

THE FAMILY DUTY

BY

JOHN BUNYAN

Copyright (Public Domain)

www.reformedontheweb.com/home/.html

(Reformed on the Web)

THE FAMILY DUTY

BY

JOHN BUNYAN

DUTIES OF THE MASTER OF A FAMILY.

If thou have under thee a family, then thou art to consider the several relations thou standest under; and art to know, that thou in each of them hast a work to do for God, and that he expecteth thy faithful deportment under every one of them. As, in general;

A FATHER'S DUTY TO THE FAMILY IN GENERAL.

He that is the master of a family, he hath, as under that relation, a work to do for God; to wit, the right governing of his own family. And his work is twofold.

First, Touching the *spiritual state thereof*.

Second, Touching the *outward state thereof*.

First, As touching the *spiritual state of his family*; he ought to be very diligent and circumspect, doing his utmost endeavor both to increase faith where it is begun, and to begin it where it is not. Wherefore, to this end, he ought diligently and frequently to lay before his household such things of God, out of his word, as are suitable for each particular. And let no man question his rule in the word of God for such a practice; for if the thing itself were but of good report, and a thing tending to civil honesty, it is within the compass and bounds even of nature itself, and ought to be done; much more things of a higher nature; besides, the apostle exhorts us to ‘Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, and of good report, to think of them,’ that is, to be mindful to do them (Philippians 4:8). But to be conversant in this godly exercise in our family, is very worthy of praise, and doth much become all Christians. This is one of the things for which God so

highly commended his servant Abraham, and that with which his heart was so much affected. I know Abraham, saith God, 'I know him' to be a good man in very deed, for 'he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord' (Genesis 18:19). This was a thing also which good Joshua designed should be his practice as long as he had a breathing time in this world. 'As for me,' saith he, I 'and my household, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15).

Further, we find also in the New Testament, that they are looked upon as Christians of an inferior rank that have not a due regard to this duty; yea, so inferior as not fit to be chosen to any office in the church of God. A [bishop or] pastor must be one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? 'The deacon' also, saith he, must 'be the husband of one wife, ruling their children, and their own house well' (1 Timothy 3). Mark a little, the apostle seems to lay down thus much, that a man that governs his family well, hath one qualification belonging to a pastor or deacon in the house of God, for he that knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Which thing considered, it giveth us light into the work of the master of a family, touching the governing of his house.

1. A pastor must be sound and uncorrupt in his doctrine; and indeed so must the master of a family (Titus 1:9; Ephesians 6:4).
2. A pastor should be apt to teach, to reprove, and to exhort; and so should the master of a family (1 Timothy 3:2; Deuteronomy 6:7).
3. A pastor must himself be exemplary in faith and holiness; and so also should the master of a family (1 Timothy 3:2-4; 4:12). 'I,' saith David, 'will behave myself in a perfect way; I will walk in,' or before, 'my house with a perfect heart' (Psalm 101:2).
4. The pastor is for getting the church together; and when they are so come together, then to pray among them, and to preach unto them. This is also commendable in Christian masters of families.

Objection: But my family is ungodly and unruly, touching all that is good.

What shall I do?

Answer: 1. Though this be true, yet thou must rule them, and not they thee! Thou are set over them of God, and thou art to use the authority which God hath given thee, both to rebuke their vice, and to show them the evil of their rebelling against the Lord. This did Eli, though not enough; and thus did David (1 Samuel 2:24, 25; 1 Chronicles 28:9). Also, thou must tell them how sad thy state was when thou wast in their condition, and so labor to recover them out of the snare of the devil (Mark 5:19).

2. Thou oughtest also to labor to draw them forth to God's public worship, if peradventure God may convert their souls. Saith Jacob to his household, and to all that were about him, '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' (Genesis 35:3). Hannah would carry Samuel to Shiloh, that he might abide with God for ever (1 Samuel 1:22). Indeed a soul rightly touched, will labor to draw, not only their families, but a whole city after Jesus Christ (John 4:28-30).

3. If they are obstinate, and will not go forth with thee, then do thou get godly and sound men to thy house, and there let the word of God be preached, when thou hast, as Cornelius, gathered thy family and friends together (Acts 10).

You know that the jailor, Lydia, Crispus, Gaius, Stephanus, and others, had not only themselves, but their families, made gracious by the word preached, and that some of them, if not all, by the word preached in their houses (Acts 16:14-34; Acts 18:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 1:16). And this, for ought I know, might be one reason among many, why the apostles taught in their day, not only publicly, but from house to house; I say, that they might, if possible, bring in those in some family, which yet remained unconverted, and in their sins (Acts 10:24; Acts 20:20, 21). For some, you know how usual it was in the day of Christ, to invite him to their houses, if they had any afflicted, that either would not or could not come unto him (Luke 7:2, 3; Luke 8:41). If this be the way with those that have outward diseases in their families, how much more then, where there are souls that have need of Christ, to save them from death and eternal damnation!

4. Take heed that thou do not neglect family duties among them thyself; as, reading the word and prayer; if thou hast one in thy family that is gracious, take encouragement; nay, if thou art alone, yet know that thou hast both liberty to go to God through Christ, and also art at that time in a capacity of

having the universal church join with thee for the whole number of those that shall be saved.

5. Take heed that thou suffer not any ungodly, profane, or heretical books, or discourse in thy house. ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners’ (1 Corinthians 15:33). I mean such profane or heretical books, etc., as either tend to provoke to looseness of life, or such as do oppose the fundamentals of the gospel. I know that Christians must be allowed their liberty as to things indifferent; but for those things that strike either at faith or holiness, they ought to be abandoned by all Christians, and especially by the pastors of churches, and masters of families; which practice was figured out by Jacob’s commanding his house, and all that was with him, to put away the strange gods from among them, and to change their garments (Genesis 35:2). All those in the Acts set a good example for this, who took their curious books and burned them before all men, though they were worth fifty thousand pieces of silver (Acts 19:18, 19). The neglect of this fourth particular hath occasioned ruin in many families, both among children and servants. It is easier for vain talkers, and their deceivable works, to subvert whole households, than many are aware of (Titus 1:10, 11). Thus much touching the spiritual state of thy household. And now to its outward.

Second, Touching the *outward state of thy family*, thou art to consider these three things.

1. That it lieth upon thee to care for them that they have a convenient livelihood.

‘If any man provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel’ (1 Timothy 5:8).

But mark, when the Word saith, thou art to provide for thy house, it giveth thee no license to distracting carefulness; neither doth it allow thee to strive to grasp the world in thy heart, or coffers, nor to take care for years or days to come, but so to provide for them, that they may have food and raiment; and if either they or thou be not content with that, you launch out beyond the rule of God (1 Timothy 6:8; Matthew 6:34). This is to labor, that you may have wherewith ‘to maintain good works for necessary uses’ (Titus 3:14). And never object, that unless you reach farther, it will never do; for that is but

unbelief. The word saith, ‘That God feedeth ravens, careth for sparrows, and clotheth the grass;’ in which three, to feed, clothe, and care for, is as much as heart can wish (Luke 12:6-28).

2. Therefore though thou shouldest provide for thy family; yet let all thy labor be mixed with moderation; ‘Let your moderation be known unto all men’ (Philippians 4:5). Take heed of driving so hard after this world, as to hinder thyself and family from those duties towards God, which thou art by grace obliged to; as private prayer, reading the scriptures, and Christian conference. It is a base thing for men so to spend themselves and families after this world, as that they disengage their heart to God’s worship.

Christians,

‘The time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away’ 1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

Many Christians live and do in this world, as if religion were but a bybusiness, and this world the one thing necessary; when indeed all the things of this world are but things by the by; and religion only the one thing needful (Luke 10:40-42).

3. If thou wouldst be such a master of a family as becomes thee, thou must see that there be that Christian harmony among those under thee, as becomes that house where one ruleth that feareth God.

(1.) Thou must look that thy children and servants be under subjection to the word of God; for though it is of God only to rule the heart, yet he expecteth that thou shouldest rule their outward man; which if thou dost not, he may in a short time cut off all they stock, [even every male] (1 Samuel 3:11-14). See therefore that thou keep them temperate in all things, in apparel, in language, that they be not gluttons, nor drunkards; not suffering either thy children vainly to domineer over thy servants, nor they again to carry themselves foolishly towards each other.

(2.) Learn to distinguish between that injury that in thy family is

done to thee, and that which is done to God; and though thou oughtest to be very zealous for the Lord, and to bear nothing that is open transgression to him; yet here will be thy wisdom, to pass by personal injuries, and to bury them in oblivion: ‘Love covereth a multitude of sins.’ Be not then like those that will rage and stare like madmen, when they are injured; and yet either laugh, or at least not soberly rebuke, and warn, when God is dishonored.

‘Rule thy own house well, having thy children — with others in thy family — in subjection, with all gravity’ (1 Timothy 3:4).

Solomon was so excellent sometimes this way, that he made the eyes of his beholders to dazzle (2 Chronicles 9:3, 4).^[1] But to break off from this general, and to come to particulars.

DUTY IN RELATION TO THE WIFE.

Hast thou a wife? Thou must consider how thou oughtest to behave thyself under that relation: and to do this aright, thou must consider the condition of thy wife, whether she be one that indeed believeth or not.

First, If she believeth, then,

1. Thou art engaged to bless God for her: ‘For her price is far above rubies, and she is the gift of God unto thee, and is for thy adorning and glory’ Proverbs 12:4; Proverbs 31:10; 1 Corinthians 11:7).

‘Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised’ (Proverbs 31:30).

2. Thou oughtest to love her, under a double consideration:

(1.) As she is thy flesh and thy bone: ‘For no man ever yet hated his own flesh’ (Ephesians 5:29).

(2.) As she is together with thee an heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). This, I say, should engage thee to love her with Christian love; to love her, as believing you both are dearly beloved of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and as those that must be together with him in eternal happiness.

3. Thou oughtest so to carry thyself to and before her, as doth Christ to and before his church; as saith the apostle: So ought men to love their wives, 'even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Ephesians 5:25). When husbands behave themselves like husbands indeed, then will they be not only husbands, but such an ordinance of God to the wife, as will preach to her the carriage of Christ to his spouse. There is a sweet scent wrapped up in the relations of husbands and wives, that believe (Ephesians 4:32); the wife, I say, signifying the church, and the husband the head and savior thereof,

'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church' (Ephesians 5:23).

and he is the Savior of the body.

This is one of God's chief ends in instituting marriage, that Christ and his church, under a figure, might be wherever there is a couple that believe through grace. Wherefore that husband that carrieth it undiscreetly towards his wife, he doth not only behave himself contrary to the rule, but also maketh his wife lose the benefit of such an ordinance, and crosseth the mystery of his relation.

Therefore, I say,

'So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:' (Ephesians 5:8, 29).

Christ laid out his life for his church, covereth her infirmities, communicates to her his wisdom, protecteth her, and helpeth her in her employments in this world; and so ought men to do for their wives. Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter had the art of thus doing, as you may see in the book of Canticles. Wherefore bear with their weaknesses, help their infirmities, and honor them as the weaker vessels, and as being of a fraailer constitution (1 Peter 3:7).

In a word, be such a husband to thy believing wife, that she may say, God hath not only given me a husband, but such a husband as preacheth to me every day the carriage of Christ to his church.

Second, If thy wife be unbelieving or carnal, then thou hast also a duty lying

before thee, which thou art engaged to perform under a double engagement:

- 1.** For that she lieth liable every moment to eternal damnation.
- 2.** That she is thy wife that is in this evil case.

Oh! how little sense of the worth of souls is there in the heart of some husbands; as is manifest by their unchristian carriage to and before their wives! Now, to qualify thee for a carriage suitable,

- 1.** Labor seriously after a sense of her miserable state, that thy bowels may yearn towards her soul.
- 2.** Beware that she take no occasion from any unseemly carriage of thine, to proceed in evil. And here thou hast need to double thy diligence, for she lieth in thy bosom, and therefore is capable of espying the least miscarriage in thee.
- 3.** If she behave herself unseemly and unruly, as she is subject to do, being Christless and graceless, then labor thou to overcome her evil with thy goodness, her forwardness with thy patience and meekness. It is a shame for thee, who hast another principle, to do as she.
- 4.** Take fit opportunities to convince her. Observe her disposition, and when she is most likely to bear, then speak to her very heart.
- 5.** When thou speakest, speak to purpose. It is no matter for many words, provided they be pertinent. Job in a few words answers his wife, and takes her off from her foolish talking: ‘Thou speakest,’ saith he,

‘as one of the foolish women. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?’ (Job 2:10).

- 6.** Let all be done without rancour, or the least appearance of anger:

‘In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if – peradventure they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will’ (2 Timothy 2:25, 26).

‘And how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?’ (1 Corinthians 7:16).

DUTY OF PARENTS TO CHILDREN.

If thou are a parent, a father, or a mother, then thou art to consider thy calling under this relation.

Thy children have souls, and they must be begotten of God as well as of thee, or they perish. And know also, that unless thou be very circumspect in thy behavior to and before them, they may perish through thee: the thoughts of which should provoke thee, both to *instruct*, and also to *correct* them.

First, To *instruct* them as the scripture saith, and to ‘bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord’; and to do this diligently, ‘when thou sittest in thine house — when thou liest down, and when thou risest up’ (Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:7).

Now to do this to purpose:

1. Do it in terms and words easy to be understood: affect not high expressions, they will drown your children. Thus God spake to his children (Hosea 12:10), and Paul to his (1 Corinthians 3:2).

2. Take heed of filling their heads with whimsies, and unprofitable notions, for this will sooner learn them to be malapert and proud, than sober and humble. Open therefore to them the state of man by nature; discourse with them of sin, of death, and hell; of a crucified Savior, and the promise of life through faith:

‘Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it’ (Proverbs 22:6).

3. There must be much gentleness and patience in all thy instructions, ‘lest they be discouraged’ (Colossians 3:21). And,

4. Labor to convince them by a conversation answerable, that the things of which thou instructest them are not fables, but realities; yea, and realities so far above what can be here enjoyed, that all things, were they a thousand times better than they are, are not worthy to be compared with the glory and worthiness of these things.^[2]

Isaac was so holy before his children, that when Jacob remembered God, he

remembered that he was ‘the Fear of his father Isaac’ (Genesis 31:53).

Ah! when children can think of their parents, and bless God for that instruction and good they have received from them, this is not only profitable for children, but honorable, and comfortable to parents:

‘The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him’ (Proverbs 23:24, 25).

Second, The duty of *correction*.

1. See if fair words will win them from evil. This is God’s way with his children (Jeremiah 25:4, 5).
2. Let those words you speak to them in your reproof, be both sober, few, and pertinent, adding always some suitable sentence of the scripture therewith; as, if they lie, then such as (Revelation 21:8, 27). If they refuse to hear the word, such as (2 Chronicles 25:14-16).
3. Look to them, that they be not companions with those that are rude and ungodly; showing with soberness a continual dislike of their naughtiness; often crying out to them, as God did of old unto his, ‘Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate’ (Jeremiah 44:4).
4. Let all this be mixed with such love, pity, and compunction of spirit, that if possible they may be convinced you dislike not their persons, but their sins. This is God’s way (Psalm 99:8).
5. Be often endeavoring to fasten on their consciences the day of their death, and judgment to come. Thus also God deals with his (Deuteronomy 32:29).
6. If thou art driven to the rod, then strike advisedly in cool blood, and soberly show them,
 - (1.) their fault;
 - (2.) how much it is against thy heart thus to deal with them;
 - (3.) and that what thou dost, thou dost in conscience to God, and love to their souls;
 - (4.) and tell them, that if fair means would have done, none of this severity should have been.

This, I have proved it, will be a means to afflict their hearts as well as their bodies; and it being the way that God deals with his, it is the most likely to accomplish its end.

7. Follow all this with prayer to God for them, and leave the issue to him:

'Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him' (Proverbs 22:15).

Lastly, Observe these *cautions*,

- 1.** Take heed that the misdeeds for which thou correctest thy children be not learned them by thee. Many children learn that wickedness of their parents for which they beat and chastise them.
- 2.** Take heed thou smile not upon them, to encourage them in small faults, lest that thy carriage to them be an encouragement to them to commit greater.
- 3.** Take heed thou use not unsavoury and unseemly words in thy chastising of them, as railing, miscalling, and the like: this is devilish.
- 4.** Take heed thou do not use them to many chiding words and threatenings, mixed with lightness and laughter; this will harden. Speak not much, nor often, but pertinent to them with all gravity.^[3]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The queen of Sheba was as much or more delighted with the order, harmony, and happiness of Solomon's household than she was with all his splendor and magnificence. It is to this Bunyan refers in this quotation. — Ed.

[2] 'Though the words of the wise — are as nails fastened by the master of assemblies (Ecclesiastes 12:11) yet sure their examples are the hammer to drive them in to take the deeper hold. A father that whipt his son for swearing, and swore himself while he whipt him, did more harm by his example than good by his correction.' — *Fuller's Holy State*, p. 11 — .Ed.

[3] How exceedingly admirable are all these scriptural directions, warnings, and cautions. Happy are those parents and their children where such wisdom is manifested in that painful duty of administering counsel and correction. — Ed.

This material was taken from John Bunyan's '*Christian Behavior*'