

Courtship & Marriage article 15

Dear Young People,

We will continue our “pre-marital counseling sessions”. At our last session we talked about what is necessary to establish a covenant home.

Let it be very clear that covenant homes are essential in this world of sin and darkness. God saves His elect people in the lines of generations, that is, parents and their children, grand children, great grand children . . . , in covenant homes. God is pleased in His counsel to use the means of covenant instruction to preserve His covenant. That covenant instruction comes primarily in the home.

Furthermore, the church is dependent on covenant homes, because the church is the **gathering of believers and their covenant seed** in the corporate worship on the Lord’s Day.

One has to fight in our day to preserve a covenant home because the forces of evil are strong and powerful and have invented many ways to attack our homes. Vigilance is necessary.

But there are a couple of more things that need to be said about covenant homes. Covenant homes are places where Biblical **values** are taught. Let us remember that Biblical values are taught, not only by word of mouth, but by the conduct of the parents and the older children.

“Values” simply refer to what is important in life and what is not; what we ought to work for and what to keep out of our homes; what are worthy goals and what are not; what we set our hearts and minds on and what is only of passing interest to us – if it is of any interest at all. In short, our values must come from the Word of God, for only God can tell us what is important in life and what is not.

I am not going to discuss this at great length, because it is my plan, if God wills, to discuss the Reformed doctrine of the antithesis when we are finished with our discussion of courtship and marriage. And the whole question of Christian values belongs properly under a discussion of the antithesis.

But a few things are worth mentioning here.

First of all, when I speak of Christian values in a covenant home, I mean that parents weigh carefully what is most important to them and what they consider most important for their children, and find the answers to their questions in Scripture.

I think I ought to say at the outset that both in our churches and in the churches in Singapore we have already lost two battles in our war to uphold Christian values. The one battle we have lost is the battle of mothers working outside the home. I am not saying that it is always wrong for a woman to work outside the home. Single women find places of employment so that they are not a burden to the church. Widows, if possible, seek a job to support themselves. Circumstances in a family may require that a mother find work to do outside the home for a short time.

Nevertheless, a mother belongs in the home to care for her husband and children. Most of the time mothers (and you will notice how I speak of “mothers,” not women in general) work outside the home for one of two (or perhaps for both) reasons. One is that they are bored at home and dislike the responsibilities of motherhood. The other is the driving desire for financial gain. Both are very wrong, and both never can nor will serve to enrich a covenant home. I think of what Solomon says in Proverbs 15:17: “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”

I will not discuss here the second battle that we have lost, for I want to talk about it later. But I refer to the battle against movies and drama – whether that be in a movie theater or on TV.

Biblical values can be best described by quoting Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:24-34. Jesus is talking there about our constant worry over earthly possessions: what we shall eat and what we shall drink and wherewithal we shall be clothed. Over against all this He tells us what true values are: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (verse 33).

A couple of points concerning this are worthwhile enough to point out.

Our obsession with earthly things is indicative of a lack of trust in God’s care of us on the one hand, and a burning covetousness on the other hand. We are not a contented people. We cannot say with Paul, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11). As a matter of fact, the apostle was in prison in Rome when he wrote this, waiting for a trial that might end in his execution. He was content in prison and about to be killed.

We do not pay much attention to what the author of the epistle to the Hebrews writes: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5, 6).

When Christ says, Seek ye **first** the kingdom. . . , He does not mean that we make a list of the things we want to seek in life: a car, a house, a lot of nice furnishings, but put at the top of the list as priority number 1, “the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” He means that seeking the kingdom must be first as the principle of our whole lives and the basic commitment to which we are wholly committed. That is quite something else. And from that, all other Christian values flow. We may not make the kingdom of heaven number 1 on our list, and from 2 -20 list the things we desire. How many of us do this. We give to the church and to the poor. But then we have money left. And so we say, “I have paid my obligations to the church and to the poor. What I have left is mine. I may do with it as I want.” That kind of thinking is wicked.

I think it important to make one more point in this letter. I am writing you who are young people and who have no immediate plans to marry for a while. The question I want to put before you is this: How can I, as a member of the family, among the other children, contribute to the work of making my home a covenant home?

No child or young adult may simply shove on to their parents the responsibility of making the home in which they live a covenant home. Each child has a calling and obligation; and the older one becomes, the greater is that obligation.

Children of every age are under obligation to honor their parents. Such honor includes reverence, respect, love and obedience. If there was one thing I could not tolerate in our home and which made me more angry than anything else was when our teen-agers would talk back to their mother, sass her, show her no respect, and refuse to do what she commanded them. Nor

is a child ever too young to learn to keep the fourth commandment. Every one in the home is responsible for making the home a happy one. I remember Billy Sunday, a well-known evangelist of the past century (whose theology I abhorred) saying that many Christians walk around with such a long face that they can eat oatmeal out of the tailpipe of a car.

Young people who walk around with a long face, ornery, surly, unhappy and uncooperative, are a drag on the family and are working against a covenant home, not for it.

All the children must willingly assume the responsibilities that are involved in the housework: washing dishes, cleaning, keeping their bedrooms neat, helping their mother with the duties of the home. And to do this willingly implies doing it cheerfully and out of love for the parents.

And finally, older children must assume responsibility to help the younger children. They must help them get dressed when their young siblings do not yet know how to do this. They must help them with their chores around the house and teach them how to do them. They must (especially by their example, but also by their speech) teach their younger children the right way that is pleasing to God. The young children look up to their older brothers and sisters and want to be like them. How sad when the older children teach wrong and sinful conduct. I know, I know how busy young people can be in their studies and in their other obligations, but to neglect their families is wrong and nothing nor any excuse can make it right. In our family, when I was still home with our parents, we had a sister who was mentally and physically unable to function normally. My father insisted that she learn all she possibly could. She needed extensive exercises every day and needed constant help with her school work (she never got beyond the sixth or seventh grade). But my father was busy as the pastor of a 550 family congregation and my mother was not well and was frequently in the hospital. And so the work of helping our sister fell on me and my brother (my other sister had her hands full because she did much of the housework when my mother was ill.). We were going to college ourselves and had a great deal of studying besides our obligations in the church. So, much of the help my sister needed was given by my brother and me. It was our contribution to the life of our covenant home.

In a covenant home each person has his or her own place and the responsibilities that go with it.

With warm regards,

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