

A
FAMILY ALTAR,
ERECTED TO
THE HONOUR OF THE ETERNAL GOD;
OR, A
SOLEMN ESSAY
TO PROMOTE THE WORSHIP OF GOD IN
Private Houses.

THE
EPISTLE
TO
THE CHRISTIAN READER,
ESPECIALLY TO

Householders professing Religion.

FOR your sakes, dear Friends, I presume again to appear upon the public stage, to be your faithful monitor, to prompt you to your duty, and to promote the work of God in your souls, and the worship of God in your families : and I know not how a minister can employ his time, and studies, and pen better, (next to the conviction and conversion of particular souls) than in pressing upon householders a care of the souls under their charge. This hath a direct tendency to public reformation ; religion begins in individuals, and passeth on to relatives, and lesser spheres of relationship make up greater, churches and commonwealths consist of families. There is a general complaint of the decay of the power of godliness, and inundation of profaneness ; and not without cause. I know no better remedy than domestic piety : did governors teach their inferiors by counsels and examples ; did they severely discountenance and restrain enormities, and zealously promote holiness, and then call on God unitedly and earnestly that he would efficaciously work what they cannot effect ; who can tell what a blessed alteration would follow ? In vain do you complain of magistrates and ministers, while you that are householders are unfaithful to your trust. You complain that the world is in a bad state, what do you do to mend it ? Do not so much com-

plain of others as of yourselves ; and complain not so much to man as to God, and plead with him for reformation, second also your prayers with earnest endeavours ; sweep before your own doors ; act for God within your sphere. As you have more opportunity of familiarity with the inmates of your house, so you have more authority over them, from their dependance on you, to influence them ; and if you improve not this talent, you will have a dreadful account to give, especially as their blood will be required at your hands, because their sin will be charged on your neglect. Oh sirs ! have you not sin enough of your own, but you must draw upon yourselves the guilt of your whole families ? It is you that make bad times, and bring down judgments on the nation. Would you rather see the agonies of your children, and hear them crying amidst infernal torments, than speak a word to them for their instruction, hear them cry under your correction, or supplicate God for their salvation ? Oh cruel tigers and barbarous monsters ! you may imagine yourselves to be Christians, but I cannot judge that man worthy to be a fit communicant at the Lord's table, that maintains not the worship of God ordinarily in his family ; and he deserves admonition and censure for this sin of omission, as well as for scandalous sins of commission, for he bewrays his base hypocrisy in pretending to be a saint abroad, when he is a brute at home : for a right-bred Christian is a universalist, " having respect to all God's commandments : " * such as are righteous before God, " walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. " † Let these then go amongst the herd of the profane, and fare as they do at the last, that make no conscience of family or relative godliness. Such as will not pray now, will cry too late, " Lord, Lord, open to us, " ‡ when the door is shut ; yea, they that now will not cry for a crumb of mercy, shall in hell cry out for a " drop of water, to quench their scorched tongues in those eternal torments. " || To these self-destroying hypocrites, I recommend the serious consideration of Prov. i. 24—31. Job viii. 13—15. xxvii. 8—10.

I shall address myself to honest, well-meaning householders, who make conscience of serving God with their families. You may look on this as your privilege, as well as duty ; I hope

* Psalm cxix. 6. † Luke i. 6. ‡ Matt. xxv. 11, 12. || Luke xvi. 24.

you do. David thought it a great mercy that he and his people had any thing to offer, and any hopes of acceptance.* O what an honour is it, that the King of heaven gives you an admittance into his presence-chamber with your families twice a day ! to confess your sins, beg pardon and supplies of mercy ; to give him the glory of his goodness, and to lay your load on him, and get ease : I hope you will never be averse to it, or weary of it. God forbid you should : you are not weary of meal times, if you be healthy ; know and keep these appointed times of coming to God. If you promise to meet a person of quality at such an hour, when the clock strikes, you rise up, crave pardon, and tell the company one tarries for you, you must be gone. Oh take not more liberty with God than you would do with men ; and keep your hearts continually in a frame for duty. Rambling in the day indisposeth your spirits for duty at night. So act, as to think you must go to a heart-searching God before you sleep ; and so pray, as if it were the last time you should approach to God with your family in this world. Study the frame of your hearts ; be not content with lip-labour : rest not in the work done, without communion with God : presume not upon your own goodness, you that are the holiest : despair not because of your wickedness or guiltiness, you that think yourselves the worst of men : remember, Manasseh prayed, and God was entreated of him, when he humbled himself greatly.† Be not discouraged because you cannot do so well as others : “ God despiseth not the day of small things.” ‡ God hath babes in his family, that chatter like a crane or swallow. || A child’s lisping is understood by an indulgent father : and if a distempered child stoop down, and reach us up any small thing, we take it kindly ; so doth God when a sick soul falls low in humility, and reacheth high in heavenly-mindedness. You cannot be always actually on your knees, or speaking with your tongues, but still maintain a praying frame of heart. Mr. Greenham saith, When one asks how your family doth, let this put you in mind to pray for them ; thank God for mercies ; reflect on yourselves, what have I done for their welfare ? how are the

* 1 Chron. xxix. 9—14.

‡ Zech. iv. 10

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

|| Isa. xxxviii. 14.

souls of my children, servants? and lift up an ejaculation for them. Be much in prayer: give yourselves to prayer: prayer is your physic, your armoury, your ammunition, your antidote against Satan, the world, and the flesh. This is your way of trading with God for the richest commodities for yourselves and yours; the profit will be yours, the glory God's.

To help you in this work, I have written this Treatise, not having seen any directly upon this so needful a subject, and was requested to do something this way; but after I had completely finished the following work, there came to my hands a very learned and elaborate discourse,* of Mr. Thos. Doolittle's, on Josh. xxiv. 15, to rivet this nail, which may seem to render this Essay needless; yet for the following reasons if it be judged convenient, I am willing it should go to the Press. 1. That excellent discourse full of sinewy arguments may be more suitable to learned, this plain Treatise to vulgar capacities, being adapted to the common use of country people. 2. Both matter and method are far different, as I perceive upon reading and comparing both. 3. That discourse is inserted amongst the voluminous books of Morning Lectures; this being a small thing by itself, is more attainable and portable. 4. Possibly this may fall into some hands, into which the former hath not fallen, and may be an appendix and supplement to that choice piece, which I do earnestly recommend to the reader to purchase and peruse; and if this my slender attempt may provoke any to purchase that, and both together may but attain this great end of setting up family worship in the power of it, I have my end, and shall follow all these spiritual helps with my earnest prayers, that the God of all grace would pour into your souls the Spirit of grace and supplication; make the members of your families conscientious in joining; and governors and governed orthodox in principles, sincere in their spirits, and holy in their practices, to the glory of God, and good of his church; which is the hearty desire of thy soul's friend,

Feb. 2, 1692-3.

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

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RECOMMENDATORY EPISTLE.

THIS Discourse, and that other by the Reverend Mr. Newcome on Prov. xxv. 28, do very opportunely come out together, both in reference to one another, and to the time we live in, and to that which should be aimed at in all times, the reviving and keeping alive of serious, practical religion, but most of all in this time wherein it so much languishes.

They that know the Reverend Author of this work; or have perused, (with desire to profit,) those pious practical Treatises, which he hath formerly published, will think as we do, that there is no need of any letters commendatory to bespeak a favourable acceptance of the following Discourse. The design of which is to persuade and engage those that are heads and governors of families, to take up Joshua's resolution; that whatever others do, yet "they and their houses will serve the Lord," in daily, faithful, fervent prayer, with thanksgiving.

It is a word in season; for it is a common complaint, and that too, by many, who are not a little guilty of it themselves; that the power of godliness, the life of practical religion, is at this day under a lamentable decay; and amongst the many causes of this decay, there is scarcely any that hath been more perniciously influential thereunto, than the neglect of family worship of God, which is one most proper means to promote seriousness in religion. Frequent solemn addresses to God, having a tendency to keep God in remembrance, and to cause the apprehensions of God to make the deeper impressions, and to have the stronger influence upon the hearts of those who have not quite lost all sense of a God, or forgotten that they have souls to save, or lose. Prayer also being a means of God's appointment, to obtain family blessings and mercies, as well as personal and national, according to the many promises which God hath made of audience and acceptance of the prayers that

are put up unto him in the name of Christ, with upright hearts. To those that sincerely love God, and have wisdom to judge of things as they relate to eternity, the duty commended in this Treatise, will appear not only to be a necessary duty, but a precious privilege, and gracious vouchsafement. For there are two things which do especially render a Christian's continuance in the world desirable and comfortable to him; the one is, that he may acquaint himself with God, and enjoy some sweet communion with him, which is a beginning and foretaste of heaven whilst we are here on earth. They that are utter strangers to this, have no cause to think, that they are as yet made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. The other desirable end or business of a Christian's life is, that he may be serviceable to God, by promoting his glory and interest in the world, especially by furthering the spiritual good, and salvation of souls; both these do meet together in the conscientious practice of this duty.

First; Communion with God. When the head and master of a family, who is as prophet, priest, and ruler in his family, doth jointly with his children and servants, as a little church of God in his house, offer up daily sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving unto God, the author of their beings, the God of their lives, and the giver of every good gift wherewith their lives are sweetened; and does also receive from him communications of grace and mercy; for our bountiful God will never be behindhand with those that seek him in truth, but giveth liberally to them that ask in faith.

Secondly; Serviceableness unto God, in training up his family in the fear of God; God himself bearing witness how greatly acceptable family righteousness is unto him, in that high commendation, which he hath recorded of Abraham: "I know him," saith God, "that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." It is a duty that is both work and wages; a service, that carries its reward with it, (reward not of debt, but of grace) it brings a blessing upon a family, as the ark did on the house of Obed-Edom; when on the contrary dreadful wrath is imprecated to be "poured out upon the families that call not on the name of God," Jer. x. 25.

Reader, if thou be one that livest in the daily exercise, and due performance of this duty of family prayer, thy own experience of the spiritual benefits and advantages of it, will enable thee to set to thy seal to what the God of truth hath spoken in his word. "I never said to the seed of Jacob, (Israelites indeed, that know how to wrestle with God,) seek ye my face in vain." But if being a master of a family, thou be a stranger to this duty, either through slothfulness, multiplicity of business, or prejudice and disaffection to the duty; the Reverend Author hath said enough to convince thee, that it is thy duty; and if convinced hereof, thou wilt continue in the wilful neglect of thy known duty, thou dost in effect say with those in Jer. xlv. 16, "As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee;" what an aggravation will this be of thy sin! "for to him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin," Jam. iv. 17, that is, exceeding sinful; and also of thy punishment! for "that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes," Luke xii. 47. That the one and the other may be prevented, and thou mayest be prevailed with conscientiously to practise this duty, is the design of this Treatise, and the hearty desire of

Thine in the Lord,

JOHN STARKEY.

JOHN HOWE.

A
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GENESIS XXXV. 1—3.

And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

CHAP. I.

EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT.

THIS passage is copious, and may be called a family text, as comprehending the whole duty of householders and their inferiors: he that is not relatively religious, is not really religious: God hath to do with all men in every capacity: and men have to do with God in all their circumstances, relations, and actions. As we must give an account to God of our natural, civil, and

spiritual acts: God's word must regulate all we do, that we may act as Christians, according to God's will, and for his glory. The passage contains an excellent pattern for all families.

The whole of the context holds forth the following general considerations :

God's commission to Jacob, v. 1.—Jacob's charge to his family, v. 2, 3.—His family's cheerful compliance, v. 4.—The blessed issue, namely, success and safety, v. 5.—Let me briefly advert to these.

I. The words contain God's commission to Jacob; in which commission observe four things :

The privacy of it; God spake to Jacob when alone.—*The order*; “Arise, go to Bethel, dwell there.”—*The duty to be done*; “make there an altar.”—*The reasons to enforce that duty*. First, God's appearing to him; and secondly, his danger—fleeing from his brother.

Doct. 1. That most of God's manifestations to his people are personal, or when they are alone.

Jacob was alone when he had the vision of the ladder, Gen. xxviii. 12. and when God bids him return to the land of his fathers, Gen. xxxi. 3. Jacob was left alone when he wrestled with the angel, Gen. xxxii. 24. Our Lord invites souls to solitary recesses, where he whispers them in the ear, speaks to their heart, there usually is a reciprocal expression of love.* It is good being alone with God.† Happy souls that can say with our dear Lord, John xvi. 32, “Ye shall leave me alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

From the order and appointment, “arise, go to Bethel,” we may derive,

Doct. 2. God alone is the fittest to dispose of men's habitations.

* Hos. ii. 14. Song vii. 11, 12.

† Nunquam minus solus quàm cum solus.

Deut. xxxii. 8. "The Most High divided to the nations their inheritance; when he separated the sons of Adam." The great God is the author of all topography and geography, as well as genealogy and chronology. Acts xvii. 26. "He hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations." And as God is the sovereign disposer of all; so what he doth is in infinite wisdom, as a general of an army, ordering the troops to their distinct posts, with which all men must be contented.*

But why doth God bid Jacob here go to Bethel?

Ans. 1. To convince him of his absolute dependence upon God, and his duty of resignation of himself and all he had to God's good pleasure.

2. To quiet Jacob's spirit who was at this time full of fears, because of the late slaughter of the Shechemites, chap. xxxiv. 30.

3. To secure him and his family from danger, by carrying them to a safer place out of harm's way; Bethel being thirty English miles distant from Shechem,† southwards: God hath his Patmos for his servants in times of danger; his Pella for his hidden ones in a universal slaughter.

4. To put Jacob upon paying his vows; for hitherto he had been slack in making good his promise made at Bethel, chap. xxviii. 22.

We have next the duty God puts Jacob upon, which is to make there an altar unto God; which he must do, partly to maintain and promote God's worship; partly to strengthen his faith against his present fears,

* *Nunc videmus sicut in castris sua cuique turmæ et decuriæ distincta est statio ita in terra locatos esse homines, ut singuli populi suis finibus contenti sint; et in ipsis populis suum quisque, domicilium incolat.*—*Calv. in loc.*

† Gen. xxviii. 11. 19.

from the gracious discoveries he had at Bethel, Gen. xxxi. 13.

Doct. 3. God will be worshipped wherever his people inhabit.

Men's shifting their habitation must not divorce them from God and religion: as God is every where present, so in every place incense must be offered to his name, Mal. i. 11. Change of place must not lessen our piety.

Further it is assigned as a reason to enforce this duty, that God appeared to him at Bethel, from which we may infer,

Doct. 4. Former appearances of God to his children are mementos of present duty.

Jacob had been nine years in the country, and had not returned to Bethel to pay his vows made there; whether it was, that he waited for a fit opportunity, to do it solemnly with tythes or sacrifices: or waited for an admonition from God, and hoped that he would signify his mind, since he wholly depended on the divine appointment:* or, whether now his new straits put him in mind of his old straits and relief: or, whether this was Jacob's sin to forget and neglect this duty; which is most likely, as rich Jacob sometimes forgets what poor Jacob had vowed,

Doct. 5. God hath a time and a way to rub up his people's memories to perform forgotten duties.

God tells him there was a day when he fled from Esau his brother, and now lets him see the danger he is in of the Canaanites, that he may perform old duties before he expect new mercies.† And indeed new straits revive old guilt, Gen. xlii. 21.

* Totus à divino nutu pendebat, nec dubitabat Dominum illi significaturum tempus.—*Vide Poli Syn. in loc.*

† Dr. Lightfoot on Genesis thinks God was angry with Jacob

Thus much for the first general thing, God's commission.

II. Here is Jacob's charge to his family, ver. 2, 3. "Then Jacob said to his household—" wherein Jacob as a householder acts the part of a *prophet, priest,* and *king*.

1. He is as a prophet, to instruct his family in the mind of God; teaching them their duty; informing them of what he had resolved to do; and communicating to them his own experience for argument and encouragement, namely, his prayer, and God's answer; in his deliverance, and direction, verse 3.

2. He acts herein as a priest in his own house, in making an altar unto God, and in pouring a drink-offering, and also oil thereon, verse 14.

3. He acts the part of a king or supreme governor, over his own family which consists,

(1.) In the command he gives them, to put away strange gods; to be clean and to change their garments.

(2.) In his actual exercise of jurisdiction, manifested by their compliance, ver. 4, they gave him the strange gods, and ear-rings; and by his demolishing them, or putting them out of their sight—he hid them.

Qu. 1. How came idols to be in Jacob's family?

Ans. (1). Either those newly taken from the Shechemites, amongst other spoils, chap. xxxiv. 29, which Jacob's sons might keep, not to worship, but for their precious matter, of gold or silver.

(2.) Or Jacob's Gentile servants kept these images to worship secretly, unknown to Jacob.

(3.) Or they might be retained, and used by Leah, or Jacob's two wives, or his concubines, Bilhah and

for distrusting his promise, and sending Esau 500 cattle, of which he had vowed the tythes to the Lord, therefore sought to kill him. *Observ. on Gen. p. 16.*

Zilpah, or Deborah nurse to Rebecca ; for idolatry was but gradually extinguished.

(4.) Why might not these gods be the images that his beloved Rachel stole? chap. xxxi. 19; they are called *teraphim* or images; Laban calls them his gods, ver. 30; they were made in the shape of men, whom the heathen adored as subordinate gods, to whom they committed the protection of their houses, with whom they consulted about secret or future things, from whom they received delusory and diabolical answers; these idols Laban worshipped together with the true God, which Rachel took as due to her for a portion; or it may be, to prevent her father's consulting them, that they might not inform him which way Jacob fled: but charity bids us believe that Rachel stole these idols, to expose his egregious folly in worshipping gods that might be stolen, or at least, to take away an occasion of her father's idolatry.

Qu. 2. Why did Jacob bury them, or hide them under an oak, and not break them to pieces?

Ans. (1.) The Greek version addeth, καὶ ἀπώλεσεν αὐτὰ ἕως τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας, and destroyed or lost them, even until this day. And it seems probable from parallel instances, that he first melted them, and then hid them.*

(2.) He did this privately, not known to his family, so that they could not seek for them or find them. And they being now to depart thence, could not have an opportunity to inquire after them.†

(3.) There is a peculiar reason, why he hid them in this place. Whether we take it for a terebinth, or turpentine tree as the Greeks translate it, καὶ κατέκρυψεν αὐτὰ Ἰακωβ ὑπὲρ τὴν τερέβενθον, or an oak, as we read it, for the Hebrew word אלה signifies either; if we re-

* Exod. xxxii. 20. 2 Kings xviii. 4.

† De non existentibus et non apparentibus eadem est ratio.

spect verse 8, we find Deborah was buried under an oak, called Allon-Bacuth, the oak of weeping, a fit funeral for dead idols.

(4.) Interpreters give us two reasons why they buried these idols under an oak; first, because those trees were generally abused to idolatry, as Isa. i. 29; therefore proper places for interment of these monuments of idolatry. Secondly, this was the safest place; where they were likely to remain longest hid, because the heathen had a great veneration for oaks, therefore would not cut them down, or dig them up. Besides, critics observe, that the root of this word signifies an execrable, doleful tree; such as is wont to be planted by idol groves; therefore he hid these execrable idols in that place.*

Doct. 6. It is fit all monuments and occasions of idolatry be put out of people's sight.

See Exod xxiii. 13. Deut. xii. 2, 3. Hos. ii. 16, 17.

Doct. 7. A resolute reformation produceth safety and satisfaction.

When Jacob had taken this course, the terror of God came upon the cities round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob, ver. 5, they became still as a stone, their desire to hurt them was restrained, or they were dispirited; yea, God made them friends to them. O wonderful work of Almighty God!

But all this is a digression from my main design; I shall not meddle with Jacob's prophetic and regal office over his family, but speak chiefly or only to his priestly and sacerdotal office, signified here by his making an altar unto God.

* Si radix spectetur, significat arborem execrabilem funestam quales apud idolorum delubra plantari solent, et fortè hâc de causâ sub ea execrabilia idola recondidit.—*Vid. Poli. Crit. in loc.*

The famous Usher in his annals on the third age of the world, fol. 9, saith, Jacob was ninety-one years of age when Joseph was born, consequently seventy-seven years old when he began first to serve Laban; upon his return into Canaan he built an altar, which he called El-Elohe-Israel, that is, the mighty God, the God of Israel, Gen. xxxiii. 20; which was the self-same place where Abraham heretofore had built his first altar, Gen. xii. 6, 7, and where Jacob's well was, near to mount Gerizim, John iv. 5, 20. This was about the year of the world 2273, 1731 before the birth of Christ; he died at the age of 147 years, 2315 years after the creation. Having got both the birth-right and blessing from his brother Esau, he was thus priest in the family, till God settled the privilege of priesthood on the tribe of Levi, instead of the first-born. He saith, this history of Genesis contains the story of 2369 years' space; he quotes Servius Sulpicius, affirming that in this tract of time lived Job, a man embracing the law of nature, and the knowledge of the true God, &c. But this by the way.

The altar which Jacob now was to build, was at Bethel, formerly called Luz, Gen. xxviii. 19; which should be God's house, ver. 22, where he would offer prayers and sacrifices to God, and where God promised and vouchsafed his special presence, according to Exod. xx. 24. Whether Jacob repaired the old pillar, his quondam pillow, chap. xxviii. 18, which might be ruined by the injury of time, or demolished by idolatrous neighbours; or whether he erected a new one, more stable, durable, and fashionable than time and his former low circumstances would then permit, it is not much material to dispute; though most probably the latter. However this altar was a monument of God's mercy, and a token of his present gratitude;

and the use and end of it was to offer sacrifice, so saith the text, Gen. xxxv. 14; he poured a drink-offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon; these were to be joined with a sacrifice, Exod. xxix. 40, called drink-offerings, Numb. xxviii. 14.

Concerning an altar observe, the scripture takes notice of three descriptions of altars, *a literal* or *typical altar*, *a mystical*, and *a metaphorical altar*.

1. The literal, or typical altar existed either before the law or under the law; the first altar we read of is that of Noah, Gen. viii. 20; yet those sacrifices of which we read, Gen. iv, presuppose an altar. Under the Mosaical dispensation, there were two sorts of altars; *the altar of burnt-offering*, and *of incense*: the former in the wilderness was built of earth; and, saith Mr. Weemse, the Lord would have it so, because he would not have it permanent, to remain after they were gone out of the wilderness; and he would not have it made of hewn stone, to signify, that men's inventions do but pollute the worship of God,* Exod. xx. 24, 25. This is an altar most holy, Exod. xl. 10; it signified the death of Christ for satisfaction to divine justice. There was also the altar of incense, mentioned Exod. xxx. 27; this is called the golden altar, Exod. xl. 26, 27; and it holds forth Christ's intercession at God's right hand. The four horns signify the strength and prevalence of Christ's advocacy. None might go to the golden altar to offer incense, but he who might go to the brazen altar to offer sacrifice. So we have no mediator of intercession, but he that is the mediator of our redemption.

2. A mystical altar; that is Christ Jesus only, Heb. xiii. 10, "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat, which serve the tabernacle." This is in

* See Mr. Weemse's Expos. of Cerem. Laws, Com. 2. pag. 46.

opposition to the Mosaical. Our new testament altar, Christ, affords to us our soul's sustenance, safe protection sanctification, justification, consolation, eternal salvation. We need no other ; we have all in Christ, see Isa. lvi. 7. Rev. viii. 3.

3. There is a metaphorical altar, figuratively so called : so gospel-ministration is called an altar, 1 Cor. ix. 13. They which wait at the altar are partakers of the altar, that is, of holy things, or things of the temple in allusion to the Old Testament dispensation. So the worship of God is called the altar, Matt. v. 23, 24. If thou bring thy gift to the altar, that is, to God in a religious exercise : yea, the whole gospel-worship is thus denominated, Rev. xi. 1, "Rise, measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein ;" that is, look that gospel-service be regular according to God's word, cleansed from antichristian pollutions : this is prophesied, Isa. xix. 19, "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt ;" that is, God's worship shall be settled in all places in gospel-times, not a Levitical, but evangelical altar. Nothing is more common in the Old and New Testament, than to speak of gospel-worship in the phraseology of the law.

The like may be said of sacrifices, spiritual sacrifices in a gospel sense ; so offering ourselves up to God, Rom. xii. 1. Prayer and praise, Heb. xiii. 15. Acts of charity, v. 16. A broken heart, Psal. li. 17. Martyrdom, Phil. ii. 17.

As for a false altar, constituted in the Romish church, upon which they would offer Christ daily as a sacrifice for quick and dead, Protestants renounce it, as a crucifying the Son of God again, and inconsistent with scripture and reason, Heb. ix. 25 ; nor yet that he should offer himself often, v. 26, 28 ; "Christ was

once offered to bear the sins of many." Heb. x. 14, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." It cannot be denied that the ancients have called the Lord's supper, an unbloody sacrifice; the table, an altar; ministers, priests; the whole action, an oblation: not however in the sense the Papists do, but by way of allusion, as it is a memorial of Christ's sacrifice; or as spiritual prayers, praises, alms are its attendants, as our divines have abundantly proved; and disproved the propriety of the language as applied to that ordinance.

Well then, we renounce Popish altars, sacrifices, and priests, yet acknowledge in a spiritual sense, that Christ by his blood hath made all believers kings and priests unto God and his Father,* Rev. i. 6: and that we "are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9.

The words being thus explained, I shall raise this important

Doctrine, That governors of families must as priests erect family-altars for God's worship.

It well becomes householders or governors of families, to set up and maintain family-altars for worshipping of God with the members of their families.

As holy Jacob, the famous patriarch, was a prophet to instruct his family in the true religion, and a king to govern them for God; so a priest to set up an altar, offer sacrifices and perform religious worship for and with his family: even the poorest man that has a family is to be prophet, priest, and king in his own house.

God commands Jacob to build an altar at Bethel,

* Quid opus est altari ubi nec ignis ardeat, nec victimæ cædantur,—*Pet. Martyr cont. Gard.*

Jacob resolves upon it, and gives all his family orders how to conduct themselves in managing this important affair; and when they did their duty, God secured them, they journeyed and passed on safely.

Let none say that this setting up of an altar by Jacob was but ordered upon this particular occasion, that he might pay his vows formerly made at Bethel, and so doth not oblige us.

I answer, (1.) It is true the circumstances of the place, occasion, and solemnity are personal and particular, but the duty is general, moral, and perpetual, as I shall prove.

(2.) Jacob, doubtless, worshipped God with his family in all places where he had come, as he took the fear of God with him in his heart, so he left not the external practice of religion behind him: but set up God's worship which was equivalent to an altar in all places where he came, as his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham had done.

(3.) And may not we have the like occasion as he had to rear an altar? Have we had no mercies from God? Do we lie under no vows, or at least, obligations to the Lord? And do not these precedents, and general rules bind us to the like practice, without having a particular command by a voice from heaven, or in an extraordinary way?

(4.) Because Jacob was left alone, and wrestled with the angel and prevailed upon an extraordinary occasion, Gen. xxxii. 24.; that is, when in fear of his brother Esau; shall we think that Jacob never prayed alone, but when he was in the like hazard? yes, doubtless he was well acquainted with God, and much accustomed to this practice of conversing with God. So because we find God prompting him to this family exercise

here, can this be thought to exclude his ordinary course of family proceeding? No, certainly, it rather implies and includes this.

In prosecuting the subject I shall use this method,

1. Explain what I mean by altars in families.
2. Prove it to be the duty of householders to set them up.
3. Answer objections against this practice.
4. Make some deductions and application.

CHAP. II.

STATEMENT OF WHAT IS MEANT BY FAMILY-ALTARS, AND WHAT IS REQUIRED OF HOUSEHOLDERS.

BY altar I mean (considered as an instance of synecdoche) all the worship of God to be performed in families. To an altar in old times literally, and in gospel-times mystically, or metaphorically; there are four things requisite:—

1. The institution or consecration; none can appoint an altar to be erected but God, Exod. xx. 24, “An altar of earth shalt thou make.” None hath power to order God’s worship but himself alone. Men may not add or diminish at their pleasure. Ministers must teach, Christians must observe all things whatsoever our Lord commandeth us.* Men may dedicate an altar—it is God alone that properly consecrates or sanctifies it;† yet men are said to consecrate themselves to the Lord, yea, and other things in a secondary way, and instrumentally:‡ but as God appoints, so himself

* Matt. xxviii. 20. † Numb. vii. 10. ‡ 2 Chron. xxix. 31, 33.

only doth authoritatively, efficiently, actually, consecrate persons and things. Let us see, we have a warrant from God for what we do in his worship.

2. An altar requires a priest. Before the Mosaic law, the first-born of the family was priest to offer on the altar; but afterwards God took the tribe of Levi instead of the first-born, in remembrance of the Lord's smiting the first-born in Egypt, Numb. iii. 12, 13. Aaron and his family were the blossoming rod whom God had chosen in a peculiar manner to appear before him;* but our Lord Jesus is our New Testament Aaron, yet above him, even after the order of Melchizedeck;† a higher order than that of Aaron. Upon whose account all God's saints are kings and priests:‡ for as Christ's divinity sanctified his humanity, since our Lord as God sanctified himself as man; so he also sanctifies all his saints; "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified;|| for this end, that they may be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."§

3. A priest must needs have something to offer upon this altar.¶ The priests under the law offered bulls, goats, and other brute beasts. Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Saints offer their souls and bodies as a thank-offering unto the Lord; besides their prayers and praises, as was hinted before: but the Holy Ghost adviseth us to be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. v. 1. or than fools to give sacrifice, who vainly think to please God with the variety and costliness of their offerings. "Obedience is better than sacrifice; and the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord;" therefore it becomes us all to look to our state and standing, and also to

* Numb. xvii. 8.

† Heb. vi. 20.

‡ John xvii. 19.

|| Heb. x. 14.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 5.

¶ Heb. viii. 3, 4.

the manner of our sacrificing, as well as the matter sacrificed.

4. As to the altar, there must be respect to the end and design of this altar; for the end either makes or mars the action. Now the text saith, "I will make there an altar unto God;" and God saith, "an altar shalt thou make unto me;" not to idols, nor to themselves, to please their own fancy, or for vain-glory.* God threatens he will break down all such altars:† for though every family must have their distinct altar in their peculiar relative capacities, yet they must only make use of the one altar Christ Jesus for acceptance, and worship God after the pattern shewed in the mount; that the Lord may be one and his name one,‡ that is, his worship uniform, and the same in all places. Hence it was that when the two tribes and a half had made an altar, the other tribes were offended, and prepared war against them; till they were assured it was not in opposition, but as a testimonial of their relation, and worshipping the same God, therefore they called it Ed, a witness: read the story, Jos. xxii. 10, 34. Every family must erect such an altar, to be a witness that they serve the same God who is worshipped in public assemblies, and in the catholic church in all times and places.

Only this altar of which I am now treating, is distinct from *public*, and also *secret personal altars*.

1. It is not properly public, either national or congregational, such as that which David erected, 2 Sam. xxiv. 18, "Gad came to David and said, go up, rear an altar unto the Lord." This was for all Israel to make an atonement, and this was the place where the temple was to be built, whither all the tribes were to go up to worship God: however, this family-altar must not

* Exod. xx. 24. Hos. viii. 11. † Hos. x. 2. ‡ Zech. xiv. 9.

exclude public ordinances, upon which holy David's heart was so set, that he envies the sparrow and swallow that built their nests near God's altars,* and is transported with an extacy of holy joy at his approach to it: "Then will I go to the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy."† No, no, the more a Christian is conversant with God in his family, the more will he prize and improve public ordinances.

2. This is distinct from secret acts of worship or personal altars, such as Abraham erected, Gen. xii. 7, 8, "The Lord appeared unto Abraham; and there he builded an altar unto the Lord:" and in the next verse, "called upon the name of the Lord." Howbeit some expositors think this was a family-altar, which Abraham erected, to keep his family in the true religion; and to separate himself and them from the idolatrous neighbourhood: if so, it confirms my assertion in favour of family-altars. But certainly that in Gen. xxii. 9. was more personal: so was Jacob's, Gen. xxviii. 18.

This therefore that I am speaking of is a family-altar, an emblem of family worship.

It is true sometimes a family signifies a whole nation, a kingdom, Amos iii. 1. "The whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt:" that is all the Hebrews, afterwards divided into the two families of Judah and Ephraim, Jer. xxxiii. 24. The sons of Adam were all one family, and after the confusion of languages they were distributed into the several regions of the world, and had their names from the head and root of that family from whence they sprung.‡ This is not the notion of family here: but it is to be taken strictly for persons dwelling together in one house; Lev. xx. 5 "Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family:" this is distinct from king-

* Psal. lxxxiv. 3. † Psal. xliii. 4. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 8. Jer. viii. 3.

doms and provinces; Judg. i. 25. "They let go the man and all his family." Esth. ix. 28, where family is distinguished from province and city: and this is the most obvious and ordinary use of the word: and in the text the restriction is to Jacob and his house. Lawyers, civilians, divines thus use the word and say, that a house or family is a society most agreeable to nature.* In this house are such as are most ordinarily and familiarly conversant together, that work, eat, drink, and sleep under one roof. To a complete family (say they) are requisite father, mother, son, and servant:† but indeed the proper constituent, essential parts of a family are but these two, *such as govern*, and *such as are governed*.

And ordinarily the person governing must set up this altar, and order the worship of God in his house or family together with the rest: hear what a great divine, now with God, saith on this point: Baxter's Christian Directory, tom, 2. fol. 490, "Note therefore that the governor is an essential part of the family, and so are some of the number of the governed, but not each member; if therefore twenty children or servants shall worship God without their father or master of the family, either present himself, or in some representative, it is not family-worship in a strict sense: but if the head of the family personally (or his delegate, or representative) be present with any of his children or servants, though all the rest be absent, it is yet a family-duty, though the family be incomplete and maimed, (and so is the duty therefore, if culpably so performed;)" thus far that reverend man of God.

If it be inquired, how must a householder act the part of a priest in his family? what must he do? I

* Domus est naturæ consentanea societas.

† 1. Paterfamilias. 2. Materfamilias. 3. Filius. 4. Servus.

answer ; the office and business of a priest in the Old Testament consisted in these four things chiefly:—

1. To instruct the people in the principles of religion, and their duty to God and each other ; Mal. ii. 7. “The priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth:” therefore God rejected those priests that rejected knowledge ; Hos. iv. 6. This is the work of householders, Deut. vi. 6, 7. “Thou shalt teach these things diligently unto thy children.”

2. To manage the holy offerings and sacrifices for atonement on behalf of the children of Israel, Lev. xvi. 11. Aaron must make an atonement for himself, and for his house ;*—and ver. 21. “Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel:” thus did Job, chap. i. 5 ; he rose early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all ; for Job said, “It may be that my sons have sinned.” Thus must we do, confess the sins of our family, and beg pardon through Christ.

3. The priest was to intercede for the people, as Aaron was to take a censer, and put fire thereon from the altar, and put on incense, and stand between the dead and living, Numb. xvi. 46, 48. Hence the priest’s office was to burn incense in the temple, and the multitude of the people were praying without, at the time of incense, Luke i. 9, 10. For as often as the priest entered into the holy place, he appeared as in the presence of God, that he might be a mediator between God and the people.† It is true, there is no mediator

* Lev. i. 5, 8.

† Nam quoties in Sanctum ingrediebatur sacerdos, quasi in Dei conspectum prodibat, ut inter eum et populum esset Mediator.—*Calv. in loc.*

of intercession, no more than of redemption betwixt God and sinners, but Jesus Christ alone in a proper sense; yet as one may pray and prevail for another through Christ, so a pious householder may and must be the mouth of his family on their behalf.

4. The priest was to bless the people, Numb. vi. 23. "Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, saying, on this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, the Lord bless thee, and keep thee," &c. Doubtless this was supplicatory, or by way of petition, and God answers that prayer, ver. 27, "And I will bless them." But how far they did this in the name, and by the authority of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I cannot say. Weemse tells us,* that the priests lifted up both their hands when they blessed the people. The text in Psalm cxxxiv. 2, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary," alludes to this; because the priests could not lay their hands upon all the people, they lifted them up; for in blessing they were wont to lay on their hands, therefore Jacob laid his hands on Joseph's sons.† There was a sacerdotal, a patriarchal, and a parental blessing. Thus the chief of a family blesseth his household, 2 Sam. vi. 20, "Then David returned to bless his household;" which was by prayer, and in the name of the Lord, pronouncing a blessing upon his family; not as a priest, nor as a prophet only but as a governor of his household, which the meanest householder may, and should do.

* Weemse's Christian Syn. p. 311.

† Gen. xlviii. 17.

CHAP. III.

ARGUMENTS TO PROVE THAT GOVERNORS OF FAMILIES SHOULD SET UP ALTARS FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD.

THE second thing proposed is, to bring forward proof of this doctrine, That householders should erect altars for the worship of God in their families.

1. The command of God. Prayer is a great duty required of all men ; the text saith, Pray without ceasing,* 1 Thess. v. 17. This is not to be understood in the sense in which the Euchites or Messalians of old understood it, as excluding other duties, but either maintaining a praying disposition, or improving all seasons of prayer, using a constant course of praying ; to form a custom of praying is a duty, therefore we are bid to watch unto prayer, as well as watch in prayer ;† that is, be sure you observe the hours and seasons of prayer, in your closet, in your family, and in public ; be not absent ; be not negligent. Then for the place, 1 Tim. ii. 8, “I will that men pray every where ;” if in all places then in their houses, and with their families in conjunction ; for it means our common dwellings, as well as temples, since there is no promise peculiarly appropriated to one place, more than another, under the gospel ; for so was the prediction, “In every place incense shall be offered to my name.”‡ Then for the sorts of prayer, read Eph. vi. 18, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit ;” that is, mental or vocal prayer ; petition for good,

* So Mephibosheth ate bread at David's table continually, that is, at meal times, 2 Sam. ix. 7. So in due season is explained, as signifying continually, Numb. xxviii. 2, 3.

† 1 Pet. iv. 7. Col. iv. 2.

‡ John iv. 21. Mal. i. 11.

deprecation of evil, intercession for others, thanksgiving for mercies; in public assemblies, in private houses, in secret closets. Certainly these kinds of prayer are necessarily included; and by good consequence inferred. Let none say, this is far fetched, for scripture consequence is good argument, as our Saviour proves the resurrection.* If prayer at all times, in all places, of all sorts, be a duty, surely family prayer is a duty, for it must be included in these.

2. Scripture types show the obligation of family worship. The passover was celebrated in private houses, *Exod. xii. 3*, "They shall take to them every man a lamb—a lamb for a house," that is, household, *ver. 4*. For the Hebrews say there must be ten, if one family was not sufficient, they must call in the members of another family; for it must all be eaten at once. The passover was a commemoration of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and the saving of their first-born, when the first-born of Egypt were destroyed. The master of the family took bread, and brake it, hence he was called a breaker; then he blessed it, saying, Blessed art thou, O Lord God, King of the world, who bringest bread out of the earth; then gave to every one about the quantity of an olive, to some the bigness of an egg. This, saith Weemse, was at their common supper with which the passover was joined;† and doubtless religion should always attend our civil concerns. This exhibits family devotion; let none say, this was their sacrament; for though it was, yet it was family religion; and though it typified the Lord Jesus, and corresponded to the Lord's supper in the new testament, which is a church ordinance; yet

* *Matt. xxii. 29, 22.*

† *Weemse's Christian Syn. pag. 132*, whether there were two suppers or not. See *Godwin, Moses and Aaron, lib. iii. c. 4. p. 137.*

it also held forth God's worship in families. But a clearer type is the morning and evening sacrifice; one lamb was to be offered in the morning, the other in the evening; this must be day by day, continually, Exod. xxix. 38, 39. This was for every individual family, and person, and it must be every day, not only on Sabbath days, and other solemnities, but it shews that God must be daily worshipped; yes, it must be morning and evening, that prayer and praise may be the lock and key of the day. And David alludes to this, saying, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning; and let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."* This was constantly practised, but solemnly; yet we do not find that the whole assembly met every day, therefore it was most probably, a family exercise.

3. Natural religion prompts to it. There is certainly such a thing as the law and light of nature, which puts men on to what is morally good, and restrains them from, or checks them for, what is grossly evil; hence the apostle saith, "The Gentiles do by nature some things materially good, and natural conscience accuseth or excuseth;"† so he appealeth to nature, as an argument, *a fortiori*; "Doth not even nature itself teach you?"‡ Whence these κοινὰ ἔννοια, common workings proceed, I dispute not, whether from some relics of God's image in man, (which some censure as Pelagianism,) or they be superinduced by God since the fall for the benefit of mankind.|| But doubtless such notions there are, as that there is a God, a supreme Being; that he is to be feared, loved, and worshipped; and that not only individually, but socially, in families as well as alone, or in greater assemblies;

* Psalm v. 4. cxli. 2. † Rom. ii. 14, 15. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 14.

|| See Mr. Capel on Temptation.

hence besides their national, and city gods, the Romans had their Lares and Penates, their household gods, though, alas, they were but dumb idols; hence it may be, idolatrous Micah had a house of gods;* and shall poor dim-sighted heathens think it highly rational to have dunghill gods in their houses? and shall not men professing the religion of the true God, own their omnipresent God, by setting up an altar to him in their houses? the prophet speaks peremptorily, Mic. iv. 5, "All people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God, for ever and ever." Is there not much more reason? and should not such as own the true God keep pace with these poor idolaters in acting for, and worshipping the true God? shall nature teach them to have more care of their children than Christians in God's way? Yea, shall even the sea monsters, draw out their breasts and give suck to their young ones?† and shall Christians be so cruel to the souls of theirs, as to neglect this household duty.

4. The prophecies and promises of the word imply this family worship: Jer. xxxi. 1, "At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel; and they shall be my people." Whether this mean all the twelve tribes, or Judah only, it is a gospel promise, and implies worship; for relation to God is inseparable from adoration of him; "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God;"‡ and this in families, not only larger, but lesser. Holiness to the Lord, is not only to be written on the bells of the horses, but the

* Judg. xvii. 5.

† Lam. iv. 3.

‡ Matt. iv. 10. Putatis nos occultare quod colimus, si delubra et aras non habemus—cum sic litabilis hostia bonus animus et pura mens, ut sincera conscientia—hæc nostra sacrificia, hæc Dei sacra sunt; sic apud nos religiosior est ille, qui castior.—*Minucii Felicis.*

pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar; that is, their very kitchen stuff, and common utensils shall be reckoned as holy as altar vessels immediately employed in sacrifices; yea further, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be "holiness to the Lord of hosts," Zech. xiv. 20, 21. The persons and utensils in private shall all be dedicated to God, and accepted by him in gospel times; civilities shall savour of sanctity; these new testament priests shall without scruple, serve God in their houses; every family shall be a temple, wherein God will be worshipped; house pots shall be holy vessels. This is meant of Gentile worshippers, ver. 16; and Jews shall not be behind them, Zech. xii. 12—14, "The land shall mourn, every family apart," in the Hebrew, *families, families*, royal family, sacerdotal tribe, and common people; they shall mourn apart, and shut up themselves apart from company and pleasures to exercise godly sorrow, vent their spirits in penitent prayers, and mournful groans for their barbarous crucifying of the Prince of Life. This some from all places did at Jerusalem, Acts ii; and more shall do it the day of their general call and conversion to God.

5. The servants of God have practised it. You can scarce name a religious householder, but he hath set up an altar in his family, and offered spiritual sacrifices thereupon. Joshua a noble warrior resolves upon this, chap. xxiv. 15, "But as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord;" let others do as they dare answer it another day, I with my children and servants must and will worship the Lord. Worshipping God is serving him, Psal. lxxii. 11, "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him,"* that is, by calling on God in prayer; doubtless Joshua did this. David a great king, in the

* Zeph. iii. 9.

midst of political and ecclesiastical employments withdraws himself from all, and returns to bless his house,* 2 Sam. vi 20, which could be no other way but by prayer, and praising God for and with his family. Public occasions must not jostle out this family-worshipping. Job rose up early in the morning, offered burnt-offerings, sanctified the members of his family, and, lest it be thought that this was but occasional and accidental, the text saith, "Thus did Job continually," chap. i. 5. And when Daniel went into his house, and his windows were open in his chamber or dining-room, his usual oratory, and when he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed; † good expositors judge this to be family-prayer, being so obvious and discernible by his adversaries. However, that devout captain Cornelius, who feared God with all his house, prayed to God with his family, Acts x. 2, which he declares, saying, "I prayed in my house," ver. 30. Calvin observes, "That Cornelius instructs his family in the fear of God, contemning the fear of danger; for, the Jewish religion was then hateful, nor might a Roman espouse a strange religion; wherefore, although the sincere profession of the gospel is much decayed in the world, yet that fearfulness is too criminal, if on account of such unjust hatred, any one should not dare to dedicate or present his family as a sacrifice to God, by his pious instructions." ‡ Thus Calvin.

* 1 Chron. xvi. 43.

† Dan. vi. 10.

‡ Nec omittenda est circumstantia, quod familiam in Dei timore instituit, contempto periculi metu, quod inde instabat; valde enim exosa erat Judaica religio; nec impunè erat civi Romano, peregrinam, ut vocabant, religionem suscipere. Quare etsi hodiè, pessimè in mundo audit sincera evangelii professio, tamen nimis vitiosa est timiditas, si quem impediat injustum istud odium, ne suam familiam Deo audeat in sacrificium suâ piâ institutione offerre.—*Ibid. Calv. in Act. 10. 2.*

6. Another argument for a family-altar is, that the providence of God calls for it: "God setteth the solitary in families," Psal. lxxviii. 6. There is certainly a signal act of divine care in disposing men and women's affections to each other; to make a barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children: it was God that made houses for the God-fearing midwives. The Lord made Rachel and Leah to build the house of Israel: and why doth God make his David's a sure house? * Why doth God give servants? Is it only to gratify the flesh, or a fancy? Is it only for worldly profit? Is it not for religion's sake? Has God no higher end than most men have for worldly advantages or pleasure? Surely God puts persons into this relation for himself, who is the grand end of all his acts. He hath made all things for himself. † Should men then live like heathens and brutes? Do they not thereby counteract God's design? Doth God give wives and children to them that fear him, and doth he not expect that they should fear and serve him together? ‡ If children be God's heritage, why should not we present them to the Lord upon our knees? If they be God's reward to us, why should we not give them again to God as our best reward? || If families are societies of divine institution, do they not need divine benediction? Should not persons carry on religion in a relative capacity? Yes, surely. When God sanctifies this relation by his appointment, should not men sanctify his name by setting up his ordinances? there is great reason for it: for every thing is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. § God's word to warrant our lawful use thereof, prayer for our holy

* Psal. cxliii. 9. Exod. i. 21. Ruth. iv. 11. 2 Sam. vii. 11.

† Prov. xvi. 4. ‡ Psal. cxxviii. 3, 4. || Psal. cxxvii. 3.

§ 1 Tim. iv. 5.

and profitable use thereof. As men without both these cross God's design, so they have no due use of this sweet domestic constitution and relation.

7. This family-altar distinguisheth betwixt religious and profane families; this is one discriminating characteristic, the one calls on God, the other not: this is as the altar Ed, to testify to all the world a solemn owning of the true God. On the contrary, wicked persons are thus described, Deut. xxix. 18, "Lest there should be amongst you, man or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God." Mind it, families in their domestic capacity, as well as in a personal, or national capacity may be alienated from God, and may have a root that beareth gall and wormwood, then see what follows: this is that which makes evil families, when instead of praying, reading scriptures, singing psalms, there is cursing, swearing, mocking at serious godliness, vain or profane talk, at least only worldly discourse.* But religious families are such as maintain God's worship according to God's institution, where the daily perfume of prayer ascends heavenwards. Mr. Fenner preaching at the funeral of a pious old man, disabled from work, and daily going among his friends for relief, saith, "O how much better was that poor cottage where he lived, whence the incense of prayer and praise mounted daily upwards; than the sumptuous palaces of princes and nobles, where oaths and blasphemies are belched out!" It was an appointinent among the Jews and proselytes, that every family, province and city, should observe the feast of Purim, as a memorial of their deliverance from Haman's conspiracy;† and is there not as much reason that Christian families should celebrate the great work of redemption amongst them? Justin

* Jer. viii. 3.

† Esth. ix. 27, 28.

Martyr tells us, that amongst the other characters of primitive Christians this was one, that they prayed fasting, before they commenced any work.* And having described the godly manners of ancient Christians, he adds, whoever live not as Christ taught, it is certain that they are not Christians, though they may profess it in words.†

8. Christian families are churches, and churches must have altars for God's worship. Luke informs us of the primitive church, that "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer," Acts ii. 42. Breaking bread in the Lord's supper, is a public church ordinance, the other are also common to families, as well as christian assemblies. Families consist of individual persons, congregations of families, and the catholic churches of particular societies; and families may partake of the name, and must of the nature of churches.‡ What is a church but a religious society gathered for God's worship? The church was limited to families in the first ages of the world; thence it spread itself by divine grace into many streams, all proceeding from one spring as branches from one root, till the church became national. But families were the first original. Nor doth family religion cease when public assemblies are formed, Gen. iv. 26, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."|| This text hath

* Just. Mart. Apol. Christ. ad Ant. Pium.

† At enim qui non ita vivere comperiuntur sicut ille docuit, certum est documentum non esse Christianos, quamvis id lingua profiteantur.

‡ Istæ enim congregationes sunt quasi partes similes ecclesiæ catholicæ, atque adeo, et nomen et naturam ejus participant.—*Ames. Med. Theo. lib. 1. c. 32.*

|| Diu me torsit hic lotus, et etiamnum torquet.—*Vid. Pol. Crit. in locum.*

tortured interpreters; but this is clear, that calling on God's name is part of God's worship; that this piety was maintained in Seth's particular family; and possibly, in a little time men began more publicly to own God's worship when others did degenerate;* and hence the sons of God and of men were thereby distinguished; which confirms the former argument. But this is what I now say, that families are to be as churches. And some interpret those places, Rom. xvi. 5, "Greet the church in their house," and "church in thine house,"† to be no more than a private family. Grotius takes it for a domestic church, and saith, that three persons, though laymen, make a church.‡ Now wheret here is a house for God, it is a house of prayer. That is no church where there is no altar to God, but it is a synagogue of Satan. We cannot call every family a church, but a christian pious family; and it is so called by the analogy or resemblance it bears to a church, from the worship of God maintained therein. So then, without God's worship in your houses, you are not churches, and so not members of Christ, or of the catholic church of God; but in that respect as heathens.

9. Householdors have a charge upon their hands, which they must give an account of, and opportunity to discharge this trust. Governors are charged with their families; hence the fourth commandment is given to them chiefly, that they should take care that their family should keep the Sabbath day: and hence the fifth command also is given to inferiors to obey their governors.|| Yea, therefore are parents rewarded or punished in their children, according to the second commandment; because governors must account for

* Gen. vi. 2.

† Col. iv. 15. Philem. 2.

‡ Ubi tres, licet laici, ibi ecclesia est. || Exod. xx. 8—12.

their inferiors. God even orders householders to bring all under their roof, to the feast of weeks, with their free-will-offerings, Deut. xvi. 10, 11; and the feast of tabernacles, ver. 13, 14. Also, they were to bring their males yearly, three times in the year, ver. 16. And it is not for nothing that householders have this charge laid on them, because they have greater authority, and opportunity to bring them together for God's public worship in the family; for they may call them together upon natural and civil accounts, to eat, and to work, and why not to pray together? their command is a law. A master may say, "Give an account of thy stewardship,"* and why not of such a sermon? They may demand an account of their time and talents committed to their trust, and why not a reason of their hope, and an account of their piety or proficiency? why not call them to prayer? and indeed it is a debt due to men's children and servants. This is implied in Col. iv. 1, 2, "Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal—" presently he adds, "continue in prayer;" intimating that prayer for, and with servants, is just and equal both upon their own and servants' account; it is as due as their promised wages. God makes masters as truly watchmen as ministers, and if they fail, God will require their blood at their hand.† Besides the advantages and conveniency of frequent intercourse, capacitates governors for this solemn exercise; and God will require an account of all these talents another day.

10. There are daily cases, occasions, and necessities that require families, to be presented to the Lord. There are family sins to be confessed, wants to be enumerated, mercies to be desired, cares and crosses to be removed, fears to be prevented, temptations to be

* Luke xvi. 2.

† Ezek. iii. 18.

resisted, duties to be performed, graces to be exercised, peace to be maintained or regained, passions to be suppressed, mercies to be acknowledged; and all these must be laid at God's feet in daily prayer. That is a rare family which hath not some prodigal son, or carnal soul, as a member of it; some body sick in it, or some child to dispose of in marriage, or to employ in some occupation; some doubts or difficulties that call for prayer, wherein the whole family is concerned; or if there be no such exigency at present, yet who knows how soon any of these, or all these may light upon a family? and what remedy is there like family prayer? Phil. iv. 6, "Be careful in nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." This is a catholicon, a cure for all diseases, a salve for every sore. We find that when God afflicted Abimelech's family, Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed him, his wife, and maid servants, and they bare children. A Pharaoh will beg Moses's prayers for him in his affliction;* and oh what a woful state is that family in, which hath no body to speak a word to God for it, and with it, in domestic troubles! a child lies groaning, and the father cannot groan out a prayer; a servant is at the point of death, and the master hath no skill or disposition to bring him to Jesus for cure. Alas! that any should be so insensible of their wants, so ignorant of the means relief, or distrustful of the power of God, or efficacy of prayer. No family is above wants, therefore none should be without prayer; for prayer riseth from a sense of wants, which no person or family is without, either less or more, either in reality or in our perception.†

* Gen. xx. 17, 18. Exod. ix. 28.

† Deest semper quod petitur, vel ex toto, vel ex parte, vel in

11. The blessing of God usually attends family-altars: not as though God were tied to religious families, as heathens chained their idols, or as Eli's sons fancied God's presence necessarily attended the ark; but God usually visits pious families: scripture and experience testify this, "He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless them that fear the Lord both small and great;" that is, proselytes, Gentiles, converts. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous:"* our Lord loves to converse, where his children inhabit; it is true, he prefers public assemblies; "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob."† God loves to see his children together in his public worship. The greater the solemnity, if good, the more of God's Spirit and presence: but God doth not despise his children seeking him in families; when devout David sings of mercy and judgment to God, and behaves himself wisely in a perfect way, he cries out, "O when wilt thou come unto me?"‡ God's kind visits are worth the world, whether by way of providence, assistance, influence, or evidence. How often have God's children met with God in their families? Abraham had a promise of a child; Cornelius had a glorious vision of a holy angel; and our Lord came to Jairus's house, to raise his dead daughter.|| How often hath God answered family-prayer? Even at present, by melting the hearts of children or servants! And afterwards: it is recorded of Mr. Banen, of Stepleford, that he seldom performed family-duty, but he had some answers of prayer to bless God for,

sese, vel in sensu nostro, vel denique quoad actum, vel quoad continuationem ejus durationem.—*Ames. Med. Theol. lib. ii. cap. 8.*

* Psal. cxv. 12, 13. cxviii. 15.

† Psal. lxxxvii. 2.

‡ Psal. ci. 1, 2. || Gen. xviii. 10. Acts x. 3. Luke viii. 41, 51.

since the former time of appearing there before God. It is a remarkable story that Polanus relates of an earthquake in the year 1584, in Berne, when a mountain violently hurried beyond other mountains, overturned a whole village of ninety houses and families, excepting half of one house, in which the father of the family, with his wife and children, were prostrate on their knees praying.* So true is that expression of Solomon, Prov. xii. 7, "The wicked are overthrown and are not, but the house of the righteous shall stand;" God blessed the habitation of the just.† He thinks fit sometimes to distinguish by his wise providence between the houses of the Israelites and Egyptians.‡ And experience doth daily show that the house is blessed where God is sincerely worshipped, as the Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom, and his household, for receiving the ark, 2 Sam. vi. 11.

12. On the contrary, God curseth prayerless families. That is a prophecy as well as a prayer, Jer. x. 25, "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name." It is a dreadful prediction; for the wrath threatened, is not ordinary displeasure, but fury; anger boiled up to the highest degree of revenge; anger and fury are sometimes joined, and "when God deals in fury his eyes spare not, neither hath he pity;"|| this is dreadful. And here also is the measure of it, "Pour out thy fury;" this denotes plenty, abundance, variety of sore judgments, not one or two, but multitudes of

* Anno autem 1584, terræ motu mons quidam in ditione Bernatum ultra alias montes violenter latus, pagum quendam nonaginta familias habentem contexit totum, dimidiâ domi exceptâ in qua paterfamilias cum uxore et liberis in genua provolutus Deum invocabat.—*Tolani Syntag. cap. 22. fol. 301.*

† Prov. iii. 33. ‡ Exod. xii. 13. || Jer. vii. 20. Ezek. viii. 18.

plagues, like drops in a shower, or as flood-gates opened or a general inundation, spreading itself universally, poured out on children, young men, husband and wife, the aged with him that is full of days.* O what would become of England if this fury were as universal as the neglect of family duty!† This fury is also irresistible; it is like a descent from above, which can no more be stopped and avoided than the showers of rain;‡ there is no stopping those cataracts of heaven, no quenching this fire of fierce wrath against irreligious families, when the Lord renders his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.¶ But what is all this for? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? is it for idolatry, murder, drunkenness, blasphemy, or for some horrible, heinous crimes? no, it is for sins of omission, not knowing God, not calling on God's name. O miserable families where religion is not exercised, there these threatenings must be executed!

Object. But we see no such thing; prayerless families flourish, live joyously, have all things at command, prosper more than others, their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.§

I must confess this promiscuous dispensation of providence, where wickedness is prosperous and holiness oppressed, hath been an offence to the godly, and a hardening to the wicked. And David himself was puzzled with it, till he went into the sanctuary, then he understood their end, and God's end in this.¶

But I answer, 1. Forbearance is no acquittance; a reprieve is no pardon. "Their foot shall slide in due time." God bears long with sinners for wise ends, till the vessels of wrath be fitted for destruction.** God

* Jer. vi. 11. † Isa. xxxiv. 2. ‡ Descensus à summis in imum.

¶ Isa. lxvi. 15. § Job xxi. 7—13. ¶ Psalm lxxiii. 17.

** Deut. xxxii. 35. Rom. ix. 22.

will be in some men's debt till another world. They shall have their good things here, and torments hereafter.* A wise man will choose his heaven hereafter, though he have a hell here.

2. Yet this curse and wrath upon wicked persons and prayerless families are secret and invisible; even in outward things, they may sow much, and bring in little; eat and not have enough. Yea, God curseth even the blessings of such as worship him not;† however, they have not a covenant right to what they do enjoy: it is not sanctified to them for their good; for the creature is sanctified by the word of God and prayer;‡ but prayerless families have no outward comforts thus sanctified. Besides, the saddest invisible curse is upon their souls and spirits; a blind mind, a hard heart, a seared conscience, and a spirit of slumber, are the greatest judgments and fruits of God's heaviest fury, Rom. i. 26—28. 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. Psal. lxxxi. 11, 12. It is a dreadful thing, when a "Lord, have mercy on them," is written upon men's doors, and they cannot read it, will not believe it, nor lay it to heart, Isa. xlii. 24, 25. This is next to Pharaoh's plague, and next door to hell. They that will not heed now, must feel this fury, and in the latter days shall consider it perfectly, read Jer. xxiii. 19, 20. Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

Thus much for the reasons to prove that the erecting of family altars for God's worship is an important duty. The command of God, scripture types, natural religion, promises, prophecies, scripture examples, divine providence, discriminating character, families being christian churches, governors being accountable, the daily necessities of families, God's blessing on praying families, his curse and wrath upon prayerless families.

* Luke xvi. 25.

† Hag. i. 6. Mal. ii. 2.

‡ 1 Tim. iv. 5.

CHAP. IV.

OBJECTIONS MILITATING AGAINST FAMILY ALTARS PROPOSED AND ANSWERED.

BUT there is no truth so plain, no duty so good, but Satan can furnish a witty head, and wicked heart with plausible arguments against it. And it is strange if men have not something to say against this duty, which apparently tends to undermine Satan's kingdom.

Object. 1. Had family prayer been a duty, we had found it expressly commanded in scripture, but we find it not in any express precept.

Ans. (1.) Where find you infant baptism expressly commanded in the new testament? yet it is plain by necessary consequence, so is this. Circumcision was commanded, there is the like reason for baptism, both are plain to all but wayward spirits. I hinted before that regular consequence is strong argument.

(2.) Let not proud reason dictate to the wise God how he must speak. General rules laid down in scripture are to be applied to particular cases, according to circumstances. If God say, men must provide for their families, he leaves it to their discretion, what kind of meat, clothes, lodgings, or callings they provide. God bids us pray without ceasing, in all places, in every kind of prayer, and leaves it to prudence for particular places, times, words, and associates, so that it answer the main end of God's glory, communion with him, and edification. Let not captious wits raise disputes to make void the substance of a duty, because the circumstance is not expressed. God gives laws to rational creatures, and indulgeth us so far as to leave us to our

liberty in mutable circumstances, except expressly prescribed.

Object. 2. Jesus Christ prayed not with his family, yet he is the best pattern: if he had prayed with them constantly, they would have learned from him, but they wanted to be taught, Luke xi. 1.

Ans. (1.) Christ's case and ours are far different; what was suitable to his disciples, was not proper for him; he needed not for himself to confess sin, ask forgiveness, beg mortification, increase of grace or assurance: so that it was not necessary that he should ordinarily be their mouth.

(2.) Yet scripture silence is no good argument. And their desire of instruction in prayer is no proof that he prayed not with them; for prayer is a personal duty, and our Lord could not be always with them. And yet we find our Lord did occasionally pray with his family: in expressing gratitude, Matt. xi. 25, 26; on working miracles, Matt. xiv. 19; at the holy supper, Luke xxii. 19; and we have his long and last prayer uttered with his disciples, John xvii. In all which he spake what was proper to him as God-man, and our mediator; and herein he is an excellent pattern to all householders.

Object. 3. "The sacrifice of the wicked, (and so his prayer) is an abomination to the Lord."* How can you then direct them to pray when most of them are bad?

Ans. (1.) God loseth not his authority to command, because man hath lost his capacity to obey; it is his duty still, though he cannot perform it in such a due manner as God requires. He is bound to pray as a creature though he cannot do it as a child: better do it as men can, than not do it at all; prayer is a natural

* Prov. xv. 8.

duty. The Ninevites must cry aloud, and mightily to God, and it was not in vain :* Simon Peter bids Simon Magus pray, though in the gall of bitterness.†

(2.) We must distinguish betwixt a wilful and a returning sinner: we bid not a thief pray that he may meet with a booty, that is abominable; or men “regarding iniquity in their hearts:” but in a complex sense we bid them “turn from their evil ways, and so pray.”‡ Prayer must be joined with repentance; as prayer is a means of carrying the heart to God in worship, so it is a means to obtain grace.¶ Prayer is the soul’s motion God-ward, desire is the soul of prayer, and who dares to say to the wicked, desire not God, Christ, faith? By praying, men may learn to pray aright, “for God gives his holy Spirit to them that ask him.”§

Object. 4. There are wicked children or servants in the family, how dare we join with them? For whose sake God may justly reject us.

Ans. (1.) If the praying governor be a really religious character and pray aright, he need not fear non-acceptance: Christ was heard in his prayer, though Judas was present. What think you of poor ministers’ prayers in mixed congregations?¶ certainly the presence of unworthy persons prejudiceth not the reception of sincere worshippers.

(2.) Prayer is God’s institution to make bad good, some have been much wrought upon by prayers of others, God in time heard Stephen for Paul, if it advantaged not at present. Mr. Weemse said of Mr. Bruce, he brought down the Holy Ghost upon us all. Deny them not this means of conversion.

* Jonah iii. 8. † Acts viii. 22. ‡ Psal. lxvi. 18. Isa. lv. 6, 7.

¶ Medium cultus, so it is medium gratiæ. § Luke xi. 13.

¶ Acts xxvii. 35.

Object. 5. This setting up of a family-altar for such constant prayer savours of forms, and will fill the country with formalists and hypocrites.

Answ. (1.) Forms in themselves as forms are not condemned, but forms only, wanting the power of godliness, 2 Tim. iii. 5. Our business is not to make hypocrites but converts: by form is meant a mask, vizard, or appearance opposed to substance and reality. But we persuade and direct to sincerity, as to principle, manner and end of religious exercises.

(2.) But a form of godliness is better than none at all: men cannot have the power of godliness without the form, no more than you can have the kernel without the shell. He that prays doth something towards duty, but he that refuseth to worship God at all, bids open defiance to God's commanding authority, and saith, I scorn to bow so much as a knee to God in prayer. This is a presumptuous sin: "The wicked through the pride of his heart will not seek after God."* Let him answer it as he dare. The text saith, 1 Tim. iv. 8, "Bodily exercise profiteth little," πρὸς ὀλίγον for a little, that is, for a little time; or for a little, that is, in some outward respects, as in Ahab's fasting though it reach not so far as the eternal salvation of the immortal soul:† however this is better than a total neglect.

Object. 6. But such kind of praying morning and evening is a stinting of the Spirit, a limiting of God to man's time, when the Spirit moves not to it.

Answ. (1.) Christ and his apostles had set times for prayer; Jesus oft times resorted to the garden, Judas knew his stated hour and place, John xviii. 2. "And the apostles had an hour of prayer," Acts iii. 1. Was this stinting the Spirit? Indeed this objection is

* Psalm x. 4.

† 1 Kings xxi. 29.

levelled against preaching, singing, the Lord's supper, and all stated ordinances, how do men know that the Spirit will move at such a season?

(2.) It is one thing to stint, another to lie in the way of the Spirit: men are bound to wait at the posts of wisdom's doors, and are blessed, and in the road of further blessing;* for the wind of the Spirit bloweth where and when it listeth:† and nobody will say he limits the wind who waits in the haven for a fair gale to waft him forward. Besides, God expects that men should stir up themselves to take hold of him.‡ Self-excitation is God's appointment to get the heart into a good frame. How often doth David begin low and end high? We must stir up the gift of God in our hearts.¶ A dead, dull, senseless heart is no supersedeas from duty: omission upon indisposition doth but harden the heart, indispose still more for duty, and gratify Satan, yea, and displease God.

Object. 7. This family-prayer is but a singular invention of brain-sick novellists, not used of old, and is more ado than needs.

Ans. (1.) In scripture-times it was used, and in the purest primitive times. Basil saith, that Christians made haste to prayers by day-break in the morning:§ Chrysostom saith we go not from table to bed, but to prayers, lest we be more brutish than brutes. It were easy to produce instances from Cyprian, Augustin, &c. of early Christians being frequent in prayers. You will say, but these were the prayers of churches? I answer: churches were mostly then in houses, yet some instances prove also daily family prayer: and godly persons in all ages have used it.

(2.) Can men be too devout? Doth not our Lord

* Prov. viii. 34. † John iii. 8. ‡ Isa. lxiv. 7. || 2 Tim. i. 6.

§ Mane orto die, in preces properare.

say, "One thing is needful; seek first the kingdom of God; thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, and strength."* Can you do too much for God? Can you be too oft with God? Alas! you cannot be over much righteous in the internal exercises of religion;† no, nor the external, as long as you keep to commanded duties, and one duty does not cross another: nay, when we have done all that is commanded, still we are unprofitable servants;‡ we have but done our duty. It was Judas that said, "wherefore is this waste?"|| Pious souls still complain of defects. Whom have you heard complain on their death-bed that they had served God too much, or been too religious?

Object. 8. They are no better than others that pray in their families; they can lie, cheat, be covetous, proud, passionate, censorious, and hard-hearted.

Ans. (1.) Take heed what you say; act not the devil's part, to be false-accusers, taking up a false report, or without proof. It is well known, that now-a-days, if persons be strict and serious in religious duties, many pick quarrels with them, take advantage against them, aggravate their faults; these men's motes are beams, yea mountains; this sect is every where spoken against;§ there needs no further jury to try them; but if they be praying persons, they are hypocrites, as if piety were a characteristic of hypocrisy. The Lord rebuke thee, O diabolist! judge charitably till you know the truth; you may wrong them, as primitive Christians were wronged.

(2.) Suppose they do transgress and miscarry; alas! they are but men. Thus the angel excused honest Joshua, when Satan accused him: "Is not this a brand

* Luke x. 42. Matt. vi. 33. xxii. 37. † Eccles. vii. 16.

‡ Luke xvii. 10. || John xii. 3—5. § Acts xxviii. 22.

plucked out of the fire?"* Alas! he smells of Babylon too much; but may not such be upright for the main? and how will God take it if you slander his children? But suppose it be true that they are faulty, doth their religion teach them so? Is this the fault of their praying, or not praying aright? Is it because they are too religious, or defective in it? No, say you, they are hypocrites; but if they who are so devout prove so, what will become of you, that are so far short of them? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall you appear?†

Object. 9. We pray in public and secret, is not that sufficient? what needs family-prayer too? surely God never required so much a-do.

Ans. (1.) One duty cannot supersede another: these are distinct parts of the same duty. Religion must be carried on in all places and relative circumstances; husband and wife must pray together;‡ and even neighbours must call to each other, and say, come, come, let us go speedily to pray before the Lord.¶ Think not then to put off God with one sort of religiousness, you must be holy in all manner of conversation, in every turn, turn you which way you will, to your general or particular calling, to a single or married state, to solitariness or company;§ you must still take your religion with you, and practise it as a member of a church or family.

(2.) It is very doubtful whether those worship God sincerely in public, or at all in their closets, who worship not God in and with their families. It was the saying of Lactantius, "that is no true religion which men leave behind them at church."¶¶ Men may make

* Zech. iii. 2.

† 1 Pet. iv. 18.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 7.

¶ Zech. viii. 21.

§ 1 Pet. i. 15.

¶ Ev πᾶσι ἀναστροφῇ.

¶¶ Non est vera religio quæ cum templo relinquitur.

a shift to serve God as others do, at church, for vain-glory, or ostentation, and pretend secret prayer merely for an evasion; but family-prayer will try whether they worship God sincerely or not: men see the former, but know not the latter.

Object. 10. None of my neighbours use it, if I pray in my family I shall be singular.

Ans. (1.) Wouldst thou choose rather to follow a multitude in evil to hell, than travel with a few to heaven? * Our Lord saith, "What do you more than others?" † Or what singular thing do you? Are you content to fare as the most fare? Will you rush with the herd into the deep, and perish for company's sake? Is that good-fellowship which ends in the sad reckoning another day? Christ's flock is a little flock. But read Matt. vii. 13, 14, and consider whether you will choose.

(2.) If you have not the greater, you have the better company to travel with. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, ministers, confessors, Christians, have all travelled in this road: "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee." ‡ Methinks you should rather choose to be companions of the excellent, whom God will own when he makes up his jewels; || than those atheists that say, it is in vain to serve God.

Object. 11. But I know some strict professors that use not to pray in their families, nay, that plead against it.

Ans. (1.) That is no part or evidence of their goodness. I deny not but some godly persons may for a season live in the omission of some duties, either through want of information, or their own sloth, or

* Exod. xxiii. 2.

† Matt. v. 47.

‡ Psal. xxxii. 6.

|| Psal. xvi. 3. Mal. iii. 14, 17.

through false teachers, and the power of delusion ; this is a temptation, but free grace will recover them, and the new nature within them will incline them to their duty, when they are convinced of it, and when they come to themselves.

(2.) Some professors, however, seem good that are not so ; they may have a name to live, and yet be dead ;* all is not gold that glitters ; men may have the face, but not the frame or heart of Christians. How many make a fair show in the flesh, and account themselves the only saints, and are so esteemed by others, but are not owned by the Lord ?† the complexion of a saint is one thing, but the constitution of a child of God is another. Some notionists spread their sails, and think themselves wronged if they be not called the godly party ; but herein they are proved rotten, by casting off some precious truths and necessary duties ; imitate such at your peril ; a sincere saint hath respect to all God's commandments. ‡

Object. 12. We have scoffers in our families, that will withdraw, and not join, but mock ; it may be a son, or wife will be doing something else at that time, and this will breed confusion, and do hurt.

Ans. (1.) But who is master, thou or they ? If thou hast lost thy governing power, be ashamed of it, and resume thy authority. Whose cause dost thou manage, God's, or the devil's ? If the cause be God's, in the name and strength of God own it, and he will stand by thee ; fear not man in the way of duty. It was thy carelessness to join thyself to an untamed heifer, or to admit an unruly servant into thy family ; add not rebellion to that sin ; be humbled, and reform.

(2.) Had never any of God's children profane individuals in their family ? Abraham had a persecuting Ishmael ;

* Rev. iii. 1.

† Gal. vi. 12.

‡ Psalm cxix. 6.

Isaac a profane Esau; David a scoffing Michal; what did they? did they give over praying? no, they prayed more fervently; "O that Ishmael may live in thy sight!" David was so far from ceasing his devotion, that Michal's scorn was as oil to inflame his zeal;* "I will yet," saith he, "be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight;" if they account it sordid baseness, I account it my chief honour to humble myself before the Lord. And which, think you, is more likely to win and work upon your carnal, scornful relations? a total omission, or a vigorous performance of family duty? I am sure a laborious charity is better than contemptuous withdrawing, and is usually blessed with success; however it is a means to proceed in order.

Object. 13. I am bashful, modest, and of weak gifts, and cannot venture to pray before others; I shall but betray my ignorance.

Ans. (1.) Canst thou act a master's part in other cases, and not in this? who commands thy servants to work? or who instructs them in their calling, or chides them when they displease thee? they shall hear from thee if they do wrong; and canst thou not speak to God before them? Cursed is that modesty that is ashamed of duty. Hast thou not reason to fear Christ will be ashamed of thee?† is not this for God's cause? deny him at your peril, he will deny you.‡

(2.) Are not all in your family, underlings or subordinate to you? have not you authority over them, to enjoin them silence and reverence? if you have lost your authority by your ignorance and childishness, thank yourselves. "Those that honour God, he will honour;" but departing out of God's ways, renders

* Gen. xvii. 18. 2 Sam. vi. 20—22.

† Matt. x. 33.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 12.

men contemptible and base.* It is grace and holiness that must recover your credit. But I know the reason why you will not pray: it is because you think you cannot do so well as others, or to get applause; this is your pride. But if you would shame yourselves, and do your best, God would provide for your credit; gifts would increase.

Object. 14. But I am poor and there is an unfeeling world, we work hard and cannot spare time; I have a great family and charge to maintain.

Ans. (1.) Dost not thou and thy family spend as much time in idle talk, sports, needless visits, sitting by the fire, as this would come to? None so hard set in their callings, but they might redeem half an hour in the morning, and more at night;† even though it were from sleep, for God's service, if they had a heart for God. Conscience will tell thee, thou spendest more time, that might be better employed; but a heart is wanting.

(2.) It is a usual saying, Meat and matins hinder no work; there is great truth in it. Prayer expedites business, for it obtains a blessing from God. Eliezer, Abraham's servant prayed, and God prospered his journey. You are atheists if you think work stands during prayer time; no, no, it makes whatsoever you take in hand to prosper.‡ The poor man cried to Mr. Carter, Sir, I work hard and fare ill, and thrive not; he answered, Work hard, and pray hard, and see what that will do.

Object. 15. But saith the man who is rich and thriving in the world, my hands are so full of business, and chapmen or customers come so fast, or I have to go abroad in my calling, that I cannot get time for prayer.

* 1 Sam. ii. 30. Mal. ii. 8, 9. † Eph. v. 16. ‡ Psal. i. 3.

Ans. (1.) I shall to this give the same answer that Mr. Ignatius Jurdan gave to a shopkeeper in London, accounted religious, being very busy in his shop early in the morning, Mr. Jurdan taking him aside, said, "Sir, I perceive you are very busy; do you keep up the trade of religion in all this throng;" he answered, "I hope I do;" Aye, but saith he, "do you visit God in your closet and family, morning and evening?" he replied, "In the evening, I pray constantly with my family, but in the morning, sometimes customers come and hinder us;" Mr. Jurdan said, "I tell you, I would throw these goods into the channel, or set fire to them, rather than they should hinder me in my course of devotion, or in the way to heaven." So say I; sirs, do you prize gain above godliness? then you are none of God's servants, but the world's slaves. Say not, it is for a time, one neglect brings on another, and thy heart will be more hardened; and by missing one season of communion with God, you lose more than all your estates are worth. Are you content, that the world be your portion? O make not gain your godliness!

(2.) How can you expect your gains and riches should be blessed to you, when you take not God's way to obtain a blessing? If you begin not with God, the end will be dreadful; God's curse is in the house of such wicked persons.* However, such treasures of wickedness profit nothing;† and since you will be rich you fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts which will drown you in destruction and perdition.‡ Do not you know that worldly riches cannot satisfy? Consider, the more you get of the world, the more difficult is your journey to heaven, and the greater your account.

* Prov. iii. 33.

† Prov. x. 2.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

Object. 16. You bind us to a tedious bondage, this is a wearisome task to pray with our families morning and evening, it is not to be endured.

Answ. (1.) It is a sign of a carnal heart to be weary of duty: a gracious soul thankfully accepts the offer of frequent approaching to God: "Then," saith David, "will I go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy: it is good for me to draw nigh to God."* This is the height of a Christian's preferment, the sweetest recreation, and the only gainful employment. "To them that love God his commands are not grievous;" but these ways of wisdom are not only pleasant, but pleasantness.† Alas, sirs, what spirits are you of, that you can say, "What a weariness is it?"‡ Surely heaven itself would be your hell, unless your hearts and natures were changed.

(2.) It is an awful token of God's rejecting that man, and of that man's forsaking the Lord, who will rather pick quarrels with divine commands than obey them: remember what became of them that said, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it? They went back and walked no more with Christ."|| It is a sign thou takest thy religion for low and base ends, and when those ends are attained, then farewell Christ: and oh, the wretched end of forlorn apostates, whither wilt thou go for a better master, where wilt thou find a better service? wilt thou prefer Satan's drudgery to God's service, which is perfect freedom?§ Ah, sinner, thou hast the black brand of reprobation upon thee, and shalt be filled with thy own ways.¶

Object. 17. Saith one, I never used this family

* Psal. xliii. 4. lxxiii. 28. + 1 John v. 3. Prov. iii. 17.

† Mal. i. 13. || John vi. 60—66. § John xii. 26.

¶ Prov. xiv. 14.

prayer and have been a housekeeper for twenty, thirty, or forty years, I am therefore loth to bring up a new custom, or condemn my former practices.

Ans. (1.) Custom in sin, or sinful negligence doubles the sin, and hardens the heart, Jer. xiii. 23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin—then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." What think you, is it an extermination or aggravation of a fault to plead custom? Will the thief say to the judge, my lord, I have been so accustomed to stealing that I cannot leave it? Oh, say not, I will go to hell because I have travelled in the road thither all my days, and am loth to change.—

(2.) Converting grace can break off a bad custom, sanctifying work will turn an old stream into a new channel, or rather renew the soul's faculties and make a new creature, or creation; "Old things pass away, and behold all things are become new;"* new principles, motives, rule, and end. You are not true Christians, if you be not new creatures; and if you be not found in Christ, you are lost for ever.† You had need pray and pray again for new covenant-mercy, "That God would give you a new heart, and a new spirit—that you may walk in his statutes."‡ Be not content with the "old man," that corrupt, disfigured image of old Adam, but "put on the new man," that will make you capable of new acts, in a new manner. Better late than never: be not wedded to old traditions.||

Object. 18. I have used it formerly, but got no good by it, and so gave it over; and if I begin again, I doubt I shall not hold out.

Ans. (1.) Whose fault was that? Was it God's fault or thine? The blame must not be laid on the

* 2 Cor. v. 17. † Phil. iii. 9. ‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

|| Eph. iv. 22—24. 1 Pet. i. 18.

duty but on the person. Thousands have got good by it, and would not lay it aside for all the world's wealth. If thy heart had been right, thou wouldst have held on thy way; if thy hands had been clean thou wouldst have become stronger and stronger.* Alas, that thou shouldst lose thy reward, by losing what thou hast wrought:† poor soul, thou hast run in vain, all thy labour is lost, thy former righteousness shall not be mentioned for thee, but against thee.‡

(2.) Who persuaded thee to leave off family prayer? You did run well, who hindered you? Not God or his ministers; this persuasion cometh not of him that called you.|| No, no, it was the devil and a wicked heart that bewitched you. And is it not egregious folly, "having begun in the spirit, to think to be made perfect by the flesh?"§ Will you go out of God's blessing into the warm sun? "What iniquity have you found in God or in his ways?"¶ Oh gratify not the devil and flesh, by saying, "It is in vain to serve God; or, why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"** Come, sirs, renew your old acquaintance, "Return to your first husband;"†† renew your ancient convictions and impressions; engage the strength of God and you shall hold on.

Object. 19. I like not this preciseness, you shall never persuade me to it; you spend your breath in vain, yet I hope to be saved, as well as the best of you all; God is merciful.

Answ. (1.) Now flesh and blood and carnal reason speak out, and vent the natural malignity of the heart, "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."††

* Job xvii. 9.

† 2 John 8.

‡ Ezek. xviii. 24.

|| Gal. v. 7, 8.

§ Gal. iii. 1—3.

¶ Jer. ii. 5. Mal. iii. 14.

** 2 Kings vi. 33.

†† Hos. ii. 7.

‡‡ Rom. viii. 7.

Oh, that any of God's creatures should spit such venom against its Maker ! How far are you from the blessed Paul, who, when God called him by his grace, "conferred not with flesh and blood."* Will you ask the devil's advice whether to be God's children or not ? Will you not serve God without the devil's leave ? Well go on gratifying God's enemy, and see the issue, it will be bitterness in the end.

(2.) Will you dare to stand by this answer at God's bar and great tribunal ? Will you then dare to say, Lord, thou didst indeed bid us pray, but we had no mind to that duty ; we loved not thee, nor did we approve of thy ways ; we thought they were too strict, and bound us too strait ; we had more inclination for our carnal ease, and sensual lusts ; we were latitudinarians, and our resolution was, we will not have this man to rule over us, whatever it cost us ? † Well, sirs, think not much if God say, "You have set at nought all my counsel and would have none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity : you thought I was altogether such a one as yourselves, but I will reprove you. ‡ Now is the day of vengeance, mercy hath an end, and justice takes place ; "and those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me."||

Object. 20. Well, now I am convinced prayer is a duty, family prayer is my duty, and I have a mind to perform it ; but I know not how to manage it, I am altogether a stranger to it, God help me, I am a mere ignoramus, and know not what to say.

Ans. (1.) Where is the fault ? Hast thou not enjoyed means, helps, ordinances many years for the good of thy soul ? Dost thou not see others as igno-

* Gal. i. 16.

† Luke xix. 14.

‡ Prov. i. 25, 26. Psal. l. 21.

|| Luke xix. 27.

rant as thou, attain to excellent gifts, under the same helps, who can pray very pertinently, even extempore; but I guess the true cause; it is either the pride of thy heart, that thou canst not pray so well as others, or it is thy sloth, in consequence of which thou hast not diligently used means to get knowledge or excite thy faculties: thy sloth will slay thy soul;* and thy damnation will be just.

(2.) God stands not upon gifts, elocution, or ready utterance; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; “a broken and a contrite heart, God will not despise.”† If thou hast not precious liquor, canst thou not offer him thy empty bottles? If thou canst not pray, canst thou not fall down upon thy knees and tell God thou canst not pray? Canst thou not desire him to help thee to pray? Canst thou not say, as much as the poor publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”‡ If it be not wilfulness but weakness, God will indulge thee much, his Spirit will help thy infirmities,|| both what to say, and how to pray. But in this case I shall give some directions shortly.

CHAP. V.

NEGLECT OF FAMILY WORSHIP, AN EVIL OF A THREATENING DESCRIPTION AND GREATLY TO BE LAMENTED.

THE first use I shall make of this subject is of lamentation, and severe admonition. If it be so, as I have proved, that governors should act the part of priests

* Prov. i. 32. † Psal. li. 17. ‡ Luke xviii. 13. || Rom. viii. 26.

to erect altars for the worship of God in their families; then I doubt there is reason for alarm to many thousand families in England, for I fear God's vengeance is hanging over their heads. God looks and expects, that in a professing kingdom, a nation where the gospel has been so long acknowledged by public authority, religion would be more respected and practised in families, than I fear it is; God may justly wonder, "That there is no intercessor"; therefore how justly may he put on "garments of vengeance," and repay recompence to these islands.* Woe is us that there are so few serious, gracious families to be found in our highly favoured land. Religion runs at a low ebb, serious devotion is banished from among us. Some families are *without priests, without altars, without sacrifice*, or *offer the sacrifice of devils*, instead of God's, or along with his. On these a few observations may be made.

1. There are many houses without priest, that is, where the governor of the family hath no religion, is not devoted to God, nor anointed with his Spirit, nor consecrated to be a gospel priest to erect an altar or offer sacrifice. A poor irreligious master of a family, that knows not how to frame for† God's worship, alas, ignorant creature! he is not capable of speaking a word from God to his family, or of speaking a word to God for them. You go to bed and rise, one time after another, prayerless;‡ you can keep them up late and call them up early to their work, but never say, come to prayer; not a word of God all the day long, not a chapter read, not a psalm sung, not a prayer put up in the family from day to day; nay, it is well if there be any solemn praying for a blessing at meat, or giving God thanks for meat, but scholar's

* Isaiah lix. 16—18. † To set about. ‡ Psalm cxxvii. 2.

grace, as they say ; every one for himself ; so they sit down and rise up like brutes ; at best, they fall to, saying, *God bless my meat, amen* : and so put off God with a compliment. Ah graceless master, ah graceless family ! woe be to thee.

(1.) How durst you marry, set up a house, or take the charge of a family upon you, when you are no better furnished for it ? Do you not shame with yourselves, that you cannot say a word to God for them ? No, not if your wife, child, or servant lie a dying, and their souls ready to be lost, you have not a word to speak for their recovery or salvation, O wretched situation !

(2.) Do you not condemn yourselves, that can teach your children and servants a trade to get a livelihood by, and live handsomely in this world, and not one word for another world ? you command them to work, never to worship God ; you quarrel with them for offending you, never for offending God ; you expect them to ask you for what they need, but you will not ask any thing of God either for them, or yourselves.

(4.) Are you not worse than idolatrous Micah, Judg. xvii. 5, “ He had a house of gods, and made an ephod and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.” Much like some ignorant parents that will set a lad to say a primer grace ; better so than none at all. But Micah was not content with that, but got a hedge-hog priest, a wandering Levite to perform divine service in his family ; and now he is a jolly fellow, and thus boasts, ver. 13, “ Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.” This poor idolater will rise up in judgment against thee.

(4.) How will you answer the charge against you ? do not your children cry out, O pity us, pray for us,

cruel parents? you brought us sinful creatures into a sinful world, help us out of this woful state! But alas! you have not a word to say for them, or with them; you regard their precious souls no more than an ox or horse; their blood will be required at your hands. How will they curse you in hell? their language will be, Oh, woe is me! had I lived in a praying family, I might have been converted and saved; I never heard a word of God except blaspheming his name. How will this grind your ears, and grieve your hearts another day!

2. Other families are without an altar; have not so much as a form of godliness; not so much as a show of religion. Oh! that it should be said of many houses in England, as of Israel, 2 Chron. xv. 3, "Now for a long season Israel had been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law." So God threatens in Hos. iii. 4, that the wretched Jews shall be without any religion true or false, as it hath been since their murdering Christ to this day.

(1.) How these wretches resemble the brutes? they own God no more than a dog or an ass; it would be better to be a brute, than to be compared to a brute. Yea God calls in the dullest creatures to condemn an irreligious people.*

(2.) How can you expect a blessing upon your mercies? they are unhallowed things as to you; nay, they are accursed to you, and, if God give commission, will rise up in rebellion against you; you have not sanctified your house, so it is not estimated as yours.†

(3.) You hinder God's interest in the world, and do what you can to propagate irreligion to future generations; how will they plead the practice of ancestors? My father never prayed in his family, nor will I.

* Isa. i. 3. Jer. viii. 7, 8.

† Lev. xxvii. 14.

Omission is a trade soon learned, with difficulty rooted out. Jeroboam made Israel sin many generations after.* Oh! you little know how far your sin may spread.

(4.) Do you not often read your sin in the punishment of it? When you are atheists in not worshipping God, your children are atheists in denying God; you are defective in duty, they abound in iniquity; you pray not for them, God rejects them, and leaves them to notorious villanies, to be punished by the judges; or God strikes them with some overwhelming judgment, as he did Eli's sons. This will make thy heart ache, and call thy sins to remembrance.

3. Some families possibly have a priest, and an altar, but want a sacrifice. As Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"† So say I, here are materials, the outward form, but where is the marrow, and mystery of true godliness? Dost thou give up thy soul and body as a living sacrifice to God? Dost thou bring a broken and contrite heart for sin?‡ Dost thou practically obey divine commands, and do all the good thou canst in thy place?|| especially dost thou take Jesus Christ in the arms of thy faith, and expect acceptance only in the Beloved?§ or dost thou only compliment God?

(1.) If there be not a principle of grace within, thou art but a lifeless machine, like a parrot that speaks articulately without sense and feeling: David's prayer went not out of feigned lips, why so? he had found in his heart to pray his prayer;¶ mind it, thou must find thy prayer in thy heart, before thou utter it with thy lips, and then thou must pray a prayer; and not

* 1 Kings xiv. 16. † Gen. xxii. 7. ‡ Rom. xii. 1. Ps. li. 17.

|| Heb. xiii. 16. § Heb. xiii. 10. Eph. i. 6.

¶ Psalm xvii. 1. 2 Sam. vii. 27.

only say a prayer as most do. Some will go down on their knees and patter over a few words in a heartless manner, when their minds are roving to a thousand trifles; and this is their devotion of which they brag, and with which God must be pleased; whereas it is a poor heartless, lifeless, spiritless form, without power, which God rejects; this lip labour is but lost labour; for it is a mocking of God, and he will not be mocked.*

(2.) If you sleepily, sluggishly, or unseasonably perform your family duties, you will come short of approbation. Some spend all the day, and the evening in work or worldly business; part, it may be in idle chat and vain discourse, and just when they are for going to bed, start up and fall on their knees, and rattle over a few words between sleeping and waking: and most of the family fitter for their beds than for devotion. Alas! sirs, doth not God pronounce a curse upon such as do the work of the Lord negligently?† and doth not God say, “Cursed be the deceiver that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing?”‡ Ah! soul, hadst thou not a male, a better, fitter hour in thy power, than that sleepy hour at bed-time? must God be put off with the world’s leavings? doth not he that gives thee all thy time deserve the best? doth not God bid thee seek first his kingdom? and shall this be last? must the very flower and cream of thy time be spent in vanity, and God be thus served? O! be ashamed and blush at thy disingenuous dealing with the Almighty.

(3.) If you come to own God in family exercises, by fits and starts, in a good mood, or when some affliction lies on you, or your family, oh how slavish are you? but alas! there are some that are never thoughtful, but

* 2 Tim. iii. 5. Isa. xxix. 13. Gal. vi. 7.

† Jer. xlviii. 10.

‡ Mal. i. 14.

in distress ; never serious, but when severely handled, like a dog under the cudgel, and then it is but howling,* not child-like crying ; “ in their afflictions they will seek God early ” and earnestly, they pour out a prayer when his chastening is upon them,† and never else. Poor souls, should you not come to the throne of grace, “ to find grace to help in time of need ? ” ‡ and when is the day, where is the place, and what is the state wherein you have not need of God ? are you not daily sinning, and need pardon as well as daily bread ? may you not die this day, this night ? are not morning and evening proper times to seek God ? Some will not pray in their families, but a little on sabbath nights, when they have nothing else to do : as though all time were not God’s, week-days as well as Lord’s-days. Surely God is to be owned daily ; “ I will,” said David, “ daily perform my vows,” and “ I cry unto thee daily : ” || and why should you be as “ the morning cloud and early dew,” § when God is daily furnishing you with his benefits, and therefore should be daily praised, not Lord’s day merely, but week-day, and every day in the week : ¶ what if God forget or forsake you any day, what would become of you ?

(4.) If you are wrong in the end of your family duties you will be rejected ; and, alas ! thousands propose wrong ends to themselves, in this as in other exercises of religion : some keep up family duty, because it was the custom of their ancestors, and it would be a kind of disparagement to degenerate ; some to gratify a religious wife, or pious servant ; some to make a show and ostentation of their gifts ; others to stop the mouth of a clamorous conscience ; some for worldly

* Hos. vii. 14.

† Heb. iv. 16.

§ Hos. vi. 4.

† Hos. v. 15. Isa. xxvi. 16.

|| Psalm lxi. 8. lxxxvi. 3.

¶ Psalm lxviii. 19. lxxii. 15.

gain; others as the Pharisees to be seen of men; nay, it is well if some pray not for a cloak of their villany, when they devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers;* long prayers are not simply condemned in themselves, for it is a sign of rare piety, the more holy men are, the more prayerful.† But, oh! damnable hypocrisy, to make so holy an ordinance truckle to such a degrading vice: it is well if that wickedness be dead and buried with the Pharisees: of whom Calvin saith, their assiduous praying was a kind of stalking-horse, or occasion to serve their filthy lucre, neither did they sell their prayers otherwise than mercenary men dispose of their day labours.‡

For (saith this prince of interpreters) "Where gain is gotten by such designing prayers, the more the fervour of that kind of devotion increaseth, the more is the name of God profaned." I beseech you therefore tremble to think of prostituting so glorious an exercise to so ignominious an end: for the end makes or mars an action.

4. As some families are without priest, altar, and sacrifice of the right kind, so there are some that have something of all these, yet have another altar and sacrifice inconsistent with these, that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham:|| that set up the devil's altar by the Lord's; as of the Samaritans of old, it is said in one verse "they feared the Lord," in the

* Mal. vi. 5. Matt. xxiii. 14.

† Nam quo quisque sanctior est, precandi studio magis est deditus.

‡ Quia illis precandi assiduitas turpis lucri sit aucupium; neque enim aliter preces vendebant, quam mercenarii diurnas operas locant.—*Calv. in loc.*—quod res per se laudabilis in pravam finem conversa est; nam ubi ex conductitiis precibus, captatur quæstus, quo magis crescit fervidæ (ut loquuntur) devotionis species, eo magis profanatur Dei nomen.—*Id. Ibid.*

|| Zeph. i. 5.

next verse "they feared not the Lord," why so? the answer is put between them, they feared the Lord, and served their own gods, 2 Kings, xvii. 32—34, that is, they did materially do the same things in worship that Israel did, for fear of being destroyed by the lions, ver. 25, but they had gods of their own, ver. 29, and God could not endure this mongrel religion, and interprets it to be no true fear, or due worship of himself: for God will not be partner with idols, he only must be served or not at all. Our Lord takes it ill when men set their thresholds by his thresholds, their posts by his posts,* thus they defile his holy name by their abominations: these are a grievous nuisance to the holy and jealous God. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee? Can men serve God and mammon?† Must Bacchus, Venus, Vulcan, be set up cheek by jole with the living and true God? Shall wickedness be practised by governors, tolerated in inferiors; swearing, cursing, lying, cheating, drunkenness, uncleanness, mocking at strickness of religion?

Observe it, there is no true worship where there is not strict discipline. How sad is it to see some men devout in worship and profligate in practice? one thing on their knees, another on their feet: pray like angels, and practise like devils: confess sin one hour, and commit it the next: plead for pardon, and to obtain a dispensation. Alas! that any now-a-days should resemble Israel of old, who would steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely; and come and stand before God in his house, to worship and say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations:"‡ or like the impudent woman, Prov. vii. 14, "I have peace-offerings with me, this day have I paid my vows." So some men think they may do as they list, and cast the reins

* Ezek. xliii. 8.

† Psal. xciv. 20.

‡ Jer. vii. 9—11.

on the neck of appetite to run to all licentiousness: why so? Have they no religion? Yes, they have said their prayers, and are in good reputation for religion, and since they have been so serious, now they hope God will not take notice of their infirmities, but overlook them, as the man Mr. Shepherd tells of, that frequented taverns, alehouses, and brothels all day, yet would not go out without prayer in the morning. Oh horrible impiety! this is gross, practical atheism, for

(1.) It is making God the patron of their impiety, as if the holy God approved and encouraged these vices, if they only bribed him with a few formal duties. But what saith God to such profane sinners, that hate instruction, and cast his words behind them, and then allow themselves all licentiousness? "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence, thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."* A time is coming when God will vindicate his justice and omniscience against these audacious transgressors, that did misconstrue and abuse his long suffering; as if by his connivance he had justified or allowed their courses.

(2.) This greatly dishonours God, and accustoms men to take his name in vain: as long as you say one thing and do quite contrary, you discredit your profession:† whilst you will be called Jews or Christians, and make your boast of God, if you know his will, practise it; otherwise through breaking the law you dishonour God, "for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you."‡ You harden the wicked against God's ways, and make them conclude

* Psal. l. 17—21.

† Dicebantur Christiani ad contumeliam Christi.—*Sal.*

‡ Rom. ii. 17, 24.

that either God is as bad as you, or approves of you, or is ignorant of your conduct, else he would be avenged on you : “he will not hold you guiltless that take his name in vain.”*

(3.) How can you expect acceptance when you thus “regard iniquity in your hearts?”† You bring your sacrifice with a wicked heart, therefore it is “abomination to the Lord: when you spread forth your hands,” saith God, “I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear, your hands are full of blood.”‡ God will disown your persons and performances, and even spread the dung of your solemn feasts upon your faces.¶ Methinks when you read that awful text, Psal. l. 16, your consciences should fly in your faces, as it did in Origen’s, “But unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?” O tremble at such a sharp rebuke!

(4.) You tempt your children and servants to abandon religion, while you act so contrary to your prayers and professions: just as scandalous ministers that speak well and live ill; people are ready to say, if this man believed himself what he imposeth upon us, he would act at another rate. Will he direct us this way to heaven, and go quite contrary? surely, he thinks it is but a fancy, else he would embrace it himself. Oh! what have both to answer for? You offend them, hinder them in heaven’s way, lead them to hell by your example, and make them manifold more the children of wrath than they were.§ By this means you gratify Satan, he will give you leave to say well, and pray

* Exod. xx. 7.

† Psal. lxvi. 18.

‡ Prov. xxi. 27. See Isa. i. 11—15.

¶ Mal. ii. 3.

§ Matt. xxiii. 15.

well, if only you be still in his fetters by wicked works: this mightily strengthens his interest: yea, by this means you fortify yourselves against convictions, and go hood-winked to hell, for you will not believe but that your state is safe as long as you can pray so well, and are so religious in your families: but, alas! though you bolster up yourselves with an imagination of your interest in Christ, yet abundance of Scriptures tell you, you have nothing to do with him, without holiness of heart and life, “for he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”* And be it known to you, that it is not saying a few prayers, according to which you must be judged another day, “but according to what you have done whether it be good or bad.† Nay, these very family prayers, without a principle of grace, and holy life, will aggravate your sin and condemnation: your hypocrisy will sink you deeper in hell, and your long prayers will make you receive greater damnation: for the furnace of hypocrites is seven times hotter than others,‡ and conscience will torment you the more. It is not a sprinkling of a little holy water in your houses that will remove the curse of God, which lies on your families, contracted by your wickedness, covetousness, and unjust gain; for brevity I refer you to Hab. ii. 9—11, Zech. v. 3, Prov. xv. 25—27.

I say not all this to discourage any from family prayer, but to deter from sin, and regulate prayer, and also that specious hypocrites and formalists may be alarmed to commence repentance and reformation.

A word more to such as live in praying families. Young persons, look to your state, it is not living amongst pious people, that will make you pious, nor

* Tit. ii. 14. † 2 Cor. v. 10. ‡ Matt. xxiii. 14. xxiv. 51.

yet complying with praying gestures that will denominate you saints or gospel worshippers; you may do as your superiors would have you for selfish purposes; as young Joash “did right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada;”* but his heart was not right, he proved wicked; so may you, if you be unprincipled, you will either gaze about you, or think of other things, or fall asleep, which is the common practice of young persons, when their parents or masters are at prayer. I shall but introduce an address of that excellent young man Mr. Janeway, to his brother sleeping at family prayer:† O, saith he, what a high contempt is this of the great God! how little sense of your own danger, what dreadful hypocrisy! what a miracle of patience that you were not awakened in hell flames! This reproof softened his brother’s heart, and wrought savingly on him, as was hoped, the child being about eleven years of age. Oh! that it might have this effect on many guilty souls.

Alas! sirs, are you not concerned in the prayers of the family? while you sleep, Satan watches and rocks the cradle; and be it known to you, your judgment sleeps not, your damnation slumbereth not;‡ for ought you know you may awake in hell. What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee that thou perish not?||

But besides, there are graceless individuals in praying families. Alas, how many walk unsuitably! they will swear and lie, they are unchaste, lewd and addicted to tippling and intoxication, they commit crimes when they are out of their father’s or master’s sight, and think, if they can but hide them from the eye of their superiors, all is right. Ah poor deluded mortal, doth

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 2.

† Mr. Clarke’s last vol. of *Lives* fol. 66.

‡ 2 Peter ii. 3.

|| Jonah i. 6.

not God see thee? "Understand, you brutish among the people, ye fools, when will ye be wise? he that planted the ear shall he not hear? he that formed the eye shall he not see?"* Be sure your sin will find you out; and do not others see you? will not they cry shame on you? and reflect upon the families where you were brought up, or have lived? O what a reproach and disparagement do you cast on the instruments of your education? what grief are you to pious people, that shake the head, and cover their faces when they behold you? where is your imitation of religious examples? is this the fruit of their pains, the answer of their prayers? were you thus taught? Woe be to you that must be snatched out of pious families and cast among devils; you had better never have been born, or born among Turks or Pagans; your condemnation will be aggravated; your own consciences will fly in your faces. O how many good instructions have I slighted! you will say, how many convictions have I stifled? what powerful motives have I resisted? what good examples have I disregarded? I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ears to them that instructed me; and now I must mourn without hope, and die without instruction or any to pray for me. †

CHAP. VI.

MOTIVES TO INFLUENCE MASTERS OF FAMILIES TO SET UP ALTARS TO GOD FOR HIS SOLEMN WORSHIP.

AND now friends, what remains but a due compliance with this call? O that sacred altars were set up for

* Psal. xciv. 8—11.

† Prov. v. 11—14.

God's solemn worship in all families throughout the kingdom! Were God duly worshipped in every house, how happy a nation should we be! we might hope that God would tarry with us, and bless us. If men would pray as Christians, and live as Christians, things would be better with us than they are; let none mistake us, together with the worship of God we must discover the necessity of a saving principle in the heart, and suitable practice in the life; men must first be good, then they will do good; and they must be first united to Christ, or neither will follow; for he saith, "*without me*," *χωρὶς ἐμοῦ*, being divided from me, "*you can do nothing*"* you can do nothing spiritually, nothing acceptably. O sirs, do not think to put off God with a few duties, or formal performances without sincerity or earnestness. God saith, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice,"† that is, not merely sacrifice, "and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings." The word mercy, is a synecdoche, comprehending all the duties of the second table under one. By sacrifice is meant also synecdochically, all instituted ordinances and worship, all the affirmative precepts of the second and fourth commandments; but yet prayer to God is of such absolute necessity, and founded in nature, (if it be granted that there is a God) that the heathen could prefer it to sacrifices, saying, offer prayers to the gods not oxen.‡ But though prayer itself be a natural duty, yet the circumstances of time and place may be various as occasion is offered; hence divines say, negative precepts bind always, and with respect to all times;|| affirmative bind indeed always, but not with respect to

* John xv. 5.

+ See this fully explained by Mr. Burroughs, on Hos. vi. 6, page 600—618.

‡ Ἐυχὰς τοῖς Θεοῖς, οὐ βόας θύει.

|| Semper et ad semper.

all times;* therefore pray continually; if it be done in season, God looks upon it as always, or continually done; but if another duty of greater importance be to be done at that instant, God dispenseth with the former, and it ceaseth to be a duty then, yet the duty continues, and must not be totally superseded; only God will have sacrifice, but not without the spirit;† for instituted worship, without natural worship, is not to be regarded; “he will be worshipped in spirit and in truth;”‡ nor will God accept those prayers and sacrifices as an atonement for sin, or a dispensation to continue in sin; if you leave out Christ in the former, and make use of Christ in the latter, your prayers are abominable.

Having premised this, I shall subjoin a few motives to persuade you to make a practice of family prayer; besides the reasons to prove it a duty, which I desire you to review:—Answer old testament types—act not against nature itself—accomplish promises and prophecies—imitate good examples—accord with divine providence—distinguish your families from those that are profane—approve yourselves and families to be little churches, as you will give account of the charge committed to your trust—obtain a supply for your family necessities, and a blessing upon yourselves and yours—avoid God’s curse and wrath upon your families, and begin in earnest this duty.

And now I beseech you in the bowels of Christ to set up altars, and offer yourselves and families wholly and entirely to the Lord, as a whole burnt-offering for God’s sake, who made you for himself, daily preserves you, and can plentifully reward your obedience or punish your disobedience.—I beseech you for Christ’s sake who laid down his life for you, “that he might

* *Semper non ad semper.*

† See 10 Instances, *ibid.* p. 603.

‡ John iv. 24.

purchase you to himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works.*—For the Holy Ghost's sake, who is moving you to duty, suggesting good things to your minds, and will help your infirmities; O do not quench or grieve the Spirit!—For the church's sake, for Zion's sake hold not your peace, but help the travelling church till she be delivered.†—For the nation's sake, which is almost drowned in atheism and sensuality, and daily subject to God's displeasure and fury.—For your poor children and servants' sake, who need your prayers for their conversion, pardon and reconciliation with God;—and for your own souls' sake that are oft under guilt, imperfect in grace, and have much work and burden upon your hands and have a great account to make. Surely if you have any sense upon your hearts of any of these things, you will instantly, constantly and affectionately call upon God in your families. Again, let me urge you from a consideration of the benefits of this practice of family prayer.

1. This devotional altar will be the best ornament to your houses; no pictures, stately rooms or household goods will be such neat and splendid furniture as this worship of God; the finest hangings and most beautiful paintings, are but sordid and disgusting filth to this; it is this that renders a beggar's cottage far more honourable than a prince's palace without it. "Righteousness exalteth a nation and family, but sin is a reproach to any people or person;"‡ this is far before full coffers, magnificent tables, rich feasts and a large train of attendants: for God is there, as the poor hermit-like philosopher said, ἐν τοῖς οἰκοῖς, here dwell the gods; so the high and lofty One dwells, with the "contrite and humble spirit,"|| in the most homely habitation. What a comely sight it is to behold all the members of

* Tit. ii. 14. † Isa. lxii. 1. ‡ Prov. xiv. 34. || Isa. lvii. 15.

a family prostrate on their knees every morning and evening! to hear melodious praises to God unanimously sung! it is an emblem of heaven. It is recorded of the prince of Anhalt's house, that it was a church, an academy, and court,* where himself was as priest, tutor, judge and sovereign lord. O how happy such a family! I may say of such a master, as the queen of Sheba of Solomon, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee."† This, this only is the glory of a family.

2. This is not only the ornament, but muniment and defence of a family: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty!"‡ Communion with God is usually attended with protection from God; if any be safe it is genuine believers that shall be safe. Lot's family must be delivered from Sodom's flames: "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, as well as upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day," that the enemy shall not find them, "and the shining of a flaming fire by night,"|| that they may see their way; yea, it shall be "a wall of fire round about them,"§ for upon all the glory shall be a defence: yea, God himself will be the glory in the midst of them; none know the advantages of praying families, but experienced and observant Christians.

3. This is the way and means to bring spiritual and eternal salvation to your houses: surely, that was a great word that our dear Lord spoke to Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to this house!"¶ That little man used much care and made a hard shift to behold Jesus, and met with a blessed, unexpected guest, that brought him the greatest blessing, himself and salva-

* Templum, academia, curia. + 1 Kings x. 8. ‡ Psal. xci. 1.

|| Isai. iv. 5.

§ Zech. ii. 5.

¶ Luke xix. 9.

tion with him ! Our Lord never comes alone, but brings happiness with him : the conversion of one man as it was a pledge of his adoption, so it made even the whole family an heir of heavenly glory :* for (as Calvin has observed) when God adopts the master of a family, he promiseth to be a God to the whole house, and by right, salvation is extended from the head to the whole body.† So Lydia was baptized and her household, and the jailor ; Acts xvi. 15, 33, 34 ; and oh what joy was produced, when himself and his house believed ! yea, Cornelius owning God in family worship, brought to him and his, words, whereby the master and all his house should be saved ; not of merit but in a covenant way, and in answer to prayer.‡ O sirs, would you not have your children and servants saved ? This is God's appointed way to bring it about ; call in divine aid, and grace to do that for yours, which you cannot.

4. Family worship will make up a defect in, or want of public ordinances ; Providence may cast your lot in places where the streams of the sanctuary run low or muddy, in this case, house-wells may do you much service ; when public persecution breaks up church assemblies, house worship will maintain religion in the world, and that private fire will break out into an open flame : what had become of religion had it not often lodged in private houses ? this hath been God's usual reserve to maintain the power of godliness ; church history tells us, that the open profession of the gospel hath been at a low ebb, and this hath helped it to a glorious resurrection : ministers were banished, as-

▪ Domum illam salutis hæredem.

† Nam quia Deus dum patrem familias adoptat, toti etiam ejus domui se in Deum fore promittit, jure salus a capite extenditur ad totum corpus.—*Calv. in loc.*

‡ Acts x. 2, 33, 34.

semblies scattered, churches demolished, and scarce any appearance of public meetings; yet then the fire glowed hot at private hearths, and in God's due time a door was opened for public assemblies: how much are we indebted to God for house altars! and such a day may overtake us again. And suppose you have free liberty of public and powerful ordinances, how can you expect a blessing upon them without seeking God for it in your families? What good will preaching do without your private instructions, admonitions, counsels, and prayers? This will inculcate truths, and may lay a foundation for after-godliness; and as family worship is a most indisputable duty, so least approachable by the enemy, because often indiscernible; however you may most warrantably suffer for it, if that be God's will, as you learn Daniel ventured himself for it to the hungry lions.

My beloved friends, what shall I say? What arguments shall I use to persuade you to this duty of family worship? I doubt your religion is to seek, if you be loth to set up a family altar, which may consecrate all your civil and natural acts and offices; I will but urge you with these few interrogatories.

1. Suppose a grave and pious minister, or Christian friend lodge with you, would you not reach him a bible, and desire him to go to prayer with you, lest he should suspect you to be prayerless at other times? And will not God's authority and presence have the like influence, and awe upon your spirits?

2. Suppose your friends and relations should quite disown, and disclaim you, unless you would pray in your family, would you not make a hard shift to do something that way, rather than be accounted unworthy of human society? And shall that prevail more

than God's disclaiming you, or disowning converse with you?

3. If your landlord should turn you out of your house, or your father should disinheret you, if you set not up this family altar, could you be content to suffer both, rather than do it? And shall a threatening of your Father in heaven, or great landlord, to reject or eject you out of heaven avail nothing?

4. If a law were imposed upon you to pay five shillings every time, that you neglect prayer in your family, would you forfeit that sum as oft as you go prayerless to bed; would you not fear that would beggar you? And shall not greater losses and heavier penalties deter you from this omission?

5. If the king or a nobleman should promise you five pounds every time that you call your family together, read a chapter, sing a psalm, kneel down and pray to God, would you not strain hard to procure that money? And will not a greater profit from Almighty God prevail with you to perform this exercise to obtain a reward?

6. Suppose a brand were set upon your foreheads, like Cain's, or a dreadful trembling should seize upon your bodies for such a neglect, or you should pass under such a stigmatizing character as that in Deut. xxv. 9, 10, "The house of him that hath his shoe loosed:" and if this name be given you, this is a graceless, prayerless man; would not this shame you out of your criminal omission?

7. Suppose the next time you go prayerless to bed, your loveliest child and darling should be snatched away by a sudden stroke of death, as it was in Egypt, when the first-born of Pharaoh and others died, and there was a great cry.* Would not this move you

* Exod. xii. 30.

into a better course? Oh, but a greater evil befalls you, your own precious souls are endangered by neglect.

8. Suppose a red cross, with a "Lord have mercy upon us," were set upon your doors, and the pestilence were within your house, seizing on you, one after another, and you had nothing else to do but to get ready to die; would you not spend some time in prayer for yourselves and families? Behold a worse plague is upon you, the plague of sin, and will you not pray?

9. Suppose, upon every omission of family prayer you should lose a limb, or member of your body, first one finger, then a toe should be cut or torn off, till all be gone, and you dismembered; would not this force you to this duty? and yet your precious souls, which are ten thousand times more worth than a limb, yea, than the whole body, are in hazard by wilful neglect.

10. Suppose a gallows were set at your door, and you must be hanged thereupon the next time you go out of your door, when you have not prayed in your family; would you venture to be hanged rather than omit this duty? do you love your lives no better? Oh! but eternal death is far more dreadful, and are eternal torments, that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, nothing to you?* Is the second death easy? And shall not sinners perish for their omission of good, as well as commission of evil? Be it known to you, that if you will not do so, that is, as God commands, behold, "ye have sinned against the Lord,† and be sure your sin will find you out;" it will hunt you as a blood-hound, and haunt you as an evil spirit in conscience here, and in torments hereafter; if God said to Cain for a defect in his sacrifice, "If thou doest not well sin lies at the door,"‡ that is, guilt shall

* Rev. xxi. 8.

† Numb. xxxii. 23.

‡ Gen. iv. 7.

be charged upon thee, (and you know how it dogged him, though he failed but in the manner of his sacrifice, not acting faith on Christ for acceptance :) Oh what will become of you that fall short even in the matter also ; and do nothing of what God commands you ? You even think it a needless ceremony, and mock them that do carefully, constantly, and conscientiously perform this duty ; woe unto you if you die in this sin, you are undone for ever.

But one word more, if any offer themselves to be members of particular churches, and to partake of the Lord's supper, I should judge them not fit to be communicants, except they pray in their families ; and if any be admitted and perform not their duty, I should think them as worthy of church censures, as those that are idle and omit working in their particular callings, which is enjoined, 2 Thess. iii. 6, 12, 14. What censure this is, less or greater, whether only withdrawing familiar converse with the offender ; or upon obstinacy, public excommunication, I leave to the judgment of the learned : but Dr. Lightfoot* tells us out of the Rabbins, that if any one refuse to nourish his children, they must reprove him, make him ashamed, and urge him ; if he still refuse, they must publicly proclaim in the synagogue, such a one is cruel and will not nourish his children ; he is more cruel than the unclean fowls, for those nourish their young ones ; and may we not say the same of such as neglect these needful family exercises for the souls of their dependants ?

* Si quis renuit liberos suos alere, reprehendunt eum, pudefaciunt eum, urgent eum: si adhuc renuit, publicé in eum proclamant in synagoga dicentes, hic crudelis est, non vult alere liberos suos: vel ipsis volucribus immundis crudelior, nam illæ pullos suos alunt, &c.—*Dr. Lightfoot in Evang. Matthæi Boræ Hebraicæ, cap. 18, 17, p. 215.*

CHAP. VII.

DIRECTIONS FOR SETTING UP AN ALTAR IN FAMILIES, AND FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY WORSHIP.

I HAVE now done with persuasives to the important exercises of family worship; whether all that I have said will prevail, I know not; but loth I am that all this should be in vain; it is a pity so needful a practice should fall to the ground, and all that I have said should rise up in judgment against you. I again renew my exhortation in the name of the Lord Jesus: You that are young set up your families with religion, whatever you have of the world beside to set up with, this will be your treasure, your palladium, your defence; you cannot miscarry if you begin with God. You that are old, and have been housekeepers long, set up this altar, turn over a new leaf, begin a new life, you are not too old to learn, nor too good to be taught, "better late than never," though you begin at the eleventh hour, you shall not be rejected; death looks you in the face, look up to God and be saved; say not, I will go to hell because I have been long travelling in the road thither; be not ashamed to undo all you have done or misdone, unravel this confused skein; what makes you hesitate? Is not the infinite God worthy of your love, fear, and worship? Are not the souls of your families precious? Is not heaven worth your seeking and having?

Oh! say you, I would gladly set up an altar in my family to the Lord; I would offer him a sacrifice, and worship him, but I know not how to set about it, or manage it in any way so that it may be acceptable

to God, profitable to my family, or comfortable to my own soul, I pray you give me some directions for this purpose. I answer, that I shall very willingly, but first I do solemnly require your promise to set about it in the name and strength of Christ, and do the best you can to do it right. My instructions I shall reduce to two heads: namely, *preparatives to it*, and *management of it*.

For the preparatives to your erection of this family altar, I shall but mention these four:—

1. See that your heads and hearts be well furnished; your heads with sound knowledge, and your hearts with saving grace. Without either of these you will not be fit for this undertaking; without the former you will have no ability, without the latter, you will have no disposition for the practice, but go to it as a bear to the stake.

First, Be sure you get scripture knowledge, a knowledge of God the object of worship, of the mediator by whom only you must have access to the Father, a knowledge of the Holy Spirit that must help your infirmities, a knowledge of yourselves, of divine truths, precepts, and promises; “for that the soul be without knowledge it is not good,”* otherwise you will worship you know not what, or you care not how, or regard not why; you will degenerate into formality and superstition. In the nineteenth chapter of Isaiah the prophet, having in verse 19, told us of an altar, he informs us of a sacrifice, ver. 22, but between those he saith, that the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and that the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation. By altar is meant gospel worship; by a pillar at the border of it, is meant, a monument of the true religion, exhibiting evidence of

* Prov. xix. 2.

their piety in all places. But without the true knowledge of God in Christ, they would set up the Athenian altar, "To the unknown God ;"* and therefore it is said, that the Lord shall be known to Egypt, in gospel times. and not only so, but that the Egyptians shall know the Lord, savingly, sincerely, sensibly, and experimentally for the words denote affection and practice, then and never till then will they be fit to offer an oblation ; for if men offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil ? and if the offerer be blind and ignorant, is not he evil ? † will God accept such a person ? what cares he for men's ignorant devotions ? if there be no knowledge of God in the land, there is no mercy nor truth ; ‡ for saving knowledge is the door and window to let in saving grace.

Secondly, You must all have a saving principle of grace in your hearts, a submissive will, a renewed conscience, sanctified affections, a soul set with a bias heaven-wards, that you "may delight in the law of God, after the inward man," and "may worship God in spirit and in truth," || else your praying will be but cant, your labour will be but lip-labour, and so lost labour ; all your piety will be but hypocrisy, and your hearts will not be engaged in it, then you will be heartless in setting about it, and soon weary of it ; without union to Christ, you can do nothing, see then that Christ dwell in your hearts by faith—that is the mystical bond ; to be united to him by love—that is the moral bond. § From this spring flow holy desires, delight in God, fear of God, repentance, humility, self-denial, zeal, and all other graces, without which you will be but cold worshippers of God ; set up with some thing within, or you are formalists at best. But you will

* Acts xvii. 23.

† Mal. i. 8.

‡ Hos. iv. 1.

|| Rom. vii. 22. John iv. 24. § Eph. iii. 17. 1 John iv. 16.

say, how shall we get this principle of grace? I answer, you must be convinced, that you have it not by nature, that you cannot work it in your own hearts, for "faith is the gift of God," you must examine yourselves whether faith be in you, you must study and plead the covenant of grace, wherein God promiseth to "put his law in your inward parts, to teach you to know him, to circumcise your hearts to love him, to put his fear in your hearts, and to put his Spirit in you, and a new spirit within you;"* and by studying and pleading these precious promises you may be partakers of a divine nature, that you may serve the Lord in a different and proper manner.†

2. Another preparative for the erection of a family altar, is the due and regular constitution of families; which consists in a solemn choice of family relations. Masters of families must be very cautious herein; it is true, children are necessary parts thereof and persons must take these as God sends them, they are not elective, or of our choice, but there are ways appointed by God to train them to what is good, but that I meddle not with at present; it is to such things as are arbitrary or within our power to choose, that I refer, as wives and servants, or assistants in families, these may be a great furtherance or hinderance to a householder in the exercises of religion.

(1.) When you are to choose a wife, be very careful. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,"‡ lest it come to pass, that when you draw one way your partner draw another; and when you would pray in your family, she be busy about the world, and will not join with you, but act the part of scoffing Michal, who

* Eph. ii. 8. 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Jer. xxxi. 33. 34. Deut. xxx. 6. Jer. xxxii. 40. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

† 2. Peter i. 4.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 14.

pointed her sarcasm at her holy husband David, for his fervent zeal in God's worship when dancing before the ark.* O what grief of heart will this be to you, who must be forced to turn your sweet communion, into a severe admonition of your own wife! and the nearer the relation the heavier the affliction; when your wife proves a tempting Eve, or as Solomon's wives, "who turned away his heart from God;"† oh! the danger of seduction; but if not so, yet a bad wife will be a continual vexation, like a constant dropping in a very rainy day; you little know the inconveniences attending such a relation; you will say, how can we help it? I answer, prudence, prayer, and due consideration beforehand may ordinarily prevent such a bad choice, if you make it your business to marry in the Lord,‡ and yoke only with such a one as bears Christ's yoke, consulting christian friends, and regarding beauty, portion, and parentage as subordinate; be sure that there be well-grounded hopes of saving grace in the first place; let religion and reason, not passion or fancy make your choice, lest you smart for your folly. O what a help may a prudent, gracious wife be in assisting you in setting up this family altar; "a wise woman buildeth her house;" Manoah's wife encouraged her husband,|| and Rachel and Leah builded the house of Jacob or Israel; Hannah prayed while her husband Elkanah sacrificed, and no doubt joined with him devoutly at home.§ O what a blessed harmony to see husband and wife "heirs together of the grace of life,"¶ that their prayers may not be hindered, but mutually furthered! this plainly intimates that unsuitableness of spirit, or untowardness in either, hinders prayers, that

* 2 Sam. vi. 20. † 1 Kings xi. 2—4. ‡ 1 Cor. vii. 39.

|| Prov. xiv. 1. Judg. xiii. 23.

§ Ruth iv. 11. 1 Sam. i. 3, 10, 13. ¶ 1 Pet. iii. 7.

is, either diverts them from praying, or mars the efficacy of prayer; therefore let young men be wise in this main concern of choosing a wife, for who would fetch water to kindle fire, as one saith, or select a bed of snow to keep one warm? you have quench-coal enough now within, espouse not more, rather get bellows to kindle your spark.

(2.) As for servants, be serious and particular in choosing pious ones; if it be possible choose religious servants: trust not to your care and pains to make them so; if Onesimus be begotten in bonds, he will be profitable to his pious master Philemon;* there is no trusting irreligious servants, they will but comply out of awe, and may degenerate into atheism. If thy servant be upright, he will not only pray when thou prayest, which will make a blessed harmony, but will pray alone for thee, as faithful Eliezer did in his master's business,† and then things will succeed well; for (as one saith) a praying servant will not only work, but set God to work. O happy family, where servants echo to their master's sighs! These will unanimously besiege heaven with importunate supplications: yea, let carnal Laban and Potiphar speak as they find, and they will affirm that God hath blessed them for Jacob and Joseph's sakes.‡ But you little know the hurt you may have, and your children also by graceless servants. This was David's purpose and endeavour to have men faithful to God, to be house inmates with him, and to banish from him froward or proud persons, slanderers, apostates, deceitful liars, and wicked doers;|| and if you will serve God comfortably in your families, you must imitate his pious example.

3. Dedicate your houses to the Lord. So did God's

* Philem. 10, 11.

† Gen. xxiv. 12.

‡ Gen. xxx. 27. xxxix. 5.

|| Psal. ci. 3—8.

servants of old, when they had built a new house they dedicated it, Deut. xx. 5; when they had been banished from it, and were restored, they again dedicated it as David did, when Absalom had polluted it.* We read also of a man "sanctifying his house to be holy unto the Lord," Lev. xxvii. 14; this must be done by praising God for houses to dwell in, all have not this mercy; some choice saints had no certain dwelling place:† others have wandered in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves of the earth, of whom the world was not worthy, yea, our dear Lord himself had not where to lay his head!‡ And who are we that God should honour us with convenient habitations? It becomes us to own him as our chief landlord, resolving by God's assistance to pay our chief rent to him, and "honour the Lord with our substance and all that we have:"|| we must thank God that we have any thing to give back again to him; for "all things come of him, and of his own we give him." We must first give ourselves to the Lord, as devoted to his fear, service, and worship:§ as we must not be content with what God gives us, except he give us himself, no more will God be content with what we give him, without giving ourselves to him: then let us give him our children and servants, so far as we are able, and be earnest with him in prayer for a blessing on all we are or have; let us plead the covenant of grace and its promises for ourselves and ours, as holy Jacob did:¶ observe the word of precept, for our warrant to dwell in our houses, with the promises for our encouragement, and act according to rule and the best patterns, engaging that we will walk within our house with a perfect heart;***

* Psal. xxx. † 1 Cor. iv. 11. ‡ Heb. xi. 38. Matt. viii. 20.

|| Prov. iii. 9. § 1 Chron. xxix. 10—14. Psal. cxix. 38, 94, 106.

¶ Gen. xxxii. 9, 10. *** Psal. ci. 2.

that we will use all we have to God's glory and the good of his church; that we will entertain Christ's ambassadors in our houses, as Lydia and the jailor did;* that we will read scriptures, instruct our families, sing psalms, continue instant in family and closet prayer, that all the rooms of our house may be seasoned: if you thus begin well, you lay a good foundation, and may groundedly hope that the presence of God will be with you, and with your families.

4. Order your families aright: as there must be discipline in the church which is a fence to doctrine and worship, "beholding," saith the apostle, "your order and the stedfastness of your faith;"† so it is in families, if the master have by gross sin, passion, pride, too much lenity, or imprudent behaviour, forfeited his authority, or by tyranny have abused it, that he become contemptible, he will hardly keep up family worship; children or servants will be ready to laugh him to scorn, as not able to rule himself, therefore little fit to rule others, and think they have good reason to ramble abroad; they will be under no government, and will come none to prayers; this is their sin, but there hath been too much occasion given by their weak or wilful masters; therefore I advise that you maintain your authority, and use it for God. Lose not the reins of government, yet sweeten it with love: when love oils the wheels, and lines the yoke, government becomes amiable and attractive to duty; when David said, hear, my brethren, it chained his subjects to him, but when Rehoboam answered roughly, it drove them from him. Rule your dependants in love, and they will obey in love: if you shew good-will to their souls, with good-will they will do you service, as to the Lord;‡ holiness creates reverence; tender-

* Acts xvi. 15, 34.

† Col. ii. 5.

‡ Eph. vi. 7, 9.

ness produceth ingenuous subjection ; affection maintains authority more than domineering rigour ; let it appear that you rule your families under God, and for God. I confess this theme is more proper to the next subject of the regal or magisterial power of householders, whither I remit it ; yet a word or two may be allowed, as due order and government do promote God's worship ; be sure that every member in your family know and keep in their posts and places, that there be no interfering or envy : and see that all order their business both within doors and without, so as to attend family prayer ; and see that you do not overcharge them with so much business as to render them incapable, either by unseasonable attendance on their secular concerns forcing them to be absent, or by over-tiring them, that they are fitter to lie down in their beds, than to fall down on their knees and lift up their hearts to God in prayer ; learn to order your affairs with discretion.* Let every work know its time, and every one know his work, that confusion may not shut out religion : order facilitates any business, prevents impediments, and produceth good success ; I know that some families cannot ordinarily be reduced to such a good order as some others ; but if masters were prudent to contract their worldly business into a less compass, or wisely to make arrangements, though their families be numerous, and business urgent, they might do much this way. Oh be not greedy of gain to trouble your own house : cumber not yourselves or yours with many things, but mind the "one thing needful."† Be sure you maintain religion whatever you do ; "Give unto God the things that are God's." Learn to divide the hoof aright, that the world encroach not upon God's due, or rob him of his right : if you separate religion from your calling, it is

* Psal. cxii. 5.

† Luke x. 42.

mere heathenism; if you separate your particular callings from your religion, it becomes enthusiasm. Unite them together, and they will be mutually helpful to each other, and to you in a due pursuit of both: change of employments will make both a pleasing recreation; observe the apostle's rule: "Brethren, let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God;" 1 Cor. vii. 24. Let your condition, station, relation be what it will, engage God to be with you, bespeak his presence by prayer, and sanctify all your civil actions with religious exercises.

CHAP. VIII.

DIRECTIONS FOR CARRYING ON THE WORSHIP OF GOD IN FAMILIES, AS TO THE MATTER OF PRAYER.

I HAVE briefly despatched the preparatives for erecting and managing family worship, in a due order. I now proceed more directly to the carrying on of this worship solemnly, that you may please, glorify, and enjoy God, while you profit and edify yourselves and others in this exercise; in which I propose two classes of instructions, which concern the matter and manner of family worship.

1. As to the matter, or words in family prayer, the Holy Ghost saith, "Take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously—"* by words, he means not only phrases, or literal expressions, for therein hypocrites may abound, but,

(1.) The subject matter, to be treated on, as Joab

* Hosea xiv. 2.

put words into the woman's mouth ;* that is, the main purport, design, or manner of her similitude, not every syllable she spoke.

(2.) Practise accordingly, keep the law ; act as real saints, for the ten commandments are called [רברים] words, and our compliance therewith must answer our professions and prayers, else we do nothing ; we must live up to our prayers.†

(3.) The word also signifies an ordering, regulating, and marshalling of things, and indeed we cannot order our words before him, by reason of darkness, therefore must we be very cautious and exact, as the wise man admonisheth, Eccl. v. 2, “ Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few,” that is, well weighed in prayer or vows, God is of infinite majesty not to be despised, of transcendant holiness not to be offended, and of unsearchable knowledge not to be deceived, nor to be flattered with vain repetitions ; study not to speak fine but fit words, not many but weighty, proceeding from thy heart, directed unto God, and pertinent to the matter in hand.

(4.) Words may signify arguments in prayer, so Job vi. 25, “ How forcible are right words,” that is, proper arguments, as appears from the latter clause ; “ but what doth your arguing reprove ? ” accordingly holy Job wisheth, “ Oh that I knew where I might find him ! that I might come near to his seat ; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments ; ” ‡ not to out-argue God, or to prove him

* 2 Sam. xiv. 3.

† Hebræi eâdem voce exprimunt verba et res, quia verba debent esse realiâ, et homine digna præsertim apud Deum.—*Vid. Pol. Crit. in loc. Exod. xx. 1.*

‡ Job xxiii. 3, 4.

unjust, no, nor to move God to that which is not his will, for "he is in one mind, and who can turn him?"* No, he is righteous and unchangeable, I dare not deal with God, or challenge him to deal with me upon terms of strict justice, but upon terms of new covenant grace, pleading his promises made to sinners in Christ, and soliciting for the performance of them.

And now I proceed to assist householders in the matter of their family worship, particularly in prayer. I shall produce some stones out of the word of God for rearing this family altar, and the rather because it has been a general complaint of many, and a principal objection with them, that they knew not what to say if they should kneel down in their houses with their families. But to such as are willing though feeble in their addresses to the throne of grace, I shall subjoin these two instructions for their assistance :

1. Attend upon a powerful ministry. There you will hear directions, motives, precepts, promises, scripture arguments to quicken and direct you in this practice ; there you may gain knowledge of God the object of worship, of Christ the mediator and advocate, of the Holy Ghost that must assist you ; there you will get a good understanding of God's mind and will, which will furnish you with ability, and further your acquaintance with God ; "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding ;"† that man is prepared to every good work. But how shall a person obtain this sacred understanding ? I answer, one way is by the ear, as man lost true wisdom by abusing that sense, and hearkening to the Syren song of the subtile serpent ; so the scriptures frequently call you to hearken to the voice of God in the ministry of the word ; light, and life, and love may

* Job xxiii. 13.

† Prov. iii. 13.

come in at that door, "Hear and your souls shall live; faith comes by hearing;" men may receive the Spirit, by the hearing of faith.* But how shall men breathe without spiritual life? and how can men pray without the assistance of the Spirit? "how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?"† nor is it any kind of preacher that you must hear, but you must take heed whom you hear, that they be sent, that is, duly qualified and regularly commissioned; you must take heed what you hear, that it be not men's fancies, but the approved word of the living God; you must also take heed how you hear; alas! any kind of hearing will not do; you must pray and prepare before you hear it, set yourselves in God's presence, cast out sin, apply the word to yourselves, mix it with love, own God's authority in it, hide it in your hearts, meditate on it, and resolve upon the practice of it; and who can tell what blessed fruits it may produce in your hearts and lives? Pray "that the word may have free course, and be glorified;"‡ and if it be so in you, the fruit of preaching will appear in your prayers as well as practice. A heart opened to the word, will "open the mouth wide in prayer;"|| but if you will not hearken to God's voice, you will have no voice to God, nor will God regard what you say; for "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."§

2. "Search the scriptures;"¶ these contain both the rule and matter of prayer; if you be mighty in the scriptures, you will be mighty in prayer. God loves

* Isa. lv. 3. Rom. x. 17, Gal. iii. 2.

† Rom. x. 14. ‡ 2 Thess. iii. 1. || Psal. lxxxi. 10, 11.

§ Prov. xxviii. 9. ¶ John v. 39.

to be spoken to in his own language; study scripture precepts, and turn them into prayer, study scripture promises, and turn them into pleas, study scripture threatenings, and turn them into deprecations, and study scripture patterns for imitation; you may find several excellent prayers in the bible, as that of Abraham, Gen. xviii. 23—32. Jacob prays, Gen. xxxii. 9, 12. Moses, Exod. xxxii. 11—13. Joshua, vii. 6—9. Hannah, 1 Sam. i. 11. Solomon, 1 Kings iii. 6—9. viii. 22—53. David, 1 Chron. xvii. 16—27. Nehemiah, i. 4—11. Ezra, ix. Daniel, ix. And we have many devout prayers put up and recorded by the apostle Paul, and others, too many to be mentioned, which in reading the holy scriptures you may meet with. Say not then, you have nothing to say before the Lord; it is your ignorance or negligence, if you be barren in your addresses to the throne of grace; some good divines have proposed a method and words in scripture phraseology, which I will not now trouble you with; but if you make it a daily custom to read the bible, you will find appropriate expressions flowing into your mind in prayer, which will prove pertinent matter upon all occasions; when you read scripture, think, now God is speaking to me, and thereby furnishing me with matter to speak to him in prayer; this passage suits my case, I will improve it in confession, petition, deprecation or thanksgiving, in my addresses to God, and thus you will arrive at a habit of free converse with God; and it becomes masters of families to be more employed in reading scriptures than others, God orders kings, captains, and ministers, to be daily exercised in this duty,* because they were to be helpful to others; so must you: if you consult God's word, you "go in unto God," so some observe from comparing, Psal. lxxiii.

* Deut. xvii. 19. Josh. i. 8. 1 Tim. iv. 13.

17, "going into the sanctuary of God," with 2 Sam. vii. 18, "then went king David in, and sat before the Lord," that is, he went in to God; to intimate that reading and praying are nearly related; the one is a help to the other; if you read much, it will help you to pray much, it will help you to read and understand. Be much employed in both.

3. Learn to understand and improve the Lord's prayer, Matt. vi. 9—13. Consider the prologue, parts, and conclusion of it: get some succinct and plain exposition of it, do not cantingly, formally, and superstitiously repeat it, as a charm, but use it as a comprehensive platform of praying: I am not altogether against the use of the words in the Lord's prayer, nay, I would rather you would kneel down with your family, and say nothing but the Lord's prayer, than that you should use no prayer at all: only see you understand the meaning of it, and do not rattle it over as a parrot, but use it seriously, and beware of mocking God; hypocrisy is a sin as well as atheism: to pray otherwise than Christ has taught, is not only ignorance, but a grievous sin, saith an ancient writer;* this refers both to the matter and manner of praying, for, saith he, "The Father will acknowledge the words of his Son, when we pray to him, in his name. Let him be in our voice that dwells in our hearts. God is not the hearer of the voice but of the heart."† But we are now speaking of family prayer, wherein God requires both voice and heart, and are intending to assist with respect to the matter of prayer. It is a certain truth,

* Aliter orare quam docuit non ignorantia sola est, sed et culpa. *Cyprian. Serm. 6. de Orat. Dominicâ et cum ipsum habeamus apud Patrem advocatum pro peccatis nostris, advocati nostri verba promamus, id. ib.*

† Qui habitat intus in pectore, ipse sit et in voce: quia Deus non vocis, sed cordis auditor est.

that all and only the things that are to be asked of God are comprehended in the Lord's prayer; that is to say, the sum and substance of the things to be asked: if you do not always utter the words, you must express the sense; therefore it is fit you should understand them, for every word hath its weight: *Our Father who art in heaven*: thou art the common Father of all mankind, and our Father in Christ, we humbly and reverently prostrate ourselves at thy footstool, in confidence of being received through thy well-beloved Son and our advocate: give us child-like affection for thee, with endeared love to all thine, and tender compassion for all others! *Hallowed be thy name*: let thy glorious titles, attributes, word and ordinances be manifested through the world, dispose all things to the glory of thy name, assist us in our confessing and forsaking our sins, adoring thine infinite perfections, believing in thee, subjecting ourselves to thee, attending on thee, and aiming at thy glory in all we are, or do, or suffer. *Thy kingdom come*: destroy, O Lord, the devil's kingdom of ignorance and wickedness, advance thy kingdom in converting sinners, building up thy church, maintaining the power of godliness, and hastening the kingdom of glory, confirming and preparing our souls for our Lord's second coming. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*: let thy preceptive will be our rule, enable us to comply with it, give us knowledge of it, conquer the enmity of our stubborn wills, enable us to do thy will singly, sincerely, universally, and constantly, as angels and glorified saints; help us quietly to acquiesce in thy providential will, be it apparently for us or against us. *Give us this day our daily bread*: vouchsafe to us a competent portion of outward comforts, for our daily supply, and thy blessing therewith, which is the staff of our bread, for we

depend on thee for all. *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors:* for Christ's sake and satisfaction, pardon all our sins; whereby we are indebted to divine justice, which we can never satisfy, but we lay hold by faith on the Lord our righteousness, and freely forgive all men their offences against us, and pray God to forgive them. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:* Lord, we have depraved hearts, prevent occasions of sin, restrain the tempter, keep us out of harm's way, or make us conquerors of the world, the flesh, and the devil; let not sin have dominion over us. *For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen:* we take not our encouragement in our prayers from any thing in ourselves, but from thee who art the only sovereign, all-sufficient God, able and willing to help thy poor creatures; to thee only be ascribed all dominion, blessing, honour, glory, and power, for evermore, amen, so be it.

Thus I have given you a short exposition of this excellent prayer, that you may be left without excuse for your wilful neglect.

4. Frequent Christian society; converse with pious, praying persons, this will help you in family exercises and worship, not only as it is a good example, but as it assimilates you to them, and also as it provokes to a holy emulation, it will make you shame with yourselves, that such as had no better assistance or higher education than you, have yet attained to such knowledge, gifts, and elocution; this will make you admire the grace of God in them, and think it not impossible, but that the same grace may do as much in you. Paul sought by the piety of the Gentiles, to provoke the Jews to emulation, and tells us that the zeal of the Corinthians,* in charitable contribution, had provoked

* Rom. xi. 14. 2 Cor. ix. 2.

very many: it is not to tell what light, and life, and love may be conveyed from one Christian to another. If two lie together they have heat; iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend:* they say boars whet their tusks one against another; and the younger ox learns of the elder to plough:† wicked men exasperate one another. So must, so will God's children consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works:‡ *ἐς παροξυσμὸν*, this word is borrowed from physicians, who describe a violent fever by it, which imports that at some times the fit is so strong, as to make the body to tremble, and the bed to shake under the patient. The same word is used to express the contention, or paroxysm betwixt Paul and Barnabas:§ only that was of anger, this is of love; striving which should exceed in zeal for God, from the sense of Christ's love to them; outstripping one another in heavenly movements. However, if you frequently converse in the society of praying Christians, you will be acquainted with their expressions, which you may make use of, if only you have experience thereof, and your hearts be engaged; thus their phrases becoming yours, you will be more prepared for family duty.

5. Converse with God alone: first pray in your closets, and then you will be better able to pray in your families, both as to matter and manner: a frequent exercise of closet prayer will move you to converse with God: there you will find that God will suggest words to your minds, which you may employ in your families in prayer, and this course will embolden you before others: and possibly this is one part of God's reward of closet prayer bestowed openly, which our Lord

* Eccl. iv. 9—12.

† Prov. xxvii. 17.

‡ A bove majori discit arare minor. || Heb. x. 24. § Acts xv. 39.

promiseth. Thus saith Eliphaz to Job, "Acquaint now thyself with him," (that is, with God,) and as one of the blessed fruits of familiarity, "thou shalt lift up thy face unto God," that is, thou shalt openly own him before others without sinful modesty or timidity, as a man dares boldly approach his intimate friend, whoever be present; he adds also, "thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee."*—O the blessed fruits of a soul's acquaintance with God in private! such will not be ashamed of him before others, such will resemble God;† this intimacy transforms men into his likeness, as long intimate acquaintance hath altered the habit of some men's bodies and dispositions of their minds into that of their friends; on Moses conversing with God in the mount his face shone, so that some rays of divine glory appeared to Aaron and the Israelites;‡ the more you are with God, the more you have of God, and this of praying with boldness, confidence, and assurance is both a duty and privilege, obtained by frequent conversing with God as our friend: but the manner of the expression is worth notice, "thou shalt make thy prayer to him:"|| the words are emphatical, and signify a pouring out of prayer, with a multitude of words in prayer, strong words, clothed with power: you will never want matter, or words, or enlargedness, if you be thus acquainted with God: your family will soon perceive that you have been with Jesus in secret, when they discern such freedom of speech and spirit; now, nobody can hinder you from praying with your family, one act of religion draws on another, private duties prepare for more public; and it is true, what Dr. Preston observes, that

* Matt. vi. 6. Job xxii. 21, 26, 27.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ Exod. xxxiv. 30.

|| עתר Multiplicavit, proprie verba fortia fudit in oratione.

helps to religion are within the compass of religion itself, multiplied acts strengthen habits, by running men learn to run, by writing they learn to write: so by praying you will best learn to pray.

6. Study the nature of sin; see what a scriptural discovery you can make of the sin of nature and the nature of sin, the kinds, degrees, circumstances, and aggravations of sin, together with the doleful effects and consequences of it, in this and another world: this will help you in confession, self-accusation, and deep humiliation, which is a considerable part of prayer. This self-knowledge helps both in the matter and manner of praying. 2 Chron. vi. 29, "What prayer, or what supplication shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore, and his own grief." Sorrow makes eloquent, you need not prompt a necessitous beggar; he hath words at will, and shews his sores, which is powerful oratory. If sin were your burden, it would squeeze out sighs and groans, and a groan is a good prayer; "Lord, my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee:"* and if there be inward sighs, there will be outward speeches; if you be full of griefs, you will be full of complaints; if you be full of matter, you will speak that you may be refreshed.† Consult the book of conscience, and you will find it easy to draw up a large bill of indictment against your own souls.

7. Study your wants, need makes beggars, and adds earnestness to prayers: learn of poor beggars at the door, malefactors at the bar: consider your own indigency, the case of your families, congregations, and the nation. Is there no unconverted sinner in your family? is there no sin breaking out amongst you? is there no

* Psalm xxxviii. 9.

† Job xxxii. 18—20.

grace weak or wanting in yourself or yours? Is there no temptation assailing any of you? or no affliction, or judgment passing on you, or impending over you? Look and look again, as you use to make an inspection into your stock, when you go to the market to make provision. Follow the Lord importunately for a crumb of mercy, as the poor woman in the gospel, or as the importunate widow, or if you can say no more, say as the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner,"* the Lord be merciful to my poor sinning family: who knows what prevalency may be in such a word, uttered from an humble sense of soul-wants? you know that man went to his house justified rather than the vaunting, vain-glorious Pharisee.

8. Make a catalogue of your mercies; recollect the kindness of God, personal and domestic, both in temporal and spiritual things. It is true, they are so many that they cannot be declared in order, "they are more than can be numbered;"† but let that not discourage you in your attempt, (any more than reckoning up your sins, which are also innumerable,‡) but do what you can in both, if you cannot do what you would or ought, the more you endeavour the more will be suggested to your memory, and thus the more will be the matter of praise and thankfulness for renewed mercy every day, and when you experience any signal mercies, set up an Ebenezer, and say, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us,"|| you will find multiplied occasions of such memorials, speak good of God in conference, and call in help of others, "to magnify the Lord with you,"§ and perhaps the members of your family will bring every one a stone to raise the pile of praise to a

* Matt. xv. 27. Luke xviii. 3, 13 † Psal. xl. 5.

‡ Psal. xl. 12. || 1 Sam. vii. 12. § Psal. xxxiv. 3.

greater elevation, yea, and bring their coal to warm your hearts together, and kindle a greater flame of heavenly devotion; try this course, and you will see the blessed issue.

9. Consider what dangers daily threaten you, and see if that will not afford you matter of prayer; possibly some of your callings expose you to greater hazards than ordinary, some ride much abroad early and late to markets, and are subject to falls; some work under ground and may be crushed to death, others go to sea, and witness the wonders of the Lord in the deep, and it hath been said, "he that knows not how pray, let him go to sea."* There is no calling but it hath its snares and difficulties, to which it exposes persons; and wisdom is profitable to direct; foreseen dangers hurt least; for as persons are forewarned, it affords matter of deprecation. But there are thousands of accidents which the most sagacious eye cannot foresee, which you see others fall into and fall by, one falls into a pit and perisheth, with respect to another his horse falls, and he breaks an arm, or leg, or his neck, some are assaulted by robbers and slain, others are burnt by sudden fires in their houses; your own observation may afford you many sad instances, and what befalls others may befall you, and may not these afford you matter of prayer for their prevention, or your preparation for them, put yourselves into God's hands every morning and evening, for you are never safe but under his tuition, the omniscient, omnipotent God only can guard you and your family. "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps;"† other means are ineffectual without him.

* Qui nescit orare, discat navigare.

† Psal. cxxi. 4. cxxvii. 1, 2.

10. Beg God's Holy Spirit. It is a spirit of grace and supplication,* go to God in the name of Christ, and if you can say nothing else, yet tell him you cannot pray, but withal say, "Lord, I hear others can pray, why not I?" No matter how dull the scholar is, so I have thee for my master, I hear others of humble gifts naturally, who are yet instructed spiritually, and have arrived at great proficiency in managing family worship, and may not I be endowed with the same spirit, first of sanctification, and then of supplication? come, Lord, and teach me to pray as John taught his disciples, or rather as Jesus teacheth his members, thou sayest, "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"† I know this is a hard text, but it must not be understood, as if God would give his sanctifying Spirit on a carnal man's prayer, by virtue of a promise, but either common gifts of the Spirit to such, or spiritual influences to those who ask with sincerity and earnestness, or further degrees of the Spirit to his own children, and so I think it is to be taken as the pledge and earnest of the Holy Spirit to believers, as Calvin takes it; as being one of the good things of the kingdom of heaven, which pious souls most importunately ask and beg; and you see here a free and faithful promise of Christ, that his and our Father will bestow his Holy Spirit on us, and the blessed apostle tells us the advantage of the Holy Spirit for our assistance in prayer; Rom. viii. 26, "Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought," &c. All acknowledge that the Spirit must help our infirmities in the manner of right praying, exciting graces

* Zech. xii. 10.

† Luke xi. 1, 13.

and holy affections, and centring our thoughts on God.* But the great question is whether the Holy Ghost dictates to God's children matter or expressions in prayer. I think the text is clear that it doth; for the text saith not "that we know not *how* to pray, but *what* we should pray for as we ought;" hence a school-man saith, "it is most difficult to know what is to be desired;"† a pious man knows that his chief end is God's glory, and the enjoyment of him, but unless the Spirit teach him he will miss it in the means, and as our Saviour saith, "ask he knows not what,"‡ as we have some instances in scripture,|| and much sad experience in ourselves, and though the Lord's prayer be a rule in general, yet we may be at a loss in particulars except the Spirit bring things into our thoughts, and often suggest scripture expressions to our memories, in earnest and appropriate pleading with the Lord; the Spirit enlightens us in our ignorance, assists us in our weakness, resolves us in our doubting, comforts us in our sadness, quickens us when lifeless, composeth us in our distractions; O therefore engage this blessed advocate within, who will plead for us in our hearts, as Christ makes intercession at God's right hand, and then you pray acceptably. God hears no language but that of his Spirit; and God's Spirit makes intercession by helping his people to intercede; he prays, by helping us to pray, not as Arians imagine, supposing that the Holy Ghost is below the Son, as supplicating the Son, or that the Son is less than the Father, as supplicating the

* Jubemur quidem pulsare, sed nemo sponte præmeditari vel unam syllabam poterit, nisi arcano Spiritus sui instinctu nos Deus pulset adeoque sibi corda nostra aperiat.—*Calv. in loc.*

† Difficillimum est scire quid sit desiderandum.

‡ Matt. xx. 22.

|| Luke ix. 54, 55. Job vi. 8, 9. Jonah iv. 3.

Father, which is a gross mistake;* for Christ intercedes for us, by the virtue of his merit with the Father, and the Holy Ghost by helping us to cry, Abba, Father, Gal. iv. 6. Let none imagine that this is an enthusiastic fancy, or a miraculous gift, (as Chrysostom thought,) no, nor a melancholy dream; they that have any solid experience in the things of God, know that the assistance of the Spirit in prayer is the greatest reality in the world; nor was it a temporary gift, but a permanent grace abiding with the church for ever, enabling even private Christians to pray in the Spirit;† yet differently, as God sees good, sometimes more enlarging their hearts, and at other times withdrawing his influences; and it becomes us to esteem highly his assistance, and pray earnestly for it.

CHAP. IX.

THE MANNER OF PERFORMING FAMILY WORSHIP CONSIDERED.

THUS at last I have despatched the instructions which concern the matter of family prayer, to aid such as are sensible of their own insufficiency; and having been longer than I intended, I must contract the rest.

As to the due manner of performing such solemn family exercises, so much is written by others concerning the necessary essentials of all prayer, that it is needless here to add any thing. With respect to the

* Spiritus interpellat faciendo nos interpellare, orat faciendo nos orare, clamat faciendo nos clamare.—*Vide sis Parcum, in loc.*

† John xiv. 16. Eph. vi. 18. Jude, 20.

essence of all prayer, public, family, secret prayer, you must be sure it be from the heart, you must pray with the spirit, and understanding also;* your family devotion must not be a mere customary formality, like the Papists' tongue threshing, as Luther calls their canting. You must engage your hearts to the exercise, and then draw nigh to God; you must also ask what is according to his will, ground your prayers upon a promise, as David did;† and God requires you also to prepare your heart, and then to stretch out your hands to him in prayer; wash before you worship; for if you regard iniquity God will not hear your prayer; you must stir up yourselves to take hold of God;‡ come in sincerity, with all humility and with importunity. You must propose right ends in your prayers, not for self-credit to be seen of men, as the Pharisees, nor for worldly profit to please a friend, but for God's glory and enjoying communion with him. But above all, see that you employ Christ as your advocate, in all your addresses to God, without whom your best sacrifices are rejected. I must not however insist on these things, but lay down some general directions how to prepare this family altar, and the sacrifice thereon.

1. Set your souls in God's presence: || remember who it is you have to deal with; not with men like yourselves, but with the infinite, eternal, incomprehensible majesty of the great God, a heart-searching, all-seeing, and holy God, "that is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity; whose throne is in heaven, who loveth righteousness; but a hypocrite cannot come before him;§ endeavour to affect your hearts with an awe of his divine majesty: consider his

* 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

† Jer. xxx. 21. 2 Sam. vii. 27.

‡ 1 John v. 14, 15. Job xi. 13. Psal. xxvi. 6. lxvi. 18. Isa. lxiv. 7.

|| Psal. xvi. 8. § Hab. i. 13. Psal. xi. 4, 7. Job xiii. 16.

infinite perfections, and the great distance between the glorious God and poor worms, yea, between the holy God and your degenerate souls; remember God is a “consuming fire,”* and you are as dried stubble, therefore serve him with reverence and godly fear; give him the glory due unto his name,† internally and externally, in your conceptions of him, affection for him, and prostration before him; he is to be had in reverence of all that are round about him;‡ it is more to appear before God than the holiest men, or greatest princes on earth, regard not auditors or those that unite in worship, so much as the object of worship; say as Abraham the friend of God, “Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.”|| O that my soul were weightied with the glorious majesty of God!

2. Call in divine assistance; the first thing you do, stand up, and implore God’s blessing upon you in the present undertaking (except you find it convenient to begin with a psalm to call the family together,) and desire the Lord to unite your hearts unto him,§ and prevent distractions, and Satan’s temptations, and vain, worldly cogitations in that duty, and lift up your souls to himself, with such an ejaculation as this, “Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in the heavens; look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven and bless thy servants!”¶ We are taking thy blessed book into our hands, “Lord, open our eyes to behold wondrous things out of thy law, let it be a light to our feet, and a lanthorn to our paths: let it be as our necessary food, yea, sweeter than honey or honeycomb;”*** more profitable than thousands of gold

* Heb. xii. 28, 29. † Psal. xxix. 2. ‡ Psal. lxxxix. 7.

|| Gen. xviii. 27. § Psal. lxxxvi. 11. ¶ Lam. iii. 41. Deut. xxvi. 15.

*** Psal. cxix. 18. Job xxiii. 12. Psal. xix. 10.

and silver ; help us to understand, apply, and practise what we read : “let our prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of our hands as an evening sacrifice : let thine ears be now attentive, and thine eyes open, to hear the prayer of thy servants ; to us belongeth shame and confusion of face ; but to the Lord our God, belong mercies and forgivenesses.”* Thou hast proclaimed thy name, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, &c.† To this name of the Lord do we flee, pleading for mercy, only for the sake of Christ ; “look upon the face of thine anointed.”‡

3. Immediately commence this practice of erecting an altar to the Lord : embrace the first conviction ; the evening of that day when you have heard the duty pressed on you, set about it ; plead no excuse to put it off till a more convenient season ; Felix lost his time and soul by such a demur :|| set about it while your spirits are warm : give not Satan advantage by delay : imperatives have no future tense, present despatch is essential to God’s commands : anon, anon, at my leisure, is no obedience ; now or never ; there is danger in delays ; “I made haste,” saith David, “and delayed not to keep thy commandments.”§ Remember his holy resolution in a weighty matter of the like nature, for settling God’s worship, Psal. cxxxii. 2—5. Your spirits will cool by delays, Satan will get advantage ; some have confessed that the holy Spirit hath departed from them, upon their not yielding to his dictates, and they have run into the dead sea of profaneness by degrees, if you miss your opportunity you are undone : you may die before morning, if you go prayerless to bed, and where will you be then ? You

* Psal. cxli. 2. Neh. i. 6. Dan. ix. 8, 9.

† Exod. xxxiv. 6. Prov. xviii. 10.

‡ Psal. lxxxiv. 9.

|| Acts xxiv. 25.

§ Psal. cxix. 60.

have no lease of your lives ; you must not say to your neighbour, “ go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give :” * and will you say so to God ? O do not put off God in paying his dues, either, as to a first undertaking or after-performance : beware of delays, and make no intermissions ; he that is not fit to-day will be less fit to-morrow. †

4. Excite yourselves and families to the performance ; it was the practice of the primitive church, to have one to say before prayer, Up with your hearts. ‡ Alas ! our spirits grow dull in the intervals of duty ; you must stir up yourselves to “ take hold on God ;” || you must wind up your affections, and tune your spirits as you would do the strings of an instrument, and you will find they will quickly slip down again ; twice did David say, “ O God, my heart is fixed ;” yet immediately he found it unfixed again, and cries, “ Awake, psaltery and harp, I myself will awake early.” § You will be forced to give your hearts a check many times in a duty, if you make conscience to maintain them in a good frame : hence those expressions of “ watching unto prayer,” and “ watching in prayer ;” as well as “ watch and pray.” ¶ O take heed of doing the work of the Lord negligently ! serve not God with that which costs you nothing : but do your best in every duty. “ Be you fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” ** Be in good earnest, as if this were the last prayer you were to offer : muster up all your forces, excite your graces, rouse your affections to and in the exercise, then you will pray better and better.

5. Take a proper season for family worship ; it is a great fault to put off family prayer and make it the

* Prov. iii. 28. † Qui non vult hodie, cras minus aptus erit.

‡ Sursum corda. || Isa. lxiv. 7. § Psal. lvii. 7, 8.

¶ 1 Pet. iv. 7. Col. iv. 2. Matt. xxvi. 41. ** Rom. xii. 11.

last thing you do ; it will not be so seasonable to go down upon your knees, when you are fitter to lie down in your beds. Our Lord saith of his sleeping disciples, “the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.”* But alas ! some there may be in your families that have not a willing spirit, and would rather be at rest, than wrestling with God ; Eutychus might be a pious man, yet attending at an unseasonable hour, he dropped asleep,† which Calvin saith, might be in some sort excusable, for it is no wonder, if having struggled against sleep, at such an unseasonable time, at length he was overcome:‡ he concludes that he had not composed himself to sleep, because he chose an unfit place to sleep in, being in a window, and it must be ascribed more to natural infirmity than wilful fault ; but by this instance masters should learn to take fit times for family worship ; not when children and servants are tired out with working ; if it be attainable, go to prayer before supper, when your spirits are most brisk and lively ; drowsy devotion brings guilt on the person and family, especially if it be through imprudent management ; it is a proper time for duty morning and evening, when the family come together to their stated meals.

6. Let family worship be performed when worldly business can be best laid aside : “one thing is needful ;”|| beware of encumbering yourselves with the many things of the world. I hope I need not bid you order the members of your family to lay all other works from their hands, but you must endeavour that (if possible) their hearts be also taken off from all other employments, that they may “attend upon the

* Matt. xxvi. 41.

† Acts xx. 9.

‡ Quid mirum si nocte intempestâ cum somno luctatus tandem succubuit ?—*Calv. in loc.*

|| Luke x. 42.

Lord without distraction ;”* not that masters can pretend to govern the inward man, but that they may so despatch and dispose of worldly concerns under their cognizance, as to leave both themselves and families, as little occasion of diversion as may be; therefore must you take such times for religious exercises, as may be freest from business. Solomon saith, “Through desire a man having separated himself seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.”† Man’s mind is but finite, and cannot be intent on several things at once; you must mind religion in your worldly concerns, but if you mingle worldly concerns with your religious duties, you mar all.

7. Be short and serious: be not ordinarily long, lest you be judged tedious: consider the infirmities of children, and some family occasions and conveniences: weaklings of the flock must not be over-driven, lest they faint or tire in the way: children and servants have but a measure of regard, especially if yet in an unrenewed state: they will soon be ready to say, “behold, what a weariness it is,”‡ and when will the duty be over? Perhaps they will even fall asleep, or seek diversions, or take occasion to be absent: not but that it is their fault, only you may give them occasion: yet though you may be short, you must be serious, run not over duties cursorily, or in post haste, as if longing for the close of a task; you must be warm and lively: our Lord’s prayer was short, but expressive and full of earnestness; “O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”|| It is not length of speaking, but strength of desire that God looks at: yet a longer prayer is not unlawful upon some special occasion, or upon more

* 1 Cor. vii. 35.

‡ Mal. i. 13. Amos viii. 5.

† Prov. xviii. 1.

|| Matt. xxvi. 39.

than ordinary enlargement of affections. But what I now say, is in a stated course of family duty : be short, comprehensive, distinct, methodical, and pathetic, in your devotions.

8. Let not guilt stop your mouths. If you have in the intervals of duty, been drawn into any sin ; oh ! be sure to get it removed, before you wait on God in your families ; retire into a secret place, confess thy sin, bewail it, act faith on the mediator for pardon ; yea, suffer not guilt in thy family, let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles, for then thou shalt lift up thy face without spot. If thou indulge sin in thyself, or in thy family, conscience will stare in thy face, and weaken thy confidence in thy approaches to God.* Guilt had shut David's lips, till it was pardoned, therefore he prays, "O Lord, open thou my lips."† An unsuitable carriage, provokes God to withdraw assistance ; then what can you do ? and as guilt stops your mouths, so it opens the mouths of others. They will be ready to say, it is no matter how you pray, except you practise better. Your servants and children will be ready to despise you, and withdraw from you, and so produce confusion in your family, which will hinder prayer ; but if your lives speak for God, as well as your lips, you may say as David, "So shall I have to answer him that reproacheth me, for I trust in thy word."‡ Then you may hope he will not take the word of truth out of your mouth. Let there be a sweet harmony formed by your professions, prayers and practices, and then God will hear you, men will own you, and your own consciences will witness for you.

9. Familiarize holy conversation with your families, and put the members thereof upon secret duties. If your relations never hear a word of God, or religion

* Job xi. 14, 15. † Psal. li. 15. ‡ Psal. cxix. 42, 43.

in intervals of family exercise, that duty will be strange to them, and they will but judge it as a formal course, and yourselves will have less heart to the performance. If God be never in your thoughts all the day, you will but coldly pray at night, nay, it is well if you be not like the wicked man, that through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; why so? The text saith, "God is not in all his thoughts," or as it is the margin, all his thoughts are, "there is no God;" *wicked* is here a collective word, for he speaks not merely of one person, but indefinitely of all, saith a good interpreter, for such is the nature of man, when he is destitute of God to govern him.* And if God be not in your thoughts, he will not be in your words, for "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh;" and who will believe you are in earnest, when your lips are sealed up in silence; tell your wife, children, servants, at due seasons, of the preciousness of souls, the necessity of grace, excellency of Christ, the awfulness of eternity, the near approach of death, the great account of judgment, and the importance of watching and prayer. And put them upon going alone by themselves, and praying as well as they can. And as such discourse will familiarize these solemn truths and duties to them, so it will make them willing to join with you in family worship. If you will not own God before your relations, sure you will not own him before enemies. Gordius the martyr, being advised to keep his mind to himself, oh! no, saith he, it is fit that this mouth of mine, which was made by God, and for God, should speak of God, and for God.

* Psal. x. 4. Impius hoc loco nomen collectivum est, neque enim de una tantum persona loquitur, sed indefinitè de omnibus. Talis est hominum natura quando destituitur gubernatore Deo.—*Moller in loc.*

O friends, will you take your leave of God, in the morning or evening sacrifice, and never acknowledge him, till the return of that family service? God forbid; are not the souls of yours committed to you? must you not give an account of them? and is not faithful speaking to them for God, one way of discharging your trust? profess your subjection to the gospel, and your example may prevail on all about you, for God is much glorified thereby.*

10. Observe answers of prayer, and gather up experience. As this will furnish you with matter of prayer, so it will help you in the due manner of engaging in it. How did the Lord assist my heart in such a duty? what quickenings? what meltings? what communion with God? what further degrees or strength of grace, did I obtain in such a performance? what power against such a corruption? what strength against temptation? what further ability or encouragement in and for God's service? Or make your remarks upon your family, what person is informed, reformed, conformed to the ways of God? what convictions or impressions have I observed, on the spirit of such a child or servant? what miscarriages to be reprov'd or bewail'd? what evils have been prevented or removed? consider how the Lord hath blessed or prospered your undertakings, that God may have the glory, and yourselves may have the use or profit of what you have met with in your families. David saith, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; in the morning I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up;"† the words are very emphatical, first, his great care and exactness so to order, direct and compose, both his person and prayers in such a manner,

* 2 Cor. ix. 13.

† Psalm lxxxv. 8. v. 3.

as to be well pleasing to God, "Then will I stand as a watchman, upon my watch tower, to consider what answer he will give me; the altar which I have made, shall be my watch tower, at which I will stand to expect some blessed answer; to ascertain what help the Lord will afford me:"* by this means you may adapt yourself to the circumstances of your family, and not proceed at random, and always find matter from things daily occurring, to present before the Lord; yea, and those very occurrences, will excite suitable affections of joy and sorrow, to quicken you in prayer or praise. This is what Solomon prescribes in Prov. xxvii. 23, "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds;" whether it refer to a literal inspection of shepherds, in a proper sense, or metaphorical in a political as magistrates, or ecclesiastical as ministers, or economical as governors of families; it is a great duty in all respects;† but it properly and principally belongs to householders; else how can you accommodate your counsels, and admonitions to them, or petitions for them, or your sympathy or compassion? Thus I have despatched my instructions, both preparatory for erecting this family altar, and also have prescribed the due manner of performing this family worship, both with respect to matter and manner.

And now you cannot plead ignorance or want of direction. I have according to my ability reached out my hand to help you, your way is lined out, some have even written down words, and forms of prayer to assist you, and you have pious ministers, to whom you may repair for further direction, and if still you wilfully live in the neglect of this known duty, your

* אערך לך Disponam tibi, ואצפה est, speculabor instar speculatoris observaturus an venias mihi auxilio.

† Est præceptum æconomicum, saith Mercer.

blood be upon your own heads, the blood of your families, will also be required at your hands. God almighty make you willing and able to discharge your relative duty. But if after all this, you will not speak a word to God, for your poor, languishing, perishing, dying families, to keep them out of hell, I leave you to that justice, which will shortly plead with you at another rate, than we poor ministers can do, and will take vengeance on you, for your wilful neglect, and disobedience to the calls of God.

CHAP. X.

A SOLUTION OF SEVERAL CASES OF CONSCIENCE CONCERNING THE WORSHIP OF GOD IN FAMILIES.

THE last thing I have in view, is to answer sundry cases of conscience, some of which have been proposed to me, and others are ordinarily connected with this point, concerning a family altar, and sacrifices in families.

1. *Query*, May a householder take upon him to preach, expound scripture, dispense the seals of the covenant, baptism, and the Lord's supper to the members of his family, seeing he is a priest?

Ans. (1.) Ministerial, authoritative teaching by order of others is one thing, and charitable, subservient teaching is another. A master of a family should teach all under his charge as a master, yet not usurp the office of a minister, without a due call :* his teaching must not be in opposition, but in subordination to

* Deut. xi. 18—21. Heb. v. 4.

ministerial instruction; as families are subordinate to churches.

(2.) Masters of families must not take upon them what they are not qualified for, or presume beyond their capacity, incurring the guilt of proud self-conceitedness, or vain ostentation, by undertaking to interpret the original, or give the sense of dark prophecy, or obscure scriptures, or determine knotty controversies. Yet they may declare, when it lies in their way, what they have read or heard from learned, pious men, or got in public preaching.

(3.) It is however safest, ordinarily to pass by those abstruse and difficult points, and insist upon plain, practical, fundamental, catechistical truths, or take occasions from the chapter read in the family, to employ such a seasonable word, suppose of admonition; as I have heard a pious father say, this is for you, look to it, this aims at you in such a case, and with serious exhortations press it home upon the conscience; or inform the ignorant on such or such a subject, requiring them to remember it.

(4.) But as for administering baptism and the Lord's supper, they may not presume to do it, this being an act of office. The one is annexed to Christ's commission, "Teach and baptize," and the other is the cup of blessing, which we, namely, as ministers bless;* and this they receive of the Lord; and are to deliver it to the people.† And I find several judicious divines affirming, that dispensing the seals, is peculiar to an organized church, and is proper only to ministers rightly ordained. For the Lord's supper is a symbol, and means of public communion, not of families as such; for though Christ administered it to his family, yet not as a family, but as a church. The judgment and prac-

* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. x. 16. xi. 23.

tice of the primitive doctors and Christians, is a sufficient proof of this.

2. *Qu.* Is the master or governor of the family, always bound to perform family duty? May he not in some cases substitute another to perform that office for him?

Ans. (1.) It is incumbent upon the master of a family, as his proper charge; and it is fittest that he do it himself, if capable. David was a great king, and had much business abroad, yet returned to "bless his house," and put it not off to a chaplain;* Job was the greatest of all the men in the east, yet he acted personally in family worship.† I have heard of a nobleman in England, that though he keep a chaplain, yet to shew his authority and duty, voluntarily at some times himself prays with his family; this is well done.

(2.) Yet a chaplain may be employed, especially where the family is numerous, or when his gifts and graces are more taking and edifying, and he is likely to do more good than the master. It may seem probable, that some Levites were kept in some of the Jews' families, being oft reckoned with their sons, daughters, and servants, and it may be in some cases to perform these religious duties in the family; so idolatrous Micah, had his Levite chaplain, of which he too much boasted. ‡

(3.) Some have thought, that a wife in a family, may in some cases perform family duty, and that this honour may be given to the weaker vessel to do the office of religious exercise, as well as partake in the government of the family:§ doubtless she is to pray: and it hath been judged by learned men that she may and must pray in the family with her husband's leave,

* 2 Sam. vi. 20.

† Job. i. 3—5.

‡ Deut. xii. 12, 13. Judg. xvii. 13.

§ 1 Pet. iii. 7.

and in her husband's presence, only she should cover her face with a veil, in token of her subjection. This they think is meant by a woman praying or prophesying with her head covered, not in the church where she was not to speak, but in the family when she performed that piece of worship,* and Calvin seems to incline to this apprehension, saying, the apostle requires this modesty of women, not only in the place where the church meets together, but in any grave assembly of matrons, or such as sometimes are in private houses: it is true he denies them liberty to prophesy in any other place, but I see no reason why an Abigail or a Deborah, may not at least be the mouth of a family to God. But I am not positive herein, and leave it to the consideration of others. †

(4.) And why may not a servant, or a steward of the house, such as Eliezer, Abraham's servant, or Obadiah, Ahab's servant, pray in the family? Especially in these cases, when the master gives him, not only liberty, but a call to that performance, yea, requests him to pray in the family.—When that servant hath gifts to qualify him for such a work, and is not exposed to the scorn and contempt of his fellows.—In case of the master's sickness or absence from home, or when more public necessary business engages him.—In case that servant be humble, submissive, self-denying, and know his place, and do it not with a kind of bravado, over his fellow-servants, or contempt of his master: and if in all things, that servant “shew him-

* 1 Tim. ii. 12. 1 Cor. xiv. 34.

† Quamquam nec hoc malè quadrabit, si dicamus Apostolum hanc modestiam non modò in loco ubi tota ecclesia congregatur, requirere a mulieribus; sed etiam in quovis graviore cætu aut matronarum aut virorum, quales interdum in privatas aedes conveniunt.—*Calv. in locum.*

self obedient, according to his duty, 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2. 1 Pet. ii. 18, 19.

3. Another case of conscience is, when is the fittest time for the performance of family worship?

Answ. As to the time of prayer. I am really ashamed, when I read how often the Mahometans pray; it is said by writers, that they go seven times a day to their devotion; namely,—early in the morning—at sun-rising—at noon—betwixt noon and even—at sun-set—an hour after sun-set—and at midnight. O! be ashamed, you professed Christians, to be outstript by barbarous Turks!*

But as for the Jews, whom the primitive Christians imitated, their hours of prayer were borrowed from the times of their sacrificing, and were morning, which was any time before the third hour, Acts ii. 15.—mid-day, called the sixth hour, Acts x. 9, or about noon—evening, which was after the ninth hour, or about six o'clock at night, Acts iii. 1. Calvin thinks they did not go into the temple to pray, merely to comply with Jewish rites, but the better to propagate the gospel; yet asserts, that the church cannot want her regular discipline, and at this day, saith he, but that too much drowsiness prevents, it were profitable to have daily such meetings for prayer.† He means, in a more public manner: but for the circumstance of time, it is judged, that morning and evening are fittest seasons for family devotion: hence Calvin observes, that by this exercise, they were taught to begin and

* Weemse's Christian Synag. p. 85. David thrice, Psal. lv. 17. Dan. vi. 10.

† Inde colligimus non posse carere ecclesiam certâ disciplinâ, ac hodie, nisi obstaret nimius topor, utile esset quotidie habere tales conventus.—*Calv. in Act. iii. 1.*

shut up the day with prayer, and the worship of God.* I have hinted this before, and shall only add briefly a few directions.

(1.) You must be sure to pray for a blessing upon your meat at meals, 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

(2.) Take your family at meal time to seek God, and read his scriptures, to sing God's praise, and to perform family duty, morning and evening.

(3.) Let it be a stated time, if possible, known to the family, that none may plead excuse for their absence: but that the whole family may attend.

(4.) Yet if some extraordinary accident intervene, you must not think yourselves so precisely bound to a time, as to be perplexed in conscience for omission, but take another more convenient time, which may more directly suit your occasions.

4. *Case.* Suppose the avocations of a housholder call him abroad about his lawful business, before the rest of his family can rise out of their beds, may he omit family prayer?

Ans. (1.) In such a case, he must go to prayer with such of his family as are risen, as it is likely some are to prepare him for his departure.

(2.) However, he must pray alone, committing himself and his family into God's hands, which the Lord may graciously accept.

(3.) He must double his diligence at his return, or at another time; and mourn for what he cannot mend. A good heart will lament any providential hinderance of communion with God.

(4.) But if possible, so arrange your wordly concerns, as not to hinder your family exercise, prudent foresight may be of great service here: but if your

* Hoc exercitio docebantur, ab invocatione et cultu Dei incipere diem et claudere.

calling be such, that this cannot be, do as the Israelites did, gather double the day or night before, two omers for a man or family,* lay in for the day following, what may stand you in stead by pleading with God, for what you will need.

5. *Case*, What posture is to be used in family prayer, and whether sitting be lawful?

Answ. Scripture tells us of several postures in prayer, as

(1.) Standing, Mark xi. 25. "When ye stand praying, forgive." The "publican stood afar off, and smote upon his breast;"† this was a penitent praying posture.

(2.) The eyes fixed upwards, "Jesus lift up his eyes to heaven,"‡ as we look a man in the face, when we speak to him: or in some cases, the eye may be shut, to prevent gazing or distraction.

(3.) Sometimes prostration, or laying the body on the earth, hath been a praying gesture, Abraham "bowed himself toward the ground;" but Joshua "fell to the earth upon his face:" our Lord also "fell on his face and prayed."||

(4.) But the most ordinary gesture is kneeling, called bowing the knee: even king Solomon "kneeled down upon his knees, and spread forth his hands:" our dear Lord also, whose example is our rule, "kneeled down and prayed."§ Methinks we should not be too stiff to kneel before the Lord our Maker, before whom every knee must bow, either in devotion or destruction. All agree—That the gesture should be reverent before the great God—That bodily gesture should be such as

* Exod. xvi. 22. † Luke xviii. 13. ‡ John xvii. 1.

|| Gen. xviii. 2. Josh. vii. 6. Matt. xxvi. 39.

§ Eph. iii. 14. 2 Chron. vi. 12, 13. Luke xxii. 41. Psal. xcv. 6. Phil. ii. 10.

doth best express the inward reverence of the heart—That the gesture be such as doth most quicken the heart, and help on in the duty—And, that it be such as gives a good example to others.*

As for sitting in prayer, it is an unbecoming, lazy position, especially if chosen, and in the beginning of a duty: indeed for weak frames tired out with other postures, some excuse may be made, but ordinarily it is not allowable.

Object. But is it not said of David, that he went in and sat before the Lord, 2 Sam. vii. 18, yet he prayed?

Answ. (1.) Some say, David was a king, and therefore might sit; according to the Jews' rule, "It is not lawful for any to pray sitting before the Lord, but the king."

(2.) Others say, the king "sat in dust and ashes," in an humble posture, "he fell on his face," say others.

(3.) This was more a meditation, than prayer, admiring the goodness of God: or he might first sit, and then kneel.

(4.) But indeed the word sitting, signifies David's constancy in meditating or praying; for a man usually continues longer sitting than standing: David sat, that is, continued longer before the Lord, and more familiarly with him, than ordinary.† It refers more to the composedness of his mind, than to the posture of his body: therefore let not this text patronize that sleepy position.

6. *Case* is, What place must we choose, or how must we use our voice in family prayer?

Answ. (1.) We are not bound to consecrated places

* Cum quis quærit orare, collocat membra sicut ei occurrit.—*Aug. de Orat.*

† מַשִּׁיט *Mansit, restitit.* Plus animo quam corpore sedit quietus coram Domino.—*Cajet.*

for the religious exercises of a family : in this you may use your liberty. In gospel times, God stands not so much upon the place of worship, as the character of the worshippers, and the manner of worshipping.* look at the frame of your hearts, as before described, and fear not reception wherever you be.

(2.) Yet the circumstance of place may be duly weighed, if you live amongst lions, mockers, scorers of religion, though you must maintain your profession of God's name in your families, as Daniel did, yet it is a disputable point, whether you may not sometimes retire from open violence into some private place. But there may be a greater reason for retirement than that, namely, to avoid the suspicion of hypocrisy and vain-glory, which was the Pharisees' great fault;† or you may withdraw into some distant place from the street, to avoid disturbance by hurries, tumults, and confusions that may distract you.

(3.) But let the place be so known to the family as that all may repair to it as an exchange, at the time of prayer, be it dwelling-house, parlour, or chamber ; as Daniel selected some convenient room, called a chamber for his family devotion, so may you.‡

(4.) For voice, it is true God is an all-seeing Spirit, and men may speak to God, when they speak not a word, as Moses, Hannah, and Nehemiah ; prayer is the movement of the will towards God, but in family prayer it is otherwise, men have bodies, and tongues, and ears, and cannot understand others' conceptions without a vocal articulate sound ; what you pray must be audible, else they cannot join with you, or be edified by you ; only see your hearts go along with your lips ; and remember the saying of Solomon, "The words of wise men are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him

* John iv. 23, 24. 1 Tim. ii. 8. † Matt. vi. 5. ‡ Dan. vi. 10.

that ruleth among fools," Eccl. ix. 17. I know it refers to wise counsels, not prayers, but some may pray more affectionately with a low voice, than others with loud clamors; yea, possibly you may command your thoughts better in the former, than latter. See you be serious, and your voice audible and intelligible, not mumbling your prayers, so that your family cannot understand you or know what you mean.

7. *Case* is, Whether is a form of prayer lawful, or whether may a householder use a form of prayer, or may others join with him in the use thereof?

Answ. (1.) Our most solid judicious divines among those called Puritans, do not judge forms of prayer absolutely unlawful; Dr. Preston saith, "I think there is none here that doubt, but that a set form of prayer may be used; you know, Christ prescribed a form—there were certain psalms that were prayers used constantly—still in all times the church had set forms; I know no objection against it of weight,"* &c. Mr. Hildersham, the oracle of his time, saith, "I dare not deny but a weak Christian may use the help of a good prayer book in this case; better to pray on a book than not to pray at all; certainly it is the spirit of error that hath taught the world otherwise."†

(2.) Yet these worthy men affirm truly that every Christian, even the meanest and weakest hath the gift and spirit of prayer, (so saith the latter of these worthies,) and must not "neglect the gift that is in him."‡ Dr. Preston saith, there is no man that hath any work of grace in his heart, but he is enabled in some measure to pray, without a set form of prayer. There was

* Dr. Preston's Saint's Daily Exercise, pag. 80—82.

† Hildersham on Psal. li. Lect. 12, p. 63. See 3 Arg. for forms.

‡ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

never any man in any extreme want, but he knew how to express himself, where he had liberty to speak.

(3.) But yet considering that some Christians, though truly gracious, may for a season be very unexperienced and incapable of opening their cases to God methodically, or in appropriate words, and considering it is before a family of which a man is to be the organ, and considering that unmeet and undigested expressions expose an ordinance of God to contempt; I would advise some Christians, before they pray with others, to premeditate, and duly weigh what they are to say to God, and think of a proper method, and some scriptural expressions, to produce them in prayer, as I have before directed.

(4.) As I doubt not the lawfulness of a member in a family joining with such a prayer, if the matter be sound and orthodox, so I question not but such a master as conscientiously useth this practice, will so increase in gifts and abilities, that in due time, he will cast away those crutches, and learn to go on profitably in daily family exercise, to the edification of all that join with him: so that in the diligent and humble use of these means, many disagreeable tautologies, and needless impertinences will be paired off, which offended intelligent ears. The worthy Dr. Preston saith, “a child that cannot go, may have a prop to help it; but we must not always be children, we must not always use that help.”

8. *Case* is, If the householder or master is loose and careless, and possibly comes home, under the influence of liquor, yet will pray, though in no fit case for it, or he is unsound at heart, and prays but coldly or formally, may I join?

Ans. (1.) Thy acceptance with God, depends not

on the state of him that prays, nor on his zeal, but on thy acting of faith in Christ, if thou be upright in joining with the words, and endeavourest to lift up thy heart to God, the Lord may graciously receive thee, though the person praying may be rejected; "for every one shall bear his own burden, and give an account of himself to God."*

(2.) Yet if thou art convinced that the party praying speaks nonsense or blasphemy, instead of praying, thou art bound in conscience to shew thy dislike of it, lest God be dishonoured and offended with the whole family, the man hardened in sin, thy own conscience defiled, and thyself in danger of playing the hypocrite, in pretending to join with what thy soul abhors; in this case thou must withdraw, and get alone, and mourn over it.

(3.) And it is also thy duty, humbly and modestly to take a proper season to speak to thy master, as Naaman's servants did to him, when they saw him wrong, and you know it did good; and Abigail told her husband Nabal of his fault and danger, and "his heart died within him."† Who can tell what good such a word in season may do? he may think of it afterwards, Jonathan's advocating David's case, before his passionate father Saul, did good for a while.‡ If you come to a father or master humbly and submissively, not saucily and malapertly, you may win upon them, and if you can say little, yet if you burst out into tears for their sin, it may prove as convincing rhetoric to them as king Edward's weeping was to bishop Cranmer and Ridley, on denying his sister Mary liberty for mass; who said, "the king had more divinity in his little finger than they had in their whole body."

* Gal. vi. 5. Rom. xiv. 12. † 2 Kings v. 13. 1 Sam. xxv. 37.

‡ 1 Sam. xix. 5, 6.

(4.) If still there be no remedy, or reformation, though thou must not with cursed Ham, discover thy father's or master's nakedness, if otherwise it may be helped, yet thou mayest or must acquaint a pious minister, or christian friend, ask their advice, and if that be judged expedient, that they may speak to thy father or master, with as much secrecy as possible, and this runs parallel to our Lord's rule, Matt. xviii. 15, 16. Who knows but a conviction may fasten? and if he be obstinate, he will leave off his praying in a little time; for his sinning will make him give over praying, or his praying prevent his sinning.

9. *Case.* Suppose I be cast into a graceless and prayerless family, how must I do, or what is my duty?

Ans. (1.) Examine thy reasons and intention in coming thither; consider thy call, if thy parents fixed thee there as an apprentice, quiet thyself in God's disposal, make good use of this providence; if thou came thither voluntarily, without due consideration, be humbled for sin, beg pardon, make sure of a friend above.

(2.) Use all lawful means to remove into a more wholesome air. I say to thee as the apostle to a godly servant, "Art thou called, being a servant, care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather."* Methinks God saith to you as once to Israel, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men."† It is a wonder the ground doth not cleave in sunder, or some judgment come down upon such prayerless families.

(3.) Humbly propose some expedients for a remedy. See if any other member in the family will undertake that exercise, or whether the master will give you leave to pray in the family; and behave yourself so holily and winningly, that the good opinion of superiors

* 1 Cor. vii. 21.

† Numb. xvi. 21, 24, 26, 31.

or equals may be a prologue and preparative to that performance.

(4.) If all this avail not for family worship, and necessity detains you there, as you love your souls, spend more time, and take more pains in secret; get into your cell, and say, Lord, have mercy on me,* as the old monk said to Luther; or as Jeremiah, "If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride."† Pray for your own soul, that you may not perish with others; pray for the family, and all the members thereof, governors and governed; be not discouraged with their scoffs; who knows what the event may prove?

10. *Case.* If I be cast into a praying family, what use shall I make thereof?

Ans. (1.) Give glory to God, admire his wise and gracious providence; it is not the lot of all young people. Think, and say, Lord, who am I, that I should enjoy this privilege? this is a blessed place, a place of blessings; this fleece is wet with dew, when others are dry; this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;‡ blessed be God that hath cast my lot here.

(2.) Join in family prayer; be not needlessly absent, but do not content yourselves with bodily presence, or postures, but see to it, that your hearts also join with the expressions, else you play the hypocrite; and when you go forth, and set up families of your own, use the same practice, and with the same spirit of your pious masters.

(3.) Improve this stock of family prayers. A father may lay up an estate for his child in bills and bonds, which may prove a good portion. The corn sown in

* Abi in cellam et dic, miserere mei.

† Jer. xiii. 17.

‡ Judg. vi. 37. Gen. xxviii. 17.

the field, is as good as that in the garner, in some respects better; the father sows, the child reaps a blessed crop. God forbid that I should lose a child's portion for want of looking after it. Lord, cut not off the entail of my father's covenant; O hear the many cries he sent up for me in my hearing!

(4.) Behave yourselves respectfully to that family where so gracious a providence hath cast you. God forbid you should be a scoffing Ishmael in an Abraham's house, a profane Esau in Jacob's, a rebellious Absalom, or an unchaste Ammon in holy David's family. You disgrace the ways of God more than others, when it shall be said, see what a brute was brought up in a praying family; you greatly discredit your privileges, and sink yourselves deeper in hell. God Almighty open your eyes, awaken your consciences, and reform your conversation, that you may walk worthy of God, to all well pleasing.

I have now done with this important subject of duly erecting a family altar, and offering gospel sacrifices to the Lord. And oh, that there were such altars set up in every dwelling house, and divine incense ascending like pillars of smoke heaven-wards.*

I have only a word of encouragement for timid, though willing souls, who set up family worship, but meet with so many discouragements from without, and within, that their hearts are appalled, and they are ready to give back, and say, will God accept such poor and imperfect sacrifices, so dead, heartless, and lifeless? I do no good, I get no good, I might as well give over, I am oft so woefully indisposed for duty, that I might as well let it alone.

O my friends! look on this as a temptation, and beware of it, strive against it, rouse up your spirits.

* Cant. iii. 6.

1. Consider, you are not the first or only persons that Satan hath resisted in duty; for even Joshua the high priest, a type of Christ, had Satan standing at his right hand, to resist him, and he had too much advantage against him; for, "he was clothed with filthy garments;" and our weakness is Satan's strength, our guilt his advantage; but our Jehovah saith, "The Lord rebuke thee."* The devil makes spots, and then accuseth us of our spots; but Christ wipes them away.

2. Our Lord takes well your good will to do, though you can do but little. The imprimis of a willing mind is accepted, though your following items be few and poor.† "The Lord is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love,"‡ that is, those duties we perform to the Lord with labour and hard struggling. It is the observation of precious Mr. Hildersham,|| "Think not," saith he, "beloved, that those prayers only are pleasing to God, wherein we please ourselves best, or which we perform with most facility and aptness of mind and speech; no, no, when we can perform this duty in obedience to God, even against our own disposition, and oppositions in our own hearts; these are the prayers that are most acceptable to God, as Abraham's obedience," Gen. xxii. 12.

3. By using and exercising little grace, improving small ability to pray, you will increase it, and will more comfortably carry on the exercise; so our Lord informs us, "To every one that hath," that is, by employing it, he shews that he hath, for otherwise the unprofitable servant had a talent also, "shall be given, and he shall have abundance."§ Sick persons, whose appetites are weakened, by eating provoke and recover

* Zech. iii. 1—3. 2 Cor. ii. 11. † 2 Cor. viii. 12.

† Heb. vi. 10. || On Psal. li. p. 65. § Matt. xxv. 29.

them, one morsel alluring to another. You will find this true in spiritual things.

4. The weaker you think yourselves, and the more likely you are to depend on the right means of your acceptance, that is, the Spirit of Christ for assistance, and the merit and intercession of Christ for acceptance. For alas! you find you have no strong breeze of gifts to fill the sails, or height of enlargement to carry you with full gale to God; you are emptied, and your plumes quite fallen, as to any thing you do, and therefore conclude, you are too low to gain access to God, and your duties quite lost, except your persons and performances be accepted through the mediation of Christ.* I shall therefore conclude this whole Discourse with that delightful text, which is worth a world, without the the benefit of which, all our altars and sacrifices are ciphers, Rev. viii. 3, "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar, which was before the throne.

* Phil. iii. 9.