of Family Religion” in *The Godly Family*, 21.

Appendix: A Brief Biblical Reference Guide for Discipline, Guidance, and Counsel

One of the great benefits of biblical child-rearing is that it forces parents to be diligent regarding their own sanctification. If parents are to be faithful to the principles of biblical discipline then they must master the Scriptures. They need to be able to apply Scripture immediately to all the various contingencies of misbehavior and daily life. In order to provide assistance in the area of finding texts to apply to specific situations in the guidance of children, this author has compiled passages of Scripture according to topic for easy reference.¹⁶¹

Anger

Psalm 37:7-9, “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret-it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.”

There are times when the wicked will say and do things in order to provoke a covenant child. They will mock, make fun of and even spit upon those who are faithful to Christ. The wicked love to see Christians lose control. They want to draw a covenant child into a fight. The godly must not lose control. They must rest in the Lord and wait patiently for His just recompense. “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom 12:19). “The godly should eschew the motions of fretting, anger, or envy against the wicked; and if anger enter, he must cease from it: if it urge itself on him with pretences of reason or violent impulse, he must forsake it; but by any means he must keep this temptation within doors, that it drive him not to break forth to a completed sin in action and doing wrong: fret not thyself in anywise to do evil.”¹⁶² If a child becomes angry or frets because of a wicked person he must replace that behavior in the mind with a fervent trust in Jehovah.

Proverbs 12:17, “A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.”

Proverbs 14:29, “He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.”

Sometimes children have tantrums and outbursts of wrath over silly things such as “I had the toy first!” or “That’s my toy leave it alone!” God says that such behavior is foolish. A child must learn to exhibit great understanding by controlling himself, by analyzing a situation calmly and clearly. Instead of a tantrum a child could say, “Let’s take turns, Johnny. You play with the toy first and then in fifteen minutes we’ll trade, etc.”

¹⁶¹ See Jay Adams, *The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975); Also, John G. Krus, *Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

¹⁶² David Dickson, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965 [1653-5]), 200.

Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Proverbs 15:18, “A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.”

Because of their sinful nature children are prone to arguments and verbal sparring matches. The Bible tells us how to stop arguments, disputes and fights before they start. A gentle answer acts as water to quench the flames of anger. An argument or fight requires at least two person (“It takes two to tango.”). But if one person refuses to fight and instead speaks gentle, rational words of peace the other person calms down and contention is avoided. “Gentle and healing words gain a double victory-over ourselves and our brethren.”¹⁶³ “Mild words, gentle expressions, delivered with kindness and tenderness, humility and submission; these will work on a man’s passions, weaken his resentments, and break and scatter the storm of wrath raised in his breast, just breaking forth in a very boisterous and blustering manner; so high winds are sometimes laid soft by showers.”¹⁶⁴

Proverbs 16:32, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” “[O]ne that has command of his temper, that can govern himself, and not suffer his passions to exceed due bounds, is superior in strength to him that can storm a castle or take a fortified city.”¹⁶⁵ It is crucial that covenant children are trained to control their temper when they are very young. Children who are indulged and permitted to lose control with little or no consequences grow up to be obnoxious, uncontrolled adults. “We must be lords of our anger, as God is, Nah. i.”¹⁶⁶

Proverbs 17:14, “The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.”

Contention must be stopped at the very beginning before an argument rages like the waters that break through a crack in a dam. “In guarding against the deadly issue of quarrels: let it be remembered, that the time to leave off is not when we see it at it worst, but at its beginning; restraining the first rising in ourselves; controlling our own proud tempers and cultivating our Master’s meek and self-denying spirit.”¹⁶⁷ Parents often do not involve themselves in a serious quarrel among their children until it becomes loud and disruptive. The Bible teaches that quarrels must be nipped in the bud. Children must be catechized in the art of spotting and stopping strife.

Proverbs 19:11, “The discretion of man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.”

Children have a natural sinful tendency to argue, accuse, tattle and make the most of a transgression against them by a sibling. Children must be taught that it is a great virtue to be merciful and overlook a personal wrong. Solomon, obviously is not advocating that we sweep sin under the rug, however, there are many rubs and offenses that occur in life that can be covered

¹⁶³ Charles Bridges, 234.

¹⁶⁴ John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1810]), 4:432.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:448.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 3:886.

¹⁶⁷ Charles Bridges, 314.

over by love. As Paul says: “Love suffers long and is kind [and]...does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:4-5). “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Rom. 12:9).

Proverbs, 19:19, “A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.”

Proverbs 20:3, “It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel.”

Proverbs 25:38, “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”

Biblical dominion starts with regeneration and then self-government. A person who does not rule his own spirit has no defense against temptation and the assaults of Satan.

Proverbs 30:33, “For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife.”

Ephesians 4:26-27, “‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”

Covenant children must be taught to deal with anger immediately so that it will not manifest itself in sinful behavior. Anger that is not dealt with and brought under control can lead to unbiblical outbursts where others have their feelings hurt; or, to clamming up (i.e., internalization) which leads to all sorts of hateful, unbiblical thoughts. When sinful problems and arguments occur in the home they must be brought to a biblical resolution, that is, biblical restoration. Under such circumstances, anger will lead to problem solving instead of sin.

James 1:19-20, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Biblical Speech

Proverbs 10:31-32, “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.”

Proverbs 12:13-14, “The wicked is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous will come through trouble. A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, and the recompense of a man’s hands will be rendered to him.”

Proverbs 13:2-3, “A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence. He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.”

Proverbs 15:28, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”

Proverbs 16:23, “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips.”

Proverbs 17:20, 27, “He who has a deceitful heart finds no good, and he who has a perverse tongue falls into evil.... He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.”

Proverbs 29:11, 20, “A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man holds them back.... Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

Ephesians 4:29, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

Titus 3:1-2, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”

Patrick Fairbairn writes, “The first verb, *blasphamein* [vs. 2, revile, or speak evil], imparts more than to speak evil in the ordinary sense; it is to act the part of a reviler or slanderer; and when used of conduct from one man toward another, always betokens the exercise of a very bitter and malignant spirit. Titus was to charge the Christians of Crete to give no exhibition toward any one of such a spirit, nor to show a quarrelsome disposition, but, on the contrary, to cultivate a mild, placable, and gentle temper.”¹⁶⁸

Psalms 15:1-3, “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend.”

Plumer writes, “The word rendered backbiteth is but once so translated, and once, slandered, 2 Sam. xix. 27. It is commonly in our version rendered by the verb spy, and by the participle by the noun spies. The verb means literally to go, to walk. And as slanderers are restless bodies and go about, spying out other people’s affairs and spreading injurious or false reports, the word came to designate the act of backbiting.”¹⁶⁹

James 4:11, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.”

Simon J. Kistemaker writes, “James delves deeper into the subject and tells his readers that slandering a brother involves the law (Lev. 19:16).... The emphasis in this verse is on the

¹⁶⁸ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954 [1874]), 289.

¹⁶⁹ W. S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975 [1867]), 201. “Backbite, 1. To attack the character or reputation of (a person who is not present), 2. To speak slanderously of one who is absent” (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* [New York: Random House, 1966], 108.

word brother, which denotes the close bond of fellowship believers have in the church. If you speak evil of your brother behind his back, you are setting aside the royal law, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (2:8; Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:39; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14). And if you set aside the law, you have become a judge of that law. Then you have placed yourself on the level of the Lawgiver. In court a judge must be impartial in evaluating the evidence, and be just in applying the law and passing sentence. The slanderer, by contrast, generally neglects to learn the facts, avoids speaking in the presence of the accused, sets aside the law of love, and as a self-appointed judge, hands down the verdict.... Blinded by sin, the backbiter often is unaware of the seriousness of his doings. The fact remains, however, that slander is a sin against the person who is accused and against God who forbids this sin by divine law.”¹⁷⁰

Leviticus 19:16, “You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against your neighbor; I am the Lord” (NASB). A. Noordtzij writes, “*rakil*, the term that is translated ‘spreading slander’ here, is related to a verb, *rakal*, which describes the work of a traveling merchant. It therefore referred to a person who made it his business to spread scandalous gossip concerning his neighbors in order to gain some form of profit from this (cf. Prov. 11:13; 20:19; Jer. 6:28; 9:3).”¹⁷¹ Andrew Bonar writes: “Gossip, and idle talking, and meddling with our neighbor..., and more directly still, insinuating and hinting evil of him, are sins forbidden here.”¹⁷²

Proverbs 4:24, “Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you.”

Ephesians 5:3-4, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”

“Silly talk is the kind of conversation one could expect to hear from the lips of a fool or a drunkard.”¹⁷³ Coarse jesting refers to speech which is “flippant, satirical, scurrilous.” Coarse jesting covers speech that is off-color, mocking, “smart,” provocative in a negative sense and so on.

Colossians 3:8, “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”

Bitterness, Contention, Resentment and Hatred

Proverbs 18:19, “A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.”

Proverbs 13:10, “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.”

¹⁷⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *James and I-III John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 143-144.

¹⁷¹ A. Noordtzij, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 198.

¹⁷² Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966 [1846]), 349.

¹⁷³ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), part 2, 228.

Proverbs 17:14, “The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.”

Proverbs 18:6, “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows.”

Proverbs 22:10, “Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.”

Proverbs 26:24-26, “He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself; when he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.”

Proverbs 26:21, “As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.”

Galatians 5:14-15, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”

Galatians 5:19-21, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are...contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions...and the like.”

Ephesians 4:31-32, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

Hebrews 12:14-15, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

Leviticus 19:17, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.”

1 John 2:9-11, “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

Confession

Proverbs 28:13, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”

James 5:16, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Contentment, Coveting

Exodus 20:17, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Proverbs 21:25-25, “The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare.” (cf. Josh. 7:21)

Micah 2:1-2, “Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them.”

Proverbs 15:16-17, “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred.”

Proverbs 23:4-5, “Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven.”

Proverbs 30:8-9, “Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches - feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.”

Habakkuk 2:9, “Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house...”

Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [i.e., food, water, clothing, etc.] shall be added to you.”

Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Mark 4:7, 18-20, “And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop...Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

1 Corinthians 5:11, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-not even to eat with such a person.”

Ephesians 5:5, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Charles Hodge writes, “[T]he apostle singles out covetousness from a list of sins, and says, ‘It is idolatry.’ This, too, has its foundation both in nature and in Scripture. The analogy between this supreme love of riches, this service of mammon and idolatry, is more obvious and more distinctly recognized in Scripture than between idolatry and any other of the sins mentioned. It is well that this should be understood, that men should know that the most common of all sins is the most heinous in the sight of God; for idolatry, which consists in putting the creature in the place of God, is everywhere in his word denounced as the greatest of all sins in his sight. The fact that it is compatible with outward decorum, and with the respect of men, does not alter its nature. It is the permanent and controlling principle of an irreligious heart and life, turning the soul away from God. There is no cure for this destructive love of money, but using it for other than selfish purposes. Riches, therefore, must ruin their professor, unless he employs them for the good of others and for the glory of God”¹⁷⁴

Philippians 4:11-13, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Colossians 3:5, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Hebrews 13:5, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

Hughes writes, “The avaricious man is never content: ungenerous and grasping, he always wants more and is always afraid of losing what he has. How different from the serenity of the true Christian who knows that, having Christ, he lacks nothing that is essential for his well-being (cf. Ps. 23:1). Paul, destitute of worldly possessions, sublimely speaks of himself ‘as having nothing, and yet possessing everything’ (2 Cor. 6:10). ‘I have learned,’ he assures his friends in Philippi, ‘in whatever state I am, to be content’ (Phil. 4:11). His is the true imitation of the Master, who on earth had no place of his own where he might rest his head (Mt. 8:20), who taught that ‘a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’ (Lk. 12:15), and who advised his disciples to lay up treasure for themselves in heaven rather than on earth (Mt. 6:29ff)-in other words, though poor in the eyes of men, to be ‘rich toward God’ (Lk. 12:21).”¹⁷⁵

James 1:14-15, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 207-208.

¹⁷⁵ Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 567-568.

1 Timothy 6:6-10, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Envy

Psalms 37:1-2, “Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (cf. 3-11).

Proverbs 3:31-32, “Do not envy the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; For the perverse person is an abomination to the LORD, But His secret counsel is with the upright.”

Proverbs 14:30, “A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.”

Proverbs 23:17-18, “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the Lord all the day; for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off.”

Proverbs 24:1-2, “Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking” (cf. 24:19-20).

James 3:14-16, “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”

1 Peter 2:1-2, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Matthew 5:23-25, “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that our brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.”

Matthew 18:15-17, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (cf. 18:21-35).

Luke 17:3-5, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day

returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him. And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'"

Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

Colossians 3:13, "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

1 John 1:8-10, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

Gossip

Proverbs 11:13, "A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is a of a faithful spirit conceals a matter."

Proverbs 16:28, "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends."

Proverbs 18:8, "The words of a talebearer are like the tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body."

Proverbs 20:19, "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips."

Proverbs 26:20, "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases."

Laziness and Work

Proverbs 6:6-11, "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep-so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man." (cf. Prov. 10:5, 26; 12:27; 19:15, 24; 20:13; 24:32-34; 26:14.)

Exodus 20:9, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work..."

Proverbs 12:24, "The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labor."

Proverbs 13:4, “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.”

Proverbs 24:30-31, “I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down.”

Proverbs 20:4, “The lazy man will not plow because of winter; he will beg during harvest and have nothing.” (cf. Prov. 21:25; 22:13; 26:13; Mt. 25:26.)

2 Thessalonians 3:10, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Ephesians 5:15-16, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Charles Hodge writes, “The same exhortation, and in the same connection, is found in Col. iv. 5. Here the apostle says, ‘See that ye walk as wise men, redeeming the time;’ there, ‘Walk in wisdom, redeeming the time.’ So that this right use of time, or this seizing on every opportunity for doing good, is in both places represented as the evidence and the effect of wisdom, i.e., of divine truth, which is the wisdom of God, which he has revealed, 1 Cor. ii. 6-13.”¹⁷⁶

Lying

Exodus 20:16, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Proverbs 8:6-8, “Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things; for my mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; nothing crooked or perverse is in them.”

Proverbs 6:16-19, “These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”

Proverbs 12:17-19, “He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”

Proverbs 12:22, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.”

¹⁷⁶ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 219.

Proverbs 19:5, “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape.”

Proverbs 19:9, “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.”

Proverbs 24:28, “Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, for would you deceive with your lips?”

Proverbs 26:18-19, “Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, ‘I was only joking!’”

John 8:44, “He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

Ephesians 4:25, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.”

Colossians 3:9, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.”

Revelation 21:8, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Name Calling

Matthew 5:21-22, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ [i.e., “you blockhead” or “empty-head”] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ [i.e., “you idiot” or “you moron”] shall be in danger of hell fire.”

James 3:9-10, “With it [the tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”

Pride

Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate” (cf. Prov. 6:16-18).

Proverbs 11:2, “When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.”

Proverbs 13:10, “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.”

Proverbs 16:5, 18-19, “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; though they join forces, none will go unpunished.... Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he” (cf. Prov. 18:12; 21:4).

Proverbs 27:2, “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”

Proverbs 28:25, “He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered” (cf. Mk. 7:20-23; Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 4:5-7; 10:12; Gal. 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:6; Jas. 4:6).

Proper Companionship

Proverbs 12:26, “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

Proverbs 13:20, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.”

Proverbs 24:1-2, “Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of trouble making.” will be destroyed.”

Proverbs 22:5, “Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them.”

Proverbs 22:24-25, “Make no friendship with an angry man and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.”

2 Corinthians 6:14-18, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.’”

James 4:4, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Self-Control, Discipline

Mark 8:34, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (cf. Lk. 9:23).

Proverbs 25:28, “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.” (cf. Prov. 29:11).

Romans 13:13-14, “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

Galatians 5:16, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.”

Romans 14:8, “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord.”

Galatians 5:22-25, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 10:4-5, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 5:5-8, “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

2 Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” [or “discipline” (NASB), “self-discipline” (NIV)].

Titus 2:2, 6, 7, “That the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience.... Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works...”

Titus 2:11-12, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” To live soberly means to live in a self-controlled and thoughtful manner.

1 Peter 1:13, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

2 Peter 1:5-6, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness.”

Alexander Nisbet writes, “Because there remain in the best many immoderate and unruly affections and passions, which, as they are ready to exceed bounds even about lawful objects, so the excess of them darkens reason, indisposes the heart for duty, mars the exercise of faith, and

so hinders all the former three. Therefore a Christian that would grow must labour to have, by the power of God's grace in him, such a command over his passions of anger, fear, grief, &c and over his affections of love, joy and the like, especially in the use of sensual delights, that he may be able to keep within the bounds which right reason according to the rules of God's word prescribes to them. Therefore, the Apostle exhorts to add to knowledge, temperance; which is a grace whereby a Christian's passions and affections are held under the dominion of sanctified reason."¹⁷⁷

Sexual Immorality, Pornography and Lust

Matthew 5:27-29, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

Spurgeon writes, "In this case our King again sets aside the glosses of men upon the commands of God and makes the law to be seen in its vast spiritual breadth. Whereas tradition had confined the prohibition to an over act of unchastity, the King shows that it forbade the unclean desires of the heart. Here the divine law is shown to refer, not only to the act of criminal conversation, but even to the desire, imagination, or passion which would suggest such an infamy. What a King is ours, who stretches his scepter over the realm of our inward lusts? How sovereignly he puts it: 'But I say unto you!' Who but a divine being has authority to speak in this fashion? His word is law. So it ought to be, seeing he touches vice at the fountainhead and forbids uncleanness in the heart. If sin were not allowed in the mind, it would never be made manifest in the body: this, therefore, is a very effectual way of dealing with the evil. But how searching, how condemning! Irregular looks, unchaste desires, and strong passions are of the very essence of adultery; and who can claim a lifelong freedom from them? Yet these are the things which defile a man. Lord, purge them out of my nature, and make me pure within."¹⁷⁸

Proverbs 4:23, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life."

Proverbs 5:18-20, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?"

Job 31:1-3, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman? For what is the allotment of God from above, and the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is it not destruction for the wicked, and disaster for the workers of iniquity?"

Romans 6:19, 21-22, "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.... What fruit

¹⁷⁷ Alexander Nisbet, *1 and 2 Peter* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982 [1658]), 227.

¹⁷⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revel, 1987), 57.

did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

1 Corinthians 6:18-20, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

1 Corinthians 7:9, “If they [unmarried persons and widows] cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

2 Corinthians 7:1, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Galatians 5:16, 19-21, “I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.... Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (cf. Gal. 5:16-18).

Ephesians 5:3, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints” (cf. Eph. 5:3-17).

Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things.”

Colossians 3:5-7, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 7, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;...For God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness.”

2 Peter 2:9-10, “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority” (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4-21).

Revelation 2:20-21, “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent” (cf. Rev 2:14; for passages dealing with homosexuality see Gen. 19; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11).

Stealing

Exodus 20:15, “You shall not steal” (cf. Lev. 19:11; Dt. 5:19; 23:24-25; Prov. 6:30-31; 30:7-9; Rom. 2:21).

Proverbs 28:24, “Whoever robs his father or his mother, and says, ‘It is no transgression,’ The same is companion to a destroyer.”

Proverbs 29:24, “Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life; he swears to tell the truth, but reveals nothing.”

Jeremiah 7:9-11, “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations’? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord.”

Ephesians 4:28, “Let him who steals steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his own hands what is good, in order that he may something to share with him who has need” (NASB).

Hendriksen writes, “He [Paul] told the Ephesians to stop stealing and to practice honesty. But he wants more than that. He realizes that back of this sin of stealing lies a more basic fault, namely, selfishness. Hence, he strikes at the very root of the evil, for, by turning the attention of the thief, whether actual or potential, away from himself to the needs of other people.... The thief must stop stealing and begin to do some hard, honest labor.... By using his hands in honest work, the worker will be accomplishing something that is good instead of doing that which is bad, contrary to God’s law.”¹⁷⁹

Talking Back and Respect to Parents

Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

¹⁷⁹ William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), Part 2, 219-220.

Exodus 21:15, 17, “And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death... And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

Deuteronomy 21:18-21, “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.”

The Immoral Woman, Seductress

Proverbs 2:16-20, “To deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God. For her house leads down to death, and her paths to the dead; none who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life—so you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness.”

Proverbs 5:3-5, “For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell” (Prov. 5:1-23).

Proverbs 6:23-29, “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, from the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (cf. Prov. 7:5-27; 20:16; 22:14; 27:13; 29:3; 30:20).

Copyright © Brian Schwertley, Lansing, Michigan, 1998

[HOME PAGE](#)

