

THE AMERICAN
NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 3. Vol. XVI.)

MARCH, 1842.

(WHOLE No. 183.)

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.

This command includes two things, *respect* and *obedience*.

1. The first of these topics will now come under consideration ; and I hope, whilst commenting upon it, to have the serious attention of the younger members of this congregation.

It can scarcely be expected, that I shall enter fully into the various and almost countless particulars to which this command applies. It has intimate bearings on the conduct of every hour which is passed under the parental roof, and extends occasionally even to the period when youth is merged into manhood, and when graver duties and more mature affections have superseded our earlier attachments. If there has been exercised towards us the ordinary kindness and attention of parental love, it is a dictate of nature, that with the increase of our parents' years, we should entertain for them an increasing respect ; and when their venerable forms shall have sunk into the grave, and we can see them here no more, we shall then, more than ever, appreciate their worth. But it is only whilst they are living, and principally whilst we are with them and under their control, that this command can be fulfilled. It is *then* for us to recompense, in some degree, by our profound respect, and prompt obedience, and tender assiduities, the numberless self denials and cares to which, for our sakes, they have so cheerfully submitted. All the tears which we may pour upon their graves will not atone for past ingratitude and coldness. Not *there*, can they feel the reactings of affection which they longed to see, and for want of which perhaps their grey hairs were brought down the more speedily with sorrow to the grave.

2. Filial respect is expressive of both *feeling* and *conduct*. We must entertain towards our parents those feelings of reverence and regard which their age and relative station demand. These, independent of their personal character, should secure the homage of the child. It is to be regretted, that in some instances traits of moral excellence calculated to command respect, are wanting ; and that we are hence obliged to base this filial duty on the naked command of God ; for even where such traits *are* wanting, the obligation of this part of the divine law is by no means canceled. It is to be supposed, that filial affection is so strong as to overlook what others might be disposed to censure ; and that whatever blemishes exist in a parent's character, affectionate regard for the child still maintains its hold. I am aware that some of the grosser vices may so get the dominion as to disrobe a parent of every thing calculated to elicit affection or to enforce authority. He becomes sometimes, by the indulgence of abominable lusts, cold and alienated towards those who were once dear to him. But even then, the recollection of what he once was, should serve to apologize, in the view of the children, for faults which others may justly reprobate. The sacred name of *father* is as a mantle of charity, which, imitating the virtuous sons of an ancient patriarch, the child, with averted face, should cast over a parent's faults. But these are extreme cases, and whether it is possible to respect such, or how far the command in such cases applies, is not easy to determine.

The obligation of filial respect imposed by this command had in view, no doubt, the ordinary range of parental character. In general, it is such as claims respect not merely on the ground of divine authority, but also from personal characteristics.

Providence has signified his approbation of the marriage relation in many particulars. One is, the improvement of character, which in most cases is visible when an individual enters into this relation. The dissolute are often seen to become regular, and the reckless considerate. Self respect begins to take the place of levity and vulgarity. The volatile spirit which fed on empty flatteries, settles down into the sober matron; and the responsibilities of her new station gives to the mother a force of character to which she was before a stranger. To these improved traits, there is added parental affection, whose operation is to call forth what is good and to restrain what is bad in the human character. This affection is not indeed holiness; but there is something in it, I had almost said, akin to it. It exerts over our rough and rebellious nature a more soothing and refining influence than any feeling or principle save that of religion. It strikes a blow at the deep rooted selfishness of the heart, and makes it both our interest and our inclination to advance the general good. Who can look at all this and not admit that a divine providence has given its sanction to the marriage relation? But I adduce the improvement growing out of this relation, to show that the ordinary range of parental character is such as to command the respect of the dependent child.

3. As an inducement to filial respect, there is also the *superior age of the parent*.

God has implanted within us a disposition to reverence what is old. The venerable oak claims more of this feeling than the ambitious sapling which shoots up at its roots. The grey towers of antiquity are more impressive than the fantastic structures of modern times. We should feel grateful for this instinctive reverence for antiquity, inasmuch as it contributes to the stability of social order, and serves to counteract that pride and self sufficiency so natural to man. By these remarks, I may be thought wanting in the spirit of the times; but I cannot do violence to nature, by doing homage to an age of innovation, if not of radicalism. I am not one of those who believe that a thing is of course superior because it is new; and I very much fear that a morbid appetite for novelties is tending rapidly to undermine some of the principles which God has laid at the base of our social and domestic happiness. The feeling which treats scornfully what is ancient, is the same which is likely to dispute or to disregard parental authority. It is a feeling of self sufficiency akin to that state of mind which hesitates to admit its dependence even on God himself. I am for teaching children to respect what is old; because it is, in general, conducive to their moral improvement; and is a guarantee for their future stability of character. So important was deemed this reverence for age on the part of the young, that Jehovah made it a matter of divine legislation. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and

honor the face of the old man, and fear thy God, I am the Lord." And in Deuteronomy, predicting the incursion of a fierce pagan enemy, he characterizes them as "a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old."

4. Again, age generally brings along with it experience and knowledge, which are a ground of respect.

By this remark, I do not intend to assert, that in native intellect or acquired knowledge, a parent is of course superior to his child. But whosoever, with habits of observation, has lived longer than another, must have acquired a greater amount of practical wisdom. In this respect, the parent is generally, if not always, superior to the child. Humble as may be his condition in life, he has had, amid the vicissitudes of earth, that opportunity to study mankind which enables him to impart many a salutary lesson to his offspring. And this species of instruction, let me say, is the best of all kinds; far, very far superior to that which is learned merely from books. For, as a christian poet very justly observes:

"Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft times no connection.
Knowledge dwells in heads replete
With thoughts of other men—*wisdom*
In minds attentive to their *own*."

It sometimes happens, that when a youth is elevated by circumstances somewhat above his parent—as where more ample opportunities for education have supplied him with acquired terms or ideas which the parent has not, he undervalues his sire at the same time that he overestimates himself. Any disrespect from a child on such grounds argues a great defect of character, and must expose the delinquent to the certain displeasure of heaven. I solemnly warn every young person, on the authority of God himself, to honor his parents, whatever be their grade of intellect, or however circumscribed may have been their opportunities for improvement. Know also, that in ability to furnish lessons of practical wisdom, they are generally our superiors even to their dying day. The advice which they may feel it their duty to impart is grounded on their knowledge of the evils of life. It is administered in affection. It is our real good which impels them to give it; and never should it be received with any other feeling than that of profound respect. When the opinions of other men are given, we are never sure that they are free from an admixture of selfishness; but when the *parent* counsels, it is as if he spoke to his *own* soul. Surely then, every child, in matters of practical wisdom, should, from respect to the parent, seek *his* counsel before that of any other person. Children are very apt to err on this point. They violate God's holy command by treating with levity the good advice of their sires. With an overweening opinion of themselves, they assume to know quite as much and sometimes even more than their father or their mother. Because, from what are considered modern improvements in

education, they may have got a smattering of knowledge above what was taught in former days, they take the liberty, on such grounds, to treat as old fashioned and exploded the opinions of their fathers. Especially when sound principle and practical morality are, from the tenderest of motives, inculcated, does the prurient depravity of youth neutralize the wholesome lesson, by the false imputation of a selfish incapacity for enjoyment on the part of the counselor. The old man, say they, having lost his susceptibility to enjoyments of a sensual kind, has of course parted with his relish for them; and how, under such circumstances, can advice come with weight upon us? Many is the reckless youth who has thus reasoned; and who consequently has not only inflicted a deep wound on the parental heart, but has prepared the way for his own physical and moral ruin. Let all, then, who are thus disposed to trample on venerable authority and influence, remember that they are at the same time treading under foot God's holy law. Let them beware, lest for such filial impiety, God take them away with a stroke. The opinions no less than the persons of their ancestors are to be respected.

5. Again. The efforts which are made by parents to render their children happy, and to improve their outward condition, is a reason why they should ever stand high in the respect and veneration of the latter.

The principle or feeling is instinctive, I admit, which leads the parent to take care of his offspring. I concede, also, that in the very act of cherishing the child, there is an attendant reward. The God of nature has implanted deep in the heart an inextinguishable love of offspring. Our children are but an expansion of ourselves. We seem to multiply our own natures in their existence, and to convey down through posterity a sort of personal immortality. Under the influence of these feelings, what endurance of toil and self denial will the parent encounter to sustain the being, and foster the interests of his child! But is this any reason why that child should deny the obligations of a reciprocal respect and esteem? Indeed, I believe that every truly affectionate son or daughter does contemplate with no ordinary emotions, the trials and the toils of parental love, which were so generously endured for their happiness. The little helpless creature is thrown first on the mother's care. And none but a mother can administer properly to a being so frail and so dependent. She *only* is endowed with the necessary qualifications. It is her deep love alone that can be tasked to supply the vigilance, and the cares, and the assiduities requisite to keep so feeble a flame from extinguishment. No other than a mother's love could hold out amid the discouragements and toils of infantile life; nor could any other principle endure that perpetual draught upon the patience, which the fickleness and the feverish fretfulness of childhood call for. A mother's love! What will it not endure or dare to promote the child's safety and happiness! How often, by the light of the sickly taper, does it converse with the midnight hour of suffering! What tears

wrung from the heart's agony does it let fall on the fevered brow, whilst the prayer for relief is breathed unto God on every sigh! But memory cannot retain these early exhibitions of maternal care. They were made at a period too remote for its retrospective powers. Still knowing that such must have been the labors and anxieties of a mother's love, should we not ever honor one who endured so much for us, and at a period when we could do nothing for ourselves? Cold and callous must be that heart which feels not the warm gush of filial tenderness, as it recurs to the scenes of childhood, and traces the thousand kind offices of maternal affection. Who, even without experiencing the same early bereavement, cannot sympathize with the amiable Cowper, standing before his mother's portrait and giving vent, in touching numbers, to his soul's deep emotion?—

“ My mother! When I learned that thou wast dead,
 Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
 Hovered thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
 Wretch, even then life's journey just begun?
 Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unfelt, a kiss;
 Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.
 Ah, that maternal smile! It answers—Yes.
 I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
 I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
 And turning from my nursery window, drew
 A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!
 But, was it such? It was. Where thou art gone,
 Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
 May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
 The parting word shall pass my lips no more!”

As we advanced from infancy to youth, how many hours, subtracted from personal ease, have been devoted to our good! To supply our temporal wants, has cost no small sacrifice. The anxiety expended on this point alone, may have caused the tear to flow and the heart often to ache. We have not heeded when or where the means of support and comfort were to be obtained. Blithe as the lark, we have hailed each rising day, and sported away its sunny hours, as if the world was made for us alone; whilst the fond parent may have been weeping away the lonely hours of the previous night under the thought of actual or anticipated poverty. What is it that nerves the arm of the laborer, and holds him up day after day, amid heat and cold, until he drops exhausted into the grave? Is it not the thoughts of home, and the affectionate yearnings over his numerous offspring? And shall all this be met or followed by filial ingratitude or disrespect?

The parent toils in order not only to supply the temporal necessities of his child, but to raise him to a respectable standing in the community. The child's honor is his; and he is anxious to advance him in the esteem of all who know him. With this view, how many affectionate counsels are given! how much of his hard earnings are

expended! He will deny himself often the comforts of life, if he may thereby impart respectability to his child. All the recompense which he asks or expects, is the success of his efforts, and the reciprocal esteem of his offspring. And is this too much to ask? Is it too much to give in return for all that is bestowed? That heart which, on this point, does not feel, must be dead to every generous emotion; and if the ability is given to soothe the last hours of parental existence, and it fail to do so, the curse of God must follow so recreant a child, if not in this world, assuredly in that which is to come.

Filial respect is a lovely attribute of youthful virtue. It is said of one of the ancient kings of England, that having lost, in quick succession, his father and his son, he manifested a far more inconsolable state of feeling at the former event than the latter. Astonishment was expressed at this by some of his courtiers. "What, sire, weep more at the death of thy aged father than at that of the heir of thy kingdom!" "Ah!" replied the king, "God can give me another son; but even *he* cannot give me another father."

6. Inward respect for parents should be accompanied with the corresponding external signs of reverence.

The scriptures *enjoin* such tokens of regard. They command that the young shall rise up in the presence of the hoary head. It cannot be that children truly honor their parents, who do not in their deportment treat them with becoming respect.

Their address should be reverential. It may be affectionate, occasionally even familiar; but it should never savor of levity. Never should it be the address of an equal. It should always have, in its tone and terms, that which bespeaks a respectful regard. Even the petulance of age should be soothed by kind words, and the garrulity of second childhood should never be allowed to provoke an impatient or scornful reply.

In the presence of others the child should always treat his parent with becoming reverence. Any departure from this rule, I regard as a violation of the fifth commandment.

The parent should always have precedence, in any situation where a choice is to be made. This is especially applicable to the period of minority. The first station in the family uniformly belongs to the parent, as also the first share in any enjoyment, whether of taste or of intellect. I have sometimes known this order reversed. I have seen a sort of filial usurpation, in which the parental rights have been trampled upon, and the sceptre of authority virtually wrested from the legitimate hand. Selfishness in the child will sometimes extinguish all sense of propriety; and personal gratification will be sought, though it involve an indecent disregard to filial obligations. Is not the *parent* sometimes to blame for this? Does not an inordinate affection invite this display of selfishness? Is not the child sometimes trained to consider his parent as a sort of slave, to minister to his personal pleasure? If such be the case, there may come a

retribution for this over indulgence, in the cold hearted selfishness, which mocks at a parent's woes, and coolly disregards the claims of honor and respect, which both the law of nature and of God enjoin.

The first station in the family, I repeat, uniformly belongs to the parent. Every attempt, on the part of the child, at invading this prerogative, by setting himself forward when he should retire—by offering his opinion when he should keep silence—by interruption, or by contradiction—in tones of voice, or by expression of countenance—every such way of manifesting filial disrespect, is a breach of God's high and holy command. Never should the child forget the sacred precept, "Honor thy father and thy mother." He should "bind it about his neck, and write it on the tablets of his heart." It should give a character to all his intercourse and manners in the family circle; and believe me, my young friends, in no light in which you can be placed, will you appear more lovely than in rendering to your parents the honor which God claims for them, and which is justly their due.

These remarks are made under a conviction of their importance, and in view of a supposed deficiency in filial respect of the youth of our common country.

The institutions of the old world, political and social, are favorable to the parental authority, and have a tendency to restrain the premature development of youthful independence. Children, from the very nature of the case, are taught to venerate what is old—to keep in check their passions—to defer to authority—to await the appropriate time for the display of their fancied or real attainments. Established usages, and the gradations of social life, all have this restraining tendency. I shall not stop to inquire in how many important respects we have the advantage over the citizens of a more restricted government. I introduce the above statement simply to show the influence on filial respect which a certain social state may exert, compared with our own institutions, founded on the principles of liberty, but not on that very account, perhaps, quite so conducive to a reverence for age, and to the restraints of authority. *Independence* is a word which exerts a magical influence on every class of our citizens. It is interwoven with our national history, and is the watchword under all circumstances of public peril. Is it to be wondered at, then, that the youth of our country should early imbibe a dislike to all kinds of restraint,—even to that which both God and nature have imposed? And is it not true, that in this country, more than any other of equal standing, the young are prematurely released from the watchful care and wholesome authority of the parent? If these suggestions are well founded, then is there a need of great vigilance on the part of parents, in order to counteract a tendency in our social and civil condition, unfavorable to domestic government. The child, too, should remember that he may gain his liberty too soon for his own good. The price of this premature indepen-

dence may be, not simply the sighs and sorrows of a parent's heart, but the disappointment of his own expectations, and the ultimate ruin of his own soul. He may have the satisfaction of anticipating, by a few years, his release from parental restraint; but like the unfledged bird which has ventured too soon from the warm nest, and finding its wings incompetent for a self sustained flight, sinks neglected on the ground, or dies beneath the peltings of the storm; so he may ere long bitterly repent of his presumption, and sigh for a return to privileges which, through his own folly, he has forever forfeited.

Never can a youth hope to prosper, who has wilfully cast contempt on a parent's authority, or treated with disrespect his person. If the opposite course be so important as to call for a special mandate from God, and so lovely as to warrant the annexation of a promise of temporal good, can the ungrateful or disrespectful child expect the favoring providence of God? or rather must he not meet with a retribution even in this world? For the love which your parents have felt for you, my young friends, for the self denial which they have practised for your good, all they ask or expect is, that you act worthy of them, and return them your respect and esteem. Repay them you never can. But by filial fondness, and a proper respect, you may soothe their declining years; and this you are bound to do. God expects and requires this at your hand. You cannot do otherwise and be guiltless.

But if you owe so much to an *earthly* parent, how much do you owe to God? If you are bound to respect the authority of the former, in what light should you view the high commands of Jehovah? *He* imparts on a great and liberal scale. Have you ever thought of your obligations to *him*? What returns have you made for all his kindness? In the name of your *Heavenly Father*, I press these high and holy claims upon you. Tell me, have you ever seriously considered them? If God threaten you for disobedience to an earthly parent, will he not vindicate his own honor? Has he nourished and brought you up as children, and have you rebelled against him? Come, then, this day, take with you words of contrition, and return unto the Lord. Repent of your cold ungrateful conduct. Seek the intercession of Jesus, who alone can effect a reconciliation, and as obedient children, bow, without delay, to the commands of Jehovah.

SERMON CCCXX.

By Rev. J. B. WATERBURY, D. D.

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.

In the foregoing discourse, I observed, that the duties enjoined in the fifth commandment relate to two points, viz: *respect* and *obedience*. The first of these having been considered, we have to notice the obligations of filial obedience embraced in the second topic.

It has been very justly remarked, by a distinguished writer, that “the word *honor*, by which this duty is here enjoined, is chosen with supreme felicity, as being sufficiently comprehensive and sufficiently definite to express, with as much exactness as can easily be compassed, all the several branches of duty which parents can equitably demand of their children.”

The nature, obligations, and rewards of filial obedience, will very naturally constitute the principal features of a discourse purporting to explain and enforce this precept of the divine law. But it must be perceived how utterly impossible it is for the preacher fully to illustrate in one or two sermons, a theme so extensive and important. Something, however, on each of the topics just named, may be said; and it is hoped that these hints, by awakening attention to the subject, may lead to a more full investigation of its claims. To say that it is one of unspeakable importance, after God has given it a place in his laws, seems a useless truism, and savors of positive irreverence. By placing it there, in the very centre of that immutable code, stereotyped on stone with his own hand amid the flames of Mount Sinai, God has given us *his* impressions of its importance.

It remains for us to inquire, by all the lights which we can obtain, what is the nature and the extent of the obligation. This every *parent* is bound to do, that he may know how to command and to govern his house—that he may enjoin nothing which it may be lawful for the child to refuse; and thus become a domestic tyrant, rather than an intelligent guardian. For the want of this discrimination, a parent, by driving the child into legitimate resistance, may lose that control which both reason and religion, under different circumstances, would have conceded. This inquiry into the nature of the fifth commandment, the child, also, is bound to make, that he may understand where the source of filial obligation lies, and what are the limits to which it extends.

If these points be not examined and settled, it is not difficult to see that family government cannot be properly maintained. If the parent have no fixed principles understood and recognized by the child, the latter cannot ascertain when he is rendering, or when refusing obedience. In such a case his relative position towards his parent, is like that of a slave towards a despot, trembling with perpetual apprehension. Caprice, in this instance, takes the place of law; and punishment is awarded or withheld, not on the principle of desert, but according to parental humor. How certainly destructive is such a course of all order and government in a family! and when family government is undermined, the effect on social security and civil rule, is like tearing away the corner stone of an edifice, or poisoning the head waters of a pure refreshing stream.

The obedience required in the text is positive and negative; that is, the doing of what is enjoined, and abstaining from that which is forbidden.

It so happens, under the divine constitution, that, with respect to the training of children, nature lends her assistance in the enforcement of a divine precept. The child is thrown entirely on the care of its parents. It is at first a very helpless thing, and requires their watchful assiduities in order to keep alive the vital spark. The first conscious feeling of obligation must be when it is very young. This feeling respects those who are its natural guardians, and whose gentle and affectionate looks have won for them a place in its young heart, as yet unoccupied by any rival attachment. Thus the force of natural affection comes in to strengthen the weight of parental authority; and it is an auxiliary, powerful in proportion to the manner in which it is used. It may become to principle an antagonist or an ally. It may act on the parent's weakness to lead him into indulgences most injurious; or influence him to withhold that discipline which the law of God enjoins; but on the other hand, it may be used as a powerful lever to filial respect and obedience, and this, no doubt, was one benevolent end which the Creator had in view in implanting it.

But, besides this, the physical weakness of children compared with maturity, and their entire dependence, are circumstances which illus-

trate a divine wisdom, in making nature an auxiliary in enforcing a divine command. If the physical frame were as strong as the passions are turbulent, how could the parent hold the reins? Or if the child could take care of itself—if it felt or feared none of the consequences of abandonment, parental government would be equally impracticable. But how admirably has God adjusted all these circumstances to afford, on the one hand, every possible facility to the parent to perform *his* part in controlling youthful depravity; and on the other, giving to the child, thus early, a sense of its weakness and dependence, that it may learn to fear as well as love the hand that fosters it.

This obedience on the part of the child, should begin at a very early age. On this point, more responsibility attaches to the parent than to his offspring. The will of the latter is operative much sooner than we have been wont to imagine. When it is placed in opposition to the will of the parent—indicated often rather by signs than by words—it is necessary to give some signal of disapprobation. The child should be made to feel that its animal instincts are not always to be gratified; and when the passions rise to give impulse to the will, it is still more important to teach the little rebel submission to a higher power. Neglect this at the outset, and many a pang must penetrate the parent's heart, as a just retribution for allowing the affections to triumph over principle. Children thus indulged are not likely, in subsequent life, to "honor their father and their mother."

On this subject we are obliged to presuppose that what is enjoined by the parent is what the child ought to do. We must take it for granted that affection for his children is such as to be a pledge for the propriety of his commands. I am aware that many exceptions might be urged, in which even the natural instinct of parental love seems to have been extinguished amid the turbulence of low and groveling passions. But these exceptions ought not to have much weight when a great moral principle is to be settled. It would be better for a few, in such cases, to suffer by compliance, than for the principle of filial obedience to be in the least degree weakened.

We may, then, lay down the principle, *that whatsoever is commanded by the parent—plainly not against the laws of God nor the decencies of life—the child is bound to do.*

Nothing short of this, we think, can be recognized as compliance with that sacred command, which we have chosen for the text. In the government of a family, the parent is the executive head. *He*, and not the child, is to decide what should be done. He is a prince over his own little domain; and whilst he is bound to order his government according to the laws of God, he is or ought to be, with such restriction, an absolute monarch. Let him recognize God's word as his guide, and there is no fear that, in his paternal administration, he will become too rigid on the one hand, or too reckless and indulgent on the other.

The commands which are issued from day to day, in a family, respect a thousand little items which it were impossible to mention in detail. They are given out to meet the ever varying incidents of domestic life, or shape themselves according to the character and conduct of the child. Specification is not important. The great point at which we aim, is to settle the principle of obedience, and to mark, according to heaven's law, its limitations. In *all things* which are commanded, the child *must* obey. He may not make an exception, unless, as has been observed, he can show that the *parental* conflicts with the *divine* command. A child will often think a parent misjudges—or he may be disposed to consider the requirement as hard and even cruel. He will deem the thing impracticable, even before trial; and wonder that he can be called upon to do a thing so much beyond his ability. But such views and feelings are traceable, in most instances, to a selfish ungovernable temper; and if they are allowed to break the force of parental authority, or worse, lead the child to disregard it, they will overturn all family government, and drive every vestige of peace and order from the domestic circle. Reasonable requirements from the parent, and implicit obedience on the part of the child, is the only safe, as it is the only scriptural rule.

The obedience which the child is required to render, is not only *implicit*, but *prompt*.

When the parent issues his command, whether it respect what is to be done, or what is to be avoided, the child should instantly comply. There is a proneness in children, even where positive disobedience is not intended, to put a parent's patience to the test, by withholding compliance as long as possible—a sort of dilatoriness, which argues almost as much criminal disrespect, as if the command were deliberately disregarded. In some cases this may be owing to heedlessness, but in more, it is the fruit of obstinacy and selfishness. Certainly there is, in such cases, a manifest want of principle. That respectful regard for the parental authority, which the text enjoins, cannot be felt; and the obedience which is so slowly and reluctantly rendered, seems the offspring of fear, and not the generous and spontaneous impulse of affection.

Now, who cannot see that prompt obedience is the only obedience which meets the spirit of the text, as well as the only kind which gratifies a parent's heart? Is it honoring the father or the mother, if obedience is rendered only when, through fear, it can no longer be withheld? or not until the young and selfish heart has first accomplished its own plans, and gratified its own desires? A child will often think this a point of but small consequence, and will consider compliance, however tardy, as fully exonerating it from the charge of disobedience. He must, in the first place, finish what he has begun, or step aside to enjoy some intermediate pleasure, or idly linger without any positive cause of delay. Now this should not be. The parent should *expect*, and should *have* prompt obedience. *He*

should feel it to be as much his duty to expect it, as it is the duty of the child to render it. No matter what may be the circumstances of the child, compatible with compliance, nor how interesting to him may be his juvenile plans and pleasures, they should be at once relinquished, and the parental voice responded to with the least possible delay. Aside from the abstract principle of duty, the importance of such promptitude to the character of the child cannot well be conceived. I can perceive, I think, its favorable bearings even on his prospects for eternity. Instantaneous compliance is the implied and asserted duty in all the commands of the law and the gospel. It is the dilatory, the procrastinating spirit, which destroys men's souls; a spirit, if not fostered in the nursery, at least not there sufficiently rebuked.

1. The obedience required must be *cheerful*. It will be so, where there is felt the union of filial respect and love. Then no command seems hard, nor any prohibition unreasonable. But how often is it the case, where obedience is rendered, there is such evident displeasure in the manner, so many marks of dissatisfaction, that the virtue of compliance is wholly neutralized? It is, in such cases, a servile, and not a filial obedience. It is *obeying*, but not *honoring* the parent, and is, therefore, a violation of this holy command. How painful to the fond heart of the parent is that sullen compliance, which seems to say, "I obey because I must. Power and authority, not love and respect, impel me. Were I sure of impunity in disobedience, I should consult my own wishes and inclinations."

On the other hand, there are few things in this world more lovely, or of better report, than a cheerful acquiescence by affectionate children in the commands and wishes of a parent. It is one of the finest moral pictures which can be presented. It argues great excellence of character in the head, and unusual amiability in the members of the family. The selfish nature must, under such circumstances, have been, at least, strongly controlled; whilst the more uncommon traits of kindness and benevolence must have been assiduously cultivated. Among such children, I should expect to find the candidates for earth's purest pleasures, and for heaven's bright rewards. Here, I should say, is a nursery for those influences which, under God, are to act powerfully in improving the age, and in renovating the world. Our future men of renown, who are to fill our pulpits—to adorn our civil offices—who are to prove the guardians of liberty—the advocates of truth, and the defenders of innocence—who are to lead on the van of that heaven selected corps, whose honor it shall be to spread over our fallen race the lights of science, of civilization, and of religion; all these are to receive, in such well governed families, their early impulses and inspirations.

"No man," says a pious author, "is able to govern, who has not himself learned to obey;" and I would add, that a disobedient, refractory child is as likely to resist the civil authority, when administered by others, as he is to abuse it, when unhappily it is committed to his own hands.

I have little doubt, that if the personal history of two thirds of the inmates of our penitentiaries were examined, it would appear that the incipient steps to this climax of infamy were taken in the nursery or at the fireside. It was at *home*, that the young rebel first spurned with impunity, the wholesome restraint; and thence emboldened by success, he moved on to more daring deeds of depravity, until the outraged law inflicted upon him its merited retribution.

Let the child learn to obey at *home*—let this obedience be prompt and cheerful, and the habit of subordination is fixed forever. In every situation, then, in which the vicissitudes of earth may place him, you will find him the advocate of order; whilst he will exemplify its beauty in his own ready and uniform compliance.

These principles are highly important, in a country like ours, and at a time when the power of excitement and the tendency to revolution are heaving like an earthquake under the foundations of social order. In such a state of things, even parental authority, it is to be feared, may share in the general wreck.

There is a premature manhood, and a premature womanhood, which affect the wisdom of age, with the inexperience of infancy—which seem anxious to get rid of parental restraint; and launch forth on the stormy element, reckless of the danger, and unprovided with a compass to guide, or an anchor to cast, amid the perilous scene. Our only security in the case is in family religion, and in family government, based on the principles of religion.

2. The obedience enjoined in the text is an UNRESERVED obedience.

What the parent requires, and *all* that he requires, should be done. The child will often make exceptions and distinctions, with a view to gratify himself in part whilst rendering but a partial obedience. There is a sort of half way compliance—a mere apology for obedience, which is by no means a fulfilling of the law. A task is prescribed; it may be the work of the hands or of the intellect. The child not loving the work, or too fond of play to bestow upon it the requisite time and attention, passes over it in a careless and hurried manner, and thus betrays a spirit of selfish insubordination almost as criminal as actual refusal. He who performs not that task to the best of his ability—whether it be the acquiring of useful knowledge, or the employment of the muscles, is not rendering the obedience which God requires. The great lawgiver expects that the obedience, as in that which is rendered directly to himself, will be unreserved; that it will not be fitful, nor the effect of caprice; nor that when the duty required is difficult it may be slighted, and when easy it shall be fulfilled. All this is in direct opposition to the spirit of his holy command. It is not honoring but dishonoring the parent; and so far is such obedience from any claim to the promise annexed to the text, it will subject the unfaithful child to the divine displeasure.

3. The fifth commandment requires that the obedience of the child should be as scrupulously rendered in the *absence* as in the *presence* of the parent.

It is not possible for the parental eye always to be upon the child. The most of his conduct may be away from such supervision. The expectation is that filial obligation will press as strongly in solitude or among companions, as it does when the voice and eye of the parent are upon him. To take advantage of the absence of a father or mother in order to throw off restraint and tread a forbidden path, argues a great amount of juvenile depravity. If a comparison were instituted between filial disrespect in these circumstances, and that which an open and barefaced rebellion against parental authority would exhibit, we should say, that there was as much of moral turpitude in the former as in the latter case, and certainly more moral meanness. Yet how common is it for children to think, that when the parent is not present to command or to threaten, they may disregard the counsels and violate the principles which have been so often enjoined! Temptations also are strong from the influence of companionship and the example of the less scrupulous. A child is very apt, when surrounded by associates, and borne away with juvenile excitement, to forget those admonitions which parental love and faithfulness have instilled. How deeply reprehensible is such conduct in the light of that holy precept which says, "honor thy father and thy mother!" Could a greater dishonor be put upon parental authority, than practically to despise it because, under the circumstances, it cannot be enforced? Is there not an eye which is never withdrawn from the heart and the conduct—the steady gaze of omniscience—which marks the defect of principle in the young heart, and notices every aberration of moral conduct? If the parent be not there to chide; if his voice of authority cannot be heard; is not God there? and speaks not conscience some poignant rebukes? The divine law is as obligatory in solitude and among boon companions, as when the subject of it is seated at the fireside, or takes his place at the paternal board. No matter how far distant from home the child may be, he should scrupulously obey God's holy commandment, requiring him under all circumstances to honor his parents. The code of domestic morals should be engraven on his heart, and no temptations or solicitations, no threats or jibes, should be allowed to compel him into its violation.

Finally: The obedience which we are considering, requires that the child conscientiously do what the parent or guardian is known to approve, even where no express command or prohibition has been given.

In the constant change of circumstances, and in the occurrence of incidents modifying filial duty, it is not possible that a parent can have a rule which shall invariably apply, or issue a command in time to meet every exigency. And here lies the great test of filial respect and obedience. There is a domestic morality which is soon understood by the child; and this, together with his own sense of what is right and proper, will enable him to judge and decide in all such cases. The parent or guardian has not given an express command—the circumstance is new—the temptation perhaps presses the child to do wrong. Now, if that child shall say, "My father or mother has not forbidden

this very thing. If they had, I would not think of doing it. I may for this once indulge." When a child argues thus in favor of the tempter's schemes, knowing at the same time how mournfully a knowledge of the act must strike on his parent's heart, that child has not within it the principle of filial obedience. God looks down upon him with stern disapprobation, for violating that holy precept, "honor thy father and thy mother."

But, on the other hand, if the child say: "Well, though my parent has not given, for this particular act, an express command, still I know it will be displeasing to him. Shall I then, for a momentary gratification, incur his displeasure and wound his heart? I will not do it. The fear of God and respect for a parent's feelings shall in this instance govern me." Here is a beautiful exemplification of the very spirit of filial respect and obedience. This is compliance with the command in question; and he who exhibits such a temper is, I might almost venture to predict, not far from the kingdom of heaven.

The respect and obedience which is thus enforced by a divine precept, is obligatory principally during a state of minority. But if *then* it be rendered, it will assuredly modify the conduct of subsequent years. When the lapse of time shall have changed the relative position of the parties, and they who were children have become men and women, there is little room to fear that a venerable parent will be neglected or forgotten. Time may have abated the sensible emotion; or, as Providence would have it, new relations may have called forth new and stronger affections; but what is taken from the *force* of the current is added to its depth; and filial respect is never more cordially rendered than after the obligations of filial obedience have ceased.

What a lovely picture does Virgil present to us in his description of the sacking of Troy! His hero proposes to abandon the city now wrapt in flames and ready to fall and bury its remaining inhabitants beneath its ruins. But his venerated sire is incapable of flight. Age has intimidated his heart and weakened his limbs; nor is it easy to persuade him that a life so nearly wasted is worth the effort to preserve it. But Eneas will not stir from the spot until his father consents to accompany him. Filial affection overpowers all his fears. The old man is, at last, prevailed upon to resign himself to the conduct of his son, who, receiving him upon his shoulders, with the boy on one hand, and the wife following close in the rear, he treads the fiery avenues until he reaches the place of safety. This touching scene is from the pen of a heathen, but is worthy the inspiration of a christian poet.

Respect for the aged is a criterion of character. He who has it not, lacks an essential element of social happiness; and he who proceeds to positive acts of contempt or neglect—especially where strong filial obligations exist—must expect to incur the vengeance of heaven and the indignation of a virtuous community.

"Honor thy father and thy mother," is a precept, as much in accordance with the dictates of nature as it is with a sentiment of reli-

gion. Hence the reward of compliance has a respect to the reception of good in this life. Can any doubt that such good *will* be awarded? That sense of right which always attends a course of virtuous action is of itself reward enough. Has not many a child felt it, when in a spirit of prompt and cheerful obedience, it has met the wishes of an affectionate parent? See in the sweet smile of conscious happiness, that gilds its young face, and which is reflected by an answering smile from the gratified parent, how certainly virtue is its own reward. How unlike the sullen selfish cloud that darkens the face of disobedience, and makes the heart sad and heavy for hours! Is the known pleasure of the parent no recompense? Is there nothing in the approving eye, or the fond kiss, to repay the affectionate regards?

There is a reward also in the approbation of the good. Filial respect and obedience have always elicited admiration. The opposite course has invariably branded its perpetrator with infamy. Can the young heart be insensible to this universal sentiment? A scrupulous regard to the obligation of the fifth commandment, is not only in itself a lovely exhibition of juvenile character, but is accepted as a recommendation of no ordinary value, by those who are seeking alliances of a business or domestic kind. It is on the youth whose *home* virtues are strongly developed, that the sagacious eye of the public fixes, as the candidate for the honors and felicities even of this world; and no young person can more effectually foreclose all prospect of success in the pursuits of honorable distinction, than by trampling on parental authority, or treating with disrespect the authors of his existence. On this subject, there is even in this life both a reward and a retribution.

4. But finally, God has said to those who comply with this command, "Thy days shall be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Here is a promise of temporal life not less emphatic than the promises of a life to come. It may have respected originally that peculiar people, the Jews, and have looked to the practice of the domestic virtues when settled in that goodly land to which they were traveling. But is there any thing in the circumstances of that ancient nation which authorizes us to confine the obligation to them? And if the command apply to us and to all, as without doubt it does—shall not the reward annexed to compliance, be in some sense of equally extensive application? That it will assuredly and in every case be bestowed, we may not be at liberty to assert; but we may say, that he who fulfils the obligation, has a right unpresumptuously to expect the reward. This is not leaving faith and going over to the doctrine of works. I am speaking, it must be remembered, of *temporal* rewards. But suppose the individual complying, find an early grave. In that case, though his days may not be long in point of time, they may be in point of practical wisdom. They may be also as to the amount of felicity enjoyed. And, long or short, when they shall have been numbered, it will at least be no matter of regret, in the closing scene, to have practised the filial virtues; whilst on the other hand,

a consciousness of unfaithfulness towards a beloved parent, must plant an additional thorn in the dying pillow.

How signally has Almighty God set the mark of his displeasure on filial disobedience! The elder sons of Jacob treated their venerable sire in a manner calculated to bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Was not this act of filial perfidy sorely punished? The sons of Eli too; mark their conduct and their end! A rebellious Absalom soon met the fate, which his unnatural crimes had merited. Are these the only instances of heaven's just retribution for filial impiety? By no means. Could the history of thousands who have died in dishonor or by violence be revealed, it would show, I have no doubt, a relation between their filial unfaithfulness and their wretched end. On the other hand, how close is the connection between the practice of the domestic virtues and a life of honor and of felicity.

On this point also, the scriptures are not deficient in impressive illustration.

In what an attractive light do they present the character and conduct of Joseph? In him, the virtues of filial respect and affection were early developed, and remained in full force amid the vicissitudes of his eventful life. They beat warmly in his bosom throughout his long exile; nor could the extremes of human suffering and grandeur extinguish them. One of the first inquiries on revealing himself to his brethren was, "Doth my father yet live?" Upon ascertaining the fact, he exclaims, "Haste ye and go up to my father and say unto him, thus saith thy son Joseph; God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not, and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, and there will I nourish thee. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither." When the aged patriarch drew nigh to Egypt, "Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet his father, and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." Is there no connection to be traced between this filial piety, and the long and happy life which the honored viceroy of Egypt was permitted to enjoy?

But a still more illustrious example remains. The divine Savior voluntarily subjected himself to domestic government. He put on the weakness of infancy, and passed the gradations of childhood and youth, to maturity beneath the paternal roof. The evangelist Luke expressly says, "He went down with his parents, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." Who cannot discover in this an instructive lesson for the young! The weight of this example is to be estimated by the dignity of the Son of God. To illustrate and enforce one of his own commands, he exchanges the position of the sovereign for that of the subject. What an honor has thus been put upon the domestic government! Behold also this Savior on the cross! When the human nature was writhing under the death pang—when all his thoughts might be supposed to have been absorbed in

his own sufferings, or in the sublime object for which they were endured, he could still feel and express an interest for one whose heart was pierced with the same spear which pierced his own. Turning on the beloved disciple his dying eye, he says, "Behold thy mother." What youthful bosom can be insensible to such an instance of filial respect and affection, exhibited by such a being and under such circumstances?

O then, let me urge upon the young of this congregation, by all the arguments which have been adduced, the importance of a sacred regard to parental authority and influence. The name of father has a high and solemn import; for it has been appropriated even by Jehovah himself. To treat it with practical disrespect, involves the double guilt of rebellion against the family government and the government of God. And the name of mother; what shall we say of that? Can any other word express so much disinterested affection? How many tender images of the past does it suggest! What a weight of obligation lies in that word, *mother!* How black must be the heart that can repay all her kindness with ingratitude or neglect! Whilst you have it in your power to do honor to your parents, fail not to render it. Soon their venerable forms will have sunk into the grave. What you can do for the promotion of their happiness must be done soon, or left undone. If conscience accuse you of sin in this respect, and something whispers of reparation and confession, make haste to heal the wounds which your conduct has inflicted, and to ask forgiveness of them and of your God. With some, the possibility of craving forgiveness for filial disrespect is gone forever. So will soon go the opportunity for asking God's forgiveness. Is it the displeasure of an earthly father only that we have incurred? Has there been no high handed rebellion against God? Is not unfaithfulness in the one case, indicative of sin in the other? Has not God's holy law, in every instance of filial disobedience, been trampled under foot? According to that law, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The awful penalty is death eternal. That penalty hangs over every sinner's soul. And fall upon him it must, unless he take shelter beneath the cross of Christ. There, and there *only* can he escape its infliction.