

Sabbath School Series: The Covenant Family

Reference:

Harriet and Gerard van Groningen. 1997. The Covenant Family. Editora Cultura Crista, Sao Paulo, Brazil. Available at the Covenant Seminary bookstore, St. Louis, Mo.

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There are scores of books available on the family – why do we need another one? Harriet and Gerard van Groningen contend that there is a lack of understanding regarding God's kingdom and the covenants of the Bible, which provide a helpful context for understanding the family. What are the real purposes of marriage and family? Starting with Genesis, *The Covenant Family* aptly develops the Biblical role God has designed for the family before addressing more particular topics in marriage and parenting.

Introduction

- Trustworthy and inerrant Word of God a great help for changing challenges in society
- Lack of knowledge on covenant and kingdom
- What are the real purposes of the family?

Chapter 1. Our Source Book: The Bible

- Exemplaristic approach (descriptive passages)
- Prescriptive (what does the Bible prescribe for the family?)
 - o Contrast traditional and post-modern approach
- Bible is not time bound

Chapter 2. Covenant – Family

- What is the family?
 - o Nuclear family: husband, wife, children, often part of extended family
 - o An ancient family pattern - this is the biblical concept of family
 - o Family is not “bourgeois”, not merely result of free enterprise and capitalism
 - o Edith Schaeffer: the birthplace of creativity, a formation center for human relationships, a shelter in time of storms, a museum of memories.
 - o “Covenantal” family
- Covenants in the Bible
 - o Covenant appears over 290 times in the Bible
 - o Treaty involving land and cattle (Gen. 26)
 - o Political treaty (1 Kings 5:12 and Amos 1:9)
 - o Covenant of friendship (David & Jonathan, 1 Samuel 20:16; Psalm 55:20)
 - o Resolution for oneself (covenant with my eyes, Job 31:1)
- Elements of a covenant
 - o Promises
 - o Stipulations
 - o Blessings/curses
 - o Provisions for continuity
 - o Oath
- Covenant is a bond (Ez. 20:37) of life and love, unbreakable relationship between two parties
 - o Most often is the covenant between God and man, initiated unilaterally by God
 - o Covenants are God means of carrying out his purpose for creation and redemption
 - o “Marriage” between God and his people (Eze. 16:8-16; Jere. 31:32; Rev. 21:2-3, 22:17)
- Marriage, as a covenant (Prov. 2:17), is a representation of covenant of God with his people
- Biblical concept of family: the covenant family
 - o Husband, wife, and children called by God to reflect His intimate relationship within the Trinity and the intimate relationship God has with his people
 - o Seed : covenantal servants from generation to generation

Chapter 3. The Origin of the Family

- Gen. 1:26 God created the family
 - o Let us (trinity) make man in our image
 - o Man and woman in marriage reflect the trinity
 - o Prescription: multiply and have dominion
 - o Must take creation account seriously (not mythical)
 - o Theistic evolution destroys biblical basis for family
- Gen. 2 more detail on the creation of Adam and Eve
 - o Adam needed a suitable helper; God created Eve from his rib
 - o Marriage is instituted: a man is to leave father & mother and hold fast to his wife
 - o The man is responsible to initiate marriage and establish a family
 - o Marriage is nuclear core of family; husband & wife are one flesh
 - o Unity/bond within trinity, within marriage, and between God & people
 - o Paul accepted marriage as a given
 - o Story: better missionary if single? No, marriage/family a great blessing

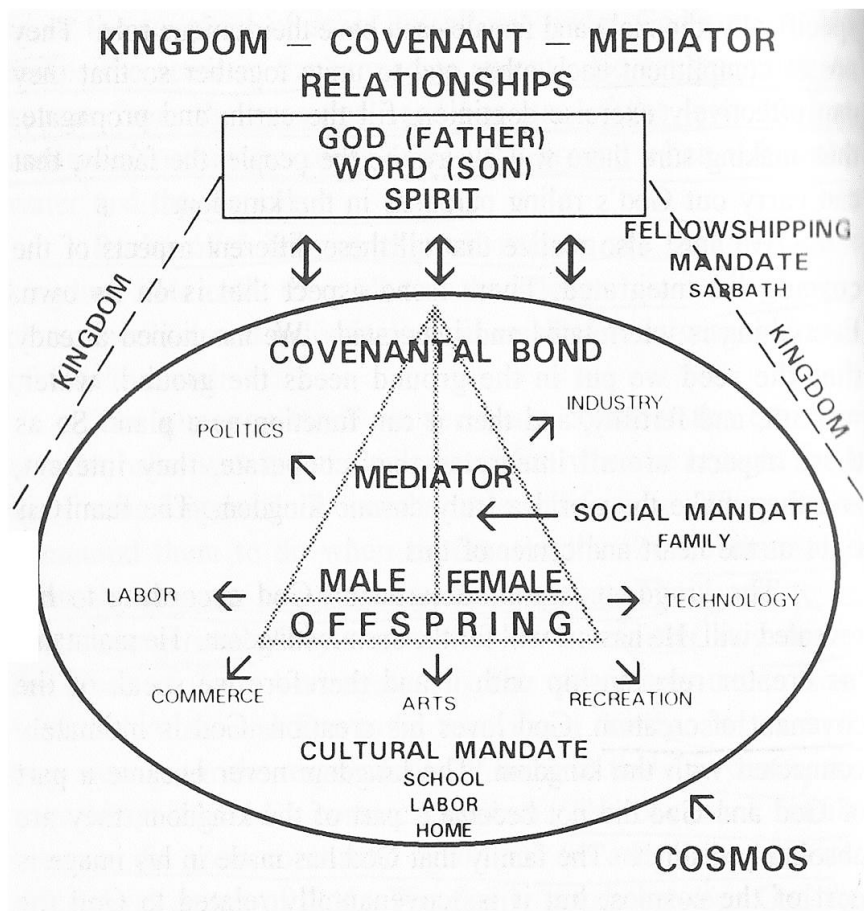
Chapter 4. Marriage is a Covenant

- Marriage is foundational, the means for becoming a covenant family
- Some want to dismantle marriage
- Marriage includes a public ceremony, legal aspects, and societal expectations
- Marriage is an institution: two people committed to each other
- Marriage is not a contract, not temporary
- Marriage is a covenant, is binding, is a bond of love and life
 - o Love
 - o Total surrender
 - o Submit to and receive one another
 - o Willing acceptance of requirements of marriage
 - o Progression: relationship becomes richer and fuller over time
 - o Solemn commitment/oath
 - o Marriage bed: physical union ratifies the marriage covenant
 - o Commitment to a home, including children (Lord willing)
- Marriage is picture of Christ and the church
 - o God hates divorce because he is always faithful to us
- Only heterosexual union is ordained
- Must not be a marriage union between a Christian and non-Christian (Dt. 7:3)
 - o In the NT, Peter also assumes a unity in faith (I Pet. 3:7 "heirs with you")

Chapter 5. The Kingdom Context of the Covenant Family

- The Cosmic Kingdom
 - [Here, “kingdom” is much broader than the “kingdom of heaven” (the church)]
 - Ps. 93 God is king over all; within that kingdom is God’s house with firm statutes
 - King: God
 - Reign: governing, directing, controlling
 - Throne: center from which He carries out His reign, heavens
 - Domain: entire cosmos (the world or universe regarded as an orderly, harmonious system)
 - Ps 67:5 all nations are part of God’s kingdom: “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!”
 - Jonah 4:11 God was even concerned for the cattle in Ninevah
 - All the laws of nature are part of the kingdom (e.g. a seed sprouting)
 - Context is the covenant with creation as a whole (Genesis 1-2)
 - Gen. 9:9-10, 16 after the flood, the covenant with creation is renewed, with mankind and every living creature
 - [Dominion is restated (v1-3,6,7): be fruitful, fill the earth, rule over animals/plants, administer justice
 - Reaffirms that people are made in image of God (v5-6)
 - The problem of sin continues (8:21), yet God shows kindness to all creation by never again destroying the world with a flood (9:11-17)
 - Covenant of creation still operative after initiation of covenant of grace]
 - Vicegerent: one who reigns under God (not viceregent, i.e. reign in the place of God)
 - Male and female were commanded to rule over everything in the kingdom
 - The family, the basic social unit on earth, is a mediatorial agent, between God and the cosmos
 - The covenant family is at the center of the cosmic kingdom
 - [Since the fall, Christ is the mediator between the family and God; the church is the community of believers where people, through the covenant of grace, are forgiven and enable to be faithful in the areas of family and dominion]
- Kingdom administered by God’s revealed will [the moral law]
 - Cosmic kingdom includes 3 covenantal relationships / mandates:
 - Spiritual / fellowshiping mandate (institution of the church)
 - The spiritual relationship was established between God and Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26; 2:15-16; 3:8)
 - It includes the family and extended family (Ps. 127, 128, Mt. 19:13-14)
 - [even pre-fall God set aside the 7th day as holy]
 - Called for obedience and close fellowship, but Adam and all mankind fell
 - The Messiah secured salvation and demonstrated his power over Satan and demons, yet they continue to rebel against him
 - The church is the primary means of grace for the family

- Social mandate (institution of the home)
 - The basic social unit is the family: husband, wife
 - Satan is active in destroying the family
 - State of family affects church and school
 - The social relationship also includes extended family and communities
 - Cultural mandate (institutions of labor and school)
 - The spiritual-secular distinction can be misleading
 - All aspects of culture are related to God (politics, education, technological, recreational, labor, artistic...)
 - We must be faithful to God culturally as well as spiritually/socially
 - Scripture must be brought to bear on the cultural task
 - Education begins in the family
 - Abraham Kuyper: "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"
- God established these 3, demanding obedience in each
- These are interconnected, one affects the other, making the world a truly "cosmic" kingdom



Chapter 6. The Role of the Male/Husband in the Covenant Family

- Illustration: Van Groningen called to mission work in Australia
 - o Time to renew commitment to family
- Most urgent social problem: fatherlessness
 - o *Fatherless America* by David Blankenhorn
- Leading role in cultural, social, and spiritual aspects should be taken by husband
- Men and women are created in God's image (Ps. 8:5 "lack a little of God")
 - o Love, understand, know, gracious, merciful, compassionate
 - o Royal, princess, vicegerents, have to be regal and stand tall
 - o Eph. 4:22 "...new self created to be like God, in true righteousness & holiness"
- Husbands/fathers should reflect God in specific ways:
 - o Ps. 103:13 as a father pitieth his children so the Lord has compassion
 - o Gen. 17:1 El Shaddai, husbands/fathers also must be all sufficient ones
 - o Men must initiate (Gen. 2:24), as God initiates covenant with us (Gen. 17:7)
 - o A man should treasure his wife as God did Israel (Ex. 19:4-7)
 - o Men must have wisdom (knowledge & application) as Christ is wisdom personified
 - o Men of commitment, dedication, perseverance
 - o Eph. 5:23 husband is head of wife as Christ is head of church
 - Head is not (in this case) "source"
 - Head – one who is called upon to exercise leadership & authority
 - Head not superior in essence or importance, just different roles
 - Gen. 3:16 creation order will continue: he will rule over you
- Husbands/fathers called to lead in demonstrating 4 characteristics
 - o Love wife and children (Eph. 5:25ff)
 - Story of husband drowning after saving wife
 - o Exercise authority (never by brute power)
 - e.g. "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching." (Prov. 1:8)
 - o Demonstrate ability as leaders, teachers, and planners
 - o Provide financially, but also more broadly: spiritually, socially, & culturally
- Eph. 6:4 do not frustrate children by failing to love/train/instruct them
- Three vices that corrupt family relationships
 - o Individualism (c.f. civil rights movement)
 - o Selfishness (e.g. crime, frivolous lawsuits)
 - o Irresponsibility – headship does not give freedom
 - Leadership means servanthood, like Christ

Chapter 7. The Role of the Female/Wife in the Covenant Family

- Feminism forced us to define role of women
- Genesis 2
 - Woman is not inferior as image bearer, as a person
 - Men and women are equal in personhood and value
 - She also received 3 mandates
 - Woman is helper/helpmeet
- Meaning of helper/helpmeet
 - Enable him to have dominion and fill the earth as he enables her
 - God is the “helper” of the fatherless Ps. 10:14
 - God stands besides us, sustains us when we are weak (Ps. 30:10)
 - “Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life” (Ps. 54:4)
 - The Lord is my helper I will not be afraid Ps. 118:7, Heb. 13:5-6
 - Woman models God as a helper, shows us that we are never alone
 - The male is in great need of a helper
 - Female is a princess, royal/regal, stand tall
- Motherhood – one of the greatest blessings of the woman
 - With God’s help Eve brought forth child (Gen. 4:1), seed, image bearer
 - God works in a woman’s womb in very unique powerful way (Ps. 139:13)
 - There is a God-given desire to be a mother (Sarah, Rachel, Hannah)
- Example of Sarah
 - 1 Pe. 3:1-6 submissive, gentle and quiet spirit
 - “look to your husband as your master”
 - She considered Abraham head of the family
 - She never surrendered her personhood, gifts, etc.
 - Eph. 5:1,22-24 submit to husband as church submits to Christ
- Other examples in scripture
 - Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2)
 - Mary’s song (Lk. 1:46-55)
 - Eunice and Lois training Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5)
 - OT kings identified by who their mothers were
 - Examples of consequence of sinful women (Jezebel, 1 Kings 21:5-16)
 - Prov. 31 virtue, strength, nobility, confidence, charm, beauty, industrious, diligent, generous, supports husband, fears God, worthy of praise
- It is wonderful to be a woman – God knew what He was doing when He created male and female

Chapter 9. Children and the Covenant Family

- Introduction
 - o 1979 “year of the child”, rights of children, but failed to mention right of good family
 - o Failed to mention duties/responsibilities as well as rights/privileges
 - o Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote against disciplining
 - Children should be allowed to grow up like flowers in the garden
 - o Right to know that they are children of God who has purpose for them
- What is the place/purpose of children? Biblical survey:
 - o Gen. 1 “be fruitful...”; Gen. 12-26 seed of Abraham
 - o Ex. 1-2 “fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceeding numerous”
 - o Passover – train children who ask “what does this mean?”
 - o Dt. 6:4-5 commands should be on hearts of parents and impressed upon children
 - o Ps. 78 teaching children: multiple generations know God
 - o Ps. 127:3; 128 children are a heritage/reward/blessing
 - o Proverbs is father speaking to children
 - o Is. 3:4-12 the curse includes a breakdown of the social order, including children ruling and being insolent to elders
 - o Hosea 4:4-6 “since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children”
 - o Jesus received the little children (Mt. 19:13-14), who inherit the kingdom
 - o 1 Cor. 7:12-14 children of only 1 believer are still holy
 - o 5th commandment / Ephesians 6:1-4 / Colossians 3:20 children obey parents
- Children have a very important place in the covenant family
 - o 1. All children are image bearers of God, are God’s children
 - They are to come to faith, followed by justification and sanctification
 - o 2. God has specific purposes for them
 - Continue the covenant and kingdom; the Lord builds his house (Ps 127)
 - Generation to generation of mediators between God & creation
 - o 3. Children are a heritage, an inheritance, from God (Ps. 127)
 - The one who gives the inheritance keeps a claim on it
 - o 4. Children are a reward, a great future (Gen 15:1-6)
 - Promise of offspring as the stars of the sky
 - Assured of a future dimension of God’s kingdom
- Parents must make sure children know that they are an integral part of covenant family
- God trusts us with His most precious possession
 - o Illustration: his dad continued to trust him with the family car after an accident
 - o God trusts us with children; we have responsibility to raise them well
 - o We must trust God, like a child jumping into his father’s arms

Chapter 10. The Covenant Family's Children: Chiseling our Children

- Dt. 6:7 "impress them on your children" (NIV); "teach them diligently to your children" (ESV)
 - o Van Groningen translates it with "chisel" (not literally, but actually)
 - o God is sovereign and rules the family through parents' chiseling
 - o God not only give parents responsibility, goal, and purpose, but also the method
 - o Children need word of God, the Holy Spirit, and parents to chisel them (all three)
 - o Must chisel the children:
 - Form them
 - Teach (Ps. 78) and answer questions (e.g. Passover)
 - Train up a child (Prov. 22)
 - Discipline (spare not the rod)
 - o Chisel: give them proper form – heart, soul and mind
 - Like Christ – he is the model we strive towards
 - Image bearers
 - o Statues: Michelangelo "I have to chisel if I am to have the ecstasy of a beautiful piece of work. I have to go through the agony of the work!"
 - o Each child is unique – should not mold them into image of the parents
 - Must shape each one according to gifts/talents/personality that God gave him
 - o Children need to be submissive, they must recognize their need to be shaped
 - o Truths/commandments must be on parents' hearts
 - We must first be chiseled before chiseling others - must know the chisels well
 - One of the greatest ways of chiseling is to be a model
 - o Dt. 6 chisel them with all the different commands/teachings/instruction God has given
 - All types of chisels (wide, narrow, for wood, for metal/rock) for different purposes
 - Chisel with "sharp" truth (e.g. one God, one salvation) which trims excess
 - o This should be done in every aspect of life (when you sit, walk, lie down and rise)

- Covenant nurture (Dt. 6:4-8; 11:18-21; Ps. 78:1-8; Mt. 19:13-15; Eph. 6:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:3-6)
 - o Model Christianity as parents
 - o Teaching the truths of the gospel; regeneration requires work of the Holy Spirit
 - Holy Spirit is present with the covenant family to apply the truths
 - o Training: how to respond to model/teaching, how to serve God in home, church, world
 - Recall chiseling, removing sin by sculpting & polishing
 - o Parents nurtured by their parents (Prov. 17:6) and the congregation (baptism vows)
- Prov. 22:6 “Nurture a child according to the measure of the child’s development; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
 - o Hebrew word is “hannuk” (i.e. nurture, “train” has a more narrow focus)
 - Solomon hannuked the temple when he dedicated it (1 Kgs. 8:63)
 - Deut. 20:5 If one has a new house, he should not enter military service until he has dedicated (hannuked) his home to the service of the Lord
 - Apocrapha: “hannuka” feast to commemorate, rededicate, and reconsecrate the temple after it was defiled by Antiochus Antiphanes
 - Nurture: feeding, protecting, leading, guiding, developing, and forming
 - o “...according to the measure of the child’s development”
 - Literal: “according to the speech of his walk”
 - Requires us to understand our children, and to nurture accordingly
 - Lifetime of age-appropriate growth, always surrendering to hannuk
 - o “...he will not depart from it” – a promise that God will bring them into His way
- Discipline: introduced
 - o Psychology Today: the rod produces aggressive children who avoid getting caught
 - o Other psychologists: lack of discipline leads to much crime
 - o Experience: aggressive children needed the most discipline; spankings will curb aggressiveness
 - o Children are born sinful, and need to be corrected
 - o Prov. 13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15, 22:6, 10:13
 - o The rod must be used with discretion, as only one component of nurture
- Discipline: defined
 - o Discipline is to make a disciple (example of Jesus making disciples)
 - o Responsibility first to make disciples of children, then the rest of the world
 - o Impart truth as we walk, talk, lie down, come and go (Dt. 6:4-8; 11:18-21)
 - Living with them, talking, working, playing with them
 - o Proclaim and live the mysterious deeds of God...great, great grandchildren (Ps. 78)
 - o Show how truth is meaningful and relevant for life at all times
 - o Positive expectations → loving correction → corporal punishment
 - To spare the rod may spoil the child
 - “Maybe a slap on the bottom is necessary to sensitize thick eardrums.”
 - Children insisting on the wrong way must be brought into the correct way
- Covenant nurturing and disciplining must be done consistently and persistently
 - o The family table is a great opportunity for this

Chapter 13. The Covenant Family's Children: Their Education according to the Spiritual Mandate

- Children are created in covenant with God
- Review origin of spiritual mandate: Adam and Eve, the fall, covenant of redemption
- Parents are priests and prophets in the home: should teach and pray
 - o Church reinforces what is taught at home
 - o Children taught to share spiritual blessings with their friends
 - o Know that they are God's children, also that they are in need of Savior
 - o Relationship with God affects how we handle all affairs of life
- Be aware of each child's ability level
 - o Example: almond orchard
- Parents should model the Christian faith (Enoch and Noah, Gen. 5:24, 6:8-9)
 - o Children should follow us, as we follow Christ (discipleship)
- [Train up workers who love the kingdom (Matthew 13:44)
 - o Highest goal is corporate worship
 - o Spiritual training in the home is of great benefit to the church
 - o Catechizing is one way to do this
 - o Family worship]

Chapter 14. The Covenant Family's Children: Teaching Them the Social Mandate

- The family is the basic social unit in society
- Review Biblical pattern for marriage and family
- Genealogies in the Bible: social connections are important
- Health, morality, friendships, become cooperative people in society
- Family should be bonded together, not just group of individuals
 - o Represent to the world the loving unity of the triune God
 - o Love, stability, wellbeing → family a source for rest and peace for its members
 - o Pray together
- Challenges families face
 - o Can law and love combine? Yes! (John 14:15)
 - o Bonding v. Individualism
 - Give, receive, share, common hopes and goals
 - o Respect
 - o Courtesy – politeness connected with kindness, civility, and considerateness
 - Opening doors, etc.
 - o Preparing children for a lasting marriage
 - Model a healthy marriage
 - Should see love between parents
 - Gender differences good, God made each child according to his plan
 - Dating/courtship, including importance of having a Christian partner
 - Instruct children on the Biblical teachings regarding marriage

Chapter 15. The Covenant Family's Children: Teaching Them the Cultural Mandate

- Cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26-28)
 - o Dominion over, cultivate, develop, participate in, and enjoy every aspect of life
 - o Ps. 8 – children praise as they see God's glory in creation, rule over animals
 - o The cultural mandate isn't unspiritual
 - o Ps. 67 (see also Ps. 85) – God's blessing: both salvation and earth yielding its increase
 - o Proverbs – all aspects of life are integrated
 - o Jesus: water into wine, healed the sick, understood military life, fishing, sowing seed, taxes, laborers and employers, tenants and landlords, livestock: "a man of the people"
- All aspects of life are God established and God owned, ruled by Jesus Christ
 - o Mission work: thankful God used talented people to build reliable ships/planes
 - o Culture: politics, labor, commerce, business, recreation, entertainment, education
- Children, as God's image bearer's, must be trained to be vice gerents under the King
 - o Family should initiate and is responsible for the education of children
 - o God-centered education is essential – not separate from rest of life
 - o Balance: any one aspect of cultural mandate must not become too important
 - o Education should be both foundational and practical
 - o Environment: God gave us the world, originally a paradise, should keep it clean
 - Many Christians have left the environment to those with extreme positions
 - o Created things are not evil in themselves ("adiaphora"), rather abused
 - o There are many careers that children can choose that are valuable ways to serve God
 - o Help children find where their talents and gifts can be used to the fullest extent

Chapter 16. Virtues in the Covenant Home

- Character is not something to have, it is something one is and it inevitably shows itself
 - o Model is Jesus who was the perfect character
- Virtues should be developed and nurtured in the covenant family
- Virtues (Romans 12:1-13; Galatians 5:22-23 – the fruit of the Spirit):
 - o Holiness – separation from evil to Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, pursue purity
 - o Humility – not think too highly of ourselves, but can be confident as God calls & enables
 - o Love – a bond that unites (more than emotion), love God and people
 - o Devotion – do our utmost to help others in whatever needs they have
 - o Fervency – whatever we do, do with joy in our hearts
 - o Joy – rooted in a sure knowledge that there is a great future for us in Jesus Christ
 - o Patience – long deep breath and taking hold of oneself when a crisis arises
 - o Prayer – love toward God must be shown with words as well as service
 - o Hospitality – desire to share with others the good things God has given us
 - o Piety – to be godly, to demonstrate an ever awareness of God's presence
 - o Compassion – to suffer with, to really hurt for and with someone else
 - o Wisdom – knowledge and knowing what to do; Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God
- Best achieved when Christ is the head of the home and the unseen guest at every meal

Chapter 17. Worship in the Covenant Family's Home

- Worship is our highest priority
 - o Dt. 10; Rev. 4 & 5
 - o First: God is the worthy one ("worship"), sovereign, majestic, glorious
 - Second: our needs, desires, hopes (God is also loving and good)
- Worship corporately, but also all of life
 - o Family worship an opportunity to train for corporate worship
 - o Private devotions highly recommended but should not replace family worship
- Must prioritize time for family worship, 20-30 minutes (total) per day
 - o Recommends breakfast and dinner (need physical and spiritual nourishment)
 - o Every family member should participate
 - o Family worship led by parents
 - o Parents should demonstrate the joy of worship
- Elements of family worship
 - o Bible: God speaks to us, take turns reading and discussing
 - o Prayer: response to God, all should participate
 - Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication
 - o Singing: praise, all can learn to sing, take turns picking psalms

Chapter 18. The Covenant Family: Leaven in Society

- Christian family should be effective leaven in society, but cultural habits, preferences, opinions, ideas, and influences have been absorbed into most Christian families, schools, and churches
 - o Money, materialism, no-fault divorce, rampant individualism
- Serve God as leaven, light, salt (Matt. 5:13-16)
- Abraham called to be a blessing to all people (Gen. 12:1-3), required to live among the nations
 - o Abraham and Hagar (Gen. 16), God's rebuke (Gen. 17:1, 19)
- Witness includes obedience in all areas of life, as well as a verbal witness
- A Christian family should be a model family for others to observe
 - o e.g. Harriet led a young women's ministry in Australia
- The family can address many societal problems:
 - o Crime
 - o Laziness
 - o Drugs
 - o Financial mismanagement
 - o Premarital sex
 - o Wastefulness
 - o Inappropriate media
- Children should be taught about the government and world affairs
- Children should be taught to be influential
 - o Exert a peer pressure that honors Christ