

Family Religion.

BY THE REV. ARCHIBALD LEE, D.A.,

Moderator of the Synod of British Columbia.

The Synod of British Columbia at its last meeting, held at Nanaimo, laid upon its Moderator the duty of issuing a pastoral letter to the members of the Church upon the duties of Family Religion. To the fulfilment of this duty I now address myself, seeking first of all guidance from God, and praying that the counsels which He shall enable me to give may be fruitful in the promotion of spiritual life in the families of our beloved Church.

Too much importance can not be given to the subject of family religion. In God's dealings with his people we frequently notice the depth of meaning attached to the family relationship. We find repeated mention of father and children in the commands and promises of God. We read of Noah, "Thou and thy house;" of Abraham, "Thou and thy son," and of the Israelites, "Ye and your children." God has thus honored the family relation, in which we have a type of the relation which should subsist between God and His believing children. The family has as one of its objects the propagation and maintenance of true religion. The warfare of the Church and of the world depends in large measure upon the religious condition of the families of our land. If families grow up without God, without the cultivation of Christian graces, then the future of the Church must be dark indeed. Seeing then so much depends on the religious condition of families, let us endeavor to lay down a few fundamental principles which may be a help to those who wish to faithfully perform the duties that devolve upon them.

Family religion first of all lays its obligations upon parents. All parents, like Joshua, should realize that religion is a personal matter. They should say like him, "As for me, I will serve the Lord." All reforms must begin with self. True religion must begin in personal dedication to God. In every Christian home, the parents must be servants of God. The first duty of a parent is a life devoted to God. It is this which creates a spiritual atmosphere in the home, which will prove a blessed means of growth in grace to the children in the household. This consecration must be whole-souled. It must be a consecration, not depending on the opinion of others, but on love to God. The ideal Christian home is that where the parents have made this personal consecration of themselves to God. In the New Testament we read of Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother of Timothy, as being parents in whom dwelt the true spirit of personal consecration. Monica, the mother of Augustine, was a faithful Christian, and under God Augustine owed very much to his mother's training and example. "All that is good in me I owe to my mother," said President John Quincy Adams. Here then is the foundation stone of family religion, viz., the personal consecration of parents to God. A question for every parent is, "Have I made this personal consecration to God?"

Again, family religion embraces within its obligations both parents and children. Parents must make a stand for themselves and all who belong to them. Their stand must be like that of Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Now God plainly indicates in His Word how parents are to do their duty to their children. In Deuteronomy vi 6, 7, "And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children," etc. This passage indicates how parents can make a stand for their children, viz., by carefully instructing them in the commandments and will of God revealed in His Word. The Church and Sabbath school are important factors in religious training, but they are not intended to relieve parents of their responsibility and duty. It is when parents are true to their duties and carefully and prayerfully seek to train their children in the right way, that they may expect the Sabbath school and Church to be to them a true means of blessing.

Again family religion must be practical. With many the sum and substance of religion is salvation. This, however, is a very narrow view of religion. We are

saved in order to serve God. God wants a people to serve Him. How often is service taught both in the Old Testament and the New. Exodus iv. 23, "Let thy son go that he may serve me;" Deut. vi. 13, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." In Romans vi. 22 Paul says of believers, "Now being made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life." Now what is it to serve God? It is to do His will, to support and honor his cause, to believe in Jesus Christ, to deny ourselves for His sake, to stand up for righteousness, to present ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service.

In a Christian home the service of God occupies the chief place. It is a beautiful sight when parents and children are seen truly serving God. It is in such homes the men and women are being trained who are to carry on the work of God in the future. Let every parent who may read this letter resolve with God's help that he will do his duty in leading the household as well as himself to faithfully serve God.

But again family religion must be a Confessed religion. It must be a religion of which we are not ashamed. Paul confessed he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Joshua confessed before the thousands of Israel that he and his house would follow God. Now we want every father and mother to be like Paul and Joshua—not ashamed to confess before their family. On one occasion Christ healed a man afflicted with unclean spirits. The man wished to remain with Jesus, but Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them what great things God hath done for you and hath had compassion on you." Now let us be practical and see how parents can confess Christ. First parents can confess Christ by faithfully attending the house of God. God from the beginning commanded and still commands those who fear Him to meet for His worship and for instruction in the House of God. Example is more powerful than precept, and therefore parents must confess their regard for God by faithfully attending God's house. They should go because it is right, because it is their duty, and if they go from such motives they will soon love to go and say like David, "I joyed when it was said unto me, go ye up unto the House of the Lord." Then parents can confess Christ by receiving and believing the Gospel, and so become members of Christ's Church. Christ says emphatically, "If ye confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father and the angels." Open confession must follow sincere acceptance of Christ. Therefore, brethren, confess Christ in your homes. From the earliest dawn of reason let your children know that God dwells in your homes. At the table provided by the bounty of God, confess His name by asking a blessing. Confess God by reading the Bible and praying with and for your households. Show your zeal for God's service by careful instruction. Seek to help your children in the preparation of their Sunday school lessons. See that they are taught the shorter catechism and to read and love the Bible. Confess Christ also by a consistent life at home and in the world. Live a life of faith, of sobriety, of purity, of uprightness, and of charity, and thus show your confession of Christ to be the outward sign of an inner life hidden with Christ in God. I could give many illustrations of parents who were not ashamed to confess Christ before their families. Joshua, who was not ashamed to acknowledge God; Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened; Eunice, the mother of Timothy; Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist, who walked blameless before God.

And now, brethren, in conclusion, let us give this subject of family religion the thoughtful consideration its importance demands. Let those of us who are ministers seek to impress upon the minds of our people the vital need of true religion in every home of the Church. Let us seek to impress upon them the need of the Holy Spirits in all our efforts at serving Him, lest we become mere formalists in our religion.

And now for our ministers, for our congregations and families we earnestly pray, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In name of Synod of British Columbia.