

*Presbyterial Exercise, May, 27, 1708.*

MINISTERS IN THE CHURCH APPOINTED BY CHRIST.

SERMON XXX.

EPHESIANS iv. 11, 12.

*And he gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

THE apostle having pressed unity amongst church members, even from the consideration of the diversity of gifts among them, seeing they all come from one and the same head ; namely, from Christ their common Lord and store-house ; and having confirmed this from Psal. lxxviii. 18, he doth in the text instance these divers gifts, all bestowed by that one blessed head for the very same ends. “And he gave,” &c., this is the connection.

But lest we stumble in the threshold, there is one difficulty to be removed, before we enter on a particular explanation of the words. This is, in the text there is nothing of gifts, but only of offices and office-bearers instituted by Christ in his church. He speaks not of gifts necessary for the apostleship, but of apostles ; he says not of the gift of prophecy, but prophets. To this it is answered, that saying the latter, he supposeth the former ; the diversity of offices including the diversity of the respective gifts, seeing Christ never calls any to an office, but he always endues them with gifts in some measure suitable. He thrust out no labourers to his vineyard, without instruments for labour ; nor does he send out any naked and unarmed, to pull down the kingdom of Satan. Thus the anointing in use of old, did signify both the call and furniture for the office.

In these words we have two things :—

1. A remarkable instance of our exalted Lord's liberty to his church, in bestowing divers gifts upon her.

2. The end for which he hath given these.

As to the first of these, for the right understanding of it, four things are to be considered : 1. The gifts. 2. The giver. 3. The act of donation. 4. The time to which it relates.

As to the gifts, they are various, and this variety is held forth two ways :

1. By the distributive particle *some*, often repeated ; which seems to hold forth two things : 1. A distinction betwixt the church and

her officers, and teachers, against the confusion introduced by Socinians, Anabaptists, and others, who impugn the necessity of a call to the work of the ministry, and transgress the sacred boundaries set by the Lord of the vineyard; who gave some, not all, to be apostles, pastors, and teachers. All may indeed prophecy, as saith the apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. 31, that is, all who have the gift of prophecy; but as the apostle says, 1 Cor. xii. 29, "Are all apostles, are all prophets." 2. A distinction among the offices which Christ has instituted; he made not all church officers apostles; but some apostles. He hath given the several office-bearers in his house their distinct provinces; some to be employed one way, some another, though all for the good of the church. Even as in the building of a house, divers artificers must be employed, every one in their proper work; but all for one and the same end, to make a convenient habitation. Howbeit, these office-bearers are not co-ordinate but sub-ordinate; and the superior office includes the inferior, so as the apostle could do what the prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher might do; but not contrariwise. We acknowledge a beautiful subordination of officers and courts, in church government; but amongst officers of the same kind, there is by divine institution a parity.

2. This variety is held forth by a distinct enumeration of several orders of the ministry in the church. We must particularly inquire what these are:

I. As for apostles. The word in general signifies any messenger sent in affairs, whether of the church or commonwealth, John xiii. 16. Thus Epaphroditus, is in Philip. ii. 25, called the apostle of the Philippians, ἕμῳν δὲ ἀποστολῶν, or messenger; as being sent by them to Paul, to carry their benevolence to him; not as having the name and office of an apostle derived to him, as some fondly imagine; which absurd conceit the antitheses in the text at first view baffles. "Yet I supposed," says Paul, "it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministereth to my wants." Now this resolved, according to that notion, will scarcely make good sense. But the word in Scripture is usually taken in a more restrained sense; and denotes those extraordinary officers whom Christ set in his church, as master builders, who are commonly reckoned twelve; Matthias being added to the eleven, in room of Judas, and afterwards Paul was added. These were a kind of office-bearers in the church whose commission was universal and unconfined; whose great work was to plant and found churches through the world, Matth. xxviii. 19; being endued with an infallibility in teaching, according to John xvi. 13. They had power to work miracles, and

to confer the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit, by imposition of their hands, and were eye witnesses of Christ. Hence Paul proving his apostleship, urgeth this, 1 Cor. ix. 1; and pleads it for himself with the rest, 1 Cor. xv. 7, 8. That they were immediately called, is generally the opinion of orthodox divines, from which we see no reason to depart, seeing the evangelists witness this of all of them but Matthias and Paul. As for Paul's immediate call, it is no less clear from Acts xxvi. 16; Gal. i. 1.

A late prelatical writer asserts that Matthias was not immediately called, but by the apostles. But it is plain from the history of Matthias' call, recorded Acts i, that he was by God's immediate choice and declaration by a lot, set apart for his office; and though the apostles presented the two to the Lord, yet he made the choice, and gave the call by that lot, after prayer made to him for that effect. A late writer of our own, to whose labours our church oweth very much, doth in this point go something out of the ordinary road, asserting it to be most evident that God called Matthias mediately, partly by the suffrages of the people, partly by their lots; yet withal, he grants that Matthias' call was extraordinary in that God directed the lots by an extraordinary providence, as in the case of Achan. For ought I know, the discovery of Achan has hitherto been looked upon as immediately from God, and the text seems to sound it so, Josh. vii. 14. And if Paul's call was immediate, being by a voice from heaven, so was Matthias' call; God discovering his mind in this case by the lot, as much as by a voice in the other. "Wherefore," the apostles in their prayer before the lots say, Acts i. 24, "Shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." The call and choice then was the Lord's, by himself, not by the people; and the lot was an infallible discovery of his mind, as it was in that case used. For although God doth not guide elections performed by lots so as they shall always fall right, when the choice is referred to a lot, without a call from the Lord to make use of the lot, as in the case of choosing magistrates by lot, which became unnecessary is therefore unlawful; yet the apostles having been called to the use of lots in this case, and having a promise of the discovery of God's mind in this case thereby, this being necessarily pre-supposed to their prayer in faith, it plainly follows this lot could not but fall right, and consequently that the call thereby was God's immediate call, as much as if it had been by a voice from heaven.

After all, that the people there, being only one hundred and twenty, should have a power to call a man to be an immediate officer of the universal church, by an approved deed, as the apostles were, seems to be a principle that can hardly be defended; unless,

with a certain set of men, it be maintained that the number of the brethren then was no more than an hundred and twenty, which, with little difficulty might be disproved.

II. There are prophets. The word signifies one that foretells things to come. The New Testament prophets spoken of in the text, were those who were endued with singular wisdom and knowledge of divine things, not by human industry, but by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They did by immediate inspiration interpret the Scriptures, open up the Old Testament prophecies, confirming and proving the doctrines of the gospel by these. Hence revelation is made the matter of prophecy, 1 Cor. xiv. 6. God did also by his Spirit reveal to them things to come, which they foretold for the confirming the faith of the people of God, and rendering the wicked inexcusable, Acts xi. 27, 28; and xxi. 10. The nature of their office shews their call to have been immediate. The church of the Jews had prophets raised up to them for a long time, but prophecy ceased with them when Malachi died; and their church having been thereby planted, nourished, and maintained, its failing was a token their church was about to expire. They themselves acknowledge that the gift of prophecy was not bestowed under the second temple, on any after the days of Malachi, so they reckon it among the five things wanting in the second house; but they expected the restoration of it under the Messiah, and that warrantably, as Joel ii. 28, 29. Wherefore the setting up of prophets under the New Testament is a conclusive argument against them, that the Messiah is come. Unless they admit of the New Testament prophets, prophecy has left them about double the time that their church, as constituted by Moses, had it; which nothing but judicial blindness can make Haggai's little while, chap. ii. 6, 7.

III. There are evangelists. Not those who wrote the gospel, for two of these were apostles, namely, Matthew and John; but a kind of preachers of the gospel, who were companions of the apostles in their travels, assisting them in the work of the gospel; being sent out by them to settle and water such churches as the apostles had planted, 1 Cor. iii. 6; 1 Tim. i. 3. They were not fixed pastors of any particular church, but remained in these places whither the apostles sent them, till they were by them recalled, 2 Tim. iv. 9. Such were Tychicus, Sylvanus, and others, and particularly Timothy and Titus, whom prelatists will needs have to be bishops, the one at Ephesus, the other at Crete, though Timothy is expressly called an evangelist, 2 Tim. iv. 5. Besides the occasional transient employment of Timothy at Ephesus, and of Titus in Crete, is sufficiently intimated by the apostle, while he tells us, that he besought

Timothy to abide at Ephesus, and that he left Titus, both of them upon a special business, 1 Tim. i. 3; Tit. i. 5; and they are both recalled in the very epistles sent to them. That they are called bishops in the postscripts of the epistles sent to them is no argument; these postscripts being neither canonical nor true. They were not subjoined to the epistles, till some hundreds of years after they were written. In the postscript of the first epistle to Timothy, Phrygia is called Pacatian, which was not the name of it, till it was conquered by Pacatius, a Roman general, three hundred years after Christ. The postscript of that to Titus says it was written to Nicopolis, which agrees not with Titus, iii. 2.

IV. There are pastors, feeders of the flock of God, and the word denotes both preaching and ruling. Their office is to pray with, and for the flock; to read the Scriptures publicly; to catechise, bless the people, and rule them; all which, and more belonging to their office, is asserted by the Westminster Assembly, in the propositions concerning church government. These are our ministers of congregations.

*Lastly*, There are teachers or doctors, whose work it is to teach the doctrines of religion, and confute the contrary errors. Though the particule *some* is not here added betwixt the pastors and teachers, yet they are distinct church officers. The pastor being gifted with a word of wisdom, by which, besides his ability in some measure to open the Scripture, he is fitted wisely and powerfully to apply the word for working on people's affections, and for advancing practical godliness. The teacher being gifted with a word of knowledge for opening up the Scripture, establishing truth, and confuting error. This difference the apostle holdeth forth, 1 Cor. xii. 8; Rom. xii. 7, 8, where the difference of their functions is clearly intimated by the different concerns which they are to wait upon.

The apostle doth not here enumerate all the office-bearers in the church. We will find others reckoned up by him elsewhere, and therefore silence here as to ruling elders and deacons is no argument against their offices; the scope of the apostle here being only to enumerate preaching officers, whose various gifts are most conspicuous in the edifying of the church; who are appointed for the work of the ministry, to bring us to unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, verses 12—14.

But no satisfactory reason can be given for omitting pope or prelate here, had they been any of Christ's creatures in his church. When they shall shew the signs of their apostleship, then, and not till then, may we allow them to be the successors of the apostles, in another sense than ordinary ministers.

The apostles, prophets, and evangelists, were extraordinary officers, and their offices ceased with themselves, having been appointed for that particular state of the church. Now the house is built up and finished; and pastors and teachers, and other ordinary officers, are sufficient to hold it up, though they were not so for erecting it.

II. The giver is Christ. The apostle elsewhere ascribes the giving of gifts to the Spirit, 1 Cor. xii. 11; and the giving of these offices he ascribes to the Father; but this being an external work of God, is common to all the three persons. The Father is the fountain of all gifts, the Son the distributor of them by the Holy Spirit.

III. The act of donation, *he gave*. It denotes the excellency and usefulness of these offices, which Christ has given to supply the want of his bodily presence. And withal, his sending out these officers, as well ordinary as extraordinary, for both are said to be given by him.

IV. The time to which this relates; "when Christ had ascended up on high." OBJECTION. Christ gave the apostles their commission before he ascended. ANSWER. Till Christ ascended, they had not the fulness of apostolical gifts necessary for the discharge of their office in its full extent. Therefore Jesus, being assembled together with them after his resurrection, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. Consequently, after Christ's ascension, they were solemnly inaugurated and installed in their office, by the visible outpouring of the Spirit upon them. "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." They had their commission before this; but the actual sending of them through the world was not till this time. We are now,

II. To attend to the end or design of this gift, which is threefold:

1. In respect of the saints, these who are in Christ already, the ministry is to perfect them, *προς τον καταρτισμον*. The word signifies the restoring and setting dislocated members again in their proper place; it is borrowed from surgeons, with whom *καταρτισμος* is *μεταγωγη των οστων εκ του προς φθειν τοπον, εις τον κατα φυσιν*. The reducing of bones from a preternatural, to their natural place and situation. It signifies also, the perfecting and establishing them in the restored state. So the Corinthians, who by their factions and divisions were rent asunder, and as a disjointed body, are exhorted to be *καταρτισμενοι*, perfectly joined together, as a joint well knit, 1 Cor. i. 10. The saints being, by reason of remaining corruption, so ready to turn aside both from Christ the head, and from their brethren fellow-members. God gave ministers to be spiritual surgeons to set

them right again, and to fix them in nearer union to Christ by faith, and to their brethren in love.

2. In regard of themselves, for the work of the ministry. It is for work that they are appointed. This work for the kind of it is *διακονια*, a ministry or service. The first excluding idleness, the second excluding a lordly dominion. The word comes from *κοινοσ dust*, and denotes a painful and laborious service, in which men are serviceable, as those that make haste in travel, raising the dust about them by their speed. So that they are neither to be loiterers, nor lords over God's heritage; but to serve them in the concerns of their souls, by the dispensing of the word publicly and privately, by dispensing the sacraments, and the censures of the church.

3. In respect of the body of Christ; it is to edify it, namely, the mystical body of Christ. There is a double metaphor here; one taken from the natural body to which the church is compared, in respect of its union with Christ the head by faith, and that union that is among the saints by love; and the vital influences received from Christ by the church. The other metaphor is taken from masons, whose work it is to build a house. Thus they are to build the body of Christ; and so they do, when they are instruments in Christ's hand to lay new stones in the building; that is, to convert the elect, and to fix and raise up others that are already laid; being instruments of the growth of converts in knowledge, faith, and holiness.

The Holy Ghost casts in that of the work of the ministry betwixt the other two ends. The two great ends not being to be obtained by naked gifts, or the honour of the office, but by a painful and laborious discharge of the trust committed to them.

The sum of all is, Christ Jesus having ascended up on high, gave various gifts to the church, in that he gave various officers to it suitably qualified; he gave some, not all, to be extraordinary, namely, apostles, prophets, and evangelists; some to be ordinary officers, pastors, and teachers; and whatever differences be amongst them, they were all given for one common end, to labour in dispensing gospel ordinances, for restoring and perfecting saints, who are so often out of frame, and for gathering in the elect, and increase of grace in those that are converted.