

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

August 2, 2015 Wives, Be Subject to Your Own Husband

No. 3787

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

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oday we return to our series of messages on marriage, the family, and the covenant of God. We look into the Word of God today in Ephesians 5:22-24, where we read: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.”

Marriage is to be a picture of Christ and the church. We cannot say that too often. We cannot emphasize that too strongly to our souls. I cannot remind you of that as a husband or a wife too often. You cannot hear that too much.

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 5, we have seen, says to us that this is a great mystery, that is, a man and a woman joined together in the bond of marriage as one flesh. But he goes on to say, “But I speak concerning Christ and the church.” In other words, Paul says, I’m telling you that God intends marriage to display, to mirror, to promote, the thing that is most dear to his heart: Christ and the church. We do not, then, want our marriage to lie to the world. We want it to tell the truth. Thus we need grace to be fitted as a husband and as a wife.

Shall we allow remarriage while one’s spouse lives? Is this a picture of Christ and the church, of Christ who never forsakes His wife for another? God forbid!

Shall there be sex before marriage? Is this a picture of the commitment that Christ makes to one woman, to His church?

Shall there be such a thing as homosexual or lesbian marriage? Is this a picture of Christ and the church? God forbid!

We want our marriage, the marriage of one man and one woman under God, and in faith in God, to be a picture of Christ and the church. And if that is to be the case, then the Word of God says there are fixed roles that are given for marriage in order that marriage may, indeed, be this picture of Christ and the church. We have looked into the role, or the calling, of the headship of the husband. And we saw that this calls a man to accountability, to leadership, and to sacrifice to provide for and to protect his wife and family.

Today we want to focus on the meaning of the wife's submission to her husband, for the Scriptures say (Eph. 5:22-24) that the calling of the wife is to "submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

Now I am very desirous in the Lord Jesus that we, both married and single, young and old, young adult or child, hear this Word of God as a call to something that is strong, noble, good, dignified, and worthy of a woman's highest spiritual efforts. The Scriptures say, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Our society, and many in the church-world, despise or simply ignore this Word of God that calls women to submit to their own husbands. It is especially that word "submit" that is called degrading, abusive, unequal, demeaning. Many will simply write this off as the sub-Christian culture or the sub-Christian values left over from the culture of the first century. And there are others, on the other side, who will distort this Word of God. There will be men who believe that their wife cannot go from one room to the next without their permission and, therefore, distort this Word of God with sinful abuse or tyranny.

But the truth of submission, the submission of a wife to her husband, is the will of God. It is therefore something beautiful, good, and dignified. It has the mark of Christ's majesty upon it. It is part of the wonderful and profound display to the world of the grace of God. It is good and beautiful. For, listen: "As the church," says the apostle, "is subject to Christ; so let the wife be to her own husband in every thing." The submission of the church to Christ is something that is good and beautiful.

Submission, according to God's Word, is a beautiful grace given by God. It is a heart issue, fundamentally. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husband. The word "submit" means "to place under, to defer, to come under the will of another." It is always first to come under the will of God. Submission, the grace of submission, is that grace whereby we bow our knee, as the apostle says in Ephesians 3:14, to our God and Savior, whereby we kiss the scepter in the hand of our Lord, who sits upon God's throne. Submission means that I make my will, by God's grace, and my abilities, to serve the purpose that God has given to me in this life. It is a grace. By nature, the apostle says, we are self-willed (II Pet. 2:10). And then, describing us according to the flesh, the apostle says that we are always presumptuous, self-willed. "They are not afraid to speak evil of dignities [or authority]." In other words, by nature we are rebellious. We place ourselves upon the throne of our own heart.

So the Bible sees that submission to God is, in reality, an evidence of His wonderful grace. It is liberation from the tyranny of my sinful self. He, says the psalmist, hath made me free, free to submit, free to serve, free to follow not my will but the will of God.

Now, wives, submit. In your heart, with an eye to God, recognize that Christ calls you to come under the husband that God has appointed as your spiritual leader. The Bible says now that this is something honorable and that it belongs to the calling of every Christian. It is dignified, it is not demeaning. Christ also has humbled Himself and has submitted to the will of His heavenly Father in our redemption. He has laid aside His own rights. It is part of the noble

calling that we have that we, as the children of God, submit ourselves always to the will of God and submit ourselves one to another, seeking not our own but the things that will edify and bless and benefit one another as fellow members of the grace of God.

Now, to submit, as a wife, at its simplest meaning, means to recognize that God has given you a head, your husband, and that you are to follow his leadership. Because we are sinful—sinful husbands and sinful wives—God’s truth so quickly becomes twisted in our understanding. Let us be clear, first of all, what this does not mean. It does not mean that you, as a wife, leave your mind on the wedding altar; that, as a wife, you have nothing to say in the marriage; that the development of your talents, abilities, wisdom, and insight is to be brushed aside; that you cannot think for yourself; and that you have become a dumb servant. A humble, wise, Christ-filled husband knows the blessing of his wife and seeks the blessing of the counsel of his wife. Proverbs 31 says of the woman that her husband doth safely trust in her. To submit does not mean that you do not have a mind of your own. Wives, be subject. But that does not mean that you renounce all of your abilities and all of your talents.

Nor does it mean that you put the will of your husband before the will of Christ. If a husband calls you in some way to do what you are convinced by God’s Word is sinful, you follow Christ’s will. While submitting, while reverencing, while coming under him, you say, “Honey, the Lord has placed you over me as my head. I want to show you that. But, Jesus is our Lord. And when you ask me to do that which is sinful, I cannot. I will not. And I may not do that.”

Nor does this submission mean that a husband is given license to sinful tyranny. Marriage is a holy covenant of both husband and wife who vow that they will behave toward each other in a Christ-like manner. If a wife is contentious and will not submit to the yoke that Christ gives, and she does wrong to her husband, then she has set herself against the majesty of God. But if a man insists on his own fancy, despising his wife, and is cruel to his wife, he also defies God openly. The way that we are to approach our wife is not with harshness, acting like a madman, expecting to scare them with a grim look. If we do so, we defy God.

What does it mean to submit? The apostle says, “As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” In other words, the apostle says that a picture is worth a thousand words. The church is subject to Christ, and that is beautiful. That is a good thing. It means two things. It means, first, that the church gives herself willingly to advance Christ’s purposes and cause, and seeks the advancement of the Lord’s kingdom on earth. Do we, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, submit to Christ? How would one know? We would teach the sound doctrines that Christ has given to the church. We would show to any visitor or to anyone who would look into our church that the interest, the purposes, the causes of the Lord are our passion and our desire. We will not, as a church, say: “What do we want, what do we think we ought to do? How shall we get a name for ourselves in the community? How shall we influence people according to our own wisdom and get our name in the headlines?” But we will ask one question: “What are Christ’s purposes for us? What is the cause that Christ gives us to advance?” We will look carefully into the will of the Lord in Holy Scripture. We will come to know the heart of the Master, and we will devote ourselves to His purposes, to His task, and to His truth.

Secondly, the church submits to Christ by seeking His honor. If you read, for instance, Psalm 45, you will see that the church, the bride of Christ, enjoys to make known the majesty of her Master and Lord. The church delights, takes great pleasure, in extolling our Lord, our King, and our Husband. Psalm 45:2ff.: “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: . . . Gird thy sword. . . ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness.” The church desires Christ to be seen in all of His glory and majesty. The bride of Christ, the church, has a sheer delight, a deep impulse, to proclaim the majesty and the glory, the worth, the might, the splendor, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The church submits, therefore, to Jesus Christ in two ways: 1) She sees herself as serving the purpose of advancing His cause. She sees herself as expendable in His cause. 2) She finds great joy in proclaiming the honor of Jesus Christ.

Now, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wife be to her husband. That means, fundamentally, you follow his spiritual leadership. But it means also that you desire him and his purpose in life to be carried through. It means that you delight in seeing him prosper in his gifts.

Christ, of course, is sinless, and a husband is not. A husband is sinful. And yet, as the wife, we will say, “I give myself to serve the advancement of your calling in this world. And I delight in seeing you take that calling and glorify God in your calling.” You will say to your husband, “I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I’m glad when you take responsibility for things and lead. I flourish when you make sure the family is going in the way of wisdom and the way of the love of God.”

There is your husband before you. He is a sinner, saved by grace. He has gifts. He has a personality. He has a calling in this life. To submit to him means that you will see it as your place to encourage him, as God’s son, to develop in the calling God gives him. You will not say, “I want my own interests, I want my own life, I want my own career.” But you will say, “I want to use my time, my talents, for his good, for the good of our marriage.” And you will honor and you will affirm your husband’s leadership and help him carry it through. You were made to be a help meet for him (Gen. 2), to help him be the man of God that God calls him to be. You will, then, be his counselor. You will be his aid. You will be his helpmeet. You will delight that his name be held in respect through your actions. And that, through you, he is honored.

As the church is to Christ, we want the name of Christ to be honored by our actions. That is the desire of the church. So also the wife will want her husband to be honored as the world looks at her in her actions. The wife, then, will not run around criticizing her husband publicly, belittling him, telling everyone his shortcomings, discouraging him in what he wants to do in this life.

As no Christian man may have his wife in terror of him, for to do so is to despise God, so also no Christian woman may have her husband feeling hopeless, resigned, and deflated, for this too is to despise God. But as the church delights in God’s cause, and as the church delights in the honor of Christ’s name, so also the wife will delight in seeing her husband fulfilling his calling to be a man of God.

Submit in that way to your husband.

The apostle brings out that this submission to the husband is an exclusive thing. Submit yourselves to your *own* husband as unto the Lord. And again, Let the wives be subject to their *own* husbands in every thing. This is a unique submission to your own husband that is not fitting in relation to any other man. You are not called to submit to all men the way that you submit to your own husband. Marriage is exclusive. The husband and wife stand in a relationship to each other that they do not stand in toward anyone else.

Further, Paul makes plain that this submission is always to be rendered. “So let the wives be subject to their own husbands *in every thing*.” This is usually more than what we might feel like or want to do. It may not always be obedience, for the wife must always obey God first. But there must always be submission. It comes out this way. You will say, “It grieves me when you venture into sinful acts and want me to go with you. You know that I can’t do that. I have no desire to resist you. I want to follow you joyfully. But I cannot follow you into sin, as much as I love and honor you and your leadership.”

It may not always be that you agree with your husband’s decision. There may be times when the most submissive wife will hesitate at her husband’s decision. It may look unwise to her. Then it will go like this: Your husband is about to make a decision that seems foolish to you. At that moment you will express your submission in the following way: “Dear, I know that you’ve thought a lot about this, and I love it when you make decisions and plan for us. But I really don’t have peace with this decision. I feel we need to talk about it some more. How about some time today?” In your disagreements, you make it clear that you honor him in his role. And you make it clear that if all the talking that needs to be done before a decision is reached has been done and you still disagree, you will defer to your husband willingly. Wives, submit yourselves.

Husband, it does not say, “You subject your wife.” Nowhere does the Bible say that. It calls the wife to do this willingly. Submission is something that is given. It must be given freely and willingly.

And cheerfully. As the church is subject to Christ. Not grudgingly, not stiffly. But joyfully. Because you want to show what your Christianity means to you in your marriage. This is not slavery. This is not degrading. This is the very heart and the demonstration of Christianity. The wife declares before the world, “I have one Master, not many. I have one Lord. I am His servant. And for Christ’s sake, I take up my calling and place to submit to my own husband.”

As husbands and wives, we must always begin by looking not to the other, but to the Lord. Do not begin by looking across the table at each other and asking yourselves, “What do I see?” But look up to God. Do not just trot out the name of God at your marriage ceremony, but put your marriage into His hands and guidance. Call upon Him with sincerity. If you do not look to God, if you look only at your husband and at all those things that can make you scream, the whole house is going to come down in confusion and ruin. And it will turn out to your pain.

As marriage is ordained of God, we who enter into this sacred union must look completely unto God, completely to Him and desperately unto Him. We must make God our refuge. We must make Him our motive. We must see Him who has joined us together. We must have our eye upon God. For God has designed marriage between husband and wife to represent the relationship of Christ and the church. And as a wife you have a calling, a holy, sacred trust. Not for your husband's sake, but for Christ's sake. To show to all who see you what it means that the church is subject to Christ, to show what the church thinks about Jesus Christ.

You do that by heartfelt submission. You show in all of your life toward your husband how much we, as children of God, are indebted unto our Savior, who has poured out the treasures of His mercy upon us.

Let us pray.

Father, we again thank Thee for Thy Word, and pray that it may enter into our hearts, that it may soften our hearts, and that it may give wisdom to our eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

August 9, 2015 A Beautiful Example of Fearless Submission

No. 3788

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

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e will return for a final time today to our series on marriage, the family, and God's covenant, focusing yet once more on what it means for a wife to be submissive to her husband. I have said many times in this series that we cannot say too often that marriage is to be the picture of Christ and the church, meaning that we, as husbands and wives, must mirror God's covenant bond with us in our marriages. We do not want our marriage to lie, to leave the wrong impression. But we want it to leave the correct impression of what it means that Christ loves the church.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven." If we are to do that, as husbands and wives, we must know our calling. Our calling as a husband is to exercise a wise, biblical headship over our wives. We are to look to Christ. We are to love our wives with a sacrificial love. We are to protect and provide for our families. And we saw last time that a wife is to submit to her own husband as unto the Lord. She is to take the picture of the church's subjection to Christ as being what she wants to mirror toward her

husband. In other words, the calling of the wife is to leave a testimony before the world of what the church thinks of Jesus Christ, and of the great love that the church has for Jesus Christ.

We are going to look once more into the calling of the wife to submit. Today we are going to look at the Word of God in I Peter 3:5, 6. We read, “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”

Peter there is tracing out the roots of a wife’s wise submission to her husband. He says that it belongs to her very womanhood, as given by God, because women, in Christ, are holy. They trust in God, and they adorn themselves with spiritual graces. Because that is the case with a woman, you will find that she also sees and follows her calling to be submissive to her husband. So, if you are looking for the source of a wife’s submission, and if you ask, “Where does this submission come from? What gives it its life? How do you explain this?” Peter responds: “You need to see Christian womanhood. You need to understand what it means to be a woman of God. The roots of a wife’s submission are found there.”

But before we look into those roots that Peter shows to us, let us note two things, if only briefly, in this Word of God. First, Peter is expressing the great purpose God has in the Old Testament Scriptures, as well as the New Testament, especially in the historical portions of those Scriptures. God’s purpose is to give us examples (living, breathing, real examples) of redeeming grace. When you read the Old Testament Scriptures, do not immediately spiritualize. Do not think that you must find some hidden meaning behind every event. God is giving tangible, concrete examples of what it means to live by faith through grace. Do not read the Bible as a dated, ancient, long-ago book. But in the lives of the saints in both Old and New Testaments, see that God is drawing a picture of what it means to live the life of grace.

And, secondly, let us see that Peter is saying to us that when he sets before us the call of the wife to submit to her husband, he is not setting forth a novelty. When the Scriptures call the wife to submit to her husband, this is not something of a particular culture. Peter is saying that the Christian life is the same in all ages. The Christian life is not determined by what a society will bear, what an age will accept. But it is determined by the will of God in Holy Scripture. Each age has its own arrogance. Each age will say, “Issues, situations of our day, are different. We live in a global society. We have redefined the roles of husband and wife. We have redefined sexual orientation and morals. The Bible talks about women who wore sandals and carried water in clay pots and lived in tents and bowed before men. But that’s not the way it is today.” God says to that, “Don’t talk arrogantly.” In the book of Job, Job was asked, “How long have *you* been around, Job?” Likewise, God says regarding women, “This is My word. This is her beauty. This is her femininity. It involves also that in marriage she will submit to her husband.”

Now, as I was saying, Peter shows the roots of a woman’s submission to her husband, the things that make it strong and beautiful. He shows three roots.

First, the deepest root of womanhood is hope in God. In verse 5 of I Peter 3 we read, “The holy women also, who trusted (or better, who hoped) in God, adorned themselves.” They hoped

in God. That is where the Scripture begins. What is the deepest root of God's grace in a believing girl? It is hope in God. In the words of Psalm 62: Truly my soul waiteth upon God; my expectation is from Him; He only is my rock and my refuge. A Christian woman does not place her hope in her husband as the source of her ultimate good and peace. She does not place her hope in this life. She does not place her hope in getting a husband. She does not place her hope in her looks. She does not say concerning her looks, "This is going to keep me. This will provide security and acceptance." But she places her hope in the promises of God. She lays hold of them. That is the root of being a Christian woman: hope in God.

We read in Proverbs 31:25: "Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come." Better translated, "She shall laugh at times to come." She laughs at everything the future will bring and might bring, because she hopes in God. The source of womanhood, first of all, in Christ, is hope in God. With hope in God the Christian woman looks away from the troubles, miseries, and obstacles of this life that seem to make the future so bleak. And she focuses her attention on the sovereign power and love of her God, who rules in heaven and earth as He pleases. The Christian woman, therefore, knows her Bible. She knows her theology. She knows the sovereignty of God. She knows His promise that He will be with her and help her no matter what. This is the deep root of womanhood.

It is not the deep root of any woman, but only of a believing woman. Not just a married woman, but all holy women. Hope will drive away fear—hope in God! That first.

Secondly, Peter says the root of womanhood is holiness. He says, "...holy women also, who hoped in God." The root of being a Christian woman is holiness, the holiness that Jesus Christ bestows. We have bad ideas sometimes about holiness. Holiness is not something of ourselves. It is of the grace of God. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit of Christ in our hearts creating new, God-pleasing desires. In Christ, holiness is not drudgery, a dull thing. It is not a proud thing whereby we say, "I'm holier than you." But it is the consecration of all my being and the dedication of all that I am to the service of God. It is the realization of the purpose of my life. Peter said in I Peter 2:9, "But ye are a...holy nation...that ye should shew forth the praise of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Holiness means that we are set aside for God's praise. Holiness in a Christian woman means that she understands that she is not set aside to be eyed in the lust of men. Girls, you need to be very careful what pictures you put on Facebook. Every boy knows what pictures you have and knows exactly what you are showing. Your body (no, not yours, Christ's body—it is Christ's possession!) is to be to the praise and to the honor of God's grace. The root of a Christian woman is the steadfast desire, it is the sincere commitment, to be pure, chaste, and devoted to God. A Christian young man will be attracted to you by what you do not show him.

And, thirdly, the root of a Christian woman is to be focused on the internal adornment of grace. The apostle Peter says, "This is how women in the Old Testament times adorned themselves." Here he is referring back to verses 3 and 4 of I Peter 3, where he said that the adornment must not be of the outward, but of the hidden man of the heart. The Christian woman, then, does not focus on the external. Not because the Bible is against beauty and attractiveness. You must not read the Scriptures and say that the Christian woman must dress in a gunnysack. But the idea is this, that the Christian woman does not focus, does not place her

efforts, on the outside but focuses on the beauty that is within. She is concerned about the internal beauty. And Christian men are also addressed here in what they expect. What are we saying to women in the church, to our wives, to our daughters, that we want them to be? In the world it is very plain what the world wants them to be. It is expressed in the fashion models—skinnier and skinnier. It is shown on the magazine covers and on the TV and on the billboards. They have to have the perfect figure, the tight clothes, the cleavage, the naked-look dress, the seductive look. Beauty to the world is brazen, manipulative, and assertive. God says, “Come into My divine school of cosmetology.” This is not dull! Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel—all of these were beautiful women. Beauty is a gift of God. But God says that you must be concerned about an inward beauty that mirrors the grace of Jesus Christ.

Now it is out of these—hope in God, holiness, and a focus on inward beauty—out of these grows the godly submission of a wife to her husband. Do not try first to be submissive. Ask God to grow these roots in your heart: hope in God, holiness, and focus on inward beauty. And out of those things in your heart, live with your husband in submission.

Peter brings it all together with an example. The Scriptures often say to us that an example is worth a thousand words. And the example here is Sarah. Peter says, “Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”

Who was Sarah? Sarah was the wife of Abraham and one of the most fascinating women in all of the Bible. She had many facets. She was a woman of faith. She is mentioned in Hebrews 11:11: “Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed.”

The Bible, of course, does not overlook the faults of Sarah. Sarah could be very pushy. In Genesis 16, when the promise of a son to Abraham was not getting done, and she was now 78 years old and had been in the land of Canaan for thirteen years, she said to Abraham, “Go in unto Hagar my handmaid and have a child with her.” And Abraham obeyed her. There you have a role-reversal. He hearkened to her. She was pushing him the wrong way. At other times, Sarah did not stand up when she should have stood up—when Abraham said to Sarah, “Tell Pharaoh you are my sister, because I’m afraid he’s going to kill me if he discovers that you are my wife.” She should have said, “Abraham, how could you suggest such a thing!”

But the Bible focuses on Sarah’s virtues, on her faith, on what God did in her. She was not perfect. And yet, when God summed her life, and uses her as an example, He does not focus on her faults. He focuses on what He did in her. God is more gracious than we are. We should learn from that.

Peter says that Sarah is an example of two things—two things that God worked in her as an example to Christian wives. First of all, in what she did. Sarah obeyed Abraham. She listened to him and she responded favorably. She showed her submission in following Abraham, by giving up what was most dear to her as a woman. God had said to Abraham, “Go to a land that I will show thee.” He was seventy-five years old. She was sixty-five. Abraham had only the word and the promise of God. Sarah had to leave a place, the place of her family, the place of her security. She had to set her husband’s God-given calling and duty above herself. She is no

different from any other woman. She would have asked Abraham, “Where are we going? Do you know where? Are we coming back?” And all he could respond was, “Sarah, I don’t know. You have to come with me.”

And then, do not forget Genesis 22, when God said to Abraham, “Take thy son, thy only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up to me where I will show thee.” Do you think that Abraham kept that secret from Sarah? I do not believe that. I believe that he told her: “Sarah, God calls us to give up this child, to give this child over. And, Sarah, you can’t go with me. You can’t protect him. God says that He is going to work this out.” I think it was a very teary farewell that day. And while we think of Abraham on the three-day journey to Mount Moriah knowing that he must offer up his own son, what do you think was on Sarah’s heart as she was left home alone, as she thought of her son Isaac, the miracle child, whom she had nursed and whom she loved? I think that the last words that Abraham and Sarah spoke on the day that Abraham left with Isaac to offer him up are the words that are recorded in Hebrews 11:19. I believe that Sarah spoke these words with Abraham: “God is able to raise him up from the dead.” Sarah hoped in God. Sarah knew God’s care of her and committed her child into that care.

Secondly, Sarah is an example because of what she called her husband. Peter says she called him “lord.” What does that mean? It means this: what you call someone reflects what you think of your relationship to that person. It is indeed interesting that there is one time recorded in the Bible that Sarah called Abraham “lord.” It is found in Genesis 18:12. Three angels have appeared to Abraham. God has spoken His promise: “Sarah shall have a son.” And you recall that Sarah, inside the tent, was eavesdropping. And when she heard that, she laughed, for she was far past the age of bearing children and she had never been able to bear a child. And the Spirit of God tells us what she said in herself at that moment: “After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” Now, what you say about someone behind his back is the clearest indication of what you think about him. To their face you say, “Yes, sir, officer. Yes, Dad.” But then, when you are by yourself, you express what you really think about that person. Here is Sarah. She is expressing her unbelief in God’s promise, her cynicism with God, and if ever she is going to speak in a degrading way of her husband it would be now. “I’m going to have child with that old man?” What would you call your husband? What do you call your husband when you are most frustrated and exasperated? Sarah, at that moment, called him “lord.” Sarah embraced in her deepest soul her relationship to Abraham given by God in marriage. She had one thing straight. “This is my God-given husband. This is my head, my leader, my provider, my protector, my lord.” Out of the heart, says the Bible, one speaks. So, have you embraced this Word of God that the man to whom God has given you, the man to whom you are married, is the head, husband, leader, protector, lord? And do you, for Christ’s sake, serve him as the church serves Christ?

Peter says to the Christian woman, “You don’t need to be afraid when you do this. You are daughters of Sarah, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.” Submission must not be rooted in fear. Submission is free. It is our liberty in Christ to give up ourselves for another. This is freedom. You are the daughters of Sarah. The faith that God placed in Sarah is the faith that God places in you. This woman Sarah, who wore sandals and lived in a tent, is speaking. God is speaking through her. A woman who had everything against her hope, who

could not see with the human eye God's promises, she believed in God. And her example gives birth.

Let us be encouraged. Yours is not just a marriage. You are a daughter of Sarah. Your life of godly submission, your life as a wife, glorifies God. Perhaps you are not being written about or are not going to be written about in *Good Housekeeping*, or in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. But you preach a lasting sermon. Your life bears a testimony throughout all ages of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. You need not fear. You need not fear that submission will make you vulnerable. Hope in God. Seek to do the will of God. Do not fear. Do not fear losing your attractiveness, your beauty. Do not fear what will happen to your children, your house, or your wealth. Make God your hope and your refuge. Follow His will. Seek the beauty that is in Jesus Christ. Sink the roots of your faith into Him. And the believing generation, the believing church, the believing husband, and the believing children will, by God's grace, say of you: "She is beautiful in the beauty of Christ."

Let us pray.

Father, we again thank Thee for Thy Word and pray for its blessing upon our hearts. We pray that we may not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by Thy Word, that in our marriages especially we may reflect Christ and the church. We pray in His name alone, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

August 16, 2015

Homeward Bound

No. 3789

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear radio friends,

I

s your family homeward bound? Is your marriage on track? Are you and your children living toward a better life?

I am asking the question whether or not in our families and marriages as Christians we are living consciously out of our confession that we believe the resurrection of our body and the life everlasting in Jesus Christ. Do you live with an eternal perspective? Do you understand that this life is preparation for the life that is to come, which is, according to God's Word, far better? Or do you live simply a carnal, earthly life foolishly, living only for the things now and the present,

believing that this present life can satisfy you? Or do you, by grace, fix your hope upon Christ, not in an abstract manner but by living your present life with your eye above, seeking to be faithful to Him and seeking to be prepared with your children for that day when you shall enter into the glorious kingdom of your Lord? Are you, then, homeward-bound travelers to the true and eternal shores of glory? Is your marriage on track? Are you and your children living toward the better life?

If so, then two things will now, by God's grace, be true of you. First of all, you and your children, and you as young people, will live ready to die. Ready to die means simply living today in Christ, now. That is what it means to be ready to die in the biblical sense. To be ready to die is to live moment by moment in the Lord Jesus Christ, doing His will and walking with Him in faith.

As young people, we have a tendency to think that our future is invincible and that we are indestructible. Sometimes we can be shocked. I can recall that, as a young person, I would be shocked when a friend of my own age died, or was diagnosed with cancer or some other crippling disease. Somehow it always appears to us that that is going to happen to someone else. Someone else is going to be diagnosed with cancer — not I. Someone else is going to have the sudden fatal car accident. That happens only to other people, right? I am invincible. I am immune. It is not going to happen to *me*.

The Bible, of course, corrects us. God asks, How do you know that? Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." We are in the hand of God moment by moment.

When we know that, when we live daily by a true faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and when we trust in His righteousness as our only acceptance with God, then we are ready to die. But if do not live in faith, if we live apart from Christ, if we live foolishly in a deliberate sin, and if we vainly think that we shall be accepted of God on the basis of something we are or do, then we are not ready to die.

The question is this, as a young person, where is your heart today? At the moment of death, where will it be? Is it fixed upon the cross today? And do you believe, by grace, that you are saved, not because you are a good person in yourself, but because God, by grace, has saved you through Jesus Christ? Then, believing that, you will not just have it in your head, but you will live out of that true faith. Day by day you will deal radically with your sin. You will live your life for the spiritual things of God's kingdom. You will take the Word of God into your heart. You will be homeward bound.

The life that we now live as children of God in our marriages, in our families, as young people, must be a life that is directed toward eternal life. What does that mean? Well, it means a number of things. First of all, it certainly means, according to Scripture, that we shall live in confidence and assurance. Confidence and assurance will mark the life of children of God because of their faith in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Read the Scriptures. Was there any doubt in the mind of the apostle Paul when he wrote, under the inspiration of the Spirit in II Corinthians 4 and 5, that we know that when this earthly house is dissolved we have a

building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? Was there any doubt whatsoever in the apostle Paul? Read those chapters. Remember that the apostle Paul lived in the day of Greek culture—the Greek gods and the philosophy of Plato, with all of its spin upon what life is and what comes after death. The apostle Paul was not in any doubt. He did not join the collective philosophy of his day and say, “Well, I have a contribution to make.” No, he said, “I know, absolutely! The resurrection of the body in Jesus Christ and the life everlasting.”

We shall live, then, with confidence and assurance. Do you have that as a young person in your college class, wherever that class may be in the coming fall, a class perhaps in botany, as you are going to be a nurse, or psychology if you’re going to be a teacher? In the midst of that class you make a good confession. You say, “I know in Christ that my soul at death shall be taken up to Christ my head, and my body shall be raised at the last day and will be made like to His glorious body, and I will live in a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness shall dwell. I know that!” Then, apart from grace, the class ridicules you. They say, “Well, prove that one.” How do you respond? How do you know? Or do you just keep quiet?

We know from the Word of God. Faith is not guessing. Faith is reality. Faith is truth. Faith, based upon the Holy Scriptures, is an absolute certainty—a certainty of those things that eye hath not seen nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, according to Scripture. So we base our faith upon the Scriptures. We go to the Scriptures and we say, “But this does not rest in debate, this does not rest in human argument, this is not decided upon the scale of human reason. The Scriptures have spoken. Christ lives, I know He lives, He lives within me. I am risen already now by His grace. I believe in Him and I shall be raised to be with Him in glory. Because Christ lives, I will live also. And the Holy Spirit testifies of these things in my heart.”

This is also the confidence and the assurance that is so important for parents as they rear their children in the home. We are surrounded by secular unbelief, which tells us that the best thing a parent can do is to do nothing. That is, not to impress upon their child any firm conclusions about morality or Christianity or what happens after death. After all, nobody can be so sure about those things, and if we just have nice feelings about them, then we keep them to ourselves and do not try to impose them upon others. Then we are being the mature parent. Such is the folly of this world. The folly of the world is: The future is not ours to see. Our children are to be sent off into the big unknown. Parents remove firm landmarks, the only true landmarks to guide them, God’s Holy Word. No, as parents we must have a certain confidence, a certain assurance that is given to us by faith.

Now, mother, the hand of your little child is small. It takes only little things to fill it up. So you give them little things. You tell them when they are with you, before they even go off to school: God is great; God is good; Jesus is our Savior; we are going to heaven; your soul—you take your finger and you tap it on their little chest and you say, there’s a soul in there. That is who you are. At death, that soul will be taken by the good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, to be in heaven with all the angels and all the saints of God. Jesus will be there. And then, one day, our bodies, even when they grow old and die and are put into the ground, are going to be raised by the power of God and we shall leap and dance in the new heavens with joy in our hearts. You tell them those simple things. And you know what? The hand of your little child is full. You do not present options concerning these things. You do not guess. You tell them the truth. You tell

them, Now we're going to live as pilgrims with our eye and our face toward heaven. And then you show them how to live as a pilgrim as you face earthly setbacks and you deal with your hard times.

Not only will we then live in confidence and assurance, but we will also know how to view earthly things and how to behave toward earthly things. With the hope of life eternal in our hearts, as families and in marriages, we will understand the vanishing reality of this present world, and the corruptible and non-satisfying reality of the things of this present time. The apostle Paul gives us very good instruction in I Corinthians 7:29-31. He says to us that the time is short, and that it remaineth that those who have wives be as though they had none; those who weep, as though they wept not; those who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; those who buy, as though they possessed not; and those who use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passes away.

We need to know that word today. We need to understand what that means. It means that marriages, heartaches, and possessions are all transient. You need to know that, if you are to live in marriage and live with your possessions in a proper way today. We need to hear that Word of God today, especially concerning the earthly things that so worm their way into our hearts. That is the sin of greed and covetousness that is as spiritual cancer aimed at the destruction of the hope of life eternal in our breast. We are living in a consumer culture. Advertising bombards us relentlessly. We are told that things will give pleasure and that we must have those things right now. Future cost must yield to present personal gratification. We are in a time of consumer debt and credit cards and no final accounting and payments deferred. How does this affect us spiritually? How are we raising our children?

The Son of God said, "Take heed. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses but in being rich toward God." Young people, what really is life? What really is value? What really will give you joy? To be able to purchase the latest CD? To have the latest clothes? To be able to spend what you want when you want? Is living this: that you get a job so that you have enough money to throw around and have a good time? Is the amount of money in your wallet what makes you a man? Is that how you live? What about those jobs that have at their heart the preparation of children for the kingdom of God, for being a husband or a wife in a Christian home? Do you set your hearts upon that? That is where it is really at. That is the heart and the focus of where the grace of God is performing wonders in the preparation of souls for eternity. Do you want to be involved in that work? What about Christian schools and being a teacher there, or the work of the church? Is your heart set upon heaven? Or is your heart taken up with the consumer culture? Have you swallowed the lie that things and earthly pleasures are what life is worth living for? Do you know the true wealth that is in Christ?

What about dating? How do you evaluate a young man? He's willing to spend money on you? He takes you out to a nice restaurant? Well, it might be enjoyable to go out to a nice restaurant if he can afford it sometimes. But as you sit there, and as you watch him, how do you evaluate him? What he's willing to buy you? Or do you ask the question: What treasure does this young man have in his heart? Does he have a treasure? Does he have the treasure of Jesus Christ?

This also affects us in how we are going to rear our children. We must understand that as parents it is not the things that we give them, and it is not necessary that the things we give them be new. The most important thing is not that we have a home filled with plenty of bedrooms, so that every person in the family has his own bedroom and can close the door and stay in there, and that in it is everything one could possibly want. That is not the goal. The goal is the truth of God. Do not sell that. Fathers, do not buy into the world's economy. Do not sell spiritual assets. Do not make this world your goal.

Probably most of you fathers work in some type of industry and you know what a smooth sale is in earthly things. Well, there is no one so smooth and oily as the devil. He says to you as a father, "Give me just a small amount of your spiritual capital and I will give you the world. Give me just a few hours of work on Sunday, just a few—just once a month. Give me those hours at supper time, the overtime hours, so that you're not going to be home at the supper table with your wife and kids. Give me those hours, because you're making double time. Hand over to me," says the devil, "hard and fast convictions on the truth." The devil says, "Let me be your financial budget manager. And let's arrange that budget around some of the things that you would really like. Give me just a little bit of your spiritual capital. You don't need to sell it all to me. In fact, you may have 90-95% of it. And enjoy it. By all means enjoy it! Go to church, too, if you want. Just sell me a little spiritual capital and I'll give you the world."

Do you want to know what you are going to get if you go into his economy? You are going to get many cares, many worries. You are going to have children who grow up who are distant from you and do not know you because you have not been there. You are going to have a marriage broken up. And you are going to see children who have not learned the one crucial lesson of being a Christian. That crucial lesson is: Sacrifice. And we will end up like Lot—fleeing Sodom alone.

Rear your children for the important things, the things of life eternal. Rear your children, with your wife, in the Word of God. Rear your children in the church of God where the truth is proclaimed. Rear your children homeward bound.

Then you will have joy and hope. You will have the assurance in your heart that you shall ever live before God's face. Your future is bright. It might not always be that, in the earthly sense, we are bubbly. But deep down, in our hearts, we will have the joy of Jesus Christ. Joy is the whisper of Jesus Christ saying to me, "You are mine." In college, as a young person, you will speak of the joy and the hope that is yours in Jesus Christ. You will speak against the tide of the politically correct speech. And you will say, "I'm not afraid of tomorrow. I have a faithful Savior who will hold my soul." And others will look at you and note your testimony.

You will live with joy as a mother before your children. And then your children will come in and will ask you, "Mom, the lady next door had some very bad things happen to her and she is screaming and crying and there's something so hopeless in her cries. Mom, we've seen you cry, too. But your tears are different. Your tears are soft. Why are you different from her, Mom?" Then you will say, "Because, by God's love, I have joy in my heart and hope. I'm going home! The way may be hard. The way may be apparently impossible. There may be many fears and attacks on the way. And the cherished hopes of this life may disappear. But I'm going home.

I'm not distressed. I'm not in despair. I'm not forsaken. And I'm not destroyed. For I have a perfect hope in Jesus Christ." That is how you raise your children.

Then we will labor and we will long for that day. There are many who will say to us that this hope of eternal life makes the child of God careless in terms of this present life. In the church they will even write a book to catch attention and say, "Heaven is not my home," supposedly trying to get at this: If you preach and teach that the hope of the Christian is life eternal—to be with Christ—then you will not be of any value or worth to society now. Supposedly that is the idea. Well, I will not enter into that right now to show that that is utterly false. But this is what I will say. The life of those who hope for life to come in Christ and who live with that hope of glory, who live not for this life but who live for the life to come—that life is going to prove that they are wrong. You will be the hardest worker in the class. You will be the most responsible person. You will not be lazy. You will help others. You will be the first person on the block to lend a hand and to help out. Why? Because we know that our labor is never in vain in the Lord. We know that our life shall not disappear. Living in the hope of Christ, we shall live now to the glory of God. And we will live with a longing. I want to go home. I am eager for Christ to come back. The apostle Paul says, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." You want to be there, do you not? Do you not want to be home in your true home, with the Father's love and with the elder Brother, Jesus Christ?

Then, husbands and wives and families, let us be resolved that we do one thing in this present life and that we do it well. Let us be resolved that we will direct our steps toward home.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. And we pray that it may enter into our hearts. Wash away and pardon us of all of our sins. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

August 23, 2015

God's Gift of the Family

No. 3790

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

I

would direct your attention today to a very beautiful promise of God found in Psalm 68:6. The title of our meditation will be “God’s Gift of the Family.”

Your family, according to God’s Word, is a gift of God. A Christian family comes in the infinite compassion of the majestic and glorious God. A Christian family is the product of God’s hand and of God’s heart. So we are taught in the Scriptures in Psalm 68:6. We read, “God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.”

Psalm 68 was sung or written by David when he brought the ark of the covenant of God out of the house of Obed-edom up to the place that he had prepared for it in the city of Jerusalem. As he is engaged in this, he thinks of how the ark, built originally by Moses and carried by the priests, would lead the way as Israel journeyed for forty years in the wilderness. And so, he begins Psalm 68 with the prayer that Moses would utter whenever the ark went forward to lead Israel in the wilderness. We read in Numbers 10:35 and in Psalm 68:1, “Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.” “Lord,” is the prayer, “lead us, protect us. Our enemies of personal sin and temptation are ever around us. As the wind drives away smoke, so, Lord, go before us and make the way plain and protect us.”

The leading, says David in verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 68, shall make the righteous people glad. “Let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice,” he says. “Sing unto God, sing praises to [God].” He calls our attention to our God’s majesty and glory, and says that He is above all praise. He rideth, says David, upon the heavens by his name Jah. Soaring above all that is majestic and honorable is God Himself. The word “Jah” is the abbreviation of “Jehovah,” which means “I AM THAT I AM.” It is found only there in Psalm 68:4 and is really involved in the word “Hallelujah.” “Rejoice before Jehovah”—that is what Hallelujah means.

But then, lest we think that God is exalted beyond reach and that we can have no approach and that we must hide in terror, David begins in verse 5 to speak of the infinite tenderness of our great and majestic God. He says, “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.” The great heart of God for orphans and widows, for deserted and lonely sinners. How many orphans were there in the forty years’ wilderness wanderings? As Moses led the people of God for forty years, waiting for all those who were over twenty to die before they could enter into the land of Canaan, how many orphans there must have been. And God cared for them.

Still more, the pity and the tender heart of the majestic Jehovah is seen in this: God sets the solitary in families. He brings out those that are bound with chains. But the rebellious dwell in a dry land. Again, the point is the great compassion of God. The point of the passage is this, that our families are the glorious gift of Jehovah to us His desolate and spiritual needy children. God’s great mercy and God’s great love in Jesus is seen in the establishment of a Christian family. He, Jehovah, the majestic and yet filled-with-loving-kindness-God, is the God who sets the solitary in families. We are being taught in Holy Scripture that as Christians we must receive in thanksgiving our family and live conscious of the blessing, of the great good, that our families are for our spiritual life. God is pleased to nurture and to guard our spiritual lives in our families. In the family, He is pleased to show His love, mold our faith, comfort our sorrows, and

give us true happiness. In the family we learn and taste of His love, and we experience His care so that we can say, as in Psalm 71: “From youth thou art my trust.” The family, then, is not a human contrivance. It is not the product of men. But it is God’s gracious gift to us His children.

But you say, “Pastor, my home does not so often fit those words. My home is troublesome. The youth, the children, don’t want to be there. It is a place of anger and fighting.” That may be true. We are broken sinners and we need God’s Word to heal us and to instruct us.

Maybe you say, “But I have no family. I’m single—not married. I don’t come from a believing home. I have no children right now to fill my house with joy. We were not given children.” And I respond to you, “Yet the family is the great gift of God to you, for we are members of the family of God—His church.” God’s gracious gift is the family.

Note with me that David, in Psalm 68, is saying that the family is precious, first of all, because it is the place where Jehovah gives us to experience fellowship with Him. God sets the solitary, or lonely, in families, or in homes. Your home, then, as children of God, should be very precious to you, not because of what it costs or the fact that *you* remodeled it and did the sweat work, but your home should be precious because in that home God is pleased to give you to enjoy fellowship with Him. As sinners, we are described as the solitary, as the lonely. Sin always isolates. Sin’s goal in our life is that we be alone—all alone. Sin always makes us look within, think of ourselves. And the consequences of sin are always isolation— isolation from God and from one another. As sinners we are solitary, or, in other words of Scripture, we are castaways, aliens, strangers, lonely, burdened. We cry out in our loneliness. We go through depression.

But God’s grace comes to us. And that grace finds us a sinful, solitary soul—cast away—and unites us to Jesus Christ by grace, unites us to the family of God (the church), and then (through marriage) grants to us a family—a place where we might experience fellowship with God, with Jehovah!

Going back to verse 4, David said that we extol Him that rides upon the heavens by His name Jah, and rejoice before Him. I said that “Jah” is the name “Jehovah,” I AM THAT I AM, a name that looks within God, a name in which God says, “This is what I am. I am what I am.” And, by pointing to Himself, He is pointing to the fact that He is a God who in Himself has everlasting fellowship. God is not lonely. We stand before the great truth of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is the truth that shows us that God is a living God. He is not solitary throughout eternity. He is not lonely. But Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love one another purely, talk freely, cherish one another dearly. And, in His grace, He is moved to bring us to experience that fellowship with Him (which the Bible calls “covenant”). Through the blood of Jesus Christ, He brings us to experience a fellowship that He Himself is the author of.

And in the family, He says, “I am pleased to give you, through faith in Me, to enjoy that fellowship with each other.” God’s grace gives us the institution of the family as a place where we might experience fellowship with Him and each other as we walk as His children in a weary and lonely world.

That means that our homes need to reflect Him. Consciously we must build our homes to reflect Him. Our homes, then, will be filled with graciousness. Note the word, “God sets the lonely in a house.” That oozes with His graciousness and kindness. God is so gracious and filled with pity toward us. Are you gracious, as God is gracious to you, to the members of your family? Do you show that? Are you intolerant of the weaknesses of a wife or a husband? Do you say, “Why does she need to be that way all the time?” Are you irritable with your children? Is there, in your home, unacceptance, yelling, fighting, bickering, a big lip, arguing? Do you children want to go home?

Our homes, first of all, must be filled with a graciousness—not with the criticism: “Why can’t you...,” but with a graciousness that God shows to us in our salvation.

Our homes must not only be filled with graciousness, but they must also be filled with compassion. God’s heart goes out in pity towards us and toward the suffering. The family is the place where we invite the lonely, the aged mother or widow, the lonely teenager, the visitor at church. Our homes are places of compassion. Within our homes we must be compassionate one toward another.

We are very concerned in the building of a physical house about radon and asbestos because they are threats to our health. So, if you buy a house that has radon and asbestos in it, it has to be taken out. If there are the radon and asbestos of ill-will, resentment, bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, take that out of your house. Then our homes will be filled with communication, talking. If our homes are to reflect the fellowship of God, then our homes have to be places where we talk with each other, we open up to each other, we talk about more than just earthly, mundane things. We talk about our faith and our walk and our spiritual life with God. The living Word of God must be the warmth, the comfort, the basis of our fellowship. There must be times for regular family devotions around the Word of God. We live in a lonely world, where everyone becomes more and more distant from others, and where everyone lives in his own room, with his face glued to a computer, to Facebook, to a television, and never talking. The picture of the Christian family is not that. The picture of the Christian family is a place of communion, fellowship, talking even as God has communion with us.

I said the family is precious because it is the place where God is pleased to give us to enjoy fellowship with Him. But the family is precious also, according to our text today, because it is the gracious means of God to deliver us from a life lived under the tyranny of sinful pride.

When we come back again to read the text, we see that the text is talking about more than just loneliness and the prison of feeling isolated. But let us read the complete text, the text as a whole. “God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.” Now, the verse is written in what is called Hebrew parallelism, which means that all of the parts must be taken together and reflect upon each other. So the evil that is considered in the text, from which the family is a gift of God to deliver us, is being solitary, alone, dwelling in chains and rebellion. The meaning, then, is this: Our problem, as sinners, is that we live a life for self, rebellious. We are narcissistic, we are under the bondage of our own pride and selfishness. And as surely as the drops of the rain fall to the earth by the hand of God and run into the tile and then into the ditch and stream and river and out into the lake or ocean, so also the

course of our life, the course of a child's life, flows to self-centered bondage, the bondage of pride and sin—unless God's grace brings us to the joy of forsaking ourselves and finding our all in serving Him, unless God brings us out of that bondage of sin into the liberty of the grace of God in Christ.

And what are the means that God uses for that? You say, "Pastor, that's the Holy Spirit, that's the Word of God, it's the preaching." Yes, but it is also the family. Also the Christian family is the means of God to deliver us from a life lived under the tyranny of sinful pride.

We are born chained in rebellion—rebellion against God. We are born proud, selfish, isolated, solitary. There is no room for anybody else in our sinful pride, except that the other person become our footstool. This is what Satan instilled in Adam and Eve: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. You are god!" And Scripture defines our sin, for which the Son of God came to die and deliver us, in this way: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Is. 53:6). That selfishness, that pride, brings isolation. We say it when we are filled with pride and we want our own sinful way. That is the way we speak in the family. We say, "Well, if that's the way it is around here, I'm out of here!" Or we say, "My parents, who do they think they are to tell *me!*" You see, there is no fellowship when rebellion and pride reign in our hearts. There will be bickering, there will be fighting. There will only be emptiness. We will end alone.

You say to me, "Oh, Pastor, I don't know about that. Look at the ungodly sinners who live according to their own sins and pride. Look at them in their parties and in their bars. They are happy, they are dancing, they are hugging, they are making out, they are having a good time." No! Hollow emptiness. It is the clang of an empty barrel.

Young girl, you want attention? Do you want someone to love you? And one day someone who does not know Jesus shows you some attention. And he uses you. And, finally, you live together and you find that he is irritable, and he hits you, and he abuses you. Sin is selfishness. Selfishness is pride. Pride is loneliness. And it leads to bondage.

The verse speaks of chains. Our sinful pride ensnares us. It isolates us and then sin enslaves us. Hear that. Sin first isolates you. In your pride you leave the family. You leave the marriage. You leave places that are going to tell you that you are wrong. You walk away saying, "I'm not going to hear that. Not *me!*" Sin isolates you and then sin enslaves you. When you think about "me, myself," when you are filled with self-pity and pride, the devil is bringing out the chains and he is ready to lock you up in the chains and bondage of sin.

God's gift of the family is so precious because it is the institution to which His grace comes to deliver us from that sinful pride, from a life lived in the bondage of self. That is why He gives us a family. That is why He sets us in the church. For life in the believing family and in the believing church is not self. The life of Jesus Christ is fellowship. You must make room. You must destroy that idol that is called "me." God sets you in a family. Why did God put you in a family? This is the reason: Graciously to turn you from the course of life that you would choose with the world, in which you would come under the bondage of sinful pride, sinful me. He uses the family to break that bondage by His grace so that we learn what it is to love and to live in

humble love and fellowship with each other, to yield our way, to be considerate, to open our eyes for the other as a reflection of the grace of God who has had respect and pity upon me.

So our families exist to teach us repentance. Our families exist to teach us what sin is, and what selfishness and pride are, and how we are to deal with that sin and repent. Mom and Dad are examples. That means that Mom and Dad are not stuck on themselves—their own pleasures, their own time, their own entertainment, their own figures. Mom and Dad are not stuck on themselves. They teach—in how they live with each other. They teach wisely and lovingly that life in Christ is to serve one another in self-denying love. And they bring up their children that way. They direct the course of their family away from the bondage of pride, the pride of the world, to the humility and freedom of fellowship with God in Christ.

This is why the family is so precious. The family is precious because it is the gift of God whereby we enjoy fellowship with God. It is the gift of God whereby the tyranny of the bondage of a sinful life lived under pride is to be broken.

Do you believe that? That is God's Word. Then guard your family. Guard it from the sewer, from the deluge of sexual perversions aimed at ensnaring and destroying you and your children. Guard your family and deliver it from the prevailing allurements of materialism. Understand that you are not on earth simply to find out how many possessions you can accumulate or to follow the latest fashion or to live for the dollar. Above all things, defend your home from your selfishness, from your pride, from your self-seeking.

The family, then, is God's beautiful, precious gift to us in the covenant of His grace. Cherish it by living in humble obedience to God, by repenting of your sins and finding your refuge in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Do you cherish your family? Do you know how precious it is? Do you thank God for your family?

Is your family today in trouble? I know why David began Psalm 68 as he did. He wrote: "Let God arise and, by His might, put all His enemies to flight." So we pray: "Lord, arise and defend my home. As Israel in the wilderness, I am an unworthy, foolish, stiff-necked, self-centered sinner. Rise up, O Lord. By Thy Word and Spirit go before me. And may my family travel together, as Israel of old through a dry and weary wilderness, a dry and weary world, experiencing fellowship with God, obeying, trusting, following, rejoicing in Jehovah, who is our strength and has promised to bless us."

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the Word. And we pray for Thy Spirit to work it in our hearts this day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

August 30, 2015 Christian Education Is Covenant Education

No. 3791

Rev. Carl Haak

Dear Radio Friends,

S

chool is in the air. Stores are having their big “Back-to-School” sales. Teachers and staff are gearing up. Some children are tired of summer vacation and eager for a new year. And many parents are eager for a new school year. It is an exciting and a busy time of year.

Maybe your family has a little one starting for the very first time. Or perhaps God has blessed you with many children and you have been sending your children off to school for years and years.

What kind of a school are they going to? The choice of school is important. Everybody says that. It is *very* important. It is an important decision for a parent, perhaps one of the most important choices a parent makes. Therefore it is a decision that needs to be made with much prayer, and over an open Bible.

Children of God ought to feel very strongly about the schools that their children attend. The school that your child attends ought to be a very important thing in your life. Are you looking into a school for the very first time? Are your children enrolled in a school you have used for many years? What kind of a school is it? Why do you use the school that you do?

Christian parents look for good Christian schools. So important is a good Christian school to believing parents that they are willing to pay large tuition bills rather than accept free public education. So important is Christian education to Christian parents that fathers are willing to work two or three jobs and to live in a place where there is such a good Christian school. Not only are Christian parents willing to pay the cost involved, but the commitment runs even deeper. They prize their Christian school as an extension of their own home and as an invaluable tool in aiding them in their calling, that is, in the parents’ calling to train their children in the way of the Lord.

But what is a good Christian school? Is the essence of a Christian school the fact that there is a Bible class included in the curriculum? Is that what makes it a good Christian school? Is the essence of a Christian school the fact that students are allowed to pray there, or that it has a dress code, or that morals and manners are taught and insisted upon? Does a Christian school relieve parents of their responsibility? Is it simply a place where they can send their kids off to for a

while? Is creation presented in such a school, as an explanation of origins, as well as evolution? What is a good Christian school, one that is truly Christian?

A good Christian school is a covenant school. A good Christian education is a covenant education. That is, it is one that is based upon the biblical teaching (I was just about to say “a biblical teaching,” but, no, based upon *the* biblical teaching) of God’s covenant with believing parents and their children. And the heart of understanding Christian education is to be found in an understanding within your soul of the truth of God’s glorious covenant of grace with believers and their children.

Now this will take some explaining. So, buckle your seat belts—that is, follow very carefully, or, better, in the words of Scripture: gird up the loins of your mind.

Our Christian faith is built upon knowledge. Faith-knowledge for sure, heart-knowledge for sure, but, nevertheless, a knowledge taken from Holy Scripture and that involves the use of your mind seeking to absorb biblical truth and principles.

I said, a good Christian education is a covenantal education. Covenant is the truth that is found in the Holy Scriptures from cover to cover. I will offer this definition: Covenant is the teaching of Holy Scripture that it is the will of the glorious God to embrace His people in Jesus Christ with arms of perfect love and everlasting faithfulness. The Bible uses many expressions to convey it. God says, “I will dwell with you and be among you; I will abide with you; I will live within you; I will be your God and ye shall be My people.” God speaks to us of a relationship that He makes with His people, chosen in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ. But He speaks of that relationship in the Bible in terms of fellowship, communion, endearment—in terms of covenant.

Covenant is a living bond of love and fellowship between God and us. As a father lives with his children in love, as a husband knows and loves his wife, so God, in the Scriptures, says to us: “I will be a covenant God to you. You shall enjoy the blessing of My covenant.” God wills, through Jesus Christ, to love us, to live with us, to keep us, to bless us, to dwell within us, and to sanctify us through Jesus Christ entirely of His grace. Covenant: the truth that God graciously takes wicked, rebellious, sin-laden men and women and washes them in the blood of His own Son. He renews them by the Holy Spirit within their hearts and He draws them to Himself in an irresistible, saving love. And we come to know, cherish, love the living God.

Then God lives within us and lives with us and holds us and instructs us, comforting, correcting, preserving, forgiving, and at last perfecting us in the splendor of heaven. The covenant!

God makes this covenant, according to Scripture, with believers and their children. Right there lies the basis for Christian education. Christian schools are born out of the truth that God establishes His covenant with believers and their children.

The Bible teaches that God takes His children out of the children of believers. Or you could put it this way, that God casts the lines of His eternal, unconditional, gracious election in the

generations of believers. Or you could put it this way (this is what we are saying), when God saves a man and a woman by grace, He promises to them that He will begin to keep covenant with them—not only with them personally, but also to work within their children, calling these parents now to love and to nurture their children in the Holy Scriptures. When God saves a man and a woman, He begins covenant, that is, He promises that He will work within their offspring His saving love and truth. And so God would say to Abraham (Gen. 17:7): “I will be a God to you, Abraham, and to your children after you.” So also the apostle Peter could say to repentant believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:39): “For the promise is unto you and to your children, that is, to repentant sinners who have been brought, by grace, to confess and repent in Christ and to possess forgiveness in Christ. The promise of God is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

So God sends forth His Word. And that Word calls sinners to Him. In the book of Acts: Lydia, Cornelius, the Philippian jailer, the house of Crispus. And then God, bringing these adults to Himself in saving faith, began a work within their household, within their children. The children, born to believers, are covenant children. God forms His people from among them. And these children—growing up and serving the Lord, marrying in the Lord—God works within *their* children from generation to generation, leaving believing parents with a blessed calling and task: teach your sons and your daughters what you have seen and what you have learned of Me.

That is the basis of Christian education: God saying to a believing parent, on the basis of His covenant, “Teach your son and your daughter what you have known and seen and learned of Me.”

Listen to good king Hezekiah say it in Isaiah 38:19. In this context, Hezekiah had been sick, nigh unto death. The Lord had restored him and given him the promise that he would have a son to sit upon the throne. And Hezekiah responds in a psalm, a psalm of his great distress when he was sick, but also of his great praise to God when he was recovered. He says this in verse 19: “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.” Hezekiah, as I said, had experienced in a profound and personal way the wondrous grace of God. He had been brought exceedingly low and had been brought to see the unshakable promises of God. Now those promises and the grace of God live within His breast. They lived! “The living, the living shall make known Thy truth. The living shall praise Thee.” A child of God who knows the glorious truth of God’s grace to him shall praise God. And out of that same impulse, out of that holy impulse, he will make known God’s truth to his children.

The covenant, then, is this, that when God sheds forth His light upon you in Jesus Christ and gives you to taste and to see that He is gracious, you will want your children to know this wonder with you. As you love God and you love your children, you will desire for your children the greatest possible good, which is to know the grace of God that you know.

So we read in Psalm 34: “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.” Or, throughout the book of Proverbs: “My son, give me thy heart.” As believing fathers, we are not just concerned that our children become electricians or cabinet-makers or

executives—a chip off the old block. But we are concerned that the children know better than we the wonderful grace of God, that they may taste and see that the Lord is gracious.

So believing parents of one faith bind together in a holy purpose to begin a Christian school. Understanding my calling as a father, which is given to me as a parent, I seek out other like-minded Christians. We pool our abilities and our resources, elect a board, hire teachers who share our faith, and we begin a school in which the children of the covenant may be taught even as God has taught us.

This includes the covenant community as we care for our children born within the sphere of that community. Our commitment in the instruction of our children is not just for the children of our own flesh. This commitment would be ours if we had no children, or if our children are now beyond the age of schooling. We possess a love for the children born in the sphere of the covenant. If a brother or sister becomes unable, laid low, we will help with their children. Should a brother become neglectful or disobedient, we will yet seek to do all that we can to aid and help in the instruction of his children. Because of covenant, because of the living desire that the children born within that sphere of God's gracious truth might come to know that truth and embrace it with all their hearts.

Out of the womb of the truth of the covenant, Christian schools are born. These Christian schools, of course, will then have very distinctive features. The most distinctive is the covenant itself, that is, in how the children are going to be viewed and approached. They will not be viewed as being outside of the grace and work of the Holy Spirit, but they will be viewed as those who are to be nurtured, taught, brought up in the truth of Jesus Christ, their Savior and their Lord.

Such schools will have some clear features. Let me mention a few of them. There will be a clear commitment to truth: biblical, creedal, confessional truth. Families seeking to have their children enrolled in this school will be told up front that there is a clear commitment here to a statement of faith and truth in the Holy Scriptures. The statement of the faith will be seen throughout the school. If a family is looking for simply good academics with just a little religious topping over it, they will soon discover that this is not the school for them. The school will be committed to teaching students the clear truth of God, in order that the student might become fully devoted as a follower of Jesus Christ.

What we are saying here is that Christian education is not neutral. It is not a school that is trying to be neutral over issues of the truth and neutral over issues of Jesus. A Christian school does not downplay what they stand for in the name of academic freedom or in the hope of increasing enrollment. But love for God's glorious truth revealed in the Scriptures and stated in biblical, Reformed creeds will be expressed in clear and open commitment.

This will keep the school from becoming aimless, purposeless, a clone of the secular school, where nothing is believed with certainty. A Christian school states up front what it believes.

Another way of saying this is that covenant Christian schools bow before the infallible and inspired Scriptures. They believe the absolute truth of the Bible, from cover to cover. It is

God's Word written. In such a school the truth of the Bible will shape the teaching of every subject and will provide understanding unto every aspect of life. In such a school the Bible will be held supreme. In schools where the Bible is not the basis of truth, students are offered plenty of information and opinions but they are not given a solid foundation on which to build their thinking and to ground their entire life. Students in a good Christian school will learn what the Bible says, learn sound doctrines, learn church history, learn every subject (literature, history, math, science, music, art) in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

A Christian school, further, has this feature, that it is God-centered. You see, Christian education is not simply a reaction to prayer-lessness and godlessness in the public schools. But believing the truth of the Bible, a Christian school is devoted to a God-centered approach in life and learning. The Bible says that all things were created for God's glory. The unifying principle of knowledge is to know God and His Son Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. The Christian school seeks to humble the mind. It seeks to bring the soul into reverence before the great and the glorious God of salvation. The physical sciences in such a school will seek to investigate the physical universe as fashioned by God's power and as a demonstration of His glory. The life sciences within such a school will study the wonderful diversity, construction, and function of all of God's creatures. The social sciences and languages will examine how God calls us to communicate with each other, to build each other up, and to express our thoughts in love. The arts and the music within such a school will provide opportunities to respond to the beauty and to the design God has placed in the creation. All will be aimed at bringing the student and the teacher to stand in awe of God and to say, "My God, how wonderful Thou art!"

A Christian school, then, is not a place where the Bible class teaches that the universe is governed by God's will, while the science class teaches that the universe is controlled by natural law. It is not a school in which the children in choir will be singing "Beautiful Savior, King of creation," and then in the chemistry class will be taught to deny the Creator by being taught a form of evolution. A Christian school tells students why they live, for whom they should live, what it means to live: God, and God alone!

There will be more features. Let me mention some of them only in passing. Such a covenant Christian school will not be mediocre. It will call students to use and to develop the abilities and talents that they have. The school will not simply "dumb things down" to make the student feel better about himself, but each child will be met at his level of ability and be aided to be thankful for what God has given him and to use what God has given to him. Another way of saying this is that each child will be taught the joy of faithful stewardship of his own abilities and talents.

Further, it will be a school that will be very friendly to families. Parents will be welcome. And parents will be viewed as the primary educators of the children. The teacher will not see himself or herself as a replacement for, but as a servant of, the parents. The parents will be involved in constructive, mature, and helpful ways, making the school the very best that it can be. It will be covenantal. It will be characterized by fellowship—humble, respectful fellowship, between administrator, teachers, parents, and students. Parents will talk with teachers. They will

work together. They will go on field trips with the class. They will know what is going on with their child.

A Christian school, further, is one that has a great passion for holiness—holiness of life, devoted Christian life for students and teachers. The education that they provide is not simply a building, not simply in books. But it is how the student will live with his classmates. A Christian school is the place where character is molded, where teachers understand that they will have a profound impact upon the life of their students. And the students, covenant students, will act as friends of God with each other. Having received of God a gracious friendship in Jesus Christ, they will be taught and encouraged to live as friends with each other. They will be respectful, thoughtful, compassionate, kind one with another. It will show. You will feel it. You will sense it within the school. You will see that everybody in this school is concerned about godly character, that their lives are shaped to the honor and the glory of God. That is a good Christian school.

These are some of the features, then, of a covenant Christian school: Clear commitment to the truth of Holy Scripture, God-centered teaching, a striving after excellence, parental involvement, personal godliness and holiness.

Yes, even the best Christian schools, reaching unto these truths, fall short. Now, remember, if you and I join such a school, our very joining it means that that Christian school cannot be perfect. All we need to do is to look at ourselves. But these schools are nevertheless a blessing. They are worth all the sacrifice. They are a great good. By God's grace God gives such schools, which are great treasures, to us. Let us pray for them. Let us encourage those who are laboring in them to strive to assure that the schools are indeed Christian, covenantal schools. May God prosper us with such schools and families in establishing them. And may God unite our hearts as parents in the thrill and in the joy of teaching our children to know and to trust in God.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word to us. As we begin another year of schooling, we ask for Thy blessing. Remind us as parents that this is our calling, our privilege, and our responsibility from God. May our hearts feel a great burden, as those who have been made alive in Christ, to teach our children the glorious truths of Thee. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.