

DIALOGUE VI

THE CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTED IN FAMILY DUTIES; in a Dialogue between a Minister and his Parishioner.

Minister. NEIGHBOUR, I am glad to see you. How do you like the new life which you have begun? And what do you find in the practice of the instructions which have been given you?

Parishioner. I find that I have long and foolishly neglected a joyful and a better life; I have lost my time, and made myself both unskilful in, and indisposed to, the practice of my Christian duties; I find that the things which you have prescribed, are excellent, and doubtless must be very pleasing to those who have a suitable disposition towards them; and some pleasure I find even in my weak beginning. But the greatness of the work, and the great untowardness and backwardness of my mind, much abate the satisfaction of it, by suggesting many doubts, and fears, and difficulties. I foresee, however, that better things may yet be noped for.

M. Where is your great difficulty, that requireth counsel?

P. I find a great deal of work to do in my family, to govern them in the fear of God, to do my duty to them all, especially to educate my

children, and daily to worship God among them. I pray you help me with your advice in this matter.

M. My first advice to you is, that you resolve, by God's help, to perform your duty as well as you can; and that you commend your family to God, the Lord and Master of it. And I pray you let the following reasons fix your resolution.

If you devote your family to God, God will be the protector of it. He will watch over it, for safety and provision, as his own. But if your family be not God's, they are his enemies; and instead of the blessings of health, peace, and prosperity, you may either look for sickness, dangers, and death; or even your prosperity shall be a snare to you and yours.

How pleasant is it to join with one heart and mind in the service of God, and in his cheerful praises! But if your family be ungodly, it will be full of discord and vexation.

Your family hath such constant need of God, as requireth you constantly to serve him. As every man hath his personal necessities, so families have family necessities, which God must supply, or they are miserable. Therefore family duty must be your daily employment.

Holy families are the chief seminaries of Christ's church on earth, and it is very much their duty to keep up the interest of religion in the world. Hence come holy magistrates; and holy pastors and teachers, who, as Timothy, received good instructions from their parents, and grace from the Spirit of Christ in their tender age. Though learning be found in schools, godliness is often received from the education of care-

ful parents. When children and servants come to church with well prepared minds, the labours of the pastor will do them good; they will receive what they hear with faith, love, and obedience. It will be a joy to the minister to have such a flock. And it will be joyful to the people that are such, to meet together in the sacred assemblies, to worship God with cheerful hearts: and such worshippers will be acceptable to God. But when families come together in gross ignorance, they understand little of what is said, and go home little the better for all the labours of the minister. They do not feel the power and benefit of the word, nor worship God in spirit and truth.

You have greater and nearer obligations to your family than pastors have to the people. Your wife is as your own flesh. Your children are as it were parts of yourself. Nature bindeth you to the dearest affection, and of course to the greatest duty to them. Therefore as you have the bowels of parents; and as you care what becometh of your children's souls for ever, dedicate them to God, teach them his word, educate them in holiness, restrain them from sin, and prepare them for salvation.

P. I must confess that natural affection teacheth me, that there is great reason for what you say. And my own experience still further convinces me; for if my parents had better instructed me in my childhood, I had not lived so ignorantly and ungodly as I have done. But alas! few parents do their duty; many take more pains about their horses, and cattle, than they do about their children's souls.

M. You might add, with too great truth, that many are sadly unmindful that God hath committed their children's souls as much to their trust and care as he hath their bodies. It is their duty first to dedicate them to God, in the ordinances of baptism. They are then to teach them, and to exhort them to keep the covenant which they made; to catechise them; and to remind them of the state of their souls, the mercy of redemption, the excellency of holiness, and of everlasting life. They are to watch over them with wisdom, love, and diligence, to save them from temptation, Satan, and sin, and to lead them by the example of a holy life.

But, alas! instead of this, they bring their children to make that covenant in baptism with God, to which they never heartily consented themselves. They turn all into a mere ceremony. And when they think that they have thus made a Christian of their child, it is well, if they even teach him the nature and meaning of the covenant into which he was admitted. They may teach him to say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, but they take no pains to make him understand them. They do not seriously remind him of his natural corruption, nor of his need of a Saviour and a Sanctifier, nor of the danger of sin and hell, nor of the way of an holy life, nor of the joyful state of saints in glory. They teach him his trade and business in the world; but not the way to serve God and be saved. They chide him for those faults which are against themselves, or against his prosperity in the world; but those that are against God and his soul only, they do

not regard. If they do not, by their own example, teach him to neglect God's word and the duty of prayer; to curse, to swear, to talk foolishly, and to deride that holy life, which in baptism he vowed to live; yet they will bear with him in all this wickedness. The Lord's day, they are content that he spend in idleness and folly, instead of learning the word of God, and attending his holy worship. In a word, they suffer their children to serve the devil, the world, and the flesh, which in their baptism they renounced; and to neglect, if not despise God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of souls, to whom by vow and covenant they were dedicated. So that their education leads, or at least permits them, to break and contradict their baptismal vows, and, under the name of Christians, to rebel against God and Jesus Christ.

For parents thus to neglect, betray, and ruin their children for ever; for them to do it, who should love them as themselves, and have the tenderest care of them, is most surely perfidious cruelty.

But how can we hope that they should have mercy upon their children's souls, who have no mercy on their own? Or that they should help them forward to that heaven, which they despise themselves; or save them from those sins, which are their delight?

P. Your complaint, Sir, is sad and just. But I find that men think, that teaching their children belongs to the school-master and the minister only, and not to them.

M. Parents, school-masters, and pastors have all their several parts to do; and no one's work

goeth on well without the rest. But, the parent's is the first and greatest of all. A minister should find his hearers catechised and previously educated, that the church may be a church indeed. If they come to him utterly uninformed, I know that this will not excuse ministers from doing what they can for such. If you will send your children and servants ignorant and ungodly to him, he must do his best; but how much more good might he do, and how much more comfortable would his calling be, if parents would do their parts?

We talk much of the badness of the world; and there are no men that do more to make it bad, than bad parents and family-governors. Many call for church-reformation, and state-reformation; but if men would reform their families, and agree in a holy education of their children, and a religious care of their servants, every church and state would soon be reformed, when they were made up of such reformed families.

P. I pray you, Sir, to give me such instruction as you think best, concerning my several duties; first to my children, that I may do my part, that if any of them perish, their condemnation may not be my fault. And then concerning the other duties, which belong to the several relations of life.

M. First, then, as to your children, be sure that you do your part in admitting them into their baptismal covenant. Teach them, as they grow up, to understand well their baptismal engagements, and what has been done for them. Cease not till you have brought them heartily to consent to it at a proper age: and then bring

them to the Bishop for *Confirmation*, that they may seriously and solemnly renew the covenant; and then be admitted to the Lord's table, that they may be preserved unto everlasting life. Frequently urge familiar and earnest persuasions and motives, to stir up holy affections in them; and show them the way of reducing all to practice.

Labour to fill them with the greatest reverence of God and the holy Scriptures. And then show them the authority of the word of God, for all that you would teach them to know or do. For till their consciences come under the fear and government of God, they will not serve him. Never speak of God and holy things to them, but with the greatest gravity and reverence, that the manner as well as the matter may affect them. For if they are used to slight, or jest, or play with holy things, they become hardened and undone. Guard them against formality in religious duties. Take often an account of what they know, and how they are affected and resolved; and what they do, both in their open and their secret practice. Leave them not carelessly to themselves, but narrowly watch over them.

Use all your skill and diligence, by word and deed, to make a holy life appear to them, as it is, the most honourable, profitable, safe, and pleasant life, that it may be their constant delight. Keep them from feeling religion as a burden, or taking it for a disgraceful, needless, or unpleasant thing.

Speak much of the praise of holy men in ancient and later times. And speak of the just

disgrace that belongs to those brutish persons, who are the despisers, deriders, and enemies of godliness.

Open to their minds the riches of Divine Grace, and the joys of heavenly glory, and exercise them much in acts of praise and thanksgiving.

Let your conversation tend to the just disgrace of voluptuousness and worldly-mindedness, and labour to make pride and sensuality odious to them.

Teach them to restrain their own wills, and let them know that they must obey God's will and yours. Men's own wills are the grand idols of the world; and to be given up to them, is the sure way to ruin.

As you love their souls, keep your children as far from temptations as you can. Children are unfit persons to struggle against strong temptations. Bring them up to a temperate and healthful diet, and keep tempting meats, but especially strong drink, from them.

Inure them to constant industry, which may never leave the mind or body idle, but at the hours of necessary recreation which you allow them.

Let their recreations be such as tend more to the health of their bodies than the indulgence of a corrupted fancy. Keep them from gaming for money, from cards, dice, play books, and novels, and foolish wanton tales; but do not deny them innocent gratifications; nor make religion a burden to them.

Let their time of leisure be so far limited, that it be no more than what is needful to their health and labour.

Let their apparel be plain, decent, and warm, and suitable to their stations in life, but not gaudy, nor such as is used to signify pride, or to tempt people to it.

When they grow towards ripeness of age, keep them from opportunity of too great familiarity with persons of another sex.

I am sure this is the way to your children's safety. If presumptuous self-conceited persons will despise such counsel, as they too often do, let them take the consequence.

Be sure that you engage your children in good company, and keep them as much as possible out of bad. Ill-disposed children, before you are aware, will infect them with their wicked language and practices; they will quickly teach them to drink, to game, to talk filthily, to swear, to mock at godliness and sobriety.

But the company of sober, pious children and servants will accustom them to a sober, pious language, and will advance them in knowledge and the fear of God, or at least will keep them from great temptations.

Do all that you do with them in love and wisdom. Make them not so familiar with you as to breed contempt. And be not so distant to them as to tempt them to have no love for you, nor pleasure in your company.

But let them perceive that they are indeed dear to you; and that all your counsel and government is for their good, and not for any selfish end or fancy of your own. And give them familiarly the reason of all against which they are apt to be prejudiced; for love and reason must be the means of the good that you do them.

Keep a special watch upon their tongues; especially warn them against foolish talking and lying; for dangerous corruptions quickly obtain dominion in this way.

Teach them highly to value time. Tell them how precious it is; by reason of the shortness of man's life, and the greatness of his work; and how eternity depends on these uncertain moments. Labour to make a waste of time odious to them. And set death frequently before their eyes, not as an object of terror, but as an entrance into eternal joy.

Use them much to the reading of the most pious and entertaining writers on religious subjects.

Let correction be wisely given; neither so severe as to disaffect them to you, nor so trifling as to leave them in a course of sin and disobedience. Let it be always in love; and more for sin against God, than any worldly matters. And show them Scripture to condemn the sin, and to justify the correction.

Pray earnestly for them, and commit them by faith to Christ, into whose covenant they were admitted.

Go before them by a holy and sober example; and let your practice tell them what you would have them be, especially in representing godliness as delightful, and the sure foundation of the joyful hopes of heaven.

Choose such professions or trades and callings for them as have least dangerous temptation, and such as tend most to the saving of their souls, and to make them most useful in the world; and

not those which tend only to the advancement of their worldly interest.

When they are marriageable, and you find it needful, endeavour to provide such partners for them as are truly suitable, and stay not till folly and sin ensnare them; but never abuse your authority by undue compulsion to marry against their inclinations.

These are the counsels which I earnestly commend to you in this important work. But you must know that your children's souls are so precious, and the difference between the good and the bad so great, that all this must not seem too much for you to do; the due education of children being one of the most needful and excellent works in the world, and especially for mothers.

Of Conjugal Duties.

P. I am so well satisfied, Sir, with what you have said of my duty towards my children, that I hope you will assist me with your advice as to every other situation in life.

M. I will endeavour to do it: and, first, as to the duty of husband and wife. You are entirely to love each other; and avoid all things that tend to quench your love.

You must dwell together, and enjoy each other's society, faithfully joining in the education of your children, the government of the family, and the management of your worldly business.

You must be helpers of each other's salva-

tion; stir up one another to faith, love, and good works; warn and help each other against sin, and all temptations; join in God's worship in the family and in private; prepare each other for the approach of death, and comfort each other in the hopes of life eternal.

Avoid all dissensions, and bear with those infirmities in each other which you cannot cure. Assuage and provoke not unruly passions; and in lawful things endeavour to please each other.

Preserve most strictly conjugal chastity and fidelity. Avoid all unseemly behaviour, which may stir up jealousy; and avoid all jealousy, which is causeless and unjust.

Help one another to bear your burdens, and not by impatience make them greater. In poverty, crosses, sickness, and dangers, comfort and support each other. And be cheerful companions in holy love and heavenly hopes, when all other outward comforts fail.

P. What are the special duties of the husband?

M. Let the husband exercise love and authority together (never to be separated) towards his wife. Let him be the chief teacher and governor of the family, and provider for its maintenance. Let him go before the wife in knowledge and patience; and be her teacher and guide in matters of religion, and her example in bearing infirmities and trials. Let him keep up the wife's authority and honour in the family over the inferior members of it.

P. What are the special duties of the wife?

M. To excel in love; to be obedient to her husband, and an example therein to the rest of

the family. Submissively to learn of her husband (if he can teach her), and not be self-conceited, talkative, or imperious. To subdue her passions, deny her own fancy and will, and not tempt her husband to satisfy her humours and vain desires, in pride, excess, or any evil matter. Not to rob God and the poor, by a proud and wasteful humour; to govern her tongue, that her words may be few, and grave, and sober; to be contented in every condition, and not torment her husband and herself with impatient murmuring. To avoid the childish vanity of gaudy apparel, not following the vain fashions of the world. And to abhor the vice of such as employ almost *all* their time in dressings, visits, and feasts. To assist in the maintenance of the family, by frugality, and by proper care and attention; not to dispose of her husband's estate without his consent. And, above all, to be a constant helper of the holy education of her children: For this is the most eminent service that woman can do in the world. If she have wisdom and godliness, a moderate share of attainments will enable her to speak to her children's edification. The mother is still with them, and they are still under her eye; her love must chiefly work towards their salvation. She must be frequently catechising them, and teaching them to know God; and speaking to them in favour of holiness and against sin, and reminding them of the world to come, and teaching them the necessity and duty of constant prayer. Godly mothers may educate children for useful public situations, by establishing in them that honest and holy disposition, which is the chief

thing necessary, in every relation, to the common good; and thus they may become chief instruments of the reformation and welfare of churches and states.

Of Filial Duties.

P. I pray you, Sir, tell me also the duty of children towards their parents.

M. The duty of children to their parents is, to love them sincerely, and to be thankful for all that love and care, which they can never requite.

To learn of them submissively; especially the doctrine of salvation. To obey them diligently, in all lawful matters; and that for conscience sake in obedience to God. To honour them in thought, and words, and actions; and avoid all appearance of slighting, dishonour, or contempt. To be contented with their parents' allowance and provisions, and willing and ready to engage in such profession and employment as they recommend to them. To take patiently the reproofs and corrections of their parents and to confess their faults, with humble penitence; and to amend. To use such company as their parents approve, and to avoid the society of vain and thoughtless persons. Not to marry against their parents' consent; and to relieve their parents if they stand in need of their assistance.

P. What is the duty of children towards God?

M. To learn what they are by nature, and what that covenant is into which at their baptism they entered; what are the duties, and what

the benefits; and at a proper age to renew that covenant with God in Confirmation, that they may come to the Lord's table; and with seriousness and firm resolution give up themselves to the guidance and direction of God the Father, Son, and Spirit, their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. To remember, that the corruption of their nature must be constantly resisted, in order that their sins may be forgiven; and to remember, that they are entering upon a short uncertain life of care, and perhaps of sufferings, in which they must do all that can be done, for an everlasting life that followeth; and that to make sure of heaven is their chief work on earth. To learn and love the word of God, and to delight in all that is good and holy; especially on the Lord's day. To see that they love not the pleasures of the world more than God and holiness; and that they fly from youthful lusts, and from excess of eating and drinking; and that they avoid wantonness and immodesty of behaviour, most especially waste of time in reading improper books, or in needless recreation. That they use their tongues to sober and godly speech; and abhor lying, railing, and idle foolish talk. To submit their wills to the will of God and their superiors, and not be eagerly set on any thing which is unnecessary, or which God or their superiors forbid them.

Of Masters and Servants.

P. What is the duty of masters towards their servants?

M. To rule them with such gentleness as be-

cometh fellow-christians; and yet with such authority, that they may not be encouraged to contempt. To restrain them from sinning against God. To instruct them in the doctrine of salvation, and pray with them, and go before them by the example of a sober, holy life. To keep them from evil company, and temptations and opportunities of sinning. To set them upon suitable employments: to keep no idle servants; nor yet to over-work them to the injury of their health, nor command them to do any unlawful thing.* To provide them such food and accommodation as is wholesome and proper for them; and to pay them what wages are due to them by agreement or promise. Patiently to bear with their infirmities, and such frailties as must be expected in mankind.

P. What is the duty of servants to their masters?

M. To honour and reverence them, and obey them in all lawful things, belonging to their places to command; and to avoid all words and behaviour which savour of dishonour, contempt, or disobedience: willingly to perform all which they undertake and is required of them, and that without grudging; and to be as faithful behind their master's back as before his face. To be trusty in word and deed. To abhor lying and deceit: not to wrong their masters in buying or selling, or by stealing or taking any thing of

* How shall we reconcile to this precept the customary practice of what we call *denying ourselves*, by putting falsehood into the mouths of our servants? It will be answered, 'tis all well understood: But in the simple judgment of the domestic, he knows and feels that he is telling a lie.

theirs, not even meat or drink, against their will; but being as thrifty and careful for their masters' profit, as if it were their own. Not to murmur at the meanness of food that is wholesome, nor to desire a life of fulness, ease, and idleness. To be more careful to do their duty to their masters, than to regard how their masters shall use them; because sin is worse than suffering. Not to reveal the secrets of the family abroad, to strangers or neighbours. Thankfully to receive instruction, and to learn God's word, and observe the Lord's day, and seriously join in the public and private worship of God. Patiently to bear reproof and due correction, and to confess their faults, and amend. To pray daily for a blessing on the family, on their labours, and on themselves; and to do all this in true obedience to God, expecting their reward from him.

P. What is the duty of servants to one another?

M. To excite each other to their duty to God and their masters. To help one another in knowledge and all the means of salvation; especially by godly, profitable conference when they are together. To save each other from sin and temptation, by friendly advice; and to take heed that they be not tempters to each other, either by wanton dalliance, unchaste speech or actions, or by excess of meat or drink, or idleness, or deceiving their master, or by passionate words provoking wrath; but that they assuage the passions of each other, and keep peace in the family. To love each other as themselves, and to do as they would be done by; and not to envy one another, nor strive who shall have most, or who

shall be highest; but humbly to submit to one another; and be helpful to each other in their labour, and in every way they can. To bear patiently little injuries to themselves; and to disclose none of the faults of each other, when it tendeth only to stir up strife and do no good; but not to conceal those faults which, by concealment, will be cherished, and the concealment of which may hinder the right government of the family, or tend to the master's wrong. But in sins against God, first to admonish each other privately: if that prevail not, to reprove before others: if that prevail not, to acquaint their masters with their offences.

Of our Duty to our Neighbour in general.

P. Now you have gone so far, pray, Sir, tell us our duty to our neighbours in general.

M. Your duty to your neighbours consists in love and justice: to love them as yourself; that is, to do as you would be done by, for which the six last commandments are your rule. Your love must be exercised towards their souls, in furthering their salvation, by inviting them to hear God's word, by supplying them with good books, by giving them seasonable, wise, and serious exhortations; by the example of a holy, blameless life, and by contributing to the support of the Gospel. Towards their bodies, by doing them all the good you can, and doing them no wrong, not speaking evil of them, nor provoking or scandalizing them; but patiently bearing and forgiving injuries offered by them.