

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

### THE RELATION OF FAMILY LIFE TO CHURCH WORK.

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"Ye stand all of you before the Lord, your God, your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is within thy camp. That thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God; and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day."—DEUT. xxix. 10.

"O our God will Thou not judge them, for we have no might against this great company, that cometh against us; neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee. And all Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, their wives and their children."—2 CHRON. xx. 12.

"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava that might afflict ourselves before our God to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."—EZRA viii. 21.

God did make a covenant with Abraham as the father of the faithful, "to be a God unto him and to his seed after him."

As Abraham was a representative believer, so in a still deeper and more permanent sense the Christian parent is God's representative in the home, to the children, in the work and worship of God. The repenting and returning Israelites are assembled by Ezra, longing for restoration to their own land, convinced of the evil of their backslidings, bewildered and perplexed as to their course. They proclaim a day for deep humiliation before God, and seek a right way for themselves, for their little ones, and for all their substance. They realize the dangers by which they are beset, and desire to be in a right relation to God. We ask your attention to this important subject as it bears on our growth and prosperity as a church.

Notice, first:

#### FAMILY LIFE.

The family is the ordinance of God. Conceived in divine love, founded by divine wisdom, organized in a life of purity, surrounded by solemn sanctions of reward and retribution, it is the corner-stone of human life. Its sacred enclosures and its crown of glory are God's special care and delight the earthly pledge and symbol of heaven's charms and character, "The family of God in heaven and earth." Its relationships do not lie on the surface of human compacts "and mutual arrangements, but deep in the solemnities of birth," out of this comes father, mother, sister, brother, son and daughter. So in the kingdom, *born of God, from the Spirit*.

The family is the place where in faith and love God's gift of a soul to be moulded for him is received, the point of departure into the mission of life for God—life with all its joys and sorrows, conflicts and triumphs, hopes and fears. Between the reception of this gift of a soul to nurture and guide for God, and its departure for work and worship, there lie around you all those influences that make or mar, that beautify or deface, this immortal trust. O how ought the home to be filled with the atmosphere of righteousness and trust, spiritual life and love; hallowed by prayer, enforced by precept, linked to eternal things by faith in God and consecration to his cause.

This ordinance of family life is not only of God, but it is first in the order of time, and we believe of importance; it has been graced by the charms of newly created innocence; it has been degraded and defaced and destroyed by sin; but the Gospel of Christ is to restore, renew and lift it to greater influence, and to an exalted mission. "Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." To this work as Christians we are summoned: called upon to gird ourselves with grace and courage, to fortify ourselves with the love and authority of fatherhood. This importance and pre-eminence of family life is made everywhere conspicuous in the Book of God; and in the divine plan of Providence, it gives tone to a nation, where there is family life approaching its highest ideal. Control family life by the divinely communicated principles lodged in it, and you communicate moral strength to national life and history; it will at the needful hour arise and repel the grasping ambition of the unprincipled invader. The home is the inner sanctuary for purity and power in the work of God in the earth. It gives firmness and fortitude in grappling with the deadly principles and powers of evil in the earth. The absence of pure family life makes a people the prey of levity and licentiousness, the sport of pride and pauperism, it writes, "Ichabod" on a nation's splendour, and doom on its most dazzling

glory. We are not without illustrations on a solemn scale of the truth of these statements. Our God is the God of the families of the whole earth. It was through a line of family life in the main true and loyal to God, that the revealed will of God was delivered. Of the families of Abraham and David Christ came in the flesh. There is impressive instruction in the action of the returning exiles. Humbled before God, weak before their enemies, but seeking a right way for themselves, for their little ones, and all their substance. Notice, second:

#### CHURCH LIFE.

These are two fundamental institutions through which this world is to be saved—the two places of the gathering of holy influence and sacred associations—the one the birth, of blood; the other by the re-birth, of the Holy Ghost, to reason and redemption. The one is by generation, the other by regeneration; the family is first in the order of time, the other is later, but more comprehensive in aim and destiny; the germ of a higher life and of wider expansion, of a more gorgeous bloom, and a rarer fruit; engrafted by the divine hand of the heavenly husbandman, on the original, hardy, prolific stock of family life; compact in growth and free-blooming, as the gardner speaks. Neither institution is complete in itself; they are mutually dependent. The family of the patriarchal times was continually being overrun by the power of ungodliness; the violation of the divine conditions of the family life always brought an ungodly seed.

The institution of the Church means the gathering together of all who love the truth, own the Lord, and wait on him for instruction in the way of holy living. The church is a wider organization, resting on a broader basis, the embodiment of purposes, thoughts, and divine emotions, that spring into historical importance with the terrible fact of sin. The magnitude and character, the sacredness and solemnity of the church life in the earth and the regard in which it is held by God, is significantly set forth by the terms in which it is named: "The house of God," "the temple of the Holy Ghost," "the body of Christ," the gift of the Father to His Son, the fruit of his purchase in the outpouring of His blood; heaven-born, guided, trained, sustained, saved with an everlasting salvation, "Holding forth the word of life," the light in the dark place, the city set on the hill, the salt of the earth. The church is then the embodiment of heavenly grace and life, love and liberty, carrying it into family life, sanctioning its authority, and that by it all nations of the earth may be blessed. This return of the Israelites to their land, church privileges, and responsibilities, shows how family life is prominent and enters into church prosperity. They sought the Lord for themselves, "their little ones, and all their substance." They sought His protection, His peace, and His guidance. Having thus indicated the reality and importance of these two fundamental institutions, the family and the Church, notice, third:

#### THEIR MUTUAL RELATIONS, PRIVILEGES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

These two institutions have mutual authority. They have been set up by the same wise hand, they are the offspring of the same loving head, the objects of the same watchful care and jealous regard. What is affirmed of the one is true of the other: "I, the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." "This is his vineyard of red wine," "with the tender vines," and the "olive plants by the sides of the house." "They have the everlasting arms encircling them, and the seal of the divine signet upon them, written over the nursery, 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" "He set a little child in the midst" and said to all the world, "except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." They have the mutual authority of life and law, of heaven and earth, of truth and trust.

#### THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS IN THEIR FINAL AIMS HAVE THE SAME MISSION TO DISCHARGE—

the training of the soul to great usefulness here and great reward hereafter. The foundation of all noble life in this world is *healthy blood, strong bone and tough sinew*. Family life here lays this foundation, and woe betide its coming generations if by false and artificial living its blood is inflamed, or by improvidence it degenerates into rude sensuality. It is from this source that "the iniquities of the father visit the children unto the third and fourth generation." The parents eat

sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. This man, and that, perisheth not alone: he has left the seeds of disease and death with others. On this healthy foundation of family life, the aim of church life is to rear a superstructure of noble reason, living virtue, and by sovereign grace, eternal life in Christ Jesus. All at once admit these last aims to be worthy of the Church of Christ, but those who practically set family life on a lower level, confining its goal to an earthly end. In the work of bringing the soul to Christ, and building it up for usefulness in time and reward in eternity, and the close relation subsisting between these two institutions, there is no room for misunderstanding or antagonism, shyness or suspicion. No institution, however hopeful its character, however manifest its authority and commission, can contravene or supersede the mission and end of the Church and family. They are schools of training, not for earth only, but for heaven; it is a training not to serve ourselves, but the Lord, and one another under him. There is to be preparation for business, but it is business for the Lord, "Diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," and these exiles are seeking a right way for themselves, and their little ones, and all their substance.

These two institutions having the same divine authority—the same mission and end, in life and godliness—we ask, *What is the right way?*

#### I. MUTUAL SYMPATHY.

Church life has taken the necessary form of teaching and preaching—the pulpit and the school. The Sabbath school is not an outside, good kind of institution, but the Church at work, teaching and training her children in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and for the cause of God. She has evangelistic efforts, for gathering around her the careless and the outcast, warning and teaching them of the right way of life. Speaking of homes where the parents are professing Christians: what is that family but the Church laying the foundation of blood and bone, high and healthy, rearing a sanctuary for reason and virtue, to be quickened by the Divine Spirit and crowned by the divine favor. The Church assembled for work and worship, embracing old and young, parents and children, is but the wider circle, the larger union, the fuller utterance of prayer, and the richer peal of praise belonging to the family, and ascribed to Christ, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." Responsive in their sympathies.

#### II. MUTUAL CO-OPERATION.

The school should not usurp the prerogative of the home, and the home should not leave its work of instruction to the school. There should be the aim of united life; co-operation in those aims to the revealed destiny of the soul; co-operation in service towards those ends; not mere good will and good wishes, but honest, honorable, healthy effort. The parents should foster loving and reverential regard for the person and work of the teacher or preacher, and they in turn should inculcate and impress on the heart the sacredness of parental authority and love. This co-operation ennobles and sanctifies the home, it extends and strengthens the work of the Church and fulfils the common mission of the training of souls, the conversion of sinners and the glory of God. In both institutions let us steer clear of that questionable territory of no-harm influence. What harm is there? Oh, there is *no harm in it!* Let us rather tread the firm ground and clear territory of positive influence, and positive good. "Godliness is profitable unto all, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Let there be unity of aim and work, closeness of sympathy and interest; encouragement and enquire concerning the spirit of each, continuing in the faith that holds, and the prayer that pleads. Keep them from the evil that is in the world. Separated from mere earthly distinction and carnal ambition, our desire could be like Salome's, "Grant that these my children may sit on thy right hand in thy kingdom;" and in the spirit of the old Hebrew prophet, resolving, "We God's servants will arise and build."

"Such is the house that I must build,  
This the cottage, this the home,  
And this the palace, treasure-filled,  
For an immortal's earthly home;  
O, noble work of toil and care!  
O, task most difficult and rare!  
O, simple but most arduous plan  
To raise a dwelling-place so fair,  
The sanctuary of a man."

What a loud call there is for co-operation in view of the position parent, or preacher, or teacher may