

Family Duty

A Father's Duty to His Family

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He that is the master of a family, he has, as under that relation, a work to do for God; the right governing of his own family. And his work is twofold. First, Touching the spiritual state of it. Second, Touching the outward state of it.

First...

As touching the spiritual state of his family; he should be very diligent and circumspect, doing his utmost endeavor both to increase faith where it is begun, and to begin it where it is not. For this reason, he should diligently and frequently lay before his household such things of God, out of his word, as are suitable for each particular. And let no man question his rule in the word of God for such a practice; for if the thing itself were but of good report, and a thing tending to civil honesty, it is within the compass and bounds even of

nature itself, and should be done; much more things of a higher nature; besides, the apostle exhorts us to 'Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, and of good report, to think of them,' that is, to be mindful to do them (Phil 4:8). But to be conversant in this godly exercise in our family, is very worthy of praise, and is very fitting to all Christians. This is one of the things for which God so highly commended his servant Abraham, and that with which his heart was so much affected by. I know Abraham, says God, 'I know him' to be a good man indeed, for 'he will



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command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord' (Gen 18:19). This was a thing also which good Joshua designed should be his practice as long as he had a breathing time in this world. 'As for me,' says he, I 'and my household, we will serve the Lord' (Josh 24:15).

Further, we find also in the New Testament, that they are looked upon as Christians of an inferior rank that have not a due regard to this duty; yes, so inferior as not fit to be chosen to any office in the church of God. A [bishop or] pastor must be one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? 'The deacon' also, says he, must 'be the husband of one wife, ruling their children, and their own house well' (1 Tim 3). Notice, the apostle seems to lay down this much, that a man that governs his family well, has one qualification belonging to a pastor or deacon in the house of God, for he that knows not how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? This, considered, gives us light into the work of the master of a family, touching the governing of his house.

- ❶ A pastor must be sound and uncorrupt in his doctrine; and indeed so must the master of a family (Titus 1:9; Eph 6:4).
- ❷ A pastor should be apt to teach, to reprove, and to exhort; and so should the master of a family (1 Tim 3:2; Deut 6:7).
- ❸ A pastor must himself be exemplary in faith and holiness; and so also should the master of a family (1 Tim 3:2-4; 4:12). 'I,' says David, 'will behave myself in a perfect way; I will walk in,' or before, 'my house with a perfect heart' (Psa 101:2).
- ❹ The pastor is for getting the church together; and when they are so come together, then to pray among them, and to preach unto them. This is also commendable in Christian masters of families.

Objection: *But my family is ungodly and unruly, touching all that is good. What should I do?*

Answer: Though this be true, yet you must rule them, and not them you! You are set over them of God, and you are to use the authority which God has given you, both to rebuke their vice, and to show them the evil of their rebelling against the Lord. Eli did this, though not enough; and so did David (1 Sam 2:24, 25; 1 Chron

28:9). Also, you must tell them how sad your state was when you were in their condition, and so labor to recover them out of the snare of the devil (Mark 5:19).

You should also labor to draw them out to God's public worship, if perhaps God may convert their souls. Said Jacob to his household, and to all that were about him, 'Let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress' (Gen 35:3). Hannah would carry Samuel to Shiloh, that he might abide with God for ever (1 Sam 1:22). Indeed a soul rightly touched, will labor to draw, not only their families, but a whole city after Jesus Christ (John 4:28-30).

If they are obstinate, and will not go with you, then bring godly and sound men to your house, and there let the word of God be preached, when you have, as Cornelius, gathered your family and friends together (Acts 10).

You know that the jailor, Lydia, Crispus, Gaius, Stephanus, and others, had not only themselves, but their families, made gracious by the word preached, and that some of them, if not all, by the word preached in their houses (Acts 16:14-34; 18:7, 8; 1 Cor 1:16). And this, for all I know, might be one reason among many, why the apostles taught in their day, not only publicly, but from house to house; I say, that they might, if possible, bring in those in some family, which yet remained unconverted, and in their sins



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(Acts 10:24; 20:20, 21). For some, you know how usual it was in the day of Christ, to invite him to their houses, if they had any afflicted, that either would not or could not come unto him (Luke 7:2, 3; 8:41). If this be the way with those that have outward diseases in their families, how much more then, where there are souls that have need of Christ, to save them from death and eternal damnation!

Take heed that you do not neglect family duties among them yourself; as, reading the word and prayer; if you have one in your family that is gracious, take encouragement. If you are alone, yet know that you have both liberty to go to God through Christ, and also are at that time in a capacity of having the universal church join with you for the whole number of those that shall be saved.

Do not allow any ungodly, profane, or heretical books, or discourse in your house. 'Evil communications corrupt good manners' (1 Cor 15:33). I mean such profane or heretical books, etc., as either tend to provoke to looseness of life, or such as do oppose the fundamentals of the gospel. I know that Christians must be allowed their liberty as to things indifferent; but for those things that strike either at faith or holiness, they should be abandoned by all Christians, and especially by the pastors of churches, and masters of families; which practice was shown by Jacob's commanding his house, and all that were with him, to put away the strange gods from among them, and to change their garments (Gen 35:2). All those in the Acts set a good example for this, who took their curious books and burned them before all men, though they were worth fifty thousand pieces of silver (Acts 19:18, 19). The neglect of this fourth particular has occasioned ruin in many families, both among children and servants. It is easier for vain talkers, and their deceivable works, to subvert whole households, than many are aware of (Titus 1:10, 11). We have touched the spiritual state of your household. And now to its outward state.

Second...

Touching the outward state of your family, you are to consider these three things.

That it lies upon you to care for them that they have a convenient livelihood. 'If any man provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel' (1 Tim 5:8). But notice, when the Word says, you are to provide for your house, it gives you no license to distracting carefulness; neither does it allow you to strive to grasp the world in your heart, or bank account, nor to take care for years or days to come,



Take heed of driving so hard after this world, as to hinder yourself and family from those duties towards God, which you are by grace obliged to; as private prayer, reading the scriptures, and Christian conference

but so to provide for them, that they may have food and raiment; and if either they or you are not content with that, you launch out beyond the rule of God (1 Tim 6:8; Matt 6:34). This is to labor, that you may have the means 'to maintain good works for necessary uses' (Titus 3:14). And never object, that unless you reach farther, it will never do; for that is but unbelief. The word says, 'That God feedeth ravens, careth for sparrows, and clotheth the grass;' in which three, to feed, clothe, and care for, is as much as heart can wish (Luke 12:6-28).

Therefore though you should provide for your family; yet let all your labor be mixed with moderation; 'Let your moderation be known unto all men' (Phil 4:5). Take heed of driving so hard after this world, as to hinder yourself and family from those

duties towards God, which you are by grace obliged to; as private prayer, reading the scriptures, and Christian conference. It is a base thing for men so to spend themselves and families after this world, as that they disengage their heart to God's worship.

Christians, 'The time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away' (1 Cor 7:29-31). Many Christians live and do in this world, as if religion were but a by-business, and this world the one thing necessary; when indeed all the things of this world are but things by the by; and religion only the one thing needful (Luke 10:40-42).

If you would be such a master of a family as is fitting for you, you must see that there is that Christian harmony among those under you, as is fitting for a house where one rules that fears God.

❶ You must see that your children and servants are under subjection to the word of God; for though it is of God only to rule the heart, yet he expects that you should rule their outward man; which if you do not, he may in a short time cut off all your stock, [even every male] (1 Sam 3:11-14). See therefore that you keep them temperate in all things, in apparel, in language, that they be not gluttons, nor drunkards; not suffering either your children vainly to domineer over your servants, nor they again to carry themselves foolishly towards each other.

❷ Learn to distinguish between that injury that in your family is done to you, and that which is done to God; and though you should be very zealous for the Lord, and to bear nothing that is open transgression to him; yet here will be your wisdom, to pass by personal injuries, and to bury them in oblivion: 'Love covereth a multitude of sins.' Be not then like those that will rage and stare like madmen, when they are injured; and yet either laugh, or at least not soberly rebuke, and warn, when God is dishonored.

'Rule thy own house well, having thy children—with others in thy family—in subjection, with all gravity' (1 Tim 3:4). Solomon was so excellent sometimes this way, that he made the eyes of his beholders to dazzle (2 Chron 9:3, 4). But to break off from this general, and to come to particulars.

Do you have a wife? You must consider how you should behave yourself in that relation: and to do this right, you must consider the condition of your wife, whether she is one that indeed believes or not. First, If she believes, then,

- You are engaged to bless God for her: 'For her price is far above rubies, and she is the gift of God unto thee, and is for thy adorning and glory' (Prov 12:4; 31:10; 1 Cor 11:7). 'Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised' (Prov 31:30).
- You should love her, under a double consideration: (1.) As she is your flesh and your bone: 'For no man ever yet hated his own flesh' (Eph 5:29). (2.) As she is together with you an heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). This, I say, should engage you to love her with Christian love; to love her, as believing you both are dearly beloved of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and as those that must be together with him in eternal happiness.
- You should carry yourself to and before her, as does Christ to and before his church; as says the apostle: So should men love their wives, 'even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Eph 5:25). When husbands behave themselves like husbands indeed, then will they be not only husbands, but such an ordinance of God to the wife, as will preach to her the carriage of Christ to his spouse. There is a sweet scent wrapped up in the relations of husbands and wives, that believe (Eph 4:32); the wife, I say, signifying the church, and the husband the head and savior thereof, 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church' (Eph 5:23) and he is the Savior of the body.

This is one of God's chief ends in instituting marriage, that Christ and his church, under a figure, might be wherever there is a couple that believe through grace. Therefore that husband that carries himself indiscreetly towards his wife, he does not only behave himself contrary to the rule, but also makes his wife lose the benefit of such an ordinance, and crosses the mystery of his relation.

Therefore, I say, 'So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:' (Eph 5:8, 29). Christ laid out his life for his church, covers her infirmities, communicates

to her his wisdom, protects her, and helps her in her employments in this world; and so should men do for their wives. Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter had the art of thus doing, as you may see in the book of The Song of Solomon. Therefore bear with their weaknesses, help their infirmities, and honor them as the weaker vessels, and as being of a frailer constitution (1 Peter 3:7).

In a word, be such a husband to your believing wife, that she may say, God has not only given me a husband, but such a husband as preaches to me everyday the behavior of Christ to his church.

Second, if your wife be unbelieving or carnal, then you have also a duty lying before you, which you are engaged to perform under a double engagement: 1. For that she lies liable every moment to eternal damnation. 2. That she is your wife that is in this evil case. Oh! how little sense of the worth of souls is there in the heart of some husbands; as is manifest by their unchristian behavior toward and before their wives! Now, to qualify you for a behavior suitable,

- Labor seriously after a sense of her miserable state, that your heart may yearn towards her soul.
- Beware that she take no occasion from any unseemly behavior of yours, to proceed in evil. And here you have need to double your diligence, for she lies in your bosom, and

therefore is capable of espying the least miscarriage in you.

- If she behaves herself unseemly and unruly, as she is subject to do, being Christless and graceless, then labor to overcome her evil with your goodness, her adversity with your patience and meekness. It is a shame for you, who have another principle, to do as she.
- Take fit opportunities to convince her. Observe her disposition, and when she is most likely to bear, then speak to her very heart.
- When you speak, speak to purpose. It is not necessary for many words, provided they be pertinent. Job in a few words answers his wife, and takes her off from her foolish talking: 'Thou speakest,' saith he, 'as one of the foolish women. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' (Job 2:10).
- Let all be done without bitterness, or the least appearance of anger: 'In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if—peradventure they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will' (2 Tim 2:25, 26). 'And how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife' (1 Cor 7:16).

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