

## EXCERPT FROM "CHURCH IN THE HOME"

Matthew Henry

Let those masters of families that have hitherto lived in the neglect of family-religion be persuaded now to set it up, and from henceforward to make conscience of it. I know it is hard to persuade people to begin even a good work that they have not been used to, yet if God by his grace set in with this word, who can tell but some may be wrought upon to comply with the design of it? We have no ill design in urging you to this part of your duty: we aim not at the advantage of a party, but purely at the prosperity of your families. We are sure we have reason on our side, and if you will but suffer that to rule you, we shall gain our point; and you will all go home firmly resolved, as Joshua was, that whatever others do themselves, and whatever they say of you, "you and your houses will serve the Lord." God put it into you, and "keep it in the imagination of the thought of your heart, and establish your way therein before him!"

Proceed in the right method; first set up Christ upon the throne in your hearts, and then set up a church for Christ in your house. Let Christ dwell in your hearts by faith, and then let him dwell in your houses; you do not begin at the right end of your work, if you do not first give your own selves unto the Lord; God hath respect first to Abel, and then to his offering. Let the fear and love of God rule in your hearts, and have a commanding sway and empire there, and then set up an altar for God in your tents; for you cannot do that acceptably till you have first consecrated yourselves as spiritual priests to God, to serve at that altar...

...Would you keep up your authority in your family? You cannot do it better than by keeping up religion in your family. If ever a master of a family looks great, truly great, it is when he is going before his house in the service of God, and presiding among them in holy things. Then he shows himself worthy of double honour, when he teacheth them the good knowledge of the Lord, and is their mouth to God in prayer, blessing them in the name of God.

Would you have your family-relation comfortable, your affairs successful, and give an evidence of your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ? Would you live in God's fear, and die in his favour, and escape that curse which is entailed upon prayerless families? Let religion, in the power of it, have its due place, that is, the uppermost place in your houses.

Many objections your own corrupt hearts will make against building these churches, but they will all appear frivolous and trifling to a pious mind that is steadfastly resolved for God and godliness; you will never go on in your way to heaven, if you will be frightened by lions in the street. Whatever is the difficulty you dread, the discouragement you apprehend in it, I am confident it is not insuperable, it is not unanswerable. But "he that observes the wind shall not sow, and he that regards the clouds shall not reap." Eccl. 11:4.

Be not loath to begin a new custom, if it be a good custom, especially if it be a duty -- as certainly this is - which while you continue in the neglect of, you live in sin; for omissions are sins, and must come into judgment. It may be you have been convinced that you ought to worship God in your families, and that it is a good thing to do so; but you have put it off to some more convenient season. Will you now at last take occasion from this sermon to begin it? And do not defer so good a work any longer. The present season is without doubt the most convenient season. Begin this day; let this be the day of your laying the foundation of the Lord's temple in your house; and then consider from this day and upward, as God by the prophet reasons with the people who neglected to "build the temple," Hag. 2:18-19. Take notice whether God does not from this day remarkably bless you in all that you have and do.

Plead not your own weakness and inability to perform family worship; make use of the helps that are provided for you: do as well as you can when you cannot do so well as you would, and God will accept of you. You will write what is necessary for the carrying on of your trade, though you cannot write so fine a hand as some others can; and will you not be as wise in the work of your Christian calling, to do your best, though it be far short of the best, rather than not do it at all? To him that hath but one talent, and trades with that, more shall be given; but from him that buries it, it shall be taken away. Be at some pains

to make the scriptures familiar to you, especially David's Psalms, and then you cannot be to seek for a variety of apt expressions proper to be used in prayer, for they will be always at your right-hand. Take with you those words which the Holy Ghost teaches, for you cannot find more acceptable words.

And now shall I prevail with you in this matter? I am loath to leave you unresolved, or but almost persuaded; I beg of you for God's sake -- for Christ's sake -- for your own precious soul's sake -- and for the children's sake of your own bodies, that you will live no longer in the neglect of so great, and necessary, and comfortable a duty as this of family-worship is. When we press upon you the more inward duties of faith and love, and the fear of God, it cannot be so evident that we succeed in our errand as it may be in this. It is certain you get no good by this sermon, but it is wholly lost upon you, if, after you have heard it, or read it, you continue in the neglect of family-religion; and if still you cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God. Your families will be witnesses against you that this work was undone; and this sermon will witness against you that it was not for want of being called to do it, but for want of a heart to do it when you were called. But I hope better things of you my brethren, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.