

The Covenant Household

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CHAPTER 1

The Meaning of Federal Marriage

We live in a time when there is much confusion in the unbelieving world about what marriage even is. We do not know what boys and girls are anymore, and thus we do not know what marriage and the family are supposed to be anymore either. We think that we can have our courts just make a decision and so they determine what the family is. As Christians, however, we believe that marriage is something that God created, which means that God establishes and defines it in Genesis.

And Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him;

male and female created he them” (emphasis added). Back then, when there were only two people, it was pretty easy to keep track of everybody, and to know exactly what was going on. However, now that there are billions of us, it is easy to get distracted and confused about what humanity is even supposed to be. And this is why covenantal thinking is needed in order for us to make sense of it. To unpack this, let me give you a couple of illustrations.

Do you think of the human race as a big box full of individual ball bearings? If you were to reach into that box and pick up any little ball bearing, you could pull one out without pulling out any of the others. This is because none of them has a relationship to the others beyond physical proximity—they were all in the same box, and that is all. Do you think of yourself as a discrete, stand-alone individual like *that*, or do you think of yourself as an individual leaf on a tree? You can certainly distinguish one leaf from another, but the two leaves are still connected to one another and are part of the same tree.

We are not so much individuals as *inter*-dividuals. We are interconnected. As we work through what the Bible teaches about the covenant, keep this in mind—and a lot of other things will come into focus.

We are interconnected by means of covenants, and so we should note what a covenant actually is. A covenant

CHAPTER 2

Common Sins in Marriage

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among

you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (Jas. 1:21–27)

The reason why I have begun a chapter on common sins in marriage with this passage is because it is all about what it means to be a Christian. The reason we want to be Bible-saturated Christians is because we want to check ourselves in that mirror regularly. We often are so close to situations that we cannot see ourselves accurately, and the fact that we are alone with our own thoughts and motives does not mean we understand them. As James tells us here, the Word of God is a *mirror*. Alone, we have trouble seeing the backs of our own heads. We need to look in the mirror of the Word and make sure that when we see ourselves, we do not forget what we looked like, trying to move on as quickly as we can.

SINS OF MEN

1. Abdication

I am going to discuss seven sins that husbands tend to commit and then move on to seven sins wives tend to

CHAPTER 3

The Sketch of a Godly Husband

According to the doctrine of federal headship, the husband is the head of the wife in an analogous way that Christ is the head of the Church. The Bible does not say that husbands ought to be the head in their home: it says that the husband already *is* the head of the home. The only question is whether he is going to be a poor head or a godly head. In this chapter, I want to provide a sketch of a godly husband, and I want to consider this verse: “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones” (Prov. 12:4).

If the wife is a crown, then the husband is a king, which means that the husband and wife should fit each other. You do not want an ornate crown on a tiny head, and you do not want a plastic crown on a great king. This is why if you are looking for someone to marry, you need to become the kind of person that the kind of person you would want to marry would want to marry. In this chapter I am going to focus on the kind of man who would be adorned and complemented by such a crown.

A MAN'S CALIBER

Our notion of what a godly husband ought to be should not be based on a particular set of cultural assumptions or a particular personality type that our culture happens to approve of currently. We always should take our questions to Scripture and have it provide us with an understanding of what godliness is.

A godly husband should love Jesus Christ more than anything or anyone. Jesus says this in Luke 14:26: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Now here Jesus is using hyperbole: He is not saying that we should go around filled with malicious spite toward father and mother, wife and children. The

CHAPTER 4

The Sketch of a Godly Wife

When reading a book like this, it is important for the husband and wife not to give most of their attention to the duties being assigned to their spouse. Many husbands and wives make excuses by saying, “Well, until the other person starts doing what *they* ought to be doing, I do not need to do anything I am supposed to be doing either!”

This is not how the Word of God comes to us: it says husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church. It does not say love your wife *if* she respects you as she should. The Bible tells wives to respect their husbands. It does not say to respect him *if* he is respectable. If we understand the doctrine of federal headship, of course we understand that

the husband is a public person responsible for the whole household. However, at the same time, each member of the household is responsible for their own individual sins. So consequently, wives should not think their husband is responsible for every single thing such that they cannot do anything until he gets his act together. It is true that as husbands obey God and submit to His Word, their wives' tasks will be made much simpler, but a wife's obligations do not disappear simply because of how much she thinks her husband is not doing.

A QUALIFICATION FIRST

Before I get into the particulars, I need to give a defense of even addressing wives and calling them to their duties. In the modern world, a particular type of exhortation has been placed off limits because of the feminist movement, and this has robbed Christian women of the right to hear the Word of God. This has happened by people claiming that any criticism of a particular woman is an assault on all women. This has had the effect of robbing Christian women of pastoral care.

For instance, suppose I were to address lazy housewives from the pulpit. Even assuming that there were only three of them in the entire state of Idaho, if I did this, there would immediately be an uproar: "Are you saying that women are lazy?" However, I would not be

CHAPTER 5

The Federal Family

As we have been considering marriage, we have paid close attention to how marriages are covenantal entities. It is the covenant that makes them what they are. Remember, a covenant is not a contract: it is something deeper, thicker, richer than a mere agreement. A covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered, with attendant blessings and curses. Covenants are built into the world, and they cannot be established or disestablished by legislation or social customs. Marriage covenants are rooted in the fact that God has made us male and female, and the two sexes were designed by Him to produce children together. It is not subject to the courts or public opinion.

COVENANT THINKING

As we look into the nature of the covenantal family, consider this passage from the beginning of the book of Job: “And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (1:4–5).

Job does not offer sacrifices because of a feeling of guilt, or to cover for his parental failure; this practice of his is cited as an example of his *righteousness*. Later in the chapter God brags about Job and declares that no one is righteous like him (1:8). This is therefore an example of the kind of thing that a father ought to be doing. Job knew the nature of his responsibility, and he was not the kind of man who made excuses.

This is the opposite of how we usually think about the family. We usually think of the family as a mere social arrangement. But home is more than where you hang your hat. We live in a time when the state is trying to amass as much authority as possible, and so consequently any authority that might be able to stand up to it is challenged. Edmund Burke called these subordinate

CHAPTER 6

Common Sins of the Household

In a chapter like this, there are some obvious sins that it would be easy to focus on (e.g., complaining, fighting, disobeying, etc.), since those are sins that are obvious and disruptive. However, we sometimes need to take a step or two back and address problems that set us up for temptation, rather than focusing on the immediate sins themselves. Obvious and glaring sins are not as dangerous as the sins that we believe to be virtues. This is why, for example, Jesus said that prostitutes and tax collectors were closer to the kingdom of Heaven than the well-respected theologians of His day—the tax collectors and sinners *knew* they had a problem, but

the self-righteous Pharisees did not know that sin had them by the throat. They thought they were virtuous and wise when they were really white-washed tombs.

The word *Pharisee* used to be a term of high respect. The closest modern equivalent would be the term *Puritan*. The root of the word *Pharisee* means “to separate,” and the Pharisees were a movement that tried to separate themselves from ungodliness so they could be holy; they took rules that applied to the priesthood and sought to apply them to the whole nation of Israel, and they were highly respected in their day. Then Jesus came and trashed their name forever, simply by teaching the world that their virtues were actually vices. This is why we should know that we often have to repent of our virtues as much as our vices.

THE CONCERN

Malachi says this towards the end of his book: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5–6). This is a prophecy about John the Baptist, and it shows that he was meant to turn the hearts of fathers and children towards each other. When fathers and mothers

CHAPTER 7

Sketch of Godly Parents

The heart of all parenting is faith. If we are Christians, we live and we die by faith. One of the great recoveries of the Reformation was the doctrine of *sola fide*—justification by faith alone—and it is faith that governs everything we do. This is not just for justification, but sanctification is also by faith. As Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16–17).

Paul does not just say that the just *start* by faith: he says the just will *live* by faith. The parental task of bringing up children in the fear and admonition of the Lord should be governed by faith. The vows and promises that parents make to raise their kids when they have them baptized are vows that cannot be kept by works, by striving, or by trying harder. They have to be kept by receiving God's gracious gospel promise in faith. This is the only way.

KEEPING COVENANT

“Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9).

Here we see that God keeps covenant for a thousand generations. This is particularly interesting because the human race has not even had a thousand generations yet. God's covenant grace extends to generation after generation, and it is our blessed task to receive this stupefying promise by faith.

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28–29).

Jesus does not tell them that our work is to strive harder, or to pick up big heavy weights and carry them

CHAPTER 8

Worldview Parenting

As this is the final chapter of this small book on the covenant home, I wanted to end by discussing worldview parenting. Worldview parenting takes the entire world into account and sees it as the Bible tells us to see it. The world is something that Scripture speaks a lot about—it is what God loved and sent His Son to save. But the word *world* also encompasses the “world system.” This is the kind of thing John warns us against: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the

Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15–16). And this verse should remind us of the temptation in Genesis 3, where Eve is tempted to take the fruit because it is good for food (lust of the flesh), pleasing to the eye (lust of the eyes), and desirable to make wise (pride of life). Worldliness has been with us since the dawn of time, and so of course we still struggle with it today.

When our children are born into this world, our task is to teach them about it and equip them to interact with it, and to stand on their own two feet when they leave home. So how are parents to do that? The world is chasing us all the time through pop-up ads on the internet and through commercials on television and billboards. Christian parents have always had to deal with the temptation to worldliness for their children. That is nothing new, but what is new is how aggressively the world is able to come in and crowd around us with its wares. We might summarize this as the problem of the smartphone and the dumb teenager. The world has always wanted to set traps for teens from believing homes, but now the entire world is contained on a device in that teen’s pocket.

The task before us is always to think and live like Christians in everything we touch. If our worldview does not come out in our lives *as actually lived*, it is not Christian worldview thinking at all. Young people today are profoundly shaped by the music they listen to,