

Courtship & Marriage article 14

Dear Young People,

You will remember that we were in an imaginary pre-marital counseling session and I was talking to you about what to expect in your marriage and how to live with a spouse in a happy relationship. I was telling you that to make a marriage a happy and successful one requires constant attention and hard work. A happy marriage is not automatic.

Some rather naïve couples think that a successful marriage just happens. They take the attitude prior to marriage: “We are in love; love will carry us through anything that happens; we are ready for marriage.” But things do not work out that way. Marriage becomes “old” soon enough; and from a romantic point of view, the luster wears off. Taking care of little children soon takes the romance out of a wife; a difficult day at work leaves a man exhausted and out of sorts; troubles come on us that fill us with worry, heartache and unhappiness.

Besides all this, two people who were once strangers and now live together in the most intimate of all human relationships cannot help but see their spouses in a new and different light. The routine of life has a way of bringing out the weaknesses, frailties and sins that each has. And just to get used to living with someone else is itself a major task. Martin Luther, the great reformer of the 16th century, contrary to Roman Catholic practice, married Katie Von Boran. In doing so and having children he and Katie (whom he affectionately called “Katie, my rib”), established the pattern for a covenant home. But he himself remarked that it was with a great shock that he woke up in the morning to see a pigtail on the pillow next to him.

A young couple who marry in the fear of the Lord marry to establish a **covenant** home. When I talk about a covenant home, I probably ought to warn you ahead of time that no couple ever attains to a perfect covenant home. Husband and wife are both sinful and fall short of their calling. But the Lord does not expect that our homes will meet the standards of a covenant home in all respects. But this does not mean that we do not try to form such a home, or that we soon give in to our weaknesses and sins and let the world dominant in our homes. We constantly strive as best we can to establish such a home, and we seek every day the grace that only God can give to be successful

A covenant home has the following characteristics.

- 1) It is a home in which husband and wife together strive to reflect in their relationships with each other the covenant relationship between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:22-33).
- 2) It is a home that, when God blesses the home with children, the family together reflects God’s covenant, for God’s covenant with His people is a family relationship: God is the Father, Christ is the elder brother, and all the saints are sons and daughters of God. We are heirs to our Father’s treasures and we have a home in heaven (John 14:1-3, II Cor. 5:1).
- 3) It is a home in which love prevails, where there is joy and happiness, where there is laughter and fun; in short, a home to which the members are eager to return, if work or school takes them away for several hours.
- 4) It is a home which could have a sign hanging above the front door, which reads: “In this home Christ is King.” I was at such a home once, in the deep south in the state

of Alabama. It struck me as most appropriate. A home where Christ is King is a home in which Christ rules and parents and children alike worship and serve the Lord Christ. Anyone who enters such a home knows immediately that this home is different from the homes in the world. There is an air of peace and serenity. There is obviously love and a mutual respect for those who live there. The rule of Christ can easily be detected by the music being played, by the programs on the TV, by the family devotions at meal time, and by the conversation of parents and children.

- 5) A covenant home is a home that has at its center the church. The church is the all-important institution for the family, the institution around which their lives revolve. The parents are busy in the church; the children learn their lessons for Catechism, prayers are made for the church and its office bearers, as well as for the saints in all their need.
- 6) And, from a negative viewpoint, you will not hear in this home quarreling and bickering, backbiting and gossip, swearing and cursing, cruel words and bitter talk. You will hear words of love and encouragement, of good fun and laughter, of love and concern.

It is not easy to establish and maintain such a home. Our best efforts must be devoted to it. Some activities in the home are of such importance that without them, the home will not be a covenant home at all. Parents must love each other and show respect for each. The husband must pray for his wife in their family devotions. Children must learn to respect and obey their parents, and cheerfully do what is required of them in the life of the home.

Family devotions are essential. The family must, especially at mealtime, begin the meal with a prayer for God's blessing, and close the meal with Scripture reading and a prayer of thankfulness. When the Scriptures are read, the father must explain what is read to the children, instruct them in Scripture's teaching, and permit the children to ask any questions about the passage read. It is better to spend one-half an hour with two verses than to spend an hour reading half of Psalm 119 with no explanation or discussion. And I think everyone will agree: Eating outside the home pretty much pushes family devotions in the closet.

My grandfather had a strange practice at mealtime. The meal always began and ended with prayer and Scripture reading, but no one, under any circumstances, might talk at the table. A murmur, "Please pass the potatoes" was all that was tolerated. We children did not like to go to their home to eat. We were used to talking, laughter, fun and discussion of what happened during the day and at school. Silence even made the food taste bad. When my wife and I were bringing up our children, our discussions while reading the Bible were often lengthy and worthwhile. But the children learned to listen to what was read and to think about what God had to say.

It is extremely sad that family devotions fall by the wayside in our day. The father is too busy at work; the mother too harried to prepare a meal; the children too involved in all kinds of activities for the family to sit down together at mealtime. My father told us that his father, in the days of horse and wagon, had to get up at 5:00 to be at work by 7:00 A.M. But all the children were roused from bed at 5:30 so that the family could eat breakfast together and have devotions to begin the new day.

To establish a covenant home requires that parents and older children guard what comes into the home. The devil, through divorce and remarriage not only, but also through the moral rot that comes on the radio, by means of the TV, and on the internet, attacks the Christian home to destroy it. God's people watch TV programs that display worldly and godless people who curse and swear, make jokes of the most serious things in life, and preach violence and self-love. If a woman would come to our door dressed as women are dressed on TV programs and talk the way men and women talk on TV, we would slam the door in their faces and refuse them entrance into our homes. But we open the "door" of the TV screen and think nothing of permitting these immodest, half-naked, godless men and women speak to our children about all the worldly values that are so spiritually deadly.

But this is sufficient for this letter. We have more to discuss in our sessions, God willing.

With warmest regards and Christian love,

Prof Hanko