

FEATURE

The Feature article in our Winter, 1988 issue came out of the Reformed Conference on the Christian Family, which was held in South Holland, Illinois on October 16 and 17 of last year. Three speeches were given on that occasion: one by Rev. Carl Haak on "The Biblical Foundation of the Family," another by Rev. James Slopsema on "The Role of Family Worship," and the third by Rev. David Engelsma on "The Happiness of the Godly Home." In our last issue we printed Rev. Slopsema's speech. This time, for our Feature article, we're privileged to have Rev. Engelsma's. He began by acknowledging that family life does indeed entail responsibilities, cares, and burdens — to the point where we might wonder if we do well to "resign ourselves to being unhappy." But he went on to say to his audience, at that conference, that it was his privilege "to announce the good news that happiness is possible for the family." He proceeded then to demonstrate convincingly from Scripture that happiness for men, women, and children is in fact "bound up" in the home — not in spite of those heavy responsibilities which are part of family life, but in the way of fulfilling them. God wills that it be so. It is the family that He favors with His blessing, such that happiness is therefore to be found, as it were, inside the house. A question put then by Rev. Engelsma must have had the affect of bringing his listening audience up short, as it should also his readers: "Do we believe this, we who are driven, it seems, restlessly to 'go out,' to live as much as we possibly can outside our house and away from our family, whether in work or in play?"

Because "The Happiness of the Godly Home" was prepared to be delivered as a speech, not, in the first place, to be printed as an article in Perspectives, it might perhaps appear to be a bit long for our magazine. But I'm sure that you'll all appreciate reading the entire work — and some of you might even, as I did, want to read it twice. If you enjoy reading the article, maybe you'd like also to think about ordering a video tape of the three speeches which made up the Conference on the Christian Family. We understand that various Bible Study Groups have already made profitable use of the tape (one speech per evening) in their meetings, conducting their own Question and Answer Period in connection with it. If you'd like to purchase one of them, you

can do so by sending your request, with \$15.00 for both tape and shipping, to The Evangelism Committee, Protestant Reformed Church, 16511 South Park Avenue, South Holland, IL 60473. From the same source you can order, if you prefer, a Cassette Tape Album (audio only) for \$15.00. That's for a set of six cassette tapes, including, in addition to the three speeches, the Question and Answer Period at the conference, and two sermons: one entitled "And Ye Fathers: Our Task" (by Rev. Haak), and the other, "The Motivation of Discipline" (by Rev. Engelsma).

We might mention too that, some years ago, Rev. Engelsma delivered a very instructive series of lectures on "Reformed Education." Recognizing their value, the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies put the lectures into book form—a small, 100-page, soft-cover edition. The supply of books from that first printing was soon depleted and, because of the work's popularity, it's been reprinted, this time by Beacon Lights. If you do not already have a copy, and if you do have an interest in the subject matter, we are very confident that you'll enjoy reading *Reformed Education*, by Rev. David Engelsma. You may order a copy by sending your request, with payment of \$2.00, for the book and shipping, to Beacon Lights, c/o David Harbach, 4930 Ivanrest Ave., Apt. B, Grandville, MI 49418.

The Happiness of the Godly Home

Rev. David Engelsma

Is family happiness possible?

This has become a real question in modern society as people observe the breakdown of the structure of the family, a breakdown that threatens the very existence of the family. In a recent, highly acclaimed study of the family, *The Making of the Modern Family*, Edward Shorter

concludes:

"The nuclear family is crumbling — to be replaced, I think, by the free floating couple, a marital dyad subject to dramatic fissions and fusions (p. 280)."

Recognition of the peril of the family is not limited to secular historians and sociologists. Already at the turn of the century,

the Dutch Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck (a man not given to exaggeration), wrote:

"There is no time known, in which the family is struggling in such serious crisis, as the age in which we live" (*Het Christeligh Huisgezin*, p. 88. The English title would be *The Christian Family*. This and the later quotation are my translation of the Dutch).

Even where the family structure is still holding, the world sees, and feels, all the conflict, all the suffering, and all the damage done within the home — husbands abusing wives, psychologically and physically; wives emasculating husbands by their feminist insurrection; parents destroying children, by cruelty or neglect; children, especially adolescents, devastating their parents and making a shambles of home-life. Not surprisingly, the world asks, in all seriousness, "Is happiness in the home possible?"

The question may also arise among us, in the Church. Let no one suppose that the Reformed Faith, i.e., Biblical Christianity, views family life through rose-tinted glasses. We know very well the sorrows and burdens of the home — the sorrows and burdens of the home *within the Church*. We suffer in sympathy with the family griefs of our fellow saints. We struggle with the inescapable burdens of family life ourselves.

And the question can arise, "Is happiness possible?" — not satisfaction, or contentment, but *happiness*. For the believer, this question is not calculated to lead to a rejection of the family, as is the case with the world, but to a certain resignation regarding family life. Family life is necessary, we all know: God wills it. But in family life, we resign ourselves to being unhappy; it is a life of responsibility, cares, and burdens. We adopt the attitude toward family life expressed in the nursery rhyme that we boys used to sing so lustily, especially in the presence of the girl we were attracted to:

Needles and pins,
Needles and pins,
When a man marries,
His trouble begins.

This is a mistake, and a mistake of such seriousness as to amount to unbelief: it is doubt concerning the promise of God.

The Promise of Family-Happiness

He who runs may read that the God revealed in Jesus the Christ esteems the family. It is His creation: God created the human race as family — husband, wife, and children dwelling together, until the children leave to form their own family. By His ordinance, the home is the basic unit of His Kingdom, both as Israel in the Old Testament and

as Church in the New Testament. When God sent His own, dear Son into the world, He entrusted Him to a family — adoptive father, Joseph; biological mother, Mary; and at least six brothers and sisters. The family — the “nuclear family,” to use the jargon of sociology — carries the Divine seal of approval.

Esteeming it, God favors the family with happiness. In Psalm 128, God says, “happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee” (vs. 2), which happiness verse 3 identifies as family-happiness: “Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine. . . thy children like olive plants. . .” God promises the objective well-being of the home (“it shall be well with thee”); and He assures us of our subjective experience of happiness as we live the life of the home (“happy shalt thou be”). Nor is this the exception. God Himself stresses that it is the rule: “Blessed,” He begins in verse 1 (where the word is really “happy” — the same word translated “happy” in verse 2) — “Blessed is *every one* that feareth the LORD. . . .”

It is my privilege, at this conference on the family, to announce the good news that happiness is possible for the family, and that God-fearing people — young people contemplating marriage; husbands; wives; parents; children; grandfathers; and grandmothers — may expect happiness. God wills it!

The Covenant-Blessing

Although we may expect happiness, we may not make it the main goal of our marriage and family life. Not our happiness, but the glory of God is the chief end of our home. We must be clear about this: our home is not for our happiness, but for the service of God. So much is this our purpose that we are resolved that we will maintain our home, even though this be at the expense of our personal happiness. In this case, we will be happy that our home serves God. If this is not our purpose, if our happiness at home is the main thing, family-happiness is an idol. The God Who esteems the family very highly warned against this over-estimation of the family on our part, for Jesus said, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Heeding this warning is crucial for the enjoyment of happiness in the home. Strange as it may sound, the reason why some are unhappy in their family is exactly because they seek happiness as the main thing in family life. Fact is, to make happiness the chief end of marriage and home is to forfeit happiness. This is true, first, because the one who does this is not fearing the Lord. To fear the Lord is to have the Lord as the

chief end of everything, including your home. But fearing God is necessary, if one is to receive from God the blessing of family-happiness. One who replaces the Lord with happiness, as the god of the home, cannot be happy in his home, because God will not bless him with happiness.

Second, it is a law of life that happiness is never found by being sought directly; happiness is always a by-product. We seek something else; and as we do, we find, almost to our surprise, that we are happy.

It is striking that in the book that I referred to before, the contemporary, thoroughly worldly scholar, Professor Shorter, attributes the death of what he calls "the traditional family" exactly to this idolizing of personal happiness:

"In modern society... individual self-realization takes precedence over community stability: The careers and happiness of individual members of the family triumph over the continuation of the lineage as a whole... as for the right of the individual to sexual gratification — well, we all know about the horrors of 'repression' " (p. 19). The "Great Transformation" of the family in modern society, according to this student of the subject, is "egoism" — the seeking of self.

To illustrate this is not difficult. The husband whose main

goal is sexual pleasure is likely to suppose, after 20 or 30 years with the same woman (and even after only 2 or 3 years), that he is unhappy (especially if he meets a younger, prettier woman); and since happiness is the name of the game, he abandons his wife and family. Similarly, a wife, burdened, as she may feel, with children and with all the dull routine of keeping up a home, to say nothing of a now rather boring husband, may well run out on the whole business, if her happiness is everything. Since sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, also the young people, discovering their parents to be restrictive, will revolt, and bolt, in the interests of freedom and pleasures.

The Bible tells us of a man, a God-fearing man, who made the mistake of putting family-happiness before God, and of the bitter consequences of this sin. God Himself judged Eli's failure to discipline his boys as his honoring his sons "above me" (I Sam. 2:29). I need not detail to this audience how severely God dealt with this sin, *in old Eli's house*.

God did not create the family, nor does He build your house or mine, for our happiness, but for His own glory. To live as a God-fearing man, or woman, is to will, in this matter, conformably to the will of God; it is to determine,

and confess, with Joshua, "As for me, and my house, we will serve the LORD" — "my house for the LORD!"

This is not to suggest that we surrender all desire for happiness in the home. On the contrary, there is happiness for men, women, and children in the home. Indeed, I may assert that there is happiness *only* in the home. Now I am not forgetting the God-fearing men and women whom God Himself deprives of family life, the life of Psalm 128, as though I mean to imply that they are excluded from happiness. Nor am I overlooking those believers who voluntarily deprive themselves of the joys of husband, or wife, and children, in order to devote themselves more fully to the Lord, as Paul writes (and which Paul praises!) in I Corinthians 7: "For I would that all men were even as I myself. . . He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord" (vss. 7, 32).

But I am saying that the rule is that God's people enjoy true, rich happiness, under the blessing of God their Savior, in the best and fullest experience of that blessing, in family life, and not outside of family life. God said, from the beginning, that it is not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Life does not go well for the single man; and, therefore, he

cannot be happy. God tells us in Psalm 128 what happiness is and where we can find it. God, Who is not selfish, Who is not content merely that His people have enough to eat and shelter from the weather — God wants us to be happy: He wills that we experience His blessing of us. How does He make happy the man who fears Him? By setting this solitary fellow in a family — by giving him a wife and, usually, by surrounding him with children; and then by making things go well for him in that family.

That happiness for man is bound up in his home is also the lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is the Word of God that passes the judgment, "Vanity," over all of earthly life: riches, power, learning, debauchery — all. But there are two escapes, as it were, from this awful judgment. First and fundamental is the fear of the Lord and the keeping of His commandments (Eccles. 12:13). Second, as the earthly way of life in which God's blessing is enjoyed, is the home — the simple life of the family:

"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath

given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccles. 9:7-10). In his fine work on the Reformed family, *When Thou Sittest in Thine House*, Abraham Kuyper put it this way: "...our real life, and therewith our real happiness in life is hid of God in just our ordinary home" (p. 281). The saint from whom God withholds marriage and family life, although he is certainly blessed and, therefore, also happy, is nevertheless deprived of something of the richness of happiness. The believer who gives up marriage and family in order more completely to devote himself to the work of the Lord, although he will enjoy the blessing of the Lord Whom he thus serves, nevertheless sacrifices something of happiness.

Do we believe this, we who are driven, it seems, restlessly to "go out," to live as much as we possibly can outside our house and away from our family, whether in work or in play?

It is a mistake for a husband to suppose that his real happiness lies outside his home — with another

woman, with the boys at a bar, or working far more than is necessary to put bread on the table. God says your happiness is in the midst of your family. Find it there!

It is a mistake for a wife to suppose that her real fulfillment lies outside her husband's house — with another man, in a career, or in gadding about. God says your happiness is on the inside of your husband's house, as a fruitful vine, bearing and rearing children. Find it there! (God's apostle becomes very strong about this, in I Timothy 2:15: "...she shall be saved in childbearing. . .")

It is a mistake for a teenager to suppose that he will be able "really to live" outside his home, in the fascinating world. God says your happiness is under your parents' roof, around your father's table, and in the fellowship of your father, your mother, and your brothers and sisters. Find it there!

It is a mistake for a young man, neither gifted with celibacy nor intent on remaining single in order more fully to serve the Lord, to spurn marriage, because it will interfere with his pleasure. Young man, you are spurning the blessing of God, and forfeiting happiness!

I sing the happiness of the home, today, with the lyrics of Psalm 128.

What the Happiness
of the Home is

First, the happiness of the home is its fellowship: the close, unique friendship of husband and wife, of parents and children, and of grandparents and grandchildren. Happiness for humans is not rugged individualism, splendid isolation, unhampered independency; happiness is communion. Happiness is in the preposition, "with." The enjoyment of the fellowship of the family is happiness: the intimacy of husband and wife (which is not the same as sex between a man and a woman); sharing earthly life; conversation; going to church together; holding the children, or grandchildren, on our lap. Whatever disturbs the fellowship threatens the happiness: another woman; a wife's sharp tongue; disinterested parents; rebellious children.

Second, the happiness of the home is the activity of giving oneself to the others — giving oneself up for their sakes, giving oneself as this is done uniquely in the family. The husband gives himself for wife and children by his labor, as provider; the wife gives herself to the husband, by becoming his "help" (the sacrifice of her "self"), and to the children, by her care of them (yet further sacrifice of her "self"); and the children give themselves to the parents, by subjecting themselves

to the parents' will, and to each other, by accepting each other, bearing with each other, and giving in to the will of each other. At the entrance to family life stands an altar upon which must be laid, in sacrifice, one's self. But exactly in this giving of the self is discovered... happiness! The law of the Kingdom of heaven holds supremely here: you must lose your life in order to find it.

The activity of self-giving in the home is happiness, if it be a willing, hearty self-giving, and not a grudging, resentful self-giving that is always calling attention to the tremendous sacrifice that is being made.

Whatever dams up the giving of oneself and gives vent to self-seeking, to a greedy taking, in the family, destroys happiness. Not only does self-seeking destroy happiness for the others, as, e.g., a husband's using wife and children makes them unhappy, but it also destroys happiness for the one himself who is doing the seeking of self. Who on earth is more miserable than the wife and mother who is seeking herself? How can she possibly be happy in the family? What can be more contrary to her basic desire than a family? What is more unconcerned about a woman's pleasure than a baby?

The happiness of the home, thirdly, is responsibility — the

heavy, awesome, unique responsibility of the family. To family life belong burdens. Not only must the husband provide for the physical necessities of this woman and her children, but he must undertake that care of her that corresponds to Jesus' being Savior of His Body, the Church. The wife must help this man, not with this or that, but with living, as well as build her entire house. The parents are responsible for the temporal and eternal welfare of their children. The children are responsible neither to grieve and shame their parents, nor to injure each other. Is there any burden like this one? As we shoulder the burden and carry it, we are... happy. Happiness for humans is not a carefree life, idleness, or irresponsibility. We are not butterflies, made to flit here and there, in carefree abandon; but we are man, made in God's image, made to have dominion, made to be responsible.

The happiness of responsibility in the home has two aspects. First, undertaking these responsibilities, we are "fulfilled." We use our energies, our abilities, and our time in a worthwhile calling; we use them for exactly that purpose for which we were created to use them.

Second, where there is responsibility, there will be trust; and trust is essential to the happiness of family life. Describing the

virtuous woman, Proverbs 31:11 says, "the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her." The wife, on her part, relies upon her husband; he is her strength and shield. As for the children, everyday experience shows how vital is a confidence in father and mother. But also we parents have a trust in our children, a trust that they will honor us and love us. The home, I am saying, is the place of security, and, therefore, of rest, for the members of the family. Out there, in the treacherous, dangerous world, is strife, faithlessness, and the necessity of always being on guard. Within the walls of the Christian home, responsibility nurtures trust, so that there is peace and safety.

Irresponsibility in the family circle spells misery, whether that of the husband who shirks headship, or that of the wife who is forever opposing her husband, or that of the parents who divorce, or that of the teenager who rebels against parental authority. There is no happiness in the family of a David who neglects to supervise and discipline his children, and who troubles his family besides with adultery, but only a chaos of disrespect, jealousy, intrigue, fighting, rape, and murder, climaxing for David himself in the pathetic sorrow of II Samuel 18:33, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O

Absalom, my son, my son!"

Upon What Happiness Depends

All of this happiness of fellowship, self-giving, and responsibility, with its fulfillment and trust, depends solely and squarely upon the blessing of the Lord. Psalm 128 proclaims that family happiness is the blessing of the LORD: "thus shall the man be *blessed* . . ." It is of the greatest practical significance that the one whom the Lord blesses with family happiness is the "man . . . that feareth the LORD" (vs. 4). First, family happiness requires the man's good exercise of his headship. Psalm 128 asserts the headship of the man, in clearest, strongest language: Happy is the *man* that feareth the LORD (vs. 1); the woman appears as "thy wife," and the children, as "thy children" (vs. 3); and the woman and children share in the happiness of the husband and father. My concern is to point out that so much depends upon the man. The man is responsible, under God, for the happiness of his family. The French have a saying, in any trouble, "*cherchez la femme*" — 'look for the female.' As regards family problems, the Word says, "look to the man."

Second, family happiness requires a God-fearing man. The secret of the happy home, subject always to God's blessing, is the

man who reverences God, the godly man. The secret of family happiness is not the sexual organs, but the heart; the most important room is not the bedroom, but the prayer closet.

Thirdly, family happiness requires the expression of the fear of God, namely, that the man walks in God's ways: "... that walketh in His ways" (vs. 1). The man must walk in God's ways *in his family life*. He must be able to say, with Psalm 101:2, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Before marriage, he avoids the strange woman (Prov. 5). He marries a woman who fears the Lord (Prov. 31:30). He lives faithfully with this, his one and only wife (Mal. 2:11ff.). He works diligently to provide for his family (Ps. 128:2). He exercises headship, but as Christ exercises Headship over the Church, i.e., in love (Eph. 5:23ff.; Eph. 6:4). He lives actively himself, and raises his family, in a true Church of Christ, where alone the blessing of the Lord is found — the "Zion" and "Jerusalem" of Psalm 128:5. He sees to it that his house has order, holiness, and peace. Not every house, not every house in the Church, not even every house headed by a believer, but a house set up and ordered *in this way*, God will bless, still today, with happiness.

This happiness, however, will be tested, sorely tested; and it

will be threatened, seriously threatened!

Tested by God

It would be a mistake to think that a family happiness is possible that is untouched by sorrow. I would be a fool to leave you with this impression. This would be to jeopardize the happiness of the family: as soon as the certain sorrows come, the family would despair of happiness, and even of the blessing of God. Our homes are builded in a fallen, disordered world. The quakes of the curse shake them; the storms of the Devil's rebellion batter them; the icy wind of sickness and death blow through them; and our own sinful natures infect them. Scripture does not hide this from us, characterized as it is by a hard-headed realism. The Reformed Faith is likewise realistic. Its marriage form *begins* by sounding the note that "married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions." Its vow requires the couple who marry to swear faithfulness, "for better, for worse."

God Himself tests our homes and their happiness by burdens and sorrows. In the very best of circumstances, there will be, ordinarily, the great sorrow of the woman's conception and the heavy burden of subjecting herself to a sinful man; likewise, there will be the profuse sweat of the

husband and father to make a living. This is the Word of Divine chastisement from the beginning; and from it, there is no escape (Gen. 3:16ff.).

There is the anxiety to make ends meet, especially where there is a large family.

There is the grief of sickness and death. I think of Luther on his knees at the death-bed of his fourteen-year old daughter, Magdalena: "O God, I love her so, but Thy will be done." What sorrow at the bedside of the pale, feverish, dying child! What grief at the grave of the husband, or wife, or parent!

There is the secret, bitter disappointment at a husband, or a wife, who comes far short of that which the other expected at marriage, indeed far short of what he, or she, is required to be by God. There are Abigails in Israel, married to Nabals. There are longsuffering husbands, married to brawling women. Herman Bavinck makes the penetrating observation that there are marriages in the Church in which the husband, or the wife, is the cross that the other has to bear: "To the adversities and crosses belong also the weaknesses and sins which the married must bear in each other. Husband and wife are often a cross for each other. And if the wife herself is not the cross for the husband, or the husband himself the cross for the wife,

that he, or she, must carry, then both of them surely have some characteristic which is a disappointment and a vexation for the other. Where is there a husband or a wife who perfectly answers to the expectation, or is completely in accordance with the ideal, that one had formed in his imagination? The virtues find in marriage a certain favorable opportunity to unfold and develop; but also the defects and weaknesses come to view nowhere so clearly as in the intimate sphere of the family. Many a man who seems great and strong in the eyes of men is weak in his house — small of soul and narrow of spirit. Many a woman who in visiting resembles an angel is in her house a plague to her husband. Who is able to comprehend the failures here, in married life and in the sphere of the family? Who is able to count the sins against each other with which husband and wife often make themselves guilty?" (*Het Christelijk Huisgezin*, pp. 111, 112)

Besides the sins of husbands and wives against each other, there is also the suffering caused parents by sinful children, especially the almost unbearable anguish due to the incorrigibly wicked child. Among the olive plants may be an unfruitful branch. Did not our Lord say that He came to bring a sword and that that sword may cut into

our family ties? "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother. . . and a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34ff.). But what bitter grief when believing parents must echo God's own lament, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isaiah 1:2).

Scripture reveals this testing through sorrow in the history of the covenant home. Adam and Eve must see Cain murder Abel in unbelief, and perish under God's curse. Noah is mocked by a son, and curses a grandson. Jacob looks back on his life as "evil," in large part because of family trouble. Rachel dies in childbirth. And Mary, blessed among women, has a "sword pierce through (her) own soul," because of her Son.

There is grief in the Christian home; there is no grief like it.

But the family sorrow does not destroy the family happiness. God tests our happiness, whether it is rooted in Him. By the sorrows, by the burdens, unbearable in our own strength, God teaches us to seek our strength in Him, teaches us to cry out, "Lord, do Thou build my house," teaches us to fear Him more; and therein is more happiness, also for the family.

Threatened by the Devil

Our happiness is also threatened by the Devil, who takes advantage of every opportunity we give him by our folly, carelessness, and disobedience. I remind you that the promise of happiness is made to the God-fearer, who is walking in God's ways. The promise, though it heartens the man who is struggling against his many weaknesses, gives no comfort to the man who is despising God's ways for family life. There is a foolish troubling of his own house by a husband and father (Prov. 11:29); there is a pulling down of her own house by a foolish woman (Prov. 14:1).

Such is infidelity, whether secret or public.

Such is the cold, unfeeling attitude, or harsh, cruel behavior, of the husband, on the one hand; and such is the domineering attitude, or contentious behavior, of the wife, on the other hand.

Such are both the main weaknesses in child rearing. Laxity troubles one's house — letting the children have their way, defending them always against accusations by teachers, covering up their iniquities. So also does over-severity destroy the happiness of the home — government by terror, harsh discipline, rigid restriction, unreasonable rules. The main warning to fathers in the Bible is that we not provoke our children to wrath (cf. Eph. 6:4).

Luther noted this danger, and its usual consequences: "Experience teaches us that youths reared in extreme strictness become much worse when loosed from restraint than those who have not been so strictly reared. So utterly impossible it is to improve human nature with commandments and punishments. More than this is required to do so." (*What Luther Says*, Vol. III, p. 1563.)

Husbands and wives grievously trouble and effectively pull down their house by drunkenness.

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house" (Prov. 15:27).

An especially destructive weakness is the introduction into our family of hatred, strife, and evil-speaking, whether against the neighbor, or against some authority, or against the Church.

Walking in such ways, we cannot expect happiness in our family. We have, in these cases, given place to the Devil, the Destroyer of happiness. What is worse, God Himself will bring judgment upon our house. He brought judgment upon David's family: "the sword shall never depart from thine house" (II Sam. 12:10). He will not spare our families, if we despise His ways. Infidelity destroys trust and, likely, the living together of husband and wife. A tyrannical father will be plagued by hostile children. Parents given to greed

must mourn worldly children. And a household delighting in tearing others to pieces with the tongue will smart under God's rod of turmoil and internal division itself.

There is no shortcut to family happiness, only the way of the fear of God and the day-in, day-out struggle to walk in His ways.

Brothers and sisters, we do well to conduct self-examination with regard to our house!

This may not lead to our looking to our own efforts for the blessing. The blessing that brings happiness is to be sought from the Word of God.

The Source of Happiness

House and happiness come from God's blessing; and His blessing is His living, mighty Word. This Word of blessing proceeds out of Zion, i.e., the Church; and, therefore, the promise of family happiness in Psalm 128 declares that "the LORD shall bless thee out of Zion" (vs. 5). For family happiness, we need the Word of God, maintained, confessed, and preached by the true Church.

This Word of God is nothing more and nothing less than the Reformed Faith. This Faith confesses an infallible Scripture which authoritatively praises marriage and the family and which authoritatively regulates family life. This Faith proclaims the Word of

the antithesis, so necessary for the happiness of the family, not only to guard our family life from worldly behavior, but also to guard our thinking about the family from the opinions of the world — the opinion that one should avoid family life because of its cares; the opinion that sexual pleasure justifies forsaking one's mate and children; the opinion that motherhood is second-class status for a gifted woman; the opinion that having children may be sacrificed to ease and comfort in this world; the opinion that the great god, Self, stands firmly on the family hearth.

The Reformed Faith preaches the Word of the covenant of grace in Jesus the Christ, which includes as an essential element that the covenant God gathers His Church from the children of believers and rears them to spiritual maturity by the instruction of the believing home. Divine election pursues family lines; the blood of the cross flows down the generations of the God-fearing; and the Holy Spirit of regeneration and sanctification broods upon the houses of saints, as His nest. The great and glorious doctrine of the covenant undergirds and envelops the family.

Ours as Reformed is the Word of truth about marriage. Lose this, and we lose the family! God has been gracious to us Protestant

in the home of the man who
fears the Lord.

By His Word, the Lord Himself builds the covenant home and blesses it with happiness. In dependency upon Him, the covenant people are to pray for the promised happiness of the family — the young man and young woman for the home they will establish; husband, wife, and children for the family realized among them; and the Church for the families of her fellowship. "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

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