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A Devout Household

"And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa." — Acts 10:7–8

Summary:

Cornelius promptly and wisely obeyed the heavenly vision. He remained true to his responsibilities, sending trustworthy members of his household to bring Peter. Their devotion reflected the home's spiritual character: a godly leader chooses faithful companions and nurtures faith through prayer, instruction, and example. Every Christian can care for the people and duties God has entrusted to them. Rather than giving a harsh command, Cornelius explained his purpose openly. His conduct shows how piety sanctifies relationships: authority is tempered by gentleness, obedience is guided by love, and kindness fosters diligence and fidelity.

Outline:

1. **Obedience should be immediate and wise**
   - Cornelius promptly acted upon the heavenly vision and carried out its direction well.
2. **Faithfulness respects our present calling**
   - He remained at his post and sent others because his responsibilities required his presence.
3. **A godly household reflects godly leadership**
   - Cornelius chose devout helpers and encouraged faith through prayer, instruction, and example.
4. **Every believer can cultivate a field of influence**
   - Even without wide opportunities, Christians can bless the home and people entrusted to them.
5. **Piety sanctifies authority and obedience**
   - Openness, gentleness, respect, love, diligence, and fidelity flourish together under true religion.

Text

Cornelius obeyed the heavenly vision promptly and faithfully. Though willing to fetch Peter himself, he sent messengers as instructed, remaining at home where his presence was needed. As an officer entrusted with authority, he rightly stayed in his calling. He sent "two of his household servants" and "a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually," showing that he had both a household and a military command. More importantly, Cornelius and his soldiers were devout. Like Joshua, he feared God with all his household, declaring, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The agreement between the head of a family and its members can be explained in two ways.

First, such a person will choose faithful people to attend him whenever possible. David said, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

Secondly, a godly leader is likely to foster faith in those who entered the household without it. He will use every means at his disposal, and his own character and example will support his efforts. The grace of God, which he never fails to seek, will bless them.

Those who are blessed become blessings, making the desert rejoice like a rose. Some have the opportunity and ability to cultivate vast barren lands; each of us can still turn a small patch of waste into growth. If we cannot tend the neighbouring moor, we can plant a cottage garden, inviting passersby to say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you."

Many servants have been grateful to enter a pious family, where they learned salvation's way and became God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. Christian masters and mistresses disgrace themselves if servants leave unable to read the Bible or without one. After explaining these matters to his servants, Cornelius sent them to Joppa—not with harsh commands, unexplained orders, or sealed instructions from a tyrant demanding obedience without trust, but with openness and confidence in both master and servants.

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How happy the household that preserves life's proper distinctions while fostering union, harmony, kindness, and openness, alongside respect and obedience without encroachment. Authority is softened by gentleness, submission by love; indulgence never breeds irreverence, and goodness earns diligence and fidelity. Where are these qualities most likely found? People do not gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. Personal piety is morality's source, safeguard, refinement, and glory.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (January 30, Morning), first published in 1854.