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SERMON CCCXIX.

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FILIAL DUTY.

“Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”—EXODUS xx. 12.

THE fifth commandment is remarkable as being the first, and indeed the only one, to which a promise is annexed. In this circumstance, we recognize the wisdom and goodness of the great lawgiver. Addressed as it is principally to youth, God seems to have taken into view the influence of motives upon their young hearts. He appeals to them not only on the ground of his high and indisputable authority; but lays before them a strong inducement to compliance, viz. the anticipation of a long and happy life. The love of life, so natural to the young, is here made subservient to the discharge of relative duty; and under the old dispensation—a dispensation characterized principally by temporal rewards—we have reason to believe that scrupulous obedience was followed by an ample earthly recompense.

Throughout the holy scriptures, great stress is laid on the importance of filial duty, and the heaviest punishments are threatened in case of noncompliance. God has guarded the parental authority, with a sort of jealous particularity. He seems to consider rebellion towards an earthly father as the germ of treason towards himself. He would have the young heart trained to obedience; inasmuch as the same principles which operate to overturn the family government, are indicative of revolt against God; and may in the end bring ruin upon the refractory individual, both for time and eternity. Hence he has issued his edict in terms the most solemn, and demanded of all, who stand in the relation comprehended, that they should honor their father and their mother.

AN ABSTRACT OF A
S E R M O N ,
SUITED TO THE MONTHLY CONCERT.

“Let us rise up and build.”—NEH. xi. 18.

“HAD not Nehemiah risen up to the work, the rest would not have built. Had he loitered he might as well have been dead. The office of a minister is solemn and of amazing importance. If ever the songs of heaven are to be brought down to earth, the ministers of the sanctuary must begin the concert and prolong the praise. Their prayers, their examples, their contributions, their thrilling appeals, and their unwearied labors, must stand in the foremost rank of every successful enterprise. If the church is ever to reach the summit of her glory, her ministers must make much nearer approaches to the holiness, zeal, and labors of the apostles.

Among the things most wanted at the present day are the following.

1. The prayer of faith. As the millennium approaches, the efficacy of prayer is to be most gloriously illustrated; for it was long ago foretold that this event would be brought about in answer to prayer. But it is no ordinary prayer, it is the Holy Ghost praying in the heart of the christian; the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. No wonder that such intercession prevails. Before every revival of religion there is a spirit of prayer for this influence that never was and never will be disappointed. It is attended with desires so agonizing as almost to break the heart, and yet so submissive as to refuse to set up any other interest or will against the interest and will of God. It is attended with a sense of absolute dependence on God, and yet with an earnest and diligent use of means that can never stop. It is marked with deep humility and self loathing, and with an awful sense of past backslidings. Nothing, this side of God himself, is so much wanted on earth as prayers like these. The prosperity of the church is waiting on the clouds for such prayers to bring it down. The world is waiting in the regions of death for such prayers to call it forth.

2. Christians must give more of their property to Christ. The Hebrews were constrained by their laws to give at least four tenths of their income. And when christians have obeyed the injunction, “Sell that ye have, and give alms;” when they have reached the point of

the poor widow who cast into the treasury all her living; when they have written *Holiness to the Lord* on all they possess, they will have gone far beyond the present guage even of liberal christians. On this subject the mass of professed believers seem scarcely to have learned the first letters of their alphabet. Immense treasures are wanted to convert the world; and before this can be accomplished every christian must hold himself a steward, ready to deliver the goods intrusted to him as fast as they are called for.

3. Christians must consecrate not only their property but themselves, as they never have done, at least since the days of Constantine, before the darkness can be swept by human instrumentality from five sixths of the earth. In past ages, few have had the heart to say, I prosper if the kingdom of Christ prospers. Too many have been satisfied with leaving the world as they found it. Satisfied with doing it no hurt, they have hugged their ease and gone down to the grave, leaving all the earth unenriched except six feet by three. There still are drones who lounge on earth and cumber the ground; who eat up the substance of the earth and make no returns. But the church must awake. There must be a vigorous pulse at the heart that will drive the streams of life through the extremities. We must hold ourselves, and all that we possess—our powers of body and mind, our time, our influence, our property, devoted to God. We must lay all our plans of business, of expenditure, of relaxation, form all our connexions and habits with a supreme reference to the glory of Christ, and go forth determined that the world shall be the happier for our living in it.

This is the high and glorious course on which I would invite you to enter. And now for the reasons.

1. The object is of infinite value. It is nothing less than the glory of God before the universe, and the translation of myriads of souls from eternal pollution and torment to immortal blessedness. Ask that redeemed spirit that sings on yonder throne—ask him a thousand ages hence, what is the value of salvation. By prayer and holy effort you may be the means of saving millions of immortal beings who otherwise would have perished, and of filling the world with the richest glories of redeeming love.

2. You ought to be wholly devoted to God, because he made you what you are, and built the world you inhabit, and furnished it for your use, and placed you in it, on purpose to serve him; and has commanded you to serve him with all your heart and soul, and has never given you a right to live to yourself a single hour, but has demanded your whole time, your whole heart, and the most zealous devotion of all your powers. What right have you to live one hour to yourselves? You are not your own, you are the creatures of God. What right have you in this world, if you will not serve him entirely? This world belongs to God. What right have you to walk his earth and to breathe his air, if you will not be wholly for him? This world is full of God. You see him, you hear him, you feel him in all things.

No other being has preserved you; no other being has watched over you night and day; no other being has fed and clothed you. And all this that you might still live and serve him. When one's eye is opened to see the immensity of his guilt, it appears a wonder of wonders that he is suffered to live an hour. He that has not seen this is still blind. Now if God will preserve us in a world of comfort rather than cast us into hell, we may well afford to work for him continually. He has done more than keep us out of hell, his tender mercies have filled our lives.

3. You ought to be wholly devoted to *Christ*, because he died to redeem you from an ignoble and eternal prison, and to raise you to the honors of the sons of God. Ye are not your own,—ye are bought with a price. What right have you to use for yourselves the powers which belong to Christ? What do you in this world if you will not wholly serve the Lord's Anointed? This world belongs to Christ. It was created *by* him and *for* him; and he has purchased it since, and received it for the residence of his church. No other being has a right to erect an interest on this ground.

And what do you not owe to the Savior of the world, for coming out to seek you when you were wandering from the fold of God, and putting a title to heaven in your hands. When you were just entering the gates of hell, he threw the arms of everlasting love around you and caught you up to the throne of God, and gave you to own suns and stars.

My brethren, let us anticipate the judgment of posterity. We are fast approaching an age when men will be devoted to God as their fathers never were; an age of action, of enterprise, of generosity, of which, in their indolent and selfish repose, former generations had no conception. This is to be the character of the whole church as it never was before. It will be the fashion and drift of society. The sordid wretch who lives for himself, will be marked and scouted as a swindler now is. A new era will have commenced. New scenes will be unfolded.

My brethren, you live in a world which has been distinguished from all the other worlds which God has made, by being selected for the theatre of redemption—for the scene of those amazing exhibitions of grace which are to carry a report to the most distant world, and to illumine and astonish the universe. Open your eyes in a clear evening on the starry heavens; and when you have filled your wondering view with the numberless worlds which float in boundless space, you will stand amazed that this planet, now reduced to a speck, has been selected to hold so conspicuous a place in the universe of God, to be a point whence shall radiate a light to illumine all worlds in the knowledge of his glory.

The time will come when the whole intelligent creation will gaze with the most intense interest upon the transactions which are now taking place on this earth. And when the inhabitants of the most distant world on that side of heaven shall hold high consultation with

the inhabitant of the most distant world on the other side of heaven, and both shall be lost in amazement at the events which have taken place on this planet, how will it seem to have been permitted to live on this earth and to take a part in bringing forward these supreme wonders of the universe.

You have the infinite privilege to live in a world where a church founded in blood is training up for glory,—to live among the records and memorials of the most astonishing facts that ever commanded the admiration of creatures. Amidst these amazing operations, which are to send their report echoing through the universe, you stand. You are among the number whose efforts are to consummate the work of redemption, and to send out a report through planets, stars and constellations, to the remotest world, to prolong its echoes through eternity. In this laboratory of the universe will you be idle? Let them sleep in Mercury, and Saturn, and Herschel; I had almost said, let them sleep in heaven; but sleep not ye in such a world as this. It is your lot to live in one of the most interesting periods of this most favored world; you find christendom teeming with institutions and projects for promoting the kingdom of Christ; give them your firm and unwearied support. If you will not do this, get ye back to the dark ages, ye do not belong to the present period.

You see the dawn of that day which prophets and kings desired to see, and which is watched by millions of eyes from heaven. They might sleep under the Old Testament dispensation; they might sleep in the ages of papal darkness; but now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

O my brethren, to what a birthright are we born. Under what a crushing weight of responsibility do we lie. What a voice of authority comes down from heaven; what appeals to our conscience, our compassions, our gratitude. What calls come in from the four quarters of the globe to break our hearts and to awaken our undivided, untiring, undying zeal. I hear a voice of wailing from the ends of the earth. I see nations weltering in their blood. I hear a loud lament from the eternal pit. By the joys of one world and the miseries of two, by the compassions and blood of a dying Savior, by the authority of the everlasting God, I conjure you, I entreat you, my brethren, to wake up to this awful voice of heaven, to these dying groans of a world."