

“God’s Order: Particular callings”

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Text: Eph. 5:22

We have covered the necessity of desiring to know God and to listen for His voice ***in order to have God’s order in our lives, and world.*** We named the Bible as an available “transcript of God speech” (written down, hence accessible always) *which we are to read and absorb/inwardly digest.* Then, keying off **Be ye mutually submitted to one another** (Eph. 5:21), we studied the role that *filial fear of God* (as proper to a beloved child) plays in created divine order among us and all creation. We also defined this mutual submission as a “general directive.” So we may now picture our spiritual offspring (those that we led to the Lord) whom we are nurturing and feeding as they grow in maturity—now that is a *particular* calling as well as the reproductive responsibility of every believer. The kingdom of God advances in this manner; those who are older in the Lord, not only lead others to faith but they also raise them up (**in the fear and admonition of the Lord**). Deflecting this work to others is reckless and ineffectual. Church and Sunday School cannot do for new Christians what their spiritual parents/mentors/disciplers can and must do.

In brief I am setting forth the conscientious terms of active faith. Each one of us must perform our general duties as well as those duties which are particular to our individual callings. In marriage, we read (Eph.5:22) **wives, submit to your own husbands as unto the Lord.** This is not oppressive. Indeed it is a firewall against demeaning, domination. Jesus rules over us by loving us. Sheep are happiest when they are led, not pushed. Note the high spiritual standard set for this dynamic: **as unto the Lord.** The whims, wishes and desires of the husband are down the line from this expectation of our Lord. For example, the Lord humbles us but does not degrade us—what he asks of us does not revolt and defile us (quite the opposite). What is asked us of *challenges* us and elevates us—increases honor, elevates and ennobles us. In pastoral counseling I have suggested that a husband take into consideration how his requests make his spouse feel as a guideline in marriage: **dwell with your wife in an understanding/considerate/respectful manner.** Violence, abuse and humiliation do not rise to that standard. Scripture reinforces this where it says: **walking worthy of the vocation** (calling) **wherein we are called.** (Eph. 4:1)

To make this directive accessible to us, the apostle, for illustration and exemplification, presents various particulars, here and elsewhere (Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Cor. 7 see verse 35; 1 Tim. 3). Compare with Peter (1 Peter 2,3) and Titus 2 which coordinate with Exodus 20:12: **Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.** This injunction is spelled out for us Proverbs 1:8-9:

Hear, my son, your father’s instruction

And do not forsake your mother’s teaching;

9 Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head

And [b]ornaments about your neck.

Solomon is the probable addressee and David and Bathsheba are the parents in view. Yes, despite their sins, errors and missteps, parents are deemed by God as fit instructors. In this world less than perfect parents are assigned less than perfect offspring!

“By this (arrangement) much good is both mutually shared one to another, and received from one another.” (Gouge, p.18) Our particular places and callings are the bonds that firmly

and fitly unite people together”— as families, communities and societies. The analogy for this is the members of our natural body, joined by nerves arteries, muscles, bones, sinews and veins—their coordination makes sensing, motion and so on possible. Or, perhaps, we should suggest that it is their communication which makes coordination that makes life what it is as we move about in our bodies. There’s a lot that goes on within our skins that we are but dimly aware of—we are fearfully and wonderfully made. However,

A bad husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant, tradesman, craftsman, magistrate, merchant or minister is no good Christian.

So as we study these particular callings *where God has set us*, let us discover the diverse duties of those callings. And, further, let us develop a conscientious attitude towards them *with an informed conscience*. Just getting by won’t cut the mustard—doing what comes naturally is a failed stratagem; those who belong to Christ must elevate their existence (as in **walk in the light!**). In the family we have, for starters, two orders: husbands and wives, then parents and children. In maintaining this order, some times, effort and expenditure must be employed. The Holy Spirit has set down these family duties purposefully. “The family is a seminary or nursery of the church and nation.” (Gouge, p.19) Gouge likens it to a beehive—in which there is a queen bee. Workers and drones which, when it is properly functioning multiples by sending forth swarms of bees to expand the community (church and nation). “The first beginning of mankind and of his increase was *out of a family*. God first joined Adam and Eve and made them husband and wife, and then gave them children. Thus, husband and wife, parent and child (which are parts of a family) existed before magistrate and subject, minister and people, which are the parts of a nation and a church.” (Gouge, pp.19-20 P 4-P 1)

Generally speaking, we as a culture have **forgotten** this divine order of things. We assume the primacy of society and buy into “social conditioning” as determinative of all things. **Thus we suppress the truth of our created order!** Acculturation, or indoctrination, we assert, as in childhood development and socialization (all under the guise of education) tend to be built on the false premise **that society precedes family**. This is entirely, scripturally, backwards! For example, the premises that society is all about “oppressors and the oppressed,” or “race and victimhood,” are both built on a false foundation (i.e. critical theory assumes the primacy of society over family).

In the beginning there was no society, no norms, no traditions, no laws, no rituals, no myths, no religion (only worship!) nor any other form of “oppressive” organized social life (no schools, hospitals, jails, civic buildings, shopping malls or infrastructure).

Before people built houses, it is most likely that they sheltered in caves and lean-to’s. It is very misleading to argue from our present conditions backwards—because family came before all of this. Family came before kinship, before moiety, clan and tribe—even family trees! How things are is not how they always were—to assert such a thing is to contradict observation science and evolutionary theory!

This template of family first was re-iterated in the Flood. Cities and nations were destroyed in the Flood, and, when God hit the restart button, **it was through the family of one man**, even Noah, that all we see and observe now came about. Of course, between Adam’s origin and Noah’s restart there was this huge distinction: Adam had no memory of a collective past (no parents, no social history which is the proposed chief factor shaping all we know and are as opinions, fabrications), but Noah did have baggage. With Noah, society had existed prior and it was to be rebuilt—from the ashes, so to speak. It could be replicated, or imitated.

All our present cultural diversity, however, sprang forth from Noah and his three sons, all of their wives and offspring who lived on a houseboat.

From this it follows that a conscientious performance of familial and household duties leads to the good ordering of church and nation by being means fit and prepare men for them. (Gouge, p.20. P 2)

So we suggest that the family is a little church and a little nation in the making—or at least a prototype of each, a proving ground where “trial may be made of those fit to serve in authority, or subjection in church or nation.” Or, perhaps better described, “it is a school where the first principles and grounds of government and subjection may be learned, and by which men are fitted to greater matters in church or nation.” (Gouge, p. 20, P 3) *This point is made explicitly by Paul when he writes that “a bishop/elder/overseer who cannot rule his own house is not fit to govern the church. (1 Tim. 3:5)* And for subordinates, “those who cannot be subject in the family will hardly be brought to yield subjugation in church, or government.” Consider David’s sons (Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah); or those of Eli (Hophini and Phinehas). Both leaders and followers are duty bound by their respective and complementary callings. Therefore, all conscientious performance of household duties is “a public work.” And, if done well, that is work enough for each! *Being earnestly godly is a full-time occupation.* Husband of one wife, father of children . . . wife of one husband and mother of the same children coupled with the children’s calling to be obedient . . . with all doing what God commands, they implement divine order and supply a stabilizing influence for the entire society, nation.

Where does anyone get the idea that they *should be spending their time as they please?* Either in idleness, or following vain pleasures, entertainments and delights day in and day out?! Excluding themselves from all responsibility and obligations? A man who casts all of the care of the household on his wife so as to play, spend time in idleness and luxury, sensual pursuits and gratification, is the epitome of a worthless fellow—no good husband, nor a Christian one. On the distaff side, there are women who do little housework, or training up of the children and occupy themselves with fitness, or lying in bed, adorning themselves—partying, shopping, gossiping, busy everywhere but at home! They are lazy and self-indulgent, neglectful of husband and negligent of their children. Too burdened with childcare to exert themselves in any other useful and fruitful manner. They are hardly the Proverbs Thirty-One Woman! Then there are young adults living in their parents’ homes, leeching off their largesse, filled with headstrong affections . . . rebellious, reckless and licentious persons, following wherever their lusts lead them. ***That this goes on doesn’t make it right—they are bums.*** They share no financial responsibility for the wider household, contributing little or nothing to general household expenses, maintenance, or upkeep. They are takers, selfish to the core. *They do not attend to the callings that God has ordained for them—this is too disorderly.* This is one implication of the frequently cited **our God is a God of order** infrequently contemplated.

The Lord gives His blessing to men while they are busy with their callings. (p. 22 P 2)

The dutiful service of Jacob to his father-in-law Laban led, moved God to bless him. (Gen. 31:42) Joseph’s faithfulness to Potiphar was done in remembrance of God (and in imitation of his father, honoring Jacob) that resulted in his eventual advancement to the ruler over all Egypt (**who is as wise as this man is?** Gen. 39:2; 41:38) Moses was faithful performing his duties as shepherd to Jethro’s sheep, and God appointed him prince over Israel (Exod. 3:1-2). David repeated that pattern and was sent for, while keeping Jesse’s sheep, to be anointed king (1 Sam, 16:11). “Not to insist on any more particulars, the promises of God’s protection are restrained (tied?) to our callings, for the charge which God has given the angels concerning man, is to keep him in all his ways. (Psalm 91:11, Gouge, p. 22 P 2).

No one in public office, of church or nation, is exempted of family duties. Many leaders (kings, prophets and priests!) in Israel failed in this regard (Eli and Samuel, Jacob and Judah, and David and Solomon). None is exempted; “private duties are necessary duties.” Joshua, as a captain and prince of his people, did much in public office without neglecting his family: **as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord** (Joshua 24:13). In the cases cited (Eli, Jacob, Judah and David) the failure of fatherly duty led to outbreaks of lewd, lascivious and ungodly behaviors as with Jacob’s sons(!)—I would say, in general, **disorderly conduct**. In David’s case, this led to strife, discord and treason—that speaks to the “necessary” piece of “necessary duties.” We should not be surprised at the conduct of men in our day, reflecting a lack of fathering whether by absence, or by neglect. *This is not to suggest that daughters are unaffected for the disorder engendered by family dysfunction is not limited to either of the genders.*

We note also that there are special degrees, or orders in family life. Husbands and wives are placed by the apostle in the **first rank**—this is foundational!—and so he declares their duties first of all. “First, the husband and wife were *the first couple* that ever were in the world. Adam and Eve were joined in marriage and made husband and wife before they ever had children.” We should ponder that. *There was no sociology of marriage and there were no magistrates in place to analyze, or solemnize anything!* Marriage was unprecedented as created and its primacy remains to this day. Families are built from this original, building block. “Second, usually the husband and wife are “chief” in family order, all under them are single persons. They are the governors of all the rest in the house.” (p. 23 P 2-4) This is a step up from the “couple” focus of our contemporary nuclear family! “Therefore it is important that they (parents) should first know their duty, and learn to practice it, so that they may be an example to all the rest. ***If they fail in their duty to one another, they give occasion to everyone under them to be careless and negligent in theirs.*** “If a husband is rude to his wife and despises her, he gives occasion to children to disdain her likewise, and to be disobedient to her, even to be rude and obstinate to each other and especially to those under them.” (p. 23 P 4) What a seedbed for rebellion resides in this defiant, disrespectful and contemptible state!

“If the wife is distrustful and unfaithful to her husband, if she steals from him, children will soon take courage, or rather boldness, from her example to steal secretly what they can from their father, Thus is the breach of duty a double fault, in one respect toward the party they wrong, and in another toward whom they give occasion for sin. (pp.23-24) There is no more compelling reason for conscientiousness *in doing one’s duty* than this (that I can think of). And no more clear statement of the need for guidance through example, or leadership in the home exists.

Is there a reason for the apostle beginning with the first subordinate, the wife? There’s this: it is God’s usual pattern: church, then Christ (v. 24); wife, then husband (v.24); children, then parents (6:1), servants and then masters (6:5). (Compare this with Col. 3:18, 20 and 28 and 1 Peter 3:1.) “The law (Exod. 20:12) expressly mentions in the first place the subordinate’s duty, only implying the superior’s to follow as a just consequence, which is, if the subordinate must give honor, and perform such duties that pertain to it, then the superior must carry himself worthy of honor, and provide answerable duties (p. 24 P 3).” “Who is not more ready to rule than to be subject? It is a far more difficult to govern well than to obey well.

To rule and govern requires more knowledge, experience, wisdom, care, watchfulness, diligence (forecasting, re-evaluation and assessment) and other like virtues than to obey and be subject.” (p. 25 P 1) A superior may sin in commanding a subordinate to do his bidding that

the subordinate may not rightfully be charged with. God's wise disposing providence is manifest in His setting forth who may govern (the stronger, wealthier, established and wiser) and who should submit (the weaker, poorer and more ignorant). **Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child** (Eccl. 10:16) and as a curse Isaiah says. **And I will give children to be their princes and babes shall rule over them.** (Isaiah 3:12) "Though governors have the heaviest burden laid on their shoulders, subordinates that are under subjugation think their burden is heaviest, and are loathe to bear it, and most willing to cast it away." And why is this? Our pride and ambition constantly seed rebellion. "This is the cause that in all ages, both divine, and human laws, penalties and punishments of diverse kinds have been ordained, to keep subordinates in compass of their duties, and yet—such is the pride of man's heart—all will not serve (p. 26 P 2)." These are the reasons for the duties of subordinates to precede those of superiors.

"Though some in authority are so proud, so savage, and inhumane, that no honor done to them, no performance of duty, can satisfy and content them. They will reward evil for goodness, like David's enemies (Ps. 38:20)." The best general direction prescribed to subordinates is for them to be careful and conscientious in doing their duty first.

Lastly, men must first learn to obey well before they can rule well. Here are five weighty reasons to motivate governors to first do their duty:

1. By virtue of their authority, they bear God's image and honor that image by doing their duty.
2. By reason of their position, they should precede those under them.
3. A faithful performance of their duty is a special means to keep subordinates faithful in theirs.
4. Their failing in duty is also exemplary; others will fail in theirs—a double fail.
5. Their reckoning for failure will be far greater for **of them to whom much is given, of them shall more be required.**

It would be ideal if all would strive to be first to begin their duties! Performing to their best, running as to win. Remembering the while, nature tends to run contrary to grace—just as the flesh resists/opposes the spirit.

We will engage the matter of wives being first brought into the school of Christ next time—remembering that they do so as the most excellent of subordinates in the divine order.

Amen.