

## SERMON CLIX.

Conclu. 3. **T**HAT it is the Divine Prerogative, to make or appoint Institutions in Worship. This Power belongs to God alone, and to no other, neither Angel nor Man. It is true, these may be the Instruments of discovering to us the Will of God in this regard. But to appoint any Ordinance of Worship, is beyond their Liberty. The Reason whereof may be afterwards considered, under the Negative part of this Command. Here only I shall offer a few Assertions for the Demonstration of this Conclusion, viz.

1. **T**HAT God alone is the Immediate Object of all Worship. The Object of Obedience in general, is either *Immediate* or *Ultimate*. That God is the *Ultimate* Object of all Obedience is certain. We are to do all with acknowledging him to be the first Cause of all things, and consequently to eye his Command in it, and with seeking his Glory as our last end, in all that we do. And except we thus perform all Duty, it will not amount to Obedience to God, let it be never so conformable to the Rule, as to the matter of it. But still, there are Two Tables in the moral Law, the Second whereof contains Duty to Man, or Love to our Neighbour, and in these, the *Creature is the immediate Object* of our Duty; whereas, the first Table enjoys us, in Duties which have God for the next Object, as well as the last End of them: So that we are to be carried forth in them, directly to God. Such are all the Duties of Worship. According to, Mat. 4. 10. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* So that we may not pay any Worship, to any other but God, so much as intermediately. Hence that, Mai. 42. 8. *I am the Lord, that is my Name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.*

2. **T**HAT the Institutions in Worship, are properly *Media* to help us in our Natural Worship. They are not ordained for their own sake, but with a respect to the former. How far, and in what respect they are so, we observed under the first Conclusion. And it is here to be remarked again, to lead us in our present search. What is contained in this Natural Worship, was considered under the former Command. *In sum*, it is to Know God, to Acknowledge him to be God, and glorify him as God. Now Man, as a dependent Creature, stands in need of help in this Concern; much more fallen Man, who hath no natural Light left in him, to direct him how to Worship God acceptably. And therefore God hath pleased to shew him a way, wherein he may do it; and to this way belong all the Institutions, appointed to Man since the Fall.

3. **T**HAT all Institutions as such, are *Positive* and *Arbitrary*. I say, as such, for we before observed, that there are Duties, which in

themselves belong to Natural Worship, that God hath appointed to be performed in Instituted Worship: But that this Duty is to be performed under this Institution, and that under another, is an Arbitrary thing, and depends on the will of the Instituter. But besides, there are Institutions, which wholly and intirely are *Positive*. There is no Natural Connection between the Duties themselves, and the End for which they were appointed. Such are all the Ceremonies appointed, either under the Old, or New Testament: And the supream reason that we can give of the Appointment of these is, that it was the pleasure of him that ordained them, to enjoyn them. They did not proceed from his Nature, nor were they in themselves necessary, for the due honouring him, by the reasonable Creature, but only he law good to appoint them. Though still it must be acknowledged, that he had a design in them, which was his own Glory, and our Benefit. However, the Seal of them is only this, *I am the Lord.* And he might have appointed others, as well as these, had he so pleased.

4. **T**HAT the *Usefulness* and *Efficacy* of all Institutions in Worship, depends on the *Pleasure* of the Instituter. Their usefulness consists in their serviceableness to the end for which they were appointed. For we observed, that they themselves are not an end, but a *Medium* to it; and in this respect are they a *Medium*, viz. as they may advantage us to promote the great End of all Worship, which is to glorify God, and enjoy Communion with him, which is our true Blessedness: and if they miss of this end in us, they do eventually become vain Oblations, and in no respect profitable to us. And this is their usefulness, when they help forward the Graces of Holiness in us, and so lead us to Eternal Life. Now this Efficacy depends upon the Instituter. We cannot give it to them, nor make them thus powerful to us, it must therefore come from him who ordains them; nor can our dependence for it, be rationally placed on any other. And it hence necessarily follows, that none else can, with any reason, pretend to make such Institutions, but he who can put virtue into them, to cause them to advance this design. For any to appoint a Religious Ordinance, who cannot command a Blessing to accompany the using of it, it is both egregious folly & arrogance, and the very light of Nature condemns it.

5. **T**HAT God, and he only can give a Blessing and Success to any Institution. He can do it, let the *Medium* be what it will, and to an eye of humane reason never so improbable, as having no natural Connexion with the end for which it is ordained; yet if he Commands it, he is able to make it certainly to attain its end. He therefore often chuseth such *Media* as Men count foolishness, that therein he may illustrate the glory of his Wisdom & Power. The Preaching of Christ Crucified was so esteemed, by the *Jew* and *Greek*, 1 Cor. 1. 23.

But

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. And yet he tells us, ver. 24. *But unto them which are called, both Jews & Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* And further declares, ver. 26, 27. *Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty.* And he challengeth this to himself, *Isai 48. 17. Thus saith the Lord thy redeemer, the holy one of Israel, I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit.* And that no other but he can do, is equally certain. And there needs nothing more to demonstrate this, than to consider, that the most able & faithful Ministers, whom he makes use of in the dispensation of his Institutions, do utterly disclaim any Ability in them, to make any one of these Ordinances, effectual to the saving good of those to whom they dispense them; but refer that entirely to him. Which Argument Paul useth, to beat off his *Corinthians*, from placing an over-value upon the best of Ministers, *1 Cor. 3. 5, 6, 7.*

6. THAT God hath engaged his Blessing to no other Institutions, but those of his own Appointment. He hath encouraged his People, to attend upon his own, by promising his presence and blessing with them, in their due attendance on them, *Exod. 20. 24. In all places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.* But he hath not so done, in regard of any other. He threatened them with his Anger, as will afterwards appear; and for this reason, they that attend them, are said to Worship him in vain, *Mat. 15. 9. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.* If Men could oblige God, to succeed all their Inventions, which they pretend to be for his Glory, they might have a Plea for them; but it is not so, but the contrary, and the reason of it may be considered in its proper Place. Here only let it be observed, that if no Institutions are of use or benefit, but such as are under Heaven's approbation and blessing, it must needs follow, that it is an abuse to Mankind for any to lay such an Injunction on Men, when they can secure no Benefit to their attendance on them.

7. THAT all Institutions of Worship bind the Conscience, which is subject to God only. All Worship that is lawful is due to God, for he is the only Object of it, and all the Service which is due to him, must have a Divine Law for it; for no less an Authority can warrant it. And all Divine Laws as such, bind the Conscience, for he is the Lord of it, and he himself hath assured us, that he will punish them that violate his Ordinances, tho' secretly. Now he that pays Conscientious Obedience to any Institutions, doth therein own, that his Conscience is subject to that Authority, by which they are enjoined; and

because God only knows, and can judge the Conscience, it must either have that God hath himself appointed, or Authorized another to appoint in his Name; but God hath reserved this to himself, and hath limited us to this Rule, in *Deut. 12. 32. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.*

Conclu. 4. THAT the Word of God is the only Rule, by which we are to inform our selves, what are the Ordinances of Divine Institution. If we would know what are those Positive Precepts of his, which concern this Affair, and not be mistaken about them, we must repair to this Oracle for our information. And that we may rightly take up this Conclusion, and the reason of it, let these things be observed,

1. THAT the light of Nature cannot of itself discover to us, what is a Divine Institution. It may sometimes be able, to give us a convincing reason of the equity and suitableness of the Institution, yet, that this or that is an Ordinance, it can give us no information. And the reason of this is evident, because, as was before intimated, they are the Arbitrary Declarations of his Sovereign Will. They therefore who allow such a Power to humane Reason, or the light of Nature, in some things, have taken up a more lax and large Notion of an Institution, than I intend, and confound things which ought to be distinguished. For indeed, that which derives immediately from the Sovereignty of God, and hath no foundation necessary in the nature of the thing, cannot be inferred and concluded from our way of reasoning. And in regard of this, may that demand be well made. *Rom. 11. 34. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor.*

2. HENCE we must receive this discovery from God by a particular Revelation. The light of Nature in a more large sense may be called a Revelation; but that which is more strictly so called, is that which God hath made known of his mind after an extraordinary manner, in the first discovery of it to Men, tho' it hath afterwards been discovered to others by those to whom it was first so communicated. And if it had not firstly been so manifested, Mankind must forever have remained ignorant of it. Now there are but these two ways, in which Men are capable of coming by the knowledge of any thing, viz. by Reason and Revelation. It therefore the former is defective in this regard, we must be beholden to the latter for it. Hence we have our Saviour Christ making such a disjunction, in his animadversion upon Peter's Confession, *Mat. 16. 17. Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

3. THAT God hath pleased to reveal his Will to some extraordinarily, in the giving of these Institutions. As these Ordinances have been given to the Church, not all at once, but successively, and with additions & alterations, so all these things were by Men inspired, and

who did all as commanded by God. And this they had, sometimes by Dreams and Visions, sometimes by Messages received from Angels, and frequently by the Son of God, who is called the Angel of the Covenant: but still, it was from God, that they had the injunction; they came not on their own heads. And they had those infallible tokens, by which they knew that it was a Divine Revelation, that was made to them, that enabled them without hesitancy to prefix it with, *Thus saith the Lord*. And thus *Paul* introduceth the Institution of the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 11. 23. *For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you.*

4. THAT God hath ordered these Statutes of his to be recorded in the Holy Scriptures. True, these were for a long time, handed from one Generation to another, and received from Fathers to Children, by Tradition; but it was God's Pleasure, when He saw meet, to command the Writing of these things, that so they might be preserved, for the help & direction of his People at all times. Thus we find, that when *Moses* had received the Ordinances in the Mount, he recorded them, Exod. 24. 4. *And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.* And we are told of such a Command, Exod. 34. 27. *Write thou these words.* And *Moses* wrote the whole Law in a Book, Deut. 31. 24. We are therefore told, both how the Scriptures were written, and for what end and usefulness they were so, 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.* And God's People were directed to regulate themselves by this, when Deceivers were ready to impose upon them, *Isai.* 8. 20. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no truth in them.*

5. THAT there are no new Institutions ordained, and consequently no new Revelation of any to be expected, since the Canon of the Scriptures was perfected. What extraordinary discoveries of the mind of God may be made to Men, in the day of Reformation, and Reformation of all things in the Church of God, which is hoped and waited for, I shall not inquire. That the Spirit shall then be poured forth abundantly, we are to believe, according to the Scriptures. Doubtless, God will then communicate a great deal of Light to his Chosen, whereby they shall have abundant satisfaction in those great Truths of his Word, about which, Christendom is at this Day, involved in endless Disputes. For we are told, Hab. 2. 14. *For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* But this is certain, that there will be no new Ordinances appointed. It pleased God to set up a legal Administration, to be and continue, till Christ had come in

the flesh: And He being the Substance of those shadows, gave being to the things therein prefigured, and so put an end to them; till when, they were to be of force; according to *Cant.* 4. 6. *Leb.* 9. 10. But when Christ had accomplished his Work on Earth, & took possession of his Kingdom, he gave a new Dispensation of Ordinances to his Church, which is to continue till the Consummation of all things. And for this reason, it is said to be a Kingdom, that cannot be moved, *Heb.* 12. 28. When therefore the Apostle *John* had written his Book of Revelation, which is the last of Canonical Scripture, he set such a Seal as that to it, Rev. 22. 18, 19. *For I testify unto every one that heareth the words of the prophetic of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophetic, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

6. HENCE it follows, that if we would know what are the Gospel Institutions, we must apply our selves to the Word of God for them. This is the only unerring Rule for our direction. Christ is the only Lawgiver of his Church, and his Ministers are to limit themselves, to teach Men no other injunctions, but such as he hath prescribed, *Mat.* 28. 20. And how shall they know them, but by his Word, wherein he hath given his whole Counsel in this respect? And it is sufficient for them to reject any Ordinance of Worship, which is imposed on them, if it hath not his Warrant for it. God therefore thought that to be enough for their Conviction, *Jer.* 7. 31.

Conclu. 5. THAT all the Institutions of Divine Appointment, are equally our Duty, with the Duties of Natural Worship. This must be understood with respect to such as have the revelation of these Ordinances made unto them by the Word of God. For we before observed, that none are under the Obligation of them, but those to whom they are revealed; But Men greatly mistake themselves, who think that altho' they are under indispensable Duty, to perform Duties of Natural Worship to God, yet they may neglect those which are of Institution without danger; but this is a great error, and the occasion of a great deal of Sin. Not that every Institution is to be run upon without the Qualifications required, but it is a Sin in Men to live unqualified, and think to plead that for their excuse or justification in their neglect; as if one Sin would excuse us from another. The Truth then of this Conclusion, may be demonstrated in a few Things.

1. THEY are enjoined by the same Authority. God is the Author of the Law of Nature, as well as of the Positive Law, and of this as well as that. Now the first Obligation lying upon any to obey a Law, is from the Consideration of the Power or Authority of the Lawgiver. If it be his Prerogative to make such

a Statute, and bind it upon us, it must indubitably be our Duty to submit to it; and whatsoever difference there may be in the things themselves, as without question there is a difference, yet in point of Obedience it amounts to one; the same Authority is despised in the neglect of the one, as of the other, and there is as much Contempt cast upon him by this as by that. That therefore is a Preface to all the Commands, *Exod. 20. 2.*

2. *THEY are directed to the same End, and to be performed to the same Object.* They are both of them Worship, though diversified by the distinction of Natural and Instituted. They are both for the same Design, viz. the carrying on of the Religion wherein God is to be acknowledged and glorified by the Reasonable Creature. God is therefore to be served in them both. And as it is our great Business to serve him, so we are to take our directions from him, how to do it; and in these he hath told it us. And because these Institutions are the *Media* found out by God's Wisdom, and prefixed by his holy Will, to help us in our moral Worship, we cannot neglect these, without hindring our selves in the other. They that will omit their attendance upon the Ordinances, will soon grow remiss in Natural Duties.

3. *THEY are by the Precept made a necessary Means to the great end of Worship.* What that end is, we have already observed. Now a thing may be said to be necessary, either in its own Nature, or by virtue of some Law or Precept; the former Necessity is, when the thing cannot be without it; the latter is, when it is the Will of God, that we shall obtain his Blessing in no other way. In the former respect, no particular Ordinance, is absolutely necessary; tho' in general, the Nature of Man, and of Worship, require that there be some Ordinances about it. Though it be at God's Liberty, what he will enjoy. But in the latter respect, these are necessary to be observed and obeyed by us, because God hath said, that this is the way in which he will be Worshipped by us, and accordingly will communicate himself to us. Hence the enjoyment of these is said to be the special Privilege of a People, *Psal. 147. 19, 20.*

4. *THAT they are a Test, by which God proves our Obedience to him.* God's Sovereign Prerogative, is in nothing more asserted, than in the Second Command; as will afterwards be considered. Now God hath from the beginning used such a Test. He did so with *Adam* in his Integrity by the Tree of Knowledge. He did so with his Ancient People, in the Laws of Ordinances given to them by *Moses*; and he hath done so by his Gospel Church, in the prescribed Appointments of it. On this tenure therefore the Promise runs, *Deut. 3. 32. 6. 24.* Now it is not what the thing is in it self, but what it is to us, that puts weight upon it. And nothing can discover our hearts more, than a trial that is in a thing of it self small and easy, and yet laid on us to be a proof

of our Sincerity: As *Adam's* forbearing the fruit of one Tree; *Saul's* carrying seven Days; and many of like nature.

5. *THAT they are urged upon us, by Reasons fetched from the same Topicks.* Some have thought all those Duties to be in themselves Moral, which are enforced with Arguments that are so, but that is a mistake: for altho' the Precepts themselves are Positive, yet the Obligation to Obedience is Moral, and therefore the Motives may well be so too. Such is that, *Lev. 10. 44.* and many of like import. God would hereby give us to understand, that tho' the thing were not a Duty, but at Liberty, before he commanded it; yet when once it hath his Seal upon it, we as truly pollute our selves with Sin, by transgressing of it, as by the breach of any of the merely moral Commands.

6. *THEY have equal Sanctions annexed to them.* The Sanctions that are added to any Laws, are to give a Solemnity to them, in or upon the Consciences of Men. Now God hath made the same Promises to Obedience, and declared the same Threatnings against Disobedience to his Institutions, as unto the Precepts of Natural Worship. When God had given the Law to Israel, what greater enforcement could be added than that, *Deut. 32. 46, 47.* And that in *Chap. 30. 19.* And we find what a fearful Commination is uttered against those that unworthily Communicate at the Lord's Table, *1 Cor. 11. 29.* Yea, and let us remember, that all the misery that is fallen upon the whole race of Mankind, was introduced by the transgression of a Positive Precept or Ordinance, *Gen. 3.* Let us then fear God, and take heed that we neglect not nor despise any of his holy Ordinances.

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## SERMON CLX.