

# PSALM 20:10

*God's Order.*

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In every relationship or position in which the believer may be set, the secret of happiness lies in the maintenance of the divine order. Whether in the family, the household, or the Church, if there be failure to uphold God's order, or if there be the substitution of that which is of man, for the sake of convenience and expediency, confusion and discord must be the inevitable result. How many striking evidences of this may be gleaned from the Scriptures!

Take first the family. The value God Himself sets upon subjection to His order is seen in that familiar passage in which He commends Abraham, on the ground that "he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment," etc. (Gen. 18: 19.) In the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians also what care is taken to enjoin on every member of the Christian household the fulfilment of their several relative responsibilities. Children and servants, as well as parents and masters, husbands and wives, are directed as to the duties of their respective positions. On the other hand, what sad examples of parental misrule and of filial disobedience are preserved in the Scriptures for our admonition and warning. The happiness of the families of Eli, Samuel, David, and many others, was wrecked simply because the parents in these cases did not establish and uphold the divine governmental order. And not only was it the case that the happiness of the family was destroyed, but the sin, whether of parental failure, or of the children's disobedience, brought with it the divine judgment. (Read, for example, 1 Sam. 3: 11-14.)

Wherein lies then the maintenance of God's order in the family? The answer to this question is found in both Ephesians and Colossians. (Eph. 5: 22-33, Eph. 6: 1-9; Col. 3: 18-25, Col. 4: 1.) The husband is the head, and as such has to act as God's viceregent, to govern not according to his, but according to the divine will. The authority put into his hands is from the Lord, and it is his to wield for Him, and it cannot therefore be delegated to another. The wife is in subjection to her husband, even as the Church is subject to Christ, the husband on his part having to love his wife even as Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. The responsibility of children is to obey their parents in the Lord. Their obedience is to be absolute, qualified only by the condition — in the Lord. Servants have likewise to obey their masters, parents and masters having on their side their respective obligations.

With these instructions before us, it is easy to perceive that if the wife govern instead of the husband, or if the children are permitted to have their own way, to please themselves instead of living in subjection; or if, again, servants are allowed to govern the household, it could not be productive either of blessing, harmony, or happiness. No; the pathway of blessing is the pathway of obedience in the several spheres we are called upon to fill. And when this is acknowledged by the various members of a family, that household becomes a testimony for God in a scene where

all have departed from Him — a bright circle of light in the midst of surrounding darkness, and an anticipation of millennial blessing when the Lord's authority shall be acknowledged throughout the whole world.

It should not be forgotten that a large part of our lives is spent in our homes, and that the household therefore is the chief scene of our testimony. In the incessant questioning as to what is the testimony, it might be well to remember that one part of it should certainly be the expression of Christ in the household — Christ in all the various relationships of the household. "To me to live is Christ." This is the testimony indeed, whether at home, in the Church, or the world.

If now the maintenance of the divine order be of all importance in the family, it certainly is not less so in divine things — in the Church. This is everywhere insisted upon; and there are several departments (so to speak) concerning which special warning or instruction is vouchsafed; viz., worship, teaching, and government. We have more than one remarkable instance of the consequences of the neglect of God's order in worship. After David was established in Jerusalem as king over both Judah and Israel, he desired to "bring again the ark of our God to us: for," said he, "we enquired not at it in the days of Saul." (1 Chr. 13: 3.) The desire was right, the offspring of true piety, one that proceeded from God Himself. But even the desires that are produced by the Spirit of God in us must be expressed in divine channels, in obedience to the Word. David had not as yet learnt this lesson, and he made his own arrangements for the transport of the ark to mount Zion. A new cart was provided, trusted men were to attend it, and all Israel went up to Kirjath-jearim "to bring up thence the ark of God the Lord, that dwelleth between the cherubims, whose name is called on it." It was an occasion of great joy, and as "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets," they little anticipated that the bright sunshine of their joy was so soon to be darkened by the judgment of God. To bring the ark to mount Zion was a laudable thing; but if brought, it must be brought in God's way. He had given special directions in His word as to how the ark was to be transported (Num. 4); but David and his people were acting as if these instructions had never been written, and indeed were in distinct transgression. The consequence was that God came in and judged them; for when Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark (which none but the priests or Levites were ever to touch) "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God." The lesson was not lost upon the king; for though he was displeased at the time, he confessed afterwards, when he commanded the Levites to sanctify themselves, to bring up the ark, "The Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not *after the due order.*" (1 Chr. 15: 12.)

Other examples might easily be collected (such as Nadab and Abihu offering their strange fire; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, intruding themselves into the priesthood; and king Uzziah offering incense, etc.), but this will suffice to show that God is not indifferent to the maintenance of His order in everything connected with His worship. It is a lesson we may well lay to heart, and one which should furnish us with ground for much searching of heart in regard to the Church of God; for we cannot be too often reminded that we must not "go up by steps unto God's altar." Nothing must be adopted for expediency, convenience, or adornment in His worship. The true worshippers must worship Him in spirit and in truth — this is the only "due order" of this dispensation.

God's order in teaching is no less distinctly indicated. "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve." (1 Tim. 2: 11-13.) And it is not without significance that the instruction as to the Lord's Supper and the assembly (1 Cor. 11-14.) should be prefaced by a statement of the relative position of the man to Christ, and of the woman to the man. There are many great and blessed fields of service inviting the activity of Christian women — fields that none but they can occupy, and in which there is abundant room for their utmost devotedness to the glory of their Lord; but there is an absolute prohibition to their assumption of teaching. The charge the Lord brought against the angel of the Church of Thyatira is, "Thou sufferest that woman (or thy wife) Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servant." In any such case it is a violation of God's order, and indeed the vessel is not adapted to the work. In her own sphere, and in such services as are suited, the woman is unrivalled. Her lively and absorbing affections, the quickness of her spiritual instincts, and, we may add, her spiritual discernment and tact, mark her out for labours for which the man has but slender, if any, qualifications. But should she be tempted to forsake her own sphere, and to take up, in disregard of the Scripture, the responsibility of teaching, confusion of truth, if not positive errors in doctrine and practice, will soon be the speedy result. The daughter of Philip, who prophesied before either the gospels or epistles were written, and, as it would seem, in their father's house, are no example now to Christian women, except in so far as they show that in the privacy of home the Lord may often use the woman as the channel for the communication of His mind to the family.

In government likewise there is to be the most careful adherence to God's order. Thus in the epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus we have the most minute details given of the qualifications of those who may take the place of rule (elders or bishop), or that of a special service (deacons). And if there is no apostolic power now present to appoint either the one or the other, the more careful we ought to be to insist on the possession of the qualifications. Believers themselves, as well as those who have the lead in the assembly, should have more conscience on this subject in their united desire that the authority of the Lord alone should be maintained as expressed in His word. Even in apostolic days self-will found expression, as, for example, in the case of Diotrephes. He was one who sought to govern according to his own will, instead of according to the word of God. Hence he would even shut out an apostle from the saints, looking upon them as his property, instead of the Lord's. But if the Lord sent any of His servants, it was a solemn thing for Diotrephes to exclude them, and even those who would receive them, on the ground of his own feeling or inclinations, and hence the solemn condemnation pronounced upon Him by the apostle. (3 John.)

In the Old Testament there are two remarkable cases of abuse of government. Both Eli's sons and the sons of Samuel seemed to have used their place for their own ends, and to corrupt the people. To speak more exactly, they derived their influence from their relationship to Eli and to Samuel. The priesthood was hereditary, the judgeship not; but Eli's fault was that he abandoned his authority to his sons, and did not restrain them when they made themselves vile. (1 Sam. 3: 13.) And how often is it the case that relatives are allowed to usurp the place and authority of the one with whom they are connected, and who himself may rightly occupy a position of rule. For him to act would be according to God; but he cannot delegate his

responsibility, and if his relatives act in his place, it must not only violate God's order, but it will also, as a consequence, introduce confusion and disorder.

Our readers can pursue the subject for themselves, and the more they investigate it the more they will be convinced that the Lord's honour and our blessing are intimately bound up with the maintenance in every way, both in the family and in the Church, of God's order. E.D.