

SERMON XXIX.*

The True Excellency of a Gospel Minister.



JOHN v. 35.

HE WAS A BURNING AND A SHINING LIGHT.

THAT discourse of our blessed Saviour we have an account of in this chapter from the 17th verse to the end, was occasioned by the Jews' murmuring against him, and persecuting him for his healing the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and bidding him take up his bed and walk on the Sabbath day. Christ largely vindicates himself in this discourse, by asserting his fellowship with God the Father in nature and operations, and thereby implicitly shewing himself to be Lord of the Sabbath, and by declaring to the Jews that God the Father, and he with him, did *work hitherto*, or even to this time; i. e. although it be said that God rested on the seventh day from all his works, yet indeed God continues to work hitherto, even to this very day, with respect to his greatest work, the work of redemption, or new creation, which he

* Preach'd at Pelham. August 30, 1744, at the ordination of the Rev. Mr. Robert Abercrombie to the work of the gospel ministry in that place.

carries on by Jesus Christ, his Son. Pursuant to the designs of which work was his shewing mercy to fallen men by healing their diseases, and delivering them from the calamities they brought on themselves by sin. This great work of redemption, God carries on from the beginning of the world to this time ; and his rest from it will not come till the resurrection, which Christ speaks of in the 21st and following verses : The finishing of this redemption as to its procurement, being in his own resurrection ; and as to the application, in the general resurrection and eternal judgment, spoken of from verse 20 to verse 30. So that notwithstanding both the rest on the seventh day, and also the rest that Joshua gave the children of Israel in Canaan ; yet the great rest of the Redeemer from his work, and so of his people with him and in him, yet remains, as the apostle observes, Heb. chap. iv. This will be at the resurrection and general judgment ; which Christ here teaches the Jews, was to be brought to pass by the Son of God, by the Father's appointment, and so the works of God to be finished by him.

And inasmuch as this vindication was so far from satisfying the Jews, that it did but further enrage them, because hereby he made himself equal with God, Christ therefore refers them to the witness of John the Baptist ; whose testimony they must acquiesce in, or else be inconsistent with themselves ; because they had generally acknowledged John to be a great prophet, and seemed for a while mightily affected and taken with it, that God, after so long a withholding the spirit of prophecy, had raised up so great a prophet among them....and it is concerning him that Christ speaks in this verse wherein is the text : “ He was a burning and a shining light ; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.”

In order to a right understanding and improvement of the words of the text, we may observe,

1. What Christ here takes notice of in John, and declares concerning him, viz. That *he was a burning and a shining*

light. He was a light to the church of Israel, to reveal the mind and will of God to them, after a long continued dark season, and after they had been destitute of any prophet to instruct them, for some ages: He arose on Israel, as the morning star, the forerunner of the sun of righteousness, to introduce the day spring, or dawning of the gospel day, to give light to them that till then had sat in the darkness of perfect night, which was the shadow of death; to give them the knowledge of salvation; as Zecharias his father declares at his circumcision, Luke i. 76.. 79. “And thou child shalt be called the Prophet of the highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And he was a burning light, as he was full of a spirit of fervent piety and holiness, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his Mother's womb, having his heart warmed and enflamed with a great love to Christ, being that *friend of the bridegroom, that stood and heard him, and rejoiced greatly because of the bridegroom's voice*; and was glad that Christ increased, though he decreased, John iii. 29, 30. And was animated with a holy zeal in the work of the ministry: He came in this respect, in the spirit and power of Elias; as Elias was zealous in bearing testimony against the corruption, apostacies, and idolatries of Israel in his day, so was John the Baptist in testifying against the wickedness of the Jews in his day: As Elias zealously reprov'd the sins of all sorts of persons in Israel, not only the sins of the common people, but of their great ones, Ahab, Ahaziah and Jezebel, and their false prophets; with what zeal did John the Baptist reprove all sorts of persons, not only the Publicans and Soldiers, but the Pharisees and Sadducees, telling them plainly that they were a generation of vipers, and rebuked the wickedness of Herod in his most beloved lust, though Herod sought his life for it,

as Ahab and Anaziah did Elijah's. As Elias was much in warning the people of God's approaching judgments, denouncing God's awful wrath against Ahab, Jezebel and Abaziah, and the Prophets of Baal, and the people in general : So was John the Baptist, much in warning the people to fly from the wrath to come, telling them in the most awakening manner, that the "axe was laid at the root of the tree, and that every tree that brought not forth good fruit should be hewn down and cast into the fire, and that he that came after him had his fan in his hand, and that he would thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John the Baptist was not only a burning, but a shining light : He was so in his doctrine, having more of the gospel in his preaching than the former Prophets, or at least the gospel exhibited with greater light and clearness, more plainly pointing forth the person that was to be the great redeemer, and declaring his errand into the world, to take away the sin of the world, as a Lamb offered in sacrifice to God, and the necessity that all, even the most strictly moral and religious stood in of him, being by nature a generation of vipers ; and the spiritual nature of his kingdom, consisting not in circumcision, or outward baptism, or any other external performance or privileges, but in the powerful influences of the Holy Ghost in their hearts, a being *baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*

In this clearness with which he gave knowledge of salvation to God's people, John was a bright light, *and among them that had been born of women there had not arisen a greater than he.* In this brightness this harbinger of the gospel day excelled all the other Prophets, as the morning star reflects more of the light of the sun than any other star, and is the brightest of all the stars.

He also shone bright in his conversation, and his eminent mortification and renunciation of the enjoyments of the world ; his great diligence and laboriousness in his work his impartiality in it, declaring the mind and will of God to all sorts

without distinction ; his great humility, rejoicing in the increase of the honor of Christ, though his honor was diminished, as the brightness of the morning star diminishes, as the light of the sun increases ; and in his faithfulness and courage, still declaring the mind and will of God, though it cost him his own life. Thus his light shone before men.

2. We may observe to what purpose Christ declares these things of John in the text, viz. to shew how great and excellent a person he was, and worthy that the Jews should regard his testimony : Great are the things which Christ elsewhere says of John the Baptist, as in Matth. xi. 7.....14 He speaks of him as a *Prophet* ; and *more than a Prophet* ; and one, *than whom, there had not risen a greater among them that had been born of women*. He observes how great and excellent a light he was in the text, to shew the Jews how inexcusable they were in not receiving the testimony he had given of him ; as you may see v. 31, 32, 33.

Therefore that which I would observe from the text to be the subject of my present discourse is this :

It is the excellency of a minister of the gospel to be both a burning and a shining light.

Thus we see it is in Christ's esteem, the great prophet of God, and light of the world, head of the church, and Lord of the harvest, and the great Lord and master whose messengers all ministers of the gospel are.

John the Baptist was a minister of the gospel ; and he was so more eminently than the ancient prophets ; for though God at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake the gospel by them ; yet John the Baptist was a great minister of the gospel in a manner distinguished from them : He is reckoned in scripture the first that introduced the gospel day, after the law and the Prophets, Luke vi. 16. "The law and the Prophets were until John ; since that time the kingdom of God is preached." And his preaching is called the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Mark i. 1. He came on that errand, to give knowledge of salvation to God's people, through the remission of their sins ; (as his

father Zecharias observes, Luke i 77,) and to preach these glad tidings that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

John being thus eminently a minister of the gospel, and a burning and shining light being taken notice of by Christ as his great excellency, we may justly hence observe, that herein consists the proper excellency of ministers of the gospel.

I would, by divine assistance, handle the subject in the following method.

I. I would shew that Christ's design, in the appointment of the order and office of ministers of the gospel is, that they may be lights to the souls of men.

II. I would shew what is implied in their being burning lights.

III. I would shew what is implied in their being shining lights.

IV. I would shew that it is the proper excellency of ministers of the gospel to have these things united in them, to be both burning and shining lights.

V. I would apply these things to all that Christ has called to the work of the gospel ministry, shewing how much it concerns them earnestly to endeavor that they may be burning and shining lights.

VI. Show what ministers of the gospel ought to do that they may be so.

VII. Say something briefly concerning the duty of a people that are under the care of a gospel minister, correspondent to those things that Christ has taught us concerning the end and excellency of a gospel minister.

I. I would observe that Christ's design in the appointment of the order and office of ministers of the gospel was that they might be lights to the souls of men.

Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of darkness ; the Devils are the rulers of the darkness of this world. But Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of light ; the designs of his kingdom are carried on by light ; his people *are not of the night, nor of darkness*, but are *the children of the light*, as they are the children of God, who is *the Father of lights*, and as it were a boundless fountain of infinitely pure and bright light, 1 John i. 5. James i. 17.

Man by the fall extinguished that divine light that shone in this world in its first estate. The scripture represents the wickedness of man as reducing the world to that state wherein it was when it was yet without form and void, and darkness filled it. Jer. iv. 22, 23. "For my people is foolish, they have not known me : They are sottish children ; and they have none understanding : They are wise to do evil ; but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void ; and the heavens, and they had no light." But God in infinite mercy has made glorious provision for the restoration of light to this fallen dark world ; he has sent him who is the brightness of his own glory, into the world, to be the light of the world. "He is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world," i. e. Every man in the world that ever has any true light. But in his wisdom and mercy, he is pleased to convey his light to men by means and instruments ; and has sent forth his messengers, and appointed ministers in his church to be subordinate lights, and to shine with the communications of his light, and to reflect the beams of his glory on the souls of men.

There is an analogy between the divine constitution and disposition of things in the natural and in the spiritual world. The wise Creator has not left the natural world without light ; but in this our solar system has set one great light, immensely exceeding all the rest, shining perpetually with a transcendent fulness and strength, to enlighten the whole ; and he

hath appointed other lesser, subordinate or dependent lights, that shine with the communications and reflections of something of his brightness. So it is in the spiritual world ; there God hath appointed Jesus Christ as a Sun of righteousness : The Church of God has not the Sun to be her light by day ; nor for brightness, does the moon give light to her, but the Lord is her everlasting light, and her God her glory. The new Jerusalem has no need of the sun, nor the moon ; for the Lamb is the light thereof. And the ministers of Christ are, as it were, the stars that encompass this glorious fountain of light, to receive and reflect his beams, and give light to the souls of men. As Christ therefore is in scripture called the sun, so are his ministers called stars. So are the twelve apostles, the chief ministers of the christian church, called, Rev. xii. 1. “ And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” And so are the ordinary ministers of the gospel called. Rev. i. 16. “ And he had in his right hand seven stars.” And verse 20. “ The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks ; the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” Here also ministers of the gospel are implicitly compared to those lamps that enlightened the temple at Jerusalem, upon the tops of the golden candlesticks : And more expressly in Zech. iv. 2. “ I have looked, and behold a candlestick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon.”

These lamps have all their oil from Christ, and are kindled by his flame, and shine by his beams ; and being thus dependent on him, they are near to him, and held in his right hand, that they may receive light from him, to communicate to others.

The use of a light is threefold ; to discover, to refresh, and to direct.

The first use of a light is to discover things, or make them manifest. Without light nothing is to be seen. Eph. v. 13. “ Whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” Ministers are

set to be lights to the souls of men in this respect, as they are to be the means of imparting divine truth to them, and bringing into their view the most glorious and excellent objects, and of leading them to, and assisting them in the contemplation of those things that angels desire to look into ; the means of their obtaining that knowledge is infinitely more important and more excellent and useful, than that of the greatest statesmen or philosophers, even that which is spiritual and divine : They are set to be the means of bringing men out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and of bringing them to the infinite fountain of light, that in his light they may see light : They are set to instruct men, and impart to them that knowledge by which they may know God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal.

Another use of light is to refresh and delight the beholders. Darkness is dismal : The light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun. Light is refreshing to those who have long sat in darkness : They therefore that watch and keep awake through a dark night, long and wait for the light of the morning ; and the wise man observes, Prov. xv. 30. " That the light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart." Spiritual light is especially refreshing and joyful. Psalm xcvi. 11. " Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. They that see the light of Christ, the star that hath arisen out of Jacob, are refreshed and do rejoice, as the wise men that saw the star that shewed them where Christ was, Matth. ii. 10. " And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

Ministers are set in the church of God to be the instruments of this comfort and refreshment to the souls of men, to be the instruments of leading souls to the God of all consolation, and fountain of their happiness : They are sent as Christ was, and as coworkers with him, to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, and to comfort all that mourn : They are to lead those that " labor, and are heavy laden" to their true rest,

and to speak a word in season to him that is weary: They are set to be ministers of the consolation and joy of the saints. 2 Cor. i. 24. "We have not dominion over your faith; but are helpers of your joy."

The third use of light is to direct. 'Tis by light that we see where to go: "He that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes," and is in danger of stumbling and falling into mischief. 'Tis by light that men see what to do, and are enabled to work; in the night, Christ tells us no man can work. Ministers are set to be lights to mens' souls in this respect also; as Zecharias observes of John the baptist, Luke i. 79. "To guide our feet in the way of peace." Ministers have the record of God committed to them that they may hold that forth, which God has given to be to man as a light shining in a dark place, to guide them in the way through this dark world, to regions of eternal light. Ministers are set to be the instruments of conveying to men that true wisdom spoken of Job 28. "Which cannot be gotten for gold, nor shall silver be weighed for the price thereof; which cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx, or the Sapphire.

I proceed now to the

II. Thing proposed, viz. to shew what is implied in a minister of the gospel's being a burning light.

There are these two things that seem naturally to be understood by this expression, viz. That his heart be filled with much of the holy ardor of a spirit of true piety; and that he be fervent and zealous in his administrations.

1. That his heart be full of much of the holy ardor of a spirit of true piety. We read of the power of godliness. True grace is no dull, inactive, ineffectual principle; it is a powerful thing; there is an exceeding energy in it; and the reason is, that God is in it; it is a divine principle, a participation of the divine nature, and a communication of divine life, of the life of a risen Saviour, who exerts himself in the hearts of the saints, after the power of an endless life. They that

have true grace in them, *they live* ; but not by their own life ; *but Christ lives in them* : His Holy Spirit becomes in them a living principle and spring of divine life : The energy and power of which is in scripture compared to fire. Matth. iii.

11. " I indeed baptize you with water ; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear ; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." True piety is not a thing remaining only in the head, or consisting in any speculative knowledge or opinions, or outward morality, or forms of religion ; it reaches the heart, is chiefly seated there, and burns there. There is a holy ardor in every thing that belongs to true grace : True faith is an ardent thing, and so is true repentance ; there is a holy power and ardor in true spiritual comfort and joy ; yea, even in true Christian humility, submission and meekness. The reason is, that divine love or charity is the sum of all true grace, which is a holy flame enkindled in the soul : It is by this therefore especially, that a minister of the gospel is a *burning light* : A minister that is so, has his soul enkindled with the heavenly flame ; his heart burns with love to Christ, and fervent desires of the advancement of his kingdom and glory ; and also with ardent love to the souls of men, and desires for their salvation.

2. The inward holy ardor of his soul is exercised and manifested in his being *zealous and fervent in his administrations* : For, he is a *burning light* ; which implies that his spiritual heat and holy ardor is not for himself only, but is communicative, and for the benefit of others : He is ardent, as he is a *light*, or in the performance of the duties of that office wherein he is set to be a light in the church of Christ. His fervent zeal, which has its foundation and spring in that holy and powerful flame of love to God and man, that is in his heart, appears in the fervency of his prayers to God, for and with his people ; and in the earnestness and power with which he preaches the word of God, declares to sinners their misery, and warns them to fly from the wrath to come, and reproofs, and testifies against all ungodliness ; and the un-

feigned earnestness and compassion with which he invites the weary and heavy laden to their Saviour ; and the fervent love with which he counsels and comforts the saints ; and the holy zeal, courage and stedfastness, with which he maintains the exercise of discipline in the house of God, notwithstanding all the opposition he meets with in that difficult part of the ministerial work ; and in the diligence and earnestness with which he attends every duty of his ministerial function, whether public or private.

But I hasten to the

III. Thing proposed in the handling of this subject, viz. To shew what is implied in a minister's being a *shining light*.

There are three things that seem to be naturally signified by it.

1. That he be *pure, clear, and full in his doctrine*. A minister is set to be a light to men's souls, by teaching, or doctrine : And if he be a shining light in this respect, the light of his doctrine must be bright and full ; it must be pure without mixtures of darkness ; and therefore he must be sound in the faith, not one that is of a reprobate mind ; in doctrine he must show uncorruptness ; otherwise his *light* will be darkness : He must not lead his people into errors, but teach them the truth only, guiding their feet into the way of peace, and leading them in the right ways of the Lord.

He must be one that is *able to teach*, not one that is raw, ignorant, or unlearned, and but little versed in the things that he is to teach others ; *not a novice*, or one that is *unskilful in the word of righteousness* ; he must be one that is well studied in divinity, well acquainted with the written word of God, mighty in the scriptures, and able to instruct and convince gainsayers.

And in order to be a *shining light*, he must be one that really knows what religion is, one that is truly acquainted with that Saviour and way of salvation, that he is to teach to others, that he may *show the things that he knows, and testify the things that he has seen*, and not be a blind leader of the blind : He

must be one that is acquainted with experimental religion, and not ignorant of the inward operations of the Spirit of God, nor of Satan's devices ; able to guide souls under their particular difficulties. Thus he must be *a scribe well instructed in things that pertain to the kingdom of God ; one that brings forth out of his treasures, things new and old.*

And in order to his being a *shining light*, his doctrine must be full, he must not only be able to teach, but apt to teach, ready to instruct the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and diligent in teaching, in public and private ; and careful and faithful to declare the whole counsel of God, and not keep back any thing that may be profitable to his hearers.

Also his being a *shining light* implies that his instructions are clear and plain, accommodated to the capacity of his hearers, and tending to convey light to their understandings.

2. Another thing requisite in order to a minister's being a *shining light*, is that he be *discreet in all his administrations.* The fervent zeal that thus should animate and actuate him in his administrations should be regulated by discretion : He should not only be knowing, and able to communicate knowledge and formed to do it ; but also wise, and know how to conduct himself in the house of God, as a wise builder, and a wise steward. And as he is one that God hath sent forth to labor in his field, and committed the care of his vineyard to, so he should conduct himself there as one *whom his God doth instruct to discretion* : He should not only be as *harmless as a dove*, but as *wise as a serpent* ; shewing himself a *workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* ; and one that *knows how to govern the church of God*, and to *walk in wisdom towards those that are without.*

3. Another thing implied in a minister's being a *shining light*, is that he *shines in his conversation* : If he shines never so much in his doctrine and administrations in the house of God, yet if there be not an answerable brightness in his conversation, it will have a tendency to render all ineffectual. Christ, in Matth. v. 14, 15, 16, says to his disciples (having undoubtedly a special respect to those of them that were to be

sent forth to preach the gospel) “Ye are the light of the world: . . . Men do not light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” And how does Christ direct them to give light to others? “Let your light” says he, “so shine before men, that others seeing your *good works*, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.” And he tells the same disciples again, John xv. 8. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” And how should they bring forth fruit? Christ tells them, verse 10, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love,” and verse 14, “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

God sent his Son into the world to be the light of the world these two ways, viz. By revealing his mind and will to the world, and also by setting the world a perfect example. So ministers are set to be lights, not only as teachers, but as ensamples to the flock, 1 Peter v. 3.

The same things that ministers recommend to their hearers in their doctrine, they should also shew them an example of in their practice. Thus the apostle says to Timothy, 1 Tim. iv. 11. “These things command and teach;” and then adds in the next verse, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” So he directs Titus, in his teaching, to recommend sobriety, gravity, temperance, patience, and other virtues, in the beginning of the 2d chapter of Titus. But then adds in the 7th verse, “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works.”

We see in natural bodies, that when heat is raised in them to a high degree, at length they begin to shine: And, as I observed before, a principle of true grace in the soul is like an inward heat, an holy ardor of an heavenly fire enkindled in the soul: This in ministers of the gospel ought to be to that degree, as to shine forth brightly in all their conversation; and there should as it were be a light about them wherever they go, exhibiting to all that behold them, the amiable, de-

lightful image of the beauty and brightness of their glorious master.

I proceed to the

IV. Thing proposed, which is to shew that the excellency of a minister of the gospel consists in his being thus *both a burning and a shining light*.

This is manifest in two things :

1. Herein his ministry is acceptable and amiable in the sight of God and men.

When light and heat are thus united in a minister of the gospel, it shews that each is genuine, and of a right kind, and that both are divine. Divine light is attended with heat ; and so, on the other hand, a truly divine and holy heat and ardor is ever accompanied with light.

It is the glory of the sun that such a bright and glorious light, and such a powerful, refreshing, vivifying heat, are both together diffused from that luminary. When there is light in a minister, consisting in human learning, great speculative knowledge and the wisdom of this world, without a spiritual warmth and ardor in his heart, and a holy zeal in his ministrations, his light is like the light of an *ignis fatuus*, and some kinds of putrifying carcasses that shine in the dark, though they are of a stinking savor. And if on the other hand a minister has warmth and zeal, without light, his heat has nothing excellent in it, but is rather to be abhorred ; being like the heat of the bottomless pit ; where, though the fire be great, yet there is no light. To be hot in this manner, and not light-some, is to be like an angel of darkness. But ministers by having light and heat united in them, will be like the angels of light ; which for their light and brightness are called morning stars. Job xxviii. 7. " When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." And because of that holy ardor of divine love and zeal with which they burn, they are compared to a flaming fire. Psal. civ. 4. " Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire," and are therefore called seraphims, which is a word

that is derived from a root that signifies *to burn*. So that by ministers of the gospel being *burning and shining lights*, the *angels of the churches* will become like the *angels of heaven*, and those stars held in the right hand of Christ here below, will be like those morning stars above, and which is much more, hereby ministers will be like their glorious Lord and Master ; who is not only the Master of ministers of the gospel, but is the head and Lord of the glorious angels, whom they adore, and who communicates to them the brightness in which they shine, and the flame with which they burn, and is the glorious luminary and sun of the heavenly world, from whence all the inhabitants of that world have their light and life, and all their glory. In this Sun of righteousness is that light, whose brightness is such that the light of the sun in the firmament in comparison of it is as darkness, yea, *black as sackcloth of hair* : For he is the infinite brightness of God's glory ; and of him it is said, Isai. xxiv. 23, " Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, before his ancients, gloriously." And accompanying this bright light in him, is the infinitely intense flame of love. There is no love to be compared to his ; nor ever was love both to God and man so manifested, as has been in what Christ has done and suffered ; for *herein was love* ! Ministers, by being burning and shining lights, become the sons of God, of whom we read that he *is light*, and that he *is love*. 1 John i. 5. " This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that *God is light*, and in him is no darkness at all." And chap. iv. 16. " And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us : *God is love*, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Therefore it must needs be that ministers, by being burning and shining lights, are acceptable and amiable in the sight of God, as he delights in his own image and in the image of his Son : And hereby also they will be honorable and amiable in the sight of men, all such as have any sense of that which is truly excellent and beautiful ; and it is the way to have

their ministry pleasant and delightful to those of this character that sit under it.

2. Herein a minister of the gospel will be likely to answer the ends of his ministry : By this means his ministry will not only be amiable, but profitable. If a minister has light without heat, and entertains his auditory with learned discourses, without a savor of the power of godliness, or any appearance of fervency of spirit, and zeal for God and the good of souls, he may gratify itching ears, and fill the heads of his people with empty notions ; but it will not be very likely to reach their hearts, or save their souls. And if, on the other hand, he be driven on with a fierce and intemperate zeal, and vehement heat, without light, he will be likely to kindle the like unhallowed flame in his people, and to fire their corrupt passions and affections ; but will make them never the better, nor lead them a step towards heaven, but drive them apace the other way.

But if he approves himself in his ministry, as both a burning and a shining light, this will be the way to promote true Christianity amongst his people, and to make them both wise-good, and cause religion to flourish among them in the purity and beauty of it.

When divine light and heat attend each other in ministers of the gospel, their light will be like the beams of the sun, that do not only convey light, but give life ; and converts will be likely to spring up under their ministry, as the grass and the plants of the field under the influences of the sun ; and the souls of the saints will be likely to grow, and appear beautiful *as the lily*, and to revive *as the corn*, and grow *as the vine*, and their scent to be *as the wine of Lebanon* ; and their light will be like the light of Christ, which is the light of life, John viii. 12.

If the sun should shine upon the earth, with the same brightness that it doth now, yet if it were without any heat, it would give life to nothing ; the world be a desolate wilderness, with nothing growing in it ; the death of every living thing must be the consequence ; and the sun's light could

be of no service to us, but to cause us to see our own and others' misery, without being able to help ourselves or them. On the other hand, if the sun diffused the same heat that now it does, but the world was destitute at the same time of any light, it would be equally unserviceable : Mankind having no light to guide them in their business, in tilling the field, or gathering the produce of the earth, we should be like the Egyptians in the three days' darkness, who saw not one another, nor rose from their place : And thus also death would be the unavoidable consequence. But by light and heat accompanying one another, the whole face of the earth becomes fruitful, and is adorned, and all things are quickened and flourish, and mankind enjoy both life and comfort.

I proceed to the

V. Thing proposed in handling the doctrine, to apply these things to all here present, that Christ has called to the work of the gospel ministry, observing how much it concerns such to endeavor to be burning and shining lights.

Our office and work is most honorable, in that we are set by Christ to be lights or luminaries in the spiritual world. Light is the most glorious thing in the material world, and there are, it may be, no parts of the natural world that have so great an image of the goodness of God, as the lights or luminaries of heaven ; and especially the sun, who is constantly communicating his benign influence to enlighten, quicken and refresh the world by his beams ; which is probably the reason that the worship of the sun was (as is supposed) the first idolatry that mankind fell into. But so are ministers honored by their great Lord and Master, that they are set to be that to men's souls, that the lights of heaven are to their bodies ; and that they might be the instruments and vehicles of God's greatest goodness, and the most precious fruits of his eternal love to them, and means of that life, and refreshment and joy, that are spiritual and eternal, and infinitely more precious than any benefit received by the benign beams of the sun in the firmament. And we shall be likely indeed to be

the instruments of those unspeakable benefits to the souls of our fellow creatures, if we have those qualifications, which have been shewn to be the true and proper excellency of ministers of the gospel. Herein our glory will answer the honorable station Christ has set us in. And hereby our ministry will be likely to be as beneficial as our office is honorable : We shall be like Christ, and shall shine with his beams ; Christ will live in us, and be seen in his life and beauty in our ministry, and in our conversation, and we shall be most likely to be the means of bringing others to him, and of their receiving of his light, and being made partakers of his life, and having his joy fulfilled in them. And this will be the way for us hereafter to be as much advanced and distinguished in our reward, as we are honored in the office and business we are called to here. In this way, those whom Christ has set to be lights in his church, and to be stars in the spiritual world here, shall be lights also in the church triumphant, and shine as stars for ever in heaven. Daniel xii. 3. “ And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever.

But if we fail of the proper excellency of ministers of the gospel, we shall not be in the sight of God the more worthy or honorable for our high office, but the more abominable and inexcusable ; our wickedness being aggravated by God’s great goodness and condescension to us, and the peculiar obligations that he laid upon us ; and instead of being eminently beneficial and great blessings, as lights to reflect the beams of Christ’s glory and love, we shall be so much the more hurtful and pernicious, for our being in such a station ; and so shall be likely hereafter to suffer a so much more dreadful punishment. The devils in hell are so much the more odious to God, and more the objects of his wrath, because he set them in the dignity and glory of angels, the excellency of which state they are fallen from. And it is likely that those in hell that will be nearest to the fallen angels, in their state of misery, will be those that Christ once set to be angels of the

churches, but through their unfaithfulness, failed of their proper excellency and end.

Here I would apply myself in a few words to the person whose intended ordination, this day, to the great work of the gospel ministry, is the occasion of this discourse.

You have now, dear sir, heard something of the nature and design of that office to which you are this day, in the name of Christ, to be solemnly set apart. You are therein called to be a light to the souls of men, a lamp in God's temple, and a star in the spiritual world. And you have heard wherein, in Christ's esteem, consists the proper excellency of one in that office, and how in this a minister of the gospel becomes, like his glorious master, and glorifies him, and is likely to be the instrument of the salvation and happiness of the souls of men, and to receive a glorious reward from the hands of God.

These, sir, are the motives that you are to be influenced by, to endeavor to be a burning and a shining light in the work of the ministry. As to the things of this world, you are not to expect outward ease, pleasure and plenty : Nor are you to depend on the friendship and respect of men ; but should prepare to endure hardness, as one that is going forth as a soldier to war. But they are higher things than these, more excellent benefits than the world can afford, that Christ offers to those that approve themselves to him in this work.

God in his providence has brought you far from your native land, and from your friends and acquaintance there ; but you will have reason notwithstanding to acknowledge the good hand of his providence towards you, if he is pleased to make you a burning and shining light in this part of his church, and by the influence of your light and heat (or rather by his divine influence, with your ministry) to cause this wilderness to bud and blossom as the rose, and give it the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, and to cause you to shine in the midst of this people with warm and lightsome, quickening and comforting beams, causing their souls to flourish, rejoice and bear fruit like a garden of pleasant fruits, under the beams of the sun.

By this means you will be to their souls the vehicle of the influences and blessings of the heavenly world, which is a world of light and love, shall be ever held in Christ's right hand, and shall be terrible to the powers of darkness ; and shall see more and more of the light of Christ's glory and grace in this place, with you and this people, and shall hereafter not only shine yourself, as the brightness of the firmament, but shall meet with them in glory also, who shall shine there around you, as a bright Constellation in the highest Heaven ; where they shall be your everlasting Crown of rejoicing.

But I hasten to the

VI. Thing proposed, which was to shew what course ministers of the gospel ought to take, or what things they should do, that they may be burning and shining lights.

And here I shall but just mention things, without enlarging.

And in order to this, ministers should be diligent in their studies, and in the work of the ministry to which they are called ; giving themselves wholly to it ; taking heed to themselves, that their hearts be not engaged, and their minds swallowed up, and their time consumed, in pursuits after the profits and vain glory of the world.

And particularly, ministers should be very conversant with the holy scriptures ; making it very much their business, with the utmost diligence and strictness, to search those holy writings : For they are as it were the beams of the light of the sun of righteousness ; they are the light by which ministers must be enlightened, and the light they are to hold forth to their hearers ; and they are the fire whence their hearts and the hearts of their hearers must be enkindled.

They should earnestly seek after much of the spiritual knowledge of Christ, and that they may live in the clear views of his glory. For by this means they will be changed into the image of the same glory and brightness, and will come to their people as MOSES came down to the congregation of ISRAEL, after he had seen God's back parts in the Mount, with his face

shining. If the light of Christ's glory shines upon them, it will be the way for them to shine with the same kind of light on their hearers, and to reflect the same beams, which have heat, as well as brightness. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, is the treasure the apostle speaks of, that ministers have, as in earthen vessels : 2. Cor. iv. 6, 7. " For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." This was probably typified of old, by the burning lights and lamps which GIDEON's soldiers had in one hand in earthen pitchers, while they held a trumpet in the other, with which they sounded, (typifying the preaching of the gospel.) And thus with the sound of these trumpets, and these burning lights or earthen vessels, they overcame the enemies of God and his people.

Ministers, in order to their being burning and shining lights, should walk closely with God, and keep near to Christ ; that they may ever be enlightened and enkindled by him. And they should be much in seeking God, and conversing with him by prayer, who is the fountain of light and love : And knowing their own emptiness and helplessness should be ever dependent on Christ ; being sensible with JEREMIAH that they are children, should sit as children at Christ's feet to hear his word, and be instructed by him ; and being sensible with ISAIAH that they are men of unclean lips, should seek that their lips may be, as it were, touched with a live coal from the altar, as it were by the bright and burning seraphim.

I come now to the

VII And last thing proposed, to say something very briefly concerning the duties of a people that are under the care of a minister corresponding with these things that Christ has taught us concerning the nature and end of this sacred office. And here I would have a special respect to the people of God in this place, who are about to have the care of their souls

committed to him, that is now solemnly to be set apart to the work of the ministry.

If it be, as you have heard, the proper excellency of a minister of the gospel to be a burning and a shining light, then it is your duty earnestly to pray for your minister, that he may be filled with divine light, and with the power of the Holy Ghost, to make him so. For herein you will but pray for the greatest benefit to yourselves ; for if your minister burns and shines, it will be for your light and life. That which has been spoken of, as it is the chief excellency of a minister, so it renders a minister the greatest blessing of any thing in the world that ever God bestows on a people.

And as it is your duty, to pray that your minister may by this mean become such a blessing to you, so you should do your part to make him so, by supporting him, and putting him under the best advantage, with a mind free from worldly cares, and the pressure of outward wants and difficulties, to give himself wholly to his work ; and by all proper acts of respect and kindness and assistance, to encourage his heart, and strengthen his hands : And to take heed that instead of this you do not take a course to obscure and extinguish the light that would shine among you, and to smother and suppress the flame, by casting dirt upon it ; by necessitating your minister by your penuriousness towards him, to be involved in worldly care ; and by discouraging his heart by disrespect and unkindness. And particularly when your minister shews himself to be a burning light by burning with a proper zeal against any wickedness that may be breaking out amongst his people, and manifests it by bearing a proper testimony against it in the preaching of the word, or by a faithful exercise of the discipline of God's house, instead of taking it thankfully, and yielding to him in it, as you ought, does not raise another fire of a contrary nature against it, viz. the fire of your unhallowed passions, reflecting upon and reproaching him for his faithfulness. Herein you will act very unbecoming a Christian people, and shew yourselves very ungrateful to your minister, and to Christ who has bestowed upon you so faithful a minis-

ter, and will also, while you fight against him, and against Christ, fight most effectually against your own souls. If Christ gives you a minister that is a burning and shining light, take heed that you do not hate the light, because your deeds are reprov'd by it ; but love and rejoice in his light ; and that not only for a season, like John the Baptist's apostatizing hearers : And come to the light. Let your frequent resort be to your minister for instruction in soul cases, and under all spiritual difficulties ; and be open to the light and willing to receive it ; and be obedient to it. And thus walk as the children of the light, and follow your minister wherein he is a follower of Christ, i. e. wherein he is as a burning and shining light. If you continue so to do, your path will be the path of the just, which shines more and more to the perfect day, and the end of your course shall be in those blissful regions of everlasting light above, where you shall shine forth with your minister, and both with Christ, *as the sun, in the kingdom of the heavenly Father.*