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A
SYSTEM
OF
FAMILY DUTY,

CONTAINING
THE DUTY WHICH HUSBANDS, WIVES, PARENTS, AND
CHILDREN, OWE TO EACH OTHER, IN THEIR
RESPECTIVE SITUATIONS.

WITH AN
APPENDIX :

CONTAINING
I. AN ADDRESS TO HUSBANDS AND WIVES.—II. AN ADDRESS
TO PARENTS.—III. AN ADDRESS TO CHILDREN.

TO WHICH IS NOW ADDED,
A SERMON TO CHILDREN.

~~~~~  
BY SAMUEL DAVIES, A. M.  
~~~~~

AND A PLAIN AND SERIOUS ADDRESS TO THE
MASTER OF A FAMILY.

ON THE IMPORTANT SUBJECT OF
FAMILY RELIGION.

~~~~~  
BY PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D. D.  
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TO
FAMILY DUTY

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FAMILY DUTY.

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SYSTEM

OF

FAMILY DUTY.*

DISCOURSE I.

GENESIS, Chap. ii. verse 24.

Therefore shall a man leave his father, and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

WHEN God had created man upon the earth, perceiving that it was not good for man to be alone, he proceeded to form the other sex. And having capacitated them for social intercourse, and happy society in an early period of their existence, instituted the connexion of husband and wife: a connexion very wisely calculated, and happy in its consequences.

* The Author of the following subject was not known to the publisher; therefore his name is not inserted in the title page.

B

It contributes, not only, to the individual happiness of the parties immediately concerned; but also, to public peace, and felicity.

It secures the protection, nourishment, and support of children, while in their helpless state; and provides for their being led in the peaceful paths of future bliss.

But in whatever relation, or connexion, we are situated in the present life, there are certain relative duties to be performed, as the necessary means of our fully participating in the sweets of such connexion.

The duties relating to this connexion, are in the sacred scriptures, pointed out with great accuracy, and plainness.

The husband and wife in their respective provinces, may thence learn what is incumbent on them; and what is the way to that mutual felicity which their intimate connexion proposes.

But the principal object of this discourse, is, to illustrate, more particularly, the incumbent duties of a husband, towards his wife: to which our text has apparent reference.

In the present depraved state of this world, instances too frequently occur, in which persons inconsiderately conceive that marriage is simply an object of will; and the subsequent conduct of the parties, towards each other, things of mere discretion. And, that the scriptures, nor religion, have any immediate interference, control, or superintendence in the business.

From such ideas, are liable to proceed many irregularities, which may prove very prejudicial both to the parties connected, and the peace of community.

It may, therefore, pertinently be observed, that marriage is a very solemn contract; that it is a divine institution; and that all its appendages are holden under the particular cognizance and dominion of the sacred scriptures.

To these must we ever have recourse, as the unerring rule, in determining what is the real import of the marriage covenant. And, from these only, can we determine with precision what is incumbent on the husband or the wife, in that relation.

In our investigations, therefore, of the present subject, we shall do well, to have our eye fixed on the scriptures, as our pole star, and sure guide.

From these it appears, that in the divine arrangement of things, superiority was given to the man: yet, that it was not the design of his great Creator, that he should exercise a tyrannic control, over his female companion; but treat her on the principle of equality, as a joint associate in the common scenes of life.

The sum of duty, in all the relations which we may sustain, whether with our Maker, or fellow creatures, is comprised in love. "*Love is the fulfilling of the law.*"

Agreeably to this, the duty of a husband, in relation to his wife, is frequently inculcated in this general term, "*Husbands, love your wives.*"

But this virtue, which in the scriptures is urged on different occasions, and towards different objects, has by the learned generally been defined, as being of two kinds, 'love of complaisance; and love of benevolence, or compassion:' the former of which supposes a delight, or well-pleas'dness, in the object beloved; but the latter, simply a desire for the good, or wellbeing of the object, without any delight or complaisance in it.

These two kinds of love are considered as applying to the two general descriptions of men, the virtuous and the vicious.

But husbands are required to love their wives, indiscriminately, whether virtuous or vicious: and some of them appear not to merit complaisance, and approbation; but the displeasure of their husbands.

This inquiry, therefore, comes forward, 'What kind of love are husbands bound to exercise in such cases? a love of complaisance; or simply a love of compassion: the same which we may and ought to exercise towards the vilest persons, and even the worst of enemies.'

To this inquiry, the great gospel injunction replies, "*Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.*"

Christ loved the church, not merely with a love of compassion; but with peculiar delight, and complaisance.

To render this business familiar and plain, it remains that we seek for some definition of love more

intelligible, and which may pertinently apply in all cases.

The exercise of love is ascribed to different beings—And different characters are the subjects of it. God is said to love the righteous. He is also said to love the world. Christians are required to love their brethren. They are also required to love their enemies, and those who hate them. Husbands are required to love their wives; and parents their children.

In all these different cases, *love is one*, and the same thing, exercised upon different objects; and for different reasons.

'*Love is an exercise of complaisance, or delight in some object on account, of some conceived property; or some calculation in that object, suited to promote good, and happiness.*'

Agreeably to this definition, when God is said to love the righteous, it is an expression of his complaisance, or delight in their good moral properties. When he is said to love the world, it is an expression of his complaisance, not in good moral properties; but in a calculation, or suitedness in it, to answer good, and happy ends.

When he had created the world and all its objects, he pronounced them all very good; not because they all possessed moral beauty; but because they were all calculated to answer the end for which they were made: for this reason he took delight in them.

In like manner, when men are required to love their Maker, or their fellow christians, they are required to exercise complaisance in their moral virtues. But when they are required to love their fellow men in general, and even their enemies, in whom no moral beauties appear, they are required to exercise complaisance, and take delight in those properties, and natural calculation in them, suited to effect good and valuable purposes.

In the exercise of love towards objects, men may be either selfish, or benevolent, accordingly as they regard supremely, a private or general happiness. If general happiness be the supreme object, to which private happiness is duly subordinated; that is a truly benevolent exercise. But if instead of this, private happiness have the pre-eminence, the act is selfish and destitute of true virtue.

In all the divine requisitions upon men, to exercise love, it is conceived that benevolent love is required.

The foregoing general definition of love, if just, may serve as a clew, to our rightly understanding the true import of that love which is required in the conjugal relation.

It is very presumable that husbands, however close their connexion, are not required to delight in their wife's foibles, or to exercise complaisance in their moral blemishes. But they are required to love, and delight in their persons, accordingly as there may appear, in them, agreeable properties, or

a capacity for accomplishing good and happy purposes. The general direction is to love them, as *Christ loved the Church.*

Christ loves the church, not only for the beautiful and amiable properties of her moral character; but also on the account of a certain capacity, or suitedness which he discovers in her, for accomplishing great good, and happiness in a near, and intimate connexion with himself. The inspired Apostle intimates, that *Christ loved, and even died for us* (that is, the church) while we were yet enemies. In this situation, no moral beauties, or amiable properties, could appear.

The connexion between Christ and his church is very strong; and is contributive to great, and very important ends. Those properties, therefore, or capacity, which he discovers in his people, suited to effect these ends, secure his particular attention.

The connexion between husband, and wife, is also very strong and their union very close. It is said, "*they are no more twain; but one flesh.*"

Very important, may be the consequences, attending this connexion. Those properties, therefore, or that capacity, which may be found in a wife, suited to produce happiness, cannot but merit, if not obtain, the attention and approbation of her husband.

Even the external bodily properties; a beautiful countenance, an amiable structure; and a constitution happily suited to please her husband, and increase his present felicity, are objects of no small value, in this intimate connexion.

But where these are found in alliance with a natural sweetness of temper, and pleasantness of disposition, the foundation for happiness must be still enlarged.

And, if there be found, in addition to all these, a truly pious, benevolent, soul; the obligation upon the husband, to love, and exercise complaisance, must be redoubled.

The love of Christ towards his church leads him to overlook, in her many foibles, imperfections and even criminal offences; and to encourage, strengthen, protect, and support her, from day to day.

This, in the scriptures, is holden up as a sampler for husbands in the treatment of their wives.

And this love, enjoined on husbands, from the example of Christ, if pursued to its proper length, would be productive of all that tender care, and those kind offices, which in the scriptures are inculcated on husbands, as duties towards their wives.

But, the subject requires that we point out, in a manner more particular, what are some of those things in practice, which are incumbent on husbands in this relation.

We find in the example of our divine Redeemer, not only the exercise of love in general, towards his church, but all the happy fruits of that amiable principle, flowing forth in their proper place.

Those particular offices belonging to a husband, are ascertainable not only from the examples of Christ; but also from various passages in the sacred scriptures,

We proceed then, in this way to observe; that when a man has taken a wife, it becomes a duty indispensable on him that he dwell with her.

Christ dwells with his church. He leaves her not comfortless.

The apostolic injunction to husbands is that they dwell with their wives, according to knowledge.

A wife, by her connexion, is constituted a member of the same family, with her husband; is therefore to be embraced, and treated as one in the most intimate society. She is not to be abandoned or forsaken by him at pleasure; but has a rightful challenge upon the first seat in the catalogue of his intimates, for social amusement.

A husband may, it is readily conceived, under certain circumstances, be called in the pursuit of his lawful business, to a long absence from his companion. And this may consist, entirely, with his exercising a becoming regard for her wellbeing; and estimating her society as a first object of his earthly enjoyment.

But, when a husband designedly forsakes the society of his wife, and refuses the duty of marriage, he violates that solemn contract in which he is bound unto her.

It is likewise incumbent on a husband as a duty towards his wife, that he provide for her comfortable subsistence.

That wives might receive a becoming support at their husband's hands, provision was anciently made,

in the Jewish ritual. And in conformity to that sacred institution, the apostle Paul adjoins, "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an Infidel.*"

A very full and plain intimation that the office of providing for wife and family was devolved on the husband.

By this, however, we conceive is not intended, that wives should be supported in mere idleness; exercising no care; nor making any exertions for the family weal.

The woman was made to be an help for the man, in all the cares and concerns of life.

And, though she have a province allotted her different from that of the man; still, there is to be a joint exertion, in this common interest.

It is doubtless incumbent on a wife, that she with care and diligence, improve those materials for family support, which may be committed to her intrustment.

It appears from the very make and constitution of the man, to have been the design of his maker, that, in the common labours of life, the lead of business, and the front of the battle, should be his lot. In assigning, therefore, to the different sexes their respective shares in the calamities of life; God says to the man, "*In the sweat of thy face, shall thou eat bread.*"

As it is ordained that the desire of the wife should be unto her husband, and that he should rule over her; so also is it ordained, that he should take her under his protection, and provide, according to the best of his ability, those things which make for her support, and comfort in life.

In this place, let it be observed, that the husband should consult the comfort, and happiness of his wife, even as his own. Such, indeed, is the tenour of their connexion; that, while he consults her happiness, by gratifying her wishes, and accomplishing her rational desires, his own, is of necessity involved.

It highly, then, becomes a husband, even from selfish, as well as benevolent motives, very attentively to observe and perform all those kind offices, which contribute to the real comfort, pleasure, and felicity of his wife. This will secure to himself a certain pleasing sensation, exhibit to his wife a good example for her improvement, and be the most ready method to preserve her approbation, confidence, and esteem.

The man who possesses that noble, generous spirit which ought to inspire the breast of every husband will be excited by a laudable ambition to seek, not only, those things which are simply necessary, for the comfort and support of his wife in time of sickness, trouble, and distress; but those things also which may serve to encourage, comfort, and please, in time of prosperity.

Distinguished complaisance, and respect are also due from a husband, as duty towards his wife.

Civility, and respectful treatment towards people of every rank, is very desirable, and becoming. But, however men may be disposed to treat others, they should not be negligent in rendering that becoming tribute of respect, which is due to those whom they have once acknowledged as being entitled to their first esteem.

A compliance with duty in this respect would contribute, not only to excite pleasing sensations in a wife, and secure her good will; but also, to secure the peace and respectability of the family: and even the husband's own dignity.

Great respect is shown by Christ towards his church. And surprising is the honour which he has bestowed upon her.

In conformity to this, husbands are required to honour their wives. And the happy effects of this interesting duty are liable not to be confined to the narrow limits of a single family; but to diffuse a pleasing favour, even throughout an extensive community.

With the greatest propriety, then, may this be inculcated, on rational beings, formed for social felicity, as a duty of no inconsiderable magnitude: seeing it is so friendly to peace, and happiness, both at home and abroad.

The ways for expressing our respectful feelings are almost innumerable.—Many things, in human conduct, under certain circumstances, may be very expressive of respect, or the contrary; which, under

different circumstances, might be of small consideration.

Husbands who wish for a rich harvest of conjugal sweets should very sacredly observe all those rites which most intelligibly express a becoming respect for their wives; and not wholly pass without notice those less momentous things, which may be construed into neglect, and give displeasure.

It is incumbent on husbands, as duty towards their wives that *they treat them with great tenderness, and much forbearance.*

If we may produce the example of Christ towards his church as any guide in this case, we shall find abundant authority in support of the idea.

From a view of the weakness, and imperfection of the church, Christ exercises a tender forbearance towards her, continually; and that without bounds, or measure.

In this way he expresses his love.

And husbands are required to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

How then, should husbands, from a principle of love, treat with tender forbearance their wives?—They are liable to many trials, pains, and distresses, peculiar to their sex; which are calculated, not only to produce many anxieties with dark glooms, and great fears; but also in many instances, to excite a fretfulness and irritation of temper.

Some instances of this kind which appear to arise almost from necessity, should be winked at: and oth-

ers should not be augmented and made worse. And further,

The natural make and constitution of the female sex is such, that it requires tenderness of treatment. —Speaking to this purpose, the apostle Peter directs husbands to give honour to their wives as unto the weaker vessels.

Whether the weakness, here mentioned, refer to bodily, or mental properties, it militates not against the propriety and fitness of the exhortation.

We are all very sensible, that in point of bodily strength, females are inferior to men; that their natural structure is more delicate and feeble.

Still, in as much as they are well fitted to fill the capacity allotted them, this by no means renders them the less honourable, or meritorious.

And should we conceive, and take for granted, that their mental powers are also inferior to those of men—that they are not capable of penetrating so deeply into important subjects, or of comprehending so copious ideas: yet as this deficiency is so amply compensated by their superior sprightliness of imagination, acuteness of sensibility, and tenderness of affection; together with their natural ease of manners, and aptitude for sociability; which are so well calculated to meliorate the more rough passions of men, to sweeten mutual society, and increase social happiness; we cannot but concede that wherein they do well they merit our honour; that a most respectful, and tender line of treatment, as a lively expression of

our genuine affection, is but a reasonable tribute to their amiable virtues.

Those properties in women, by which they are distinguished from men, and by which they become dependent on them for protection, are shining ornaments to their sex; and so far as they act in their own province, and agreeably to their allotted capacity, they do honour to themselves, merit our affectionate esteem, and become entitled to our protection and defence.

It is incumbent on husbands that they impose no unreasonable burdens on their wives, nor treat them with bitterness.

Wives were never designed for slaves, nor drudges; but to be companions, and partners with us, in our sweet as well as bitter scenes of life.

In rude and barbarous nations it has been not uncommon, that men have taken undue advantage from their superior strength, compelled their wives to perform the principal labour, and laid on them the principal burdens and hardships of life.

But in the more enlightened nations, this is not so much the case, nor ever ought to be.

Neither divine institutions, the natural formation of the different sexes, nor the light of natural reason, give countenance to such a practice.

This is the genuine production of savage barbarity.

To impose on women those burdens, and heavy labours, for which the male constitution is much bet-

ter suited, is calculated to strip them of their native delicacy, one of the peculiar beauties of their sex; render them rough, and masculine; which is very unfriendly to civilization, and neatness of manners; and even to the interest, and happiness, of those with whom they are connected.

In the wise arrangement of things, under divine providence, every object is fitted to fill some place for which it was designed.—In this wise arrangement, women have received their appropriate endowments: and they appear to have been designed for the domestic department; where they may, consistently with all their endearing properties, perform an active part in family support.—Diligence is doubtless becoming them, in that branch of business, for which their constitution is suited; but to impose on them, those labours, and burdens, for which they were not calculated, is at least very unwise.

If not by some means deprived of their natural endearments, they are calculated to alleviate our sorrows, sooth our drooping spirits, and heighten our pleasures; to soften our manners, sweeten our enjoyments, and render more feasible, the rough scenes of life.

How much, then, does it become men, by all proper measures, to encourage and cultivate, in their dear companions, those amiable properties, which are so friendly to happiness, both public and private?

In order to this, it is necessary not only, that too heavy labours and severe burdens, but also that all rashness of speech, and bitterness of communication be cautiously avoided.—Every branch of this malignant growth, is prejudicial to the sweets of the connubial life.—In this view of the subject, the Apostle Paul exhorts that husbands be not bitter against their wives.

A bitter irritating language ought ever to be avoided, in all societies, as an evil very destructive to peace and happiness. But more especially, in this near connexion where persons of delicate feelings, are interested, and consequences, so momentous are depending.

If wives, at any time, by reason of some irritating scenes, should exhibit language, not so pleasing as may be wished; still, men ought ever to feel themselves above that degrading spirit of retaliation, in such cases.—The wise man very pertinently observes, “A soft answer turneth away wrath”—And it is very evident, that to heap on combustible substance, is no ready way to quench a raging fire.

Husbands should duly consider the weaknesses and imperfections, the infirmities, and frequent perplexities, peculiar to the female sex; and then, endeavour, at all times, to apportion their burdens and labours, to their capacity; and conform their own conduct to the exigences of their tender, and delicate constitutions.

It is becoming husbands, that they minister suitable encouragement to their wives, by applauding their virtuous deeds.

Such is the make and such the feeling of the human mind, that nothing in life has a more powerful tendency to excite, in any, an ambition to excel in well-doing, than a consciousness of approbation in others; especially those for whom they have an high esteem.

And the opposite to this serves equally to discourage and sink the spirits.

Much more may be effected towards promoting and increasing person's virtues, by suitable approbation and applause, than by a continued torrent of censures poured forth upon their vices.

Almost every person may be much more easily led than driven.

In this intimate connexion, it is highly incumbent on husbands, that they improve all proper measures, for securing the good will, and increasing the virtues of their wives.

It is but too common, that much more pains are taken, to stigmatize the foibles and imperfections of others, than to encourage, by suitable applause, those things which are truly praise worthy.—But this is bad policy; especially when applied in a family.—Encouragement, and applause, must there be used, as well as reproof.

Solomon when speaking of a virtuous wife, says, "Her husband also, and he praiseth her."—By this

he insinuates that she merits by her well-doing, the applauses of her husband. And the great gospel injunction is, "Render to all their dues." If therefore, wives by their good conduct merit the applauses of their husbands, it becomes indispensable that they render unto them according to their merit.

And however insignificant or unimportant to any this may appear, it is very presumable that if husbands would adopt and practice this kind of policy, they would find themselves richly compensated, by seeing their wives more ambitiously striving to please, and excel, in laudable conduct.—In this respect, therefore, duty and happiness appear inseparably connected.

It is incumbent on husbands that they sacredly observe the appropriate tenour of the nuptial bands; and that they give no rational ground for suspecting their loyalty to the right of the marriage bed.

Violations of this intrustment are not only very odious in the sight of heaven, but are liable to become the most ruinous to the happiness of families and the peace of community.

There is nothing which gives a more deadly stroke to the spirit and design of the connexion.—And every grounded suspicion or jealousy of such unfaithfulness, derives its colouring from the native malignancy of the real crime,

Hence the wise man says, "Jealousy is the rage of a man; therefore he will not spare in the day of

vengeance."—And again, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame."

Therefore to avoid this peculiar evil, much care is taken, and urgency used in the sacred scriptures.

Says Solomon, an inspired penman, "Drink waters out of thine own cistern: and running waters out of thine own well. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers with thee.

"Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.

"Let her be as the loving hind, and pleasant roe: let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love."

The inspired apostle Paul, says, "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.—Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body; but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body; but the wife.—Defraud you not one the other."

There are, in this connexion, certain rights in which there is a mutual challenge; and such is the delicacy of the subject, that great circumspection and care is necessary, that neither of the parties may feel themselves wounded in so tender a point.

There are but very few if any crimes, or violations of contracts, which serve more directly to alienate

affection, than violations of these appropriate rights of matrimony; and consequently but very few, if any things more poisonous to the connexion.

Would husbands, therefore, consult their own reputation, and felicity; the respectability and peace of their family; they should be very cautious how they intrude upon the rights of their companions in this way. They should also very cautiously avoid all ground for suspicion.

They should endeavour at all times to exhibit the strongest testimony of their fidelity to the rights of the marriage bands, and personal attachment to the proper object of their affections.

In this way they might rationally expect to secure the confidence of their wives, attach them more firmly to their persons and interest, and share a more rich harvest in their affections. This would become a worthy consideration for all their virtues and persevering fidelity, with usury.

It becomes husbands to take the lead of all family concerns. It belongs to them to administer family government, instruction, and religion.

In this little republic, the husband is a principal, the wife a secondary officer.

Although the husband and wife are joint in one common interest, and compose an united head of the family: yet the supremacy is given unto the husband; and to him it pertains, when present, to execute the parental functions.

To this purpose the Apostle Paul says, "The head of the woman is the man."

And again "I suffer not a woman to teach; nor to usurp authority over the man."

The husband is constituted, not only the governor and instructor of his family; but to him it pertains as their minister, to offer daily sacrifices, and perform religious worship in their behalf as a little community.

It becomes a husband not only, as a duty which he owes to his Maker, but as a duty which he owes to his wife, and family, *that he perform daily worship and religion in his house.*

From the days of our first parents, it has been understood by the pious, to be the will of God, that families perform social worship. And from the days of Moses it has come forward in positive precepts. And the head of the family has ever been considered as the proper person to perform this worship—Hence the patriarchs and all the fathers in Israel, have performed this office for their families.

The same is now, as much incumbent, as in the patriarchal, or Jewish day.

Every husband stands bound and holden to perform this office for his family.

In fine, every man who marries a wife receives her to that intimate union with himself, whereby they become one flesh: their interest, cares, and concerns, are blended: and there is no separate, detached good, to which there is not a mutual challenge—Therefore it is becoming every husband to consider his wife as a partner with himself in all his

joys, as well as better scenes of life; to take her under his protection, and support; and endeavour to perform for her, all those friendly, kind, and pleasing offices, which her delicate constitution, and particular circumstances, may require: that he not only, bequeathe, but also improve all his faculties, for the promotion of her happiness, as well as his own; and indeed, that he love her as himself; and in all things, make her interest his own. *In this way is a man to cleave unto his wife, that they may become one.*

A few reflections will close the present discourse.

From the subject, we discover, as one valuable lesson, what is the direct and even the only way, to secure that felicity which the marriage connexion proposes.

For the attainment of every object or end in life there is some appointed way, or method. To attain that happiness in this connexion, for which it was at first designed, and for which it is calculated, we must perform the duties pertaining to our relation. To think of securing the happy fruits without pursuing the proper means, would be no less absurd than to expect a fruitful harvest from the ground without cultivation.

It will not avail for a husband, or wife, to promise themselves greater happiness from this connexion, or more kind treatment from their companions, than what they shall merit by their own good, and virtuous conduct.

Some appear to conceive that this connexion, when formed, will inevitably secure to them a certain portion, at least, of happiness; be their subsequent conduct what it may. But this is presuming beyond reason. No person, in what ever relation, has a right to expect from his fellow creatures, higher esteem, or better treatment than what his own conduct deserves.

Whatever esteem any person receives from others, it is on the account of some desirable properties, either real or conceived. The only way, therefore, to continue and preserve such esteem, is to continue evidence of those good properties: otherwise, it must fail.

In the marriage relation, mutual esteem, and respect, will decline in proportion, as the ground on which they were raised, shall appear to fail.

It is not merely our being bound, or having others bound with us in the bands of wedlock, which will secure unto us esteem, or happiness; but our own conduct, in this respect, will decide our lot for us.

Do husbands then, or wives, wish to reap these happy fruits of which this relation is susceptible, it highly becomes them to walk in those paths and carefully observe those rules which are wisely instituted for that purpose. They should cautiously avoid all revengeful retaliations: never render evil for evil. They should suitably reflect upon their own improprieties; and make proper concessions when faulty;

seek each others pardon: and decently bury all former matters of grievances, if any there be, at least as often as once a quarter.

They should seek to please as they would wish to be pleased; and endeavour to merit all that esteem, kindness, and affection, which they wish to receive.

In this way the number of family contentions might be greatly reduced; and as much happiness be enjoyed, as there now is.

Our subject further suggests, that it is, in various respects, of no small consequence that those in this intimate connexion, judiciously perform the duties relative to it.

Divine providence discovers great wisdom, as well as kindness, in forming our race for social felicity; and tender care, for our well being, is no less conspicuous in the institution of this connexion. This is the first connexion which was ever formed in the race: and it still is at the bottom of all other connexions in life. From this connexion proceed families: and of families are composed all other communities on earth. Community, therefore, at large, is very materially affected by the manner in which the duties of this relation are executed: and consequences are liable to extend to an endless futurity.

Of great importance, then, in this view, is it, that duties of this kind be judiciously and with fidelity performed.

But when we view the subject as immediately respecting the parties connected, there are no transactions in life, on which their private happiness is more depending. The conduct of husbands and wives towards each other, has most peculiar weight and influence in rendering life comfortable or wretched. They are capable of becoming, to each other, the greatest and richest earthly blessings.

They are also capable of becoming the greatest plagues and torments. And whether they become a blessing or a curse to each other, their performing or refusing the duties of their relation, will determine. Do they, in the exercise of a becoming affection, conduct towards each other according to the true tenour of that covenant, under which they have bound themselves; their daily intercourse will be pleasant as the vernal season with all its blooming beauties; and their revenue richer than the prolific harvest of autumnal fruits. They may sweeten the rough scenes, and render feasible, the rugged paths of life.

But if in this respect they walk counter to their mutual engagements, and instead of pleasing, seek to irritate; misery and wretchedness may reasonably be expected, to no less extent. All the pleasing and beautiful scenes pertaining to that intimate relation will be tarnished; and the sweets of connubial life turned into bitterness.

In this view, it must be very interesting, to public and private happiness, that connubial vows be faithfully performed.

May husbands, then, and all those who have entered the connubial field, be hence induced faithfully to fulfil their vows, and discharge the interesting duties of this important relation; and their virtuous example have a good and salutary effect on the mind of the youth, who are advancing to similiar scenes; and peace and happiness in this way, be diffused, and have an extensive spread among all rational beings formed for social felicity.

connexion with a prudent wife, is a blessing too great for them to bestow. *This is from the Lord.*

Parents, it is true, may give their daughters in marriage; but those properties, which are necessary to render them agreeable and happy companions, or which are necessary to constitute them prudent wives, are not the patrimony of fathers.—*House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent wife is from the Lord.*

It is well known to this Congregation, that the present speaker has lately, by an awful stroke of Providence, been separated from a beloved companion; whose virtues, he wishes may ever be preserved in remembrance. And that his young daughters, together with his other friends of the fair sex, may be animated to excel in the female virtues, is his ardent wish and desire; and by this, is he influenced, as a principal inducement, in pursuit of the present subject.

Should he find himself indulged in being the happy instrument of advancing, even though in a small degree, in the fair sex, those virtues which are in themselves so amiable and so friendly to the connexion of the different sexes, would view himself richly compensated for all his labour.

The subject presenting itself for consideration, very naturally leads us to notice some of the properties of a prudent wife; and also to inquire in what distinguished sense such a wife is from the Lord.

DISCOURSE II.

THE PRUDENT WIFE.

PROVERBS, CHAP. XIX. VERSE 14.

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent wife is from the LORD."

THERE are two things relating to the secular felicity of children, which usually lie with peculiar weight on the mind of parents.—The one is, their being supplied with a competent portion of wealth. The other, their being happily connected with agreeable companions for life.—These are objects very desirable; the latter, especially, is not of small moment. There are but very few, if any objects pertaining to the present life, which have greater influence in rendering persons happy or miserable here, than their connubial connexion.

In this view of the subject, the wise author of our text represents an happy connexion, as not descending to men in the same line with the wealth, which in common, they possess;—that fathers may give this to their sons, as an inheritance; but, that an happy

It is very presumable, that it was the design of the wise man to present us with a truly virtuous and pious character. In describing an agreeable companion he says, "*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.*"* And in continuing the same description, says, "*But a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised.*"†

However desirable properties may appear in any person, if they proceed not from some virtuous principle, and are not regulated by some pious motive, they are ever liable to be unstable and no safe confidence can be rested on them.—The shift of some simple circumstances may present a very different character to view. But where persons are actuated by motives of piety, we may more safely calculate upon their apparent virtues. We hence, therefore, conclude that our author, when drawing the features of a most desirable and worthy companion, was describing one whose apparent virtues originated from a good heart. It does not, however, appear to have been so much an object of his design, to present her character as she stands in relation to her maker, as to present it in the relation in which she stands to her husband. He represents, that in this relation, being actuated by such laudable motives, and properly filling her capacity, she is a blessing to her husband far superior to the blessings of a common providence.

* *Chapt. xxxi. 10,*† *Chapt. xxxi. 30.*

In proceeding, therefore, to trace the properties of a prudent wife, let it be remembered, that those properties are to be considered as proceeding from truly virtuous and pious views.

There are many things in action necessary to constitute the character of a truly prudent wife. Some few of these we now proceed to consider—And,

I. Since it hath pleased the great parent of our race to give superiority to the man, and to constitute him the "*head of the woman,*" reason unites with prudence in directing wives to reverence and respect their husbands according to the capacity which is allotted them.—Order and peace in any community, whether greater or less, require that those of every rank should be respected according to their rank. The want of this, is invariably attended with disorder and confusion. To avoid this great evil in families, the sacred scriptures have accurately defined the capacities both of husband and wife, and directed the wife to treat her husband with respect and reverence.—Says the inspired apostle Paul, "*And the wife see that she reverence her husband.*"*

From no diminutive views of the female sex, no want of attachment to their virtues, nor any emulous desire to usurp undue superiority over them; but from scriptural declarations, are we led to embrace the sentiment, that not only respect and reverence, but even subjection to husbands, is a duty incumbent

* *Eph. v. 33.*

on wives, as that of an inferior, to a superior officer—*“And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”**—*“Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord”*†—*“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.”*‡ This, however, is enjoined, not as a piece of degrading humiliation to the sex; but as an honourable method for securing the peace and happiness of families. There is nothing degrading in submission, or obedience, where the peace and general good of the community require it. Even Christ, the Lord of Glory, most cheerfully became obedient, even unto death, on that ground. In no way can persons do themselves greater honour, than by filling with fidelity their allotted capacity. It was mentioned by an apostle, to the great honour of the pious women of old time, that they rendered such a respectful submission to their husbands. *“For after this manner, in the old time, the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well.”*

What can be more beautiful, than for a wife to render unto the husband of her choice, all that respectful deference which his character merits, the peace of the family requires, and cheerfully perform all

* Gen. iii. 16. † Eph. v. 22. ‡ 1 Pet. iii. 1.

reasonably required services for him, who is the crowning object of all her earthly delights.

So intimate is the connexion of husband and wife, that both their happiness and misery are reciprocal. Whereinssoever, therefore, the wife does honour to her husband, she pursues the most direct method to perfect her own.—And in all kind offices, by her performed for the partner of her felicity, her's are the happy fruits. Prudence in a wife would lead her very cheerfully to adopt and pursue a measure so friendly to the peace of her family, so happyfying to her marriage connexion, and which is equally promotive of her own personal felicity. Thus we conclude that a respectful submission unto her husband, is one of the properties of a prudent wife.

2. Another property pertaining to a prudent wife, and which is a shining ornament to the female sex, is *Modesty*.

That wise hand which hath given existence to all things, hath fitted every object for its destined place and capacity, in the great machine. And by this hand, hath a different construction been given to the different sexes of our race.—From which, it appears evident, that they were designed to act in different provinces. Men appear to have been destined to encounter hardship, stem the more rugged scenes, and take the front of the battle, in the heavier and more severe fatigues of life. Strength, bravery, and fortitude, in the several capacities in which they may be called to act, may be very essential proper-

ties; but females being of a more delicate texture, slender constitution, and destined to a different capacity in life, very different properties seem to become their situation and standing.

With no greater propriety or fitness does bravery appear in the hero, or fortitude in the politician, than modesty in the female character.

On viewing the tender and delicate structure of the female sex, with the capacity allotted them in life, with one consent, we bequeath to their custody, this amiable virtue; considering them as the proper repository of it. If, therefore, we find them destitute of this virtue, we find them lacking one of the richest gems with which the sex is ornamented; and they of course become objects of disgust in the view of all men of refined taste.

This is a beautiful rose, in the flower bed of female virtues; which goes very far towards the establishing of their reputation in the view of sensible and discerning minds.

How very cautiously, then, would a prudent wife seek to cultivate and preserve this endearing property, by which she presents a brilliant specimen of female beauty, merits the esteem of acquaintances, and secures a rich harvest in the affections of her husband.—With equal care will she shun every species of the opposite description. Not an indelicate, vulgar, or obscene word, will she drop from her lips; nor by her conduct, betray a wanton heart.

According to the wise calculation of things, by the great author of nature, this property appears to have

been a legacy peculiarly bestowed on females, by which they might render themselves very agreeable, and pleasing to the other sex. So wide then is the deviation of vulgar immodest women, from those beautiful and virtuous paths clearly marked out for their walk, and from the reasonable expectations of men, that they may rightfully be considered as differing but very little from human monsters. This view of the subject naturally leads us to conceive that a prudent wife would be solicitous not only to conform her own conduct to the rules of modesty, but also that young female minds might early be inspired with those principles which are so conducive to their own felicity, and ornamental to their sex.

3. Neatness is an amiable property pertaining to the female province, and by which the prudent wife renders herself peculiarly agreeable. Neatness exhibits a peculiar lustre wherever found, and is very captivating to all people of taste. Specimens of this may be exhibited by the different sexes, and those of every capacity in life. But there is, perhaps, no situation in which it shines with a more pleasing lustre, than in the female province; nor any persons, whose steps are more accurately examined for displays of this property, than females.—As in the case of modesty, the female sex is uniformly considered as the proper nursery for the propagation and growth of this odoriferous and wholesome plant.

However careless and slovenly men may appear either in their apparel, employment, or behaviour, it

is in most instances, in a great measure at least, dispensed with; when the same things, if discovered in females, would be unpardonable. Such are our views and expectations, with respect to the different sexes that, what in many instances, would appear decent in the male, would in the female sex appear insufferable.

There are many instances in which men are apparently displeased, and even fault their wives for paying too much attention to neatness, which at the same time, raises them in their esteem, and the want of which, would sink them into contempt.—Nor can women on the other hand, in reality, possess themselves of that displeasure at the want of neatness in men, which in like cases is exercised by men towards them.

There are instances not a few, in which women are heard to scold and storm at their husbands for their want of neatness and slovenly conduct; when they cannot avoid discovering that it is but a dramatic scene, and that in reality, they do not possess that displeasure, which their language bespeaks.—This is a property in which they do not expect men to excel; if, therefore, they discover a want, it does not so deeply wound their feelings, as if their expectations had been disappointed.

It being expected by all that this is a property pertaining to the female sex, and in which they will excel, every species of sluttiness in them, serves to disappoint our expectation, and sink them in

esteem.—With a very accurate and scrupulous eye, is every step of theirs observed, especially by men; and every deviation from this desirable virtue in any branch within their province, has its influence in bereaving them of that esteem and respect which might otherwise be their due.

In the execution and discharge of this amiable virtue, the prudent wife secures the good will and high esteem of her husband, the respectability of her family, and the applause of her neighbours. As a treasure particularly committed to her trust, she looketh well not only to her own, but also to her family's appearance, that displays of her prudence in this way, may be presented to spectators.

Thus, says Solomon, "*Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.*"——We observe,

4. That a prudent wife is not negligent and slothful, but is willing, and cheerfully performs the duties and offices pertaining to her rank.—The wise man saith, "*She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.*"†

Idleness in females is mentioned by the apostle Paul in very reproachful language, as very illy becoming their character, and as being an intimate associate of tattling, one of the greatest pest of society.†

It is not however, improbable, nor doubted, but

* Chap. xxxi. 23. † Chap. xxxi. 13. ‡ I Tim. v. 13.

that in too many instances very severe and unreasonable services may have been imposed on them, and they have had abundant reason for complaint.—The female constitution is not equal to their enduring the severest fatigues in life—And in addition to this, there is a certain lot which has fallen unto them, a fruit of the first apostacy, in which the male sex have no share, and of which they can have no adequate conception.—It is allotted unto women, in sorrow, to bear children; and unto the man, to endure the heavier fatigues of common labour—“*In the sweat of thy face, shall thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground.*”*

It is not, however, to be conceived from this, that women are exempt from all labour; but only from those more severe and heavy parts which are better apportioned to that robustness and strength, which in greater measure, are given unto men.—Diligence, in certain kinds of labour, which are suited to their strength and constitution, is very becoming, and highly incumbent on women; and from which the more virtuous of the sex would not be anxious to screen themselves—This is not only healthful, and profitable; but is also, equally contributive to honour and respectability.

A prudent wife who feels deeply interested in the comfort and prosperity of her family, must needs feel very strong inducements to seek the good and well-

* *Genesis, iii. 19.*

being of it.—That her family should experience the unhappy fruits of her idle and unprofitable strollings from house to house, would neither coincide with her own views and feelings, nor with the scriptural description of a truly virtuous prudent wife. The apostle Paul inculcates, as a peculiar female excellence, that the younger women be taught to be keepers at home.*—That they should pay proper attention to the concerns of their own families, and not be idling away their time to no profit. Not, however, but that a suitable portion of time may be very profitably improved in friendly interviews: in this way, not only acquaintance, but real friendship in society may be promoted.—But the excess of this, is wont to be attended with effects very pernicious, both at home and abroad.

It is not so uncommon as might be wished, that an excess of this habit is attended with unbecoming speeches, evil surmises, and jealousies, which are liable to terminate in bitter outrage. May we not safely then conclude that a prudent wife, would in the main prefer a more retired situation, where she might pursue the duties of her own province without endangering her own reputation, or the peace of society? Like the prudent man, foreseeing the evil, she would hide herself.

5. Economy is another desiable property in the prudent wife, which, with diligence, goes hand in hand.

* *Titus, iii. 5.*

Much depends on this property, in the support and comfortable subsistence of a family. It is very easy for one to waste and destroy, what many can earn.

Since the principal provision for the family's support, falls under the immediate inspection, care, and disposal of the wife, it is of no small importance to the family, that she well understand what belongs to family economy, and that she be disposed to improve, to the best advantage, that which is committed to her trust.

The inattentive and imprudent, are wont to make merry with what they have, and live lavishly while their stores continue: but want is generally the next extreme. This is not the dictate of good family economy. The prudent, economical wife, agreeably to the vulgar proverb, in her domestic concerns, "*cuts her coat according to her cloth;*" and on this principle, though her stores be small, her family will never be wholly destitute; and with middling supplies, will always be comfortably fed.

The imprudent may devour in a month, that which might well have served them a year. How important then is good economy, in the support of a family? It is of most excellent use in any community, whether greater or less, and in every situation and capacity in which men may be called to act; but in no situation does it shine with a more beautiful lustre, or is of greater use, in proportion to the property depending and the numbers concerned, than

in a family, and especially when wisely administered by a prudent wife.

Solomon says of a prudent wife, "*that she looketh well to the ways of her household.*" That is, she not only seeketh diligently to procure, but carefully preserveth from unnecessary destruction, whatever is committed to her hand. And without a measure of this kind of economy, though the incomes be large, the family must be poor. Just hinting at these things, we proceed to observe.

6. That *Fidelity* is another of the excellent properties of a prudent wife, and is very essential to the happiness of a family.

Fidelity is of singular importance in persons of any trust; and the opposite is attended with very pernicious consequences—but unfaithfulness will ever appear vile, and injurious, in proportion to the importance and worth of the trust betrayed. There is no property passing among men, nor objects committed in trust, of richer quality, and of more essential worth to individual happiness, than that in which a husband and wife are partners; and which they must usually commit to each other. In this partnership, or connexion, they mutually make a bequeathment of themselves (under God) to each other, with every property, both bodily and mental—Hence the apostle Paul says, "*The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: And likewise also the husband: hath not power of his own body, but the wife.*"*

This shews that the nature of the connexion is such, that neither of the two in connexion, has a right to the disposal of his own body, but that each one has a challenge upon the other. There is also included in this connexion, an interchange or mutual alienation of affections, as well as bodily transfer. Each one, therefore, has a challenge upon the other's affections—On this principle we hear the scriptures abundantly inculcating the mutual conferment of these, as a sacred duty—“*Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.*”*

The commerce, therefore, in which the partnership of husband and wife is occupied, is of richer quality, and more interesting to personal felicity, than gold or richest pearls; and consequently there are in this life no contracts violated, nor trust betrayed, which afford a more bitter sting, or more deeply wound the sensible tender feelings of our race, especially the more reformed, than violations of this contract.

Does a wife shew an unfaithful disposition even in the disposal of things of smaller moment, she in measure loses the confidence of her husband, and in the same proportion his affections; but does she give reason to suspect her continency, that she, unfaithful to the sacred ties of wedlock, she at once sustains the loss of that in him, without which she might

* 1 Cor. vii. 3.

well be a widow as a wife: For it is but of very little, if any real advantage, to have a man without his affectionate love—Unfaithfulness, therefore, in this case is not only prejudicial to others, and the connexion in general; but is the very bane of its own actress.

Sensible of these evils, the prudent wife is very circumspect, and careful not to give her husband an occasion to suspect her continency, or want of affection for him; but in every proper way, cautiously exhibits testimony, that he, not another, is the object of her first choice.

Speaking of such a character, our author says, “*The heart of her husband, doth safely trust in her.*”*

Very happying must be the consideration to the feeling husband, that he hath a companion with whom he can safely entrust not only his common concerns, but his richest treasure also; having no fear that his trust by her will be betrayed. It must also be very happying to a wife, to find that the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her—She must feel an internal satisfaction, which will amply compensate all the expense at which she obtains it.

In the exercise of this virtue, the prudent wife procures satisfaction to herself, happiness to her husband and much respectability to her family, in the view of all her judicious acquaintance.—But reproach and infamy, together with a mortifying remorse of mind,

* Chap. xxxi. 11.