THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Walk Before Me"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*September 8, 2002; No. 3114*

Dear radio friends,

We are going to begin today a series on the theme "Covenant Godly Living," sermons which are intended to build us up in our marriage, in raising of children, as well as in our own personal walk of godliness in this world. You ask, "But what do you mean by that theme: Covenant Godly Living?"

The covenant is that truth of Scripture, from its beginning to its end, of the bond of friendship with God given to us through the blood of Jesus Christ, in which God becomes our God and we are made His people, who now live under the blessing of God and desire to show forth His praise in all we do. Covenant, godly living emphasizes that this covenant is not simply an external code, that religion is not merely an outward matter, but that true covenant living is fueled by personal godliness. Covenant, godly living - that is, the truth of God's gracious covenant as applied to our life in our home, in our marriage, and in every aspect of our walk.

I would like to begin today by laying the foundation of what covenant, godly living is to be. Covenant, godly living, according to the Scriptures is built upon true, experiential knowledge of God. The text that I have chosen, Genesis 17:1, is very instructive on this point. We read, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." Genesis 17 is one of the great chapters in the Bible in the unfolding of the truth of God's covenant. God is come to dismantle Abram's hope in his son Ishmael and to tell him that God would give Sarai a son. But if Abram is to embrace this truth, and if Abram, in the broader context, is to live a covenant, godly life, a life of true fellowship and friendship with God, then Abram's faith must be placed upon a bedrock. What is that bedrock? This: "I am Almighty God to you, Abram. Walk before Me and be thou perfect."

To walk with God, to live a life of fellowship with God, must be built upon this: A deep, Spirit-worked, heart-understood knowledge of the all-sufficient God who loved me, and the desire that in every aspect of my life, I will live for the approval of His eyes. That is covenant, godly living. Is that your life? Is that an adequate description, by the grace of God, of your life today? Do you live a covenant, godly life? That is, do you know God in such a way that you are awed? Your pride is broken down within you. And yet, you feel yourself drawn irresistibly by His grace and love. And, in Christ, you desire to do *everything* to please Him? Covenant, godly living is to walk consciously before the Almighty God.

Let us emphasize that point. Covenant, godly living is built upon and draws its strength from a staggering, soul-shaking understanding of God as the Almighty God. "I am Almighty God," says God to Abram, "therefore, walk before me, and be thou perfect." Mark it down in your heart. **Those who have lived most godly, those who have shown the power of faith in their life, those who have lived faithfully in their marriage and reared their children in a holy way are those who have known the majesty of God.** And if you and I are to live godly in this present world, a world given over to self and saturated in every form of evil, then we must possess the knowledge of the Almighty God. And if we are to experience the blessing of God in our life, then we must have our life built upon one foundation: "I am Almighty God. Walk before Me and be thou perfect."

You see, in our text, God is saying that He intends His name to be the foundation of Abram's life. God, in Genesis 17, has come to speak to Abraham of great things, not the least of which would be that He would give him a son at the age of ninety-nine years. But Abram's ability to believe all these things, and to respond faithfully, would be dependent upon one thing: this faith worked in his heart that God was Almighty God to him.

I am Almighty God. In the Hebrew, the word is "El Shaddai." Genesis 17:1 is the very first time that we find the word for God used in Scripture. It is composed of two words: El, or Elohim, the most common name of God in the Old Testament. El, which is simply God - a name which expresses the truth of His greatness and glory as the Creator of all things in six, twenty-four hour days, and as the Ruler of all things. The word "El," or God, oozes with the truth of His omnipotence, that is, His all-power and sovereignty, that is, He rules over all things (Deuteronomy 10:17, "For the LORD your God (or El, your Elohim) is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward"). As Elohim, God creates all things. As El, He is the One whose being is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. As God, He possesses, owns heaven and earth. He is *God.*

El Shaddai, translated God Almighty. Now that is not merely a redundancy or repetition. The word Shaddai, or Almighty, is literally, "self-sufficient," or "all-sufficient," and thus, the God who sheds forth blessing, the God who provides all things. God Almighty emphasizes that God is able to carry out all of His purposes, to accomplish His plans to the fullest, to triumph over every obstacle, and to supply every need to us His children. He is the inexhaustible store of all mercy and power. He is El Shaddai, there is no want or lack in Him.

I am Almighty God. That implies that God says to us and to Abram, "You are dependent. You are insufficient. But I am God Almighty, powerful to pour out My blessing upon you." And that is the way God uses His name in our text. There had been a period of thirteen years of silence. Abram had now been in the land of Canaan for twenty-five years. Thirteen years earlier, his wife had suggested that he have a son with Hagar, named Ishmael. But now God has come to tell him that it is not Ishmael who will be that promised son, promised to Abram. But Sarah his wife shall have a son. God has waited until Abram's body is dead. Through the long period of years it had become abundantly clear that they could not have any children. "Yet," God says, "you shall have a child, Abram, with Sarah. And I will tell you why. Because I am El Shaddai. I am Almighty God. Abram, I'm sufficient. Your life with Me must be built upon that truth."

And for Abram it was. It staggered Abram, it overwhelmed him, it knocked him off his feet. Look at verse 3 of this chapter, "And Abram fell on his face." There was imparted to Abram's faith such a knowledge of God, of God as He is in Himself; there was imparted to Abram such a knowledge of himself as an insufficient sinner - that Abram was staggered. And knowing the bounty of his God and the power of his God, Abram believed in the Almighty God whose promise must stand forever sure.

Now that is the foundation, that is the heart of godly, covenant living. If you are to live a life of covenant, of friendship with God; if you are to live a God-honoring life in your marriage, as a child, in your family, in your church, in your work - it must be built upon this shattering, wonderful declaration: "I am Almighty God to you. I am powerful and able to fulfill all that I have promised and to bless those who patiently wait upon Me."

Apply that now to your soul. The single most determinative factor in your Christian life, in your living a holy life, in your marriage, in rearing your children, is to know and to tremble in faith before El Shaddai and to hear Him say, "I am Almighty God to you." If you are to be pure in your body, if you are to keep your head above the water of materialism and self-worship, then you must hear, deep down in the chambers of your own heart: "I am Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." Right now that is the most important factor in your covenant living. It *will be* simply the most important factor when troubles start to come and darkness closes round about you and the world's love appeals to your flesh. But, no! You must have this right now, before your affection for your wife or husband begins to cool; before the world begins to hold out more attraction to you as a young person with its parties, its money, its good times; before your child becomes a stranger to you and communication becomes a problem. Before all of these things arrive, you must, today, live in the knowledge that God is Almighty God to you.

Are you close to God? That is a simple question. What is your answer? Are you close to God? Do you live your life as if you are standing right before His feet (for you are)? Do you read the Scriptures? Do you engage in prayer? Do you attend church faithfully? You say, "Well, no, but I'm too busy." Too busy with what? God is our business! People of God, there is one thing that we are upon the earth for. That is to know El Shaddai, to base all of our life in Him as the Almighty God.

Notice that God is saying to us that He is sufficient. He is sufficient for everything. And that is the experience of all the saints. God, then, is sufficient. "I am El Shaddai. I am sufficient for you today."

Therefore, He says, "walk before me, and be thou perfect." Now, there is a figure of speech here that God is employing with Abram. He simply means to say to Abram (and to you and to me) that we must live our life for the eye of God, for God's approval. That makes sense. If He is El Shaddai, Almighty God, totally sufficient and completely sovereign, then every part of our life must be lived to please Him. Our walk in the Bible refers to the way in which we live. But not simply the external part. That, for sure. But more than that. Our walk of life is our life as we live that life from the heart. Our walk of life is not just the outward part that is seen. The outward part could be your act of life. It is possible to go through the acts of a Christian life and then to have it said "that person walks as a Christian." But that is not necessarily true. For the Christian walk is not only the outward. No, the Christian walk of life is our life as we live it from the heart. And that is our walk. What you are in your heart is what you are. Your walk of life is your life as regulated from the heart. And the Christian walk of life is that life regulated from the new heart that God has given by His Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ.

Now God says, "Walk before Me, that is, walk in the consciousness that I am before you and do everything in your life to please Me."

Let me put it as simply as I can. **To walk before God means that God's smile upon your life is the one thing you covet the most**. And God's frown upon your life would be the one thing that you would dread above all others.

Walk before Me, Abram. You and I, walk before Him in the consciousness that He is before us and that we desire to please Him in everything that we do.

You understand that that will free us. Walking before the Almighty God wrenches us loose from a life lived for the approval of the world and the approval of others and the approval of self. By nature we look for approval. You cannot get away from that. That is true. Even for the young person who says, "I'm my own man. I don't care what people think," that is not true. We are very self-conscious and very conscious of what others think about us. We are, by nature, idolaters. And we seek the approval of others, of the world, or ourselves. And for that approval we will serve them. But, you see, now redeemed in Jesus Christ and brought into the covenant of God, given to know the Almighty God, there will be one thought that frees our soul. What does God say about me? What does God think of me? And God sees me in Jesus Christ as His child. The world wants you to live before their eyes. They want you to conform to their standards and to walk in their way. They want you to measure up. So maybe, as a Christian, you begin simply to dress provocatively the way they do. Or you, as a young person, swagger, and you walk the way you have seen it on the television. The world wants you to line up and to follow along like a bunch of sheep.

But, as children of God, we are free. Now the only thing that matters is what God thinks about us. And we are free to serve Him from our hearts. That means that we will regulate our words, our actions, and our thoughts as if we are in the presence of God. Indeed, we are in the presence of God! Is God, God to you? How much so? If you simply say what you want to in your anger and in your frustration and in your irritation, and if you say, "Well, I'm free to think what I want to about that person," and you harbor evil thoughts and resentments, then God is not God to you for all your insistence. Oh, no. When God is God to us, that will regulate our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

"Walk before me, and be thou perfect." The word "perfect" here is not sinless. But it means complete and whole. Be sincere. Be wholehearted. "Do not try to serve Me," says God, "with a divided affection. Don't try to give half of your heart to Me and half of it to the world, half of it in church and half of it somewhere else. Serve Me undivided, with one heart. Devote *all* your love and *all* your heart to Me."

Walk before Me, Abram, and be thou perfect. Do you know that blessed experience? I am Almighty God. Every part of this is evil to the wicked. "I am Almighty God." The wicked, unconverted man gnashes his teeth against that. He says, "There is no power over me. I don't need God's aid. I'm my own man and I'm self-sufficient." And so he continues apart from God's grace in his course of folly.

"Walk before me and be thou perfect." The unconverted man says that is the greatest dread. "I don't want God to see me. I don't want to think about the fact that I must appear before God. I want everything to deny God and to hide from me the truth that I live before Him."

But, by the grace of God (and here's the mark of God's grace), we reckon with this word: "I am Almighty God. Walk before Me and be thou perfect." Do you reckon with that in your heart? That's God's grace. And that is the most blessed of all experiences. To trust in El Shaddai, to trust in the living God - not a god of man's imagination, not a god of wood and stone, not a god who was made by men - but the God who remains unmade, and eternal, and who has made all things and upholds them by His own hand and has promised to be all-sufficient to us. To walk before Him, to know that He sees me every moment in my trials and afflictions, that He holds me within His hands - ah, that is godly, covenant living! What a wonder.

And then the comfort is this: It is not so much that we always see Him and are conscious of Him, for we must confess today that in our sin we do not. We should, but we do not. But the comfort is this: He sees us. He *is* almighty God to us, not first by our initiative, but by His almighty initiative. He has made Himself known to us in Jesus. And now He calls us to walk before Him. God grant it.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy word today. And we pray that Thou wilt bless it unto our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Biblical Manhood"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*September 15, 2002; No. 3115*

Dear radio friends,

Covenant, godly living. Do those words accurately describe your life?

What is covenant, godly living? The truth of the covenant is that truth, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, of the bond of fellowship with God in Jesus Christ. Godly living, that is, the covenant, is not merely an outward form of religion. It is not merely to play religion. But it comes forth from the grace of God in our hearts.

Covenant, godly *living,* that is, the friendship of God and living a godly life, reaches down to every area of our life and, therefore, must control our marriage, the rearing of our children, and our own individual walk of life. Now, do you live a covenant, godly life?

You ask, "But what is the heart of a covenant, godly life?" We sought to answer that last time. In the book of Genesis, chapter 17, verse 1, where God appeared to Abram, we found the very heart of a covenant, godly life. It is a profound, shattering knowledge that God *is* almighty God to me, and it is a commitment that every part of my life shall be lived for God's eyes.

We would like to continue our series by fleshing this truth out a bit. We begin by applying it to ourselves as men.

We ask the question today, "What is covenant, godly living for a believing man?" We ask an even more basic question: What is a man? What is biblical manhood? "Be a man," we are told from our little days. What is it to be a man? Is it some macho thing - iron-bodied, chiseled jaw, dark and wavy hair? Is it to know how to handle a woman? If you look around in the world for your definition of a man, you will end up with a self-inflated brute.

What does God say a man is?

I'd like to answer that question by following an old adage that one picture is worth a thousand words. So, I'd like to look at the picture of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, who was zealous for the Lord's sake. Phinehas' story is found in Numbers 25:10-13. We will take our message from that passage today. Open your Bibles to Numbers 25:10-13 and read that passage.

**The heart of biblical manhood is to live out of a zeal for God**. Phinehas is the example. Do not say that he is an unattainable ideal. Do not say, "But now wait a minute, that comes from the Old Testament. But we live in a different age than way back then. We live in a day of open sex and different influences and powers. You can't expect us to live the way he did. Besides, don't you believe that we are saved by grace, so our life really doesn't matter?" No, no, do not say any of that. Phinehas is given by God in His infallible Word to be for us a picture of biblical manhood and what it means in every day life to be a man.

To be a man of God is to live out of zeal for God. Nothing less is a man of God.

The setting in Numbers 25 is this: Israel was about to enter the land of Canaan. They were so close. Only miles separated them now from the promised land. They had been journeying for forty years with much testing. And they were about to enter into the picture of heaven itself, the Old Testament land of Canaan. Yet, although they were so close, they showed that, according to their own sinful nature, they were a long way from Canaan. They remained undeserving.

It happened, the incident of Phinehas, after the strategy of a false prophet called Balaam. The king of Moab, Balak, had hired Balaam to curse Israel. You can read of that in Numbers 22-24. And Balaam tried three times to curse Israel, so that he could gain the gold and silver that he was promised. But, instead of uttering a curse, his mouth spoke a blessing.

But evidently the greedy Balaam counseled Balak the king of Moab that there was another way to get at the children of Israel, a way in which God's wrath would burn against Israel. So his counsel was that Balak would get the women of Midian to dance before the men of Israel, to lure them into fornication, and then to have them commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Baalpeor. Baalpeor was a place where the idol Baal was served. At that service of Baal were also houses of prostitution, where every evil would be performed. Balaam aimed then at the genocide of God's people. He wanted the men of Israel to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab and to join themselves to Baalpeor.

That was no little sin. And it actually happened. That temptation occurred and many of the men of Israel followed. That was not a little sin! That is not a little sin today in the church. Fornication is not a little sin.

The utter seriousness of it comes out exactly when we are told that Israel joined themselves to Baalpeor. That is the whole point. God will not share. God is jealous. The sin of fornication is a picture of the child of God joining with sin. But God says, "That won't be; that can't be, because I have redeemed you to Myself in the blood of My Son. I have called you out of the world. And I have joined you to Myself. You are not to be joined to sin, but to Me." The love of God is not neutral. Nor is God neutral. When His people join themselves to sin, then God comes in His faithful chastening.

The sin that was committed by Israel came to its boldness in a man called Zimri, who was a prince in the nation of Israel. He took a woman of Moab, who was also from a chief house. He took her in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the congregation who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle. He took her into his own tent to commit fornication with her, defiantly, shamelessly, openly, demonically. He said, "I don't care what you say. There is only me, my lust, and my appetite."

In our day it is the same thing. This sin is very loud. It is out in the open. It is as a great monster sucking up men, controlling men and women. Apparently even Moses was shocked. And the people of God were shocked and frozen and stood there.

But then we read that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the grandson of Aaron, saw it and rose up with a javelin in his hand and went after the man and entered into the tent. With one thrust of his javelin, he killed both of them in their act of lust. And the Holy Spirit points now to Phinehas and to the source of his courage, to what lay behind his act. His act was not the self-righteous act of a man. It was not the act of some Islamic fanatic who says that women ought to be pure - while he charges pornography on his credit card. It was not simply a man who was trying to uphold the cultural norms of society. No, Phinehas acted because he was zealous for God. The Word of God says, "He was zealous for My sake among them [the people]."

That is a man of God. That is biblical manhood, to have a zeal for God.

What is zeal for God? The word "zeal" is jealousy or zealous. To be concerned about one's rights is the intent - an ardent insistence on what belongs to one. God is a jealous God. God insists on what belongs to Him - His name and His honor. He is committed to His own honor. He is God, whose is the right to command and who determines what we are to be. He is God who has taken to Himself a church, a wife, and has redeemed this church for Himself. He will not share the affections of His people. He will not compromise on His holy Word. He is God. God's jealousy is simply His insistence that He *is* God and shall be God.

To be zealous for God means that we desire God to be God to us, that we acknowledge Him as God, and that we desire Him to be exalted. This zeal for God was seen, above all, in Jesus Christ His Son. The Scriptures say of Him, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (John 2:17). He said to His disciples, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of…My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (John 4:32-34). Jesus Christ was a God-centered man. Jesus Christ lived in zeal for God - that God would be glorified. He lived out of one holy passion: to do the will of Him that sent Him.

Zeal in us as men of God is rooted in Jesus Christ. In Christ we also have a holy zeal for God. **Zeal for God, then, is an overwhelming desire of the heart to be devoted to the honor of God in your life**. It will cause you, as a man, to buck the stream of popular opinion, to buck the stream of lust and greed and ambition and pride and drunkenness. These things shall not rule in your life. But God shall be the center and the sum of all of your affections. Zeal for God is a pleasure and a satisfaction of our soul in the service of God which no other thing can impart to us.

Now, you say, "all of that sounds real good in theory, but we live in this world, with the old man of sin in us. How in the world can we be truly men who have zeal for God, since we are sinful and live in a wicked world?" The answer: only by God's grace.

Do you know what that means? That means that God gives you to see Him in His majesty and to see yourself in your sin and filth and corruption. That is sovereign grace. A man of God? A man of God is one who has been emptied of himself, of his self-pleasing, of his self-serving, and of his self-loving, and is now filled with one holy thing: to do the will of God who has saved him.

I said "emptied" of self. That word is too nice. That word would imply that if spiritually we could somehow be turned upside-down, all of our self-love and self-centeredness would just pour out nice and clean and easy. That is not the way it works. I should say instead, to be scraped out of our self. A man of God is one who knows the scalpel of God's Word, daily cutting down and cutting out his own sinful self, identifying himself. A man of God is one who understands that there is not a half-step between himself and God. There is an infinite chasm. I am a sinner. Yet this God, who has shown to me my sins, is also a God of mercy, who has willed to take me into His arms.

That is zeal for God. Listen to another man of God express zeal: Job. I abhor myself, for I have heard of him and mine eyes have seen the king of glory.

Are you a man of God? Do you have biblical manhood?

No man in an office or on the job-site, or young man in the locker room, when he is confronted with sexual filth and is pulled to go along with it and to laugh at the joke, is going to withstand that and stand up for God - if he has not been given to know himself as a sinner, to see the Lord in His glory and to say with the apostle: "I am what I am by the grace of God." No husband is going to take up the duties to care for all the spiritual needs of his family, the emotional needs of his wife, and to take up his headship and to deny himself if he has not seen himself as a sinner and the Lord in His glory. No father is going to have patience with his son, the infant or the strong-willed child, if he is not a man filled with zeal for God.

Are you filled with zeal for God? Do you understand that you are not a little Caesar, that you are a sinner, and that God in mercy has saved you, and that now God has become everything to you? You see, that is what it means to be a man. A man is not measured in feet and inches. A man is not measured by how much he can bench-press. A man is not measured by how many beers he can chug and still count his fingers. **A man is not measured by the car that he drives or the swagger in his walk**. If that's the way you measure a man, you are a fool.

No, a man is measured this way: Does he have zeal for the living God, the God who has loved him out of a dunghill and sworn to be a covenant God to him? Then he will take up his responsibilities as did Phinehas. He will be zealous for God's sake among His people. He will have courage.

What is courage? Courage flows from zeal for God. Courage is trust in God. The humblest child of God who is distrustful of himself but resolved that God shall be glorified by him, is the most courageous child of God.

A man who has zeal for God will also express it in responsibility. We could imagine that Phinehas could have reasoned that day this way, "Well, wait a minute. Moses is the leader of the people of God. Let's see what he's going to do about this." Or, "Well, that's the elders' job, isn't it? Doesn't Moses have seventy elders around here? Where are they? Shouldn't they do this?" Or, "Well, I'm from the tribe of Levi, and the true rule is supposed to come from Judah, isn't it? So, we'll just wait to see what the men of Judah will do about this."

No, Phinehas assumed responsibility - because he loved God's people and he saw himself standing among God's people and, therefore, responsible for how things were going. The man of God takes responsibility. When Adam fell as the first man, what aspect of his being created as a man did he deny first? What aspect of his manhood did he lose first? It was the aspect of responsibility. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she…." All right, when the grace of God implants in your soul zeal for God and He gives you biblical manhood, then how will it evidence itself? You will take up your responsibility before God. You will not make excuses for yourself, but you will take up your responsibility in the church, in your marriage, and in your home.

Single young men, do you have zeal for God? Do you have manhood? What are you intense about? Sports, money, car, computers, looks? Or God in you. Are you intense about that? Do you love God? Do you love Him with an undivided affection? Are you guilty of showing disregard for His church, for others, for your mother? Do you pray for purity? Do you pray for purity in yourself and in your sisters in Christ? Are you zealous for God in the face of all the pornography that seeks to gobble your soul? Do you have zeal for God in doctrine? Do you love God's Word? Do you want the honor of His name and the truth?

Husbands, are you men of God? Do you have manhood? Do you seek the advancement of God in your wife? Do you want her to be lovely to God? In your marriage, do you live for yourself, for your happiness? If you do, you have your head on backwards. But do you see that you are responsible for your marriage, and you should not make excuses about your wife, but you are responsible? Is there a passion in your marriage for God?

Fathers, are you men of God? Do you have biblical manhood? Do you instruct your children? Are they learning from you how glorious God is? Are they learning from you how to be a husband and to lead a wife?

Is it zeal for God that comes into your life as a child? Is it zeal for God that influences you concerning your friends and what you watch and do not watch?

Biblical manhood is to have a zeal for God alone. God must give that. By the grace of God, let us go to Him. Let us confess that we are not men. We have forfeited everything. Let us confess that we are wretches, cowards. But let us pray for God to restore in us manhood in Christ and to implant in our hearts zeal for God.

Be it with a small beginning, may it be that He gives us zeal for God. Then we may live in confidence. For God says to a man of God, "them that honour me I will honour.” (1 Samuel 2:30)

Let us live as men of God with zeal for the glory of God.

Father in heaven, write Thy word on our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Covenant Fathers" (1)**

Rev. Carl Haak

*September 22, 2002; No. 3116*

Dear radio friends,

Continuing today our series on "Covenant Godly Living" and emphasizing again what that means for a man, we come to the calling of a husband. I speak to you today on Covenant Husbands. The passage of Scripture on which I base my remarks is Colossians 3:19: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."

As our announcer said, "Doctrine determines life; belief dictates practice." We read in Proverbs 23:7, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." That is, the thinking of one's heart determines how one will be. The belief, the pattern of thought of the heart, dictates practice.

Nowhere is this so true in life as in marriage. Your belief of the truth of Scripture will determine how you live in marriage, your true belief, specifically your belief in what is called the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace, we have explained in the last weeks, is that bond of fellowship and friendship that God makes with us in Jesus Christ, in which He swears to be God to us and to be faithful to us, and in which He gives us the privilege of loving Him and serving Him.

That covenant of grace is reflected in the New Testament Scriptures in terms of Christ and the church. Now, I say to you, your understanding of the biblical truth of the covenant of grace and your understanding of the biblical truth of Christ and the church will dictate and must dictate how you live in marriage. Specifically, your thinking on so crucial a truth as the love of God will determine and must determine how you live in your marriage.

If you picture the love of God as a changeable thing, if you picture the love of God as a conditional thing; your love in your marriage will be changeable, and conditioned upon the actions and words of the other.

But if you believe the truth of the Scriptures that the love of God is changeless, that the covenant of God is faithful, and that the bond of Christ and His church is an unbreakable bond of love, then you understand your calling to be faithful and loving in your marriage.

We read in Jeremiah 31:3 God's statement, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Now the clearest picture of the covenant of God is marriage. In fact, God has made marriage to be a picture of the covenant that He has made with His people in His Son Jesus Christ. Nowhere is that so beautifully expressed as in Hosea 2:19 and 20. Listen. "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD."

The truth of the Bible is that marriage is given by God to be a picture of His bond of marriage with His people. **The truth of the Bible is that marriage was originally created by God and still remains, according to God's intention, to be a reflection of Christ and His marriage to the church. Therefore, our marriages have a perfect pattern, a perfect goal, and a perfect standard.**

Now, your believing these truths of the covenant of God as being an unbreakable bond, and the union between Christ and His church as being an everlasting marriage, will not guarantee all happiness in your marriage. It is not going to remove your sins and the devastation of your sin in your marriage right now. In your marriage, you are not immune from any trials and from any weaknesses and any shortcomings. But belief in the covenant of God does do this: it gives you grace, it gives you hope, it gives you humility, it gives you enduring, unconditional love, it brings you to enjoy the blessing of marriage.

But, you see, all of this must be internalized, by the power of the Holy Spirit. I can show you, and I can show myself, from the holy Scriptures the doctrine of Christ and the church, that Christ has loved the church and will not cast her away. I can show you the truth of an unconditional covenant of God established in Jesus Christ, dependent upon God's own being as the faithful God. But, you see, all of that must be internalized in your heart by the Holy Spirit. And then it will be the determining factor in your earthly marriage.

Do you believe the love of God? Do you know that love of God as almighty? Do you know the covenant of God with you as an unbreakable bond sworn in the death of Jesus Christ? Then your marriage will reflect that. As a husband, you will initiate reconciliation with your wife. You will love her and you will give up your life for her.

The passage that I wish to speak on a little today, Colossians 3:19, is straight forward. "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." As we come specifically to it, I want to remind you that this is distinctively Christian teaching. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean this, that the Scriptures do not take their place alongside books on marriage. The Scriptures are not simply sage counsel. Paul is not simply saying, "Well, men, from my observation the best thing you can do is try to love her." The Bible does not join human counsel on how you can learn to cope or decide what is in your best interest. No, this is distinctively Christian teaching, that is, it flows from the cross.

Specifically it is the word of the all-sufficient Savior. That is the theme of the book of Colossians. Christ is all sufficient. Therefore, we do not come to this Word of God and say, "But that's not going to work for me now. I need something more than that." The theme of the book of Colossians, as I said, is the sufficiency of Jesus. Listen to Colossians 2:10. It is a wonderful passage; it thrills with power. "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." Colossians 1:17, "by him (that is, in Christ) all things consist," all things hold together. This is the word of the all-sufficient Savior. In Colossians 3:17, the apostle began a new paragraph, in which he will speak of marriage, of wives and of husbands. But he is speaking out of the reality of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the inspired apostle believes that Christ, risen from the dead, will provide the power and the ability to do this, to love our wives. "If ye then be risen with Christ," Colossians 3:1, well, you will love your wife.

The apostle, further, believes that Christ will give your marriage the right goal, the right purpose. That purpose was stated in Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." **The goal, then, of your marriage will not first be your happiness.** But you will see your marriage subservient to another purpose: the glory of your God.

Further, the apostle Paul believes that Christ will also be the One who gives a true pattern for how you will live in your marriage. We read of that in Colossians 3:13: "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." In Christ, you will be able to stoop low and to love in a humble, forgiving love.

God is addressing, then, Christian men who are husbands, that is, men who have been placed by God in the institution of marriage and given a wife. A husband.

Now, let us not forget all that we have learned about biblical manhood. Biblical manhood, we saw last time, is to have zeal for the Lord God. Again, in the words of the epistle, a man of God is one who knows that Christ has the preeminence, and that Christ is the One who has translated him out of darkness into His marvelous light.

A man of God, then, is mature. To be mature means that God is God to you, and you know how you must live before Him. Are you mature as a man? Single men, are you mature? Have you renounced yourselves, your earthly, fleshly ideas of a woman, and are you resolved that you will glorify God and obey God? If you do not have that maturity, I do not care how old you are or how much money you have, do not marry! First have the maturity of Christ.

But what is a husband? To answer that, let us turn to two passages of the Word which will give the answer.

First of all, Genesis 2:18-25. I trust that is familiar. There we learn that a husband has been bound by God to one woman, his wife, for life; and he is given the calling to care for her, to live with her, and to seek his life in her. God, in Genesis 2, had Adam first name the animals. And Adam observed that there was no help meet for him. Then a deep sleep was placed upon Adam, and out of his rib the Lord God made a woman and brought her to the man. And Adam said, "This is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. She shall be called Woman." God said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

What happened was this: God entrusted to Adam a woman, Eve, the mother of all living, so that Adam would cleave to her and she to him, that he would protect her, care for her, lead her and provide for her even as God was going to take to Himself a people to love, to cleave to, to lead and to provide for them.

A husband, therefore, is one who looks at his wife and says, "The Lord has given you to me to complement me, that I might seek my life in you." Adam said, "Here are the giraffes and the orangutans, the tigers and the zebras and the lions. But, as wonderful as all of those animals are, they don't supply my needs. For I have not been made simply to study zoology. Nor have I been made to find my completion in being a gardener in the Garden of Eden. I need a companion. I don't need another me, not a male, two males, but a female, a woman, to be my wife, to be my companion. I need her for godly children and I need her for a sexual life to be one flesh with her in the love of God. I need my wife to complete me, to care for her, and to live with her (one woman) for life."

Now, husband, God gave you your wife today. And He said to you, "Think of your wife as the perfect, God-ordained, and God-designed companion and help to you. That is the way you have to think, for, indeed, she is exactly that. We do not believe in chance. We believe that God controls and orders all things. And God brings to us our wives just like He brought Eve to Adam and, therefore, God says, "Whether you see it or even believe it in your heart, you must know that I have made her a companion and help for you, the perfect one for you." Do you have wandering eyes? You are sinning against God.

Now you are to cleave to her. You are to cleave to her sexually. You are to be faithful to her and live with her. You are to give your wife your time. Your wife needs your time. Maybe there are all kinds of hobbies that you are interested in - night out with the guys, all types of things. Or maybe your work puts a lot of pressures on you. And if you like your work, you could be at it for eighteen hours a day or more. Then you have to learn to say, No! to that work and No! to your hobbies. You must give her your time.

The second thing is that a husband is the head of his wife. For that truth of Scripture, let me read to you from Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." And I Corinthians 11:3, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man." Now, what does that mean?

The Bible is calling us to look to the reality of Christ as the Head of the church. That means that God appointed His Son in the flesh, from His counsel in eternity, legally to represent the church, to assume responsibility for the church, to rule, and to lay down His life for the church.

Husbands, do you know your Head, Jesus Christ? Do you know what that means? It means that He assumed out of grace the responsibility for you. It means that He rules over you always, with your best interest at His heart. It means that He leads you and nurtures you and gives you to grow. Now, be the head of your wife. Assume towards her the posture that Christ has taken towards you. Nurture and cherish your wife and be the head of her even as Christ is your head.

Now, note with me that you *are* the head of your wife. It does not say *become* the head of your wife. You are. It might be a question of what kind of a head you are. That we need to ask. But you are the head of your wife. Do not abdicate because this is hard, and do not neglect this. In other words, as a husband you are holding an office from God. That office is to be the head, under God, to your wife.

Now, what does that mean, specifically? I think it means two things. First of all, authority. That is on the forefront in Colossians 3:18, where we read, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." We are going to leave that truth of the submission of the wife to another time. But it implies that **a husband, as the head of his wife, has the authority from God to lead his wife in the ways of God**. It means that, although your wife is your helpmeet and, therefore, you talk to her and you make your decisions with her, it means that you are the one who is to lead in your marriage.

But it means another thing. It means responsibility. To be the head of your wife means that you are responsible for your marriage, for your wife. The husband *is* the head of the wife. That is inescapable. Husband, have you ever reckoned with the fact that you are responsible for the state of your marriage? Do you begin by saying, "Well, if we have problems, it's her fault"? You are the head and are responsible for the state of your marriage.

Now, husbands and wives both have their own sins. We must confess individually our own sins. As wives you have to go to God and confess your sins. No one can do that for you. And husbands must do the same. That is true. But whether the problem in marriage is due to the sin of the wife or of the husband or both, the point remains that the husband is responsible for the problem because he is the head. His is the responsibility before God for his covenant household. Do not enter into your marriage with an adversarial spirit of competition saying, "Well, the wife is over there and I'm over here. And we each have our own perspective. And we'll just see who is going to get his way." She is not your opponent. You are her head. You are to lead her. Do not say, "Well, she has her problems and I have mine. What we need is a counselor to split the difference between us." Oh, no. Husband, you are the head. You are responsible.

When you come home tired at night and she says, "That son, that child, that daughter, I've had trouble disciplining her," that is not *her* problem. That is *your* problem. You are the head of your household. Listen. As our Head, Jesus Christ assumed responsibility for our sins. Now you are given an office to reflect Him. You are the head of your wife. Take up your place. Do not come to God in your prayers and say, "Lord, it's my wife. She…." Do not talk that way to God. The husband is the head of the wife.

Let us return to this next time. May the Holy Spirit apply and bless His Word to our hearts.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word and we pray that, indeed, the Holy Spirit may place it upon the fleshly tables of our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Covenant Fathers (2)"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*September 29, 2002; No. 3117*

Dear Radio Friends,

Last week we began a study of a very important verse in the Bible on marriage, Colossians 3:19, where we read, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." It is short and straight-forward.

We saw that a husband has been given by God a wife for life and that he is to be the head of his wife, that is, the one who is responsible for her and for the marriage.

Today we are going to continue by looking now at the call of God as to what a husband is supposed to *do*, namely, husbands, love your wives.

Now, what does that mean? What is love? Young girls listening, what is love? Is it an emotion that gets hold of you and sweeps you up and gives you a feeling? Is that all that it is? And men, what is love? Shall we simply say, "What we need around this house is a little more love and things would be better"? Is that the way we talk? Well, what is love?

There are two passages of the Word of God that will give us the answer. The first is found in the same chapter as our text, Colossians 3:14. There we read, "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." To love your wife means that you love her with the love of God. Now, the love of God is not a natural commodity, that is, it is not something that grows deep down in your own heart. The love of God is a wonder. The love of God is something that has to be given. It is a gift to you. We read in I John 4:7-8, "every one that loveth is born of God…for God is love." You must be born of God. God must create this love in you by a miracle of His grace. He must put in you the life of Jesus, and then that love must be nurtured and instructed through the Scriptures. Love is not identical to a human passion. It is not found in the hormones. That is lust. It is not centered in self. Love is not the overwhelming desire to own another person, to possess and then to tyrannize that person.

The Bible says that love is a bond of perfection. Now, what does that mean? A bond, of course, is a union, it is a cleaving together, a holding together. The Bible says that love is a union in perfection or holiness. We read in the Bible, "God is love." The triune, covenant God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - they love each other. They are bound together in holiness, in purity, in delight of the truth, in perfect, shameless acceptance of each other. You see, God's love is not "dirty." But God's love is to be joined and tied together in the holiness of Jesus Christ.

Love is, therefore, a holy affection for God. It is the tender lovingkindness toward others in the love of God. It is a delight in God and a delight in others.

Husbands, love your wife with God's love, that is, stick with her in holy affection. Guard your heart, man, against sexual sins, pornography, the magazines, imagining other women, lust. Is the love in your heart at its very center the love of God?

Love is knowledge. Jesus loves us, we know that. And that love is always knowledge - He knows us. Therefore, to love your wife, husbands, means that your call from God is to know her and to learn how to express your love to her, to learn her language of love. Maybe you wanted to express your love to her and you bought her some flowers, you came home with this beautiful bouquet of flowers and you came in as she was changing the diapers and the other kids were hanging on her legs and she said, "Oh, how nice." And she set it aside and did not pay a whole lot of attention to it right then and there. And you were hurt. And you say, "Oh, how cold. Here I bring her this beautiful gift." Well, maybe it would have been better that you had expressed your love that night by emptying the dishwasher or being a help to her in some other way. Not maybe. That is the way you should have done it.

Or you want to show your love to your wife and you say, "I'm going to give her a hug." And she responds, "Not now, leave me alone, I'm too busy." And you are hurt again and say, “Oh, boy, this is a hard woman to love.” Maybe, then, you should just leave her a little note on the nightstand when you get up and leave for work in the morning.

The point is, you have to learn her and you have to learn to love her in the way that gets across to her.

The second passage which will teach us about love is Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Now, that says everything. That says it all, does it not? How are we to love our wives? As Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. Maybe you say to me today, "But I didn't really have a good example of how to love a wife. My heart was torn in divorce." Or, "My parents didn't know the Lord." Or, "It's my makeup. I don't communicate, I don't really know how to express love. I don't know how to love."

Is it not true that when every Christian man gets married he thinks that it should not be too hard to love, but he finds out rather soon that, due to his sin and the sin of his wife, that he does not even know how to love? Then listen. Listen as God speaks. Believe in your heart that God speaks to you now. Love her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.

I do not know the state of your marriage at this point. I do not know whether you are getting along or whether there is tension and distance in your marriage. I do not know if this morning you went to church bickering all the way in front of your kids or if you went as you ought to, with reverence in your heart to worship the Lord as a family. I do not know these things. But I do know this: at this moment God has prepared His Word for you and for me. Here it is: "Love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." That applies to every husband listening at this very moment. God is saying that to you now. You want to know how to love your wife? Then open your Bible, get down on your knees, and learn of the mystery of how Christ loved the church, how Christ loved *you,* and then go and do thou likewise.

Doctrine determines life. Yes, it does. How you understand God and how you understand Christ and how you understand the love of Christ will determine how you set about living with your wife. If you do not love your wife, if you do not show reasonable expressions of love for your wife, do not walk around saying, "Oh, I love God and the Reformed faith and the sovereignty of God." Do not say that, because you do not. If you know God and you know the love of Christ, you are to love her as Christ loved you.

How do you know that love of Christ deep down in your heart right now? That will determine how you are going to love your wife. I would like to interject here the great need of the church of Jesus Christ to stand fast in doctrine. This is a great burden, a great need in the church. Stand fast in doctrine. I know that immediately, whenever the church wants to insist on truth, people say, "Oh, how cold. Will you please be relevant?" Listen, the most relevant church is that church which holds fast to the truth of God's Word. That is a relevant, in-touch church. We must know the love of God in Jesus Christ. We must be rooted and grounded in the truth of the Scriptures. Doctrine determines life.

Do you accept in your church the idea that the love of God is conditional, that is, God loves those who first love Him? Do you say, "Oh, well, let's not get hung up over these points of Calvinism. We all know that God is great and it's all going to turn out in the end, so, yes, it doesn't matter if they say that the love of God is conditional." Do you accept in your church the idea that the grace of God is resistible, that is, that God might want and would desire fellowship with man, but He cannot until man first accepts Him? Do you believe in your church a conditional covenant, that is, the bond of fellowship is a conditional fellowship? God will not be a covenant faithful God unless you, first, by your faith make an agreement with Him. Do you believe that?

If you believe any of those that I have just mentioned or anything similar to it, then, and I do not say this with gloating; I say this with weeping: then you have to say goodbye to the marriages of the church. No, you have to say goodbye to the marriages of your sons and of your daughters in these evil days because doctrine determines life. The truth of the Scriptures is that the love of God is changeless. The covenant of His grace is unconditional. His grace is irresistible. He abides faithful. That is the way He loves. He loves faithfully. He loves particularly. Love your wife as Christ loved the *church.* That is particular love. God loves enduringly. God loves sacrificially. God loves forgivingly. God loves faithfully. Do you believe that? Alright, now go love your wife that way. The foundation of marriage is laid for a little boy and a little girl in catechism class, in the doctrines of the church.

Let us apply that.

...as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. That means that the love for a wife must be sacrificial. Remember, husbands, you are to walk before God and be perfect. Therefore, you must love as Christ loved. And you must be willing to love her sacrificially. Christ gave Himself for the church. You must be willing to die to yourself.

By nature, we live for ourselves. And we look at that wife and we look at her as something for ourselves. We want to pride ourselves in her beauty or we say she exists for our ease, she is there to make my life pleasant. That is the way you think by nature.

Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church. You have been made a husband in order that Christ can teach you the dynamics of discipleship. What are the dynamics of discipleship? "If any man will come after me, let him deny *himself"* (Matthew 16:24). Love for your wife will mean that you will subjugate your feelings, your wishes, your dreams, your desires, and you will give yourself for the good of your wife, that God might be everything to her. Is that not the heart of it? God nowhere said that you have to give your wife a home with seven bedrooms. God nowhere said that you have to give your family a car for each child and member. God nowhere said that you have to clothe your wife in the latest and best fashion. But God *did* say that you are to give yourself for her. And that is what she needs. She needs to rest in your love. She needs to know that you will listen to her, that you will pray for her, that you will protect her, that you will calm her fears with God's Word.

Secondly, we are to love our wife in the way that we take the initiative. As Christ loved the church…. Christ did not wait for the church to love Him. **If Christ had waited for us to love Him, where would you be?**

That means that you take the initiative as a husband. You do that. You do not wait for your wife to make the first move towards reconciliation. You are not in competition with that woman. The question is not, "Who is going to give in?" The question is: Are you going to be the head and are you going to love as Christ loved the church? Do not compete with her. You go and you initiate the reconciliation. You do that by the love of God. God sent forth His Son. And He says, "Now you *go* to her."

Are there any things in marriage concerning which you said, "Well, first she has to do this, and then I…"? Is this the way you talk? Are you going to wait her out? How dwelleth the love of God in you?

Thirdly, the love of God will be exclusive. Christ loved His church and gave Himself for *her.* Marriage is an exclusive bond. You cannot put a third party in there. There is no room for a third party. You are to love her, the woman that God gave you. The book of Proverbs says, "Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; ... why wilt thou…be ravished with a strange woman?" Marriage is an exclusive bond.

Finally, that love for your wife will be enduring. Will Christ forsake His church? Will God alter the vow of His covenant? Will He set His bride aside? No! Listen. The Scriptures tell us that the whole universe holds together on one absolute truth. Do you know what that one absolute truth is that holds *everything* together right now? It is not some principle about thermo-dynamics or whatever it may be. This is what holds the whole universe together: but evermore the love of God is changeless, still shown to those who look to Him in fear. The love of God is the one unchangeable, sustaining truth. God has loved His people.

We live in a culture where the message is repeatedly conveyed to us: I love you, because…. I love you until…. I love you when…. I love you if…. Now, listen, men of God. Listen, women. Listen, children and young people of God. Every disciple of Jesus Christ, right now in this present culture, who seeks to exemplify the Lord's love in Christ, will repeat to his spouse in word and in deed, "Honey, I love you - period! No strings attached. No condition. Unreservedly. And I promise to show you and to express to you that kind of love each and every day. Why? Because, in the midst of a sinful, selfish, self-centered, unloving, and unlovely world, God has loved me. And I will love you as He loved me."

Love your wives and be not bitter against them.

That warning is not just pulled out of the air. It is a sin to which husbands are prone - bitterness, resentment, and dealing with their wives in a harsh way. It can happen this way. You had a hard day and you come home crabby. You are carrying the office on your shoulder, or that employee gave you a hard time. And she greets you at the door with her needs and the problems with the kids and you snap at her and you stomp off and go into the living room. Or you told her how to keep a checkbook. You told her what to say when the realtor called. You told her what to do when the red light comes on in the car. You told her to put your books by your chair. And she didn't do it. And you say to her, "That's the dumbest thing anyone…." And you go on and on. Then, after the argument and the explosion, you think, "Well, she doesn't meet my needs. She doesn't fill the bill." And you sulk and you feel sorry for yourself.

Or, it can happen this way. She, in love, admonishes you. As a wife, seeking to show honor and respect to you, she confronts you with respect to your sin. She says, "Honey, this is wrong." And you resent it. You try to bulldoze right over her. You shift the blame and turn it upside-down on the weaker vessel and say, "Well, you know, it's really your fault. If only you would… I would not." Stop it.

What happened? What is the source of all the ruckus that I have explained here that can happen so easily? Do you say, "Well, she…." No, that is not the source of it. What happened, man? This is what happened. You did not remember in your soul that you are her husband, her head, who is to love her as Christ loved the church. That is the problem. The problem is with you. You have to lead her. You have to be patient. You have to think of her first. You have to behave like Jesus Christ. And be not bitter against her.

That means you will confess your sins. Do not pile them up. Husbands and wives, do not pile up your sins against each other, not confessing them. That is just like a messy house. You put something down and say, "I'll get to that in a little bit." And you keep doing it. At the end of the month you can hardly move through the house. You say, "Look at this mess. We don't even know where to begin! How did this happen?" That is the way it happens with sin. And that is why, before the sun goes down, you must confess your faults and pray together. I believe that. That is true, and eternity will verify the words that couples who pray together stay together.

Still more. You want to be a husband? Listen to the word of God in Colossians 3:12-14: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity."

You want to be a husband? Then put those things on and God will bless you in ways that He alone can show you. And God will say, "I see My covenant reflected in that man, in that husband. And I will be with him and I will honor him."

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, apply Thy word to our heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Nursing Fathers"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*October 6, 2002; No. 3118*

Dear radio friends,

Perhaps when you heard our announcer give the topic today you thought that a mistake had been made. Nursing *Fathers?* You probably thought, "Well, maybe he means 'nurturing fathers.' That is certainly a biblical expression (Ephesians 6:4, Fathers, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord)." But it is no mistake. It is very deliberate. The title of our message today is "Nursing Fathers";for the inspired apostle Paul equates all the tenderness, love, and travail of a nursing mother to fatherhood. He does that in I Thessalonians 2:7-12. And God, through him, is teaching us that the qualities of a good nurse and the work of a nursing mother of little children and the tenderness required, all of these are indispensable requirements of a biblical, godly, covenant father.

If you would read that passage (I Thessalonians 2:7-12), I trust that you would become aware that it was a biographical account of Paul's ministry in the infant church at Thessalonica. In the course of reminding the Thessalonians how he, the apostle Paul, had labored among them, he uses the figure of family relations. He uses some striking ones. In verse 7, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." And again in verse 11, "As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."

Now, obviously, the primary focus of the passage I am referring to does indeed have to do with Paul and his companion's ministry among the Thessalonians. If you would ask me for a chapter in the Bible which sets forth how a minister is to do his work in the church of God, I would point you to this chapter: I Thessalonians 2:1-12. But you cannot help but notice, if you read the chapter, that as Paul describes his work as a minister he compares it to the work of a father in his own household.

So the Word of God comes to you as a father.

When the inspired apostle Paul describes what he was and what he did as a spiritual father to the church, he is also setting down the truth of what we are to be as fathers in our own homes. So, passing from the primary focus of the passage, I want to draw from it what a covenant, godly father is.

This is applicable to everyone who is listening. Whether you are a father or not, or whether you never will be a father. You may be listening today and fatherhood is as far from your thoughts as day from night. Yet the truth of a biblical father is vitally important to you, no matter who you are.

It is important to you as a father, obviously. This is God's Word, a word that He speaks to you, a word of direction, correction, and encouragement. But it is a word to you as a wife and a mother also. You are to be a help meet to him. Therefore, you must not simply hear the Word of God to have ammunition to criticize your husband. But, when you understand what God calls him to be as a husband and now as a father of your children, and knowing his sins and inability, you are now more able to support him and to pray for and aid him, that he may be exactly this kind of a father, a nursing father.

This is very applicable also to you as a teenager. And I pray that this Word of God may come and exercise a powerful influence upon your life as a teenager and as, perhaps, a college student, and will prepare you for marriage. This is a word that is important for young men. This is the instruction of God's Word to mold you into the kind of man who is God's man, and someday a godly father. You must not be molded by the world. The world says, "Oh, yes, a father. He's someone who's there for me on the weekends. He's divorced my mother and occasionally I see him. And we have this relationship." That is not a father. The Word of God teaches us what a father is. And this is important for you as girls as well, that you listen carefully. What kind of man will be the father of your children? Is that important to you?

It has very much to say to all of us.

Consider with me today, "Nursing Fathers."

What is the fundamental grace from God required of a father? The passage to which I am referring would answer, love. This passage contains some amazing statements. We might even say, some of these ideas contrast or clash. Paul says that he was a spiritual father to the Thessalonians. And, as a spiritual father, he showed the traits of a gentle, loving nurse. And we would say, "Isn't that a mixture of ideas? A strong, assertive father who has the gentle tenderness of a nursing mother?" But that is exactly what God's Word says. Verses 7 and 8 of the passage, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." And then in verse 11, "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."

The Word of God is teaching us that the **grace above all others, which caused Paul to act as a father to the Thessalonian believers, is the grace of an intense, sensitive, self-giving love of God**. So being affectionately desirous of you, that is, desiring you with great love because ye were loved of us, we behaved ourselves gently as a nurse.

Notice how this love was shown. First of all, it was shown in a gentle bearing - as a nurse. It is the picture of a woman who so loves babies that she gives herself to wet-nurse other people's children. She so loves them that she will give herself to sustain them. Paul says, "In my calling to be the spiritual father of the Thessalonians, I came with authority. I came with boldness. I came with the teaching of the Word of God." In the first four verses, the apostle emphasizes that. But then he goes on to say, "But all of that was mixed with an intense, self-giving love shown in a tender bearing. As a father, I exhorted, I comforted, I charged." The work of the ministry in Thessalonica was a difficult work for the apostle Paul. Paul faithfully labored in the firmness and authority of the Word of God with the Thessalonians. He was no namby-pamby minister who sat around and let the spiritual household of Thessalonica go to pot. No, he was a father, a spiritual father, who had a clear understanding of the Word of God, of the situation, and of the sins of the people of God. He knew what was needed and he brought the Word of God. Yet, he says, his bearing was still that of a tender nurse.

What is it that makes a man responsible for his household, a leader of his household, firm for his household, and yet loving his household?

It is the love of God in Jesus Christ, that gentle, tender love.

The apostle goes on to say that that love was shown in a selfless disposition. "So being affectionately desirous of you," he says in verse 8, "we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." Technically speaking, the apostle says that all that was required of him as a minister was to speak the gospel in all its integrity. He says in verse 4, "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." But, Paul says, "I went beyond the minimum requirement of simply teaching and giving the gospel. I was ready to go beyond and impart my very soul." His heart was baptized with a love that is selfless.

That was shown in intense labor among the Thessalonian believers (v. 9), "For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." Paul worked. It was travail. It was not something that a person who is absorbed in his own comfort would endure.

But what caused him so to give himself? It was the essential grace necessary for a father: the love of God - intense, selfless love of God.

Fathers, standing as king and queen over all other graces from God is the love of God that we need if we are to be fathers. Whatever else we need (we need wisdom, we need faithfulness to God's Word, we need patience, we need strength and steadfastness, yes) this is essential - we need the love of God. Without this love of God abounding in your heart you cannot fulfill your calling. What is essential to fatherhood? The Bible is clear. Intense, self-denying, gentle, Spirit-worked love of God - without that love you will not be willing to pay the price to be the head of your household. **Only in the love of God will you willingly and joyfully deny yourself many things, your own time, your own pleasure**. You will set your own time and your own pleasure apart and aside. You will not insist upon it, if you have the love of God for your home. Only with this grace will you work to know your children. You will set up communication with your children from the very first day. You will listen to your children. You will give yourself to pray for your children. You will talk with your children.

Only with this grace will you continue when you meet snags. And you *will* meet snags as a father. You will come to problems, problems with your own children, and some problems are great. And you will say, "I can't break through." Only with the love of God will you continue. Only with this love will you desire to do more than just the technical requirement of being a father. The technical requirement: put bread on the table. But only in this love of God will you go far beyond and give your very soul for your children.

You and I need this essential grace of love if we are to be biblical fathers. Without this we will not discipline our children. Or, if we do discipline them, we will discipline them out of a sinful irritation, anger, or resentment. Without this love of God your discipline will not be wise, thought-out, or consistent.

It means, if you are to be a father, that you must deny yourself and work in the love of God for your children and family. Then you might need to be ignorant of who won the ballgame Saturday because you needed that time to study the book of Proverbs and to pray and spend time with your children. Not time in front of the TV, but time with your children.

Fathers, we need hearts that are baptized in the love of God. The apostle says, "So being affectionately desirous … we were willing to have imparted unto you…our own souls." Now, that is radical language in our age. Our age of no-commitment-relationships. Our age of no-strings-attached, one-weekend relationships. Our age, which says that you must assert your own rights. A sinful age. God says, "You, man of God, as a father of your children, must be committed, not to living for yourself, but living with an intense, self-giving, gentle love, firm in the Word of God - the love for your child as a nurse cherisheth her children."

That is God's Word.

I want to press that upon you as a father, first of all.

How much do you know of that love? Can you say as Paul did in verse 7, "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children"? Do your children know you as a firm, real father? Yes, a father who brings them up in the way of the Lord. But do they also know the gentle, loving tenderness of a believing father? I am not asking if you are sinfully pliable. You must not be a glob of back-downs because your children have learned to manipulate you by their tears. No, fathers. Bring them up in the way of the Lord! Yet, and not contrasting this at all, at the same time you must have the gentleness, the love of God for your children.

Yes, fathers who are permissive and neglectful are shameful fathers. But also fathers who are all stone and no heart, who run their household by the book, who run their home like a boot camp, and who are bringing up a bunch of little marines! Not compromising your call to bring them up in the way of the Lord and to correct and to discipline them, at the same time God says your children have to know you love them in the selfless love of God.

Let me ask you, fathers. Are you becoming choked with the things of this life? Do you give all of your energy and your time to your business, to your riches, and to the pleasures of this life, so that there is no time, no energy left over? You find yourself exhausted, so that you do not have any time for your kids? Do your children exist for your ego, to make *you* look good? Fathers, do you yell at your son because hefailed to meet unreasonable expectations that you put on him? Do you yell at your daughter because she didn't get an A? Do you drive your child beyond reason because you want your child to reflect well on you?

What about the labor that the apostle Paul mentions - intense labor? Or do you leave all the labor that goes into bringing up children to Mama, your wife? Ephesians 6:4, Fathers, nurture them. Or do you say, "Look, I put in my 9-10 hours at the office. Now I'm going to relax at home." Listen, man! You put in 9-10 hours at the office? So did your wife at home. You need to relax? So does your wife. We have just so many hours, so many years when our sons and daughters will be at home. It goes very fast and then it is done. And when it is done, it is done. In love of God, you must give yourself now for your children.

Young girls, I have something to say to you. What are you looking for in a husband? A pretty face? Money? Carved jaw? Thick hairline? A car? Or are you looking for a man whose heart knows something of the love of God in Christ Jesus? Listen to me. That man who loves the Lord God in Jesus Christ may be only 5'5" and weigh 125 pounds and a little lumpy and out of shape and maybe balding. But if the love of God and the Word of God are his bread and drink, I tell you, fifteen years from now, after you have married him, you will be thankful to God, as you sit at the table with him, with your children, and then your teenaged children, and the family can say, "Lord, thanks for the grace of love in a father who loved me as a picture of my heavenly Father."

And I tell you, young girls, that if you marry a man who does not have these things, this love of God, a man who is simply interested in your body, and he is built like Adonis and he is as rich as Donald Trump and he is muscular and all the rest, I tell you that fifteen years from now, after you marry him, you will weep - because your sons will be like him.

And I tell you, young girls, a ring on his finger is not going to change him.

Young men, what are you cultivating? Maybe you pump iron. It is good to take care of your body, that is fine. But do not make a god of it. You say, "I work hard. I'm going to get ahead. I hold a good job, I'm going to succeed." Good. But here is the question that is much more important: What are you doing to cut the cord of your selfish, self-centered self? Of your lust? Of your selfishness? And what are you doing to build yourself up in the love of God? What kind of a man are you going to be to your children? How vital that we hear this Word of God and that we pray from our hearts: "Father in heaven, make me a father filled with Thy Word, and filled with the love of God in Christ Jesus."

Let us pray.

Father, bless Thy Word to our hearts this day. Bless our fathers and cause them through Thy Word to be, indeed, a covenant, godly father. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Exemplary Fathers"**

Rev. Carl Haak

*October 13, 2002; No. 3119*

Dear radio friends,

If you listened to our radio program last time, you will remember that we began a study of a very important passage in God's Word, I Thessalonians 2:7-12. In those verses the apostle Paul gives an account of how he labored as a minister of the gospel among the Thessalonian believers. In the account he equates his work among them to the work of a nursing mother and of a faithful father.

Last week we looked at that and saw that the Word of God was teaching us that the fundamental grace required of a covenant, godly father is the love of God, the true love of God in Christ Jesus. A father certainly must be one who brings up his children in the way of the Lord. He must be a strong and courageous man. But a father must also be, at the same time and not contradicting that, a man baptized in the love of God for his household, so that the man, as the apostle Paul says in those verses, is willing to impart his very soul for the well-being of his children.

We come back now to that passage, and I would like to point out to you that the apostle goes on to say that another important aspect of fatherhood is to stand as a godly example. In the passage the apostle brings out that not only is it essential, for fatherhood, for us to have that selfless and intense love of God, but it is also important to be able to stand before our children as examples of everything that we teach them, examples of the Christian faith itself.

Let me read to you verse 10 and 11. "Ye (that is the Thessalonians) are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." What is he saying? He is saying that, like a father, he did not only do the outward deeds that are required of a father, and not only did he show love for them, but he stood before them as a godly example of everything he was saying. "We left a godly example," says the apostle. "You are witnesses of that, and God also."

The apostle is saying that, without that godly example, all of the love and all of the instruction that he gave would have had no impact upon the Thessalonians. He says, "We behaved ourselves." That is, we lived holily, we lived a life of devotion to God, and we sought to keep ourselves separate from sin and devoted to God. "We lived justly," he says, that is, a life of obedience to the ten commandments with honesty and integrity in our life. "We lived unblameably among you," he says, that is, consistently. The Thessalonians could bear witness of this, and God also. In other words, Paul says, "You saw the real thing in me." Paul and his companions in the ministry, when they were among the Thessalonian believers, left a godly example. He says, "We were not one thing in front of you and another thing when we were alone relaxing. If so, then what you saw and what God saw would be two different things." But, he says, "You are witnesses and God also that we were an example to you as our spiritual children."

Why does Paul bring that up at this point? What is the connection? Why is that so crucial to fatherhood? Because God is teaching us that, without a godly example, all spiritual fathering of the Thessalonians, and all of our fathering, would be neutralized.

Paul understood the biblical law of teaching and learning. What is that biblical law of teaching and learning? It is simply this: You must be what you teach. And children learn from example. The Lord Jesus said, "It is enough for the disciple to be as his master." The apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." Do as I do. Paul was a father to the Thessalonians in Jesus Christ. There were many young Christians in that church. Paul could say, "I loved you. I poured out my soul for you. And I strove to be an example to you of all that I taught." He knew that all of his teaching of the gospel would have no grip on their soul, on their conscience, without his own example.

He knew that as a minister. He knew that if he was to have the Word that he taught take hold, by the grace of God, upon their hearts, that he must also live the Word before them. He must, as he writes in II Corinthians 4:2, also renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He did not, then, labor with the Thessalonians as a hypocrite. He did not say, "This is what we say, but we don't do." No, he sought to be an example.

Now, let every man, every woman, every child, and every father look to themselves. Fathers, what is necessary if you are to be a biblical, covenant father? You must live a genuine life of godliness before your children and before God. You must be able to say to your children, "You are witnesses, and God also." Let us strive for that. Do not strive for your reputation in the business world. Do not strive for your financial security. Do not let the bottom line be what's good for your career. But let this be the heart of your life: to say to your child, "Walk as I walk."

That must make the grip upon the conscience of your child. Your child must be able to say, "My dad was, for all of his faults, real with God. He had his weaknesses. He was irritable. At times he was inconsistent. There were times when I thought that he was unfair and unreasonable. But I have to say that he walked with the Lord. He lived holily, justly, and unblameably before God." Now, whether your child (and may God forbid!) hates that or whether your child thanks God for that, either way, you must, as a father, live what you talk.

Without this your children will not feel the weight of your instruction. **If we do not ourselves live what we tell them, our children will become cynical and sour on the faith that we teach them**. Then the child will say, "Dad says we're supposed to love. But look at how he treats mother." Then they will say, "Dad says don't talk evil of other people. But you should hear what he says about other people." Then your child will say, "Dad says the priorities are the church. That's your priority. But you should see the way he runs his finances." We must teach our children biblical priorities. We must teach our children a biblical way of life. Yes! But you must remember, as a father, that your children are going to learn by example, by what you do.

Fathers, if God spares your children and spares you, will they be thankful to God for the memories that they have of you? Or will they have to put up with a self-centered, indulgent old man who had all of his religion in his mouth? Can you teach your son personal sexual purity by example? Listen to the question. Can you teach your son (your teenage son, your twelve-year old son - maybe even younger - your seventeen-year old son) personal sexual purity by example? Or, do they see your eyes taking a second look when the TV is on - the football game and the cheerleaders - and your eyes roaming over women? Or, do you turn it off? Can you say with Job in chapter 31:1, "I made a covenant with mine eyes," not to lust after a maid? If we cannot say that, then all of our talk with our sons about decency and purity and being careful, all of those words apart from God will have no binding influence upon our sons whatsoever. Then we will raise up an age of children who will know that, well, there are parts of the Christian life where everybody in the church knows that this is what we say, but it is not what we do.

Father, how do you treat your wife? You must be an example to your son. How do you care for your wife? Do you honor her in her femininity? Are you sensitive to your wife? What about stewardship? Do your children know that you cheat with the boss? What about your devotional life - is there consistency there? What about your life in the church? Are you unconcerned and insensitive towards others in the church? Fathers, we need to pray for grace to say with the apostle Paul to our children, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you."

Young men, I want to talk to you for a few moments. You want, someday, to be married and to have children. That is good. But you must remember this: fathering is not an act of the moment, of a single moment. Fathering is the discipline of a lifetime. You must remember this: biology does not make a father. God has to make a father. Being a father is a lifetime commitment, and you begin right now, before you are married, by cultivating a godly, consistent life before God. You will then want to be what you confess. You will want to live a consistent life now. And **remember, young man, that the sins that you are tolerating in your life right now are going to cripple you as a father**. It will affect the kind of father you will be if you tolerate sin now.

Young women, I want to talk to you. What are you looking for in a husband? Looks? Are you only concerned about the feelings that he gives you? Or are you looking for practical godliness? May God give you eyes to see it.

As we come, then, to this passage, let me close with two thoughts. The first is this. Do you see your need of grace? We have to see our need of grace whenever we come before our calling in the home (father, mother, wife, child). We have to see our need of the grace of God. Essential to being a biblical father, then, is the gentle, selfless love of God. But we do not have that. We do not have anything of that. Our human nature is opposed to that. Necessary to being a father is a godly example. But we must admit before God that we do not have that, we fall short of that, we are sinners. We cannot do this of ourselves. If you think you can, then go ahead and try. The only thing you are going to succeed in doing is passing on your depravity to your children and an outward righteousness. No, God must give us grace. And we must be diligent to seek that grace from God.

Therefore **the essential ingredient of a biblical man, of a biblical father, is: prayer**. Pour out your heart to God. Be men of prayer. Boys and young men and fathers, elders, old men - all of us! We must be men of prayer. Is that true of us? Is it true of our generation, as in a former day, that we can be classified as men of prayer with God? Listen. Generations have gone before us. And they have done without all that we spend so much time to get. We spend so much time on things, pleasures, television, sports, homes. Generations have come and gone before us and they have lived and passed on without all of those things. But *no* generation of the church has had believing, biblical fathers without prayer. Are we men of prayer? And do we give ourselves much time to prayer?

The second thing I want to close with is this: we must look to our heavenly Father. The study of every husband must be Christ. The study of every woman and wife must be the church. A husband must love his wife as Christ loved the church. And the wife must submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ. Then the study of every father must be the heavenly Father, our Father who art in heaven. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

What does that mean? That means that you take yourself to the Word and you learn the blessed truths of God's Fatherhood. It means that you must be a member of a solid, Reformed, biblical church. You must be faithful in your attendance. And you must listen carefully to the instruction and to the preaching of the Word of God. Through the preaching and through the Word of God you are given strength to follow the pattern of your heavenly Father.

Covenant, believing fathers. What a blessing. Men of God who devote themselves in the love of God for their family. Men of God, firm in the Word, and yet gentle, filled with a selfless love, laboring day and night for the well-being of their household.

Children and wives, you need to pray for these fathers. And children, you need to thank God for a believing father and you need to pray for your father.

Fathers, what do our wives and what do our children testify concerning us? Do they say, as a wife, "Father in heaven, thanks. Despite all of his faults, he is a man of selfless, self-giving love of Christ for me and the children." Do your children say, "Father, thanks for the father that I have. He has shown me something of the love of my heavenly Father."

May God give us hearts filled with the love of God, and make us covenant, godly fathers.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee again for Thy Word. We pray that the Holy Spirit may apply that Word to our hearts. Make us to be men of prayer, men of the Word. Make us to be biblical fathers. In Jesus' name, Amen.