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SERMON XLII.

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ON JUSTIFICATION.

ROMANS 3:28.—*A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*

POWER, in an intelligent agent, implies an obligation to its exercise. The contrary supposition is an impeachment of the Creator's wisdom. The parable of the talents assumes this truth whilst it illustrates its application. Possession confers the right and imposes the duty. Such, too, is as plainly the common sense of mankind as it is the dictate of scripture. Hence idleness is esteemed a crime, which, if not punished by law, is at least placed under the ban of public reprobation. The buried talent will see its resurrection morn and meet its murderer at the bar of God.

Intelligent agents are moreover not accountable for the *exercise* only of their talents, but also for the *manner* of it. The Giver has defined the use of the gift, and prescribed a law to regulate it. This, too, is an original element in morals, and we can form no distinct conception of morality without it. Intelligent action, according to prescribed rule, is a leading item in our complex notion of moral agency. The very thought of an intelligent creature existing without law or rule to regulate and govern his actions, is difficult to conceive; its reality impossible to be believed. There *is* one, and we presume there *can be* but **ONE** such being. He whose understanding is infinite, and He alone, exists in simple and pure intelligence without *prescribed law*. He giveth none account. But to all created mind the prescription of rule appears a necessary adjunct.

Nor is our idea of moral existence yet complete. Law implies more than simple rule to regulate action. It also measures accountability. It is retrospective as well as prospective. It looks upon past as well as upon future action. It originates in sovereignty and flows back upon its source. Sovereign authority prescribes the rule, supreme power superintends its final application. Its alpha is legislative: its omega judicial. What the law prescribes must be done, and if done, will be rewarded; what it prohibits, must not be done, or if done, will be punished. In other words, God has always dealt with man on the principle of motive; addressing his fears on the one hand and his hopes on the other; both having their influence through the principle of self love. The desire of happiness is an essential item of our being. Thus has God formed us; and to this indestructible principle has he address-

SERMON XLIII.

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PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS.

GENESIS 18:19—*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.*

The principles of the text will be evolved, by a discussion of the two following propositions, viz:—

I. A godly man will faithfully train his children and his household, in the right ways of the Lord.

II. This training will secure the blessings of the promised salvation.

I. As to the first of these—let us state its general truths, and glance at the mode of their application.

1. The family is the primitive social institution and the foundation of all others. Two societies only have been organized among men, by immediate divine authority, viz. the family and the church.

2. The law of creation has constituted the husband head of the house. Every social body must have a head.

3. The head of the family is vested with *authority*, a right to exercise governing power. This is indeed what constitutes headship. And its exercise is not a matter of volition but of moral necessity. No man constituted by the God of providence head of an household, can permanently divest himself, either by delegation or resignation, of the power entrusted to him.

4. For the exercise of his authority, every head of a family shall give account of himself to God. That thus it must be evident from the very nature of a trust. "Occupy till I come," implies a limit to the possession, and an account of its manner.

Abraham is in this text commended for the faithful exercise of his trust. And at a distant day, Eli was fearfully reprimanded for his infidelity to his ———. Let us view,

5. The extent of authority. It confines with the family or household. The partner of his bosom, the fruit of their body, and the stranger that is within thy gates, are within its range. In other words, the children and the other inmates of the dwelling; all to whom he is a parental head. Should the providence of God throw the fatherless and the orphan under his roof, he may not withhold paternal discipline: he may not refuse the legitimate exercise of family training.

6. As to the mode of its exercise, this vested authority is not arbitrary, cold, forbidding; but tempered throughout with love. Accordingly divine wisdom has thrown around it a cluster of feelings and affections of a very tender character.

7. The ultimate ends of family government may be summed up in the word *holiness*. A godly seed is thus secured to the church, and a succession of sound members to the body politic. To perfect and

to perpetuate the human character, and thereby to promote the glory of God, as seen in the holiness of his people, should be to every christian parent the ever present object of his unwearied efforts.

How are these principles to be applied in the attainment of this object? I answer,

1. By the slow and silent, but certain operations of parental example. He that will train up a child in the way he should go, must himself walk in that way. "He will command his children and his household *after him*."

• 2. Another and most important theatre on which to exhibit the power of imitation, is in the great concerns of religion. Let the little child be accustomed from its earliest capability of observation to see its parent daily consulting the oracles of God with profound veneration, and it is almost impossible that he should not grow up with a feeling of deep reverence for the bible. Let the voice of praise to God be sounded in his ears from their first opening, and they will always delight in the songs of Zion. Let the parental knee be daily bended at the family altar, and the fervent aspirations, warm from a parent's heart, ascend in sweetest sympathy to the throne of mercy, and the blessed example cannot miss of its legitimate and most benign influence.

3. Let us remark, that the faithful inculcation of divine truth constitutes a very important item in the system of family training. How shall a man walk in the ways of the Lord unless he know them? Mere example is not expected to work miracles of transformation upon character. But let the religious and moral truth, which lies spread out in the living page of a parent's conduct, be also set forth in his preceptive instruction—let there be precept upon precept—plain familiar illustration, and the force of example receives an impulse which cannot be resisted.

II. This training will secure the blessings of the promised salvation.

In illustrating this position—let us remark, first. That there exists, substantially, a covenant between God and the believing parent. "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." (Gen. 17:7.)

Now that the passage quoted has reference to the great ecclesiastical constitution, called in the Old Testament, "the congregation of the Lord," and in the New, "the church of God," is not to be doubted. Equally true and obvious it is that "thy seed" here, is Christ, (Gal. 3:16,) and that in reference both to his mediatorial person and to his body the church. Still, however, it includes in this last, the children of believing parents. Indeed so intimately blended are the interests of these too divinely constituted social bodies, the family and the church, that we often find difficulty in settling the question to which many passages of scripture relate. And I can see no violation of the soundest rules of interpretation, in the application of such to both.

2. Therefore, I remark that this covenant guarantees to the seed of the faithful the blessings of the covenant of grace.

3. FAITHFULNESS to his covenant engagements on the part of the parent, is indispensable to foreclose the obligation and bind down the faithfulness of a covenant keeping God. Let this be displayed in all

the duties resulting from the relations of a parent and a believer and the hypothetical promise becomes absolute.

4. Wherefore, in the last place:

The faithful training already described, is a means, an efficacious means of securing a godly seed, and transmitting the blessings of peace and salvation to the most distant generations of men. There is security, and therefore he says, (Is. 55:3,) "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." The faithfulness of Jehovah being pledged, and that faithfulness being met by the faith of the believing parent, setting to his zeal that God is true, the covenant is confirmed and the blessings it guarantees must infallibly come in their season.

We hasten on to some practical improvement of the whole subject.

1. Christian parent! you are accountable for the souls of your children. You are constituted by the God of heaven and monarch of the skies, temporary guardians, not only of their bodies and their various interests, but also of their spirits. How precious the trust! How heavy the responsibility!! How solemn the account!!!

But if the trust is precious; the responsibility heavy; the account solemn; you have your comfort in this; the reward of faithfulness is great. If he has said, "Take this child away and nurse it for me;" he has also said, "I will give thee thy wages."

For 2. High and honorable is the state to which your labors are designed to raise the fruit of your body. Your children are in a course of preparation for the blest society of heaven.

Therefore, 3. Let your labors in the education of your children be directed to prepare them for their ultimate destination. In the early care and training of a child, wisdom and prudence will never lose sight of his post of usefulness and honor in future life. To fit him in the best manner for this, is the object of education. How absurd the conduct of a guardian to whom has been entrusted the education of a prince, that he might be fitted for the throne, should he instruct him only in the elementary branches of literature, and then direct his whole attention to music, drawing, sculpture: leaving out of view entirely the great principles of morals, the science of political economy, the history of nations, and the policy by which they have risen or fallen? Not less absurd is the conduct of that parent who directs his whole attention to the preparation of his child for this present life; whilst he turns not his attention to the life beyond the grave.

4. Piety is an inheritance for children. This remark I mean to be understood literally. An inheritance is that which is inherited, or received gratuitously from parents or other relations, by will and law. The position therefore is, that parents may transmit their piety to their children, as they do their worldly goods; so that the son shall with as much regularity heir his parent's piety as his property. To this conclusion we are shut up by the doctrines already laid down. If there is a covenant between God and the believing parent, and the latter, (on the strength of grace received,) perform his part, the former cannot fail; and the blessing is sure. There is no difficulty in the theory, and the practical difficulties are more imaginary than real.

Let the parent be equally careful, diligent and skilful in using all the means to transmit his piety that he does to transmit his property, and the results will be as regular in the one case as in the other. And indeed the facts accord with the principles. Wherever parents are faithful,

there the blessing is received. The failures are as frequent in the transmission of property as of piety. How very often does it happen, that the greatest diligence in treasuring up property for children, and the greatest care in securing it, utterly fail. No precautions heretofore have been able to guard against all contingencies. If then, the exceptions are as numerous in the one case as in the other, we ought to impute both to deficiency either in the means, or in their use. Now the means of transmitting piety are of divine origin, those of transmitting property of human; and therefore the former must be more perfectly adapted to their end than the latter. But the right use of the means is probably less neglected in the latter than in the former, because it depends on man's agency, which is much affected by his *feeling* of interest.

Thence, 5. Woe to that son or daughter who breaks the line of transmission by which piety has heretofore flowed down in the family blood. Woe be to him that expatriates himself from the kingdom of God: that brings a taint into the blood, and places his family under the ban of proscription from the house of God. I know not a more dreadful case; no sin that can place a human being under more fearful forebodings of destruction. To turn away from a line of holy ancestry, and to become a head to a new dynasty of rebels—to unite the interests of an interminable line, perhaps of descendants, with the interests of sin and satan! Oh horrible apostacy! Think seriously of this, ye youths of pious parentage. Examine well the whole subject, in its bearings upon time and upon eternity, before you make the fearful election.

6. Let us learn hence, the high importance of family religion. When the head of a house is a prophet, we may expect the will of God to be known, and the household to be trained in its practical obedience. When he is a priest, we may expect them to be led to the altar of God for forgiveness of sins, and for offering up the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. When he is a king, we may expect subjection to moral rule, because it is right. Thus the state is supplied with valuable citizens, the church militant with valiant soldiers of the cross, and the church triumphant, with pillars to decorate her temple and to stand for ever as monuments of grace and memorials of its victories.

7. The present attitude of the church in reference to the world's conversion to God, it appears to me, calls upon christian parents for very peculiar efforts in the whole business of family training. The signs of the times plainly indicate the approach of the days of the Son of man.

Now, christian parents! what part do you wish your sons and your daughters to act in that bright day? Shall they not participate in its conflicts and its triumphs? When the Son of man exclaims, "whom shall I send and who will go for us?" burns not your heart with a holy ambition to furnish a son or a daughter who shall step forward and respond, "Here am I, send me." How, important then, that the infusion of a missionary spirit begin in the early training of the domestic altar! Let every christian parent feel that he is bound to do something toward the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. Let the hallowed desire of furnishing some portion of that host which is destined to bear the banner of the cross in triumph round the world, animate the heart and kindle the fire of its devotion amid the family circle. So shall our sons and our daughters come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty; and having served the Captain of salvation in the foreign field, and been instrumental in turning many to righteousness, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament for ever and ever.—Amen.