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A SERMON

by

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THE NECESSITY AND EXCELLENCE OF FAMILY RELIGION.

1 TIM. v. 8.—*But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

THE great Author of our nature, who has made us sociable creatures, has instituted various societies among mankind, both civil and religious, and joined them together by the various bonds of relation. The first and radical society is that of a family, which is the nursery of the church and state. This was the society instituted in Paradise in the state of innocence, when the indulgent Creator, finding that it was not good for man, a sociable creature, to be alone, formed a help meet for him, and united them in the endearing bonds of the conjugal relation. From thence the human race was propagated; and when multiplied, it was formed into civil governments and ecclesiastical assemblies. Without these associations the worship of God could not be publicly and socially performed, and liberty and property could not be secured. Without these, men would turn savages and roam at large, destitute of religion, insensible of the human passions, and regardless of each other’s welfare. Civil and religious societies are therefore wisely continued in the world, and we enjoy the numerous advantages of them. But these do not exclude, but presuppose domestic societies, which are the materials of which they are composed; and as churches and kingdoms are formed out of families, they will be such as the materials of which they consist. It is therefore of the greatest importance to religion and civil society that families be under proper regulations, that they may produce proper plants for church and state, and especially for the eternal world, in which all the temporary associations of mortals in this world finally terminate, and to which they ultimately refer.

Now in families, as well as in all governments, there are superiors and inferiors; and as it is the place of the latter to obey, so it belongs to the former both to rule and to provide. The heads of families are obliged not only to exercise their authority over their dependents, but also to provide for them a competency of the necessaries of life; and indeed their right to rule is but a power to provide for themselves and their domestics.

This is implied in my text, where the apostle makes the omission of this duty utterly inconsistent with Christianity, and a crime so unnatural, that even infidels are free from it. If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

The apostle, among other things, in this chapter, is giving directions how widows should be treated in the church. If they were widows indeed; that is widowed and entirely destitute of relations to support them; then he advises to maintain them at the public expense of the church; (ver. 3, 9, 10.) But if they were such widows as had children or nephews, then he orders that they should be maintained by these their relatives, and that the charge should not fall upon the church; (ver. 4, 16.)

He supposes that the relatives, of some of them, might be unwilling to put themselves to this expense: and to engage such to their duty, he in the text exposes the unnatural wickedness of neglecting it. If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

By a man's *own* are meant poor relatives, who are unable to support themselves. And by his house are meant those that are his domestics, and that live with him, 'as wife, children, servants. The former a man is obliged to provide for, but especially the latter; and if he neglect it, he has denied the faith in fact, however much he may profess it in words; he is no Christian, nor to be treated as such; nay, he is worse than an infidel: for many heathens have had so much humanity and natural light, as to observe their duty, supporting their domestics and such of their relatives as could not procure a subsistence for themselves.

In order to make provision for our families, we must be careful or laborious, according to our circumstances, and see that all our domestics be so too. *And him that will not work, neither let him eat.* 2 Thess. iii. 10.

“This,” some of you will say, is excellent doctrine, and this is our favourite text, which we often descant upon to justify our eager pursuit of the world. This commandment have we kept from our youth up; and, as we exert ourselves to provide estates for our children, we are not chargeable with any guilt in this case.” But stay, sirs; before you peremptorily conclude yourselves innocent, let me ask you, are your domestics, your wives, children, and servants, nothing but material bodies? If so, I grant your duty is fulfilled by providing for their bodies. If they are only formed for this world, and have no concern with a future, then it is enough for you to make provision for them in the present state. They are like your cattle, upon this hypothesis, and you may treat them as you do your beasts, fodder them well, and make them work for you. But are you so absurd as to indulge such a thought? Are you not fully convinced that your domestics were made for eternity, endowed with immortal souls, and have the greatest concern with the eternal world? If so, can you think it sufficient that you provide for their bodies and their temporal subsistence? I appeal to yourselves, is there not as much reason for your taking care of their immortal spirits as of their perishing bodies? Ought you not to be as regardful, and as laborious for their comfortable subsistence in eternity as in time? Nay, is not your obligation to family religion as much more strong, as an immortal spirit is more important than a machine of animated clay, and the inter-

ests of eternity exceed those of this transitory world? If then he that does not provide for his domestics a competency of the necessaries of life *has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*, what shall we say of him that neglects their souls, and takes no pains to form them for a happy immortality? Surely he must be worse than one that is worse than an infidel; and how extremely bad then must he be! He has more than denied the faith, however confidently he may profess it.

You see that though this text does not immediately refer to family religion, yet it will admit of a very natural accommodation to that purpose: and in this view I intend to handle it.

Several of you, my hearers, I doubt not, have long since formed and practised Joshua's resolution: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*. Josh. xxiv. 15. While vanity laughs aloud, and impiety belches out its blasphemies in families around you, the voice of spiritual rejoicing and salvation is heard in your tabernacles. Psalm cxviii. 15. I congratulate you, my dear brethren, and hope your families will be nurseries for religion in future times, and educate many for the heavenly state; nay, I hope you have seen some of the happy effects of it already in the early impressions that begin to appear upon the tender minds of your dear children, and the promising solemnity and reformation of some of your slaves. It were to be wished that all of you made conscience of this matter, and it would not at all seem extravagant to expect it; for surely it would not be extravagant to expect that you, who attend upon public worship, and profess the religion of Jesus, should not so grossly deny the faith as to be worse than infidels. But, alas! my friends, though I do not affect to be a spy into your families, *I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy*, lest some of you habitually neglect this very important duty. Though family religion be not the peculiarity of a party, but owned to be obligatory by Christians in general, (and therefore Christians of all denominations should conscientiously observe it, if they would act consistently with their own principles,) yet are there not several in this assembly who live without religion in their houses? Conscience can find out the guilty, and I need not be more particular. It is certainly a most lamentable thing that any who have enjoyed such opportunities for instruction, who have been solemnly and frequently warned, exhorted and persuaded, and who have come under the strongest obligation to this duty, should, notwithstanding, live in the wilful and habitual neglect of it. For persons to omit it for want of instruction about its obligation might be very consistent with a tender conscience, and nothing would be necessary to bring such to the practice, but to convince them it is their duty, which it is very easy to do; but to omit family religion in our circumstances, my brethren, discovers such a stupid indifference about religion, or so inveterate an aversion to it, that it is lamentably doubtful, whether a conviction of the duty will determine you to the practice of it. When persons have long habituated themselves to sin against light, it is hard to take any effectual measures to deal with them. All that the ministers of the gospel can do, is to convince their understandings, to persuade, to exhort, to invite, to threaten; but such are accustomed to resist these means, and now they find it no great difficulty to master them. I therefore make this attempt with discouragement, and hardly hope to succeed with such of you as have hitherto obstinately fought against conviction; and the attempt is still the more melancholy, as I know

that, if what shall be offered does not prevail upon you to make conscience of family religion, the additional light you may receive will but render you more inexcusable, increase your guilt, and consequently your punishment. This is one of the tremendous consequences of the ministry of this neglected, disregarded gospel, that may strike ministers and people with a solemn horror. However, I am not without hopes of success with some of you, who have not yet been cursed with a horrid victory over your consciences. I hope that when you are more fully convinced of this duty, you will immediately begin the practice of it. But though I had no expectation of success, I am still obliged to make the attempt. Though nothing can animate a minister more than the prospect of success, yet he is not to regulate his conduct wholly according to this prospect. He must labour to deliver his own soul, by warning even such as may not regard it. He must declare the whole counsel of God, whether they hear, or whether they forbear. I shall therefore, my dear brethren, endeavour honestly this day to bring you to Joshua's resolution, *that you and your houses will serve the Lord*; and let him who is hardy enough to despise it prepare to answer for it at the supreme tribunal; for he despises not man but God.

I would not have you perform any thing as a duty, till you have sufficient means to convince you that it is a duty; and I would not confine you to an over-frequent performance of the duty I am now to open to you; therefore, when I have briefly mentioned the various parts of family religion, I shall,

I. Prove it to be a duty, from the law of nature and Scripture revelation.

II. Show in what seasons, or how frequently family religion should be stately performed.

III. I shall consider what particular obligation the heads of families lie under, and what authority they are invested with to maintain religion in their houses.

IV. And lastly, I shall answer the usual objections made against this important duty.

As to the parts of family religion, they are prayer, praise, and instruction. We and our families stand in need of blessings in a domestic capacity, therefore in that capacity we should pray for them; in that capacity, too, we receive many blessings; therefore in that capacity we should return thanks for them; and singing of psalms is the most proper method of thanksgiving. Further: Our domestics need instruction about the great concerns of religion, therefore we should teach them. But I need not stay to prove each of these branches to be a duty, because the following arguments for the whole of family religion, will be equally conclusive for each part of it, and may be easily accommodated to it. Therefore,

I. I shall prove that family religion is a duty, from the light of nature and of Scripture..

To prepare the way, I would observe that you should hear what shall be offered with a mind in love with your duty when it appears. You would not willingly have a cause tried by one that is your enemy; now *the carnal mind is enmity against God*, and consequently while you retain that carnal mind, you are very unfit to judge of the force of those arguments that prove your duty towards him. If you hate the discovery, you will shut your eyes against the light, and not receive

the truth in love. Therefore lie open to conviction, and I doubt not but you shall receive it from the following arguments.

If family religion be due to the supreme Being upon the account of his perfections, and the relation he bears to us if it be one great design of the institution of families—if it tend to the advantage of our domestics—if it be our privilege—then family religion appears to be our duty from the law of nature.

1. If family religion be a just debt to the supreme Being, upon account of his perfections and the relation he sustains to us as families, then it must be our duty to maintain it according to the law of nature. Now this is the case in fact.

God is the most excellent of beings, and therefore worthy of homage in every capacity, from his reasonable creatures. It is the supreme excellency of the Deity that renders him the object of personal devotion, or the religion of individuals, and the same reason extends to family religion; for such is his excellency, that he is entitled to all the worship which we can give him: and after all, *he is exalted above all our blessing and praise*, Neh. ix. 5, that is, he still deserves more blessing and praise than we can give him. Hence it follows, that our capacity is the measure of our obligation to serve him; that is, in what ever capacity we are that admits of service to him, we are bound to perform all that service to him, because he justly deserves it all. Now we are capable of worship ping him as a family for family devotion, you must own, is a thing possible in itself, therefore we are bound to worship him in that capacity. If any of you deny this, do but put your denial into plain words, and you must shudder at yourselves: it must stand thus, “I must own that such is the excellency of the Deity, that he has a right to all the homage which I can pay him in every capacity: yet I owe him none, I will pay him none in the capacity of a head of a family. I own I owe him worship from myself as an individual, but my family as such shall have nothing to do with him.” Will you, sirs, rather run into such an impious absurdity as this, than own yourselves obliged to this duty?

Again, God is the Author of our sociable natures, and as such claims social worship from us. He formed us capable of society, and inclined us to it: and surely this capacity ought to be improved for religious purposes. Is there any of you so hardy as to say, “Though God has made me a sociable creature, yet I owe him no worship as such, and will pay him none?” You may as well say, “ Though he formed me a man, and endowed me with powers to serve him, yet as a man or an individual, I will not serve him.” And what is this but to renounce all obligations to God, and to cut yourselves off from all connection with him. Now if your social nature lays you under an obligation to social religion, then it must oblige you to family religion, for a family is the first society that ever was instituted; it is a radical society, from which all others are derived, therefore here social religion began (as it must have begun in families before it had place in other societies,) and here it ought still to continue.

Again, God is the Proprietor, Supporter, and Benefactor of our families, as well as of our persons, and therefore our families as such should pay him homage. He is the owner of your families, and where is the man that dares deny it? Dare any of you say, God has nothing to do with my family; he has no right there, and I will acknowledge none? Unhappy creatures! Whose property are you then? If not

God's, you are helpless orphans indeed; or rather the voluntary avowed subjects of hell. But if your families are his property, must you not own that you should worship him as such? What! pay no acknowledgment to your great Proprietor? how unjust! The apostle argues, that because our persons are his, therefore we should serve him, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, and surely the argument is equally strong in this case. Further, Are not your families entirely dependent upon God as their Supporter and Benefactor? Should he withdraw his supporting hand, you and your houses would sink into ruin together. Are you not then obliged in a family capacity to acknowledge and praise him? You also receive numberless blessings from him in a domestic capacity: every evening and morning, every night and day you find his mercies flowing down upon your houses; and shall no grateful acknowledgments ascend from them to him? You also every moment stand in need of numerous blessings, not only for yourselves, but for your families;—and will you not jointly with your families implore these blessings from your divine Benefactor? Here again consider the language of your refusal, and it must strike you with horror: I own that God is the proprietor of my family, that he is the constant support of my family, that I and mine every moment receive mercies from him, and depend entirely upon him for them, yet my family as such shall pay no worship, shall serve him no more than if we had no concern with him.” Can you venture upon such a declaration as this?

2. If family religion was the principal design of the institution of families, then is family religion our indispensable duty. That families were founded by God may be inferred from the creation of different sexes, the institution of marriage, and the various relations among mankind, and from the universal agency of his providence. Psalm lxxviii. 6, and cxiii. 9. And that family religion was the principal end of the institution, is evident; for can you think that God would unite a number of immortals, heirs of the eternal world, together in the most intimate bonds, in this state of trial, without any reference to their future state? Were your families made for this world only, or for the next? If for the next, then religion must be maintained in them, for that alone can prepare you for eternity: or if you say your families were formed for this world, pray what was this world made for? To be the final residence? or to be only a stage along which to pass into your everlasting home, a place of probation for candidates for immortality? And must not religion then be maintained in your families? They should be nurseries for heaven; and that they cannot be, if you banish devotion from them.

If the conjugal relation, which is the foundation of families, was first instituted for religious purposes, then certainly the worship of God ought to be maintained in them. But the former is true; Did not he make one? Mal. ii. 15; that is, one of each sex, that there might be one for one; and that the very creation of our nature might carry an intimation that polygamy was unnatural. “And wherefore one?” that is, wherefore did God make but one of each sex, when *he had the residue of the spirit*, and could have made more? Why, his design was *that he might seek a godly seed*; that is, that children might not only be procreated, but retain and convey down religion from age to age. But can this design be accomplished if you refuse to maintain religion in your families? Can you expect that godliness shall run on in the line of your posterity, if you habitually neglect it in your houses?

Can a godly seed be raised in so corrupt a soil? Therefore if you omit this duty, you live in families in direct opposition to the end of the institution, and deny your domestics the greatest advantage they can enjoy as members of a family; a consideration which leads me to another argument.

3. If family religion tends to the greatest advantage of our families, then it is our duty; and to neglect it is wickedly to rob ourselves and ours of the greatest advantage.

If you deny that religion is advantageous, you may renounce the name of Christians yes, and of men too. Religion places its subjects under the blessing and guardianship of heaven; it restrains them from those practices which may be ruinous to them in time and eternity; it suppresses such dispositions and passions as are turbulent and self-tormenting; and affords the most refined and substantial joys.

Now I appeal to yourselves whether it be not more probable that your family will be religious, if you solemnly worship God with them, and instruct them, than it would be if you neglected these duties? How can you expect that your children and servants will become worshippers of the God of heaven, if they have been educated in the neglect of family religion? Can prayerless parents expect to have praying children? If you neglect to instruct them, can you expect they will grow up in the knowledge of God and of themselves? If they see that you receive daily mercies from the God of heaven, and yet refuse him the tribute of praise, is it not likely they will imitate your ingratitude, and spend their days in a stupid insensibility of their obligations to their divine Benefactor? Is it as likely they will make it their principal business in life to secure the favour of God and prepare for eternity, when they see their parents and masters thoughtless about this important concern, as if they saw you every day devoutly worshipping God with them, and imploring his blessing upon yourselves and your households? Their souls, sirs, their immortal souls, are entrusted to your care, and you must give a solemn account of your trust; and can you think you faithfully discharge it, while you neglect to maintain your religion in your families? Will you not be accessory to their perdition, and in your skirts will there not be found the blood of your poor innocent children? What a dreadful meeting may you expect to have with them at last? Therefore, if you love your children; if you would make some amends to your servants for all the service they do to you; if you would bring down the blessing of heaven upon your families: if you would have your children make their houses the receptacles of religion when they set up in life for themselves; if you would have religion survive in this place, and be conveyed from age to age; if you would deliver your own souls—I beseech, I entreat, I charge you to begin and continue the worship of God in your families from this day to the close of your lives.

4. You are to consider family religion not merely as a duty imposed by authority, but as your greatest privilege granted by divine grace. How great the privilege to hold a daily intercourse with heaven in our dwellings! to have our houses converted into temples for that adorable Deity whom the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain! to mention our domestic wants before him with the encouraging hope of a supply! to vent the overflowings of gratitude! to spread the savour of his knowledge, and talk of him whom angels celebrate upon their

golden harps and in anthems of praise! to have our families devoted to him while others live estranged from the God of their life! if all this does not appear the highest privilege to you, it is because you are astonishingly disaffected to the best of Beings. And since the Almighty condescends to allow you this privilege, will you wickedly deny it yourselves? If he had denied it to you, you would no doubt have cavilled at it as hard: you would have murmured had he laid a prohibition on your family and told you, "I will accept of worship from other families: they shall converse with me every day; but as for yours, I will have nothing to do with them, I will accept of no worship from them; you may not make mention of the name of the Lord." How would you tremble if God had marked your families with such a brand of reprobation? And will you put this brand upon them with your own hand? Will you deny that privilege to your families which would strike you with horror if God denied it? Will you affect such a horrid singularity, that when other families are admitted into a familiar audience with the Deity, you will keep off from him, and pay him no homage in yours?

These arguments are chiefly derived from the light of nature, and plainly show that family-religion is a duty of natural religion. Accordingly heathens and idolaters have observed it. The heathens had their Lares, their Penates, or household gods. Such were Laban's gods which Rachel stole from him, Gen. xxxi. 34; and such were those of Micah, Judges xvii. 4, 5. These indeed were idols, but what did they stand instead of? Did they not stand instead of the true worship of the true God? What reformation was necessary in this case? The renouncing of these idols, and taking nothing in their room? or the renouncing of them and taking the true God in their place? Undoubtedly the latter. And will you not blush that heathens should exceed you? that you should be according to the text, *worse than infidels*? And must you not tremble lest they should rise up in judgment against you, and condemn you?

I now proceed to some arguments more purely scriptural, which prove the necessity of family religion in general, or of some peculiar branch of it.

1. We may argue from the examples of the saints, recorded and commended in Scripture.

Good examples infer an obligation upon us to imitate them; and when they are transmitted down to posterity with honour in the sacred records, they are proposed to our imitation, and as really bind us to the duty as express precepts.

Now we are here surrounded with a bright cloud of witnesses. Even before the introduction of the clearer dispensations of the gospel, we find that the saints carefully maintained family religion.

On this account Abraham was admitted into such intimacy with God, that he admits him into his secrets. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; for—I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD," &c. Gen. xviii. 17, 18.

We find Isaac and Jacob, by the influence of his good example and instructions, follow the same practice. They, as well as he, built an altar to the Lord wherever they pitched their tents; an altar then being a necessary utensil for divine worship. This you will find repeatedly in the short history we have of these patriarchs, particularly in Gen. xxvi. 25; xxviii. 18, and xxxiii. 20.

We find Job so intent upon family devotion, that he rises up early in the morning and offers burnt-offerings and this he did, we are told, not upon extraordinary occasions only, but continually. Job i. 5.

The devout king David, after he had spent the day in the glad solemnity of bringing the ark to its place, returned to bless his house. 2 Sam. vi. 20. He had his hour for family devotion; and when that is come, he leaves the solemnity of public worship, and hastens home. This was agreeable to his resolution, *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.* Psal. ci. 2.

Daniel ran the risk of his life rather than omit this duty, which some of you omit with hardly any temptation. When the royal edict prohibited him, upon penalty of being cast into the lion's den, *he still prayed and gave thanks to God, as he did aforesaid.* This is added to show that he had always observed a stated course of devotion in his family, and that it was not a transient fit of zeal that now seized him. Dan. vi. 10.

These illustrious patterns we find under the dark dispensation of the Old Testament. How much more zealous should we be, who enjoy the meridian light of the gospel, to keep the religion of Jesus in our families!

In the New Testament we repeatedly find our blessed Lord in prayer with his family, the apostles. St. Paul thrice mentions a church in a private house, Rom. xvi. 5, 1 Cor. xvi. 19, and Col. iv. 15, by which he probably means the religious families of Nymphas, and that pious pair Priscilla and Aquila. And Cornelius is an instance peculiarly observable, who, though a heathen, and ignorant of the coming of Christ, *feared God* (an expression that often signifies to worship God) *with all his house; and prayed unto God always;* that is, at all proper seasons. And when a divine messenger was sent to him to direct him to send for Peter, we are told he was found praying in his house; that is, with his domestics, as the word often signifies. Acts x. 2, 30.

If it might have any weight after such authentic examples as these, I might add, that in every age persons of piety have been exemplary in family religion. And if you look around you, my brethren, you will find, that by how much the more religious persons are, by so much the more conscientious they are in this duty. What though some, like the Pharisees, use it as a cloak for their clandestine wickedness, this is no objection against the practice; otherwise there is hardly one branch of religion or morality but what must be rejected too; for every good thing has been abused by hypocrites to disguise their secret villainy.

2. We may argue from several Scripture precepts, which either directly or consequently refer to the whole, or to some branch of family religion.

The apostle Paul, having given various directions about relative duties in families, subjoins, *Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving:* Col. iv. 2. Peter exhorts *husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge, &c,—that their prayers might not be hindered:* 1 Peter. iii. 7, which certainly implies that they should pray together. And here I may observe, by-the-by, what is, perhaps, immediately intended in this text, that beside the stated worship of God, common to all the family, it may be very proper for the husband and wife to retire for prayer at proper seasons by themselves together. As there is a peculiar

intimacy between them, they ought to be peculiarly intimate in the duties of religion; and when retired together, they may pour out their hearts with more freedom than before all the family, and particularize those things that could not be prudently mentioned before others. But to return: we are enjoined to *pray always with all prayer and supplication*; Ephes. vi. 18; and surely family prayer must be included in these comprehensive terms.

As to family instruction, it was expressly enjoined upon the Israelites. "These words which I command thee shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house;" Deut. vi. 6, 7, and xi. 19. They were commanded to instruct their domestics in the nature and design of the ordinances of that dispensation, particularly the passover; Exod. xii. 26, 27. And the Psalmist mentions all the wonderful works of God as what ought to be taught by parents to children from age to age. And must not parents now be under even superior obligations to inform their children of the more glorious doctrines and ordinances of the gospel? Again, It is enjoined as a duty common to Christians in general, though they should not be united in one family, *to exhort one another daily*; Heb. iii. 13; and to *teach and admonish one another*; Col. iii. 16. How much more then is it our duty to teach, and admonish, and exhort our families, which are more particularly entrusted to our care?

As to family praise, it is a duty, because thanksgiving is so often joined with prayer in Scripture; Phil. iv. 6; Col. iv. 2; 1 Thess. v. 17, 18; and psalmody must be owned the most proper method of expressing thankfulness by such as own it a part of divine worship. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous;" Psal. cxviii. 15; an expression that may properly signify, *praising God in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*, as we are commanded, Col. iii. 16.

And now, my brethren, I presume you are convinced that family religion is a duty, unless you shut your eyes against the light of nature and the light of Scripture; and if convinced, you are reduced to this dilemma, either to set up the worship of God immediately in your families; or sin wilfully against the knowledge of the truth. And which side will you choose? Oh, sirs, the case is so plain, you need no time to deliberate; it is as plain as whether you should choose life or death, heaven or hell!

If you from henceforth make conscience of this important duty, it will be a most happy omen to your families and to this congregation. If the grateful incense of family devotion were ascending to heaven every morning and evening, from every family among us, we might expect a rich return of divine blessings upon ourselves and ours. Our houses would become the temples of the Deity, and our congregation feel his gracious influences. Our children would grow up in the knowledge and fear of God, and transplant religion from our families into their own whenever they should be formed. Our servants and slaves would become the servants of righteousness, and heirs with us of the grace of life. The animosities and contests that may now disturb our households, and render them like the dens of wild beasts, would cease. Vice would wither and die among us, and languishing religion, would lift up its head and revive. This would certainly be the consequence in several instances, if we were but to maintain family religion in a proper

manner: for God hath not commanded us to seek his face in vain; and if this desirable success should not be granted universally, we shall still have the comfort to reflect that we have done our duty.

But how shocking is the prospect if you are determined to resist conviction, and live in the wilful neglect of this duty! Your families are like to be nurseries for hell; or if there should be an Abijah in them, one “in whom some good thing is found towards the LORD God of Israel,” (1 Kings xiv. 13,) no thanks to you for it; you must be punished for your neglect of him as though he had perished by your iniquity.

Remember, sirs, that the omission of a known, practical duty against the remonstrances of your conscience, is a certain evidence that you are entirely destitute of all religion; and therefore I must discharge the artillery of heaven against you in that dreadful imprecation which, as dictated by inspiration, is equivalent to a prediction, or denunciation. “Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name.” Jer. x. 25. Observe here that you are ranked with heathens that know not God; and that the divine fury is imprecated upon you, and it shall fall, it shall fall speedily upon your devoted heads and your prayerless families, unless you fly out of its reach by flying to the Lord in earnest supplications in your houses. Will you rather run the venture, will you rather destroy yourselves and your domestics too, than spend a quarter or half an hour, morning and evening, in the most manly, noble, heavenly, evangelical exercises of devotion? Surely you are not so hardy! surely you are not so averse to God, and careless about your own welfare, and that of your dearest, relatives and domestics! I request, I beg, I adjure you by your regard to the authority of God, by your concern for your own salvation and that of your families, by the regards you bear the interests of religion in this place, and your poor minister, that this may be the happy evening from whence you may date the worship of God in your houses; that this may be the blessed era from which you and your houses will serve the Lord.

I proceed,

II. To show in what seasons, or how frequently, family religion should be steadily performed.

Now it is more than intimated in Scripture, that it should be performed every day, and particularly morning and evening. Thus the sacrifices under the law, which were attended with prayer, were offered daily, morning and evening. To this the Psalmist alludes; *Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, which was offered in the morning, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice,* Psalm cxli. 2. He elsewhere resolves, *every day will I bless thee.* Psalm cxlv. 2. Yea, his devotion was so extraordinary, that he resolves, *Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud.* Psalm lv. 17. So Daniel performed family-worship thrice a day. Hence we are undoubtedly bound to perform family religion twice at least in the day. And thus frequently it seems to be enjoined for common. “It is a good thing to show forth thy loving kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.” Psalm xcii. 1, 2. Farther, reason directs us to morning and evening as the proper season for family worship; for, pray, which would you omit? Dare you venture your families out into the world all the day without com-

mitting them to the care of Providence in the morning? Can you undertake your secular pursuits without imploring the divine blessing upon them? And as to the evening, how can you venture to sleep without committing yourselves and yours to the divine protection, and returning thanks for the mercies of the day? Again, the very course of nature seems to direct us to these seasons. Our life is parcelled out into so many days; and every day is a kind of life, and sleep a kind of death. And shall we enter upon life in the morning, without acknowledging the Author of our life? Or shall we, as it were, die in the evening, and not commend our departing spirits into his hands? Night is a kind of pause, a stop, in the progress of life, and should kindle a devout temper in us towards our divine Preserver. I shall only add, that the prophet hints that we should seek the Lord as the Author of the revolutions of night and day; “ Seek him that turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night,” Amos v. 8; that is, seek him under that notion; and what time so proper for this as evening and morning? Therefore, my brethren, determine to begin and conclude the day with God.

III. I shall consider what particular obligation the heads of families lie under, and what authority they are invested with to maintain religion in their houses.

In all societies there must be a subordination, and particularly in families, and it is the place of the head of such societies to rule and direct. Particularly it belongs to the head of a family, when there is no fitter person present, to perform worship in it, to use proper means to cause all his domestics to attend upon it. The gentler means of persuasion ought to be used, where they will succeed; but when it is unavoidable, compulsive measures may be taken, to oblige all our domestics to an attendance. The consciences of all, bond and free, are subject to God only, and no man ought to compel another to any thing, as a duty, that is against his conscience. But this is not the case here. Your domestics may plead a great many excuses for not joining in family worship, but they will hardly plead that it is against their conscience; that is, they will hardly say that they think they should sin against God in so doing. Here, then, you may use your authority; and perhaps some word they hear may touch their hearts.

You should, in common cases, cause them all to attend morning and evening, unless your servants are scattered in different quarters, and make conscience of praying together, which you should exhort them to do, and for which you should allow them convenient time.

That you are authorized and obliged to all this, is evident from God’s commending Abraham for commanding his children, &c.; from Joshua’s resolving, that not only he, but also his house, should serve the Lord; a resolution he could not perform, unless he had authority over his house to compel them, at least externally, to serve the Lord, (Josh. xxiv. 15.) and from the superiority which you have over your domestics, which enables you to command them in this case, as well as in your own affairs.

IV. And lastly, I come to answer the usual objections against this important duty of family religion.

It would be more honest for people frankly to own that they have no heart to it, and that this is the real cause of their neglecting it, and not any valid objections

they have against it; but since they will torture their invention to discover some pleas to excuse themselves, we must answer them.

1st Objection. "I have no time, and my secular business would suffer by family religion."

Were you formed for this world only, there would be some force in this objection; but how strange does such an objection sound in the heir of an eternity! Pray, what is your time given to you for? Is it not principally that you may prepare for eternity? And have you no time for what is the great business of your lives?

Again, Why do you not plead, too, that you have no time for your daily meals? Is food more necessary for your bodies than religion for your souls? If you think so, what is become of your understandings?

Further, What employment do you follow? Is it lawful or unlawful? If unlawful, then renounce it immediately; if lawful, then it will admit of the exercise of family religion, for God cannot command contradictions; and since he has commanded you to maintain his worship in your houses, that is demonstration that every calling which he allows you to follow will afford time for it.

Finally, May you not redeem as much time from idle conversation, from trifling, or even from your sleep, as may be sufficient for family religion? May you not order your family devotion so as that your domestics may attend upon it, either before they go out to their work, or when they come to their meals?

2d Objection. "I have not ability to pray; I am too ignorant."

If you had a proper sense of your wants, this plea would not hinder you. Did you ever hear a beggar, however ignorant, make this objection? A sense of his necessities is an unfailing fountain of his eloquence.

Further, how strange does this objection sound from you! What! have you enjoyed preaching, Bibles, and good books so long, and yet do not know what to ask of God? Alas! what have you been doing?

Again, Is neglecting prayer the way to improve in knowledge, and qualify you to perform it?

Finally, May you not easily furnish yourselves with forms of prayer, which, you may use as persons weak in their limbs do their crutches, till you can lay them aside? It is bigotry only that will say that you should neglect the substance of the duty, if you cannot perform every circumstance of it in the best manner.

3d Objection. "I am ashamed."

But is this shame well grounded? Is it really a shame to worship the God of heaven, and share in the employment of angels?

Are sinners ashamed to serve their Master?

A little practice will easily free you from all this difficulty.

4th Objection. "But, alas! I know not how to begin it."

Here, indeed, the difficulty lies; but why will you not own that you were hitherto mistaken, and that you would rather reform than persist obstinately in the omission of an evident duty?

5th Objection. "But my family will not join with me."

How do you know? Have you tried? Are you not master of your own family? Exert that authority in this which you claim in other cases.

6th Objection. "But I shall be ridiculed and laughed at."

Are you then more afraid of a laugh or a jeer than the displeasure of God? Would you rather please men than him?

Will you never become religious till you can obtain the applause of the wicked for being so? Then you will never be religious at all.

Think how you will bear the contempt of the whole universe at last for the neglect of this duty!

Therefore, wherever you have your habitation, there let Jehovah, may I so speak, have an altar, and there let morning and evening prayers and praises be presented, till you are called to worship him in his temple above, where your prayers shall be swallowed up in everlasting praise.—Amen.