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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

ON FAMILY PRAYER.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE CHURCHES COMPOSING THE CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

Dear Brethren,

Our belief in the importance of this duty, combined with the fear that it is far too widely neglected, has suggested that it might be well in this epistle to name some of the solid reasons on which it is founded, and to throw out some hints as to the best method of its performance.

Among the arguments by which the duty is enforced, a prominent place deserves to be given to (1) *Scripture precept and example*. It may be said of the general tenor of the word of God, that it reduces family prayer to the rank of an obligation on every professor of religion who is the head of a family. No Christian can discharge his duty to his family, or be said to be doing the will of God as revealed in his word, who lives in its habitual neglect. But more particularly, the duty is plainly comprehended within the extent of such injunctions as, "I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere." (1 Tim. ii. 8.) Violence would be done this passage, if its "everywhere" were not made to embrace the home circle.

The duty is sanctioned, moreover, by the highest example. We find that wherever Abraham came to sojourn in his removals from place to place, he built an altar to call upon the name of the Lord; at which altar, it may be believed, he was accustomed to assemble his family, and present his petitions for them, as well as for himself. The attention which he devoted to the religious instruction of his household is attested in these words: "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 I may bring upon Abraham that which I have spoken of him." (Gen. xviii. 19.) The same solicitude for the spiritual welfare of their families is exemplified in the conduct of Isaac and Jacob. On one occasion the latter thus addresses his household, "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." (Gen. xxxv. 2, 3.) David did not allow the cares of royalty to interfere with the discharge of this important duty to his family. We are informed that after he had assisted in bringing the ark from the house of Obed-edom to the place he had prepared for it, he "returned to bless his house."

(2) *Family prayer is further enjoined by the dependence of families on God*. In no more natural and proper way may they acknowledge the many obligations they are under to the Divine Being, for the innumerable tokens of his goodness. The family is an institution of God's own ordination, "He setteth the solitary in families." (Psalm lxxviii. 6.) "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children." (Psalm cxliii. 9.) Its ties are of his forming. The birth and preservation of children, and their endowment with powers which, properly trained, raise them to positions of usefulness and honor in the world and in the Church, are eminent instances of the divine favor, which demand a grateful acknowledgment in the domestic circle. And the same arguments which show social prayer to be a duty, apply with still greater force to family prayer, as the family is a society from which every other originates, and with ties far more sacred and tender.

(3) *Family worship is commended by its happy tendency, under the divine blessing, to promote the religious training of children and servants*. A household in which prayer, accompanied by the reading of the scriptures, is regularly and devoutly attended to, may be regarded one of the best schools of religious instruction. In such school the whole contents of the sacred volume are, in due course, laid open. "Line upon line, and precept upon precept" are given, in the inculcation of its holy lessons. The different members of the family are continually reminded of their relation to God and the Redeemer, and become growingly impressed with the nature of sin, their need of pardon, and the beauty of holiness, as these and kindred truths are brought before them in the fervent supplications of him who gathers them, morning and evening, around the domestic altar. Thousands can point to the home circle as the place, and to family prayer, as the means of their first religious impressions. They cherish no more grateful and pleasing remembrance than that of their Christian sire interceding with God on their behalf. When prayer is neglected in a family, it may be expected that children will grow up ignorant of God, and careless of their eternal interests. In such a family, however the parents may assert that they attend to their private devotions, there will be but little to distinguish its members from those who live "without God in the world." The fear of God will not be in that place.

(4) *The beneficial influence of family prayer on the heads of families themselves may be named among the reasons of its performance*. While prayer of all the means of grace is the most beneficial, as in it the soul is brought into the closest and most intimate contact with the Infinite

Spirit, family prayer is productive of advantages which deserve a separate and especial consideration. The parent who stately attends to this duty thereby invites those around him to a peculiar inspection of his behaviour, and a restraint is imposed upon him, lest his prayers should be inconsistent with his conduct. In it he is reminded of the importance of governing his own temper, and of discharging, in a truly christian spirit, the various duties he owes to those to whom he sustains the relation of husband and father, if he would save himself from reproach in their eyes.

Of the pleas sometimes urged in justification of the neglect of this duty we mention but two, *first, lack of ability*. This plea would be entitled to some consideration, if family prayer required, in its performance, more than ordinary mental capacity. But it fails to satisfy when put forth by those who possess perhaps rare conversational powers, and in all matters of a worldly kind, experience no difficulty in conceiving ideas or expressing them in words. And especially does this apology fail when offered by those who have never attempted to lead in family prayer, and who therefore, can not be sure that they would not succeed, who perhaps never pray in secret, and whose disinclination to engage in domestic worship arises most probably from an inward disaffection to God, and dislike of the ways of religion.

To those christian parents who plead their inability to engage in family prayer as the reason of their having hitherto neglected it, we would suggest that they make the trial, believing that they would thus "renew their strength."

The second plea is *lack of time*. To this it might be replied that the time necessary is very small—four or five minutes being sufficient for the reading of the scriptures, and the same portion of time or less, answering for the utterance of a prayer, so that the exercise, morning and evening, would occupy little, if any thing more than twenty minutes. Surely the most busy life ought to allow this for an exercise so sacred in its obligation, and so replete with advantage. But we find that in the majority of instances those who allege that they have not time to pray in their families, spend, perhaps every day, more leisure than the act would require, in frivolous conversation, or in actually sinful pursuits and practices. It may be reasonably believed that time would be gained, and the business of life more successfully accomplished by the order and regularity which family prayer would produce, if it were stately observed.

The futility of the plea of want of time for the duty we are recommending will especially appear when we remember that it is virtually a declaration that religion is not the chief concern. It reverses the Saviour's injunction, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," (Mat. vi. 33), by subordinating religion to the service of mammon.

In regard to the *manner of the performance of family prayer*, we would suggest, (1) *that it be always accompanied with the reading of the Scriptures*. It might be well, especially as a means of securing attention to the portion of scripture read, to place a copy of the word of God in the hands of each member of the family, that all, by verse in turn, may share in the reading. The singing of a few verses, in which all should be invited to join, would also contribute greatly to the interest and profit of the exercise.

Punctuality may be named as an essential element in its proper performance. No day should pass without its being attended to. (3) *Brevity* should also be practiced. Religious exercises in order to prove beneficial to the young, should be brief and full of interest. Many children have learned to dread the approach of the hour for family devotion by being habitually obliged to listen to the reading of one of the longest chapters in the Bible, followed by a prayer fifteen or twenty minutes long. (4) *The utmost seriousness* should further characterize this sacred duty. Without seriousness it cannot be productive of the happy results which otherwise might be expected to follow it. (5) *As to the time best suited to the performance of the duty*, some families might prefer one hour, and some another, according to their peculiar circumstances and household arrangements. Perhaps, however, the hour most generally free from interruption is that which immediately precedes the first, and immediately follows the last meal of the day. And (6) *finally, the aid of the Holy Spirit* should be sought on the exercise, for without his gracious influence this and all other religious services can be productive of no benefit to ourselves or others. May the Great Head of the church give his blessing, that we may be enabled to fulfil the terms of the covenant to which we have subscribed, which requires that we "walk in our houses as becomes those professing godliness, and maintain the worship of God in our families, and train up those under our care in the ways of religion and virtue."

THE TWO STRANGERS IN CHURCH.

"Who are those two young ladies dressed in mourning who sat in the corner near you?" inquired Mrs. Ashby of an acquaintance who passed her pew just as the Sabbath morning service was closed. "They seem to be strangers," she continued, "and I haven't seen any one speak to them."

"They are not exactly strangers," said Mrs. Ashby's friend, "though I dare say they were never in the church before. Don't you remember a small thin-faced woman who sat in that

same corner for a few Sabbaths some three months ago, and always looked so forlorn and timid? She was their mother, and the name of the family is H—. She's dead now, I hear, and better off, I've no doubt. These girls and their father teased her to death, it is said, about her religion and church-going, for she would always come to church as long as she was able. But she's gone at last, and I wonder what sent them here."

"Perhaps the Lord has sent them," thought Mrs. Ashby, as her informant hastened down the aisle, and left her still standing at the door of her pew. She recalled the pale face of the mother, to whom she had once or twice spoken a kind word, and whose absence from church after a few Sabbaths' attendance had been accounted for by her reported removal from the town.

Mrs. Ashby looked again at the strangers; they were lingering, while all around them were fast leaving the house. No one seemed to care for them, and they looked as if almost doubting their right to be there. She felt as if some one ought to welcome them to the sanctuary; and so with a heart full of love, she went and took them by the hand. Calling them by name, she told them that she remembered their mother, and was grieved to hear that they had lost so good a parent. She added that she was glad to see them at church and hoped they would continue to fill their mother's place. Then she inquired their residence, and giving her own name, said that with their permission she would call upon them in a day or two. They were too much affected to reply, except by the brief assurance that they should be glad to see her.

Sickness in Mrs. Ashby's family prevented her from calling on Sarah and Ellen H.—that week as she intended. But when the following Sabbath came, she was glad to see them again in their mother's seat. She gave them a pleased look of recognition before the services commenced, and as soon as they were ended she went directly to them. Greeting them cordially, she explained the cause of her failure to call upon them, and told them that she particularly regretted it, because she was anxious to secure them as members of a young ladies' class which met weekly at her own house for the study of the Scriptures. She asked them to think of the proposal for a day or two, and she would see them about it during the week, if Providence permitted.

To Sarah and Ellen, Mrs. Ashby was the good Samaritan. They had been trained by their father in his own hard and bitter unbelief. The sorrowful and feeble mother whom they had just buried was scarcely a parent to them, she having married their father after they were nearly grown to maturity. She was a Christian, but too timid by nature and soon too ill to make her influence for good decided and efficient. The father and daughters laughed at her Bible-reading and psalm-singing, and utterly refused to join her in attendance at church. Finding herself disappointed in the character and temper of the family with which she hastily connected herself, she soon sank into the grave.

Not till then did those thoughtless girls realize what they had done. The fear and hesitation of the hitherto timid woman, in her dying hour gave place to Christian fortitude and even triumph. Her eyes saw truth with gospel clearness; her lips were fearless in declaring and enforcing it. The hitherto deluded daughters were touched at once with conviction and remorse. Under the influence of these feelings, they readily promised their dying mother to attend on public worship and to seek their own salvation and that of their father.

So it was that they came to the house of God; it was indeed "the Lord" who had "sent them." But the preaching they heard that first Sabbath was little calculated to stimulate or encourage them. The cold, lifeless sermon fell like lead on their awakened consciences. And when they met from those around them in church only an indifferent glance or a curious stare, they were ready to say, "No man careth for my soul." They would have gone home repelled and discouraged, but for the Christian faithfulness and sympathy of Mrs. Ashby. The tender love which glistened in her eye and made itself felt in the pressure of her hand, her unaffected interest in the welfare, and the almost motherly kindness of her manner, went directly to their hearts.

She visited them as she had promised, and soon won their confidence. They joined her Bible class, and diligently studied the word of God. It was not long ere they gave satisfactory evidence of genuine conversion; and now, under the wise training of Mrs. Ashby, who has become their trusted household counsellor, they are seeking, by the beauty and order of a Christian home, as well as by direct prayer and effort, to win their father to the Saviour.

God bless the disciples who "care for souls," and multiply their number a hundred fold.—*Am. Messenger.*

For the Christian Messenger.

NOTES OF A TOUR.

No. II.

DEAR BROTHER,—

We left Baltimore on Tuesday morning the 14th ult., and reached Cleveland on Wednesday evening, having travelled 520 miles, with only a few hours' rest at Bolivar on the Ohio, 140 miles on this side of Cleveland. The railroad crosses the Alleghany range, advantage being taken of a gorge, which enabled the engineers to cut a track in the side of the mountain, and accomplish the transit without any very difficult grades.