

BRITISH REFORMED FELLOWSHIP FAMILY CONFERENCES

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The importance of fellowship between members of the church of Christ has been recognised by the members of the British Reformed Fellowship since its beginning. When this important point is coupled with the attitude of Reformed believers towards their families it seems only natural that fellowship between Reformed families should be sought and clearly this fellowship is all the more beneficial when it is centred around the Word of God (Luke 24:32).

With these thoughts in mind, our first Family Conference was held in 1990, from 31st August to 2nd September, at the Living Waters Christian Conference Centre, Colwyn Bay, North Wales. Some 26 adults and 17 children attended and heard Professor David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America present five stimulating addresses on the all-important subject of "Marriage and the Family." Although only a short weekend conference, the event proved extremely profitable and those who attended expressed the wish that it should not be a 'one off' but that plans should be laid for a further conference in 1992.

After much planning and searching for a suitable venue, our second Family Conference was arranged for a whole week, from 15th to 22nd August 1992, in the beautiful seaside resort of Bangor, Northern Ireland. The conference was held at "Stricklands," the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled, on the outskirts of the town and overlooking Belfast Lough. The attendance was almost double that in Wales and several travelled from as far away as the USA in order to be present. Furthermore, the evening meetings were open to the public and a number of visitors attended from all over Northern Ireland.

The conference was again addressed by Professor Engelsma, ably assisted this time by Professor Herman Hanko also of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. The theme specially chosen for the conference was "The Covenant of Grace."

Fellowship started as soon as the guests began to arrive on the

Saturday afternoon and at the special introductory meeting in the evening many met for the first time. At the close of that meeting Pastor Jim North, the Chairman of the BRF, led the devotions from Malachi 3:16, "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another..."

On the Lord's day a time of corporate prayer preceded the morning worship service which was held in the conference centre and conducted by Professor Hanko. In the afternoon guests travelled by car to Ballymena where a special gospel service, organised and advertised by Covenant Reformed Fellowship, was held in the town hall and conducted by Professor Engelsma. The day was concluded at the conference centre by a "Question Time" at which many hard questions were addressed to the two Professors who responded with doctrinal and practical answers based firmly on Scripture.

The theme of "The Covenant of Grace" was treated in eight sermons shared equally between the two speakers.

Professor Engelsma dealt with the following subjects:

1. **The Source of the Covenant in God Triune** (Genesis 1:26,27).
The whole doctrine of the covenant rests on the truth that God is in His own Triune life a covenant God. The pattern for God's covenant with His people derives from the fellowship found within the Trinity.
2. **The Cosmic Character of the Covenant** (Genesis 9; Rom. 8).
As an illustration of the covenant of grace God's covenant with Noah is a rejection of the idea of common grace. God establishes His covenant with the divine elect and also with the entire creation so that it too may be redeemed in Christ.
3. **The Covenant Calling of an Antithetical Life** (2 Cor. 6:4).
Covenant people face the fundamental calling that they should live the antithesis for which they have covenant responsibilities and obligations. Christian service on the part of God's people should be undertaken with thankfulness.
4. **The Covenant as a Pattern for Marriage** (Ephesians 5:22).
The covenant has profound implications for the marriage relationship and this in turn affects the attitude of God's people toward the question of divorce and remarriage.

Professor Hanko addressed the following subjects:

1. **The Covenant with Adam: A Covenant of Works?** (Genesis 2; Romans 5). God's covenant purposes began with Adam but

although Adam was the head of the whole human race, God did not plan to realise the covenant of grace in the first Adam but only in the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

2. **The Covenant Children of Abraham** (Genesis 17; Galatians 3). First, the covenant children of Abraham are: (i) centrally Christ, (ii) those who believe in Christ, (iii) the elect children of believers. Second, the covenant is established in the line of believers and their generations. Third, the covenant is, by its very nature, unconditional.
3. **The Training and Rearing of Covenant Children** (Proverbs 22). Scripture provides advice for parents in carrying out their responsibilities of raising their offspring as covenant children.
4. **The Covenant and Making Friends** (Psalm 119:63). Scripture provides advice for young people on questions such as friendships, dating and the seeking of marriage partners.

It can be seen that the conference provided a wealth of sound biblical teaching on the great doctrine of the covenant of grace and each of the sermons created much discussion amongst both conference guests and visitors.

Whilst the addresses were at the heart of the conference, they were not the sole activity. During the week several sightseeing outings were arranged, including a coach tour along the North Antrim Coast to the Giant's Causeway and another to Newcastle and the Mountains of Mourne. Visits were also made to Carrickfergus castle and the city of Belfast. Mealtimes also provided opportunity for fellowship, for talking and for meeting new friends.

Fellowship? Oh yes, the conference was a time of great fellowship. The promise of Matthew 18:20 was clearly fulfilled and we all left Stricklands saying like those on the road to Emmaus, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

It was somewhere half way through the week when plans began to be made for the next Family Conference in 1994. We look forward under God's blessing to another time of fellowship around the Word of our great covenant God and would encourage all who can attend to make every effort to do so.

[Conference brochures for 1994 are available in the UK from the Editorial Office or in the USA from: Mr Bill Oomkes, 6299 Wing Avenue SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49512, USA. Tel (616) 698-6697.]