# FEATURE

*Just over a year ago there was held in South Holland, Illinois (under the auspices of South Holland's Evangelism Committee, I believe) a conference on the Christian Family. The subject matter was of interest to* **Perspectives** *of course, for we are a magazine the concern of which is distinctively Christian education. And education, in turn, is a concern not only of the school but most emphatically of the home, of the Christian family. We obtained therefore from each of the three conference-speakers the manuscripts of their respective presentations. Two of them we have already printed: Rev. Slopsema's on "The Role of Family Worship," and Rev. (now Prof.) Engelsma's on "The Happiness of the Home." In this issue we're pleased to have the third: Rev. Carl Haak's speech which dealt with the biblical foundation of the family.*

*A timely topic that is, in these days when the world and the devil are doing their utmost to knock away the underpinnings of the family. Men today fail to reckon with the fact that the family is an institution of* **God.** *They prefer to think of it as nothing more than a man-made ordering of society, subject therefore to re-defining and re-structuring according to the whim and fancy of men. The truth is, however, that the family has its foundation in creation, and, more than that, as Rev. Haak goes on to say, it is founded in the covenant of grace and stands in the service of the covenant of grace.*

*It is especially the latter which should be of great concern to us, for it has implications which are most practical. As Rev. Haak puts it, "God's purpose for the family of believers is that it be the incubator, the nursery, where He would cause the children of the covenant to be conceived, born, raised, taught, loved, and guided into all the truth." How about us? Do we need to be reminded that the family is a precious gift of God to the church? Has the business and busyness of life taken its toll also in our families? Does providing our children with a home and with food and clothing, and buying for them an education, take so much of our time and energy that we rarely sit down to talk to them? Is our* **first** *concern to leave our children an "example of a heart tender and soft to God," an example also of a "walk close to God and daily fellowship with God"? Do we train our children, from*

*infancy, "not for the earth, not for fashion, wealth, success, name; but train them for heaven"?*

*If we are able to answer those questions only with various qualifications, then this article by Rev. Haak is for* ***us.***

# The Biblical Foundation of the Family

Rev. Carl Haak

As fellow members of the family of God, we gather together tonight to discuss a truth which is most dear to our hearts. There is no institution in this life which so touches us in all our being, brings the greatest joys or the deepest griefs, so affects the totality of our earthly pilgrimage, as does the family. I am not assuming the stance of a psychologist, but being a faithful pastor, when I say that our life in our homes places an indelible stamp upon us. Those things which we observed when our eyes first began to focus as a child ("the manner of life" we have seen in our parents, the attitude, the godly fear or lack thereof) will never leave us.

This is doubly true for us who confess the truth of God's Covenant of Grace. We believe that the God-fearing family is used by our Lord as the nursery in which God brings us to faith and nurtures us in the Word. God, generally, calls His children out of the bosom of believing families, and uses such a family to bring us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. For us, who experience the nurturing hand of God upon us in the family, the family is dear.

Still more, the truth of the family is one close to our hearts because the family has eternal dimensions. No, our earthly ties are not preserved in glory. Our Master taught us that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage. "There shall not be there an infant of days, nor an old man that hath filled his days, the former things have passed away." But, our life now in the family prepares us for our place in glory. We have that amazing word in Psalm 45 that covenant homes of parents and children are the way God prepares us to be princes and princesses in His kingdom. Our lives now in the home reverberate to all eternity.

I choose that as our approach to this vast subject: we will look

at the family as the dear and sacred gift of God to us. She is to be defended against her foes, cultivated in our midst, and loved by every one of us who call upon God's name in faith.

The family is dear to the gospel of Christ! There are few things which constitute a more powerful demonstration of the power and reality of the Christian faith than a well-ordered covenant home existing and functioning under the lordship of Jesus Christ. And since few lights shine brighter than a well-ordered family, it ought to be the deepest concern of every man, woman, and child naming the name of Christ, to see to it that the family is ordered by the Word of God to the end that God is glorified.

And the family is dear to us personally! In the family we learn as a child the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

**I. The Foundation of the Family**

The family is founded on the wise creative act of God. God made the family, and God revealed that it is His will for the human creatures He had made that they live in families. "In the beginning" is more than just a designation of time; it is God's work of laying the foundation of earthly life and determining its course. "God created the heavens and the earth. . . male and female. . . ." And He created the relationship in which they were to live with each other. He instituted marriage – one man and one woman. And to that union of marriage He gave the command to be fruitful and multiply, to bear children who would be reared by parents. God instituted, God ordained, God founded the family in *creation.* And of the family, as the unit in which we are to live, God said, "And behold, it was very good."

The family is not a product of social convenience, it is not an arrangement which evolved in time, decided by man to be a nice way of ordering society. And, therefore, man may not define the family according to his thoughts. If you are to understand what the family is, you must humbly bow at the throne of the Creator and hearken to His Word.

God defined what the family is. He is the author of the family constitution as the creation account reveals. A family is one man and one woman united in marriage – both created equal as God's image bearers, friends of God. But they were not created identical or with the same calling and abilities. The man was created first and was made the head of his wife, as Paul says in Ephesians 5: "For the husband is the head of the wife." The

woman was made subordinate, a helpmeet, taken from the rib of Adam, that bone which guards the heart. And both were taught their need of the other. Adam first had to name the animals to see that as of yet there was no helpmeet for him. He may not view the woman as something nice and additional, but as one who was to supply what he lacked. And the woman may not consider herself some independent creature, for she is taken from man's rib. And together the man and the woman were made one in an exclusive life-long bond of marriage.

To them, we read in Genesis 1:28, came the word of God, "Be fruitful and multiply." God is pleased to bring into existence men and women out of the union of the man and woman in marriage. John Calvin comments that God did not create man as the animals, creating thousands of them, but He willed that we be brought into being through the marvel of birth. Why? So that we might grow up under the tutelage of loving and believing parents and thus be molded to glorify Him. God wills to bring into existence through birth His children whom He has known eternally, and that we be brought into being as helpless and dependent babes, to grow up in the sphere of a home where we receive nurture and are taught God's fear. And all of this is not some fairy tale, but reality. God made the family in the beginning and revealed His design for it.

"Remember now thy creator" – not just your *creation,* but your *Creator.* As believing families we are not only to nod our heads and say, "Yes, it all began with creation." We must remember our Creator. God has laid down how man is to live. In the family we have God's wise and good institution given for our good. In living in the family as He wills and designs it, we remember Him and live unto Him. God would have us live in families. Yes, He is the God of the orphan and widow. Being single is not a shame, if so the Lord leads. And when father and mother forsake, the Lord will take us up. But under normal circumstances it is God's will for us to live in the family. Not the life of a hermit, but the experience of a family life is God's good will for us revealed in His creation of the family.

But there is more. The family is founded in the Covenant of Grace, and it stands in service of the Covenant of Grace. Our fall into sin did not obliterate the family. Adam's fall and sin twists, distorts, and corrupts God's institution of the home. Man in sin becomes a tyrant over his wife; he uses and abuses her for his own lust and gratification. The

woman has become self-centered, vain-glorious, disobedient. Marriage and the family are corrupted in polygamy, divorce, remarriage, broken homes, etc. And that is not just "out there some where," but *our* sin and evil nature spoils marriage and the home by evil cravings, pride, and hatred.

But God makes known His wondrous grace and mercy. In His work of gracious redemption, God shows that He will maintain the family. God takes up the family into His church. Salvation in Christ does not mean that God throws out the created orders, that there are no more husbands, wives, children. Ephesians 5 and 6 make plain that in the church the family structure as created remains.

The family stands in the service of God's covenant purpose! The family can only be understood when we see the truth of God's covenant. God is pleased to gather His children from the children of believers. God works His grace in the family! God's purpose for the family of believers is that it be the incubator, the nursery, where He would cause the children of the covenant to be conceived, born, raised, taught, loved, and guided into all the truth. The Puritans were fond of saying, "God casts the lines of election in the loins of believing parents." We often say: "God gathers His church in the lines of the generations of believing parents." Men say, "What is marriage? Just a piece of paper! What is a family? Just one way of organizing society." Do not talk so exceedingly proudly, oh man! With God's wonder and purpose we have to do. The family exists for God's purpose to create for Himself a people who shall dwell in His presence forever.

The foundation of the family is to be found in God's wise and perfect institution in creation, and as it serves God's purpose to build His church.

**II. The Pillars of the Family**

The Holy Scripture gives us certain bedrock characteristics of the godly family. Proverbs 9:1 reads, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." There are pillars to be erected upon this foundation which both characterize the believing home and define it. Let me suggest five pillars of the family to be set in place upon the foundation we have just seen.

1. *ORDER.* There is a fixed order, laid down in Scripture, which is necessary for the existence of the family. A godly marriage, devoted parents, pious children — specifically the order of a husband and father who is the head of his home, a wife and mother who is a helpmeet and submissive to her husband, and

obedient children.

Our concern is not now to elaborate on these callings, but to assert that this order must be present and that the family depends upon it. Today, everything is up for grabs. Roles have to be redefined according to the trends. The feminist movement, no friend to any godly woman or family, says that the family has to be reordered; traditional roles must go; there must be no authority; women must not view themselves as keepers of the home; children's development ought not to be stunted by oppressive discipline, and so on. Beloved in Christ! God orders the home, and that order is not negotiable. The Biblical roles of the family are not the product of culture; the Bible is not the expression of prevailing cultural norms. But the Bible expresses the God-given order of the home! And until God Himself comes and changes what He has written, it abides. Almighty God says, "Children, obey; wives, be subject; fathers, nurture; husbands, love; young women keep your homes." And that is not the twisted male chauvinistic perspective of bachelor Paul, but the revealed and wise will of God for the family. Throw out the Biblical order, and you have broken the foundation on which a happy, peaceful family life can be enjoyed.

Our Lord Himself, in the days of His earthly sojourn among us in the flesh, observed this order. We read of the young boy Jesus, "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." That is an insight into the family in Nazareth of carpenter Joseph and his wife Mary and Mary's son, Jesus. "He was subject to them" – subordinate to them! Now, who is Jesus, who is bending to the rule of step-father Joseph and mother Mary? The Incarnate God. God in the flesh was subject to two of His creatures. Why? Because it was God incarnate in the family relationship; and so inflexible is the order of the family as laid down by God that when the Son of God lived in the family He observed its order. Children, obey! Wives, be subject! Husbands, love! Fathers, nurture! All these are not suggestions or cultural norms of an ancient era, but the divine order for the families' well-being.

Flowing out of that order is a well-ordered home, a well-structured family life. Not a hit-and-miss, helter-skelter mess of missed meals and members always gone. Structure and order are necessary. This is not a cold, regimented order similar to that of a prison with its guards and inmates. It's the order of love. Set times for devotions, bed-time, study-time, play-time, meal-time—all ordered out of the love of God.

Children especially need this. They need the order of the family and want things to be under the control of wise and Spirit-filled parents who know the charge given to them, who have searched out the order God has given for the family, and who prayerfully pursue it.

2. *GOD-FEARING.* This breathes life into the family. All members, in their place, bow in humble adoring reverence before the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The family motives and rationale for doing all they do is astoundingly simple: the fear of God. Their greatest dread is to be displeasing to God, and their greatest joy is to be pleasing to God.

This begins before the family is born. When a young man and young woman seek to marry and enter into the state of marriage and begin a new family, this must be before them: the fear of God. Marry in the Lord! The selection of a wife or husband may not be spiritually unpremeditated. If marriage does not begin with hearts dedicated to God it will bring pitiful consequences.

The fear of God must be cultivated in the family. Parents, the most important thing you give your children is not a luxurious home, endowments, etc., but the example of a heart tender and soft to God. The example of a walk close to God and daily fellowship with God; let that be what you leave with them. So pattern your lives that your son and daughter say, "Dad and Mom fear God. The first question Dad always asks is, what does God say? What does God want?"

3. *NURTURE.* The family must be characterized by religious training. This is what the home exists for: the handing down by the present generation to the coming generation, the wonderful works of God. This is not something which is merely nice, so that we would say, "My children should have a little religion, should be sent to church at least once and learn to be decent." No, this is the very purpose of the home, to provide religious nurture. "And ye fathers, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Exert all your powers into your children's spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being so that the child might stand as a whole man or woman serving God. The first thing to be considered in your home-life is this: How will this affect their souls? To pet and pamper and indulge your child as if this world is all we have to look forward to, and this life is really the thing, and this life is the season of happiness, this is not love but cruelty. Nurture them! Train them from infancy not for the earth, not for fashion, wealth, success, name; but train them for

heaven! To nurture them is not to hide from but to show to the child the grand truth he must know from earliest infancy to the last of his days, namely, the chief end of man is to know God and glorify Him forever.

4. *FELLOWSHIP.* The family in which God has taken up His abode is one of fellowship. God in His covenant takes us up to Himself and tells us His secrets. He would not hide from us the things He purposes to do. Biblical family life is built on fellowship, on talking, on living in the communion which is ours in Christ.

Strong lines of communication have to be laid in a marriage and in a family by cultivating the Biblical truths of communication as the joint heirs of eternal life. Some of them are these: listening, even as God hears our prayers; readiness to drop all and come to the aid of a wife or child in difficulties; a soft word spoken to turn away wrath; forgiveness so that the past and pardoned sins are not brought up again; an understanding eye which sees difficulties arise and deals with them before they reach a stage of crisis.

This communication begins from the head down, from fathers. You can't begin too soon. You begin when that child comes home from the hospital as a newborn. Don't wait. Don't treat that baby or toddler as something for Mom. Hold your baby; let that child hear the voice and feel the care of a father from its earliest days.

5. *EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.* There are certain principles of the kingdom of Heaven regulating our lives one with another. That law is, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." And that law is expounded at large in Scripture: "Forgive one another; be tenderhearted; admonish one another; be patient one with another." Not a day goes by when the exercise of a true, living faith is not needed in the home – a living faith displayed in Christian virtues.

My point is this: the family is the place where first we begin the life of thankfulness, which gives promise for the rest of our life. Before you are able to go forth into the world as a shining light, you must first live as such a light in your home. Doesn't it strike you that the first commandment of the second table of the law (love thy neighbor as thyself) is "Honor thy father and thy mother"? The thankful life of the Christian displayed in his life of obedience to the second table of the law *begins in the home.* If one does not live in sanctification in his home, he will not do so when he walks out of the door of his house either. If one's life is devoid of the Christian graces of forgiveness, love, patience, etc.

within the four walls of his own home, then whatever he may appear to be outside of the home, his life is a fake. Godliness, specifically a life displaying Christian virtues, begins in the home.

**III. Maintaining the Foundations**

As we dearly love the family, so we are eager to maintain these truths.

The world and the devil have sought to break down this foundation. Knowing that his time is short, the evil one launches a massive bombardment today. He knows what he is about. Shameless immorality flaunted before God's face, an age sold to selfish pride, broken homes, latch-key kids, rebellion, delinquency, divorce, remarriage – all these are his legions. The State more and more grants a sympathetic ear to the humanist and feminist and comes out against the Biblical family. Pornography, abortion, child abuse, co-habitation, and, not the least of these, the uncovered and blatant challenge that the family as God ordains it has to go! Children are best raised in institutions by experts, not because parents are poverty stricken, but because self is so worshiped and served today that children are shipped out to make way for *me.*

And we are not untouched. The malady is deep. What pain and bitterness in marital strife. What heart-wrenching agony in wayward children. So that out of the family we cry, "Has God forgotten to be kind?" And from the family we ask with the psalmist, "If the foundations are shaken, what can the righteous do?"

We are called to stand in renewed faith and love for God's precious gift, the family.

The church has the calling to maintain the foundations of the family. As churches we must know that our strength and stability in the truth will be found in the family. This was the conviction of the Reformers and their successors. Their understanding of the importance of the family for the church can be seen in the zeal with which they applied themselves to formulating catechisms and confessions of faith. These confessions were intended for the church, but more particularly for family instruction. The church must preach and teach the family: her calling, her life, her purity. Officebearers must labor with our homes. Discipline must be exercised against those sins which tear down the family: divorce, remarriage, teenage rebellion. Let not the church abandon the family in the face of her many foes.

As members of the family, parents and children, we have the call to maintain the family.

We need to re-affirm our faith

in the God-appointed way of the family producing the holy seed of the church. In this age catered for self, let us hear the call of God, "He that will come after me, let him deny himself." That call runs right across the family. He who will live well-pleasing to God in marriage and the family, let him cut the nerve of self-love. Having children, rearing children, living in the home – before it all stands the call, "Lose thyself in service of my kingdom!"

We need a re-assertion of the priority of the teaching of the home in the rearing of children. Bringing up a family is a divine calling. There is a tremendous dignity attached to fatherhood and motherhood, as well as an awesome responsibility. It is not dull, lackluster, void of fulfillment; but it is the greatest of all privileges and callings God has given: to be entrusted with the children of His kingdom.

We need to be reminded that the family is the real life and happiness for us. It is not out there in the streets and on the go. How much are you at home? Teenagers out; parents out; children out – nobody is home anymore! And what is out there? Everything in the world is calculated to break up the fellowship of your soul with God. The home life is where the real joy and life God has given is to be enjoyed. In the home God works a work no man can tear down. To maintain the home, you have to be there!

We need to do all in dependency upon God. It is not your plans, your will, your love that can erect a covenant home. "Without me, ye can do nothing." There is nothing we can do in the home without life union to Him. You may want what is right; you may want peace and understanding and a meeting at the cross with your spouse or teenager – and sometimes it doesn't happen. Pride rears up to smash the home, sending it reeling, confused, tormented. We need more vital communion with the Savior– not just the vain folding of hands and impotent prayers, but a begging and crying to God for help. And then arise from prayer to do His will even in hardship.

To the family which trembles at God's Word, walks in His ways, defies the world's mold, looks to the Savior, and seeks to end in the glory of God – to that family, though at times we tremble, weep, and are afraid, comes the Word, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the earth."

Oh may the Lord God dwell among us! Then all is well.

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