

for the *Unconverted*, That God would make them to return and Live, and Bless all Means to that end: That Proud and Careless Sinners may be Awakened, and Convinced Sinners may be Humbled, and that CHRIST may be formed in them. And they should Pray for every one, whose Case needs particular Remembrance; and lay them before God, with fervent Importunity. Yea, They should continue in Prayer, unto *Perseverance*; and whensoever God gives them *Good Success*, they should bring their Acknowledgements to Him, and give to Him the whole Praise of it.

U S E. *AND if all this belongs to Men in this Post, certainly then, It is no Easy Work that lies upon them; nor do they need Envy, but Pity.* Surely, It becomes all that stand in

Relation, to maintain an Holy Awe of the solemn Charge that belongs to it; and to wait humbly on God, for Pity, Pardon, Assistance, and Acceptance thro' Christ. And if any do in any measure Acquit themselves in it, they are to be accounted as the *Servants of JESUS CHRIST*.

[ MARCH 7. 1704. ]

## SERMON CLXXXVI.

Secondly, **W**E proceed to Consider, *The Duties which a People owe to their Ministers.* That there are such Duties is certain, for the Gospel hath prescribed them; and it follows from the very Nature of *correlates*, between which the Duties are *Mutual*, and the one flows from the other. But that I may not *Speak in the Air*, it will be requisite that we a little Consider, *who are this People, who thus do stand related to the Elderhip, and owe their Duty to them as such.* Now, Though there be a Relation to the *Church Catholick*, which all Ministers and People that are Christians do bear; so that a Minister may Lawfully Preach *Ex Officio*, to any Assembly of Christians, and Administer the other Ordinances to them, if orderly Invited thereunto; and the Members of *one Church* may, on that Score, Communicate with *another* Occasionally: Yet it is certain, That Christ hath Ordained, that there shall be *Particular Assemblies* of His People, in the several Places where such dwell; hence we not only Read of a *Church at Rome*, at *Corinth*, &c. but of *Churches in Galatia*, Gal. 1. 2. Now for the Organizing of these Churches, it is necessary that there be both *Elders* and *Brethren*, and these to be peculiarly Related each to the other: For this Reason the Apostles and Apostolical Men, when they had in any Place Converted a Number to the Gospel Profession, they Ordained *Fixed* and *Resident* Presbyters over them, as is every where Witnessed: And the very Light of Nature teacheth us, That if these *Elders* are by Christ's Command, to take the Charge of this or that *Flock*, as their Overseers; then *every one* of such a Flock are to acknowledge the spe-

cial Authority of such, and themselves under peculiar Bonds to them, more than to any others: And it is against right Reason, that the one should be *bound*, and the other at *aloose end*; and without any Order, to *Desert* them, and go hither and thither at their own Pleasure: And this Practice, tho' too much followed by many, yet hath a natural tendency to destroy the Gospel Discipline: Not as if *Churches* are *Prisons*, but because it is necessary that a *Decorum* be used in Mens passing from one to another, and Scandal be prevented: For which Reason, all the *Reformed*, every where that I know of, have provided, that no Person be entertained in one Communion, without a Regular Recommendation from that where they formerly were Communicants.

NOW concerning such as these, who have a proper Relation to this or that particular *Society*, and consequently are immediately under the Watch and Care of this particular *Elderhip*, we may consider what are the *Principal* and most *Comprehensive Duties* incumbent on them; which may come under *Two Heads*.

I. **T H E R E** is a *suitable Respect* which they ought to show to their Persons. There is an Honour due to them for the sake of the *Post* which Christ hath put them in, which is Honourable: And there is an Honour due to them, when they are *Faithful* to God, and to the Souls of their Hearers. Now this Honour is to be shewn to their *Persons* principally:

[1.] *IN their Hearts.* And indeed it must begin here, or all the rest is but *Flattery*, and *Abuse*. And there are *Two things* wherein this Honour ought to be maintained;

1. *IN an entire Cordial Love of them.* There is a *peculiar Love* which a People owe to their Faithful Ministers: Their Relation is very near, and the Cement of this Relation is *Love*, which ought to be *Real*, for that is a general Rule, 1 Joh. 3. 18. *Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* The Apostle observes what Affection his *Galatians* once had for him, which he blames them for the Loss of, Gal. 4. 14, 15. And if we Love Christ, we shall certainly Love those that come from Him, on His Errand, and do truly discharge it.

2. *By a precious Esteem maintained for them.* And indeed this will be the genuine Fruit of a *Cordial Love*; especially if we consider *who they are*, and *what it is for*, that we have them. The *Place* which Christ hath set them in, the *Errand* they come upon, and their *Fidelity* in the discharge of it, challengeth an Honourable Respect for them, in the Hearts of those to whom they are sent. They are Christ's *Ambassadors* to us, and do Represent His Person, 2 Cor. 5. 20. *Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ---* They are Men of God, such by whom he hath been pleased to communicate His Mind to us; and those that despise them despise Him; and He reckons it as so. They are Christ's *Especially* Gifts, (Eph. 4. 10.) and for that reason to be Valued: They bring us *Glad Tydings* from Heaven, and therefore ought their Feet to be *Beautiful*, Ha. 52. 7. Paul gives that Advice

to People, 1 Cor. 4. 1. *Let a man so account of us, as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* And without this Esteem, there is little hope of Profiting by their Administrations: Let their Persons be what they will, their Commission calls for this Respect for them.

[2.] *IN their Words.* Words are, or ought to be, the Expression of the Heart: And there is a Duty here also, which these ought to testify this Respect by; and that,

1. *BY speaking Respectfully to them.* They ought to acknowledge to them, the Office Relation which they bear; and avoid all Reviling or disdainful and insolent Language; particularly those Terms of Reproach and Contempt, that many delight to entertain them withal. It is the Apostle's Direction in, 1 Tim. 5. 1. *Rebuke not an elder, but in-treat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren.* And we find what a fearful Judgment of God befell very Children, who Affronted the Prophet with Reviling Language, 2 Kings 2. 23, 24.

2. *BY speaking Honourably of them, and defending their Reputation.* We ought to be tender of every Man's Reputation; but peculiarly of God's Ambassadors: As not to Revile them *our selves*, so to be ready to speak for them, when others calumniate them. We should neither slander them ourselves; nor be silent, when we hear others do so. We should both Commend what is Laudable in them; and speak Charitably of their Infirmities: And except we thus do, we shall hinder our own Edification by them.

3. *IN their Actions or Carriages towards them.* And here I shall only offer at Three things,

1. *THEY should shew this Respect by a Civil Carriage towards them in their Station.* God hath set them in an Honourable Post; and they ought to have a Deference paid to them according thereunto. The Word of God is far from teaching Christians to make no difference in their Deportment to Men, of Higher or Inferiour Rank; and doubtless all those eminent Titles put in the Scriptures upon the Ministers of the Word, do evidence that they ought to be regarded as such, and Practically acknowledged so, by those that are under their Watch and Charge. The Apostle tells us what is Duty in this regard; 1 Tim. 5. 17. *Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine.*

2. *BY hearty and assiduous Prayers to God for them.* They need our Prayers; and if we have a due Respect for them, it will make us fervent and frequent in offering them up to God in their behalf. How often therefore have we Paul earnestly asking Prayers for himself, of the Churches, which he directs his Epistles unto? And indeed, in our so doing, we not only shew our Love to them, but to ourselves too. They need great Assistance from Heaven, to help them in their Work, to in-

fluence them with fresh Supply of Gifts, to embolden them in their discharge of Duty faithfully, to preserve them against great Temptations to which they are liable, to animate them under their sinking Discouragements, to keep them Humble, to supply them with Matter suitable and seasonable, to give them a door of Utterance; to afford good Success to their Labours, and give them to see the precious Fruits of their Endeavours: And in all this our Profiting is concerned; and all must come from God, and is to be expected in the way of Prayer; and no wonder if those Profit little by their Ministers, who are slighty in their Prayers for them. And it is but a Reciprocal Duty, in Answer to their Prayers for us.

3. *BY an Honourable Maintenance allowed to them.* It is a great Mistake in those who think that all that is done for the Support of the Ministry is *Charity* and *Alms*; and that accordingly Men are at their Liberty whether they will do any thing or nothing towards it; and that they have no other Rule in their doing, but their Arbitrary Pleasure. It is certainly an Act of Justice; and God hath ever since He had a Church in the World, taken Care of the Comfortable Supply of those who Serve Him in *Religious Orders*. It was so in the times of the Law: Hence that, 1 Cor. 9. 12. *Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar?* And he assures us, that the same Rule stands under the Gospel, Ver. 14. *Yea, he proves it by many Arguments, thereby to let us know, that his particular Instance of not taking Maintenance of some Churches, was not to be a Rule for other Ministers, or improv'd by the People to withhold their Dues from them.* And tho' there may be different ways of Prudence for the Raising of this, yet these Two things are undeniable, *viz. That there is some Proportion of Men's Abilities to be observed; and, That all that are Partakers in their Labours, do owe a Portion to this:* Hence we have that, Gal. 6. 6. *Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things.* And they have no Reason to think it much, as he gives a Demonstration, 1 Cor. 9. 11. *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your carnal things?* Faithful Ministers spend their Time for the Souls of their People; and it must therefore be but Reason, that they should see that they may Live without Fear for the Maintenance of their outward Concerns; and so some interpret that, 1 Cor. 16. 10. *Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do.*

II. *THERE is a suitable Entertainment due to them in all their Ministerial Administrations.* And as the former is in order to this, so it cannot be rightly expressed without this. It is for their Work sake, that they are to be Respected, 1 Thes. 5. 12, 13. *And we beseech you,*

you, brethren, to know them which Labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their works sake. And be at peace among your selves. Certainly then, There is a Respect to be paid to them in the Work it self which Christ hath called them unto; herein the great and main Duties of this Relation are concerned: And there are two Respects in which this may be considered;

[ 1. ] IN respect of their *Doctrine*. The main and principal part of a Minister's Work lies in Preaching of the Gospel to that People to whom God sends them, and among whom they are orderly fixed. I am not here concerned to enquire how or in what way such Congregations are to be determined; or what Rules are to determine a Man's Duty in his fixing himself in this or that Assembly, peculiarly in such Places where there are more than One: But I think it undeniable, That all Christians that are settled in their Habitations, ought also to adjoyn themselves to one Society of Professors, and put themselves under the Dispensation of the Ordinances there, for this was the Design of particular Churches. Supposing therefore, that he hath thus disposed of himself, there are these Duties which naturally flow from such a Relation in this Regard under consideration;

1. HE ought Ordinarily to give his Attendance upon the Preaching of such a Ministry, as is there established. I say Ordinarily, for there may be such Occasions offered him in the Providence of God, which call him to be elsewhere, and he ought not to neglect the Opportunity in the Place where he may enjoy it. And for this Reason there is a Communion of Churches necessary to be upheld: Nor is there Reason to be censorious of such, as may on special Considerations, for once and away, Attend upon the Preaching in another Congregation, especially if in the same Town: But for such on the Sabbath, to go to other Towns for their Curiosity or Prejudice, when they are at a considerable Distance, when they have the Word Preached at their Doors, and in their own Congregation; this is not only a casting of contempt upon their own Ministers, but also a Profanation of the Lord's Day: And for such to Run this Day, or part of the Day, to one, and the next to another, merely to please their Fancy, or itching Ears, is contrary to the Mind of Christ. Paul Writing to a particular Church, giveth that Caution, Heb. 10. 25. *Not forsaking the assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is.* And if many should drive this Trade, as there are too many that do, it would offer unworthy Discouragements to God's Stewards, who have taken Pains to provide their Spiritual Nourishment. Nor can a Christian with a regular Faith, ordinarily promise himself that Blessing and Profit from another, that he might from him whom God hath appointed to dispense to him.

2. THEY should Hearken diligently to the Word of God, that is delivered by them. As they should Attend on their Ministry, so they should

Attend to it; and yield Obedience to the Will of God, which they declare. They should look upon them, not barely as Men, or such as have Gifts; but as such who are Commissioned by Christ, and sent on His Errand, to deliver His Message to them; and this should draw their diligent Hearkening to them; and to reckon that Christ Himself is now applying Himself to them: That was the Commendation given of some, 1 Thes. 2. 13. *— It received the word of God which ye heard of us, not as the word of men, but ( as it is in truth ) the word of God.* Hence they should come with a Resolution to do as they make a Presence of; Jer. 42. 5, 6. *Then they said to Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.* A Negligent Hearer casts a Neglect and Contempt, both on him that is sent, and Him that sends him.

3. THEY should Ponder diligently on the Truths which these declare unto them. Though they ought to receive the Truths of God from them, as delivered with Authority from God Himself; yet they are not to build their Faith upon their Authority: For tho' they come from Christ, and have a Promise of His being with them in their faithful Endeavours; yet they are not Infallibly Inspired. And if they were, yet it is no Reflection upon them, but a Credit to them, when their Hearers do lay up their Doctrines in their Hearts, and take care to satisfy themselves, that this is the Mind of God: Hence they are so Commended, Acts 17. 11 *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scripture daily, whether these things were so.*

4. THEY ought to Bless God for them, and Corroborate their Love to them, when they are made the Instruments of Spiritual & Saving Good to them. They ought not to ascribe unto them the prime Efficiency of this, as if they did it by their own Vertue; they desire it not, but utterly renounce it, as he, 1 Cor. 3. 7. *So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.* Nevertheless, if God have made use of them for our Saving Benefit, we are not only to Thank God for the thing, but to Bless God for them, whom He hath made Instruments of this Benefit. We should acknowledge our selves to be Seals of their Ministry, and Love them as our Spiritual Fathers: And we should Cheer their Hearts, by letting them know, that their Labour is not in vain in the Lord; but that their travailling pains for us, till Christ is formed in us, are not lost, or miscarry. Paul could say, 1 Cor. 4. 15. *For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.* And, 1 Thes. 2. 19, 20. And sure we owe as much Love to our Spiritual Fathers,

Fathers, as to our *Natural* ones; at least in some Respects.

5. *THEY ought to Practise according to the Doctrines that they are Instructed in by them.* The End of the Ministry is, as the *Conversion* of Sinners, so the *Edification* of Saints; and this is the present Comfort of such as are the true Servants of Christ: And there is nothing that more grieves them, than to see that they lose this Design, *Isa. 48. 4.* The End of all Evangelical Truths is *Practise*; and if all our Hearing and Enquiring do not lead us to this, it is lost upon us: All the Airy Commendations that we may give to their Sermons, are but Idle Compliments, if mean while we regard them not, but live as we list; nor can we throw more Scorn upon them: Hence that, *Ezek. 33. 31.* *And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their hearts goeth after their covinousness.*

6. *THEY should avoid entertaining Prejudices against them.* The Person that will suffer fixed Prejudices at his Minister, doth thereby hinder his own Profiting under him: There are *Fainings* in these, (for they are of like Infirmities,) these are to be Covered; there are *Dubious* things, these are to be interpreted with the most Candid Glosses that they will admit of; there are *Calumnies* and *False Reports* ordinarily rais'd against them, these are not to be easily believed & entertained. There was good reason for that Rule in this regard, *1 Tim. 5. 19.* *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*

7. *THEY ought to Consult them in their Spiritual Concerns.* There are frequent Occasions wherein the People of God want Assistance, which possibly they do not meet with in the Publick Ministry, but must enquire for in a more Private way. We formerly observed, that God hath made it the *Ministers* Duty to be ready to afford it, and it is the Duty of their *Hearers* to Address to them; and if they do it Cordially, they may Hope to receive Help from God by them, to enlighten them in their dark Questions, to Resolve their Doubts, to clear their Way for them, to strengthen them against their Temptations; and to neglect them in these Cases, is to despise an Ordinance of God: Hence that in, *Mal. 2. 7.* *For the priest lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*

[2.] IN Respect of their *Discipline.* That there is a Discipline which Christ hath appointed to be upheld in his Churches, is very evident by the Gospel: And that the Administration of this Discipline, belongs to the Presbytery in the Church, is equally evident: Peace and Purity cannot be preserved in the Church without it; nor will Gospel Order be observed. And here *Two* things,

1. *THEY ought to acknowledge their Authority over them, which Christ hath vested them with.* If there be *Rulers*, there are *Ruled*; and

these are *Correlates*; and are for that Reason to own the Relation, and the Obligations of it. True, They are not *Lords over God's Heritage*, are not left to Govern Arbitrarily; but they are *Overseers, Rulers, Stewards*, which intimates, That they have a Power from Christ, to Exercise in His Church; and unless it be acknowledged by us, we are not like to pay a due Deference to it: If we deny their Office Power over us, we Reject the Discipline of Christ; and this do all those, who Run from *one* to *another* upon every Disgust, and so think to escape Government: Such also are those Churches, who Usurp upon the Office of the Presbytery.

2. *THEY ought to Submit to their Reproofs and Censures, which are Regularly Administred in the Name of Christ.* There is a Submission required in the Gospel, by Christ Himself; hence that, *Heb. 13. 7, 17.* *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. 1 The. 5. 12.* *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.* These have the Authority of binding and loosing, both Doctrinally and Disciplinarily; *Joh. 20. 23.* *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.* They have a Power to Reprove Sin in those that are under them, Authoritatively, and that both Privately and Publickly; and to Administer Censures upon such as are Obstinate and Impenitent; and take them off from those who duly testify their Repentance: And Christ hath said, That He will Approve and Ratify them, if dispensed according to Gospel Rules: They ought therefore to receive them as from Him, and demean themselves accordingly.

USE. LET us then *Think of these things*; and when we at any time are ready to *Despise the Persons of such, and count our selves too good to be Taught or Rebuked by them*; let us consider, *They are sent to us by Him who is the great Shepherd and King of His Church.* And let the Image of His Authority in them, Suppress all such up-risings: And let us take heed of grieving them, lest we so grieve the Lord Jesus Christ and His Spirit: And this will be the way to Profit by them in this Life, and to meet them with Joy in that which is to come.

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