

# FAMILY WORSHIP

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There are some very important outward ordinances and means of grace which are plainly implied in the Word of God, but for the exercise of which we have few, if any, plain and positive precepts; rather are we left to gather them from the example of holy men and from various incidental circumstances. An important end is answered by this arrangement: trial is thereby made of the state of our hearts. It serves to make evident whether, because an expressed command cannot be brought requiring its performance, professing Christians will neglect a duty plainly implied. Thus, more of the real state of our minds is discovered, and it is made manifest whether we have or have not an ardent love for God and His service. This holds good both of public and family worship. Nevertheless, it is not at all difficult to prove the obligation of domestic piety.

Consider first the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God. It was for his domestic piety that he received blessing from Jehovah Himself, "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" (Gen. 18:19). The patriarch is here commended for instructing his children and servants in the most important of all duties, "the way of the Lord" - the truth about His glorious person. His high claims upon us, His requirements from us. Note well the words "he will command" them; that is, he would use the authority God had given him as a father and head of his house, to enforce the duties of family godliness. Abraham also prayed with as well as instructed his family: wherever he pitched his tent, there he "built an altar to the Lord" (Gen. 12:7; 13:4). Now my readers, we may well ask ourselves, Are we "Abraham's seed" (Gal. 3:29) if we "do not the works of Abraham" (John 8:39) and neglect the weighty duty of family worship?

The example of other holy men are similar to that of Abraham's. Consider the pious determination of Joshua who declared to Israel, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (24:15). Neither the exalted station which he held, nor the pressing public duties which developed upon him, were allowed to crowd out his attention to the spiritual well-being of his family. Again, when David brought back the ark of God to Jerusalem with joy and thanksgiving, after discharging his public duties, he "returned to bless his household" (2 Sam 6:20). In addition to these eminent examples we may cite the cases of Job (1:5) and Daniel (6:10). Limiting ourselves to only one in the New Testament we think of the history of Timothy, who was reared in a godly home. Paul called to remembrance the "unfeigned faith" which was in him, and added, "which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice." Is there any wonder then that the apostle could say "*from a child* thou hast known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15)!

On the other hand, we may observe what fearful threatenings are pronounced against those who disregard this duty. We wonder how many of our readers have seriously pondered those awe-inspiring words "Pour out Thy fury upon the heathen that know Thee not, and upon the families that call not on Thy name" (Jer. 10:25)! How unspeakably solemn to find that prayerless families are here coupled with the heathen that know not the Lord. Yet need that surprise us? Why there are many heathen families who unite together in worshiping their false gods. And do not *they* put thousands of professing Christians to shame? Observe too that Jer. 10:25 recorded a fearful imprecation upon both classes alike: "Pour out Thy fury upon ..." How loudly should these words speak to us. It is not enough that we pray as private *individuals* in our dosets; we are required to honor God in our *families* as well. At least twice each day—in the morning and in the evening—the whole household should be gathered together to bow before the Lord—parents and children, master and servant — to confess their sins, to give thanks for God's mercies, to seek His help and blessing. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this duty: all other domestic arrangements are to bend to it. The head of the house is the one to lead the devotions. but if he be absent, or seriously ill, or an unbeliever, then the wife should take his place. Under no circumstances should family worship be omitted. If we would enjoy the blessing of God upon our family then let its members gather together daily for praise and prayer. "Them that honour Me I will honour" is His promise.

An old writer well said, "A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of Heaven." All our domestic comforts and temporal mercies issue from the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the best we can do in return is to gratefully acknowledge together, His goodness to us as a family. Excuses against the discharge of this sacred duty are idle and worthless. Of what avail will it be when we render an account to God for

the stewardship of our families to say that we had no time available, working hard from morn till eve? The more pressing be our temporal duties, the greater our need of seeking spiritual succor. Nor may any Christian plead that he is not qualified for such a work: gifts and talents are developed by use and not by neglect.

Family worship should be conducted reverently, earnestly and simply. It is then that the little ones will receive their first impressions and form their initial conceptions of the Lord God. Great care needs to be taken lest a false idea be given them of the Divine Character, and for this the balance must be preserved between dwelling upon His transcendency and immanency, His holiness and His mercy, His might and His tenderness. His justice and His grace. Worship should begin with a few words of prayer invoking God's presence and blessing. A short passage from His Word should follow, with brief comments thereon. Two or three verses of a Psalm may be sung. Close with a prayer of committal into the hands of God. Though we may not be able to pray eloquently, we should earnestly. Prevailing prayers are usually brief ones. Beware of wearying the young ones.

The advantages and blessings of family worship are incalculable. First, family worship will prevent much sin. It awes the soul, conveys a sense of God's majesty and authority, sets solemn truths before the mind, brings down benefits from God on the home. Personal piety in the home is a most influential means, under God, of conveying piety to the little ones. Children are largely creatures of imitation, loving to copy what they see in others. "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: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psa. 78:5, 7). How much of the dreadful moral and spiritual conditions of the masses today may be traced back to the neglect of their fathers in this duty? How can those who neglect the worship of God in their families look for peace and comfort therein? Daily prayer in the home is a blessed means of grace for allaying those unhappy passions to which our common nature is subject. Finally, family prayer gains for us the presence and blessing of the Lord. There is a promise of His presence which is peculiarly applicable to this duty: see Matt. 18:19, 20. Many have found in family worship that help and communion with God which they sought for with less effect in private prayer.