



THE
DIVINE COMMENDATION OF ABRAHAM

OR

PARENTAL DUTIES

AND

THE BLESSINGS RESULTING FROM THEIR
FAITHFUL PERFORMANCE.

BY THE

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PREFACE.



THE Author of the following work has long been impressed with the conviction, that the declension or revival of religion throughout the church, is inseparably connected with the state of domestic society. If the family relations are not under the pervading influence of genuine Christianity,—if the duties which they suppose are neglected or heedlessly performed, the most injurious effects must follow in other departments of religious practice; and the consequence can scarcely fail to be,—a barren and deceitful profession, without any holy principle, or the attractive graces of Christian character. On the other hand, a healthful condition of domestic piety will impart a salutary and elevating influence to other social duties, and the Church and the commonwealth will reap the benefit in increased purity, peace and prosperity.

It has been justly observed, that “Christian families are as certainly the nurseries of the Church upon earth, as she is herself

the nursery of the Church in heaven.” The seed-beds uncultivated, or suffered to be overrun with weeds, the tender plants will be choked in their growth, and future vigour and fertility will in vain be expected. The fact that has become matter of common and painful observation, that comparatively few of the youth of the Church tread in the steps of professedly religious parents, attests the extensive neglect of parental duties. Whence is it that so few baptized youth, even when the forms of religion have been strictly observed, give early indications of devoted piety? Whence, that when aged and venerable members of the Church are removed by death, so few of the young of Christian families come forward to fill their places? How is it, on the contrary, that a large number of this class manifest aversion to practical godliness, and rank with the careless, the worldly, or the profligate? The cause, it is feared, will be found in the omission, or formal and lifeless performance of parental duties. Children, whose early conversion to God has not been prayerfully and earnestly sought,—who have not been trained to godly practice,—and whom parental instruction and example have not attracted to wisdom’s ways, cannot reasonably be

expected to display the amiable lustre of Christian character, or to be distinguished by self-denial, and consecrated zeal in God's service.

The writer has been desirous to contribute his mite to remedy evils which are too palpable to escape observation, and which he has often deeply deplored. Fully persuaded that anterior to any powerful revival in the Church, and as a principal means of promoting it, there must be a revival of family religion, his aim has been to awaken a sense of parental responsibility,—to excite to neglected duty—and to present such considerations and encouragements to those who occupy the most important of earthly relations, as, under the Divine blessing, may induce them to labour for God, and for the present and eternal welfare of the precious souls that have been committed to their care.

The tendency of our age is manifestly to withdraw attention from duties which are retired and unobserved, to works which court public observation; to overlook what is secret and noiseless, and to delight in what can be seen of men. Yet among the former, lie many of the well-springs of human society, and from them issue forth streams, that are diffused through innumerable channels, to purify or to

pollute the community. In endeavouring to supply an antidote to a prevailing taste of the day—in attempting to direct attention from the exciting subjects that are discussed on the arena of controversy, to the cultivation of domestic duties, the writer would not be understood to undervalue efforts to propagate or defend any article of the truth as it is in Jesus, or to oppose its application to existing systems, civil or ecclesiastical. On the contrary, he regards the faithful discharge of parental duties as intimately connected with the maintenance of the Redeemer's testimony, and as essential to its unimpaired transmission to future generations.

The design of the following work was suggested by instructions communicated on the occasion of administering the ordinance of baptism, and in pastoral visitation. At one period the author had contemplated the publication of a more brief and general view of parental obligations and duties; while latterly, a work of larger dimensions on the domestic relations, seemed preferable, and some materials were arranged for this purpose. This will account for the somewhat extensive outline of topics presented in this little volume, and, at the same time, for the cursory manner in which various subjects are handled. The

present size was chosen, as rendering the work more easily accessible to the poorer members of the Church, while it was hoped that it might yet supply a view of parental duties, and of considerations by which they are enforced, not unworthy the attention of Christian parents of any rank in society. Designed as a *family book*, to furnish a manual for parental direction and encouragement, the author has to express his regret that frequent engagements in pastoral and other public duties, during the time when it was in course of preparation, left him little leisure to render it so full or complete as he could have desired. Should the present humble attempt meet with encouragement from the Christian community, and Divine Providence enable him, the author designs to follow it with a work relating to another view of the domestic constitution, and containing counsels to the baptized youth of the Church.

Ours is an era of momentous changes. Days of evil are approaching, and our own and our children's safety can only be found in the chambers of the covenant, and in the path of duty. A great work is to be accomplished by the Church, before the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations.

Upon Christian parents, much of the preparatory work for the upbuilding of Zion, and the establishment of the Mediator's kingdom devolves; and the faithful performance of their arduous and important duties will do much to draw down a present blessing upon the heritage of the Lord, and to sow the seed of the Church's future increase and prosperity. With the earnest desire to subserve this high and holy design, the author commits this display of Parental Duties to the favourable regards of those for whose special instruction and encouragement it is intended, and to the blessing of Him who can render the feeblest effort to advance the glory of his great name, instrumental in conferring extensive and lasting benefits upon the Church.

KNOCKBRACKEN, May 1844.

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THE
DIVINE COMMENDATION,
&c.

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INTRODUCTION.

GENESIS XVIII. 19.

“For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

THE transactions recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, are among the most remarkable and striking that are contained in the Old Testament history. The testimony borne to a public servant of God in the nineteenth verse is most honourable and illustrious. To terminate the unseemly strife between his servants and those of his kinsman Lot, directed by eminent piety and practical wisdom, he had taken up his abode in a comparatively unpopulous and infertile region, while his friend had selected his residence in the populous and well-cultivated valley which contained the “cities of the plain.” Self-

denying sacrifices, made for the maintenance of brotherly concord and communion, are amply compensated by internal peace, and by peculiar manifestations of Divine favour. Abraham had willingly surrendered to his kinsman a portion of the rights secured to himself in the promise of the covenant; and God graciously confirmed to him the whole, accompanying the renewed grant with special tokens of approbation. "The Lord said unto Abraham, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever: And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth. \* \* \* Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."\*

On the other hand, Lot was severely chastised for a choice in which worldly aims, and carnal considerations predominated. Sodom and the neighbouring cities were characterized by abounding sin, and gross immorality, and the cry of their wickedness had ascended to heaven. The ser-

\* Genesis xiii. 14-18.

vant of the Lord, in a situation which he had voluntarily chosen, was forced to be an eye-witness of evils of enormous character, whose progress he was unable to arrest. He was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked;" and as he dwelt among the Sodomites, "in seeing and hearing," this righteous man "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."\* His family suffered severely from the contagion of prevailing wickedness. His daughters were allied to the men of the place, who were evidently unconcerned about the abominations of the land, if they were not partakers in them, and were hardened against solemn warnings. His wife was a worldling and an unbeliever; and stricken by a sudden and fearful visitation, she was set up as a monument of divine displeasure to succeeding ages. He himself was at one time taken a captive in war; he subsequently fled out of Sodom, with the loss of property, the violent disruption of domestic ties, and under other severe chastisements; and the aggravated sin that afterwards stained his conduct, is plainly traceable to the influence of Sodom's heinous wickedness.

\* 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.

The cup of the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah was now full, and they were doomed to tremendous desolation. At a period when a written revelation was unknown, the destruction of these devoted cities, like that of the antediluvian world, was designed to be an awful and impressive testimony to the holiness and rectitude of the Divine government, and a standing monument of the sure retribution that will overtake the workers of iniquity.

We are informed in this chapter of the Lord's special favour vouchsafed to Abraham, at the time of this approaching vengeance. While the clouds were collecting for a tempest of wrath, and ere they discharged their contents, a divine gracious appearance was made to the venerable patriarch. Indulging in greater freedom and familiarity, and displaying less grandeur than characterized former manifestations, the celestial visitants declared to him and his family the divine acceptance, and a peculiar blessing. One of the three personages who appeared to him in human form, as he sat at his tent door, and condescended to accept of his hospitality, was unquestionably the Messenger of the everlasting covenant—the Redeemer of men, in the garb of his future incarnation. Throughout this remarkable interview, he

is accosted in terms of the deepest reverence—he is styled the LORD, or Jehovah,\* and he owns as his the vengeance which his hand was about to execute. Accompanied by two created angels, the ministers of his will, after he had announced to Abraham the birth of the son of promise, and detected and reprov'd the unbelief of Sarah, the Divine visitant turned his face towards Sodom, and meditating vengeance, his steps were directed towards the devoted city. The patriarch, evidently aware of the dignity of his august guests, though ignorant of the special design of their visit, and desirous of protracted intercourse, “went with them to bring them on the way.” It was on this eventful occasion that the Lord discovered towards his servant complacential friendship, and bestowed upon him distinguished honour. As if reluctant to proceed in the execution of judgment, without opening his design to his friend and favourite,—as if unwilling to part, with any secret concealed, he asks, “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?” As a proof of eminent favour, he introduces him as it were to his cabinet-council, and makes known to him his mind. And as a reason, not a little singular, why

\* Gen. xviii. 3, 17.



there is conferred upon him this peculiar honour, he utters concerning him the illustrious testimony recorded in the verse to which we have referred.

In the subsequent part of the chapter, we are informed of Abraham's remarkable intercession for Sodom; and we have an instance, at once of the wonderful condescension of the Hearer of prayer, and of the eminent distinction enjoyed by the righteous. The patriarch pleaded that the vengeance might be averted. He stood in the breach to arrest the sword of judgment; and while, with the deepest reverence and humility, he approached the throne of grace, he sought with holy boldness and importunity divine forbearance, and merciful deliverance for the righteous. Encouraged by the gracious access that was allowed him, he becomes more and more urgent, and in each successive petition, he improves the answer he had obtained, by entreating still further displays of long-suffering and compassion. On this memorable occasion, the prevalency of the prayer of faith was remarkably discovered. The Lord bent down his ear to hear. He permitted his servant to renew and enlarge his requests, and to command him concerning his sons, and the work of his hands,—and Sodom's de-

struction was held in abeyance till Abraham's supplications were ended, and till Lot, by a special interposition, had been conducted forth from the devoted city.

The striking testimony borne to the patriarch's character stands intimately connected with this instance of condescending intercourse, and enlarged liberty in prayer. The Angel of the Covenant presents it as the reason for revealing his mind,—“for I know him;” and it forms the appropriate introduction to the holy boldness and near access with which Abraham was favoured at the mercy-seat. A particular part of his character and example is selected, and on it is enstamped the mark of Divine approbation. We are not told here of his knowledge, or faith, or love, although for these graces he was eminently distinguished; he is not commended as a skilful warrior, though his arms had shortly before vanquished the victorious kings of the country; nor is there mention made of his riches and extended possessions. But his *domestic piety* is taken as the ground of special approval, and high commendation; and through it not only are present privileges bestowed upon him as the confidant of Heaven, but future blessings are granted to his posterity for many generations.

The God of Abraham is still the covenant God of his people. In the administration of his grace, and the dispensation of his providence, he bestows blessings in connection with approved character. Of the different relations in which his people are placed, none is more closely associated with the enjoyment of gracious benefits, than those which exist under the domestic constitution. Sustaining himself the endearing character of the "God of all the families of Israel," setting "the solitary in families," and placing them like a flock under the great Shepherd, he watches over them with unremitting care, accepts of their worship as a sweet-smelling savour, and regards them as a blessed inheritance. Moreover, he constitutes the families of his people the channel for diffusing abroad the bounties of his benevolence; and wherever the household is ordered for God, and domestic duties are performed aright, there descends the blessing from above, like the dew upon the hill of Zion,—and thence will issue, as from a copious fountain, countless streams to refresh and purify society. The "house of the wicked," on the other hand, "shall be overthrown."\* Domestic relations being perverted, and

\* Proverbs xiv. 11.

domestic duties neglected, the parent becomes a curse to his family; children again are a scourge to parents; and the household, as if itself blighted of Heaven, spreads around and perpetuates an influence pestilential and destructive. Such being the effects that flow from the domestic institution—effects which extend to all the other relations of human society, need we wonder that the estimate of character should be taken from the manner in which domestic duties are performed—or that the enjoyment of eminent privileges should be suspended upon their proper performance? It has been justly said, that a man is what he is in his family. The household is the sphere of duty and trial, a field of incalculably important labour, in which shall be reaped joyful and blessed fruits, or experienced vexation and misery, according as its cultivation is promoted or neglected. Here grace is exercised and increased, and its benign influence is felt; or, devoid of principle, and insensible of obligation, the head of the family entails a heritage of misery upon those who should have found in him a guardian and benefactor. There is therefore singular propriety in estimating the character from the performance of domestic duties—and in

connecting the blessing of the household with parental fidelity.

The subject thus viewed presents an epitome of parental duties, and exhibits the blessings consequent upon their performance. Our earnest desire is to be instrumental in awakening parents to a sense of their responsibility, that the hearts of the fathers may be turned to their children, and of the children to their fathers, that the threatened curse may be averted.

*The faithful discharge of Parental Obligation is accompanied by manifold tokens of Divine favour—and is followed by consequences the most salutary to the Family, the Church, and the world, both for the present, and for future generations.*

This proposition shall be discussed in the following order:—Chapter I. The nature of parental duties. Chapter II. The manner of performance. Chapter III. The consequent blessings; and, Chapter IV. Motives and encouragements to parental fidelity. May the subject be blessed to the conviction and direction of parents, and to the revival of true religion in families, that sons unborn may arise and inherit the blessing of faithful Abraham!

## CHAPTER I.

## NATURE OF PARENTAL DUTIES.

THE distinction bestowed upon Abraham was the fruit of sovereign favour. God “called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.”\* He took him from Ur of the Chaldees, and brought him forth from an idolatrous country and kindred. He engaged in covenant to be his God and portion ; and by special gracious influence, the patriarch was led to appropriate the promises, and to rely upon Almighty power for their accomplishment. “He believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”† All the goodness and mercy that afterwards followed him—all the blessings in providence that he enjoyed—and all the excellence to which he attained, were the results of distinguished favour. He was not justified by works, that he might have nothing whereof to glory before God. Faith was reckoned to him for righteousness, not while he was in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

\* Isaiah li. 2.      † Genesis xv. 6.      Romans iv. 3.

“The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”\* The whole history of the patriarch declares that his eminence of character, and the blessings in his lot, arose not from any natural excellence which he possessed, or from works of righteousness which he had done, but solely from sovereign gratuitous mercy, of which his vocation, and faith, and obedience, were the blessed fruits.

Nor are we permitted to doubt that the revelation of God’s mind to him flowed from the same fountain; nor that the foundation of the commendation that he received was the grace exercised towards him, and the internal spiritual operations of which he was the subject. He was the friend of God, and therefore were the Divine purposes revealed to him; and his bright example in the household was the appropriate fruit of that faith for which he had been celebrated. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.” To those who by supernatural grace become the friends of God, he still communicates his mind. Prophetic foresight they may not expect; but in communion with God,

\* Romans iv. 2, 10, 13.

and in sure promises, they have intimations of the future—they have acquaintance with the movements of providence—and as from a lofty mount of observation, they discern the signs of approaching judgments and mercies. Domestic piety is the result of peculiar favour, and the fruit of supernatural grace. God commends in his people the dispositions implanted by his Spirit; and the faithful performance of important duties arises from strength communicated from on high. To this source are we to look for parental faithfulness and family blessings. “Without me,” says the Saviour, “ye can do nothing.” Destitute of his special aid, and of the grace and blessings which he alone can communicate, we can perform no acceptable service. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” By the grace of God, we are—in any relation, and for strength and acceptance in any work—what we are. And especially, is a living operative faith indispensable to the discharge of parental duties—a work of self-denial and difficulty, and in which we are altogether dependent upon Divine grace for strength, acceptance, and a blessing.

Assuming this as a fundamental principle throughout the discussion of the subject, we remark,



SECT. I.—*The solemn dedication of the household to God, is implied in commanding them to know the Lord.*

The patriarchal history is distinguished by frequent instances of solemn dedication. The God of glory appeared once and again to the father of the faithful. He revealed himself unto him under suitable characters, and as sustaining the most valuable, and endearing relations. When he called him from his father's house, he proposed himself to him as his "Shield and exceeding great reward;" and again, when he gave him the covenant of circumcision, he said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."\* He even enlarged the gracious offer, so as to include posterity in the promised inheritance, for he added, "I will be a God to thee, and thy seed after thee."† These declarations were the proposal of the everlasting covenant to the patriarch; and they required on his part joyful acceptance, and holy obedience. By faith he embraced the offers of mercy, and took hold of the covenant, dedicating himself to the God of salvation. The church had

\* Genesis xv. 1; xvii. 1.

† Genesis xvii. 7.

previously existed in the families of the descendants of Seth; and though under the Abrahamic covenant, it obtained a more visible organization, yet still its duties and privileges had a peculiar relation to domestic society. The patriarchs, as the name imports, were the heads of families or tribes. While the covenant so frequently renewed with them, confined the grand promise concerning the coming Saviour in a particular line, it gave a special interest in it to the families of their descendants. The dispensation from Abraham to Moses differed from that which preceded, inasmuch as, instead of making the proposal of covenant blessings to separate families, it was extended to collections of families under one head,—and it embraced posterity, with their progenitors, as included in the federal compact of duty and privilege. Solemn dedication was essential to the participation of covenant-benefits from the beginning; and under every part of the former economy, it was frequently and strikingly exemplified. Performed in faith it has, moreover, a special respect to the family.

*Circumcision*, the sacramental sign and seal of that covenant in which the seed are specifically mentioned, was the appointed ordinance for devoting the offspring

to God. It was to be extended to all the males of the household, under a fearful penalty, and it remained the covenant in the flesh,—the outward token of consecration to God. Wherever the patriarchs sojourned, and wherever they experienced deliverances or mercies, they erected *altars*, frequently designating them by significant names, where they renewed their acts of personal dedication, and engaged their domestics to the Divine service. At a later period, it was enjoined that the house newly built should be dedicated to God, before it became the family residence; the first-born of men and beasts were claimed as the Lord's; and the first-fruits of trees and of fields, and of all the increase were to be set apart for a sacred purpose. Thus impressively was it taught the ancient people of God that they were not their own,—and thus were the members of the family, their residence, and all that pertained to them, separated from the world, and surrendered to Him who esteems it his glory to be styled the “God of all the families of Israel.”

The shadows of the former dispensation have vanished away, but the substantial realities remain; and all that is spiritual in privilege is enjoyed under the New Testament, equally as under the Old, and

is even increased to believers under the "ministration of the Spirit." The Abrahamic covenant is still the charter of privilege and the covenant of duty to the church. The administration is different, but the spiritual benefits are the same. Baptism is a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith, as was circumcision to the descendants of Abraham; and like it, is an ordinance appointed as a visible means of dedication to God. This initiatory seal of the covenant is provided, not only for individuals, but for families. In the early records of the New Testament Church, we read of baptism being dispensed to whole households. Lydia, the Philippian jailor, Stephanas of Corinth, and their respective families, on their separation from the surrounding idolatry, and professing faith in Christ, were baptized, and thus visibly sealed as the Lord's.

The institution of baptism subserves valuable purposes to the families of God's people. Placed among the most solemn rites of our holy religion, while it is a precious means of grace to the church collective, it is a special privilege to those who occupy the domestic relations. Therein Christian parents enjoy the privilege of taking hold of God's covenant for themselves and for their offspring, and of dedi-

cating both to him who proposes himself as their shield and their everlasting portion. They are permitted to draw near to God, and to come even to his seat. In a most impressive and affecting manner, the Lord condescends to look upon parents in their manifold infirmities, and upon children in their helplessness of infancy,—the lively emblem of that act of wondrous condescension and love, in which He passes by his people when cast out in their blood, and says to them, Live. Encouraged by his own invitation, parents should bring their infant children to Christ for a blessing; and embracing his gracious offer for themselves and theirs, they should surrender them to the Lord, with the views and feelings of the devout Hannah. “For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore, also, I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord.”\*

Every thing connected with the baptismal ordinance implies such a surrender. When properly administered, children are presented in the sanctuary as at Shiloh, that they may be numbered among the people of God, and publicly recognized as

\* 1 Samuel. i. 27, 28.

pertaining to the fellowship of the visible church. The name of a triune God is named upon them, in token of their being solemnly dedicated to his service, and of taking him as their sure and only portion. The appointed symbol of the blood of the covenant is applied to them, to mark their separation from the world, and to seal and ratify their engagement to be the Lord's. Godly parents cannot but regard it as an inestimable privilege thus to devote objects endeared to them by the most tender ties to the God of their salvation, to Him who is the portion of their cup and their everlasting inheritance.

To the infant seed of the righteous too, this early dedication is an eminent advantage.\* While in unconscious weakness, they are brought within the pale of that society to which the Lord is a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst, they are introduced to the fellowship of "the excellent of the earth," and commended to their prayers. A pledge the most solemn is publicly given before many witnesses for their training for heaven.

\* See an excellent little work by the venerable Dr. Malan of Geneva, entitled "*La Famille Baptisée*," in which the advantages of baptism to the infants of Christian families are exhibited and illustrated with singular propriety and beauty of expression.

The seal of redeeming love is applied to them. They are placed in the arms of the compassionate Shepherd of Israel, and are taken engaged wholly to be the Lord's. Although baptism is not regeneration, we deny not that this great change may sometimes accompany the outward ordinance; and we doubt not, that the God of the families of Israel frequently remembers to his people for good, the covenant of their youth. Like a stream running under ground, blessings springing from this source afterwards encompass their lot, and refresh their souls.\*

The surrender of children to God in baptism is frequently renewed by those who, by faith, are the children of faithful Abraham. If a "life of holiness" be a "life of repeated acts of self-dedication," as says a venerable expositor,† then Christian parents may be expected often to yield themselves to God. Impelled by the mercies of God, the most powerful of all motives, and feeling this to be their reasonable service, they will give their bodies as a living sacrifice, and devote their hearts and lives, their time, talents, and influence to

\* See Buchanan on the Office and Work of the Holy Spirit, pp. 225-236.

† Matthew Henry.

him from whom all have been derived. The self-dedication of a parent is inseparable from the dedication of his household to God. His children have been given him of the Lord, and are as a part of himself. His domestics, possessions and influence in his family are entrusted to him in stewardship; and when the obligations to personal holiness are felt, there will be cherished a deep and habitual concern that these objects should be holy. Acts of solemn dedication recognize the all-important fundamental truth that we are not our own, and that none related to us, and nothing we possess are our own. Thus do we come out and are separate,—thus are the families of God's Israel distinguished from others, and thus do they voluntarily claim connection with those who are emphatically designated "a peculiar people, a holy nation,"—the one family which in heaven and earth is named after Christ.\* Recognizing God's sovereign right to them and theirs, godly parents resign all to him,—and in feelings of adoring gratitude and admiration, say with the dying son of Jesse, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all

\* 1 Pet. ii. 9; Eph. iii. 15.



things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee?" "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto?"\*

The children and household are set apart as sacred, and the first great step is taken for leading them to keep the way of the Lord. It is as it were guiding their feet in the way of God's precepts,—the way of holiness and the path to heaven. The pledge is given and ratified with all solemnity, that they shall be treated as God's heritage, and trained as the heirs of his glory. And, besides, it is the appointed means of placing infants, when they are capable of receiving instruction, under the teaching of him who has access even to the infantile mind, who gathers the lambs in his bosom, and who "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfects praise." Viewed in this light, dedication is a first and most important means of commanding children and the household to keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment. Surrendered to God, and committed to him for a blessing, we are encouraged to hope that he will condescend to undertake the charge. If not by calling them in infancy, at least by

\* 1 Chron. xxix. 14; 2 Sam. vii. 18.

the means which he has provided and revealed, and by his gracious providence, he prepares those that are his chosen, and that have been dedicated to him, for his service, and for the enjoyment of himself in grace and glory. Christian parents are warranted to plead the baptismal engagement as a prevailing argument in seeking blessings for their children,—and those who become partakers of the grace of salvation, often delight to mention their own early dedication to God, with praise and thanksgiving.

SECT. II.—*Early and diligent instruction of children, is a principal duty of Christian parents.*

A pious expositor has properly remarked, “Those that expect family blessings must make conscience of family duty. If our children are the Lord’s, they must be reared for him. If they wear his livery, they must be trained for his work.”\* Among the direct means of commanding a household to keep the way of the Lord, a principal place is to be assigned to parental instruction. This duty is the subject of explicit and reiterated command in the sacred Scriptures. Under both dispensa-

\* Matthew Henry on Genesis xviii. 19.

tions, its obligation is prominently exhibited and powerfully enforced. Israelitish parents were directed thus to rear their children as the seed of the covenant, and thus to perpetuate the remembrance of Jehovah's wonderful works. "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life ; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." "I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." Again, "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And presenting the most solemn and weighty motives to obedience, the Lord addresses the seed of Abraham, "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart, and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes, and ye shall teach them your children."\*

\* Deut. iv. 9, 10 ; vi. 6, 7 ; xi. 18, 19.

The practice of godly Israelitish parents accorded with these repeated precepts. At a period long subsequent to the delivery of the law at Horeb, the inspired writer of the seventy-eighth Psalm ascribes the transmission of divine truth, through succeeding generations, to parental fidelity, shown in obedience to God's command,—“I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children.”\* And Hezekiah, when under the powerful influence of the Spirit, and expressing lively gratitude, speaks of parental instruction as the approved means of perpetuating the knowledge of divine truth, and of exciting to spiritual worship;—“The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day; the father to the children shall make known thy truth.”\* The obligation of these precepts rests upon Christian parents, equally as upon the descendants of Abra-

\* Psa. lxxviii. 2, 3, 5, 6.

† Isa. xxxviii. 19.

ham. The duties are moral in their nature, —and the motives and encouragements to obedience remain in full force under the New Testament dispensation. The Christian economy takes for granted parental instruction as a divinely appointed instrument for the transmission of revealed truth, and as it contemplates a wider diffusion of the truth than did the Mosaic ritual, the obligation to impart it is proportionably strengthened and increased. Parents are commanded to bring up their children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” —this comprehensive precept implying scriptural discipline and government, and the instruction of the young concerning the character, works, and ways of God, by which they may become wise unto salvation.

Children being naturally under the power of darkness, as they come into the world, are without any innate conceptions of Deity, and utterly ignorant of those great truths that concern man’s duties, or his immortal destiny. On all that pertains to the soul’s welfare, they are involved in worse than Egyptian darkness. The god of this world has blinded their eyes. Guilty as well as depraved, the human mind is naturally averse to the light, and hates it; and of whatever expansion its powers are

susceptible, or whatever knowledge on other subjects it may acquire, if uninstructed in divine things, it will remain in ignorance, without God, and without hope in the world. Unlike the animal desires and appetites, the want of spiritual food creates no craving; and the person destitute of the knowledge of God, of himself, and of salvation, will continue to wander farther from the light, and to pursue his downward, desolate path to the blackness of eternal darkness. Parents should contemplate their children as in this melancholy condition; and they are to regard it as a main part of their duty towards them to be instrumental in rescuing them from its degradation and horrors. They are the *natural instructors* of their offspring, and they have opportunities of insinuating truth into their minds that are denied to others.

None of the high ends of their creation can be answered without knowledge,—and for usefulness in the present life, and happiness in the next, suitable instruction is indispensable. “That the soul be without knowledge it is not good.”\* “The children and the household” can neither “keep the way of the Lord,” nor “do

\* Proverbs xix. 2.

justice and judgment," if they are untaught in the nature of the way, or uninstructed in relation to duty and obligation. The commendation of parental fidelity, in the case of Abraham, supposes a course of diligent and sustained education; and it evidently implies that upon parents devolves the duty of communicating it. Parents should consider themselves as the appointed instruments to lead their children in the way they should go, by enlightening their understandings, and impressing their hearts. In truth, this is an office that cannot properly be delegated to another. Some parts of intellectual training,—some portions of the instruction that qualifies for the duties of the present life, may be imparted by others; and there are, doubtless, many cases in which the whole of what is commonly termed *education*, must be deputed to those whose office and attainments qualify them above parents for the important work. But while parents are, in some measure, to direct and superintend all the education of their children, on themselves it properly devolves to impart religious instruction. Theirs is necessarily the work of instructing their children in relation to their ruined condition, and of leading them to the knowledge of Christ, whom to know is life everlasting. While

they are to watch with jealous care, lest any thing in common education should be opposed to the doctrines of revelation, and lest any bias should be contracted, hostile to the gospel of Christ, they should regard, as peculiarly their care, the religious training of their offspring. Whatever aid they may receive from others, the responsibility is eminently their own, and they should betake themselves to the work as of unspeakable magnitude and importance.

Instruction, to be suitable, should be commenced *early*; and parents have access to their children's minds at a period in which no other persons have, and in ways which the hand of a stranger cannot reach. Like some of the organs of the body, the mind of infancy is developed much sooner than is commonly imagined. It has been affirmed that children at the early age of *four years*, are capable of understanding the principal doctrines of the gospel; and the chief elements of mental and moral character which, in ordinary cases, remain permanent, are probably formed before the term of boyhood has expired. Of what exceeding importance, then, is it to begin instruction early, and to pre-occupy with the plants of righteousness, the soil which would be otherwise a sterile waste, or be over-grown with noxious weeds!



Instruction should proceed on the principle that its *subjects are possessed of an immortal nature*, and that they are *accountable* to God, and to be reared for his service. It is the training of those who have been previously dedicated to God. It is the education of their higher nature for its immortal destinies. The *authority* of God is not only to be kept constantly in view, as enjoining the duty, but is frequently to be presented to the minds of children as supplying the grand reason for their obedience. Parental instruction has, moreover, a *bearing upon eternity*; and it must fail of effecting the desired results, if it does not proceed at every step, upon an impression of the worth of the soul, of the danger of its loss, and of the unutterable joys or miseries which are to be its everlasting portion. Early and faithful instruction requires wisdom and assiduity, in those who communicate it. Important truths must be brought down to the level of children's capacity, and presented in a form pleasing and interesting. Children are proverbially the creatures of impression, and the education imparted to them, to be effective and salutary, should be conducted so as to engage the attention, and impress the conscience and the heart. This is, in truth, a principal secret of success. If we

feel ourselves, we shall rarely fail of making others to feel. When the attention is enlisted, and the mind impressed, the intellects even of children will be opened, to a wonderful degree, to comprehend the truth; and the impressions made on the heart of childhood will influence the man of future years. The subject is, in a high degree, worthy of pains-taking and skill, and will amply repay all our diligence. A human being is to be rescued from sin and misery, fitted for the service of heaven's King, and qualified to be a blessing to fellow-men. An immortal spirit is to be educated for glory. Is not such an object calculated to task every energy, and to call forth the most diligent and sustained exertions?

If any withhold instruction from their children, or impart it in a careless, irregular manner—and we fear that many nominally Christian parents act thus—on the plea that they have not leisure, or that they have not the ability, we beseech them to consider seriously, whether these excuses can be sustained as valid, if their children grow up ignorant of God, or estranged from his ways, and are lost hereafter. If they perish, they may be assured, it will be in a great measure through parental neglect. God designs that all parents

should find time to take pains; and no apparently necessary engagements,—no encumbrance “with many things,” will be sustained as a proper excuse for neglecting this “one thing” so “needful.” Nor is intellectual superiority so much required for the work, as moral abilities. The heart impressed with a sense of parental obligation, and of the momentous consequences that must result from the duty neglected or faithfully performed, is the grand requisite. The sincere humble Christian parent, who makes the spiritual instruction of his children every thing,—who places it above his own ease and gratification, and above any worldly prospects to them, will generally succeed, and reap an abundant reward of his labour.

To impart knowledge to the young, that will be profitable or lasting, there must not only be *diligence* in teaching, but instruction should likewise be communicated in a manner *persuasive* and *attractive*. The Israelitish parent was to teach his children when he sat in the house, and walked by the way; when he lay down, and when he rose up.\* Tender minds require “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”† Instruction in

\* Deut. xi. 19.

† Isaiah xxviii. 10.

the way of life, to be productive of salutary fruits, must be sustained and systematic; and parents are to account it their privilege and duty to inculcate, as well as to teach, to recall what has been previously learned, and to renew the impression of truths that have been admitted into the mind. God himself draws "with bands of love, and cords of a man." The Great Teacher administers "milk to babes," as he "gives strong meat" to them who are of full age. He taught as his disciples were "able to bear," and his instructions still descend as "the rain on the mown grass," and distil as the dew upon the tender herb. This should be our rule and model, in training the young in the way wherein they should go. Wisdom's ways should be seen and felt by the young as pleasantness, and all her paths as peace.

Parental instructions are, furthermore, to be addressed *to the heart*, as well as to the intellect, and the culture of the moral nature must ever form a principal part of all well-conducted education, whether domestic or public. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" should be taken as a fundamental inquiry, even in instructing children in tender years: and all pains should be taken to render instructions familiar. It is possible to communicate

even the great doctrines of the gospel in a manner so plain, that he who runs may read; and where the teacher himself has an "understanding of him that is true." and above all, where his heart is under the power of divine things, he will generally be at no loss to make himself understood, even by persons of very limited capacity. The heart and conscience cannot but be a principal subject of faithful parental education. If the seat of feeling, the interested witness and arbiter of moral actions, is unimproved, a sense of duty will be imperfectly felt; and the "issues of life" will not flow forth in the life and conduct.

The effects of the patriarch's paternal precepts and authority exhibit the nature of Christian instruction, and the great subjects which it comprehends. His children and household were instructed to "keep the way of the Lord," and to do "justice and judgment." These expressions evidently imply that they were made acquainted with the great subjects of supernatural religion—instructed in their duties to God, and trained to moral habits and virtues. Such, too, is the import of the Apostle's direction to Christian parents,—  
"Bring them up in the nurture and ad-

monition of the Lord.”\* *Admonition* not only signifies careful teaching; it implies, also, exhortation, reproof, correction; it imports a heartfelt concern of parents about their children, and the enforcing of instructions by all proper motives and arguments. It is “the admonition of the Lord,”—that which he enjoins in his word,—that course of instruction of which the word of God is at once the directory and foundation; and it is the tender, affectionate dealing of a “nursing father,” which exemplifies the Lord’s treatment of his people. The “way of the Lord,” which the household should be taught to keep, is the way of the divine commandments, and these relate to all duties to God, and to man.

Though parents cannot impart grace to their children, they may train them to *correct habits*. Through careful instruction they may acquire a detestation of lying or injustice, or meanness, and a habit of declaring truth, acting with honesty and integrity, and exhibiting whatsoever is lovely and of good report. The Christian’s end is to glorify God in all his actions, however minute, and his duty to adorn the gospel of Christ in his whole

\* Eoh. vi. 4.

deportment. Parents should never regard the inculcation of proper habits as beneath their attention. Whatever tends to advance the temporal and spiritual welfare of their children, whatever is beneficial to mankind, or aims to promote the Divine honour, is included in the admonition of the Lord,—and in all this, overlooking nothing however apparently little or immaterial, they are to bring them up.

But the instruction which parents are to communicate to their children pre-eminently respects the great truths of revelation,—those which concern the character of the object of worship, and pertain to the soul's eternal destinies. The great design should be to render them “wise unto salvation.” By nature ignorant of all that is most important for man to know, they are to be instructed in the doctrine of their lost state, and the nature and consequences of sin. They should be taught the character of God, and impressed with a sense of his perfections. They should be early informed of that wondrous method of recovery for fallen sinners, into which angels desire to look, and led to Him who is “the way, and the truth, and the life.” They should be instructed in the nature and necessity of the new birth,—taught the way of God's commandments,—and

told of the judgment to come, and of happiness and misery unending beyond the grave. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

On themes like these, the constant aim of parents should be to deliver the lessons, as from a heart deeply interested, and so as to produce a powerful and lasting impression upon the heart. Coldness and formality here cannot fail to be most pernicious. The effect upon the young will be to lead them to conceive that the parent himself feels no lively concern in the truth inculcated, and that they are of insignificant value or importance. If we would command the household to "keep the way of the Lord," we must teach them the excellency, suitableness, and all-sufficiency of the Saviour. We must show them that he is the portion of our own souls, and that from him we expect and desire all abiding support and consolation. With a heart filled with the love of Divine truth, parents will exercise a constraining influence over their children, and will be honoured to guide them to Him who is the teacher sent from God, whom to know is life everlasting. Parental instruction should be generally conveyed in a *catechetical form*. Our venerable translators of the English approved version of the Scriptures,



seem to have recognized the importance of this method of teaching, when they gave the marginal reading of the command respecting training children, in the 22d chapter of Proverbs, to “catechize.” Without adverting to the obvious adaptation of this way of instruction to the capacity and habits of the young, we may remark that “a form of sound words” learned by children in youth, is frequently of immense value in preserving them from being led away by insidious error, and in establishing them in the profession and love of the truth. Even before their judgment has been fully developed, it is of importance thus to instruct them. What was early imprinted on the memory may afterwards enlighten the understanding, and influence the conduct. It is matter of observation that those who, in youth, were early instructed in a Scriptural catechism, have generally been kept from embracing novelties or plausible errors in religion, while others, from the want of such training, have readily been carried away with shifting winds of doctrine. The lessons of the Shorter Catechism have contributed to preserve the truth, even in periods of declension,—they have been instrumental, again, in reviving it; and to a singular extent, in different countries and ages, they

have served to advance the cause of pure and undefiled religion. Regular catechizing should be regarded by parents as a Divinely appointed and approved way of instructing their children,—it should be essayed in entire reliance upon a blessing from on high,—it should never be allowed to become a formal service, or an exercise of memory alone, on the part of the children. On the contrary, all pains should be taken to make them thoroughly understand the answers which they give, and all diligence employed to impress the practical import of the truths that are communicated. Catechetical instruction will thus form a valuable part of parental training; and children so educated will often furnish pleasing evidence of an intelligent and stedfast attachment to the way of truth and righteousness.

The sacred word is the grand *instrument* of leading the household to keep the way of the Lord. It is able to make wise to salvation. As a light from heaven, it reveals truths which none of the princes of this world know, and discloses mysteries which, although adapted to the youthful mind, angels cannot fully understand. Containing the dictates of unerring wisdom, it is the only infallible rule of faith and practice,—the directory of conduct, and the

charter of hope. It is, moreover, strikingly suited to the instruction of the young, and admirably fitted to realize all the great ends of Christian education. By this means, a young man learns to “purify his way.”\* In the use of the Bible, as the great instrument of instruction, children are made to feel their responsibility: and the authority of God, the value of the soul, and the means of its recovery and happiness, are presented in a manner calculated to attract the attention, enlighten the understanding, and impress the heart.

The Bible is emphatically the book of childhood and youth. It contains the elements of natural knowledge, exhibiting effects in connection with their causes, and pointing continually to him who worketh all in all. It displays the true philosophy of the mind, and presents a simple, sublime, and unchangeable system of morals. And herein the amazing scheme of salvation is revealed with wondrous simplicity,—that scheme which is destined to be the song and science of eternity. No proper knowledge of the way of the Lord can be obtained elsewhere, and none can keep it without having constant recourse to the Divine directory.† The instruction which

\* Psa. cxix. 9.

† For a fuller statement of the argument for em-

faithful parents impart will in all its parts be Scriptural. In the Bible, God himself condescends to speak to the sons of men, and the Great Shepherd has become the teacher of babes. He has here answered the request which the godly Manoah preferred about his promised child. He has taught parents "how to order" their children, and what to do unto them. They should gratefully receive the information, and faithfully employ it. Regarding it as an unspeakable privilege to be allowed to come to the fountain of Divine truth, and to bring their children with them, they should draw forth for them living water. They should lead them to him, of whom the Scriptures testify, and through whom the blessed promise is accomplished,—“All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children.”\*

SECT. III.—*Family worship is an important duty of Christian parents.*

The altars which the patriarchs erected in the places of their sojourning, were not

employing the Scriptures as the basis of all education, see the Author's Two Discourses on National Education.

\* Isaiah liv. 13.

only expressions of their gratitude, and a means of personal dedication; they were intended, besides, to engage the household in the work of religion; and to interest them in the promised blessing. The family was called to take part in building them; and the significant names by which they were designated, implied the extension of the benefits connected with them to posterity. On a memorable occasion, Jacob accosted his household, and said, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments. And 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, and was with me in the way which I went."\* At another time, the same patriarch erected an altar, and called it "El-elohe — Israel" — the Lord — the mighty God of Israel.† These actions, as far as their moral principle is concerned, still invite the imitation of Christian parents. It is not enough to dedicate their children to God in secret, or when they are in unconscious infancy. They must lead them to the altar, renew the solemn act in their presence, and teach them to regard it as their highest interest and honour, to

\* Genesis xxxv. 2, 3.

† Genesis xxxiii. 20.

yield themselves to the Lord. It is not sufficient to pray *for* children—we must pray *with* them, and show them prayer as an evident means of enjoying all covenant blessings, and as our highest and most valued privilege.

A primary design of parental dedication or instruction should be the *conversion of children*. Until this great change is effected, they remain children of wrath, under the curse, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise. No amiability of disposition—no outward knowledge—or acquired notional views of divine things—no correct habits superinduced by instruction, can alter the spiritual condition; and with none of them should parents rest satisfied in relation to their children. “*The redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever.*” The translation of the soul from darkness to light—the introduction of a child into the family of heaven—and the evidences of having passed from death unto life—should be to parents objects of anxious and incessant solicitude. In the spirit of the patriarch, when he fervently prayed, “O that Ishmael might live”—Christian parents should plead particularly for the spiritual life of their children. They should “travail as in birth,” till Christ be

formed in them. And cherishing in their own spirits habitually this great concern, they should impart it to their children, that they too may be brought to feel it. Frequent solemn instructions on the nature and necessity of regeneration should be closed with fervent prayer, in company with the child; and the unrenewed members of the household should be made to feel, that their ingathering to the fold of Christ is to the head of the family a subject of constant concern.

The *worship of the family* should be conducted with reference to this end; and with this view children and other domestics should be brought to the family altar. The obligations to this great duty are numerous and weighty. The recognition of Jehovah in his gracious character as the God of the families of his people— ascribing to him the homage due to his name — the blessings which households daily need, and which, through this channel, they frequently receive; and the fearful curse denounced against the families that call not on God's name, present reasons the most powerful for its diligent observance. The requirement of divine revelation, and the example of the saints, in every age, exhibit family worship as an eminent means of securing the best blessings for the

household, and of extending the hallowed influence of true religion beyond its pale. Without a domestic altar, the family can in no sense be regarded as a religious family. God is to be acknowledged in the various relations in which he has condescended to reveal himself to the sons of men; and, in one of the most endearing of these is he to be habitually owned, and the tribute of willing homage rendered to his name. The best times of the church—seasons of eminent revival and refreshment, have been characterized by the regular solemn performance of family worship. In the dwellings of the righteous has been heard the voice of joy and melody; and, like the morning and evening sacrifice of God's ancient people, the followers of the Lamb have been careful to present the daily offering of prayer and praise in their families. As David on a day of peculiar favour, returned to "bless his house," so Christian parents have drawn down the blessing upon their households, while their own spirits have been abundantly refreshed. Stated domestic worship, combined with diligent instruction, exemplifies "the church in the house;" and wherever it is faithfully maintained, there the fulfilment of the gracious promise may be expected—"I, saith the Lord of hosts, will be a wall of



fire round about thee, and the glory in the midst.”\* Family religion is a principal part of the glory that dwells in the land; and the households that are distinguished for it, are peculiarly under the protection and blessing that are enjoyed near the mercy-seat. The house of Obed-edom, and all that he had were blessed for the ark’s sake.† A similar recompense of reward is still dispensed by the Holy One of Israel to the families of the righteous, in connexion with domestic worship. At the family altar there is enjoyed communion with God;—there he dispenses the blessing,—and there he dwells with his people, bestowing upon them and theirs, the manifold tokens of peculiar favour.

Every view that can be taken of the ordinance of family worship warrants us to consider one of its principal designs to be the conversion of every individual composing the family. This should be a subject of habitual concern to those who are, by Divine appointment, “kings and priests” in their household; for this, frequent and fervent supplications should be offered at the throne of grace; and parents should never rest satisfied, till they obtain some clear evidence that their children and

\* Zech. ii. 5.

† 2 Sam. vi. 12.

servants have been translated into the family of heaven. Nor should we be contented with doubtful evidences on a matter of such thrilling interest, and unspeakable moment. Gentleness of manner, a kindly disposition, filial obedience, may exist, disconnected from the grace that bringeth salvation; and parents should beware of mistaking these for a spiritual renewal of heart and life. Till such a change is experienced, children remain under the curse, bond-slaves of the destroyer, and in continual danger of being consigned to inconceivable ruin. Christian parents should always act under the solemn conviction of the misery of such a condition. The family devotions should call down the blessing upon domestic instructions; and besides impressing upon those who engage in them the value of the soul's salvation, parents should put the work into the hands of Omnipotent agency, that can alone effectually renew, and preserve, and bless.

That the services of domestic worship may be instrumental in subserving this high purpose, two things are indispensable; they should be performed with scrupulous *punctuality*, and *formality* should be carefully avoided. No multiplicity or variety of engagements—no plea of inability

for conducting devotional services—no backwardness, from the presence of servants or strangers, can be sustained as valid excuses for the occasional or frequent neglect of a duty, on which so much of the benefit or happiness of the family depends. To limit family worship to one part of the day, and to omit it, at times, from the interruption of business, or society, is to neglect heaven's standing institute, and to postpone the spiritual welfare of the household to the trivial, fleeting interests of the world. It is, in fact, to substitute a human invention for God's appointed ordinance, and to render the spiritual and eternal interests of a family subservient to mere worldly caprice or convenience. Ability for duty is obtained in the way of diligently observing it, and never by neglecting it; and obstacles and interruptions will give way before those whose faces are towards God's altar, and whose heartfelt purpose is that of the veteran Joshua—"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." David might have pleaded multiplicity of engagements, and pressing public duties, as an excuse for neglecting family worship, on the day that he returned to "bless his house;" and the "father of the faithful" had doubtless many temptations, in his frequent journeyings, to omit at times the

devotional exercises of the family. But the saints of God have ever regarded their true interest, and the blessing of their households, as connected with seeking God's face; and amidst difficulties and trials, they have considered daily domestic worship as at once the most valuable work in which the family could be employed, and as the most effectual means of promoting its genuine prosperity.

An irregular attention to family worship cannot fail to lessen in the minds of domestics a sense of its importance. Omitted in the morning or evening, from indolence, or upon some urgency of worldly affairs, children and servants will naturally regard its observance as of little consequence; they will think it may be omitted upon other occasions. Their attendance will be reluctant or constrained; and the duty will thus come to be altogether laid aside, or to be observed only according as worldly interest or convenience may dictate. On the other hand, the regular presentation by the household of the morning and evening sacrifice, is calculated to impress the members with a sense of its indispensable importance. They will learn betimes to associate all their duties and enjoyments with the family-altar — and children and servants receiving thence the

blessing, will themselves be led to choose the way of duty, and to experience wisdom's ways to be pleasantness, and all her paths peace.

Next to the punctual observance of family worship, Christian parents should take special heed that it be performed in *a devout and impressive manner*. If there is formality or deadness here—if the word of God is read in a hurried, careless way—if prayer and praise are offered so as to give evidence that the heart is not engaged—if the temper and disposition displayed are incompatible with the exercises of devotion, the great design of family worship will be frustrated, and the effect will be either to teach domestics to cherish a cordial dislike to religion, or to become mere formalists or hypocrites. If gracious effects are to follow from family devotion, much—very much will depend on the manner of conducting it. Religious duties which are social, should be observed in a solemn, impressive, and yet attractive form—they should realize to attendants the Divine presence, and have yet nothing in them repulsive; they should exemplify the gracious liberty and boldness with which the saints are privileged at the mercy-seat, and exhibit, at the same time, the work of religion as pleasant and delightful. The

excellent Philip Henry is said to have been accustomed always to spend some time in his closet, seeking for special grace to conduct domestic worship, before he engaged in its performance.

Peculiar wisdom, meekness, and holy fervour are required to render the worship of the family a means of blessing to the household. Babes must be fed with the sincere milk of the word—the unruly warned—providences improved, and the instructions of the word applied. The parent, when worshipping with his family, should be characterized by the earnestness of one pleading for the life of his children, and should display the holy confidence of a child approaching to a Father who is able and ready to help. In the spirit of the patriarch, offering up at God's command the child of promise, he should commit his household to God; and in all the other duties of religion, his aim should be to excite, encourage, and attract those under his care to divinely appointed ordinances. This is unquestionably one principal design of the parental relation. Parents are, by precept and example, to point out the way to God and to heaven, and to lead in that way. As when the Egyptian princess restored the infant Moses to his mother, so God says to every Christian parent, "Take

this child, and nurse it for me.” Believing parents, regarding divine ordinances as their own well-springs of comfort and of saving benefit, should lead their children to them, that they also may become partakers of rich and heavenly consolation. Thus will they be instrumental in bringing them to Christ, and in habituating them to the ennobling services of religion: thus may they fulfil the divine directions, and realize the gracious promise—“Instead of the fathers, thou mayest take the children, and make them noble princes in all the earth.”\*

SECT. IV.—*Training the household to practical godliness.*

The conduct of Abraham, which receives the Divine commendation, evidently implies a high regard to practical religion. He commanded his children and household after him, to “*keep* the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment.” It was not enough with him to communicate to them the knowledge of the doctrines of supernatural religion, or of the ways of providence. He did not esteem it sufficient to impart to his family notional views of

\* Psalm xlv. 16.

the object of worship, and the way of acceptance. He guided their feet into the way of duty, and he trained them to walk in the path of the Divine commandments. The "way of the Lord" intends the course of holy obedience. To "fear God, and keep his commandments" has in every age been the "whole duty," as well as the whole privilege of men.\* The patriarch led his household to walk in all duties to God and to man—to be serious, devout, and diligent in attendance on religious ordinances, and to be honest and upright in their conduct toward men—to cherish a continual sense of obligation to God, and concern for his honour, and to act with fidelity and integrity in all that pertained to fellow-men. He instructed them to maintain a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men—to walk in all the commandments of the Lord blamelessly, and to observe whatsoever is honest, pure, lovely, and of good report in human society.

To lead children and a household in such a course requires assiduous training.

\* Eccles, xii. 13. In the original there is no word corresponding to the word "duty"—the supplement of the translators. It is literally, "the whole of man," and may suitably be rendered—the whole privilege, interest or happiness of man.



To talk merely of the way of duty, or at times to lead into religious exercises, cannot be regarded as sufficient to prepare the young for the service of religion, or the practice of morality. The explicit command of Heaven is, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Training supposes patience and attention—the adapting of instruction to the capacity and condition of the child; and it obviously implies that the subject of instruction is habituated to the service required. It is to "draw along by a regular and steady course of exertions"—to make trial of walking in the approved way—and to accustom to the performance of the duties prescribed. It carries in it the idea of continued watchfulness and unceasing care. Such training aims to render necessary labours pleasant, by superinducing proper *habits*. Even in the inferior creatures, evil propensities may be overcome, and they may be fitted for useful services by diligent training. In the education of youth, we have to deal with a nature, fallen indeed, but possessed of vast capacities, and varied susceptibilities; and proportioned to its rank in the scale of existence, its solemn responsibility, important duties, and high destinies, should be the dread of marring its culture, and

the concern to conduct it aright. Children are to be trained for the Lord's work, as soldiers are taught to acquire skill in handling their arms, to keep their ranks, to endure hardships, to obey orders, and to be animated in every service by the prospect of ultimate victory and reward. Herein multitudes even of religious parents are greatly deficient. They do something, perhaps, to promote their children's religious welfare, but they cannot be said to *train* them in the way of life. They instruct them at times—they take them along with them to religious ordinances, and occasionally they reprove and correct them. But they do not lead them along by watchful and sustained efforts. Their exertions in their behalf are desultory and irregular, and, by indolence and inconsistency, they often mar the effect of even good instructions.

One topic connected with this parental training merits attention, as we fear it is generally and greatly overlooked. Children should be early led themselves to make religion their work, and to engage in the ready performance of religious duties. It is not enough to pray *with* them and *for* them—parents should see that they themselves pray, and that not in the mere forms which are taught to

lipping infancy. They should be instructed in the nature and privilege of prayer, informed of their spiritual wants, and led to the fountain of all gracious supplies; and parents, by causing them to pray in their presence, should see that their children are actually cultivating communion with the throne of grace. The same course of faithful training is requisite in relation to all other religious duties.

Much earlier than is generally imagined, the obligation of the baptismal vow descends upon the young. As soon as children are capable of conceiving the character and perfections of God, and of entertaining a sense of their own accountability, they should be trained to recognize the baptismal covenant, by a public profession of religion, and by actively engaging in all religious duties. Parents very generally err in this matter. They consider it sufficient to tell children of their duty, without seeing whether or how they perform it: and on the plea that it is too early, they do not insist on their making a public profession of religion, by entering personally the membership of the church, and coming to the Lord's table, till they have arrived at mature youth, or even reached the period of manhood. Now this is obviously any thing but a faithful training of children

in the way they should go. Parental indolence and neglect, and above all, an overweening concern of parents about a provision for their children in the world, lead to this fearful dereliction of duty. But whatever is the cause, the consequences of this negligence are most ruinous. Emerging from childhood, with opening powers of mind and conscience, in active and constant exercise; and surrounded by countless and powerful temptations, the young are left without a proper sense of their obligation to God, and are suffered to pass over a number of years, in the utter neglect of many duties to which their early dedication had pledged them. The melancholy result is easily declared. Children learn to cherish an increasing aversion to practical godliness, and they fall a prey to the destroyer. Untrained in the way they should go, they depart from it even in youth; and, although "the children of the kingdom," they grow up ignorant of its nature, undesirous of its privileges, and only fitted for final rejection. Would parents deprecate this dread consummation for their offspring? Let them lead them early into the way of holiness; and ere the world assails with its allurements and engagements, and before temptations from other quarters gather strength,

let them engage them in the active service of religion, and exhibit it to them as their highest honour, to be with them that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. Assign them a part in the religious exercises of the family. Take them to the religious meetings of God's people. Teach them never to be ashamed of the duties of religion, but, on the contrary, to consider it an honour to take an active share in the services of the sanctuary, and in efforts for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. Thus their feet will be placed in the way of peace, and they will be prepared to keep it; and yours will be the satisfaction of knowing, that even in old age they will not forsake it. Your children will be trained to extensive usefulness; and, like the youthful Timothy, knowing even from childhood the Holy Scriptures, they will become instruments of blessing to others through future generations.

The household should not only be trained to the performance of duties which immediately respect God—they should likewise be led to the practice of all duties towards men. Practical godliness embraces the love of our neighbour, as well as supreme love to the Author of our existence. “To be *really*,” it has been well observed, “is to be *relatively* holy.” The observance

of those duties that respect mankind in various relations, is the fruit and evidence of genuine religion. Children should be trained to cultivate sobriety, frugality, and industry, and to observe towards others justice, integrity, and benevolence. They should be taught to cherish high moral principle in all their relations in society; and in their conduct, uniformly to obey the golden rule of doing to others, as they would that they, in like circumstances, should do unto them. They should be early engaged in benevolent exertion, and be instructed never to weary in well-doing. They should be reared as separate from the world lying in wickedness, and yet as the benefactors of mankind,—in every place and station, aiming to lessen human misery, and to benefit men's souls and bodies.

Parents are not merely to *recommend* such a course of conduct; they are to take their children by the hand and engage them in it, as their grand employment, and true dignity and honour. And not only are the young to be trained to well-doing; they should be led to act, so that their good may not be "evil spoken of"—that they may have "a good report of them that are without"—that they may imitate the character of Him, of whom it

was said when a child, "He grew in favour with God and man." By motives adapted to the youthful mind, the practice of these duties should be enforced. Even when children may be unable to appreciate fully the force of the gospel motives, there are subordinate considerations that may suitably be employed: such are, their own happiness and comfort in the world, the shame and disgrace of a course of wickedness, and the honourable and praiseworthy character of a course of holy obedience.

The maxims of the sacred word, especially those contained in the book of Proverbs, which refer to all the concerns of human life, deserve to be engraven on the memory, and frequently presented to the attention of youth. The examples, too, recorded in Scripture will supply motives and encouragements to duty, peculiarly fitted to interest and impress the young. And by leading the household betimes to practise the admonitions addressed to them, parents will most effectually instruct. Children may not be able always to understand or remember a variety of precepts, but they will readily understand, if you conduct them to the constant practice of the duties you recommend. Habit will render what was difficult or irksome at first, easy and agree-

able. The principle which is said to “govern the world,” and whose sway, in many cases, is inevitable, will powerfully affect children, and strengthen with their growth. The propensities of persons in adult age are generally such as habit induced in earlier years. Availing yourselves of a principle whose power is universally acknowledged, Christian parents, show your children constantly that godly practice is every thing. Urge them to it, from the earliest dawn of reason. Draw them to wisdom’s paths as being all “pleasantness and peace;” and should you be called to leave them, tell them that to fear God and keep his commandments, is the alone way of safety and honour. So will your children appear in the lovely character of the seed of the righteous; and trusting in the Lord, and doing good, the Divine promise shall be realized to them—they shall dwell in the land, and be fed. They shall obtain the desire of their hearts; and their righteousness shall be brought forth as the light, and their judgment as the noontide of the day.

It may here be observed, that the proper performance of parental duties requires the *study and co-operation of both parents*. The truth is, that the obligation rests equally upon both; and if one of the pa-



rents neglect any part of the duty towards children, devolving it upon the other, and much more when the one hinders the performance by the other, the consequences cannot fail to be most injurious. Parents should regard themselves bound, each separately, and both together, to engage in every duty that is enjoined upon the head of the household, and that is calculated to benefit a family. Husbands and wives are commanded so to live, that their "prayers be not hindered," and this implies that they are prayerful, that they pray with and for one another; and directs them to guard continually against whatever would obstruct their comfortable access to the throne of grace. Some parts of parental duty may appear to be more especially the province of one parent than another,—as the instruction of children in infancy is considered most suitable to the mother, and the conducting of family worship has been most commonly assigned to the father. But it would be quite wrong to hold, even in such cases, that these duties so devolve upon the one parent, that the other is freed from the obligation of performing them. On the contrary, the Divine word furnishes not the slightest hint that either of the parents is exempted from any religious duty to the family. The mother, equally

with the father, is to pray with and for her children,—the maintenance of family worship is incumbent upon her, as well as upon her husband; and the authority and example of the female parent are indispensable to the right training of children,—to the government and prosperity of the household. A peculiar blessing has often rested upon those mothers who have been impressed with a due sense of parental obligation; and where eminent piety has distinguished a family, it will frequently be found to have been connected with maternal devotedness.

Parents should cordially co-operate in every work which they perform, in relation to their family,—they should often take sweet counsel together, on this all-important subject,—should aid each other's instructions, and support each other's authority, and they should always present the aspect to their household, of being perfectly united in one heart and mind, in all family duties. In the matter of government, each parent should exercise separate and independent authority; while they strengthen one another's hands, and support each other's rule, children should not be referred by one parent to the other, in cases that may appear difficult to manage; nor should they in any instance

be left to expect indulgence from the one, when the other may judge it requisite to show severity. Each parent should be regarded by children as supreme, and should lay it down as fundamental, that the case that is taken in hand must be managed, without any appeal to the authority or power of the other. While parents should thus act in one view, separately and independently, their government in the family should be concurrent and harmonious. Children should always see that the same sense of Christian obligation, leading to the faithful performance of all duties, actuates both their parents, and that the same holy and attractive spirit of Christian love and devotedness characterizes both. This constitutes the beauty and excellency of parental instruction, government, and example. While a contrary way has generally been followed by disastrous consequences, this has rarely failed of producing happy and beneficial results. The lovely and pleasant spectacle has been presented of a family dwelling in unity;—the household has thus lived in peace, and the God of love and peace has been with them.

SECT. V.—*Duties which the heads of Christian families owe to their domestics in other relations.*

The declaration respecting Abraham, to which we have referred, expresses the patriarch's concern for his servants, whether born in his house, or bought with his money. He commanded his "*household,*" as well as his children, to keep the way of the Lord. His domestics were instructed, trained, and brought to the altar of God, that they might participate in the spiritual benefits of the family, and that the whole household might enjoy the protection and blessing of the covenant. Of the effect of this concern, we have a striking instance in what is recorded of the steward of his house, Eliezer of Damascus, when he was sent to espouse a wife for his master's son. Originally involved, it is probable, in the surrounding idolatry, he had greatly benefited by his master's instructions, and by his shining example; and the whole narrative contained in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis, exhibits him not only as distinguished for integrity and fidelity, but as a man of prayer, and as one who recognized the hand of a special gracious providence, and who gratefully acknow-

ledged answers to prayer. The laws of the Mosaic institute, that enjoined kindness and mercy to be exercised towards the stranger and servants, and which required the master and servant together "to rejoice before the Lord" in particular feasts; and the fourth precept of the Decalogue, which secured for the stranger within the gates, and for the servants of the household, a share in the Sabbatical rest, proclaimed the concern of the God of Israel for the spiritual welfare of servants residing with his people, and plainly intimated his intention that they should enjoy the instruction, religious worship, and moral training, by which their usefulness and salvation might be promoted.

The conduct of eminent saints recorded in the Old Testament, exemplifies the religious care of domestics in a lovely and engaging aspect; and holds forth at once an injunction to enforce this part of family religion, and an encouragement to its performance. Who does not admire the fidelity of Boaz as a master, when he greeted his reapers and said, "The Lord be with you," and the piety and gratitude of his dependents, when in return to his salutation, they answered him, "The Lord bless thee?"\*

\* Ruth ii. 4.

after God's own heart, presents a striking view of a household ordered for God, and of a jealous concern about the character and deportment of servants. "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave unto me. . . . Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceitfully shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."\*

The New Testament contains frequent directions addressed to the heads of families concerning their duties to servants. These directions are enforced by the most commanding motives, such as their accountability to a Master in heaven, the insignificance of all distinctions of rank in his sight, and the authority of Christ the Son. "Ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him." "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."† Besides enjoining

\* Psalm ci. 2, 3, 6, 7. † Eph. vi. 9; Col. iv. 1.

kindness, moderation, and justice towards dependents, these precepts plainly imply that heads of families should consult for their spiritual welfare, and should, by their authority and influence, aim to guard them from sin, and to lead them into the way of holiness.

The domestic constitution, under the law of Christian charity, evidently demands this concern for dependents, and exhibits the sin and danger of neglecting such duties. Servants are an important portion of the household; and according to their character and deportment, they are either a blessing or a scourge both to the parents and the children. Placed in a state of dependence upon their masters, and having surrendered to them for a period, their time and liberty, they have claims upon them, for such opportunities and means of instruction, as may fit them for discharging the higher duties that they owe to God, and that constitute a suitable preparation for eternity. The heads of the household are to some extent, accountable to God for the conduct of servants while under their care, and especially for their access to the means of salvation. Wherever the love of Christ predominates, it will constrain masters to have compassion on the souls of their servants. They will pray for them—extend

to them the means of instruction—and endeavour to engage them in the service of religion. They will show them that they cherish a deep concern in their spiritual welfare; and while they employ advice and authority to restrain them from the ways of wickedness, by their whole conduct, they will convince them, that they desire greatly that they should “adorn the doctrine of God the Saviour in all things.”

The proper observance of these duties often brings with it an abundant harvest. Heads of families may enjoy the honour of saving souls from death. Servants thus trained,—by their diligence, integrity, and fidelity, afford another proof that the way of godliness is the grand means of promoting the interests of a household. Neglect of the moral and religious instruction of servants, on the contrary, is often severely visited upon families. Domestics whose souls are uncared for, become regardless of character; they learn to hate religion, by seeing it divested of some of its principal features; and by neglect, dishonesty, and companionship with the wicked, they injure the outward estate of their masters, and entail a curse upon a family. Children are perverted through the influence of wicked or neglected servants; and thus the hopes of a household are sometimes



entirely blasted. The malign influence, arising from this source, often works so secretly, and operates so slowly, that no danger is perceived, till the disease has become incurable; and parents are left to mourn in the destruction of their offspring, their sin in overlooking the character and spiritual welfare of their servants and dependents. To this might readily be traced much of the irreligion, that in our day characterizes the higher class of the baptized youth of the church, and much of the proverbial dishonesty and unfaithfulness of servants. Their souls' interest has been disregarded, even by men that made a Christian profession—they were denied access to religious ordinances—they have not been warned, counselled, and encouraged in the way of godliness. Their labour has been exacted, and all the obligation that has been recognized, is that of awarding to the hireling his wages; while the consideration of his immortal interests has hardly in the least been regarded. Need we wonder at the result? The neglect of any class of duties, and especially of domestic duties, often brings retributive punishment in this world; and the complaints so common among professing Christians of the unfaithfulness of servants, are, in many instances, the certain evidence that masters

are unmindful to instruct their households to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.

Those who would desire the promised blessing, must carefully watch against such negligence. Let them esteem the souls of their domestics as inconceivably precious. Let them labour assiduously that God may be honoured and owned by all under their care. For no earthly consideration, should they bring into their families those who are hardened against religion, and addicted to vice. And remembering continually their great Master in heaven, and acting as in his sight, they should manifest a tender and faithful regard to the spiritual and eternal welfare of servants. Even should their instructions be undervalued, and the opportunities which they afford slighted, they must not give over. The discharge of their duty is paramount to all consideration of the consequences. The abundant blessing that descends on the dwellings of the righteous, may only be expected, where a vigilant concern is exercised that all under the roof may fear God and keep his commandments. And amply will the heads of families be rewarded, if strangers entrusted in providence to their care, and led by them to the domestic altar, shall join themselves to the

Lord. To be an instrument of spiritual good to the humblest domestic, will be attended with rich blessings in time ; and throughout eternity, believing masters, and servants that were brought by them to the Redeemer, shall rejoice together.

*Parental duties, it may be added, have respect to the future, and affect even remote posterity.*

Abraham “commanded his children and his household *after* him.” He not only trained his family to the service of religion while he was among them, and walked before his house in a perfect way, —he consulted for posterity, and laboured that piety might flourish among his descendants when he was gone. The covenant which God had made with the patriarch, embraced future generations in its stipulations and promised blessings. “I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”\* The gracious promise implies a consequent obligation to walk in the way of holy obedience. Parental fidelity is the

\* Gen. xvii. 7.

means divinely ordained for the transmission of the truth to succeeding generations, "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children."\* Christian parents should feel habitually that they neither live nor die for themselves. In labouring for the spiritual benefit of their households, they sow seeds that are to vegetate and bear fruit, when they shall have ceased from all earthly labours. They become thus the "first fruits" of a future harvest of promise. The mercy that flows in the channel of covenant-obedience, extends to thousands of the generations of them that love God and keep his commandments;† and fidelity in domestic relations brings into operation an influence that circulates and enlarges to succeeding ages, diffusing innumerable blessings throughout human society.

What an important sphere is thus assigned to the head of the household! Recognizing the sovereign authority of the God of the families of Israel, and depending

\* Psalm lxxviii. 5, 6. † Second Commandment.

upon his promised grace, let him betake himself to the performance of domestic duties, as incalculably momentous in their nature, and of consequences unspeakably important. Regarding with compassion the originally depraved state, and helpless, dependent condition of those committed to his care, and all the solemn endearing ties by which he is connected with them—let him gird up his loins for the work, the faithful performance of which will confer distinguished honour upon himself, bless his household, and diffuse blessings throughout the world, for ages to come. Animated by the hope of promised success, and warned that all negligence or unfaithfulness will be visited by fearful retribution, let him diligently and perseveringly employ the means of Divine appointment. So will he accomplish the designs of his high vocation. Parental fidelity will evidence that he is by faith a child of faithful Abraham. The blessing of Abraham's God will descend upon him and his seed. His work will be rewarded. In life, his family, blessed through him, will be to him a blessing. At death, like another venerable patriarch, he will have comfort in committing his household to the God of their fathers, assuring them of his promised protection and blessing. And in the language of joyful

confidence and triumph, he will be enabled to declare to the generation following,—  
“This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death.”\*



## CHAPTER II.

### MODE OF PERFORMING PARENTAL DUTIES.

THERE are means graciously provided for the proper discharge of parental duties,—there is a way clearly marked out in the Divine word, whereby parents may lead their children to God’s service, and may themselves obtain the commendation which was given to Abraham, the father of the faithful. The efficacy and the blessing are only of God. *Paul may plant, and Apollos may water*, but it is God that giveth the increase. Nevertheless he has appointed and revealed the means of domestic nurture and admonition, with which he has connected his blessing. In the natural world, instrumentality without Divine energy is of no avail. The hus-

\* Psalm xlviii. 14.

bandman may cultivate the soil—cast the seed into the ground — and assiduously watch over its growth; but without the genial influences of the sun, and the fructifying rains of heaven, and other unseen agencies, by Him who appoints fruitful seasons, there will be no harvest to reward his toil. So in things moral and spiritual, neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth, is anything, but God that gives the increase. The means of moral and spiritual cultivation are adapted to the end designed; and while of themselves, they can produce no salutary effect, they are yet, in the declared purpose of God, so conjoined with supernatural gracious agency, that we have the warrant to employ them with the fullest confidence. This is God's established and declared connexion, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" Much, very much of parental success in the training of children, is connected with maintaining a habitual and simple-minded reliance upon the power and blessing from above, "without which nothing is strong, nothing is holy." But much too will depend on the *manner* in which instructions are communicated, and the religious services of the family are performed. Among those who are acquainted

with the business of public instruction, it is received as axiomatic, that method is indispensable to success. Without it, men of distinguished abilities will be disqualified to teach others, and the best instructions will fail of cultivating the intellect, and of improving the heart.

If this is generally admitted in common education, it is still more applicable to the work of moral and spiritual instruction. The young are to be trained as immortal beings, and for a work, the most important, beneficial, and ennobling in which it is possible to engage. From the earliest period, they are to be led forward in a course, becoming their responsibility, and their relation to the Author of their existence, and befitting their eternal destiny. They are to be recovered from a state of misery and ruin—guarded against countless evil influences—and educated for the lofty exercises, and inconceivable felicity of the kingdom of heaven. And the whole household is to be ordered as the heritage of the Lord—to be instructed and governed so as to exhibit “the glory dwelling in the land,” and as a nursery to prepare worshippers for the upper sanctuary. Need we say, that for such a service, there are required consideration, diligence, and faithfulness? A holy dread of marring the



work, through neglect or imperfect performance—an earnest desire of success, and an humble and constant reliance upon the Divine direction, support, and blessing, are indispensable to the right use of appointed means; and all who desire for themselves and theirs, Divine favour, will, with such dispositions, employ their efforts to train their household in the good and right way. We proceed to notice some of those means which are connected with the proper instruction and government of the family.

*SECT. I.—Parents should act habitually under a deep sense of their solemn engagements concerning their families.*

The head of the family stands in a federal relation to the members of his household. He has solemnly vowed for them to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh; he has engaged to rear them for God, and for heaven; and in the name of the God of Israel, and before many witnesses, he has given a sacred pledge for himself and his house, that they shall serve the Lord. Not only in the baptismal covenant has he entered into such an engagement; it has been frequently renewed and ratified on other occasions. The believer cannot but feel constrained to devote his

household to God. Having himself subscribed with his hand to the Lord, and regarding Him as the Fountain of his being and happiness, he cannot withhold from Him aught that he has. His children and household, to whom he is bound by ties the most endearing, will be specially surrendered to his gracious Benefactor, and as often as their cases are presented at the mercy-seat, will their dedication to God be renewed.

To cherish constantly a deep sense of this solemn surrender, is a principal means of discharging faithfully parental obligation. A Christian is excited to all duty, when he becomes fully sensible that he is not his own—but, as bought with a price, that he is bound to glorify his Master, in body and spirit which are his. Having opened his mouth to the Lord, he feels that he must not go back; having consecrated all his talents to the service of a glorious Master, he would regard it as impious and sacrilegious, after vows to make inquiry—to appropriate as his, or to withhold through negligence, what has been voluntarily and unreservedly yielded up for a sacred purpose. Impressed, on the contrary, with a sense of covenant-obligation, actuated by love to Christ, and animated by the hope of a glorious recompense of reward, he

delights in the consideration that he is no longer his own, and that he has been separated to a special holy calling. Similar will be the feelings and views entertained by the godly parent, in relation to his household.

When the covenant was renewed with Abraham in terms that included posterity in its benign provisions, the command was given to the patriarch, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect."\* The direction referred to the whole course of holy obedience. It included the spirit and deportment of a devoted servant, under the approving eye of his master—and it aimed at ultimate perfection of service and character. The precept had a manifest respect to the domestic constitution. The man after God's own heart, as he expresses his earnest desire after the Divine gracious presence, declares, "I will walk in a perfect way before my house." Such will still be the resolution of the faithful parent respecting his family. Having brought his children to God's altar, and devoted them to God, he will labour to cherish on his spirit a constant sense of this dedication. His children were given him of the Lord. He has yielded them back to Him by voluntary

\* Genesis xvii. 1.

and hearty surrender. He has solemnly vowed not to regard them as his own, not to educate them for himself, not to train them for the world, or its pleasures, or pursuits, but to rear them as the servants of heaven's King, and as denizens of glory. Like the pious Hannah, he vowed in the presence of the ark of the covenant, and before the Lord in Shiloh, that as long as his children lived, they should be "the Lord's." If the ends of this dedication are to be attained, the solemn act must be frequently remembered, and the impression of it cherished on the spirit. A principal design of exacting an oath is, that the authority of the Supreme Being, and a sense of a future account may be felt on the conscience, and a vow is universally understood to impose a superadded obligation. A due sense of the parental vow will exercise a subduing purifying influence on the whole conduct of those who have made it. Even a heathen satirist\* declares that a sacred reverence should be cherished in all that pertains to the interests of youth. The vow of parents when properly felt will impel them to regard their families as set apart to a sacred purpose—to refrain from every thing in conduct that

\* Juvenal.

is inconsistent with holy dedication, and to task all their energies, and employ all available means, for obtaining the desired results.

To children too, the sense of early dedication, impressed on their minds by parents who have first felt it themselves, may be of incalculable advantage. If the youthful Hannibal felt the obligation of the oath which his father made him utter in childhood to oppose the enemies of his country, and was impelled by it, even to the end of life, to seek their destruction, may not the children of Christian parents be led to entertain an early sense of the obligation of their baptismal covenant, and to such a feeling of their infantile dedication to God, as may influence their whole conduct? Godly Israelitish parents gave significant names to their children, and frequently inserted some attribute or title of God in their names. The design probably was, that they might connect the remembrance of their covenant God, and of his gracious works, with the objects of their most cherished affections, and thus impressively teach children too, their obligations, to special distinguishing goodness.

In this spirit, Christian parents should perform all duties towards their offspring. They should always look upon their fa

milies as dedicated objects, and should labour betimes to make them sensible that they are under engagements to be the Lord's. The effect would be most salutary, if this feeling were generally prevalent throughout the families of professing Christians. The head of the household, true to his character as the priest of his house, would view himself as called to stand at the altar of God. His children and domestics would appear to him as sacred offerings to be presented with holy hands, and never to be alienated from Him to whom they have been devoted. And from such a surrender, he would be excited and animated to spend and be spent, that its important designs might be accomplished. A proper sense of the vow to God would impel to the diligent performance of every parental duty—and by the blessing from above, the objects of parental solicitude would be brought to rejoice in their early consecration to the service of God. A due sense of the importance of duty, it has been said, is half its performance. In domestic relations, the remark is peculiarly apposite. The instances are few, in which parents, cherishing a habitual and powerful impression that they and their children have been dedicated to God, have lived in the neglect of the

means of moral or religious cultivation, or in which parental diligence has been disappointed.

SECT. II.—*Frequent and fervent prayer with and for children.*

The Christian's rule of duty, as well as his exalted privilege, is to "pray without ceasing." Placed in the important station of a parent and the head of a family, there is a double reason why he should abound in prayer and supplication. °The souls of his household are entrusted to his care, and on his instrumentality, it in a great measure depends, whether they are to be the victims of ignorance and misery, or the possessors of endless glory. In a work of this kind, a sense of inability, and of entire dependence upon Divine agency, is indispensably requisite. Prayer is the appropriate expression of a feeling of helplessness and want. It is committing to God what of ourselves we cannot keep—depending upon him to accomplish what we cannot do—and resting wholly upon his direction and blessing, without which human instrumentality is nothing. The *spirit* of prayer, essential to the proper performance of all duties, is especially necessary to the Christian parent, for the

nurture and admonition of his household. Here, if he has recognized the importance of his station, and the obligation of his vow, he must feel at every step urgent and pressing wants, and be sensible of his own insufficiency. To renew the heart of a child, he has no power ; nor can he guard him from manifold dangers, or fit him for a life of usefulness, or a state of felicity, without supernatural aid administered to him every moment. Under a trembling anxiety lest the work should miscarry in his hands, and an earnest desire that his seed may inherit the blessing, he will, in prayer, bring them to Jesus, and importunately seek for them the participation of covenant blessings. All his efforts to promote their welfare for time or eternity will be undertaken in this spirit ; and feeling that without this, all other means are unavailing, and that the secret of all desirable success lies in the Divine favour and agency, he will continue instant in prayer, that the Lord's work may appear unto his servants, and his glory unto their children. He will pray for and with his family ; and the impression which his spirit and conduct will make upon the members of it, will be, that he is a man of prayer, and that their best interests are frequently



carried, as the weightiest concern of his heart, to the mercy-seat.

God has remarkably owned exertions for the advancement of his glory, that have been made in the spirit of prayer; and the instances on record of parents that were thus accepted, and of their offspring that were blessed, are numerous and encouraging. Prayer is the appointed way of inheriting the blessing; and the Divine assurances of its enjoyment in the way of prayer are remarkably full and explicit. "Whatsoever ye ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."\*

In the spirit of prayer, Hannah, even when afflicted with domestic trials, surrendered her child to the Lord; and in the devotedness of Samuel, the Church has been reaping the answer to her supplications till the present time, and will continue to reap it, as long as it shall have ex-

\* John xiv. 13, 14; 1 John v. 14, 15.

istence upon the earth. Moses was preserved in infancy by parents who trusted in the Divine promise, and who doubtless waited in prayer for its accomplishment. His deliverance afterwards by the daughter of Pharaoh—his preservation and escape from the temptations of the Egyptian court, and his singular choice of affliction with the people of God, in preference to the treasures of Egypt, as well as his preparation for the exalted office of lawgiver and king in Jeshurun, may be ascribed, in a great degree, to their prayerful instructions and pious example. David, the sweet singer of Israel, on several occasions, makes grateful mention of his mother, as “the handmaid of the Lord,” in terms that evidently imply his having enjoyed the benefit of parental piety. Who can tell how much of his public eminent usefulness is to be ascribed to this instrumentality? Who can say how much of the training, that, under the blessing of the Spirit, prepared him for being the penman of the songs of Zion, which have been in all ages the food and consolation of the heirs of glory, resulted from maternal devotedness? The examples as well as the precepts of the New Testament equally point to the intimate connexion between parental prayer and domestic piety. The

parents of John the Baptist—the mother and grandmother of Timothy—and the mother of Him who was emphatically the “seed of the woman,”—were illustrious for faith, and were instruments of unspeakable blessing to the world.

Parents are encouraged to pray with and for their children, not only from the Divine promises, exceeding great and precious, but from what the Saviour has already done, in answer to parental supplications. It deserves remark, that many of those miracles of mercy which he performed in the days of his flesh, stand connected with parental concern about the welfare of the household. The blessing was, moreover, doubly communicated. Children and domestics were healed, and the faith of the applicants was approved and commended. The Syro-phenician woman, the centurion whose servant was sick, and Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, are among the most affecting instances of the Saviour's compassion, and of his ability and willingness to relieve the distressed, and comfort the wounded in spirit; and these are associated with parental prayerfulness. With sympathizing tenderness, the Redeemer heard the petitions of the afflicted supplicants. With infinite readiness he delivered from the power of the

destroyer those whom they brought to him ; and, as if specially delighting in such applications, he conferred distinguished approbation upon those who presented them, and exhibited them as encouraging examples to others till the end of time. Once only is it recorded by the evangelist that Jesus was "*much displeased*" with the disciples whom he had chosen ; and this was when they would have hindered parents, who were his auditors, from bringing their children into his immediate presence for a blessing. His holy displeasure still goes forth against all parents and others who oppose an obstacle, of whatever kind, in the way of children coming to him. His command, simple, striking, and of universal application, is—"*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not—for of such is the kingdom of God :*" and the tender action with which it was accompanied when first uttered, gives great and high encouragement to ready obedience. Jesus took the little children into his arms and blessed them, outstepping the request of maternal affection, and displaying the riches of his benevolence, and his affectionate concern for helpless infancy.

Prayer is the principal means of bringing children to Christ for the blessing.

Without it, other instrumentality will prove useless; and frequently, when other means of parental training are found inefficient, the earnest supplications flowing from a father's pity or a mother's affection, have been honoured for the conversion of children, and for promoting their safety, and comfort, and usefulness. The prayers in the family that promise to be productive of real and permanent benefit, must be *with* them, as well as *for* them; and they should be *fervent* as well as *frequent*. The head of the household should not only pray for the members of the family in particular, when they are assembled round the domestic altar—he should also take them apart, and pray for them separately. Like the patriarch Job, he should daily offer the sacrifice of prayer for each child of the family in secret, and present his case by name at the mercy-seat; and taking him apart, he should pray with him from tender years. Thus may a child be impressed with a sense of the Divine presence, and the necessity of his soul's redemption, even before he arrives at years of judgment and reflection; and as the answer to such prayers, we cannot doubt that, in many cases, the grace of salvation is communicated in childhood, or bestowed in future life. Legh Richmond records

the impression made upon his mind by the prayers of his mother, when tried with a solemn bereavement, when he was only five or six years of age ; and the excellent John Newton relates, that the remembrance of his mother's prayers never forsook him, though she was removed by death before he had passed his seventh year. Even when running in the paths of folly, they were a restraint upon him ; and to them may be ascribed, in a great measure, his future conversion and eminent usefulness.

Parental prayer, for and with children, should be *fervent*. It should be pleading for the precious life. It should manifest habitually the earnestness and importunity which characterize the supplications in behalf of a child when under the hand of disease, or in the view of death. With similar importunity should Christian parents carry the case of their children's souls to the throne of grace, and seek for them the blessing. Embracing in their thought and concern, their original state of alienation from God, the dangers with which they are surrounded, and the unspeakable excellency of redemption,—they should wrestle in prayer for their children, that they may be made partakers of the divine

nature, and escape the pollution of the world.

Do any plead exemption from this duty, on the ground of backwardness, or inability, or other engagements? None of these excuses can be sustained as valid. None of them is fit to meet the eye of him who is God of the families of Israel, and to whom we must render account for all our obligations and privileges. On whatever ground parental prayer for and with children is omitted, the neglect is grievous, and the consequences are frequently most injurious. Hereby formality, indifference, or hardened contempt of religion is generated in early life; and upon parents themselves, and upon their children, are visited in righteous retribution, the omission of an all important duty, and the misimprovement of a valuable privilege. Why should parents,—whether male or female,—be ashamed or reluctant to pray with their children? They bear their image—they are related to them by ties the most tender and powerful—they will live in their children afterwards, either in honour or infamy—and they must stand with them in the judgment. To neglect duty from a false principle of shame, is wrong in any case; but to neglect it in a case where all familiarity of intercourse is required, and

where religion should be exhibited as most honourable, is doubly culpable. It tends directly to lead the young to be ashamed of Christ and his cause—to refuse to confess him before men—and, in short, to live and die without God, and without hope in the world.

The promises to prayer are full and encouraging. To Christian parents and their seed they furnish the highest inducements to parental fidelity; and they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. “What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he should choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth.” “Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker. Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me.” “Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”\*

### SECT. III.—*The exercise of parental authority.*

The approving testimony which was given of Abraham represents him com-

\* Psal. xxv. 12, 13. Isa. xlv. 11. Jer. xxxiii. 3.



*manding* his children, and his household, to keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment. This evidently implies the interposal of authority. The patriarch diligently instructed his family ; and being a distinguished believer, prayer about their most important concerns would not be neglected. But he did not regard the performance of these duties as fulfilling the whole of his obligation to his household. He was called to govern as well as to instruct ; he had to guide and direct, as well as to present the domestic offering on the altar of prayer ; and the promised blessing came upon him, and his posterity, through the faithful and judicious employment of parental authority, equally as through the diligent use of other means entrusted to him, as the head of a household. The Christian parent has authority delegated to him by God, for the proper exercise of which he is deeply responsible. He is a king and a priest in his family ; and these combined offices require the exercise of authority for discharging aright their appropriate functions. It were easy to show that upon the wise government of the family depend, in a great measure, its order, comfort, and outward prosperity. Self-government is intimately associated with due regulation and control in the do-

mestic relations. The waywardness of childhood left unrestrained, the young will become the prey of their own impetuous passions; and before reason and conscience can assert their supremacy, evil habits are formed, and depraved inclinations ripen into maturity. Viewing the subject in a still higher aspect, we regard proper parental government as a divinely appointed means of spiritual benefit to a family. The command to which we have repeatedly adverted, is, to “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” In the original, the first word in the precept is taken from a root that signifies to *correct*, and it implies authoritative restraint, in instructing and directing the household in the path of duty.

The proper exercise of family government subserves the great design of leading children to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. It cannot, it is true, convert the soul to God; and the habit of subjection to parental authority superinduced, is different from the submission of the heart to the sceptre of Immanuel, and may exist entirely separate from it. Still it is a valuable means towards effecting this desirable end; and, in ordinary cases, the child who has become the dutiful subject of a well-or-

dered rule in his father's house, is thereby placed in more favourable circumstances to receive the yoke of Christ, than he who has been allowed, unrestrained by parental control, to follow the bent of his natural appetites and passions. To all who desire the spiritual welfare of their children, this is a subject of absorbing interest and importance. Observation daily shows us many buds of promise nipped in infancy, and blighted, through injudicious management,—by the absence of proper restraint, or the irregular exercise of parental authority. Eli's sin is recorded in fearful characters, as that of a good man who, by undue indulgence, brought ruin upon his family,—who honoured his sons rather than God,—who gently expostulated and reproved, when he ought to have impartially judged and severely punished. The parent's authority is delegated to him by God, to be exercised for his glory, as in his sight, and as one that must render an account. It should be uniformly employed with firmness and affection, and with the steadfast aim to promote the usefulness and felicity of the members of the household.

The first object of parental government should be to secure the *child's absolute and unreserved subjection*. Without this,

the bonds of authority will be relaxed; instructions that cross the natural inclination—and many of the highest and most salutary are of this character—will be rejected; and youth will become, in a great degree, the victim of its own waywardness and perversity. In this, as in other domestic duties, parents should begin early; and they should lay it down as an established principle, that the unreserved and ready obedience of their children should be held indispensable. Here many Christian parents are greatly in fault. They view children as not the proper subjects of restraint and discipline, till they are capable of exercising reason and reflection; and they permit their authority to be set at nought, and their commands to be gainsayed, under a foolish and improper idea that children, in early life, require indulgence rather than restraint. Both these assumptions are wrong; and the domestic government conducted upon such principles cannot fail to be productive of serious and lasting injury. Habits are formed in tender infancy; and experience has established the fact, that even in the first year or two of a child's existence, dispositions are contracted which frequently distinguish him in future life. Nowhere are we told in the Scriptures that restraint

or correction should be withheld from a child, for discovering an evil temper, or a perverse disposition, till it can reason and be sensible of moral distinctions. On the contrary, the whole current of Scripture testimony warrants a parent to restrain the earliest indications of depravity. Right reason calls him to take the case in hand, as soon as the twig may be bent to a proper direction; and to pre-occupy the soil of the infantile mind with the seeds of submission and virtue, before the tares that are indigenous shall have taken deep root, and sprung up to rank luxuriance. Infants may be trained to yield implicitly to the look and voice of the parent; and if we wish them to be afterwards in subjection in the family, or to grow up in obedience to Christ, we must labour to bring them up early to regard the parent's command as imperative, and parental authority as absolute and uncontrollable.

The want of this early and firm control is often followed by consequences the most injurious. Complaints of the insubordination of children when in more advanced youth, may be traced, in a thousand instances, to parental indulgence, or to relaxed and irregular domestic government. Children were permitted to indulge wayward dispositions in infancy, and to resist

parental authority with impunity in childhood, and the blame of their subsequent disobedience properly lies with the parents themselves.

The government of the household should be conducted with *affection combined with firmness*. It must be far removed from undue indulgence, and should be so directed as to manifest affectionate concern for the best interests of the household. It should be ordered so, that the exercise of natural affection will be controlled and directed by judicious regard to the child's benefit; and all selfishness and love of ease must be mortified. The Divine requirements are most explicit on this subject,—"He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chastiseth him betimes." "Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."\* Undue *severity* in parental government is as injurious as improper indulgence. Fathers are enjoined not "to provoke their children to anger, lest they be discouraged;" and the direction is repeated, in a connection that would seem to imply, that such provocation is

\* Proverbs xiii. 24; xxiii. 13, 14.

calculated to frustrate the great end of religious training.\*

Family government must, in the nature of the case, be *absolute and supreme*, and yet it ought *never to be capricious or despotic*. If parents rule with severity,—if they correct in passion, or to gratify temper,—if harshness characterizes their domestic government, the inevitable result will be, that their domestics will ascribe to religion a spirit severe and unsocial. They will learn to dislike its restraints, and when removed from the control of parental authority, to which they only yielded a reluctant submission, they will become more confirmed in disobedience and irreligion.

Parental government, we only wait further to remark, should be *uniform and impartial*. In both these respects, many Christian parents are greatly to blame. They begin well, but their progress is not uniform. At one time, they are strict to a fault, at another, they vibrate to the opposite extreme. What they forbid one day they allow the next; what calls forth punishment at one time, is permitted at another, without subjecting to reproof. There is no certainty in their administra-

\* Colossians iii. 21; Eph. vi. 4.

tion. They are fretful in their temper, and fluctuating in their disposition and judgment. Children will speedily notice this uncertainty in parental rule, and will readily learn to despise authority which is so capriciously exercised. This is an evil which should be carefully avoided. Having determined in their own minds what is right, parents should hold the reins of government with a steady hand. What they are, and what they require to-day, they must be, and require to-morrow. And throughout, in ordering, correcting, and rewarding, they should maintain an even and uniform tenor of conduct, discovering that they act on fixed principles, and that they have always before them the great ends for which they have been entrusted with parental authority.

Every thing resembling *partiality* in domestic rule, is, moreover, to be carefully shunned. There may be marked differences in the characters and dispositions of the members of a family; and a parent may find it impossible to regard them in every respect alike. Some children are gentle, affectionate, and obedient, while others are stubborn, ungainly, and perverse. So far as parental love consists in *complacency*, a father may love a dutiful rather than an undutiful child. This is



not, properly speaking, *partiality*: it arises from moral discrimination, and a parent cannot altogether avoid it, even if he would. But to indulge one child more than another—to punish one and exempt another—to be quick to discern a fault in one, while blind to the faults of another—this is partiality, which, wherever it is shown, will mar the beneficial designs of parental government. The sacred Scriptures exhibit in striking colours, the baleful effects of such misplaced affection in a family; and the character and conduct of Esau and Absalom were an impressive and fearful rebuke to the partiality of parents otherwise eminent for piety. Parental favouritism destroys domestic harmony, and inflicts a double, and often a lasting injury upon a family. It mortifies and prejudices the children who are overlooked; and it frequently perverts the objects of an unjust and misguided affection. In many instances, favourites, instead of repaying to their parents greater gratitude and respect, are the first to despise their authority; and they sometimes bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

The true model of parental rule, is the Divine government, as exercised towards the members of the peculiar family, that in

heaven and earth is named after Christ. The God of the families of Israel governs the household of faith in infinite wisdom and love,—consults their benefit in every act of his administration—and whether He corrects or rewards, aims continually at the present and future good of the heirs of salvation. Thus should parents conduct the government of their families;—so will their authority be sustained and respected,—a blessing from on high will accompany its exercise,—their commands will ensure a ready obedience, and the deportment of the household will attest the excellency of a faithful domestic administration.

SECT. IV.—*A holy and consistent example.*

The force of example is universally admitted, in subjects connected with mental and moral cultivation. Example is precept embodied in action; and while it shows the practicability of applying the lessons communicated, it exercises an attractive and subduing influence upon the subjects of instruction. Precept, it has been properly observed, directs, while example draws. On the article of moral and religious training, we have the highest authority for inculcating the importance of

example. The sacred volume frequently enjoins upon those who teach others, the necessity of having their own character and conduct a living commentary upon their instructions. This they are taught to consider a principal way of benefiting others, and as that without which their labour will be, in a great measure unavailing. Christians, in their different stations, are commanded to let their light shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven. Ministers of the word are exhorted to be examples to their flock,—and in various departments, superiors in gifts and office are instructed to maintain a conversation becoming the gospel, as a powerful means of leading their dependents and other inferiors to follow them, in all godliness and honesty.

Much of the instruction contained in the sacred oracles is, in fact, conveyed in the way of impressive example. The history and biography with which the Scriptures abound, are given in order to exhibit abstract and important truths in the living conduct. In every walk of duty, there are presented, in attractive and impressive narrative, examples for imitation, or courses of conduct to be avoided. Character, the proper fruits of principles, and the conse-

quences of different modes of action, are constantly presented in familiar instances. We are less informed what the persons brought under notice in the Bible said, or what instructions they communicated, than we are shown how they acted, what spirit they manifested, and what conduct they displayed. And what adds uncommon weight to this method of instruction, the Saviour himself has left us an "example that we should follow his steps." His principal design in coming into the world, it is true, was to finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. But still, having assumed our nature, and being in all things made like unto his brethren, he furnished a perfect model, to which his people are to seek complete conformity. The "mind which was in Christ Jesus," should also be in us; and we are enjoined to be "followers," or imitators "of God as dear children," and "to walk in love," "as Christ also loved us," and gave himself a ransom for us. Practical godliness is, in fact, just constant study and transcription of the example of Christ. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."\*

\* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

Thus all-important as the Scriptures represent the power of example, it is evidently of great importance to employ its influence in parental training. Children can understand the language of conduct, before they are capable of judging of the truth of abstract principles. They are the ready interpreters of a parent's looks and actions, and are proverbially quick-sighted to observe inconsistency in his conduct. The young are creatures of imitation; and parents, by their example, should aim habitually to draw their children to the admiration and practice of whatsoever is pure, and amiable, and excellent. The head of a household should be able to address his domestics, and his conduct should always say, "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ Jesus." The example of parents will teach, when words cannot; it will speak when they are absent, or when they have been removed by death; and it will either impede the whole work of instruction, or it will impart a mighty and salutary influence to all the lessons imparted to the household.

The exhibition of a harsh violent temper by a parent will naturally prejudice children against religion; and a worldly spirit, and formality displayed in connection with a religious profession, will generate like

dispositions among those who have the opportunity of frequently and closely observing them. It is fearful to contemplate even the possibility of a parent's sins being transcribed in his children; and yet, even among religious professors, it is but too apparent that such a case is by no means of rare occurrence. To this may be traced the acknowledged and lamentable fact, that the children of professors frequently discover less concern for religion, and display less of a devotional spirit than others; and in some instances, become utterly irreligious and profligate. Their parents laid the snares into which they have fallen. Parental example misled them to their ruin. The fruits of early instructions were thus blighted, and the exercises of religion were regarded as a mere formal and lifeless drudgery—the youthful heart rejoicing in emancipation from a service in which it felt no delight, and which a parent's conduct taught to regard as the service of an austere master. Professors of religion, by their example, often entail upon their children and domestics, formality, irreligion, and infidelity; they confirm them in their natural aversion to spiritual religion, and are instrumental in their eternal condemnation. “The children of the kingdom are cast out,”

while their rejection may frequently be ascribed to the effect of example that never presented religion under an inviting or attractive aspect, but always in a manner repulsive and forbidding.

Parents should be sensible that their children and domestics will form their idea of religion, from observing *their* spirit and conduct. Their manner at the domestic altar, and their deportment in the family, will be the model and measure, which they will copy in the closet and in society. They should, therefore, endeavour to show, by a consistent holy example, that with them religion is everything; and they should aim to present the service of God to their household under an attractive and alluring aspect. Their whole conversation should constantly teach that “wisdom’s ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

The household will have numerous opportunities of observing the parent and the master in diversified circumstances and relations—in prosperity and adversity—in health and sickness—in the solemn services of the sanctuary and of the household, and in the business of life—amidst reproach and opposition of enemies, in life and death. In all these conditions, he should exemplify and reflect the mind of Christ, in mild and

alluring lustre. His path should be that of the just, which "shineth more and more to the perfect day." His conversation should be in heaven, and his life should declare to all the excellency of the believer's character, and the pre-eminence of his portion. The examples of the saints in all ages have been of unspeakable benefit to the family and the church. They have been a principal means of attracting others to the standard of truth—and the blessing of Abraham has descended upon children and children's children, in the way of following holy parental example.

SECT. V.—*Parental duties require for their performance much self-denial, watchfulness, and circumspection.*

The first lesson of genuine discipleship is to deny one's self. Indispensable in all parts of a Christian profession, self-denial is peculiarly required for the proper discharge of parental obligation. The business of domestic training demands at every step, pains-taking, diligence, and devotedness. Parents know how to deny themselves when the temporal condition of their children is concerned. They will submit to toil, and cheerfully undergo privation and



suffering, in providing for the health and comfort of their offspring. And if a child is under disease or exposed to danger, parents will part with ease, and sacrifice their own health and comfort, to effect its restoration or rescue. The common sentiment of society concurs with Divine revelation, in inculcating the necessity of such a concern and provision. "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."\* While parents deny themselves to promote the temporal welfare of their children, it is melancholy to reflect, that comparatively few, even of those who make a religious profession, practise self-denial, to secure their spiritual and immortal interests. Some, through the indulgence of criminal ease, suffer the proper season to pass, without sowing the seeds of mental and moral culture. Others indulge in the pleasures of society, or are devoted to business, so that their attention to the training of their children is irregular and fitful;—while a large number consider it sufficient to bring the young to be present at religious duties, or occasionally to address to them formal instructions, without any attempt to expand

\* 1 Timothy v. 8.

the intellect, or to impress the heart. It must be apparent that no salutary fruits can result from such imperfect training. Patience, consideration, and habitual attention are requisite in dealing with the young; and it has been justly remarked, that to adapt instructions to the capacity of the youthful mind, is an attempt worthy of a philosopher. Much more is the wisdom that descends from above needed, when the conscience is to be awakened and pacified—the understanding enlightened in Divine things, and the heart impressed.

Parents should early teach children lessons of self-denial, by displaying it in themselves, in attending to their instruction, and in their concern for their spiritual welfare. Of Abraham it is testified, that he sojourned in Canaan, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the “heirs with him of the same promise.” Here was self-denial strikingly exemplified. The patriarch asserted no claim to the possession of a land secured to him by federal donation; he bought no fields, built no houses, and took no part in the politics of the country. He journeyed up and down in the land of promise, as in a strange country, subjected to numerous privations and inconveniences. All his concern was to

appropriate the promise for himself, and to instruct his son and grandson in the excellency of the promised inheritance, and to train them for its enjoyment. Christian parents, to be successful, must thus be denied to themselves and to the world. They must be denied to every selfish feeling respecting their children. Called as they are to nurse them for God, and for heaven, they should be willing to relinquish ease, and to forego all friendships, connexions, and prospects, that would injure their spiritual interests.

Holy vigilance and circumspection are required in directing and giving effect to parental instruction and government. Parents need diligently to watch over their own spirits, as they should carefully and faithfully watch over their children. They are their natural guardians; and they cannot be instrumental in preserving them from temptation and danger, or in leading them in the way they should go, without maintaining about them unceasing vigilance. While men sleep, the enemy sows tares; and many a parent has been left to mourn, in bitter and lasting regret, the heart of a child luxuriating in destructive principles and perverted passions,—the sad consequence of his own neglect and unwatchfulness. Those who would enjoy

the blessing from on high upon their household, must watch continually,—and all their conduct in their family should be characterized by holy circumspection. The minds of children are more susceptible of right impressions at one time than at another. Circumstances are constantly occurring, which, by parental vigilance, may be turned to profitable account; and the young are exposed to innumerable dangers, from which parental circumspection is required to protect them. Thousands have their principles poisoned, and their minds perverted, because their parents neglected to exercise this vigilance. Their intentions about their children were good. They instructed them in divine things, and they were not altogether neglectful of prayer in their behalf. But they left them, in a great measure, to follow the bent of their own inclination. They were not careful to guard them against evil company, and to protect them against the vanities of the world—and their instructions were ill-timed and irregular. The melancholy consequences are easily told. Children speedily learn to cast off parental authority. They become an early prey to evils against which parental vigilance might have guarded them. They go with the multitude in the ways of folly, and their hope-

less destruction reveals the fearful doom to which the neglect or the culpable indulgence of parents conducted them.

Without a measure of holy vigilance and Christian circumspection, the duties of the household can never be rightly performed. Parents should walk in a perfect way within their house. To them the direction applies with peculiar emphasis—“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”\* The enemy of souls well knows when to seize the opportunity of marring Christian instruction, and of thwarting parental training. Parents must watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. They must guard their precious charge from the snares of the wicked one; and in discharging every duty which they owe to their household, they must aim to be circumspect, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

Yet, with the most vigilant concern, they should constantly cherish distrust of their own powers, and should seek for themselves and their children the guidance of the wisdom that descends from above. Of themselves they are wholly insufficient

\* 1 Pet. v. 8.

for the proper performance of any of their important duties. Even in relation to the things of the present life, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps; and parental training will assuredly fail of realizing any good fruits, if those who conduct it lean upon their own understanding. There is all encouragement, however, in bringing children to Christ, and in depending on him who can own and bless the feeblest instrumentality. Let parents learn daily to place their children under the guardianship of the Shepherd and Watchman of Israel. Let them look to him for direction and strength in relation to their own duty, and for protection and blessing to their children. He is faithful who has promised. He will remember mercy to them that fear him and keep his commandments through many generations. "The children of his servants shall continue and their seed shall be established before him."\*

\* Psalm cii. 28.

## CHAPTER III.

BLESSINGS CONSEQUENT UPON PARENTAL  
FIDELITY.

IN keeping God's commandments there is a great reward. Arduous and solemn as are the duties of the parental relation, the end to be accomplished is most valuable, and the reward is beyond expression excellent and glorious. The intimations and promises of the Divine word are full and most encouraging on this subject. A child trained in the way he should go, it is declared, shall not, when he is old, depart from it. Upon Israelitish parents it was enjoined concerning God's precepts,—“Ye shall teach them your children,” and the rewards of obedience are proposed in the numerous cheering promises that follow, Deut. xi. 19—21, 26. In terms at once forcible and affecting, God's earnest concern about parental fidelity is displayed, in connexion with blessings to be conferred upon parents and their children through succeeding generations. “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my command-

ments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.”\*

The testimony given to Abraham to which we have frequently referred is singularly expressive. It proclaims an established Divine constitution, and intimates the way in which new covenant blessings flow to the families of mankind. The patriarch is commended for parental fidelity,—he is presented as a bright example of one who faithfully instructed and wisely governed his household; the design and salutary effects of domestic training are declared, and it is added,—“that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” That which the Lord had spoken of Abraham, comprehends all that he had announced to him in the way of promise, in the federal transactions between Him and the patriarch. It respected the gracious relations in which Jehovah proposed himself to his servant, and the various blessings that were guaranteed to him and his seed. Numerous, comprehensive, and precious as these were, they chiefly respected *three* great privileges, a numerous seed,—Christ the Saviour to come,—and Canaan, the land of

\* Deut. v. 29.



promise. The covenant had unquestionably a primary reference to spiritual blessings. The seed, numberless as the sand, and as the stars of heaven, was the redeemed multitude,—a number which no man can number, destined to shine as lights in the firmament of glory. The seed in whom the nations of the earth were to be blessed, was Christ, the author and fountain of blessing. And Canaan, the glory of all lands, was a suitable emblem of heaven,—the better country which all the patriarchs desired,—the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Subordinate to these leading promises, and inseparably connected with them, were those which respected the outward condition of Abraham's posterity, and the preservation, provision, and comfort of the household of faith. It was declared that his seed should possess the gate of their enemies,—that they were blessed who blessed him, and cursed who cursed him,—that he should have ample and comfortable provision—enjoy deliverance from all his foes—and that through him the nations of the earth should be made partakers of innumerable blessings. In the passage to which we have referred, it is plainly intimated that all these blessings are enjoyed

in the way of parental faithfulness. This is a divine constitution,—and whatever view we take of the covenant, its precious benefits and enlarged privileges are communicated in connexion with parental devotedness and domestic piety. In the gracious arrangements of the Mediator, this is ordained a channel through which the blessing flows to the church and the world. By means of domestic piety, true religion has been preserved and continued in the earth; and thus the distinguished advantages conferred upon the seed of promise by the Abrahamic covenant are to be obtained.

Before pointing out the extent and fullness of the blessing, we may briefly notice the relations which Abraham sustained to future generations, as discovering the nature of their interest in those things, of which God had spoken to him in promise. The patriarch may be regarded in a *three-fold* aspect, and the promise is, we conceive, addressed to him in each of these relations.

First, *As the individual head of a family.* This is clearly the primary view in the passage. God had called him when in youth and alone, from Ur of the Chaldees, and had blessed him. The revelation and the promise that were graciously

given him were adapted to him as an individual and to the peculiar trials to which he was exposed. "*I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*" As his defence against all dangers, God condescended to propose himself as his servant's shield, and to compensate him for all that he was required to relinquish, in forsaking his father's house and his native country, he offered himself as his great reward,—the portion of his cup and his inheritance for ever. A subsequent Divine manifestation contemplated the patriarch in a family-relation, and the promise was suited to his condition: "*I will be a God unto thee, and thy seed after thee.*"\* The same interest in the benefits of the covenant was guarantied to his descendants, as was secured to himself; and Isaac and Jacob were "heirs with him of the same promise," as they were trained by him to keep the way of the Lord. That which God had spoken to Abraham in Mesopotamia, in the plains of Mamre, and as he sojourned in Canaan, came upon him and his descendants, but still in the way of parental piety. The Abrahamic covenant was not designed to be of temporary duration. The Spirit expressly testifies, that

\* Genesis xvii. 7.

being before “confirmed of God in Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after could not disannul it, that it should make the promise of none effect;”\* and the purpose of its continuance is declared,—“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.”† The “father of the faithful” may be regarded, in the federal transaction, as the representative of the heads of Christian families, and the same connexion between duty and privilege is established with them as with him. The God of the families of Israel still speaks to Christian parents. They should command their children and their household after them to know the Lord. The blessing of Abraham cannot otherwise be fully realized by the family; and whether the promise respects their outward provision and deliverance, or their spiritual benefit, thus only may they expect to enjoy abundantly the promised inheritance. In all ages, parental fidelity has been singularly rewarded. The comprehensive promise to Abraham has found its application to domestic associations, and families have been prospered and blessed, according as their natural guardians have led them in the way

\* Gal. iii. 17.

† Ver. 4.

of the Lord, and as children and domestics have followed faithful instructions.

Secondly, The promise was addressed to Abraham, *as connected with the Church of Christ*, and as, though in a subordinate sense, federally its head.

Abraham is said, by way of peculiar distinction, to be “the father of them that believe,” whether they be Jews or Gentiles. The covenant with the patriarch is still the great charter of the visible church. God that dwells in Zion is styled the “God of Abraham;” and the church, as founded upon the covenant which was made known in Ur of the Chaldees, is compared to an “olive-tree,” spreading verdant and fruitful.\* The natural branches are broken off, in the penal rejection of the Jewish people; Gentile believers are grafted in—and when the mysterious purpose of Heaven in Israel’s dispersion shall have been fulfilled, the natural branches shall be restored, and shall yet partake in the fatness and fertility of their own olive-tree. The olive-tree is the same in all ages; and when all its lovely branches, natural and engrafted, are collected together, each in its place, it shall appear most beautiful, the

\* Romans xi. 17—25.

joy of all the earth, and shall shake with prosperous fruit, like the trees of Lebanon. The enjoyment of privilege is connected with duty; and the church collective, or its constituent parts, may only expect the pleasant heritage in the way of holy obedience. Thus are churches and congregations blessed, and thus have they real prosperity. Families are the nurseries of the church; and not only do they furnish supplies to its membership from age to age, but upon their spiritual condition, it greatly depends whether congregations are as gardens, which the Lord has blessed, thickly planted with the trees of righteousness, or are blighted and unfruitful. The vow of the church to perpetuate the remembrance of her exalted Head has respect to domestic society. "Instead of the fathers, thou mayest take the children, and make them noble princes in all the earth."\*

The loveliest and most devoted sons of Zion have generally been those who enjoyed faithful instruction, and who were early dedicated, and trained in the family to the service of God. Decay of religion in the church is almost always associated with the neglect of domestic training; and

\* Psa. xlv. 16.

the absence of holy zeal and spirituality is the mournful evidence that family religion has been neglected. Revival in the church must begin in the family, and the maintenance of a faithful and unimpaired testimony, and its transmission to succeeding generations, are connected with the instruction of children in the way of holy obedience. Hence, when the Psalmist earnestly pleads for the revival of "religion, he seeks it as associated with early piety ; " O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."\* The testimony established in Jacob, and the law appointed in Israel, are transmitted by means of the divine command laid upon fathers, " that they should make them known to their children."† And times of covenanting and of manifold blessing to the church are, in the announcements of inspired prophecy, connected with the effusion of the Spirit upon the seed and offspring of Jacob. This forms a main ground of our hope concerning the future revival and prosperity of the Protestant church. Notwithstanding the decay of first love, and the neglect of first works, mournfully apparent in many quarters, family religion is still maintained in various places, and

\* Psa. xc. 14.

† Psa. lxxviii. 5.

has to some considerable extent been of late revived; and pious parents are assiduous in training their children in the way of God's commandments, making known to them Israel's testimony and law. Such efforts can never be in vain. In the dark times that are now passing over the church, these are sowing those seeds of truth and godliness, that contain the germ of valuable principle and practical piety, and that are destined in a future day, to bud and blossom, and fill the face of the world with fruit.

Thirdly, *The welfare and prosperity of nations were promised in the same connexion.* To Abraham it was said, when the covenant was renewed, and his name was changed, "A father of many nations have I made thee." "I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee,"\* and once and again was it declared to him, that in him and his seed, the nations of the earth should be blessed.† He who was addressed as the father of a family, and as standing in a peculiar relation to the church, is regarded also as a ruler or civil head—the father of nations, the progenitor of kings. To him in this capacity is the promise spoken, and through

\* Gen. xvii. 5, 6.

† Gen. xii. 3; xviii. 18; xxii. 18.



him it is addressed to civil rulers in their official character, and to nations as such, until the end of time. The obligation rests upon them equally, as upon individuals, to *command* the rising generation to know the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment. Civil rulers are to their subjects, in some respects, as parents to their families; and a nation, as a moral person, having a continued identity, is prospered or punished according as true religion is promoted, or as the moral and religious interests of the young are neglected. Families are the schools of virtue for the citizens of the nation. Parental fidelity and domestic piety are at once the honour and safeguards of a state; and from these peaceful retired sources, issue many of those streams that purify and fertilize a land.

The state of domestic society will, almost universally be found characteristic of the national condition; and the prospects of the commonwealth, whether for blessing or judgment, may be not obscurely discerned from the family. At the present eventful crisis, the importance of this subject can scarcely be estimated. Throughout Christian nations, there has been a widespread and general neglect of true religion on the part of rulers; and faithful parental

training and domestic piety are mournfully decayed, or in many cases unknown. The baleful consequences are seen in extended misery, profligacy, and popular commotion, and in impending judgments which threaten national destruction. The ruin of the Israelitish commonwealth may easily be traced to the corruption of the family,—and to Jewish parents and rulers disobeying those precepts which required them to promote the truth, and to train the rising generation in the fear of the Lord. The present state of modern nations, and the evils that threaten them, may plainly be ascribed, in a great measure, to a similar cause. Domestic prayer and instruction, and godly parental example are almost unknown in France and in some other continental countries; therefore does immorality abound, and the foundations of society are gone out of their course. England, with all her advantages, is evidently in a state of moral decay,—and judgments upon the nation for abused mercies and privileges are to be apprehended. If there is one cause more than another, that has contributed to produce this alarming state of things, it is the neglect of early religious training. The evil is manifest,—and it deeply concerns those who perceive and lament it, to attempt its removal. National

blessings are only to be enjoyed in the way of national obedience ; and the increase of domestic piety would diffuse countless benefits throughout the community. It will be the means of preparing a race of virtuous, disinterested, and public-spirited citizens ; it will check the evil in its bud, cast the purifying salt into the fountain, and draw down the blessing from heaven upon the national society and its measures. In no other way will a state enjoy real and permanent prosperity. The promises to Abraham, the father of many nations, implying particular providential protection, power and prosperity, will only come upon nations, when parents command their children to keep the way of the Lord, and when rulers exercise their authority in training a people to God's service.

However interesting and instructive are the two last mentioned aspects of the application of the promise, for the present we pass them by, and confine our attention to the blessing enjoyed by children, as the fruit and reward of parental fidelity. What God had spoken, was brought upon Abraham, when the blessing was conferred upon his seed. While parents may expect, and shall assuredly obtain good to themselves, in the faithful performance of duty, they are chiefly to look for a full reward

in the blessing upon children and on children's children, in their usefulness in this world, and in their felicity in the world to come. They live and labour for posterity. Enough for them if their work is owned by Him who sits upon the throne, and through the Divine acceptance of their designs and labours, if it is said,—“It shall be done in thy son's days.”—We observe concerning this blessing,

SECT. I.—*The conversion of children is frequently the fruit of faithful parental instruction.*

A principal object of a Christian parent's concern, we have seen, is the spiritual welfare of the children that God has given him; and their early conversion to God, as the first great step in securing it, must appear to him a matter of no ordinary importance. The conversion of the soul is its passing from death unto life—the entrance upon the path that leads to glory—the great change which contains the germ of all that is excellent in character, and carries with it the guaranty of safety and ultimate felicity. Thus momentous and important being the sinner's conversion, the Christian parent cannot but earnestly seek it for his children. All his first duties

towards his household will have this as a principal design. Their deliverance from the wrath to come—their introduction into the kingdom of Christ, will be a primary object in the early surrender which he makes of them to God, and in his daily prayers, instructions and example. The Christian parent has frequently brought his child to Jesus, and his most solemn desires have been presented to God that he might be numbered among the lambs of his flock.

The compassionate Saviour often grants to his people in this matter the desire of their hearts. What they commit to him in believing dedication, he receives, and will keep till the day of his future coming and glory. The promise is to believers and their children; and the terms in which it is expressed, all-comprehensive and gracious, encourage parents to expect the blessing which they earnestly seek for their children. "*I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed.*"—The same covenant offer which forms their warrant to plead for mercy, and to expect it with humble confidence for themselves, is presented in relation to their offspring. When there is eminent parental piety, and faithful training, children frequently afford hopeful evidences of early conversion. God graciously gives to godly parents the soul of a child as a prey, in

answer to their fervent prayers : he confers upon them thus, a first instalment of their "*wages,*" for nursing their offspring for him.

We do not deny that the God of the families of Israel acts as a Sovereign here, as he does in the ministry of the word, and in the government of providence ; nor would we absolutely affirm that children never depart from the way in which godly parents have trained them with all fidelity. But we are warranted, from the whole testimony of Scripture, as well as from the observation of Divine providence on the subject, to declare that there is a special blessing annexed to parental faithfulness in the education of children. In cases of failure, some neglect on the part of parents is frequently observable. Undue indulgence on the one hand, or harshness and severity on the other ; one parent thwarting the plans of the other,—and irregularity in parental training ; or inconsistency in conduct, will mar the best instructions, and render designs for the benefit of children abortive. Yet even where success follows, no ground is left to any to glory. It is sovereign grace alone that disposes and enables to be faithful in domestic as in other duties ; and they who received that for which they travailed as in birth—

their children's souls as a prey, will be most ready to disclaim all idea of merit,—and to exclaim—“Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory, even for thy truth and mercy's sake.”

The conversion and early piety of children is an object worthy of the earnest desires and devoted painstaking of parents. There seems no reason to doubt the justness of the sentiment of a valuable expositor,\* that where the faithful ministrations of the word are enjoyed, the conversion of the young may, in most cases, be traced to parental dedications and prayers, and their future edifications to the ministry of the gospel. Thus has it been in the history of many who have obtained a good report in the church; and the instances of Timothy, and Baxter, and Doddridge, and many others, whose names are in the book of life, furnish a confirmation of the statement. If this view be correct, with what importance does it invest parental cultivation! How eminent and glorious the reward! The soul of a child given to the prayers and tears of a parent; an immortal spirit delivered from death, and in the dawn of its existence instamped with the Divine image, or imbued with principles

\* Scott.

that shall expand to glory, honour, and immortality ! How should parents aim at being instrumental in effecting this great change ; and beginning early, how should they seek with all importunity, and labour with all diligence, that Christ may be formed in the hearts of their children, the hope of glory ! The happy issue will abundantly repay all their toil ; and the joy of children's conversion will far transcend the joy that swelled the bosom when they were born into the world.

SECT. II. — *A godly race is thus perpetuated.*

The promise respecting the continuance of piety among the descendants of faithful parents, was repeatedly, and under a great variety of forms, held out to God's ancient people ; and being strictly moral, Christian parents are warranted likewise, to claim it as a part of their gracious heritage. They are commanded to instruct their children in God's testimony and law. The result of obedience is that posterity will walk in the way of Divine precepts. The generation to come is brought to know them, even the children that are born,—“ that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his com-



mandments.” The covenant with David secured spiritual blessings to posterity, in connexion with the faithful performance of parental vows,—“If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.”\* And this being an exhibition of the covenant of grace, the promise pertains to all believers, and is realized in the way of parental piety and fidelity.

The heads of Christian families ought to be sensible that they live not to themselves. Nursing those who are the future hopes of the church, and training them for the service of God and the enjoyment of heaven, they become the benefactors, not only of their own country and time, but also of coming ages. One generation rises to praise God’s works to another, and to declare his mighty acts.† God has established a connexion between parental fidelity and extensive blessing to the church; and it were not going too far to affirm, that the piety of the household is a means more honoured than any other, for raising up, and continuing on the earth a holy race. We deny not that God, in his sovereign grace, brings others to inherit the blessing,

\* Psa. cxxxii. 12.

† Psa. cxlv. 4.

and that even from families where neither precept nor example was on the side of true religion. He is found of them that sought him not. They "come from the east and west," and "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven," while the "children of the kingdom" are "cast out." The young of a neglected and degraded population, collected in the Sabbath school, or arrested by the aggressive ministrations of devoted men, — and the youthful converts from heathenism frequently present examples of shining piety; and thus at times is the church revived and her membership renewed.

But whatever accessions may occasionally arise from this source, and however great may be the future increase, when the isles shall wait for the Redeemer's law, the fulness of Jew and Gentile shall be brought in, — the spiritual seed of the Church, in ordinary cases, arises from parental piety and faithfulness. Children are dedicated to God, — they are trained early to the Redeemer's service; the seeds of Divine truth, which the hands of godly parents sow, are watered by their prayers and tears; and a holy example continually exhibited before their eyes, attracts them to wisdom's ways. The blessing from

on high owns this instrumentality, and renders it effectual. Children trained to regard the Redeemer's service as honourable and delightful, emulate and sometimes excel the piety of their parents. Their children enjoy similar advantages; the blessing not only extends from one generation to another, but it enlarges and multiplies as it descends; and long after the humble and devoted parent has rested from all earthly labours, the fruits of his instructions and example are reaped by the church and the nation.

The view of the Divine character, and the encouraging promise presented in the second commandment, exhibit the rewards of parental obedience. God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation; while to show that he has more pleasure in blessing than in punishing, and especially to declare the blessings that flow to posterity through the practical piety of parents, he is represented as "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments." A judicious and pleasing writer has justly observed, in reference to this part of the Divine dispensation,—“A good man not only leaveth an inheritance to his children's children, but to the most distant period, the influence of

his piety, and of the care of that God whom he worshipped as his God, and the God of his seed, may be traced. It is like the root of the tree which gives life and beauty to every thing that sprouts from it however remote, or the fountain which sends the salutary influence of its waters to the farthest extent of its course. We are told that when Gideon was dead, the Israelites showed no kindness to his house, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel; but while public benefactors are forgotten, and the children of the good are often neglected, and even oppressed by those whom their fathers served, the precious ointment of the Almighty's blessing not only refreshes the head of a good man, but descends to the skirts of his garments, and is felt by his latest posterity."\*

Sometimes in the same family, distinguished piety continues to flourish through a number of succeeding generations. The "unfeigned faith" that characterized the youthful Timothy, had dwelt before in his "grandmother Lois, and in his mother Eunice;"† and was at once the fruit and the reward of the devotedness of these

\* Belfrage's Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, p. 224.

† 2 Tim. i. 5.

eminent females. The descendants of those who have witnessed a good confession for Christ, frequently form the preserving and purifying salt of a country for ages; and the testimony of the church is upheld, and her purity maintained by the posterity of godly men, who accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than all earthly treasures. Sometimes this reward of parental piety is immediate, and sometimes more remote. It is related of Dr. Milne, the excellent Chinese missionary, that, on the last day of his life, he was overheard by a person who stole softly to his bed, ejaculating, —“Lord, grant that my children may arise, and fill their father’s place.” The prayer of the dying servant of God was heard and answered,—for although he left to his children no earthly inheritance, God put it into the heart of a benevolent individual in the East, to send them to Scotland to be educated with his own children, and after a distinguished course at the University, they have tendered their services as missionaries to the heathen, in the land where a parent laboured and died.

Christian parents should consider themselves thus placed in a position honourable and highly important. On the faithful performance of the duties towards their children, to which their vows and affec-

tions should constantly prompt them, depends in a great measure, the perpetuation of the seed of the righteous in the earth : and on their instrumentality, it rests, whether their offspring are to be numbered among those who are to the Lord a praise and a name in the world, and who are accounted his “peculiar treasure,” or to have their place with those children of the kingdom who are doomed to final rejection. Let them lay to heart their obligation, and contribute their influence, that a holy race may be continued. Thus shall their children, and children’s children dwell in the land that God promised to their fathers—they shall become the first fruits of a harvest of blessing—and ages to come shall reap the multiplied benefits that result from parental godliness. “The seed of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.” \*

*SECT. III.—Posterity often become eminently useful, and are peculiarly blessed in their lot and labours.*

The children of faithful parents not only become frequently the subjects of con-

\* Psalm xxxvii. 28, 29.

verting grace, and a godly seed is continued; but they are rendered eminently useful to others. A secret blessing is connected with early dedication and religious training. Blessed themselves, the children of pious parents become a blessing to those with whom they are connected; and while the church enjoys the benefits of their consecrated zeal, even the irreligious of the world are constrained at times to behold and acknowledge the excellency of their character, and the peculiar favour with which they are encompassed. A selfish and unnatural kinsman was compelled to testify of Jacob, "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake."\* The house of Potiphar was blessed for Joseph's sake, and even in prison when the word of the Lord was sent, and tried him, he obtained favour with men because the Lord was with him. Who have been the most eminently useful individuals in every age? Who are they who have advanced the truth, benefitted the church, and performed services of the most profitable and enduring character? With few exceptions, they have been the children or descendants of godly parents. The Scriptures record the character and labours of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and

\* Genesis xxx. 27.

John the Baptist, and Timothy: they declare their distinguished usefulness, and distinctly connect it with parental devotedness. The annals of the church, since the canon of inspiration was closed, exhibit a similar connexion. Some of the most illustrious reformers—the worthies of Scotland—and those whose writings have been signally blessed to the church, owed much of their usefulness to the prayers and examples of parents who had devoted them to God, and who preferred Zion's good to their chief earthly joy. The mother of the late distinguished historian of Knox and Melville, after accompanying her son some part of the way, when he was about to enter the university, kneeled with him by the way side, and commended him to the protection and blessing of the God of Jacob. This was but a single expression of the pious concern which a godly mother had all along cherished about him; and it is impossible to say how much of his future eminent usefulness in the church is to be ascribed to the instrumentality of maternal piety.\*

It is matter of painful observation, that many of the young live only to themselves. They are trained for the world, and they follow the path of pleasure, or profit, or

\* See *Life of Dr. McCrie*, by his son.



ambition. Though acquainted with the principles of religion, they make no religious profession; or if, in compliance with custom or the solicitation of friends, they enter the fellowship of the church, they become unfruitful professors, and instead of exercising an influence to win others to the ways of wisdom, their character and conduct operate as an obstacle and stumbling-block. Through them, the ways of religion are evil spoken of, and the name of Christ is reproached. In a great many instances, the young who act thus, are the children of parents who are themselves formalists or at ease in Zion; whose example was a constant contradiction to their instructions, and who, unmindful of their solemn vows, nursed their offspring for themselves and for the world, rather than for God. On the other hand, there are some of the youth of the church, who, from early life, give evidence of a distinguished devoted spirit, and are singularly useful in their day. They engage early in the service of religion; the dew of their youth is given to God; they consecrate their talents to the Master whom they love, and, whatever their hand finds to do, they do it with their might. They live not to themselves, but to Him who died and rose again. They become benefactors to the world,

and through them the church is increased, edified, and refreshed. They are the sons that “grow up in youth as plants,” and “daughters,” that are as “corner-stones,” “polished after the similitude of a palace.”\* Whence arises this remarkable difference? It is owing to the blessing that rests upon those who command their children and household to know the Lord—but which is denied to others. What they themselves earnestly desire to do for the house of the Lord, is often done by their children; and what they are incompetent to effect, the little ones whom they nursed for God, are afterwards qualified and honoured to perform. Parental dedication is accepted, and parents enjoy a double honour, in the object of their affections being the selected instruments for building up the sanctuary, and diffusing the savour of the Redeemer’s name throughout the earth.

Designed for usefulness in the church, the children of godly parents are blessed in their persons. They are preserved in life, and by strange and gracious providences, obtain the qualifications that fit them for their work, and are conducted forward to their appointed sphere of labour.

\* Ps. cxliv. 12.

Amidst dangers they are kept—through temptations they are led in safety—and difficulties that seemed insurmountable are removed. With fewer natural advantages than are enjoyed by others—and, it may be, even without any mental superiority, they are rendered polished shafts in the Divine quiver, and become the instruments of accomplishing works of extensive and lasting benefit in their generation. Even when parents are gone, the Lord takes them up. The blessing of parental prayers and dedications rests upon them, when the breasts that nursed them, and the arms that fondled them, are laid in the grave. They are preserved, provided for, and prospered. A special gracious providence is round about their paths, and their footsteps are ordered aright. A blessing descends too on the works of their hands. Satisfied early with God's mercy, and adorned with the beauty of the Lord, their labour of love is owned and accepted; and the work of their hands is established.\* While others of more eminent talent are rejected, and their works, although commanding human applause, are accounted as nothing, the prayerful efforts of humble and devoted servants contribute greatly to advance the Divine glory in the earth.

\* Psa. xc. 14, 16, 17.

Of those public servants of God, whose works praise them in the gates, and who speak by their labours when they are dead, not a few have been the children of godly parents; and they themselves have been ever ready to acknowledge with gratitude, that they inherited an unspeakable blessing from parental prayers and example, and that hence too they derived much of their public usefulness. Incalculable is the good which a single individual may thus be the means of conferring upon society. While he lives, it will issue forth, like a purifying and refreshing stream. It will continue to flow on while he is gone, and for ages to come, it will go forward in the diffusive blessings of a high and holy benevolence. Christian parents standing at the fountain-head of these healing waters should feel their solemn responsibility, and as the dispensers of blessings to the world, they should consider it alike their honour and their duty, to engage their children in a service that brings with it its own reward, and that is doubly blessed, blessing them that labour, and those who enjoy the fruit of their labours.

SECT. IV.—*The children of pious parents that are led astray, are thus sometimes restrained and recovered.*

The fruits of parental instruction do not always come to maturity in a sudden. As with other labourers in the Redeemer's vineyard, parents are required to sow in hope, and sometimes to wait, amidst disappointments and trials, the expected harvest. To show the power of innate depravity, to evince the weakness of all instrumentality, and to stir up parents to a constant sense of the necessity of Divine influence, the children even of godly parents sometimes give painful evidences that they are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and that they despise all good instruction. Such instances should incite to greater diligence, and lead to more fervent prayer and supplication. They should induce parents to consider seriously the manner in which they have discharged their obligations to their offspring, and speedily to rectify whatever is amiss,—but they should not cause them to sink down in discouragement, or to relinquish their work in despair. The instances are not few in which the conversion of children takes place, after a time of wandering, as

the fruit of the seed that had been previously sown by parental hands, and watered by parental tears. Christian parents, it is true, should never rest satisfied with distant prospects of future piety in their children. The spiritual interests of those whom God has given them are too momentous and absorbing to be left to uncertainty,—and they should continue to travail as in birth till they have some comfortable evidence, that the objects of their tender solicitude have been plucked as brands out of the burning, and have been numbered in the family of heaven. But while the blessing desired may be delayed, the hope of future fruits of their labour should raise them above discouragements. God is not unfaithful to forget a “work of faith and labour of love,” however weak may be the instrument that performs it, however lengthened may be the period of hope deferred. The prayers and counsels of godly parents are often a check to thoughtless and wayward children. Even in the season of folly, they are thereby held back, as by an unseen hand, from courses that would harden them for ever, or would lay a gravestone upon their future repentance. Augustine was reclaimed from error and profligacy, and became a burning and shining light in the

church, as the fruit of the prayerful and anxious concern of an eminently pious mother. The reproof tendered to her by a Christian minister, when she gave way to despair, in the prospect of her son being lost, may still supply encouragement to parents to labour and hope to the end. "Woman," said he, "it is impossible that a child of so many prayers and tears should be lost."

Nor are the children for whom many believing prayers and tears are offered, often left to wander in sin unchecked, or given over to final impenitency. When early instructions appear unavailing, subsequent amendment sometimes gives evidence that backslidings have been healed, and parents while they live are called to rejoice over children that appeared lost being found again, and over those that were dead being made alive. And even should this joyful discovery not be made to them in time, the tidings of their children's conversion may be carried to them in glory; and their felicity will be enhanced, as they join the angelic choir in rejoicing over a repenting sinner, when that restored one is the child for whom they prayed,—and for whose welfare in life and death they were intensely concerned.

SECT. V.—*The joint participation by parents and children of heavenly glory is a last and crowning blessing, consequent upon parental piety and faithfulness.*

Heavenly felicity is enhanced by being social, and by its unfading and inconceivable pleasures being shared in a state of holy and exalted fellowship and communion. The saints sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Sometimes godly parents are consoled under the bereavement of children, by the evidences of their early piety, and by the thought that, as a part of themselves, they have gone before to take possession of the heavenly inheritance. In their translation, they receive an earnest of future bliss,—and like a good man,\* on the death of a promising child, they can rejoice in trouble, in the anticipation that their own flesh and blood will be among the first to welcome them to glory. Trying to the hearts of Christian parents as may be the death of their children, when it is accompanied by manifestations of youthful piety, it should be taken as itself a high reward of faithful



parental instruction. The dedication that was early made, is thus seen to be accepted,—the Redeemer, to whom little children were brought, only asserts the claim to his own, and removes his lambs to his immediate presence in the heavenly fold. The course of tuition for an heir of glory is completed under parental instrumentality. A lovely flower which had just begun to bloom is transplanted, to flourish for ever in the paradise of God. The child of a household is removed from a father's or a mother's embraces, to become an attendant in the palace of the King of glory. What higher approval could there possibly be, of the instrumentality employed in his education? What more distinguished honour could be conferred upon a family? Well might the devoted Elliot—the missionary to the North American Indians say, when he spoke of the conversion and final safety of his children,—“My assured belief is that they are all either *with* Christ or *in* Christ. Three of them I had hoped would have served my Master on earth—but they were taken to serve him in the upper sanctuary; and what was I to oppose my Master's will?”

The hopeful death of a child is designed to loosen the ties that bind parents to the world, and to lead their affections to things

above. The heavenly country is endeared to the heart, by being the abode of objects of tender affection. Like David, Christian parents should learn to say with joy, of children that have died in hope,—“We will go to them, but they will not return to us,”—or as Beza when Calvin was no more,—“Now is heaven more sweet, and earth less dear.” But however alleviating and consoling the thought of children having gone before their parents to heaven, the joy of re-union with them in that happy country is inconceivably greater. The land of Canaan was promised as a possession to Abraham’s seed, and though the patriarchs had no inheritance in it, yet so great was their desire after its full enjoyment, that they sought that their dust should be carried thither; and even in death, they gave commandment concerning their interment in the land of promise. Believers are characterized by “seeking a better country, even an heavenly.” A principal concern about their children was to rear them for heaven,—and even in anticipation, it was often refreshing and animating to their spirits, that they would meet with them in glory, and be “a whole family in heaven.”

The realization of these desires, however, will vastly surpass all our present concep-

tions. Parents will receive again the objects of their fondest affections, arrayed in the beauties of holiness, and glorious beyond all that they sought for them in prayer, and anticipated in hope. The joy of recognition in the abodes of bliss will be a part of the great recompense of reward, and will amply compensate for all the anxieties and trials that were theirs, in watching over them, and nursing them for God. Presented themselves to the Father with exceeding joy, they will bring with them their children, and say with thrilling delight, as they stand with them before the throne,—“Behold, we and the children whom God hath given us.” They will see the Redeemer as he is, and surrounded with his glory, they will point him out to their children as the blessed object to whom they and theirs owe every thing,—and as the Alpha and Omega of all their praise. With the wonders of redemption, and the mysteries of providence fully unfolded, and with the unspeakable riches of glory in view, they will hold converse with their children,—now fellow-heirs of bliss, on those blessed realities which they could but imperfectly apprehend on earth.

It is true, the saints will know each other after the flesh no longer, when admitted to glory. The covenant relation-

ship to the Elder Brother, and to the brotherhood of faith will take place of all natural ties. But still in the holy, happy society of the redeemed in heaven, we cannot doubt that their felicity will be enhanced by those sharing it together, who were tenderly related on earth, and who had joys, and anxieties, and trials in common, on their pilgrimage to the celestial country. Though they neither marry, nor are given in marriage in heaven, the joy of husbands and wives at the everlasting espousals of the Lamb, will transcend the delight of their union on earth. Ministers and those whom they were instrumental in gathering to Christ, will exult in their future meeting and recognition. In the presence of the four living creatures, the four and twenty elders worship Him who liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns prostrate before the throne. A believing people are to faithful ministers their "joy and crown of rejoicing," in the day of Christ Jesus. If such be the increased felicity of the parties in other relations, when they join "the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven," how great will be the happiness of parents and children, when they shall stand together upon the sea of glass mingled with fire before

the throne, having gotten the victory, and having obtained the crown of righteousness! Happy is the family now, whose members are united in the Saviour's love, and travelling onward together to the heavenly country,—unspeakably more happy will they be, when they have successively come home to the Father's house, and sit down together at the marriage supper of the Lamb. All that parents thought or spoke of in instructing their children, will be then felt as a glorious reality. In the joy of their Lord, they will sing together the new song—they will mutually taste the sweets of redeeming love—they will exult in a communion with God, with fellow-saints and holy angels, and with each other, that can know no interruption, and shall never come to an end. If the aged patriarch was overcome at the tidings that the son of his love was living, and in honour in Egypt, and exclaimed—"It is enough; my son Joseph is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die,"—should not Christian parents now rejoice in the prospect of meeting their children adorned with the crown of eternal life, and advanced to sit as conquerors with the Redeemer upon his throne? The expectation of this blessed consummation should sustain them in trials—animate their pray-

ers—raise their hopes, and lead them to press continually toward the mark for the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus.



## CHAPTER IV.

MOTIVES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS TO LEAD CHRISTIAN PARENTS TO DILIGENCE AND FAITHFULNESS, IN COMMANDING THEIR CHILDREN AND HOUSEHOLD TO KNOW THE LORD.

THE *motives* to the faithful performance of parental duties are numerous and powerful. They are furnished by a consideration of the authority of Him who instituted the domestic state—the relation of parents to their offspring—and the consequences to children, to the church, and to nations, from parental faithfulness or neglect; and they bring into view the solemnities of the coming judgment and the vast interests of eternity. The *encouragements* which the word supplies to Christian parents, are sufficient to sustain them under their weighty responsibility, and to animate them in the discharge of arduous duties.

Of the motives which the Scriptures present to lead parents to command their children and household to know the Lord, and to walk in the way of godliness, we notice,

SECT. I.—*The frequently intimated will of God.*

This is declared in express and repeated commands. Parents are directed to teach diligently God's ways to their children; they are enjoined to "train them in the way they should go;" they are bid to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." These are expressions of the authority of him who is the God of all the families of Israel; and they evidently enjoin duties primary and fundamental—the neglect of which will be accounted rebellion against God, and will be visited by his displeasure. Many *implied precepts* inculcate parental duties; such as those which enjoin families to worship God, and to cultivate domestic peace, godliness, and morality; those which respect duties to inferiors; and those which concern the transmission of the truth to posterity. Examples, having the seal of Divine approbation appended to them, are held forth, for the imitation and encou-

agement of Christian parents. Particular petitions for children, dictated by the Spirit of God, are recorded in the volume of inspiration, and reiterated promises are given as our encouragement to offer them in their behalf. And the compassionate Saviour is represented as cherishing a tender regard towards the young of his people, and as specially enjoining them to be brought to him for a blessing. They are the "lambs," whom as the Shepherd of Israel, he "carries in his arm, and bears in his bosom." Children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward, and his standing merciful command is, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."

Thus various and frequent as are the intimations of the Divine will concerning the religious education of children, we need scarcely observe that parents are hereby taught to view their obligations to their family as greatly momentous, and should be incited to all diligence and fidelity in discharging them. In fact, no class of relative duties occupies a higher sphere in the prescriptions of Divine revelation—none are more frequently and solemnly enjoined—none are enforced with more commanding and impressive sanctions. Diso-



bedience must, therefore, be peculiarly heinous, and the fatal consequences to children and families are incalculable. In the passage to which we have frequently referred, parental instruction and the proper exercise of parental authority, are evidently exhibited as a primary duty—that which gives a tone and direction to other duties, and on the due performance or neglect of which, a blessing or a curse is entailed upon posterity. Arduous as is the work, it should always be remembered that grace sufficient is promised. In the way of duty, strength for the performance may be expected. The promise is to parents and their children, and as many as the Lord God shall call. While parents should regard, with reverence and godly fear, the Divine authority—and should often reflect upon the weighty obligations resting upon them to rear their household for God, they have encouragement to trust to Almighty power, and to cling to the Divine promise. Neither can ever fail any who are in the way of dutiful obedience. “Work, for I am with thee, saith the Lord of hosts.” “I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.”

SECT. II.—*The consideration of the parental relation itself, supplies a farther motive to the faithful performance of parental duties.*

Children are nearly and tenderly related to their parents ; and their interests in soul and body, and for time and eternity, should be near to their hearts. They are partakers of the same flesh and blood—parents are the instruments of their earthly existence—many of their natural features are enstamped upon their minds—and what is exceedingly solemn and affecting, they share their moral likeness, as having received through them the taint of original depravity, and as being partakers with them of the same fallen humanity. Parents live again in their children ; and either for honour or infamy—as persons who have been a blessing in the world, or have lived only to themselves, through their offspring their names will descend to succeeding generations. The relation that exists between a parent and his child, puts the parent in possession of an influence that is almost boundless. It brings with it authority joined with affection ; and entwining the interests of children with the tenderest feeling of the heart, and connecting

them with a parent's comfort and happiness, it supplies a motive the most powerful and constraining to the faithful discharge of all parental obligations.

Let not a parent allege as an excuse or palliation of neglected duty, that he has little or no influence over a stubborn child ; let him not exhibit the waywardness of his child, as the proof that he is devoid of power to control his habits or influence his conduct. In all probability, parental neglect at first laid the foundation of the perversity of the child. The work of training was not commenced early, or it was marred by the irregularity and inconsistency of the parent. There is the influence of conduct and example, and this, we have seen, is even more powerful than that of precept ; and where it is either wanting, or does not uniformly act in favour of virtue and religion, it need not be thought wonderful that parents should have to complain that their authority secures from their children little respect or submission. Painful as are such instances, they by no means prove that the parental relation does not furnish one of the strongest motives for the proper performance of parental duties, or that it does not supply peculiar facilities for training the young in the way they should go.

Look at the national characteristics of different countries, and behold the extensive influence that parental instructions and habits exert upon the human family. The mental and moral condition of the inhabitants of various nations—the distinctive peculiarities of their character—and much even of their outward state and circumstances may be traced to domestic culture and example.\* That other influences combine to mould the character and to affect the conduct and condition, we do not deny; but many of them even operate through the medium of parental education. That which distinguishes a native of Turkey, or India, or China, from the inhabitants of other countries is, in a great measure, the impression which was early made upon the mind and character, through the parental relation. The son walks in his father's steps; and thus servility, and treachery, and idolatry, characterize a people throughout many generations. Hence is it that nations continue for ages under

\* "Great care and pains must be taken to acquaint children betimes, and to affect them with the word of God, and the wondrous things of his law. Nor will any thing contribute more to the prosperity or perpetuity of religion in a nation, than the good education of children; if the seed be holy, it is the substance of a land." Henry on Deut. xi. 19.

superstition and oppression : and the dark places of the earth are filled with the habitations of cruelty. It is matter of common and painful observation too, that in Christian countries the children of neglected families in large towns or in the country, follow the footsteps of parents, who have cruelly hid themselves from their own flesh ; and who, while they neglected their mental and moral culture, left them a prey to all kinds of pernicious influences, that were prevailing around them. And in those cases, where there is in families a form of religion without its power, or where some palpable neglect or inconsistency is associated with the observance of religious duties ; few become so hardened or careless, as the children of those professors who display not exemplary piety in the domestic circle.

There is generally more hope of the conversion of a profligate, than of the child of an unholy professor. Prejudiced against religion by the example of a parent, he will speedily endeavour to cast off its restraints, and will become more callous to shame or reproof, and more bent upon sensual indulgences, than those who never came in contact with religious exercises. Those cases, and many others that might be noticed, show that the parental relation establishes

an influence over the young of vast power—an influence which may be productive of the most beneficial results, or may cause immense injury. Let parents habitually regard their children as a part of themselves; let them view their interests for time and eternity as inseparably connected with their own; let parental affection, elevated and sanctified by Christian principle, urge them to diligence and fidelity in the instruction of their children. The relation which they sustain towards them presents one of the most powerful considerations to enforce the performance of parental duties; and the affection for their offspring, which has been implanted in their hearts, is designed to lead them to employ all proper means for securing their happiness. These means are clearly revealed, and fully supplied to Christian parents. As they would not be found destitute of natural affection, and be instrumental in the injury and ruin of those who are so nearly and tenderly related to them, they are bound to employ them faithfully, and thus to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

SECT. III.—*The fearful evils of parental neglect are replete with warning, and furnish a solemn and powerful consideration to urge to the diligent performance of all parental duties.*

The iniquities of the fathers are frequently visited upon their children. The young, neglected by their natural guardians and instructors, become a prey to the innate evil propensities of their own heart, and to the numerous malignant influences with which they are surrounded. If untrained to good, they are reared up for the perpetration of wickedness,—if the seeds of piety are not early implanted in their minds, and they are not drawn by precept and example towards the path of virtue, the natural weeds of sin and folly will spring up to rank luxuriance; evils indulged in tender years, will acquire the power of strong and irresistible habits, and the course of conduct will be unprofitable and wicked. It is fearful to contemplate a child thus growing up a rebel against God, becoming a mere sensualist and worldling, and at last sinking down to the blackness of darkness for ever. Parents may be assured, that if children perish through their neglect, they will severely suffer for it.

The influence which they might have exercised for the most valuable objects, but which was perverted, will in future years, react with fearful power upon themselves. No maxim is of more extensive application than this—"What a man soweth that shall he also reap"—and in no relation are there more disastrous fruits reaped than in the parental, when the early religious training of children is overlooked.

Among men, it has been justly remarked, there is scarcely such another instance of absolute power on the one hand, and of entire dependence on the other, as at first exists in the relation between parents and their children. The infant is helplessness itself, dependent on parental kindness for every thing necessary for its existence and welfare; and under parental control and direction in all that concerns the formation of future character, and the conduct of life. The child gradually rises from this state of dependence; and every succeeding day of its life is working out more and more its emancipation. And just in proportion as parental authority and example are applied to the proper training of children, or as in their exercise their best interests are overlooked, so will the effects be salutary or injurious. The child rises to manhood; freed from parental control, he will bring



down upon the head of a parent, the blessings or curses which his conduct has taught him to procure. He will either repay to parents and to society in blessings the pains employed in his early culture, or will be to the one the fearful scourge of criminal neglect, and to the other a withering curse. The continuance of such an influence forms an afflicting and aggravating consideration, when through the neglect or the evil instruction and example of parents, children are led into the paths of folly and wickedness. Parents! you are connected with your children by bonds that you cannot sunder. You cannot say concerning a profligate or perverse child, "I will leave him to his own way—I will disown him—I will have done with him for ever." The attempt may be made but the yearning of parental affection, and the overflowing of parental feelings, will prove it to be ineffectual and vain. The cord that binds you to your children is too strong, either for their unworthiness or your resolution to break asunder. God himself has fastened it, and no circumstances in life can ever fully dissolve the tie. Even death is unable to loose it. Parents will linger over the grave of a lost child; and as the sense of neglected duty, or recollections of unfaithfulness rise up to view, the heart will be wrung with

anguish ; and no distance of time will be able to efface from the mind the remembrance of influence perverted, or opportunity neglected.\* The lamentation of the king of Israel over a lost son, expresses at once the strength of parental affection, and the bitter sense of his former indulgence—“ Oh Absalom ! my son, would to God, I had died for thee, my son ; oh Absalom ! my son, my son.” When parents have a religious profession and character, the evils resulting from the neglect of some parts of the duty which they owe to their children, from something defective or improper in the mode of performance, or from blemishes in their temper and deportment, are frequently grievous and fatal. Undue severity either crushes the spirit of children or provokes them to resentment, and renders them wholly averse to religious principle and obligation. Hence parents are warned against *provoking their children to anger*, and are commanded to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If religion is only, or chiefly presented to the young under a repulsive aspect, and duties are enforced only by stern and despotic authority, the natural consequence

\* See Abbot on Parental Duties ; from which work, several of the thoughts expressed in this section are taken.

will be, that the first opportunity will be seized to cast off its restraints, and to rush headlong into courses of youthful folly. Improper indulgences, on the other hand, never fail to bring ruin equally upon the objects of perverted affection, and upon their parents. Possessed of a corrupt nature, a child left to himself will assuredly go astray. To check evil at first is easier than to restrain it afterwards; and many a parent has bitterly lamented the progress of evils in his children, to which his own injurious and culpable indulgences gave the first impulse.

The sin of Eli is held out in the Scripture as a terrible example of the evils of parental indulgence. Because the aged priest honoured his sons more than God, the priesthood was rent from his family—his two sons were cut off in their sin—Israel was discomfited before the enemy—the ark was taken captive, and the parent himself, overwhelmed by sorrow, was suddenly carried off by death. Many a child, foolishly spared from early correction, and indulged in youthful propensities, has grown up in confirmed irreligion, and has brought a parent's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

The inconsistency and misconduct of parents form a snare for the feet of their

children ; and the display of an unmortified spirit, in connexion with the observance of religious duties, is calculated to excite in a household aversion to religion, and to turn away their steps from the ways of godliness. We have known the children of some parents who made a high profession, becoming utterly regardless of religious obligation ; in some instances, avowing infidelity, and in others, their conduct marked by debasing immorality. The causes of such melancholy defection were not difficult in many cases to discern. Parents had frustrated the instruction which they gave, by an example unbecoming their profession ; they had exhibited a worldly or a censorious spirit before their children ; they had trained them to serve mammon rather than God ; and they had manifested no concern to display before their household the living attractive influence of the religion of Christ. Need we wonder at the fruits which have followed ? Are not filial disobedience and irreligion the native consequences of parental inconsistency and neglect—the genuine fruits of a spirit and manner in parents opposed to the religion which they professed ? Indeed, whenever a child is perverse, rebellious, neglectful of religion, or addicted to wicked practices, it may be concluded that there

has been something wrong in the training of parents, though we may not always be able to discern what in their conduct was reprehensible. If a child is ungovernable, parents should consider that to them it is entrusted to render him tractable. For this purpose, they should watch and pray continually—avoid every inconsistency in their own spirit and deportment, and temper correction with Christian prudence and tenderness. Betimes, they should consider their own deficiency rather than their child's; and in self-denial and assiduity, employ the means with which God has connected the blessing.

The evils of parental neglect or irregularity are of alarming extent and frightful magnitude. They are seen in the irreligion, profligacy, and ruin of children; they entail misery upon the family; they are the rods that most severely punish parents; and while the church is left to deplore the defection and irreligion of those who were baptized within her pale, the world is confirmed and hardened in ungodliness and infidelity. Nor are these evils confined to the present state; they extend to endless duration. Children neglected here are ripened for destruction, and are given over to the fearful retribution of a lost eternity. As parents would deprecate such a doom,

let them habitually avoid the conduct that tends to ensure it. Let them, cherishing a holy dread, attend with all diligence to their solemn and important duties. They will then be preserved from the fearful infliction that awaits slothful and negligent servants. Thus may they be instrumental in delivering their children from the paths wherein destroyers go, and of guiding their steps into the way of happiness and peace. Instead of a curse, they and theirs shall inherit the blessing; and while others are snared and fall, they shall rejoice together in deliverance from all evil, and in the enjoyment of an abundant and everlasting recompense of reward.

SECT. IV.—*The Divine example furnishes another powerful motive, as well as a comprehensive directory, for the performance of parental duties.*

One of the most endearing views of the Divine character is that in which He is presented as a Father, and his people are exhibited as his children—the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. His love towards the redeemed transcends all comparison or imitation—for earthly parents do not need to be reconciled to their children, nor do they love them as enemies,—

and no gift that they can bestow, bears any resemblance to the unspeakable gift of God's well-beloved Son. The Redeemer, to whom parents are encouraged to bring their children, takes the title of the "everlasting Father."\* When He was about to ascend to the throne of his glory, he held forth the paternal character of God as the source of boundless and perpetual blessings to his people; "I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God;"† and no relationship is more frequently exhibited in sacred Scripture as connected with all that is encouraging in promise, and precious in privilege. The Lord's method of training his children for his service and glory, peculiarly claims our attention, as it furnishes to Christian parents the most impressive direction, and the most attractive example. Parental relationship exists not among holy angels; and while its existence among the human family, supplies an advantage to us above the angels for studying the mysteries of redemption, the fact that God himself has condescended to assume a covenant relation as a Father to the redeemed, and that for them he exercises paternal love, authority, and compassion, is fraught with

\* Isaiah ix. 6.

† John xx. 17.

unspeakable comfort to the people of God. Herein is presented the great model of all parental duty. Parents are required to be imitators of God as dear children.\* Their success in domestic instruction, and the blessing for their household must be sought in conformity to the Divine method of government and instruction.

God's *kindness and compassion* prevail in all his treatment of the heirs of salvation. Upon them he bestows, in sovereign grace, every blessing that can contribute to their real profit and happiness. In weakness or distress, he pities them—his bowels of compassion yearn over them, and his almighty arm is extended to relieve them. The Redeemer illustrates the Divine love to the saints by the kindness of earthly parents; "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him!"† And the psalmist celebrates the tender compassion of God in terms borrowed from the paternal relation: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."‡ Our hea-

\* Ephesians v. 1, "Be ye followers of God," &c. The original word properly signifies, "imitators."

† Matthew vii. 11.

‡ Psalm ciii. 13, 14.



venly Father instructs his people—employs diversified and useful means for this purpose—engages their hearts, and adapts his communications to their condition and capacity. All the children of Zion are “taught of the Lord.” “The sincere milk of the word” is presented to babes, while “strong meat” is administered to them that are of mature age; and all are guided by the Divine counsel until they are received into glory.

The government and discipline of the “household of faith” are conducted in mercy and love, and are exercised with a *constant regard to their spiritual benefit*. Not being susceptible of passion or weakness, the Father in heaven never afflicts willingly, nor grieves the children of men. His severity is mixed with goodness; in the midst of wrath he remembers mercy. Corrections from his hand are in love. In mercy to their souls, he restrains his children when they wander, and he chastises them for their profit, that they may be “partakers of his holiness.”\* There is always a “need be,” when they are in “heaviness through manifold temptations.” Indulgences that are injurious are mercifully withholden; what is really good for them,

\* Heb. xii. 10.

the Lord will assuredly give; but even their importunity will not prevail with him to obtain what would obstruct their spiritual welfare.

Forbearing and forgiving them in love, and exercising towards them continual long-suffering and compassion, he yet trains them for his service and glory by the *discipline of the covenant*. He brings them under the rod, and chastises and rebukes every child whom he receiveth. His paternal character is eminently conspicuous in the *chastisements* he administers. His bowels are moved for them. He does not consult their inclinations, but their welfare. The rod is not spared for their crying. Correction is continued, till the heart is weaned from its idols, and the child is won to the path of filial submission and obedience. Even when correction is applied, the Father loves his children intensely. He waits for their return with interest and desire; and instead of chiding continually or cherishing anger still, he welcomes them back, and rejoices over them to do them good. In all his procedure towards them, his aim is to deliver them from sin—to lead them to a service which is perfect freedom; and, in the way of dutiful obedience, to confer upon them substantial and lasting happiness. He in-

structs, warns, and corrects his children with tenderness. He is earnest and importunate in dealing with them, presenting to them motives the most awakening and affecting. And with unceasing care, he leads them in the way of righteousness, gives them line upon line, and precept upon precept; and receives them at last to an inheritance, undefiled, and unfading, reserved for them in heaven.

What a high and impressive example is thus exhibited of approved parental character! What lofty motives are thus furnished to parental fidelity! Christian parents are directed and encouraged to look to the God of the families of Israel, not only for support, but for direction in their all-important duties. While his authority enjoins them to rear their children for God, his blessed example in his paternal dealings with his adopted sons and daughters, is their bright model, and exalted encouragement in duty. If they would themselves be the children of God, and if they would have their offspring numbered in the family of heaven, they must imitate the Father in heaven. Their household should be instructed and governed, as the church of the first-born is nourished and ruled by her glorious Head. The administration of the household should resemble the ma-

nagement of the one great family that in heaven and earth is named after Christ. Parents have the promise of abundant gracious aid, in seeking conformity to this Divine model. Their children, dedicated to God, and nursed for him, shall be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Parents become workers together with God. Their ministry, however humble, is owned and blessed, and aiming themselves after likeness to Him who is a Father and Portion to Israel, they are approved instruments of training up a race to serve the Lord, and of entailing upon posterity the richest and most glorious inheritance.

SECT. V.—*The Nation and the Church at the present time particularly demand the faithful discharge of parental obligations.*

Without adverting particularly to the numerous evils that afflict the nation, they may, in a great many instances, be directly traced to the neglect of the religious education of the young,—to the perversion of domestic instruction and example. Hence is it, that the vast masses of the people grow up in ignorance, have no due sense of moral and religious obligation, and embrace principles, and follow practices

which are subversive of all right government and order, and which are ruinous to themselves and others. Hence is it, that multitudes are involved in a dark and cheerless infidelity, and lawless and destructive principles are avowed and propagated. These have sprung from the want of Scriptural education ; they are the native fruits of popular ignorance and irreligion. To the neglect of parents, ministers, and civil rulers, may be ascribed the infidelity, error, and lawlessness that, in different parts of the nation, threaten to bring ruin to an incalculable extent upon the community. And hence it is, that in our country, multitudes are held under the chains of a dark and degrading superstition. Men clothed with authority have refused to acknowledge God, or to submit to the Lord's Anointed,—and while they adopt a low system of worldly expediency as the standard of government, they overlook or neglect entirely, the moral and spiritual interests of the people. The young have been permitted to grow up ignorant of Scriptural principles, and exposed unprotected to the hateful and demoralizing influences that are everywhere so prevalent. Family religion has, in consequence, to a melancholy extent disappeared ; and parental authority and example have be-

come the chief instrument of inuring the young to insubordination and immorality. "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are out of course." "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved."\* "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish."†

The main remedy for this deplorable state of things is found in the moral and religious education of the young. Almost the only hope that remains of averting approaching judgments from the nation, lies in parental fidelity, and the revival of domestic piety. Let domestic piety be encouraged by the legislation and example of men of power and influence, let parents be excited to train up their children in the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment, let the fire of heaven be lighted anew upon the family altar, and let Scriptural instruction be publicly and gener-

\* Psa. lxxxii. 5; Psa. lxxv. 3.

† Hosea iv. 1—3.

ally promoted. Thus may the destroying scourge pass away, and evils that are of the most threatening aspect may cease to prevail. A return to neglected duty will propitiate the favour of the God of nations, the day of his long-suffering will be protracted, and he will come and leave a blessing behind. Domestic piety is the true source of public virtue, and is intimately associated with national greatness. If the nation remains blind to its true interest, if it will not become sensible that it is chiefly a *moral* remedy that is required for the numerous evils that oppress it,—if rulers, infatuated to their destruction, still refuse to “kiss the Son,”—it becomes the solemn special duty of those who would be safe in the day of coming visitation, to betake themselves with all earnestness to the discharge of duties, the neglect of which has been the pregnant source of innumerable woes to the nation, and the continued neglect of which threatens to overwhelm it with a deluge of judgment. Faithful Christian parents are the best patriots and benefactors of their country. By their pious exertions, they are training up those for whose sake guilty communities are spared, training up a race that may be instrumental in bringing back a revolted people to allegiance to their rightful Sov-

ereign, and sowing seeds of righteousness that, in a future day of enlargement and blessing, shall bud and blossom, and fill the face of the land with fruit.

Parents that are faithful will be hidden in the day of vengeance. They and their household will be numbered among the *marked* ones, who are preserved when destruction is commissioned to begin at the sanctuary, and to slay indiscriminately throughout the city.\* For a season, the progress of retributive inflictions may be arrested, and the nation may be spared for the sake of those godly parents and righteous families that dwell therein. And even when the cup of national provocation is full, and judicial inflictions are commissioned to take their course, the children of the righteous shall be hidden in the king's pavilion in the evil day; and the seeds that have been sown by pious parents shall spring up and bear precious fruit in succeeding generations.

Important as a means of national preservation and blessing as is domestic piety, it is, if possible, still more important as an eminent instrument of revival and prosperity to the church. Few truths can be stated of more universal application than

\* Ezek. xx. 6.



this—that according to the religious condition of families, so is the state of religion in congregations and churches. The church takes its tone from the state of the household. If domestic religious instruction is unheeded, and the family altar forsaken, if parental duties are only performed in a trivial irregular way, the membership of the church will speedily degenerate into formality and hypocrisy; and the living and sustaining principle of true godliness will gradually disappear. There are few more prolific causes of the declining state of practical religion throughout the church in our day, than the want of family religion. Parents are not duly impressed with a sense of their obligation to dedicate their children to God, and to nurse them for Him. They are not concerned to seek earnestly their conversion. They do not regard religion as “the one thing needful” to them and theirs; and their example is not calculated to show to those who are about them the pleasantness of wisdom’s ways; children, in consequence, grow up without any engagement of heart in divine things; and if they make a profession of religion at all, they embrace only a mere lifeless form, and they afterwards live at ease in Zion, and hold the truth in ungodliness, if they do not become utterly apostate.

They are generally characterized by a worldly selfish disposition. They know nothing of the spirit of prayer or self-dedication. They live to themselves, and have no heart for efforts that tend to the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. And like the members of one of the primitive Asiatic churches, they have "a name to live while they are dead," or as those of another, "they are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot."

The state of family religion supplies an index, by which the claims of various bodies of religious professors may be estimated. Judging by this test, we are constrained to conclude that in large portions of the religious community, and even where high professions are made, the state of practical godliness is lamentably low. Where even office-bearers of the church neglect family worship in their houses; where those who are admitted to the highest privileges of the sanctuary, habitually neglect their vow for their children in baptism, and in direct contradiction to it, may be truly said to rear them for the devil, the world, and the flesh; where the young grow up untrained to religious duties, and addicted to vanity, there cannot be real spiritual prosperity in the church, whatever may be the pretences advanced to orthodoxy in

principle or religious activity. On the other hand, parental assiduity and faithfulness prepare a seed to serve the Lord, and are frequently owned as an approved instrumentality of revival. The children of parental prayers and tears, who are early instructed in God's law and testimony, often excel their fathers; and the work of building up Zion, on which the hearts of godly parents were set—unaccomplished in their day because of the church's apathy or unbelief, is done in their sons' days.

Christian parents should betake themselves to their arduous duties, under this animating prospect. The church greatly needs revival. The conversion of sinners, and the increase of holy principle and habits among the members, are among the primary objects of Christian attainment, for which all should pray and labour. Would we see the captivity of Zion recalled, and the dry bones revived, we must begin with the young. Our work is greatly with them, for a formal, lukewarm, worldly spirit has so sadly and so long characterized the present race of professors, that we need scarcely expect great things to be done by them, or for them, in the advancement of the power of godliness. As the race of Israel that saw God's wonders, and yet murmured and rebelled, were rejected

in their unbelief, but their children, schooled in the wilderness, came in and possessed the land of promise, so our aim should be to prepare a right-hearted and devoted race, who may be fitted and honoured to share in Zion's future enlargement and glory.

Parents! you have here presented a motive worthy to enlist all your energies, and to quicken you to the most strenuous and persevering exertions. Revival should begin in the family, but when it is real it will not rest here. It will diffuse its influence like leaven throughout the fellowship of the church, and will secretly and yet powerfully act till the whole mass is leavened. Think not that your sphere is limited. When the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, in a period of reformation under Nehemiah, the pious heads of Israelitish families repaired *every man over against his own house*. God owned these labours, and despite of the attempts of enemies, conducted the work to a prosperous issue. So will it be with the labours of faith and love, in the sphere of domestic duty. The humble unnoticed work of maternal piety, in nursing children for God, has been frequently owned as the instrument of revival to the church. God has already accepted these labours, and he will yet accept

and honour them. On you, Christian parents! it depends in a great measure, whether the church is to continue in her low circumscribed state, or to put on her "beautiful garments," and to arise and shine, because of her arisen glory. The children whom God has committed to you to train, are the hopes of the church, and according to your training, will they either become a dead weight upon her membership, or a holy agency, to carry forward the ark to its resting place in millennial glory. Oh! consider your deep responsibility in this particular. Think of the present solemn and eventful era. And as you profess to pray for the coming of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the upbuilding of Zion, take the objects of your dearest affections, and teach them to love the habitation of God's house. Habituate them to labour and self-denial, for the promotion of the Redeemer's cause. Accustom them to regard this as a principal end of their being—the noblest pursuit of their life. Endeavour to render them men of prayer and holy devotedness; of single-hearted integrity and simplicity, willing to suffer cheerfully for Christ's sake, and to count all things but loss and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. Thus will your prayers and labours

be owned for reviving the Lord's work in the midst of the years; and your children so trained, while you live, or after you are gone, will be as a dew among many people, a happy means of abundant fertility to the heritage of the Lord.

SECT. VI.—*The consideration of the separation of parents from their children by death, and of their meeting in judgment, furnishes a powerful incitement to all parental duties.*

The ties that bind parents to their children, however tender and powerful, must soon be severed by death. Before many years, parents! you must see these objects of affection deposited in the grave, or you must bid them farewell when they stand weeping around your death-bed. If you are possessed of proper feelings under the influence of Christian principle, in their afflictions you will be called to a severe trial. Inheriting through you a corrupt nature, their sufferings are the consequences of sin,—and parents may see in them the punishment of their own transgression. They should not only sympathize with them tenderly as their own flesh and blood, a part of themselves afflicted,—but in their children's troubles they should accept the

punishment of their own iniquity, humble themselves under the rod, and be stirred up to earnestness in seeking their children's salvation. When the visitation issues in their early removal by death, none but a parent's heart can know the bitterness of the trial. The stroke that lays a beloved child in the dust is the blight of a parent's fondest hopes,—the disappointment of his cherished expectations. Parental anguish will be found to be deeper and more intense than filial. You may have wept over other bereavements: you may have followed the remains of a parent to the house appointed for all living; but when you are called to lay the child of your affections in the dust, you will experience a keener pang, and your heart will endure a more lasting sorrow. At such a season, parents will require strong consolation; and in vain may they hope to enjoy it, if they have been unmindful of parental obligation, and neglectful of parental duties. On the other hand, what can be more effectual to assuage the grief of bereavement than the recollection that children have been dedicated to God, and have been trained for heaven? What more consoling than the evidence that they have been taken into the family of God? In their removal, the exalted Sovereign whom godly parents

love, takes home to himself objects renewed by his grace which were never properly theirs, but which were only lent them for a time. Here is the fruit and crown of all their parental anxiety,—here the rich reward of all their labour. Instead of sorrowing as they who have no hope, they are called to rejoice in tribulation. Their children are removed from the evil to come. They are taken to be immediate attendants in the palace of the King, and to be partakers of inconceivable and endless felicity. What a source of support and comfort to a parent in the loss of children is this! What an animating and encouraging motive to the faithful performance of all parental duties!

If parents are taken away from their families first, they will find upon their death-bed the tie that binds them to their children to be peculiarly strong and affecting. Amidst the loosening of earthly relationships, it will be the last that will be severed asunder. The heart will linger about the family, even when it begins to faint and fail. Affection to children will make a parent cling to life; and for their sakes he will desire to remain, even when in some measure satisfied with length of days, and when his eyes have been gladdened by some glimpses of God's salvation.



How happy at such a solemn season, to have confidence in leaving upon God fatherless children, who had been given over to him before, and who were nursed for his service ! How joyful to feel, in the immediate prospect of separation, that God will be a Father to the fatherless, to provide for them when you are gone, and to remember to them his covenant mercy and faithfulness ! With what an assured confidence can a believing parent leave his fatherless children upon the Lord, and encourage his widow to trust in Him ? Like the aged patriarch when he blessed the sons of Joseph, he can invoke upon them the blessing of the God that led and fed him all his life long,—of the Angel that redeemed him from all evil. Resting on the covenant that extends to children and to children's children, he can assure posterity that his God will guide them to death, and abide their God for evermore. And as he commits them to Him who can preserve them from temptation, and be their refuge from every storm, he can cherish the joyful expectation, that their parting will not be final, and can triumph in the prospect of reunion in heavenly glory.

To none save those who have faithfully nursed their children for God, do such support in death, and such felicity in prospect,

pertain. *They* however have reason to expect it, and theirs is the privilege betimes fully to realize it. The view of such consolation reserved for a dying hour is calculated to excite a Christian parent to all diligence and earnestness. Let him train his family so that when it arrives, he can commit them to God with joyful confidence, and can anticipate with delight the future felicity, when his children that are left behind, shall rejoin him in the same glorious immortality.

The appearance of children in the judgment to come, should be frequently present to the minds of parents, and should excite them to diligence and faithfulness in all domestic duties. They are enjoined to "occupy" their talent in the family, till the Saviour's second coming. Parents and children must meet at the judgment-seat of Christ. How fearful the thought of being then arraigned as unfaithful stewards, or of being called to witness the condemnation of children who perish through parental neglect! How unutterably dreadful for parents and children to be consigned together to the mansions of endless woe! How terrific for children, amidst the horrors of a lost eternity, to be execrating their parents as the authors of all their misery; and for parents to endure the ex-

cruciating anguish that will arise from the thought, that their own punishment and the ruin of their children have originated in their withholding the reproofs, warnings, and instructions that might have saved them from condemnation ! The very possibility of such an issue is almost too tremendous for conception, and should be taken as a continual warning against all parental indolence,—against every thing in the instruction and conduct of parents that is calculated to prevent the spiritual benefit of their children.

On the other hand, the joy of parents meeting in the judgment with children that were dedicated to God and nursed for him, will crown all their hopes concerning them, and will vastly surpass all their present expectations. The objects of their endeared affections rise to a blessed immortality. Parents receive them again, far more lovely than ever they were upon earth. Standing together at the right hand of the Judge, and taking their place in the general assembly of the first-born, the joys of recognition will be lost amidst the glories that beam from the tribunal. Their own bliss will be enhanced by the presence and fellowship of their children ; their own crown will be more bright and glorious, as they behold each

child receiving from the hands of the Judge, the crown of righteousness. And with thrilling delight, they will hear the approving sentence pronounced upon those whom they reared for God and heaven,—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.” Godly parents, and children to whom they were instruments of spiritual good, meet then, never again to be separated. They enter together into the fulness of joy that is at God’s right hand,—and at the fountain-head of felicity, they drink of endless and unalloyed pleasures. Parents receive the full reward of their fidelity, and children reap for ever the unspeakable blessings that flow from the instructions, prayers, and example of believing parents. The prospect of this happy consummation should sustain parents in every trial, and animate them in their self-denying labours. With this great recompense of reward in view, they should press to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The joys of glory will recompense all their toil. The reunion with their children in heaven will far transcend all their present desires; and the joint participation with them of endless felicity will be the abundant reward en-

joyed by those whom the King of heaven delights to honour.

We only wait to notice *two* encouraging considerations to animate Christian parents in the performance of duties with which their own and their children's happiness for time and eternity are intimately associated. In the *first* place, *Divine support is guaranteed in the way of obedience.* Faithful parents will, while engaged in their arduous work, receive strength and direction,—they will enjoy comfort and success. All that is required is a sense of the importance of the duty, and a ready mind for its performance. The promise is all supporting. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” He who called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, upheld him by his power, and brought him to the land of promise. He who was his shield and exceeding great reward, is still able and willing to work for the accomplishment of his people's desires,—and to faithful parents. He will do exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think. Let them depend on his promise, and confide in his strength. He will fit them for duty, work all their works in them, open the minds of their children, and crown their labours with success.

And, *secondly*, we have reason to believe that *whatever is sincerely and heartily dedicated to God he accepts*. There is no instance on record of his rejecting those who have come to Him,—none in which the surrender that parents have made of their children to him has been refused. On the contrary, he outdoes parental desires,—he exceeds parental requests and expectations. The compassionate Saviour embraced in his arms and blessed the little children whom his disciples would have kept at a distance, and whom fond mothers only ventured to request him to touch. Believing parents, you have ample encouragement here. He whose character it is to receive sinners, will not refuse the pledges of your affection when you commit them to his hand. You should bring them to him with humble confidence. He will take them and bless them. Remembering their dedication for good, he will himself supply the means for their preservation, and instruction. He is infinitely more ready to give than his people are to ask. That which has been committed to him he will keep,—and the covenant of his people's youth, he will remember for ever, the word which he has commanded to a thousand generations.

## CONCLUSION.

To Christian parents, this subject *addresses inquiries* at once solemn and searching, while it exhorts to the diligent performance of their duty. The example which has been considered presents an instance of domestic piety, and of parental instruction, government, and example, amongst the most illustrious that are on record. Abraham's conduct in his household is the subject of special Divine approval, and the happy consequences of his fidelity are recorded both in the page of inspiration, and in the history of the nations of the world. Christian parents, can the testimony borne to the patriarch be given of you? Living under a clearer and more enlarged dispensation of mercy, your obligations to duty are proportionally increased, and you are called to special fidelity and devotedness in the domestic circle. Your character must be estimated by the manner in which your duties to your family are performed, and the enjoyment of special privileges may be expected only in this connexion. You will not be owned as the friends of God, if you do not labour to honour him in your house. You will not be favoured

with special communications of his mind in times of trial, if you command not your children and household to know the way of the Lord ; and the great blessings held forth in the promises, you cannot expect as the portion of your family, if you do not bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I beseech you to consider seriously the magnitude and extent of your obligations, and to ask yourselves how you have endeavoured to discharge them. You should frequently review your spirit and conduct in other relations, but this you should make a principal concern, as God himself makes it. Your children are naturally in darkness ; and on you they are dependent for the instruction that may make them wise unto salvation. Have you been diligent and faithful in teaching them the good and acceptable way ? Are you giving them line upon line and precept upon precept ? Are you conducting them to the holy oracles of God, the Fountain of truth, and leading them to Christ Jesus, the Great Teacher sent from God ? Do you instruct them diligently about God and heaven, and is your constant aim to impress the heart and to purify and direct the conscience ?

You should examine, moreover, the character of your domestic worship, and of



your government and example in your family? If the fire is not kept burning upon the domestic altar, if religion is not presented to your children in an attractive aspect, if your family rule is unduly severe, or lax and unsteady, and if your example is inconsistent or injurious, then will your children be placed in a condition, in some respects, worse than that of families where the form and profession of religion are unknown. Let frequent searching scrutiny be made, in relation to all these subjects. Thousands of parents fatally err, and thousands of families are undone by the assumption that parental duties are easy, or that self-examination and watchfulness are not necessary to their performance. No mistake could be more deplorable, none attended with consequences more melancholy and mischievous. Hence it is that many parents, who make a religious profession, satisfy themselves with a mere negative or external religion in their children, are pleased with the indications of a mild spirit or peaceful demeanour, instead of a change of heart; and are content with their observance of outward ordinances, instead of the active and devoted service of the Redeemer. Let me exhort you to guard against evils that are lamentably common in our day. Set apart special

seasons for taking account of your duties toward your family. Examine yourselves as in the Divine sight, respecting the spirit and manner of their performance. Entertain a jealous and solemn concern about the state of practical religion in your household. Remembering that it will take its tone and character, in a great measure from yourselves, be it your study to be at all times "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Your family is your sphere of labour and trial. In it, you may do much for God and your children; or your conduct will be followed by results to yourselves and others the most disastrous. Under a responsibility so solemn and arduous, you are required to watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation. Make diligent and frequent inquiry how the matter goes with you and yours, how God is honoured in your house, whether you are walking in his sight, and living under his blessing, whether your family is growing in vital religion, and advancing toward the reward and enjoyments of the faithful. Thus will you be preserved from formality and self-deception; you will be excited to diligence and activity in all domestic duties; and those for whose welfare you are deeply concerned, will give evidence that your labour has not been in vain in the Lord.

Secondly, you should seek *Abraham's faith* to enable you to walk in his steps, and to realize to you and yours the promise of Abraham's God. The possession of living faith in the Messiah to come, constituted the distinguishing excellency of the patriarch's character, led to his fidelity in every relation, and secured to himself and his seed the enjoyments of the blessing of God's covenant. By faith he was numbered among the "elders" that "obtained a good report." Seeing Christ's day in promise and type, he rejoiced in spirit. He embraced the promises as the earnest of a future glorious inheritance. "He believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

To this holy principle are expressly ascribed his self-denial, and his concern to have his posterity joint partakers with him of the benefits of the covenant. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise."\* Believing in the faithful word, and rejoicing in the promised Seed, he exhibited before his family the faith that overcomes the world. Training them too to live above it, his principal con-

\* Heb. xi. 9.

cern was that they should be interested in the promise ; and that he might have converse with them as fellow heirs of the grace of salvation. The same principle is indispensable for you, if you would discharge aright your solemn trust. Without faith, in any condition, or in any work, it is impossible to please God. But Christian parents require an eminent measure of this grace, if they would be instrumental in rearing up a godly seed, if they would obtain for their offspring the great blessings which were promised to Abraham. Theirs is peculiarly a work of faith and a labour of love ; and without the lively exercise of these two graces, it cannot be performed. The personal piety of parents is intimately associated with the education and discipline of the household ; and the blessing from on high generally comes upon families only in this connexion. In the performance of every part of parental duty, the vigorous exercise of faith in the Redeemer, and in the word of promise is required, and without it neither will the work be performed, nor the desired success follow.

If children are dedicated to God, and brought to the Saviour for a blessing, it must be in confidence on his gracious paternal character, and in assured belief in his encouraging promise. Instructions must

be communicated, by mixing faith with the words spoken, and in dependence upon the great Teacher himself to open the understanding of the young, that they may know the Scriptures, and be rendered wise unto salvation. Prayer for and with children must be the prayer of faith—the effectual fervent prayer that availeth much. And domestic rule and parental example should be conducted under the influence of a living faith upon the Saviour, if they are to be productive of any salutary and lasting effects. For all this great work, mere human wisdom and strength can avail nothing. Without direction and power communicated from on high, parents are entire weakness. Relying upon their own abilities for success, the most distinguished must fail. The blessing is wholly the Lord's; and it behoves parents, while they employ Divinely prescribed means for training their children in the way they should go, to be denied to their own wisdom, to have no confidence in the flesh—and to cherish a constant dependence upon the Redeemer, for acceptance and success.

Many are the instances in domestic management, in which Christian parents are called to “walk by faith, and not by sight.” When children are in tender infancy, and cannot be expected to exhibit evidences

that a work of grace has begun—when they are under affliction, or are early removed by death—when religious instructions appear to be followed by no salutary fruits—when answers to prayer are deferred—and when parents are taken away from their children—in all these, and many other cases, the principle, which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” is indispensably required. Why should we particularize? For the whole work of parental duty—for the trials of the household—and for the enjoyment of promised blessings, heartfelt dependence upon the Saviour’s word and character is required. While parents draw the strength for duty from Christ, children should see exemplified in them the work of faith. They should act before their household as “seeing Him who is invisible,”—they should be distinguished by the self-denial, devotedness, and godly sincerity, which spring from habitual converse with things unseen and eternal.

Christian parents! you should ever remember the Saviour’s answer to a father’s application, when he presented to him the case of a distressed child,—“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”\* Look habitually to Jesus,

\* Mark ix. 23.

“the Author and Finisher of faith.” Recognize his authority, trust his promise—and depend with confidence upon his grace for strength, acceptance, and blessing. “According to your faith, it shall be done unto you.” In proportion to your reliance upon the Divine promise, and upon Him who is given “a covenant of the people,” so will you be animated to holy exertions for the spiritual improvement of your household—your comfort under trials will abound, and your work will be rewarded.

The prayer of faith cannot remain unanswered—the work of faith will be accepted and prospered. Begin, go forward in dependence on the Saviour’s grace and promise. Seek an increase of faith—and in humble confidence and joyful hope, be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Possessed of Abraham’s faith, like the patriarch you will be excited and encouraged in the performance of all domestic duties—and yours will be the blessing of Abraham’s God. Your own “shield and exceeding great reward,” He will be a God to you and your seed after you; and to you and yours there shall be an abundant fulfilment of those things which the Lord has promised.

This subject likewise suggests solemn and affectionate *counsels to the youth of Christian families.*

If so many and so momentous are the duties of parents towards their children, then it is not surely going too far to say that a weighty obligation rests upon the young of Christian families to receive and obey the instructions, and to follow the example with which they have been favoured. Yours, beloved youth, has been no mean privilege. To you may be applied the Saviour's declaration — "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them." \* In the sovereign disposal of Divine providence, you have been placed, by no choice of yours, in a connexion in which your best interests have been cared for from the dawn of your existence. You were born of Christian, and not of heathen parents. You were dedicated to God in helpless infancy: the seal of God's covenant was impressed upon you, and a pledge was given, in solemn circumstances, that you would be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This training you have

\* Matthew xiii. 17.



been privileged to enjoy. Many parental anxieties have centered upon you; many earnest prayers have been offered in your behalf; and to you have been addressed instructions, by line upon line, and precept upon precept.

The church's hopes are directed towards you; and even the world around expects from you a profession and deportment becoming the young of religious families. You are "the children of the kingdom." To you much has been given, and assuredly much shall be required. Will these expectations be disappointed by your carelessness and neglect, and your final doom be thus fearfully aggravated? Or, will they be fulfilled in your early dedication to God, and in your open and decided attachment to religion? A great load of responsibility rests upon your parents in relation to your instruction and guidance—your usefulness and welfare for time and eternity. It remains with you either to lighten it, or greatly to increase it. If you defer the serious consideration of divine things till a future season—if you refuse to give God your hearts, and to confess Christ before men—if you only yield a formal constrained attention to religious duties, and make religion no heart concern, nor devote to it the morning of your days, you will reap no

blessing, and the advantages you have enjoyed will only serve to aggravate your condemnation. From "the unprofitable servant" his misimproved talent shall be taken away, and given to him that hath ten talents.

Delay on your part is inexpressibly dangerous. One of Satan's principal attempts against the church, is to thwart the design of early religious training—to lead the young of Christian families to cast behind their back all good instructions, or to become mere formalists, and to defer the concerns of personal religion till a future period. In this policy, he has in all ages been too successful; in our own day, thousands of the young of religious families are deceived, and finally and irretrievably ruined. Of all the devices of the arch enemy, there are few more fatal than this. That children who have been solemnly dedicated to God, should entertain no feeling concerning their baptismal vows—that those for whom many prayers have been offered should themselves continue prayerless—that parental exhortations and warnings should be unheeded; and that, surrounded and pursued by mercies innumerable, from infancy to mature youth, the heart should be unaffected, and the person remain a wanderer from God, is melan-

choly to an awful degree, and the consequences are, generally, exceedingly deplorable. Neglecting religion, and despising God's authority, the young in such a case become hardened. They are given over to their own heart's lusts. They fall into temptations. Not unfrequently they remain callous to all right impressions; while afterwards, in the course of life, or the relations which they have chosen, they reap the fruit of their doings.

How appalling to contemplate the aggravated doom of those who, having been often reprov'd, harden themselves! How tremendous their final rejection! How overwhelming the horrors of the punishment from which attention to parental instruction would have saved them, and which shall be dreadfully aggravated by the stings of an awakened conscience—by the tortures of the remembrance of all their youthful forwardness and rebellion.

Let me beseech you, my young friends, in the bowels of compassion, to hasten your escape from the wrath to come. Consider your danger, and delay not to accept of the salvation graciously provided, and which has often been presented to you in alluring offers and tender invitations. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come. “Yield

yourselves to the Lord ;” give him your hearts ; devote to him the prime of your days ; and you will find in your happy experience, that wisdom’s ways are pleasantness and all her paths are peace. It is the exhortation of Divine counsel that addresses you, “*Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth ?*”\* Take God as the guide of your youth, and you will be preserved from innumerable dangers, and your feet will be guided into the way of comfort and happiness. To you is addressed the assurance of Divine wisdom—“*I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.*”† Why should you linger long as those who are slothful, or defer the work of faith and repentance to a future period ? You may never enjoy a more favourable season than the present. “*Now is the accepted time—behold, now is the day of salvation.*” Your delay is a practical rejection of the offered mercy—since it comes to you, as it does to all, as a present and not as a future salvation. The time which you propose to yourselves for the serious consideration of Divine things may never arrive, and even should it, every delay will render future

\* Jeremiah iii. 4.

† Proverbs viii. 17.

repentance more difficult, if not remove the hope of it entirely.

On the other hand, consider how excellent and desirable is youthful piety. By the early recognition of your baptismal covenant, and the early improvement of parental instructions, you will reap a double blessing. With your youthful powers consecrated to God,—with affections warm, and energies unimpaired, you will be prepared for a course of distinguished service. You will escape numerous temptations, and be preserved from the path wherein destroyers go. Your lot will be sanctified, and of outward things, all that is really good and salutary for you shall be conferred. “*They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.*” The command and the promise are inseparable, and they contain the assured guaranty of support and provision that cannot fail. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.*” The blessings of parental piety shall descend upon your heads; and the fervent prayers that were breathed around your cradle, and that have never ceased to follow your path, will be answered, in the dews of heaven shed upon your lot—in gracious benefits bestowed upon your hearts and crowning your life. Your

father's God will be your God; and the mercy which parents enjoyed, will be remembered to children, and to children's children, through many generations. May you begin early to know the God of your fathers! May you serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind; and while you exhibit the lovely and attractive graces of early piety, may you enjoy, here and hereafter, the gracious inheritance which the Lord promised to Abraham and to his seed!

Finally, Let parents, keeping constantly upon their minds a sense of their solemn obligations, cherish dependence upon Divine direction and support in their arduous duties, and anticipate the glorious rewards of obedience. Considering the tender and powerful ties by which you are bound to your children, and surveying the field of duty, with the incalculably momentous consequences of fidelity or neglect, you may well exclaim,—“Who is sufficient for these things?” You are never permitted, however, to use the language of despondency or despair. The grace of the covenant is sufficient for you; and relying upon it, Divine strength will be perfected in your weakness. The compassionate Saviour, who has commanded you to bring your children to him, encourages you to hope that he will accept of the surrender,

and bless them. While he feeds his flock like a Shepherd, he manifests peculiar sympathy and tenderness towards the young and the weak. He carries the lambs in his arms, and bears them in his bosom. For his people, he performs all things perfectly, and does for them “exceeding abundantly above all that they are able to ask or think.”

You can never think too much, or too deeply upon your duties to your household ; nor can you give yourselves to their performance with too much earnestness and devotedness. The salvation of your children from death, and their engagement in God’s service—the revival of true religion in the church—blessings to the church flowing onward for ages to come—and above all, the joint participation with your children of endless glory—these are the high objects presented to Christian parents, to animate their exertions, and encourage their hopes. This is “the mark of the prize of the high calling,” to which they should continually press forward, forgetting the things that are behind, and in the prospect of its coming glory, resolutely and cheerfully encountering obstacles and difficulties, however arduous or numerous. Yours, Christian parents, is a work of no common importance, and it should occupy

no inferior place in your thoughts. It should enter into all your plans, and possess a high and commanding place in all your pursuits. Your family is your appointed sphere of labour, and your work therein will assuredly be a principal ground either of your future punishment or reward. Children, if neglected, will become your scourge and tormentors. If they are trained aright, they will be as the staff of your declining age, and as your crown of honour; and may be the means of embalming your memory, long after you have been gathered to your fathers.

By all their desires and hopes of blessing for children, and children's children—by the prospects of the church revived and prosperous—by the honour of the God of the families of his people—and by the joys of reunion with their children in heavenly glory, let parents be excited to diligence and fidelity and holy zeal. Entering upon their self-denying work, under the consciousness of their own inability, and conducting it in habitual dependence upon promised grace and strength, their labour will not be in vain in the Lord. In due season, they shall reap, if they faint not. The conversion of their children, in answer to prayer, and of which they shall be acknowledged the instruments, will amply



reward their anxiety and solicitude. Their filial obedience will soothe their woes, and comfort their hearts. Blessed and happy in their union on earth, they will have hope in their parting; and the joys of eternity will gloriously compensate for all labour and sorrow that were encountered by the way. Awake then, Christian parents, to a proper sense of your vast responsibility. Gird your loins for a work which, whether as regards its subjects or its results, is among the most important on earth, and go forward in the strength of the Lord, making mention of his righteousness alone. "Be ye stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth, and for ever."

