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THE GREAT SEPARATION.

“I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”—MAT. x. 35.

THE subject which is suggested by these words, is, THE GREAT SEPARATION WHICH RELIGION MAKES IN FAMILIES. The Savior, in the text, simply states a fact. He does not say that he *aimed* at such a separation; or that it was in itself desirable; or that religion would be responsible for it; or that there would be no possibility of avoiding it: he states the fact simply as it would occur—evidently in his view a lamentable fact, and one that would be attended sooner or later with unhappy results. The union of families is desirable. It is such an object as the “Prince of peace” would seek. But the meaning of the Savior in the text is, that his religion, by calling out one part of a family from another, would in fact tend to divide them, and would be the innocent cause of alienation. “I am come,” said he, “to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” Endeavoring to keep the spirit of these words in view, and to pursue such a line of thought as shall best illustrate them, I shall invite your attention to two points.

I. The union of families in religion is desirable. And,

II. Religion in fact often separates them.

I. The union of families in religion is desirable; or, in other words, it is desirable that a family should be all united in the same faith, and in the same hope of heaven.

Before suggesting the reasons for this—which indeed appear obvious almost without argument or illustration—I would observe, that in other subjects than religion, separations often occur in a family which create no evil, and which are in fact unavoidable. They are such as

relate to the professions and callings in life, the daily avocations in the domestic circle, or the separation of a family when children advance to years of maturity. There is often much *painfulness* attending such separations, but there is no blame, and no injury is done to individual interests, or to society at large. In the distinct departments of labor pursued by the husband and wife; in the different professions which the father and his sons may follow; in the separations which occur when one is a merchant, another a physician, another a lawyer, a fourth a clergyman, a farmer, or a mariner, no injury is done; no alienation of feeling of necessity occurs. The great interests of society are not endangered; nor need the harmony of a family be disturbed, for its affairs move on like machinery where every wheel has its place, and where the revolution of one promotes the beautiful action of the whole.

If religion were something of this description, and affected no more vital interests than these different callings, the same thing might occur in regard to it, and no more injury would follow were one member of a family a christian, another an atheist, another a scoffer; were one member to delight in prayer, and another to disregard it; one to love the bible, and another to regard it as a cheat and an imposture. What is there in religion, it may be asked, which makes it so much more desirable that the members of a family should be united in that than in their professional pursuits? What is there that makes separation a subject of special regret? I shall submit a few considerations which are so obvious that they will probably at once occur to your own minds; at any rate they will commend themselves to you as true. They are these.

1. Union in a family on the subject of religion is desirable, because all its members have the same interests at stake. It is not here as it is in regard to worldly matters. The same great object, substantially, may be obtained in a family in worldly matters, in separate callings in life. Happiness, health, property, respectability, may be secured though one be a farmer, another a merchant, another a mechanic, another connected with one of the liberal professions. Indeed, so nicely is this adjusted and balanced by the Great Disposer of events, that it is to this day a question with every young man still undecided, though the experiment has been made some thousands of years, which of these callings furnish the most favorable field for the attainment of these objects. Either of them is still open as an ample and an honorable department where the great objects sought in the present life may be gained. But no such remark can be made in reference to the differences in religion. Neither reason, experience, nor the Bible, furnish any evidence that the same things in regard to man's immortal welfare can be obtained where there are radically different views in religion, or that the christian, the impenitent sinner, the infidel, the scoffer, and the atheist, though in the same family, can equally secure the favor of God. The history of the world has furnished impressive lessons on these points, and the Bible abundantly confirms all that that history has taught.

In reference to religion, all the members of a family have substantially the same interests at stake. The soul of one is of the same value as that of another, and is to be saved, if saved at all, in the same way. Each one has been redeemed by the same blood; and each one is advancing to the same judgment-bar. Pardon, needed equally by all, is to be obtained by each in the same manner; and being obtained will confer the same peace on all. In a family there is no reason why the wife should be a christian and the husband not; why the father or the mother should be the friend of the Savior, and the son or daughter not; or why the sister should seek her happiness in the hope of heaven, and the brother feel that he has resources which can compensate for this, though he is not a christian. Neither the husband, the son, the daughter, nor the brother, can secure the salvation of the soul without religion, any more than the wife, the father, the mother, or the sister. As they have the same great *interests* at stake, it is desirable that they should be united in religion.

2. It is desirable because they are all under substantially the same obligation. That obligation may be slightly varied by age, or capacity, or the relation sustained, but it rests substantially on all. There is no special obligation which binds a wife to love God which does not rest also on the husband; there is none which claims the affection of a sister which does not also demand the heart of a brother; there is none which is laid upon the child which is not also upon the parent. Of the husband, whose wife is a christian, no one can show, that God has exempted him from the duty to which she responds; of the parent who has sons or daughters in the church, no one can show that he is exempt from the duty which they feel resting on them. If one is bound to love God, so is the other; if the father, so is the son; if the mother, so is the daughter; if the daughter-in-law, so is the mother-in-law. The claim is the same, and for the same reason. It rests on the broad basis of the duty which all men owe to their Maker, and so far as *obligation* is concerned, it is desirable that a family should be united in religion.

3. Such union is desirable in order to promote the happiness of a family; for religion enters more deeply into the things that promote or mar domestic enjoyment than anything else. Other differences, as has already been intimated, do not necessarily produce a jar, or lead either to alienation or to anxiety. A son may be a merchant or a lawyer while the father is a farmer, and the separation shall produce no alienation, and cause no regret or solicitude. All the wishes of the father's heart may be gratified in his virtuous life, and in the honor which a son of rising worth and reputation shall reflect on the family. But this cannot occur in religion. A christian father can never have such feelings in the contemplation of the fact that his son is an infidel, or a mere neglecter of religion. All the father's hopes are identified with his religion, and all his expectations that his children will ever be happy are identified with that also; and when there is not reason for that hope in regard to the child, there

must be anxiety in proportion to the sense which the parent has of the value and importance of religion. Accordingly it is a fact with which every one is familiar, that there is nothing that enters so deeply into the happiness of a family as unity of religious views, and of course nothing that will so much mar the peace of a family as discord on this subject. So important has this been usually regarded, that it has been felt that every sacrifice, but that of conscience, should be made to secure this union, and that in the case of a husband and wife attached to different denominations, one of them should be willing to sacrifice the preference, if it can be done with a good conscience, that they may "walk to the house of God in company."

Besides. Religion is as needful to the happiness of one member of a family as another. If it has a good effect on the temper of a wife, it would also have on that of the husband. If it sustains one in times of trial, it would also the other. If it enables one to meet the rebuffs of adverse fortune with a calm spirit, it would enable the other to do it also. If it makes one serene and cheerful in the prospect of approaching death, or when a child is laid in the grave, what shall forbid us to suppose that it would minister the same consolation to the other also?

4. In like manner, unity in religion in a family is desirable to promote the happiness of those who *are* christians. In most of the families that compose the congregations associated for public worship, there is one or more who is a sincere christian. The happiness of such is in religion. Their most intense and ardent aspirations are for heaven—for themselves, and for their friends. Their feelings of solicitude in behalf of their families are indeed often unknown to others. They are sometimes—often, I believe—criminally negligent in making them known; but there are often difficulties in the way which they cannot overcome. It is not easy for a daughter, who has the most intense solicitude for the salvation of a father, to express that desire to *him*; and there *may be* cases where if a wife were to express the wishes of her heart to her husband, she may be certain that it would be met with a sneer, a witticism, a rebuke, or with most withering indifference. Even a mother may have so frequently pressed the subject on the attention of her sons, and may have so exhausted all the sources of appeal at her command, that she may have become disheartened, and feel almost the effort would be vain. Yet though silent, the solicitude of the wife and the mother is not extinguished. It may no longer be manifest as it once was to the husband or the son. It is now poured forth in the closet; and the appeal is transferred from their closed ears and hardened hearts to an ear that is never closed, a heart that never ceases to feel. Now if a child desired to pour into the bosom of a tender parent the purest, sweetest, most enduring joy, he would become a christian. If a husband so loved the partner of his bosom as to desire to promote her happiness in the highest degree, he would become a christian. For there is nothing else that will make a family so blessed; no increase of wine or oil will diffuse such deep-felt and permanent bliss around the fireside.

5. Unity in religion in a family is desirable, in order to give consolation in times of affliction. Nothing is more common than the breaking up of a family circle. No securities that we can throw around our domestic comforts, can save them from the entrance of sickness and death. The ranks of all families will be broken. Death comes. A husband, a father, a mother, a child is removed, and the survivors go forth and weep together. They have common sorrows. There is no jar, no discord there. The same chord has been struck in each heart, and the tones of its vibration are deep and long. In their affection for the departed, and in their sorrows, there is entire harmony of feeling. But not so in their consolations. One heart acquiesces in God, even in the unsearchable mysteries of his dealings, and feels that all is right. That heart is calm, and rests on the unfailing promises. The eye of that weeper looks up through tears to heaven, and the Father of mercies regards the desire of the suppliant, and gives peace. But not so with all. Another heart may have no consolation. It may be full of murmuring, and repining, and rebellion. There is no submission, and no looking to God. Nothing is seen by the eye of this one but clouds and darkness. Not a ray penetrates the gloom; not even momentary respite and consolation visits the soul. Now religion would have made all that weeping circle calm and submissive. It would have met their common sorrows by common joys, and though afflicted here together, yet they could have looked forward to a world where they would rejoice together, where all tears shall be wiped from every face.

6. Once more. Unity in religion in a family is desirable, in order to promote the eternal welfare of all. There is no reason to believe that one can be saved in one way and another in another. There is but one path that leads to heaven, and that is a "straight and narrow" one. It accords not with reason any more than it does with the Bible, to suppose that one can be saved by christian piety, and another by infidelity; that faith will conduct one to the skies, and the want of it another; that he who prays has a well founded hope of glory, and that he has the same ground of hope who does not pray; that the righteousness of the Redeemer is the robe by which one is to be clothed in heaven, and that the morality of another is to constitute the "white garment" in which he will appear on the banks of the river of life; that one is to be borne up to receive the crown, ransomed by the blood of Jesus, and with the song of salvation on his lips as he ascends, and that another, who is a reviler, and a scoffer, and a blasphemer, is to ascend to the same world of glory, borne on the wings of imprecations and curses. Not thus do men ascend to the skies. If anything is clear from the Bible, and from all the deductions of reason, it is, that they who have different characters in this world must meet a different doom in the next, and that this great principle *cannot* be set aside by all the tenderness of ties in the domestic relation. The mere fact that we are united there in love, and interest; that the most tender of all chords bind the heart of a christian father even to an impenitent

child, cannot, and should not, abrogate the great law by which God purposes to save men; and unless to every other tie there be added the "unity of the faith" and "the bond of christian peace," there cannot be hope of unity in heaven. Yet I need not say one word to show how desirable it is that an entire family should be prepared to enter into heaven. Is there any one of our children on whom we can look but with overwhelming emotions of horror with the anticipation that he will be at the left hand of the Judge, and is to "dwell with devouring fire" for ever? Christian fathers, mothers, ye who hope in the mercy of the Lord, the affairs of this world are *trifles light as air* when this thought enters the soul. What think ye of the gaiety and vanity, of the worldliness and want of religion, of the neglect of prayer in your closets and in your families, which may be the means of separating a child from your side at the bar of God; which may unclinch your hand from the hand of a son there; which may sunder the embrace of mother and daughter there for ever, that the daughter and the son may "go away into everlasting punishment"?

II. My second object was to show that religion does in fact make a separation in families. You will not suppose that I design to attempt to *prove* this. The fact is too apparent to make an attempt at demonstration proper. I design, under this head, merely to suggest some of the circumstances where religion makes such a separation.

1. It divides families at the communion table. There are, indeed, in our congregations, perhaps generally, some three or four families all of whose members are communicants in the church, and there are about as many not one of whose members is a professed friend of Christ. But the body of communicants in the churches is made up of *divided families*; not divided in the sense of alienation, and jealousies, and heart-burnings; not divided it may be, unless in quite rare instances, in the sense that any portion of the families is sceptical or profane. But they are divided in a more important sense than any mere temporary estrangement would be, or any alienation founded on a reference to worldly concerns. It is a division *that has reference to religion*; where the welfare of the soul is at stake, and which bears upon vital and eternal interests.

Now, I will not say that in all cases it is true religion which makes this separation at the communion table. I will not venture to affirm that *all* who come to the Lord's Supper in the churches are true christians; nor will I say that all who do not have no evidence of piety. On these points my subject requires me to make no affirmation, and I would not dare to do it, for it is not given to man to search the heart. But there are two considerations which may without impropriety be suggested here, and which demand the attention of all who do not make a profession of religion.

(1.) The first is, that *so far as the evidence goes* in the observance of the Lord's Supper, it is, that *true religion* makes the difference

between those who commune and those who do not. The fact of coming to the communion-table, and of professing attachment to the Savior, is the *public* proof, or *prima facie* evidence, that they who do it are christians. I know, indeed, that the proof is not infallible; but *so far as it goes* it is proof, and is good evidence unless it can be rebutted by showing that the life proves that there is no true religion. To make a profession of religion is, and should be regarded, as in itself an expression of a desire to do the will of God, to give up the heart to the Savior, to lead a christian life, to be prepared for heaven. The profession has been also made in most cases after much anxious inquiry; after much examination of the heart and of the Bible; and after much prayer to be guided aright; and has about all the security that there can be that it is based on the possession of real piety. No selfish motive in our land is likely often to influence men to make the profession, for it is followed by no recompense of office or gain; and if there is deception, it is to be set down to the credit of the liability of human nature to deception, and to the difficulty of determining what the real state of the heart is, even after much examination.

(2.) The second thing is, that your neglecting or refusing to make a profession of religion, is a *public* proof of the same kind, and of the same force, that you are not christians. This may not, I admit, be infallible. There may be some recently converted who wisely and prudently defer the profession for the present, that they may examine and test their piety. There may be some who *should* have connected themselves with the people of God, but whose evidence of piety is not as clear as they desired and as they hope it will be. But my idea is this: that your refusing to make a profession of religion is evidence, *so far as it goes*, that you are not a christian: it is the *public proof* that you are not. It is naturally and properly so interpreted by your fellow men. It is the construction which they must, will, and do, put on it, and a construction which it is difficult to avoid, and perhaps which you do not *wish* them to avoid. Why may it not amount, in many cases, to full evidence—so full as to be the public proof in the day of judgment of the want of religion? Why should we, from mere blind charity, kind-hearted as it may be, ascribe to a man that which he does not *profess* to have? Why give him the credit of possessing love to God and to the Savior, and of being influenced by the principles of religion, when he makes no such profession himself? Does that charity which is so commended in the New Testament, require us to go *beyond* what a man himself professes, and to put an interpretation on his principles which he himself forbids? The natural and fair inferences in regard to a man are, that when he professes to have no religion, he has none; that when he voluntarily separates himself from his christian friends, he has no sympathy with them in their religion; that when he declines to obey a command of the Savior which is simple, plain, obvious, universal in its obligation, and easy to be complied with, there is no principle of religious obedience in his heart. As a general rule, I know not why we should not abide by this simple

principle, and why we should not regard those who *profess* to have no religion as having none—whatever we may think of those who do. This rule is certainly in accordance with the principles of the Savior. “He that is not with me is against me.” “He that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” If these remarks be correct, then the truth of what I have stated is established, that, to a great extent, the division which is made at the communion-table is a division made by religion, and that the line which is run there is one of fearful portent in regard to the destiny in the future world.

2. There will be less doubt in regard to a second separation which religion makes in families. It is in reference to the grave. It requires the exercise of large charity to believe that all families in the tomb sleep there with the same prospect of future glory. They may occupy the same dark house, and be arranged side by side, close to each other as they were when living; or they may sleep in neighboring graves, and a small enclosure railed around with iron, or set thick with flowers—an enclosure smaller than the area of the house where they dwelt in the land of the living—may hold them in close connexion in the abodes of the dead. But what shall make us believe that they all sleep there with the same prospect of heaven? What is our evidence that religion has made no separations there? Our nature prompts us—and I know not that our religion forbids it—to a more tender and wider charity for the dead than for the living; but the widest charity that is consistent with the maintenance of *any* religious principle whatever, can very rarely discern the evidence that *all* the members of a family die in hope. Religion made a difference while living: it made a difference in their plans of life; in their principles of action; in their conversation and deportment; in times of temptation and affliction, and on the bed of death; and why does it not perpetuate that difference in the grave? Is there some magic virtue—some potent charm in being put into the same vault, the same coffin, or the same grave; in having the same solemn vestments, and in mingling with the same mother earth, to change the character or the destiny? Surely no one can pretend this; and what shall then hinder the conclusion that the division in the family which religion begins here, reaches down to the tomb? There might be much, could we see all, that would be melancholy in looking on a family burying-place besides what meets the eye. Of the smiling babe that was laid there, christian hope entertains no doubt that the soul is safe; of the christian father, mother, or child that sleeps there, there is as little doubt. But what is the doom of the others? Here faith and hope are speechless; and a double pall rests on their remains.

3. There is less doubt still in regard to a third separation which religion makes. If there is not absolute certainty in regard to the effect of religion in causing the division at the communion table; if there is still uncertainty of increasingly painful character in regard to the separation in the grave, there can be none of the agency of religion in the divisions of the day of judgment and of the future world.

Here there is no room for conjecture ; none for doubt. If the line run at the communion table be not the true line ; if we are deceived about the dead, and hope when there is no ground for hope, and fear when there was really no reason to fear, yet the line will be drawn at the judgment-bar with unerring accuracy. That line will be so drawn that the universe will see and approve the reason why it is done ; *and it is a line which will be run wholly by religion.* On this point the Scriptures leave us no room to doubt ; and the account in the Bible is one that wholly accords with our own reason, that it is *religion* that is to make the separation there. It will not be beauty or blood ; not rank, station, or wealth ; not bodily vigor, learning, or accomplishments ; not age, or fame. These things do not trace lines on the human character or destiny that continue beyond the grave. They are obliterated before the earth is made smooth over the graves of the prince and the peasant ; or before the surface of the sea becomes calm when beauty, and rank, and youth, are engulfed beneath,—when,

“ Like a drop of rain,
Man sinks into the depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelt, uncoffined, and unknown.”

But religion *makes* a separation at the judgment—makes THE GREAT SEPARATION FOREVER. It makes a division there in such a manner that there shall be no future union. It places at the one hand of the Judge a father, and at the other a son ; at the one hand a mother, and at the other a daughter ; in one world a parent who sought the conversion and salvation of his children, and in the other those children, neglectful, impenitent, unbelieving. The time is coming when one portion of a family, redeemed and sanctified, shall ascend to heaven, elevated to its glories by the religion of the Redeemer ; the other portion will live on, indeed, but in the GREAT SEPARATION THAT IS TO BE ETERNAL. To this all things tend. Every communion hastens it ; every closing year, every month, every week, every Sabbath, every day. To-day it has been determined in relation to multitudes who have left the earth for eternity ; ere the shades of this night pass away, it will be determined in regard to multitudes more.

The subject is one that cannot be pursued further without exciting emotions that would produce pain without profit. My object in presenting it will be gained if it secures two or three results which I will now state in the conclusion of the discourse.

1. If it leads christians here to feel more deeply, and to pray more fervently, for their impenitent children, partners in life, parents, and friends. To-day you are separate from them. They evince no love for our great and blessed Redeemer. How natural, how proper, to ask whether they are to be separate in the grave, and for ever, as well as in the church on earth ! How appropriate to bear them on our hearts when *we* are near the cross, and to beseech, even with tears, the Redeemer to have mercy on those whom *we* tenderly love !

Friends of the Savior ! Ye who can scarcely bear the thought of

separation from your children for a month or a day, how can you think of being separated from them for ever? Ye parents who are sleepless with anguish when they suffer on a bed of pain, who watch with earnest solicitude over them in the slow-moving hours of night, how can you bear the thought that they are to suffer on for ever and ever? Ye who would start with horror at the thought of their sinking into a watery grave, or at the idea that they would be wrapped in flame in a burning vessel at sea, how can you be unmoved at the *possibility* that they may sink in an ocean of fire to roll amidst its billows forever? Rouse, parents, rouse! Awake, arise, and call upon your God that they may be saved!

2. If the subject leads those who are not now christians, to similar reflections, it will accomplish another object which I wish. Among those of you who do not profess to be christians, are husbands separate from your wives, parents from your children, children from your parents. From that father, and that mother, who have consecrated their hearts to the Son of God, and from that Savior to whom they have devoted themselves, you are divided. Shall this continue? Shall it be deepened and prolonged until it terminates *in the great separation that shall endure forever*? Dear objects of our earthly affection; friends whom we love more tenderly than we love any other friends, why not come and let heart beat against heart in love to the same Redeemer, and walk hand in hand with us in the same path to heaven? How can you bear the thought of an eternal separation from your christian friends? Divided in religion from us, yet you are not divided in affection. Without our hope of heaven, yet you love us; and though with different feelings in regard to the prospect of eternity, yet at home, at the table, at the fireside, in affliction, in joy, your heart beats against ours, and the same chord is struck in our souls and yours. Children of pious parents, parents of pious children, husbands of pious wives, how can you bear the thought of an eternal separation from your friends? How can you think of their walking on the banks of the river of life—happy spirits, while you wander—wretched outcasts—on the plains of despair? How can you think that all these tender ties are to be torn asunder, and that you are to be banished from them for ever and ever? Friends that we love! Awake! Arise! and call upon our God! Seek the salvation of the soul! O let the love begun on earth be perpetuated on the plains of heaven! Save us, O save us, we beseech you, from seeing you driven away from us that we may behold your faces no more!

3. A third result to which our subject should lead should be to cause us to look forward to the future world, and to contemplate the possibility that a family should be *united in heaven*. It is *possible* that there should be such an eternal union. It is not necessary that religion should make an eternal separation. There is nothing in the nature of christianity that naturally and necessarily demands this. There is no such adaptation of the gospel to one member or portion of a family only as to make such a result inevitable; there is no restricting of the

offer of salvation to the father, the mother, or to one of the children of a family ; there is no limitation of the efficacy of the atonement which makes it impossible that the blood which saves one should save all ; there is no such circumscribing of the power of the Holy Spirit that he can renew and sanctify only a portion of the family group. The blood which has been sprinkled on one heart may cleanse all ; the same Spirit that has renewed and sanctified the father or mother is able to renew and sanctify each child ; and the same grace of the gospel which prepared that loved and lovely sister who has been taken from you to walk by the side of the river of life in white raiment, can prepare you also to join with her and walk arm in arm on those shady banks. Look upward to yonder heavens. See there your smiling babe ! It stretches out its hands and invites you. "Come, father, mother," is its sweet sound, "come and take the water of life." May not that same grace of the gospel which has raised that child to heaven, save you also ?

Why should it not be ? A whole family united in religion—what a spectacle of beauty on earth ! A family lying side by side in their graves, to be united again in the same blessed resurrection, what a spectacle for angels to look down upon with interest ! A whole family united in heaven—who can describe their everlasting joys ? Not one is absent. Nor father, nor mother, nor son, nor daughter, are away. In the world below they were united in faith, and love, and peace, and joy. In the morning of the resurrection they ascended together. Before the throne they bow together in united adoration. On the banks of the river of life they walk hand in hand, and as a family they have commenced a career of glory that shall be everlasting. There *is to be* hereafter no separation in that family. No one is to lie down on a bed of pain. No one is to wander away into temptation. No one is to sink into the arms of death. Never in heaven is that family to move along in the slow procession, clad in the habiliments of woe, to consign one of its members to the tomb. For no member of the family is the soil of heaven ever to open its bosom to furnish a grave. God grant of his infinite mercy that every family in this assembly may thus be united in religion in all the joys and sorrows of this life ; united when they lie down in the grave in the hope of the same resurrection ; and united on the banks of the river of life, to drink of the streams of salvation for ever ! AMEN.