

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Truth of God's Covenant

. . . a covenant home is a reflection, in all its rich variety, of God's dealing with us. Where we are conscious of how God works in our lives, and where we attempt, by grace, to reflect these great works of grace and love, there you have a covenant home.

See "A Covenant Home: What Is It Like?" —

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MEDITATION —

Everlasting and Perfect Covenant Bliss

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.
-Hosea 2:21-23

What a beautiful and comforting conclusion these words constitute to the message of sin and grace which the prophet Hosea had to bring to

Israel, the church of the old dispensation, in a dark period of apostasy!

Nowhere more than in this last section of Chapter 2 does it appear more clearly that the prophet speaks of God's everlasting covenant of grace with His people in Christ Jesus in terms of an unbreakable bond of marriage with His beloved, elect wife, Israel. No, that people is not the Jews as a nation; then this word was never fulfilled, and never shall be. But the reference is to the Israel of God, the spiritual seed of Abraham from Jew and Gentile. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ," Gal. 3:16. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise," Gal. 3:29. With that "seed of Abraham" Jehovah realizes His unbreakable covenant of marriage, betrothing unto Himself His bride with lovingkindness and mercies that are revealed in the way of righteousness and judgment, so that she has living, intimate, spiritual knowledge of the Lord.

And while the preceding context speaks of that marriage-relation as such and of its realization, the verses upon which we are meditating speak of the married life of Jehovah with His Bride. Jehovah, Israel's husband, will in mercy tell her that she is His, will speak to her in terms of divine endearment, will sow her unto Himself in the earth, and will open His ear to her every desire. And tasting His love, His Bride shall respond and say, "O my God!"

Perfect covenant bliss! The everlasting bliss that shall be ours in the new heavens and the new earth, when the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever!

Powerful words of love, of endearment, spoken to His spouse!

Surely, the text describes the speech of love; but it is an *almighty* love. This is no ordinary speech of a husband to his wife, however genuine and endearing and heart-warming such speech may be. An earthly husband may speak the language of love to his betrothed; but however genuine and endearing such language may be, it is ultimately ineffectual unless it finds reponse in the heart of his intended and she says, "I love you, too!" But Jehovah is the Divine Husband. He speaks no ordinary speech, but divine speech, almighty speech, efficacious—and in that sense, irresistible—speech. He speaks His Word of calling, a speech which accomplishes what it says. Is He not the God Who speaks and it is done, Who commands and it stands fast? Jehovah loves His Betrothed; and in that love by His Word of calling He makes His people His own, His Bride.

Saving speech of the Almighty!

To that speech belongs all that makes of a dead sinner a living, loving, obedient child of God; and to it belongs, too, all that makes of the multitude of elect but in-themselves-lost sinners in Christ Jesus a church, God's Bride, the one, holy, catholic church. You may distinguish various phases in that speech of God. You may distinguish the very earliest beginning of His speech by which He implants the new life in us, the work of regeneration. You may distinguish the calling through the Word of the gospel and by the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. You may distinguish the calling of God in Christ at the day of the resurrection of the body, when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. You may also distinguish that speech of God as it shall continue to all eternity: for God in Christ by His mighty Word of love will call us His people forever—and thus we shall forever be His! He will speak that Word to all His own—not to each one individualistically, but to His entire church! If it were conceivable that He should cease to speak His almighty Word, we would cease to be His people, His church. But it is impossible for Him to cease!

The speech of love!

Threefold is that speech. In the first place, Jehovah says to His Bride, "Ammi—My people!" This name has occurred and been explained previously in the prophecy (1:10-2:1), and then its significance was viewed distributively: for it was explained as meaning, "Ye are the sons of the living God." Here the emphasis is on the one people. Jehovah's Bride is one church, a race of sons of God, all conformed to the image of His Son; and as one multiform people, they constitute His beloved wife, His peculiar possession. But when we read our text in its context, it is plain that Jehovah has two more names of endearment for His Bride. The one name is Ruhama—Object of Mercy: "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy." (Cf. Hosea 1:6, 7; 2:1; Romans 9:24, 25) This name is expressive of the blessed truth that Jehovah wills to make His Bride blessed with Himself. And the third name referred to is Jezreel. The name occurs in verse 22 ("and they shall hear Jezreel") and is explained in verse 23: "And I will sow her unto me in the earth." Also this name occurs earlier in the prophecy (1:4,5), but there it occurs in its historical significance and with reference to the blood which was shed by Jehu at the city of Jezreel. Here the name occurs in its *meaning*: "shall be sown." Jehovah's people shall be sown by God Himself, that is, sown in the new earth (not in the old land of Canaan). He shall say unto them, "Jezreel," and so they shall be established forever in the new creation and shall take root and bring forth fruit.

And it is all of grace, grace that is free and undeserved!

Yes, God's grace is always free and undeserved. But when that grace is manifested to *sinners*, its undeserved character is underscored. And this is emphasized in this passage. Notice this. Our English version has it: "...and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people." In other words, "Lo-Ammi (Not My people)" is changed to "Ammi (My people)"; and "Lo-Ruhama (Not the object of mercy)" is changed to "Ruhama (Object of mercy)." And while the name Jezreel is not changed, the very name of its historical significance as compared with its meaning, "Jehovah's planting," is a reminder in itself of that free and undeserved grace. Always this is the character of Jehovah's loving speech to His Bride. Forever we shall experience that love in Christ Jesus as precisely such a love, a love that quickened dead sinners, that changed them from enemies of God and children of the devil into living and loving sons of God, into "Ammi, My people!"

And what blessedness shall attend the life of Jehovah's Bride, the Bride of Christ, in the day when the bliss of God's covenant shall be perfected, in the new creation!

For "it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel."

Yes, the language is obviously Old Testament. It is all in terms of the earthly Canaan, the typical land flowing with milk and honey. It is in terms of the life of Israel in that land, when they desired corn to sustain and nourish them, when they desired the oil of gladness and wine that rejoiceth the heart. It is in terms of the fatness of the earthly land of Canaan.

But the reference is to the blessedness of life in the heavenly Canaan.

Moreover, there is a figure of speech in this language, the figure of personification, so that the heavens and the earth and the corn and the wine and the oil are depicted as calling out, speaking. Jezreel, God's people, cry for corn and for wine and for oil, for the fatness of the land. The latter in turn cry to the earth which produces them and from which they spring forth. The earth in turn cries to the heavens for rain and sunshine, without which it cannot produce corn and wine and oil. And the heavens in turn cry to Jehovah, so that He will cause them to give rain and sunshine. For "He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is

satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart," (Psalm 104:13-15).

We know, of course, that the heavens and the earth and the corn and wine and oil do not speak and cry out. We know, too, that Jezreel, God's Bride, does not pray to corn and wine and oil, but makes known her needs to Jehovah Himself, her Husband. But the reference is a very graphic one to the whole chain of mediating causes through which Jehovah concretely hears His people, fulfills their needs and supplies their wants perfectly.

God's covenant people, His church, shall be established ultimately in Canaan, God's house, in which He shall dwell with His people. But that shall not be the old earthly land of Canaan. It shall be the new creation. There the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever.

And when Jehovah shall dwell in that house of the new creation with His bride, then His ear shall be ever open to her cry. As a loving husband, He shall be attendant to His Bride's every desire. And He shall see to it that His Bride has no wants. There shall forever and ever be perfect equilibrium between the needs and desires of His Bride and Jehovah's supplying of those needs and fulfillment of her desires.

For He is Jehovah, the unchangeable constant and faithful God.

And He is the God of all the earth, so that all things are and shall be at His disposal.

And He will cause *all things* to be for the sake of His beloved wife, His covenant people.

We have His Word for it! An emphatic Word it is, too. For He repeats it: "I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear...!"

And the response of the Bride shall be that of uninhibited adoration.

"My God!"

That response says it all. It is the expression of all the wonderment, of all the humility, all the gratitude, all the joy, all the love to which the heart of the Bride of Christ can and shall give expression when all this comes to pass in that day.

God, Jehovah, says, "My people!"

The Bride says, "My God!"

Drawn by irresistible love, blessed with every conceivable blessing out of free and sovereign grace, they *shall*, as the sure fruit of the experience of His love, say it.

Soli Deo gloria!

Editor's Notes

This is the second of our special issues for the current volume-year. It is devoted to the truth of God's covenant. As you will discover in the process of reading, however, this issue is by no means simply doctrinal in its contents; but it includes articles of a so-called "practical" nature, that is, articles which deal with the implications of the truth of God's covenant for our life as God's covenant

people in the midst of the world.

There is another special feature of this issue. It includes an article written for and to our covenant children. We suggest that parents read this article with (or to) their children.

The staff's sub-committee for special issues thanks all those who helped prepare this issue.

The Realization of the Covenant

Rev. C. Hanko

God realizes His covenant throughout all of history. From the dawn of creation until the consummation of all things in the day of Christ's return, God is gathering His elect people unto Himself in Christ and preparing them as heirs of eternal life for the glorious blessedness of His covenant fellowship in the world to come. Then, and then only, the covenant promise will be fully realized in all its riches, "I will be your God and ye shall be my people." Therefore throughout history there is also an ever richer unfolding of the revelation of the covenant. In fact, the course of history runs in cycles, in which a new aspect of the covenant is revealed to the church, followed by a gradual decline into sin and misery, requiring an awakening or reformation, by which God proves His faithfulness as Jehovah, Who keeps covenant forever. For us this is deeply humiliating. No flesh will ever glory. Unto God is the glory forever.

It is our intention to follow briefly the various phases in the realization of God's eternal covenant.

The covenant of paradise.

Adam came forth from the hand of his Maker as the highest of all the earthly creatures, formed in the image of God in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, capable of knowing, loving, and serving God with his whole being as God's friend-servant. He was God's prophet, who marvelled at the handiwork of the Creator as he saw the splendor of every creature, heard the rushing of the

streams, the singing of the birds, and the rustling of the wind. He was king, whose subjects recognized his authority, as he, in turn, devoted himself with the entire creation to his God. Thus he was priest unto God, rendering himself as a daily sacrifice of praise to his Sovereign Friend. The one lack in his life was filled by the creation of his wife, Eve, who was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. Both were so completely suited to each other that their perfect marital union reflected their intimate covenant fellowship with the Most High. Their joy was full when God came in the cool of day to walk with them and commune with them at the tree of life. But Adam was fallible and fell into sin. Yet God was faithful to His covenant. He sought out Adam and Eve, rebuked them, but also gave them the blessed promise of deliverance and salvation through the Seed of the woman, the Christ. Adam fell, as it were, into the arms of Christ. The first Adam opened the way through his fall for the last Adam, Who is the Head of His elect, our eternal Prophet, Priest, and King.

The Covenant Including All Creation.

As sin developed, particularly in the generations of Cain, the first world was ripe for judgment in a comparatively short time. It was to Noah that God revealed the deliverance of His people through judgment, which would bring the wicked to everlasting destruction. Noah was instructed to build the ark for the salvation of himself and his family,

and was given faith to carry out these instructions. God brought these eight souls through the horror of the flood, saved them through judgment, and brought them back to a purged earth. After the flood God renewed His covenant with Noah and gave him the sign of the rainbow that spanned heaven and earth, uniting them both in one. For God assured Noah that He would not again destroy the world with water, but when He comes with judgment He will do so with a consuming fire, whereby the present creation will be renewed unto heavenly perfection. The sign of the rainbow still assures us that God keeps covenant, always preserving His church to bring us to glory through the judgment to come. Not only the church, but the whole world is the object of God's love, preserved to be delivered from all evil and all evil workers in the last day (John 3:16).

The Covenant of Promise.

God continued the covenant line, particularly through Shem to Abraham. In the meantime, sin once more lifted its vile head in Noah's descendants. Wicked pride caused them to unite under Nimrod, the mighty hunter, and to build a city and tower to perpetuate their name upon the earth in defiance of God. God foiled their plans and scattered them over the earth. In Shem's descendants sin revealed itself in the form of idol worship (Joshua 24:2). But God brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees into the land of Canaan, promising him that his seed would be as the stars of the heavens innumerable and that his seed would inherit the land as a picture of the eternal inheritance of God's people in heaven. God showed to Abraham that righteousness, the right to eternal life, is attained only by grace through faith in the promised Savior. This Savior would be born to him in the line of generations of believers (Gen. 17:7). Thus Abraham was called the father of believers and a friend of God. To him was given Isaac as a wonder child, born in his old age, revealing to the patriarch the wonder of the virgin birth. To him was also given the vision of the slain animals and God walking between the pieces, testifying that He would rather die in giving His only begotten Son than see His people perish (Gen. 15). Later this was confirmed by the substitution of the ram as a sacrifice in the stead of Isaac on Mount Moriah, by which Abraham was given a glimpse of the wonder of Christ's resurrection (Heb. 11:17-19).

The Covenant and the Law.

God continued His covenant in the line of Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob, particularly in Judah. These were the shepherd kings who typified Christ, and to them was given the promise that the scepter would not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from

between his feet until Shiloh would come (Gen. 49:10). In an ever increasing measure it became evident that the church of the old dispensation was still, as it were, in its infancy, like a child that still had to be taught by pictures. The church of the old dispensation lived in a picture world where their lives were surrounded by types and shadows of the reality still to come. Again in the descendants of the patriarchs we see a rapid spiritual degeneration, so that God preserves His people by bringing them into bondage in Egypt. There spiritual Israel learned to understand more fully the bondage of sin and death as they groaned under the oppression of Pharaoh. Through Moses, the Old Testament mediator, God delivered His people by placing them under the blood, even as He poured out His judgment upon Egypt. With a mighty hand God led Israel, the typical nation of God, out of the house of bondage through forty years of wandering, and brought them into the promised land. At Sinai God established His covenant with Israel as a nation, a theocracy, as type of the spiritual nation, God's chosen people. There at Sinai Israel was placed under the law. God gave them the moral law of the ten commandments, requiring that their whole life be devoted to Him in love. And He also gave civil and ceremonial laws that governed every aspect of their lives, so that wherever they turned they met the obligation: Do this and live. In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul tells us that the law did not disannul the promise as it was given to Abraham, but was added to it as a richer revelation of the righteousness that is by faith in Jesus Christ. Spiritual Israel experienced every day anew that it was impossible for them to love the Lord their God in every demand of the law. The law became a burden impossible to bear (Acts 15:10). For example, every Friday afternoon the believing Jew washed himself, put on his clothing for the Sabbath, and yet realized that he had not loved the Lord his God with his whole being throughout the week, and therefore actually could not keep the Sabbath. (See the fourth commandment.) Thus the law served a very useful purpose, for it was the schoolmaster (or governor) which drove them out to Christ to seek all their salvation in Him alone. We witness Israel upon the arrival in Canaan standing between mount Gerizim and mount Ebal while God's blessings and curses are read to them and the people accept these curses as well as blessings with an emphatic Amen. This could actually never be done except by faith in the promised Savior, Who by His atoning death would fulfill all the demands of the law and merit eternal life for them. By the grace of God Israel could confess, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile" (Ps. 32:1, 2).

The Covenant and the Kingdom.

After the bitterly sad history of the judges and the wicked reign of Saul, God raised up the man of His choice, David, to reign over the theocracy. Through David God subdued all the enemies that oppressed Israel and introduced an era of peace. In this, David typified the Christ in His state of humiliation, in which He fought the battle of the Lord against all the forces of darkness, Satan and sin, death and hell, and thus entered into His glorious kingdom in the heavens. After David, Solomon reigned as the prince of peace during a period of unequalled peace and prosperity. During Solomon's reign the temple was built, signifying God's dwelling among His people. All this pointed to Christ in His exaltation as Lord of lords and King of kings. Thus we read in Psalm 89: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations. ...Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven" (Ps. 89:3, 4, 27-29). This could never be realized in David, but spoke of the Christ Who was to come.

The New Covenant.

Israel fell into idolatry and was punished by the dispersion and the Babylonian captivity, upon which followed the dark four hundred years before

the birth of Christ. In the fulness of time God sent His Son into the flesh, born of a woman, born under the law. He bore the wrath of God against the sin of His people all His life, was crucified, died, and through His atoning death entered into His kingdom, where He received power from the Father to carry out the counsel of God's will unto the day of His return with the clouds. From heaven He pours out His Spirit into the church, whereby He gathers His church and prepares her for glory. This is the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah, as quoted in Hebrews 8:8-10: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. I will put my laws into their minds and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

The Tabernacle of God with Men.

Throughout this new dispensation sin continues to develop, finally to culminate in the man of sin, the antichrist. Through this development of sin Christ hastens the day of His coming unto the time when God fully realizes His covenant in Christ as described in Revelation 21, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (vs. 4). This is the wedding feast of the Lamb, the glorious kingdom of God in Christ Jesus, in which God will be all in all! Let us wait with uplifted heads, for our salvation draws nigh.

Fellowship with God

Rev. G. Van Baren

The truth concerning man's relation with God is one which deserves our attention and our understanding. Nothing can be more important than one's standing before God. It is very literally a matter of life and death.

There is a relationship of fellowship between God and His people. That relationship has been called a "covenant relationship." This concept is fundamental unto a proper understanding of our duties and responsibilities before God and with

men. Within the church it becomes very plain that some sort of beautiful relationship exists between God and this people of His church. It is also to be clearly understood that this relationship exists only because of and through the cross of Jesus Christ.

"Covenant" involves a coming together, a dwelling under one roof. The term emphasizes that God and His people have a basis for unity. This, we believe, is the purpose of God's revelation outside of Himself—that a people might eternally dwell

with Him in Christ.

This covenant with God must not be misunderstood. Many use the term "covenant" rather freely—while defining it in an unscriptural way. Some have regarded the covenant of God with men as a form of alliance. As two nations might sign an agreement for cooperation with mutual stipulations, so the covenant of God with man is presented. God will perform His part of the agreement provided that man carries out his part.

Connected with that, the covenant is presented as a way to an end. It is become the way to attain glory. It is, so it is said, God's arrangement whereby He, with man's assistance, will get some into heaven. With man's obedience and cooperation, God will be able to save him and exalt him to the glory of heaven.

Rather, it is the teaching of Scripture that God's covenant with man is itself the purpose and end of God's grand design of creating all things and redeeming His people in Jesus Christ. God's covenant with man is not an after-thought. It is His eternal plan to reveal outside of Himself the blessedness of the relationship which exists within Himself.

The full, glorious realization of this covenant relationship will be seen in heaven. There, the purpose of God will be fulfilled when His people can perfectly and forever have communion and fellowship with God. This is the goal which God has in mind. His purpose is not simply to bring a people to a wonderful place—but He will bring them into wonderful fellowship with Himself. The purpose is not simply to enjoy the good things of a perfect world—but to enjoy speaking with God which is life itself. All of creation and all of the body of Christ will be united in beautiful harmony to the praise of the Name of our God.

This covenant fellowship is already enjoyed by the child of God in this earth. He has the opportunity to speak with God through prayer. He has the desire and opportunity to read His Word. He knows that God speaks to him through His Word and by His Spirit. There is the foretaste of eternal fellowship already now. This is the essence of eternal life, as Jesus taught, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

The reason that God determines that this shall be the essence of the glory of heaven is that it is His pleasure to reveal outside of Himself to His people that glorious relationship which exists within the Triune God eternally. God, after all, plans all things in order to show within His creation the beautiful fellowship which exists in the Trinity between Father, Son, and Spirit.

Though it is difficult for mere creature to comprehend, we confess that there is in God eternal communion of the three Persons in one Being. That is life—the life of God. Without that interaction, there could be no living God. Were He not three Persons in eternal fellowship, there would have been no creation and no salvation.

Jesus spake of this eternal fellowship in John 5:19, 20: "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will show Him greater works than these, they ye may marvel." Of the Son, too, Scripture declares (Heb. 1:3), "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, and when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." And Father and Son fellowship in the Spirit. The Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son as Jesus points out in John 15:26: "But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me."

This covenant life of fellowship which eternally exists within God, is the basis for the manifestation of covenant life between God and His people in Christ. God would show, in the highest way possible, the wonder and glory of that fellowship.

One recognizes through all of Scripture how wonderfully God shows this covenant when He created all things and now redeems His creation and people through Christ. The truth concerning the establishment of this covenant between God and His people, a truth often ignored, is that God Himself establishes it. It is not a cooperative effort, not an agreement between God and man. Rather, God Himself establishes His covenant. He showed this great truth to Abraham in Genesis 15:9-18 in response to the question of Abraham, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit the land of Canaan?" God commanded him to take three animals and a dove and young pigeon. The animals were to be divided in half. Normally, when a covenant or agreement was made, the participating parties would together pass between the divided animals. In this case there was an obvious difference. When it was dark, Abraham saw a smoking furnace and burning lamp pass between the pieces—signifying the Presence of God passing between. But Abraham, with whom the covenant was established, did not pass between the parts. What did that mean? It pointed to the wonderful fact that the establishment of God's covenant with Abraham

and all his spiritual seed was through the power and act of God—and not with the help of men. The covenant is established by God Himself.

God further pointed out in Scripture that, after the fall, the covenant is possible only through the blood of the Lamb. In Genesis 17:10, God spake to Abraham, "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised." This circumcision, the shedding of blood, pointed to the truth that the covenant can be established only in the way of shed blood—ultimately of Christ Himself on the cross. For God will establish a relationship with His people only in the way of having their sins covered—thus satisfying the just demands of the righteous God. Other Scripture confirms this same wonderful truth.

Another important truth which God had revealed concerning this covenant is that it would continue in the line of generations. The covenant was not made with single individuals haphazardly gathered from the peoples of the earth. Rather, God would fellowship with His people *and their spiritual seed*. Already to Abraham God had said, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generation for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). The same truth was repeated in the New Testament when Peter declared in Acts 2:39 at Pentecost, "For the promise is unto you and to your children...." This fact explains the church's emphasis not only on the covenant, but also upon covenantal instruction of the youth and their baptism in infancy.

This covenant which God Himself establishes through Christ, is the basis for hope and comfort for the child of God. Surely, first, there is no fear or terror of that One with whom we can now have fellowship and communion. God is God. He is just and righteous in all of His ways. He will not allow sin to go unpunished. But He has also provided the

way of redemption—the cross. Now in communion with God, we can enjoy guidance and encouragement in our earthly journey to glory.

There is also assurance of God's blessings daily. Those who enjoy a covenant-relationship with God, can do so because He bestows all spiritual blessings upon His people. They receive the gifts of love, mercy, wisdom, knowledge. They have what they need to live a covenantal life in this world.

All of this has to do with our relationships with each other—and especially of our relationships within the home. How does our relationship with God reveal itself in our relationships with one another? He who loves God will love his brother also.

Then the covenant child of God will not be guided or set his standards by that which the world has to offer. By way of advertising as well as through its corrupt dramatizations, the world clearly sets forth what its standards and goals are. The heart of man is set upon material things. He finds his pleasure in earthly, worldly amusements. He considers this life as the end of all things.

For the Christian, it is not so. He has the Word of God to serve as his guide. That Word directs in a godly walk and holy life. It is the standard of measurement for the Christian life. He who begins to understand what is involved in the covenant of God with man, will spend much time with the Word of God. Though so many scoff at the very idea, there is really no other answer for proper holy living than that found in Scripture. The family which prays together (and studies Scripture together) stays together. Where Scripture and prayer are ignored in the home, there usually one finds troubles and disruptions.

Of what I have to say, this is the sum: apply the truths of the covenant to our family living—and the blessings of God will rest on such a household.

The Breaking of the Unbreakable Covenant

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

There is a rather wide range of expressions, especially in the Old Testament Scriptures, which refer to covenant-breaking. Thus, for example, in

Genesis 17:9-14 observing the institution of circumcision is equivalent to keeping God's covenant, while of him who is not circumcised it is said that

"he hath broken my covenant." In Exodus 19:5 obeying Jehovah's voice is equivalent to keeping (opposite of breaking) His covenant. In Exodus 31:16 we read of the keeping of the sabbath "for a perpetual covenant." In Leviticus 26:14, 15 despising Jehovah's statutes and abhorring His judgments and not doing all His commandments is equivalent to breaking His covenant. Yet in vs. 44 of the same chapter the Lord states, "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God." Other expressions occur. Deuteronomy 4:23 speaks of forgetting God's covenant by making a graven image. Yet vs. 31 of the same chapter emphasizes that Jehovah will not "forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them." Deuteronomy 17:2 speaks of transgressing the covenant by doing wickedness and engaging in idolatry. In connection with the sin of Achan, Joshua 7, Scripture also speaks of transgressing the covenant by taking the accursed thing. In Joshua 23:16 the same expression occurs, where it refers to serving other gods. And II Kings 18:12 the transgression of the covenant is equivalent to transgressing all that Moses commanded. Scripture also speaks of the forsaking of God's covenant, Deut. 29:25, I Kings 19:10, Jeremiah 22:9. It speaks of not keeping the covenant, I Kings 11:11, Psalm 78:10. It speaks of (not) dealing falsely in God's covenant, Psalm 44:17. Jeremiah 11:3 speaks of not obeying the words of this covenant. In Deuteronomy 31:16, ff. it is even told Moses in advance that after he dies the children of Israel "will forsake Me, and break My covenant which I have made with them."

Yet, as we have seen, the Lord asserts that He will not break His covenant. Besides, the Scriptures speak often of the fact that God's covenant cannot be broken. In Jeremiah 33:19-21 we read: "And the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break My covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers." And frequently, as we know, Scripture speaks of God's covenant as being *everlasting*. Striking in this connection is the text in Isaiah 24:5, "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." More than one passage of Scripture emphasizes in one way or another that God's covenant is unbreakable, that it cannot be disannulled, or that it is everlasting. But the passage in Isaiah 24 is

striking, in the first place, because it speaks in one and the same verse of the breaking of God's covenant and of the fact that it is everlasting. This raises the question: how can God's covenant be everlasting and nevertheless be broken? Or: how can the unbreakable (everlasting) be broken? Secondly, the passage in Isaiah 24 is striking because of its broad sweep. The entire chapter speaks of the judgment of the world. And it speaks of the sin of the world as ground for its final judgment. And it specifically refers to this sin as a transgressing of the laws, changing of the ordinance (statute), and a breaking of the everlasting covenant.

It is especially in connection with Isaiah 24:5 that we shall make a few remarks concerning the breaking of the covenant.

First of all, we may note that Scripture speaks of the *everlasting* covenant. As the covenant is often explained, one would not expect this expression in the text. For one thing, the covenant is often viewed as a way, or means, to an end—the way of or to salvation. And then it is often described as an agreement or contract or pact between God and man; or it is described as consisting in a conditional promise. Further, it is not unusual that men speak of various such agreements. There was one with Adam, called the covenant of works. There was a covenant with Noah, called the covenant of nature or the covenant of common grace. And there was the covenant with Abraham and his seed, the covenant of particular grace. With such a conception it becomes very difficult, of course, to understand how the covenant is everlasting. For one thing, if the covenant is simply a means or way to a certain end, then that covenant falls away when and if the end is attained; and it can hardly be understood as being everlasting in that case. Besides, the difficulty arises that if the covenant with Adam and the covenant with Noah were not of an everlasting nature, while the covenant with Abraham was everlasting, how is this to be explained? How could the whole world (and Isaiah 24 certainly speaks of universal judgment) break the covenant with Abraham and his seed?

Hence, we must bear in mind that the covenant is essentially one. There are not several different covenants in Scripture, but only one covenant. There are indeed various manifestations and dispensations of that one covenant. And there is progress in Scripture in the revelation of that covenant. But the covenant is essentially one. And the essential idea of that covenant is that of the relation of friendship. This friendship-relation exists, first of all, eternally in God Himself. The Three Persons of the Trinity, Who are One in Being, from eternity to eternity live a life of perfect harmony, harmonious fellowship, friendship, in themselves. This is true

because there is in God the highest possible likeness (His Oneness of Being) with personal distinction (the Three Persons). Of the Father, in the Son, and through the Holy Spirit, God knows and loves and delights in and has fellowship with Himself. If God were only One, He could never have fellowship; He would be a dead, static God. But now He is the Triune; and He lives a life of perfect and eternal friendship in and of and by Himself.

But that friendship-relation is also the essential idea of God's covenant with man. It pleased God to reveal His covenant life outside of Himself to and in the creature. It pleased God to reveal His life of friendship to and in a creature, man, who was so created that he was able to enter into and to enjoy that life of divine friendship. And so that covenant life of God in Himself is reflected in man, who is created originally in God's image and thus adapted to that life of God. Only we must remember that in that covenant relation God remains God and man remains man. Hence, in the covenant relation God is Friend-Sovereign, and man is God's friend-servant. The covenant means, as it were, that man is taken up into the stream of God's own life of friendship, to enjoy Him, to delight in His fellowship and in His lovingkindness that is better than life, and to serve Him in love with all his heart and mind and soul and strength.

That covenant is eternal. It is eternal in God Himself. But also as His covenant with His people it is an eternal covenant of grace. It cannot be broken in the sense that that bond of friendship can be severed, in the sense that God's covenant can be abrogated. If I may run ahead of myself for a moment and refer to that covenant as it is sealed in holy baptism, this is precisely the comforting truth which our Form for the Administration of Baptism emphasizes so beautifully. The fact of the matter is that we, on our part, violate that covenant. We do not fulfill our "part" of the covenant of grace, except in principle. That second part, remember—and it is *second*, not first—is that we shall love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, shall forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. But we do not do this perfectly. We even *fall* into sin. But what does our Baptism Form say about this? Notice: "And if we sometimes through weakness fall into sin, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and *undoubted* testimony that we *have* an *eternal* covenant of grace with God." (italics added) Thank God for that! His covenant bond He will not sever!

Nevertheless, Isaiah here speaks of men as having "broken the everlasting covenant." And the term that is used here indeed means "to break" though it is used figuratively. Just as we can speak,

and Scripture speaks, of breaking the law or breaking the commandment, so it speaks of breaking the covenant. When we break a commandment, that does not mean that a commandment is actually destroyed and made void. Similarly when Scripture speaks of breaking the covenant (and the Dutch translation here is strong: *vernietigen*, to negate, to put to naught), that does not mean that the covenant is actually destroyed and made void. Apart from the fact that this would have other serious implications, this would raise the question: how can a covenant that is eternal be voided and brought to nothing? That is, how could it nevertheless be *eternal* in that case? Besides, how could a mere man make void and make vain the work of the living God and bring it to nothing? Hence, that cannot possibly be the meaning.

But this expression does imply, in the first place, that man is in his very being a creature who was adapted to that covenant life of friendship. He was created originally after God's image, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And as such he was adapted to the life of God's friendship. True, he lost all his original righteousness through his own fault through the fall and disobedience of our first parents. But that does not change the fact of his original creation. He can never escape that, and he can never escape the implications of it or the responsibility under which this placed him. In the second place, this implies that principally the wicked man always sins as such a "covenant creature." In that basic sense, *all* sin is always breach of the covenant, transgression of God's covenant. He who was originally the friend of God—and who is still obligated to be the friend of God—is become God's enemy. The knower of God is become a liar and walks in darkness. He who must be righteous and must walk in righteousness does unrighteousness. He who must be holy and walk in holiness is corrupt in all his life and walk. As far as he is concerned, the ungodly man always lives contrary to that covenant life. He breaks God's covenant. On his part, he smashes it in pieces and tramples it with his feet.

[My subject turned out to be too big for a single article. You are invited to read the sequel in our next issue. HCH]

Read and study
The Standard Bearer

God's Covenant, a Family Covenant

Rev. Ronald Hanko

Apart from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing which so wonderfully displays the richness of His grace as the promise of the covenant, that He will not only be the God of His people but of their children after them. It is according to this promise that God establishes His covenant of grace in the line of continuing generations.

The richness of this promise is beautifully illustrated in the story of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34). This man, who was instrumental in opposing the Gospel in the city of Philippi, was brought to his knees by the mighty works of God and by the witness of Paul and Silas. And when, by God's great grace, he asked concerning his salvation, the promise was given to him that not only he but also his house would be saved. And that promise was richly and abundantly fulfilled, for it was the promise of the Almighty, confirmed by an oath and revealing the immutability of His counsel. Not one word failed of that promise, but the gifts of faith and repentance were given also to those of his household, and he and his were baptized that same night into the fellowship of Jesus Christ and into the hope of glory. No wonder, then, that he rejoiced, for God had done for him exceeding abundantly beyond what he had asked or thought.

Psalm 128 also declares this blessedness, that the man who fears Jehovah and walks in His ways shall enjoy Jehovah's goodness with his family, for his wife shall be a fruitful vine and his children like olive plants round his table. Nor do these things refer only to the enjoyment of earthly benefits, for there is neither blessedness, nor peace except in the way of salvation, and of these things also the Psalmist speaks.

And in the same measure as this truth shows forth the riches of God's grace to His people, in such measure it is precious to them. What possible point, for example, would there be, or what incentive to labor in the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools and homes, were it not for the promise, "I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). Who would even dare to bring children into the world in these last days before the end, except that the promise, as declared to Abraham, is also given to the New Testament

Church; "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Nor would the church as Institute have any hope for the future, were it not for these richest blessings of God's grace. Apart from this promise and its gracious, faithful fulfillment, the church would have to be re-constituted and re-established with every passing generation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Psalmist in Psalm 128 not only speaks of seeing children's children, but also of seeing the good of Jerusalem (vs. 5).

The fact that God's covenant is a family covenant is revealed in many different ways in Scripture. It is specifically stated in the promises of the covenant as given to God's people in the Old Testament, to Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham and the Patriarchs, to David, and to Israel (Gen. 3:15, 9:9, 17:7, 26:3-4, 28:13-14, Ex. 2:23-25, Ps. 89:29-37, 103:17, Is. 44:3-4). It is implied in all the admonitions to instruct the children of the covenant and the warning against those who do not (Gen. 18:17-19, Ps. 78:1-8, Judges 2:10). It is implied in the Fifth Commandment which is very much a family commandment in that it is addressed to children as those to whom Jehovah says, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." So too, in Israel's history, children with their parents, as families were baptized in the cloud and in the sea, ate of the bread from heaven, drank of the spiritual rock, and entered into the promised land. Even the Old Testament sign of the covenant revealed the family character of the covenant, not only in the fact that children received the sign, but also in that the sign itself was performed upon the male generative organ. It is for this reason that Psalm 127:3 tells us that children are an heritage or inheritance from Jehovah, a part of the reward of grace that He gives to us. This is true only if we understand that those children are included in His covenant, for children who are not included are neither a reward nor a blessing, but a "grief of mind" to their parents (Gen. 26:34-35).

That all this was true in the Old Testament is not usually denied by anyone. Nevertheless, there are many of a Baptist persuasion who do deny that the

covenant of God in the New Testament is still a family covenant, for certainly a family covenant in the New Testament does not harmonize with their denial of infant baptism. By this denial, however, they make void for the New Testament Church all of the Psalms and prophecies to which we have referred, and even the Ten Commandments and much of the rest of the Old Testament, so much of which is deliberately addressed to families and not just to individuals.

But, more importantly, the New Testament itself teaches us that God's covenant is a family covenant. It is exactly that promise of the covenant that God will be the God of His people and of their children after them that Peter proclaimed on the great day of Pentecost when the New Testament Church received from Christ in heaven all the blessings of His death and resurrection. That promise and its fulfillment in the New Testament is also the explanation of all those passages in the New Testament which speak of the salvation of households (Luke 19:9, John 4:53, Acts 10:2, 16:14-15, 16:30-33, 18:8, I Cor. 1:13, II Tim. 1:16). Those who argue for adult baptism completely miss the point when they argue that none of these passages speak of children, for the point is not so much that God's covenant is also established with children as that God's covenant is always a family covenant both in the Old and New Testaments.

It is for this reason that the Church itself is called a family or household in the New Testament (Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:19, 3:16). It is built up of families and households (Acts 5:42, 20:20, Col. 1:18-22, etc.), takes the form of a family with its elders and other office-bearers (I Cor. 4:15, Gal. 4:19, I Tim. 5:1, 2), and is altogether the family of God, acknowledging God as Father and submitting to the rule of Christ, the elder brother in the house of God (II Cor. 6:18, Heb. 2:13, etc.).

This truth that God's covenant with His saints is a family covenant has its foundation in the truth that God Himself is a family God. God's revelation of Himself in creation and in salvation is always consistent with His own nature and Being and reflects to us what He is in Himself. Therefore, because He is unchangeable, and because He is Himself a family God, His covenant with His people must be and always is a family covenant.

It is in the doctrine of the Trinity that God makes Himself known as a covenant God. In the Trinity He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, living one life of perfect fellowship, in perfect harmony and love—a Family God (Prov. 8:30, 31, John 17:21-23). It is for that reason first of all that He is called a Covenant God in Scripture. When He reveals that covenant to us, then He does not change it, but takes us into

that family life and deals with us as families, so that there may be unity and harmony between Himself and His works.

Thus it is that the truth of the Trinity and the whole idea of fellowship and love are woven together in the First Epistle of John. It is also for this reason that John deliberately addresses himself to families in chapter 1:13, 14 and to the church as a family, using such words as children, brethren, Father, Son, sons again and again in the Epistle.

All this does not mean, of course, that anyone receives salvation because of his natural birth, or that the promise of the covenant means that every member of a covenant family shall be saved. To receive salvation in the line of generations is not to receive it from those generations. Nor does the promise to save families and generations mean that every individual shall receive that salvation, no more than God's promise to save the world means that every individual shall be saved. This is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the husbandman in John 15. The husbandman's purpose to save His vine is not a purpose to save every branch. Many branches are taken away, gathered, and burned, and even the branches that remain in the vine are pruned and purged. There are fruit-bearing branches, as well as suckers that grow and, for the very life of the fruit-bearing branches, must be taken away. Not all are Israel that are of Israel, even in the New Testament.

From the beginning there has also been a seed of the Serpent born in the line of God's covenant, and the presence of that seed is a continual reminder that salvation is from God alone and not because of earthly generations. In fact, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that even the presence of this seed of the serpent does not mean that God's promise to be the God of His people and of their children after them ever fails. When Elijah thought the promise had failed in Israel and begged for death, God told Him that there were still 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal and that in that elect remnant His promise was completely fulfilled (cf. Rom. 11:1-5). They alone were true Israel and they alone obtained that which was promised.

God also reminds us that salvation is of grace alone when He brings new families into the covenant, when He raises up children of Abraham, as it were, from the stones. In all His work among the Gentiles God has been reminding Israel and us that we must not trust in anything but God alone. Nevertheless, He never fails to reveal His goodness to His saints in fulfilling the family promise of His covenant to them.

Nor may we forget that He fulfills that promise in the way of faithful covenant instruction. That

the promise is of God and the fulfillment by grace alone does not take away our responsibility to be teachers both by word and example in our homes and in the church. The blessedness of which Psalm 128 speaks belongs to those who fear Jehovah and who keep His commandments. Just as the generations of Israel were cut out of God's covenant for their unfaithfulness, so too we can be cut off in our generations. We must trust only in His faithfulness, and in faith obey God's command to make known to our children the praises of the Lord, and his strength and the wonderful works which He has done. Then God, working by His grace through that instruction, will use His own covenant promise to save children's children and to reveal the riches of His grace.

Understanding these things, knowing and experiencing the riches of God's covenant grace, our

prayer must be the prayer of David when God's family covenant was revealed to him:

Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of men, O Lord God? And what can (we) say more unto Thee? for Thou Lord knowest Thy servant. For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great things, to make Thy servant know them. Wherefore Thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God beside Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears (II Sam. 7:18-22).

Christian Marriage

Prof. Robert D. Decker

Practically everything in our time is geared to the satisfaction of man's lust. Men and women burn in their lust and wicked passion toward one another. Immorality permeates not only stage and film, but book and magazine. It takes pictures of bikini clad young women to sell everything from toothpaste to automobiles. The corruption of our world is shocking, unmentionable. Modesty is a forgotten word in a world which knows no shame.

This has had devastating effects on the holy bond of marriage. Many live together apart from the marriage relationship. Husbands and wives are swapped and shared at will. Pre-marital relationships are common. Virginity is a rare relic of the past. Marriage itself is viewed as a voluntary contract between equal partners. The husband is not the head of the wife and the wife is not in subjection to her husband. "Roles" within marriage have taken the place of "God-ordained callings." And, roles are switched and merged and shared by husbands and wives. Certainly the wife is not bound to the home and the bearing and rearing of children. She must be free to work, study, develop her

talents, pursue her own interests, and in these ways and more find her "fulfillment."

That all of this has influenced the church cannot be gainsaid. This explains, for example, the denial of the biblical teaching concerning divorce and the re-marriage of divorced persons common in many churches. This explains too all the discussion on the whole subject of women and their place in the church and society. There is as well continued pressure for change even within orthodox and traditionally Reformed churches.

In this context we are called to live chastely both within the state of marriage and outside of it. There are grave, deadly temptations confronting especially our young people. The church must listen to the Word of God as it speaks on this, the most beautiful relationship between man and woman. Marriage, after all, is a reflection of the Great Mystery of Christ and His Bride, the church (Ephesians 5:32).

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Scripture exhorts us to be followers (imitators) of God in the

way of walking in love as Christ has loved us. This general theme is applied by the inspired Apostle to the marriage relationship in verses twenty-two through thirty-three. In this passage the Lord addresses wives, calling them to submit themselves to their own husbands. While it is true that every wife must obey the will of the God, the text is speaking to Christian wives, the wives of the church. Godly wives must submit themselves to their own husbands. The "your own husbands" of verse twenty-two denotes a special relationship, an exclusive relationship. The implication very clearly is that each wife has her own husband and each husband his own wife. These are brought together by God Himself and called to live together in holy marriage reflecting Christ and His Bride, the church (verse 32). Young men and women do not merely happen to meet and "fall in love." God brings them together.

The calling of wives is to submit themselves to their own husbands as unto the Lord. The verb, submit, means: to arrange under, to subordinate, to subject or put in subjection, to yield to another's control, to follow another's direction, admonition, advice. The idea is clear. Christian wives are to place themselves under their own husbands. They must yield to the control, the direction of their husbands. They must give themselves over to their husbands completely. Their entire lives, as godly wives, must be subjected to their husbands. In one word, wives are to obey their husbands. This, in general, is the calling of Christian wives.

Specifically, the text explains what this means. Wives must submit to their husbands as to the Lord. The service of submission which wives yield to their husbands is service to the Lord. When the wife submits to her husband she is submitting to the Lord. Likewise the wife who rebels and refuses to submit to her husband is living in disobedience to her Lord. A wife who is unsubmitive to her husband walks in very grievous sin. This is the plain, simple meaning of the Word of God. Verse twenty-four emphasizes and further explains this idea. The church is subject to Christ. Christ is the absolute Lord of the church. What Christ commands the church to be and do, that the church must be and do. One may never conceive of the church apart from the rule of Christ. Just as the church is subject to Christ so let the wives be to their own husbands. In the same way this means. The wife in a very real sense exists for the sake of her husband. Just as the church exists to serve Christ, so the wife exists to serve her husband.

The text adds: "in everything." In every way, under all circumstances, the wife must submit to her husband. The wife may never go against the

will and word of her husband. His word is the last word. This certainly does not mean that the husband ought to ignore his wife's opinion or feelings. Together they must seek the Lord's will. Nor does this mean that the wife is a mere slave with whom the husband may do as he pleases. It does mean that the wife must submit always to her husband. She must obey him, not just when she feels like it or only some of the time, but always. Without murmuring or complaint, without sulking or grudging, the wife must obey. Cheerfully and joyfully the wife must obey her husband in everything. It is exactly because so many wives refuse to be obedient to their own husbands that there are so many marital problems these days. When wives submit in everything there is part of the foundation for a stable and happy marriage.

Both I Peter 3:1ff. and II Corinthians 7:14, 15 teach that wives must submit even if their husbands are unbelievers. In the former passage the reason is that the unbelieving husband may be won by the chaste conversation of the wife, and in the latter passage the reason is that the unbelieving husband may be sanctified by the wife. There is only one exception to this rule. When being in subjection to the husband involves disobedience to the Word of God the wife must obey God rather than man.

Verse twenty-three provides the ground for this calling: "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." Christ is the head of the church. In that same way the husband is the head of the wife. Thus the marriage relationship reflects the great mystery of Christ and His Bride, the church (cf. vs. 32).

This means the marriage relation is a sacred union. It may not be taken lightly. For this reason, too, young men and women ought to seek to be married. They marry not for their own benefit and certainly not to satisfy their carnal lusts. A Christian young man seeks a Christian young woman, and a Christian young woman seeks a Christian young man because they desire to reflect Christ and His church. This is why young people of God's covenant *may not* seek their marriage partners outside of the church!

Christ is the head of the church. As head, Christ is the legal representative of the church. God appointed Christ to be the head of the church. Christ, assuming our guilt, made atonement for the sins of the church and thus is "the Saviour of the body." Christ is also the organic head of the church. By faith the church lives out of Christ. As head, Christ provides all the needs of the church. And, finally, Christ is the authority of the church.

His Word is the law.

As Christ is the head of the church the husband is the head of the wife. He is her legal representative, not only before the world, but before God. The husband is the provider for his wife. And, he is the ruler of his wife. Does this mean the husband is superior to the wife? Is the wife of less worth than her husband? Is the husband lord and master who may do as he wishes with his slave? *Never!* This is sin! It certainly is not the way Christ cares for His church! These are their God-ordained places. Submitting to her husband, the wife is serving her Lord in heaven. Together husband and wife are one in Christ in Whom is neither male nor female. Both are partakers of the grace of salvation (cf. Galatians 3:28).

As head of the wife the husband must love his wife even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (verse 25). In the love of God the husband must love his wife. Love never seeks to hurt or destroy, but always seeks the salvation of its object. God so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son to atone for our sins and give us everlasting life and glory. That love must be reflected by godly husbands. Loving his wife as Christ loved the church, the husband will never be a ruthless tyrant. He will lead his wife in the way of the Word of God. Together husband and wife will bow before that Word in all of their married life. God's Word will be the

foundation for their marriage. In God's love the husband will provide both the earthly and spiritual need of his wife. Just as Christ gave Himself for the church, so the husband will love his wife. With the self-sacrificing love of Christ the husband will seek his wife's welfare in this life and for the life to come. A godly husband lives for his wife. She is first in his life. He is not harsh or bitter towards her. He is tender and kind. He nourishes and cherishes her as Christ cherishes the church. He rules not with an iron hand expecting to be waited on hand and foot. His wife is no harried, tired slave who lives in fear of him. As the church has all of the love of Christ so the wife has all of the love of her husband. He loves her so much that he will not only put up with her weaknesses and bad habits, he loves her so much he is willing to die for her.

This kind of marriage, possible only by grace, reflects the Great Mystery. This is a blessed, happy union. Godly husbands and their godly wives look forward to joining the real marriage in the perfection of the new creation.

When there is strife and difficulty, and there will be for we are but sinners; the godly husband and his wife will confess their faults the one to the other that they may be healed (cf. James 5:16). Together they will confess their sins to God. They will, in God's love, forgive one another until seventy times seven. Once more, that is a blessed marriage.

The Covenant Training of Children

Rev. J. Kortering

The heart of all true religion is the doctrine of the covenant. As the physical heart circulates life-giving blood throughout the body, so covenant communion with God excites us unto a godly walk of faith. The more we meditate upon God's covenant, the more we are spiritually enriched in our religious life.

By religion we refer to the ability to practice the proper response of faith in our daily life. As we know, we are called by God to express our faith. We do this in many ways. On the first day of the week we arise with one thought in mind; we are to

gather together publicly in the house of God to worship Him. The Lord's Day is a special day in which we are busy, laboring to enter into the rest of our Lord Jesus Christ. Religion deals with the expression of this worship. It is more than this, daily we are to labor to enter into this rest. Monday and the rest of the week is a time to practice religion. Our time, our talents, our home and family, our working hours, our leisure time, all belong to our God to be used by us in His service. We are to live in the midst of the world, but not to be friends of this world. We are to be good workers and con-

scientious about our responsibilities. We are to use everything in the service of our Lord. This is religion.

The training of our covenant children falls into this category as well. We do well to ask ourselves, how does the doctrine of the covenant influence the training of our children?

Since God's covenant relationship with us is that of friendship, (e.g., Enoch and Noah walked with God, Genesis 5:22, 6:9, Abraham was called the friend of God, James 2:23), this covenant friendship touches our family life. Our relationship with God is that of the family: God is our Father and we are His children. This fatherhood of God is not rooted in our being created by Him, for sin interrupted that relationship and by nature we are of our father the devil (John 8:44). Rather, it is rooted in our Lord Jesus Christ Who is our Eldest Brother. To Christ, God said, "I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son" (Heb. 1:5). In Christ we are now the children of God. We say with Isaiah, "But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay and Thou our potter: and we all are the work of Thy hand" (Isaiah 74:8). We are the children of God by the adoption of grace, "For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). This adoption is both legal, in that Christ satisfied the demands of the law for righteousness, and spiritual, in that Christ works by His Spirit in our hearts to give us the awareness and joy of this family life (Galatians 4:4-6).

This has direct bearing upon the training of our children. If we ask the question, how should we train our covenant children, the answer is that we look to our Heavenly Father to determine how He trains us. We still have our sinful nature that must be overcome by the wonder-working grace brought by the Holy Spirit. We receive this training as children of God and learn from it. It in turn governs the training of our children.

Let's consider a few points of comparison in this connection.

First, we can point out that God *teaches* us in the way we should go. According to II Samuel 22:31, "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: He is a buckler to all them that trust in Him." We do not know this perfect way by ourselves, God tells us of this way. In the past He used many ways to do this. We recall the direct conversation God had with the patriarchs. He spoke to them by means of angels, dreams, prophets, and other ways. The message was always the same, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eyes. Be

ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee" (Psalm 32:8, 9). Since God's method of training includes teaching, we must do likewise with our children. "Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul and bind them for a sign upon thy hand, that they may be frontlets between your eyes, and ye shall teach them to your children, *speaking* of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house and upon thy gates" (Deut. 11:18-20). This teaching includes the knowledge of both doctrine and Christian life. In the context of Genesis 18:19, the angel decided to tell Abraham about the destruction of Sodom, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." If we are to be faithful in covenantal training, we must unfold before our children the knowledge of the antithesis, God blesses His people with peace, and curses the wicked with judgment.

Secondly, God does more than teach us; He also restrains us. Sarah acknowledged this when she confessed to her husband Abraham, "Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing" (Gen. 16:2). Why did God do this? Why did He wait until they were both sexually dead, before He fulfilled the promise of Isaac? He put them in such restricted and narrow straits that they might learn that the covenant would be realized in none other way than in His power and goodness. God uses many such restraints. David acknowledged, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept Thy Word" (Psalm 119:67). Training children must include such restraints. The life of Eli illustrates its lack. Yes, Eli taught his sons, but he didn't train them properly. According to I Samuel 2:23, 24 he even admonished them and told them they were wrong; but God said, "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and *he restrained them not*" (I Sam. 3:13). We do not train our children simply by teaching them. We must restrain them. Our children must be limited in their activity. They may not do whatever they please; their evil nature must be tied down as the newly planted sapling. The restraints of God's Word must be placed upon them. They must be forbidden sinful acts and told why they are wrong.

The third comparison is the use of discipline. The Word of God labels this "chastisement." Recall with me those precious words of Hebrews

12:6-8, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.... If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." Such discipline comes in many ways. In the Old Testament, God used the heathen nations to chastise Israel. Many times the Lord sends afflictions to bring us to the knowledge of our sins and spiritual dependence. James tells us that the "trying of our faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:3, 4). Peter speaks of our faith being tried as silver (I Peter 1:7). This must also be done by us in the training of our children. When they do wrong, they must see and feel in us the wrath of God against sin. Hence the Bible emphasizes the use of the rod, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). Similarly, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. 13:24). Solomon adds, "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15). Notice carefully, "the rod and reproof." We may not beat our children and not explain why; that kind of treatment is forbidden. "Fathers provoke not your children to wrath" (Eph. 6:4).

In the fifth place, training must include encouragement. Our Heavenly Father comes to us so often and brings a word of encouragement. Many times we feel beaten, unworthy, unable to go on in the high calling of keeping covenant with our God. His encouragement is this: He assures us He is our God and loves us, He will never fail, "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:26, 27). So we must train our children. Yes, as parents we must encourage them with the certainty that we, too, will be there at their side in any circumstance. We must take a bruised and beaten child on our lap and comfort him. We must also take our teenaged children and hear them out and assure them that we love them and will guide them through the perplexing years of growing up.

The sixth comparison is exercise: we must practice doing what God wants us to do. The fledgling

bird is nudged out of the nest so he can learn to fly and fend for himself. So God calls us to such spiritual exercise: "exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (I Tim. 4:7). God calls us to walk by faith, to live out that Christian calling in all areas of our life. The more we do this the more our spiritual muscles develop, our heart gets stronger, our life more meaningful. As parents we must encourage our children to develop by *doing* the will of God. Life itself is the gymnasium within which we develop and grow in faith. We must be good examples of godliness unto our children. Our home, school, church, business contacts, recreation, even unbelieving neighbors all present opportunities for us to *show* to our children how to walk in godliness in the midst of the world. This will give to them direction. From childhood on they will know how to express their faith, how to conduct themselves on the Lord's Day, how to deal with unbelievers who invite them to join with them in their evil ways. We and our children will know what Moses was talking about when he, "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25).

Finally, all this training must be done in love. Our Covenant Father teaches, restrains, disciplines, encourages, and calls us to exercise our faith in deepest love. That love is rooted in the giving of His own Son for our adoption. Our Father did more than act in love; He also constantly assures us of His love by telling us in His Word and by the preaching of the gospel. We must do no less with our children. We must act in love and govern all our dealings with them in love for them. We must also tell them of our love for them. Little wonder that a child who has seen the wrath of God manifest in a severe spanking might conclude that father or mother doesn't love him. We must assure our children that whether we teach them, restrain them, discipline them, encourage them, or lead them in exercising their faith, it is in love. Our love is directed toward them not only, but our love is deeply rooted in God's love. We love each other for God's sake.

Such training has the divine guarantee, "when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

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A Covenant Home: What Is It Like?

Prof. H. Hanko

Some years ago, on a visit to the South, I found myself in front of a home, which had, hanging over the front door, a sign upon which were the words: "In This House Christ Is King." I found this intriguing and immediately thought of the firm statement of Joshua to Israel just before his death: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

It would be equally appropriate for a covenant family to have a sign hanging over the front door of its home, with the words engraved on it: "This Home Is A Covenant Home." Such a family would want all who visited it to understand that the home they were about to enter was a special kind of home, a unique home, a home which differed from countless thousands of homes throughout the country or the world.

If you saw such a sign appropriately fixed above the front door of a house, what precisely would you expect to find inside? Would you enter with some firm ideas concerning what to expect? Or would you say: "I have no idea of what a covenant home is like."

What is a covenant home?

This is not, of course, such an easy question to answer. There are at least two reasons why it is so difficult. One reason is that, while it is relatively easy to describe an *ideal* covenant home, no home ever reaches that ideal in this world of sin. An ideal covenant home would be a home in which all the members of the family walk faithfully and without sin in the ways of God's covenant. You won't find such a home anywhere. It might be worth our while, sometime, to describe such a home, for it is certainly an ideal for which we ought always to strive. But it is not attainable, that much we know.

The second reason why this question is so difficult to answer is that a covenant home has a certain "atmosphere" about it which, while it immediately tells you that it is indeed a covenant home, nevertheless defies analysis and escapes description. Anyone can tell *when* he is in a covenant home and *when* he is in a worldly home. But when pressed to explain precisely *why* the one home differs so radically from the other, he is hard-pressed to explain this difference. He might finally say, "Well, there is just something about it."

Nevertheless, it is certainly worth our while to try to explain the inexplicable, to try to define the indefinable, to try to describe that which cannot readily be defined. Our efforts are worth while simply because God's covenant people want covenant homes.

We must, of course, take our starting point with the truth that a covenant home is a place where covenant people, covenant parents with covenant children, live. This goes without saying. But it is important to understand that these covenant parents with covenant children are what they are because God has Himself established His own covenant of grace with them. They are *His* covenant people. This is important because God's covenant people are often described in Scripture in terms of a *family*. The whole church is a covenant family. And the Scriptures do this because our covenant families are earthly representations of the great family of the elect. Our covenant homes are, therefore, *covenant* homes to the extent that they reflect in their life, the covenant family of God.

There are various aspects to this, which we can briefly mention. The relation between God and His people in Christ is often pictured in Scripture in terms of a marriage relation—and this is a covenant relation. So, a covenant home is one where husband and wife, in their life together reflect the relation between Christ and His Church. The people of God are often described in terms of being God's sons and daughters, i.e., God's children whom He has begotten again by the wonder of regeneration. In that family God is emphatically *Father*, Who assumes all responsibility for the care of His children, Who makes a will in which His children are His heirs, heirs of the great treasures of salvation which He gives to them at the end of time. In that same family, Christ is the Elder Brother, the Firstborn, the One Who opens the way through sin and the grave into the blessedness of heaven for all His brethren to follow, Who has all the rights and privileges of the Firstborn because He is the Heir of the birthright of the Father. It is even a home in which there is much eating and drinking, much joy and laughter, much fellowship and happiness, as the family gathers around the table to celebrate the great feast of the marriage supper of the Lamb. But it is also a family in which there is great need for

instruction, for discipline, for warning and admonition, for chastisement, for encouragement, for comfort. It is that kind of a family because our Father knows that we are little children who need all these things in our "naughtiness," our struggles, our weaknesses, our sins.

A covenant home is, therefore, a home in which one finds a kind of picture of heaven's family, a reflection of the family of the church, a representation both of what things are like now while the church is in the world, and what things will be like when the church is in heaven.

What, then, specifically, does one find when one enters the door over which hangs the sign: "This Home Is A Covenant Home"? What does one find if he hangs his hat and stays for a while in a home such as this?

Well, for one thing, the *house* has very little, if anything, to do with it. I have been in palatial houses which were not even homes, much less covenant homes. There are plenty of these in the world: houses costing tens of thousands of dollars, furnished with great taste and costly luxuries, staffed by many servants, with closets filled with many clothes, with new and powerful cars in the garage, with bars and recreation rooms, dens and fireplaces, art and tasteful decorations abounding; but such places are not necessarily *homes*. I have also been in very humble dwellings, in my childhood, in places where there was not even electricity, running water, inside toilets, or the conveniences of modern life; places where a family lived in great poverty and crowded conditions; but a *home* for all that. One of Solomon's proverbs sums it all up: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" (Prov. 15:17). One cannot determine whether a home is a covenant home by the house.

There are, of course, certain things about a covenant home which would be readily noticeable. You would not have to be in such a home very long before you would observe that there is a great deal of music in the home, but that the music which lies open on the piano or organ, the music which comes over the radio, the music which is sung, is all good music. It need not be Psalter music always. There may be classical music, church music, religious music; but you won't hear in such a home the music of the world—not even when the children are practicing their piano lessons. You would notice too that there probably would not be a television set, although if there was one, it was used so little that you might wonder why the people had one at all. Instead, you would see books and magazines lying around the house and on the book shelves, and both parents and children often

reading and discussing what they read. But the books and magazines, while surely not all religious, are nevertheless not such reading material as has to be hidden away somewhere when the minister and elder come on family visitation.

But there are other things which one would notice, especially if one stayed for a while. One would notice, in a covenant home, that those who belong to the family enjoy being in the home. They cannot always be home—the father must go to work; the mother must attend to shopping and other obligations; the children are off to school and to work. But it would not take you long to tell that the members of the family want to be home as much as they can; they enjoy it there at home best of all; they hurry home from wherever they have been. Father looks forward to coming home after a day's work. Mother does not try to find work outside the home to increase the family income, nor does she gallivant about, eating breakfast and lunch at restaurants, sitting in idle chatter at other people's houses, traipsing around in an almost desperate effort to escape the home. The children are not always rushing off here and there for all kinds of reasons in order to escape being home and making family life together a near impossibility. The family finds in its home its greatest happiness and looks forward to those moments when all are together.

It is for this reason that mealtimes are always the highlight of the day for a covenant family. Gathered about the table, there is the opportunity to have devotions together—to read and discuss Scripture and to pray together bringing the thanks and the needs of the family to God's throne; there is much laughter and joking; there is opportunity for the children to tell what has happened in school, for mother to tell about her day, and father to speak of his work. There is time for talk about the problems and burdens of the day and to share with the family the accomplishments, the disappointments, the troubles, and to find encouragement, help, and comfort from one another. Each member, after all, has his own place at the table. When one member of the family dies or is absent for a long time, we even speak of the fact that his chair is empty—and no one can fill it. Just as in the church of Christ, each has his own place which no one else can fill and in which place each member contributes to the fulness of the whole.

And so it is a family in which there is a great deal of happiness. A covenant family is a happy family. This does not mean that there are not great sorrows which drive the members closer together; this does not mean that there are not serious problems which have to be solved; nor does it mean that always and only happiness is present in the home: there are

times of bickering and fighting, of unhappiness and just plain orneriness. But each knows that this is sin, and that such attitudes disrupt and detract from good home life. Nor does it mean that children always do their chores around the house willingly and eagerly. Most of the time this is perhaps not the case. But nevertheless, each knows that his part in the family is an important part and that whatever he contributes to the life of the family is a contribution to a covenant home.

Love, therefore, is the great thing. A reflection of the love of God in the family is what makes a family a covenant family — God's great love for us in Christ Jesus. It is a love between husband and wife in which each knows his own place, in which each willingly and readily assumes that place, in which each is thankful for the other as a gift of God, in which each knows God's love for him. It is a love between parents and children in which both recognize that God has given parents to children and children to parents as a great gift of grace. It is a love in which each knows and is thankful for his own place within the circle of love — which, as the apostle reminds us — is a bond of perfectness. It is a love that shows itself in each sacrificing his or her

own personal well-being for the welfare of the whole. Finally, it is love which makes a home, a covenant home. Yet, love is so imperfect, and self-love and selfishness constantly intrude. So it is a home in which there are constant reminders that love must prevail. And so it is in unexpected gestures of thoughtfulness and surprising efforts to help one another.

Sin is always there, in many forms. Sometimes great sins. Sometimes the nagging sins of small thoughtless acts, of unkind words, of surliness and selfishness, of disobedience and disagreement. And so a covenant home is always a home where there is instruction and reproof, confession and repentance, encouragement and praise for the one who does well, a bearing of one another's burdens, a longing to help others do the right, but a punishment when needed. Such is also a covenant home in this sinful world.

In short, a covenant home is a reflection, in all its rich variety, of God's dealings with us. Where we are conscious of how God works in our lives, and where we attempt, by grace, to reflect these great works of grace and love, there you have a covenant home.

GUEST ARTICLE —

Why Are You Different?

Gertrude Hoeksema



Probably all of you boys and girls who read the little story I am going to tell at the beginning will say, "I know all about that story already! Something like that happened to me, too!"

Here is the little story. Early one hot summer afternoon, Jon and Jill, who lived four houses down the street, hurried up the sidewalk and knocked at the door. Phil and Paula ran to open it.

"Hi," they all said.

Then Jill, who talked more than Jon did, told why they had come: "It's so hot today, and my mother wonders whether you would like to go for a swim in the pool with us and then have a picnic in the park."

Phil and Paula poked one another, and Paula said, "Why, no, we *can't*!"

"Don't you know it's Sunday today?" Phil reminded them.

"So..." Jill said.

"Go ask your mother," Jon told them.

"She would say no. We go to church on Sunday."

"We did, too — this morning," Jill said, "and now our Sunday is over."

"Ours lasts all day," Phil started to say. He was going to add, "because God wants us to serve Him every minute of His day"; but Jon interrupted him: "Why do you have to be so strict? 'Don't do this

and don't do that!" Don't you ever get tired of it? How come your family is so *different*?"

What would you have answered if someone asked you why your family was so different? We are different, very different from most of the families who live in this earth. Do you know that only a very few, a tiny number of people serve God as we do?

That is why we must answer so many questions from our neighbors and playmates who do not serve God as we do. They ask us many questions that go something like this: "How come you may not go to the park and play a game of ball on Sunday afternoon?"

You answers: "Because Sunday is the Lord's Day."

They ask: "How do you know?"

You answer: "Because I am a Christian and I know it from the Bible."

They ask: "How come you go to a special Christian school?"

After you think a while, you might answer: "Because in a Christian school we learn what God's Word tells us."

And then they go on to ask you why you pray, and why you have to learn those hard catechism questions, and why you don't go to movies, and may watch hardly any programs on television, and whether you like to have such strict parents. Do you ever get stuck when you try to answer their questions?

Go along with me, then, to God's Word, and let me help you find the answers there to the question: "Why are you different?"

You are different because of a promise. God made that promise long, long ago to Abraham, and because *God* made the promise, He surely will keep it. Do you remember that God called Abraham to go to a land that He would show him, and that the name of the land was Canaan? After Abraham came to Canaan, God gave him a most beautiful promise: that He would give the land of Canaan to the children that would be born from Abraham's family — not every single child from Abraham's family, but those children whom God chose to be *His* children from Abraham's children. The best part of God's promise was that some day *Jesus* would be born from Abraham's children. Remember that, because I am going to tell you more about it pretty soon. God even took Abraham outside at night and asked whether he could count the millions of stars in the sky. No, Abraham

couldn't. God promised that the people that came from Abraham — we call them Abraham's *seed* — would be as many as the stars of the sky. Abraham would not be able to count his seed, either.

Do you think that Abraham was happy? Yes, but he was troubled, too; for he had no children yet — not even one child — and he and Sarah his wife were far too old to have a baby anymore. Abraham believed God's Words, but he asked God how he would know that his children would live in the land of Canaan.

God answered by giving Abraham a special picture-story, a sign. See if you can make the picture-story real in your mind, too. God sent Abraham to get some animals from his flock: a young cow, a she-goat, a ram, a turtle dove, and a pigeon. Now watch what Abraham did with those animals: he cut the cow in half and laid each half alongside a path. Next he cut the goat in half and laid each half behind the pieces of the cow next to the path. Then came the two halves of the ram, in rows behind the cow and the goat. At the end, Abraham put the whole turtle dove on one side of the path and the whole pigeon on the other side. Now the path was in the middle of the rows of dead animals!

Does this seem like a strange picture to you? It was not strange to Abraham. He knew all about it, because it was something people did in those days when they made promises to one another. After someone made a promise, he walked between the halves of the dead animals, and it meant that he would rather *die* than break his promise.

Is the picture still in your mind? It is a picture of God keeping His promise to Abraham — the promise that he would always be the friend of Abraham's children. He would give Abraham's children the land of Canaan, but He would do much more than that. He promised to save Abraham's children from all their sins and take them to heaven with Him when they died. That was the most wonderful promise there ever was! And, remember, God said He would rather *die* than break His promise.

Now watch what happened. Abraham sat near those dead animals all day, until the sun went down. When it was very dark, he saw a lighted lamp and a smoking furnace pass through those pieces of animals, and Abraham knew that it was *God Himself* Who was walking through those dead animals. It meant that God would walk right through death to save His people. To keep His promise to be their Friend and Savior, God would have to *die*!

When did God die? When He sent Jesus, His own dear Son, to live on the earth in a body just like ours, so that He could go to the awful cross to suffer

and die to take away the sins of His friends. Our Jesus, Who is God, walked right through death to save Abraham's children. That is the way God kept His promise.

The Bible calls God's promise of friendship by a beautiful name: His covenant. And He made that covenant with Abraham and his children. But what about us? Is that promise for us, too? Did Jesus die for us? Let me explain to you who Abraham's children are: they are Jesus' children; for the Bible tells us that if we are Jesus' children, then we are Abraham's children, and His promise is for us. Jesus was *the seed* of Abraham. That means that Jesus was *the Child* that all the people who believed God's promise looked for all through the long years before He was born. We don't have to look for Jesus anymore, for He has already come to earth and has died for us, and gone back to heaven. We believe that, don't we? We believe that we are Jesus' children because God gave us faith in our hearts so we can believe it.

God did one more wonderful thing. He promised Abraham and He promised us that He would make His covenant — His promise — with *families* of believers: fathers and mothers, boys and girls, who will grow up to be fathers and mothers and have more children, on and on until the end of time. God calls His children from the families of believers. Now can you see how our families are connected with Abraham's family? The Bible calls Abraham *the father of believers*, and we are sometimes called children of Abraham.

Now we can see that God's promise to Abraham is His promise to us, too. Do you feel like a special child? You are. For God did not choose all the children on this earth to be His children. No, most of them God did not choose. God did not even choose everyone of the children from fathers and mothers who love the Lord; but usually it is God's way to save children from fathers and mothers who believe in our Lord Jesus. Isn't that a beautiful way for God to save His children?

What does it mean that God gave the promise of His covenant to you? It means that being one of God's covenant children is the greatest thing that could ever happen to you. Why? Because Jesus our Lord went to the cross for you; and there He took away all your sins, and He gave you new hearts that are clean and that love Him. That is the best thing that can ever happen to you — to have God for your Savior and Friend. But there is more. Covenant children are the very richest children in the world. No, you aren't the richest in money. You are the richest because God has promised to His covenant children all the treasures in heaven: the happiness and beauty and peace and joy and love of

living forever with our God.

But we are not in heaven yet. What does it feel like to be a covenant boy or girl here on earth — a *different* kind of boy or girl — a special child? Is it because we are so good? Shall we brag that we are so much better than other children? Is that why we are different? Oh, no! Just think of all the bad, sinful things we think and do every minute of the day. No, we are all bad, until God says to us: "You are my covenant children. I chose you to be mine. I will take away your sins and make you want to love me with all your hearts." God does it all, and we can only say, "Thank you, Lord."

Now we can understand that we are different because God made us different. He makes us believe His promises and love Him; and when we love Him, we ask Him to make us sorry for our sins and to fight them with all our might. And when He forgives our sins, He makes us, oh, so happy — so happy that we want to sing songs of thanks and praise.

The next time Jon and Jill ask you, "Do you *like* to be a covenant child?" tell them, "I like it better than anything in the whole world."

If they ask you, "Why do you like it better than anything in the whole world?" tell them, "Because with my body and my soul, in life and in death, I belong to Jesus."

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 11, 1984, the Lord willing, our parents and grandparents, MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM KAMPS, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. In remembrance of that day we give thanks to God for them and for the covenantal care we have received through them.

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." (Psalm 25:10).

Harry and Evelyn Langerak
Myron and Patricia Moody
Charles and Dorothea Kalsbeek
John and Carolyn Cleveland
Henry and Linda Kamps
Earl Kamps
and 21 grandchildren

NOTICE!!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year, are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee, Mr. Larry Meulenberg, Secretary, 342 Begole, S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504. (Phone 616-453-8466). This contact should be made before the next meeting of the Committee on March 13, 1984, the Lord willing.

NOTICE!!!

The Hope Christian School of Redlands, California, is in need of a Kindergarten thru the 4th grade teacher beginning in September of 1984. Teachers interested in applying for this position please write to Bill Feenstra, 831 Sylvan Blvd., Redlands, CA 92373 or phone him at (714) 793-3597.

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies for the 1984-85 academic year in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches should make application at the March 15, 1984 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

Pre-Seminary Students:

A transcript of grades from high school and college (if any), a letter of testimony from the student's pastor or consistory, and a certificate of health from a reputable physician must accompany the application.

Seminary Students:

A testimonial from the student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith and upright in walk, a certificate of health from a reputable physician, and high school and college transcripts must accompany the application. All applicants to the seminary department must have completed the equivalent of a four-year college education (125 semester hours) and must meet the course requirements for entrance to the seminary department. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All seminary department applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student can not appear at the March 15th meeting, notification of this fact along with a suggested interview date must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., S.W., Grandville, Michigan 49418.
Jon Huisken, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

The South Holland Protestant Reformed School Board is seeking applicants for teaching during the 1984-85 school year.

Please call Board Secretary James Lanting at 312-339-1070 or at 312-596-5093 and send resume to Box 156, South Holland, IL 60473.

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The Standard Bearer*

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 6, 1984, our dear parents MR. AND MRS. JUSTIN KORTERING will celebrate, Lord willing, their 65th wedding anniversary.

We their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are thankful every day for what God has done for us through them. They have taught us not only by word, but especially by example to walk with God and wait upon Him for our every need.

May we together rest in His promise, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." II Cor. 5:1

Lafern Kortering
Jess Kortering
Rev. and Mrs. Jason Kortering
Mr. and Mrs. Ervin Kortering
13 grandchildren
4 great-grandchildren

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 10, 1984, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. & MRS. HENRY MIERSMA of Doon, Iowa, will observe their 40th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the years He has given them together and for the covenant care and instruction they have given us. It is our prayer that they may continue to experience the blessings of our faithful God.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children. (Psalm 103:17)

Rev. Rodney & Sharon Miersma
Eric
Rev. Dale & Velerie Kuiper
David, Bradley Christopher, Bethany,
Phillip, Victor, Dwight, Lois
Gary & DaVonna Holstege
Mical, Nathan, Ross
Will & Nona Postma
Brian, Stephan, Luanna
Alvern & Fran Miersma
Gene & Daris Van Bommel
Kristi, Jill
Carlyle Miersma & Marcia Hanko (fiancee)

*Take time to
read and study
The Standard Bearer*