

## A PARENT'S PRIVILEGES.

A PAPER READ AT A SUNDAY SCHOOL CONVENTION HELD IN EXETER, MAY 26TH, BY JOHN RANSFORD, CLINTON.

When asked to furnish a paper for this Convention I tried to think of some practical subject. I was also desirous that my subject should not be threadbare. This latter qualification, in the face of so many papers furnished for the numerous Conventions, but more especially when one is confronted with the able pulpit ministrations on all sides, rendered such a selection a task of no ordinary difficulty for a simple layman—one belonging to what might be termed the inferior order of the laity, without any prefix or affix to his name. However, on reflection I concluded that the privileges of parents was possibly a subject not yet worn threadbare by discussion and papers thereon at similar Conventions to this, and at the same time seldom, far too seldom, dwelt upon from the pulpit. I will therefore proceed to place before you, as well as my feeble powers will permit, what I believe is the Scriptural teaching as regards the privileges of parents; and when I speak of privileges I necessarily include duties—for all duties pertaining to parents in respect to their children are high and holy privileges—and privileges also necessarily entail vast and momentous responsibilities. These all three go hand in hand. You cannot separate them. No man can enjoy the privileges of wealth without simultaneously incurring the duties and responsibilities naturally resulting therefrom. It is a universal law that cannot be broken. And I commence by what to some may appear a bold and unfounded assumption—one little known, little taught—and still less believed in in these days—and that is the consensus of Scriptural teaching plainly lays down this principle—that the children at least, if not the servants also for the time being, anyway whatever you may see fit to include by the word "house"—the house of any servant of God is brought into a position of privilege and consequent responsibility through its connection with him, the owner of such house. Understand me aright—I do not for one moment wish to infer that the work of regeneration is not needed therefore in the case of the children of Christian parents—far from it—but this much I do assert, that the Bible always connects a man with his house, and the house with the man, and a Christian father and mother are warranted therefore in counting upon God for their children, and consequently are responsible before God to train up these children in the fear, nurture and admonition of the Lord. Let us now for a few moments look and see what Scriptural ground I have for what I have advanced, and having established it as purely Scriptural teaching, I will conclude with a few remarks on the grave consequences, the weighty responsibilities that naturally follow.

Begin then with the antediluvian teaching, not to go back any further, and we find there that God spake unto Noah, "Come thou and all thy house"—all thy house are to be saved from destruction. "I will bring a flood of water upon the earth and destroy every living creature, but thou and thy house shall be saved." Why? Does it say because thy children have served me, or thy wife, or both? No! but because "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." "Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generation—Noah walked with God." Then when the final command came, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark," the reason follows: "For thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." Thus we find a man's house is indissolubly connected with the man. Let us now go on further and see if this thesis is born out by general Scriptural teaching. The next example we find in Abraham, a man selected by the Lord as fit to be intrusted with His counsels and on what ground? twofold, first that he will "become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." And "for I have known him to the end that he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." Here is food for reflection. If I went no further, let fathers and mothers ponder over the vast issues contained in this one passage. A man selected by God Almighty as one fit to be intrusted with His most secret counsels, a man in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. A man styled the friend of God, and his major qualification, if not the qualification necessary, "that he will command his children and his household that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." I spoke of the possibility of even servants being brought into a privileged position by forming part of the household of a servant of God. Was I far astray? If any think so let them explain the meaning of the words "his children and his household." Who form the household after the children are specifically named? What a contrast the picture I present before you to the modern every-day picture of family life! The wife no longer in subjection to her husband: utterly ridiculing in nine cases out of ten the Scriptural ground that the

husband is the head of the house, and the inevitable consequence—the divine order once being broken, the children no longer in subjection, but doing their own will—thinking—choosing—acting in things religious for themselves. This is partly digression, but such plain Scriptural commands bring us face to face with realities that are not to be lightly put aside. Contrast Abraham's case with Noah's! Noah's house was saved from the flood on account of Noah's righteousness. Abraham was chosen as the fitting recipient of the counsels of God because "he will command his children and his household." We are not told it was on the ground of Abraham's faith or righteous conversation, although possibly all are included. But I suggest it is worthy of the attention and serious consideration of parents to-day to think of why God chose Abraham as his confidant. It is well worthy of comment, while Abraham's case is fresh in our minds, to show how Old Testament and New Testament teaching go hand in hand, that St. Paul writes to Timothy of the necessary qualifications of a bishop, in order that he shall rule well the Church of God—lays down as an essential that such a man must be one "that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection."

Look at Jacob's history. We read that God said unto Jacob, "Arise! go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God." Well, did Jacob obey God's commands? Yes! but how? His first thought was, is my household in a fit state for me to do as God has ordered me? We read following, that he at once commanded his household and all that were with him (this surely includes servants). "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments, and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God." What could be plainer? Jacob called to worship God in a certain place; at a certain time; in a certain manner; his first step is to see that his household and all that were with him were in a fit condition to accompany him. Then, and not until then, does he go forward, and the result is blessing. Take next the history of the children of Israel. Pharaoh told Moses, "Go, serve the Lord your God, but who are they that shall go?" Moses, aware of the mind of God, instantly answered: "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord." God's saving of His people, God's bringing His people out of bondage with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm, did not apply to the men or to the women of the tribes of Israel only. It applied to the men and to the women, and to the houses, as well, of those men and women. Their sons and their daughters, their flocks and their herds. No salvation for the one without the other. No deliverance for the fathers and mothers with the sons and daughters left behind. This is God's way. The fact that these fathers and mothers never reached the promised land, that their carcasses fell in the wilderness, and their children alone received the earthly reward, cannot be urged as against my contention. These parents rebelled against God. Sin entered in and marred God's plan. This is bordering on the mysterious, if you will, but it is there.

Joshua is another example. He did not consider it sufficient to say, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve, but as for me I will serve the Lord." No! useless for Joshua to serve the Lord and let his house serve idols. But "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Does not the question fairly arise that though Joshua served the Lord and his wife and children served idols, how far would Joshua be blameless? At least it is worthy of consideration. Do we find similar teaching in the New Testament, or as some would have us think, is all this teaching relegated to a past dispensation? Is a man no longer head of the house? Is the tie broken that in other days gone by bound together a man and his house? Jesus said to Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." Take the case of Cornelius—"Send men to Joppa; and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." The same blessed teaching again is found in connection with the jailer at Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." Was this not fulfilled? Read further—"And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Read what is said about the house of Onesiphorus: "The Lord grant mercy unto that house," prays the Apostle Paul. On account of what the house had done? All we are told is "He oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain." He, Onesiphorus, helped me. The Lord grant mercy to his house. Again we find the Old Testament and the New teaching the same momentous truth; whatever you choose to make of it, the fact stares us in the face. The man and the man's house indissolubly connected. Thus far we have only looked at one side of the question,

namely, that of blessing following and descending upon the family on account of the righteousness, the faith, the ability to rule of the head of the house. But the same law holds good in a reverse manner. Can a head of the house sin and the children not be partakers thereof? Let Scripture tell the sad story. What of Achan who took the garment and the silver and the gold? Listen to the sentence, "And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the mantle, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had . . . and all Israel stoned him with stones and burned them with fire." Look at Korah, Dathan and Abiram. They rebelled, they rose up against Moses and Aaron. What was the result? "The earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their household and all the men that appertaineth unto Korah and all their goods." Just as comprehensive as Achan. Look at Eli. "I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. What an instance is David's history. David sinned, and the command went forth, "The sword shall never depart from thy house." "The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." How David suffered is known. The sword never departed from his house. His child died, and I have often thought the culminating point of his heart's misery is expressed in those words, "Oh my son, Absalom . . . would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son." I think, however, the most remarkable instance is to be found in the case of Lot. When God overthrew the cities of the plain He offered to spare the lives of Lot's sons-in-law (evidently evil men). He spared Lot, his wife and his daughters. He spared the city of Zoar, and we are told that when He did all this "He remembered Abraham." Evidently it was for Abraham's sake that all this was done. The result of Abraham's conduct extended beyond his immediate surroundings.

Do you see to where this train of thought has led us? Are you prepared to accept Scriptural ground? Will you follow the teaching of God's word? If so, we have now arrived at the second part of my paper, a few concluding practical remarks based upon the assumption that God views man and his house as indissolubly connected. What then are your duties and privileges as Christian parents in this regard? Undoubtedly you are responsible to God for the training of your children. So surely as God has entrusted children to your care, so surely does He require their training at your hands. What did He command His people concerning this? "And these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." One would think it hardly necessary to urge upon father or mother that it is their duty, their privilege to train their children religiously. And yet it is necessary. The tendency of the age, the drift of ideas, is all towards no parental discipline, no parental moral training, a godless home, and the inevitable result. For the family to meet together daily for the worship of God as a family is rare, but it is getting rarer and rarer. The attendance of the family at church for public worship in the congregation is rapidly on the wane. It all results from the departure that had been made from Scriptural injunction as regards the training of children. You will not be surprised to hear me now state that I am entirely opposed to the Sunday school as it exists to-day. The Sunday school, as introduced by Robert Raikes in 1781, when he gathered poor children from the streets of Gloucester in England, put them into school and took care of them from ten in the morning till five in the afternoon, watched them during the hour's recess, read to them and took them to church, is an admirable institution—one that should be perpetuated, one that could not fail to be productive of great good. But the modern institution, as we have it to-day, should be condemned in severe terms. In too many cases parents of children neglect the services of God in the church; they do not attend themselves, nor do they see to it that their children attend—I mean with that systematic regularity that should prevail, nor indeed anything like it. The one event of the day is the preparing of the children for attending Sunday school, which being an accomplished fact, father and mother feel that their work is done, their responsibility met and that their children are receiving all the religious education that is needful. One hour—one hour and a half at the utmost—of so-called religious instruction per week, given by whom? In many cases, even, somebody unknown personally to the parents. In some cases one who needs to be taught. Compare this with the Scriptural idea. Family prayers—children and parents day by day listening to and feeding upon the sincere milk of the Word, whereby they may be spiritually fed and grow—children and parents together approaching the throne of grace and through the One Mediator supplicating for every want. On Sunday children and parents attending