

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION OF MR. ATKINSON,

IN LONDON, JANUARY 7TH, 1712-13.

ISAIAH vi. 8.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

It is no absurdity at all, at the ordination of a gospel minister, to borrow instructions from the mission of an evangelical prophet; for the treasure is for substance the same, which is lodged in both these earthen vessels. And though there are diversities of gifts,^a and administrations, various degrees of light, and methods of revelation, yet in all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit; the very same Spirit of the Lord, that both came upon the Old-Testament prophets, and remains with the New-Testament ministry.^b In allusion to the Old-Testament way of revelation, gospel preaching is called prophesying, let us *prophesy according to the proportion of faith.*^c And the prophets are called the brethren of gospel ministers. The angel says to John, *I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets.*^d The ordinary influences and operations of the Spirit, and its plentiful effusion, in *gospel times*, in the prediction and promise of it, is represented by the *peculiar and extraordinary* ways of discovery of the divine will then in use: *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*^e they shall have a *clear insight* into the things of God, and be able to *spea*k clearly of them to one another.

None perhaps of all the Old-Testament prophets had a more awful and solemn mission than the prophet Isaiah; who spake so plainly and fully of Christ, and the grace of the gospel. Ezekiel's

mission was likewise very awful; whose errand chiefly was to prove and threaten, and display the terrors of the law: but the vision that introduced his mission was more dark and mystical.

We dispute not, whether this was Isaiah's first mission; it is likely it was not, the sermons in the foregoing chapters being placed before it. He had, if I may so say, prophesied for some time as a candidate, that he might, first, be tried, and might himself make trial of his work; in that he was owned of God, and yet he had this solemn mission afterwards. He was, before, sent of God, spake in his name, and knew he did; but his commission was then virtual and implicit, but was now more expressly recognized, when his work grew more upon his hands, and the difficulties and oppositions he met with in it increased. Now this ambassador made his *public entry*.

If we look back to the preparatives for this solemnity, (which we have an account of in the foregoing verses of this chapter,) we shall find the prophet very deeply touched with a humbling sense of his own sinfulness, and a comfortable sense of the pardon of sin, and his acceptance with God. I take notice of these for instruction to you, brother, who are this day dedicating yourself to the service of God in the gospel of his Son, that you may walk in the same Spirit.

1. He was much affected with a sight and sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness. See how he cries out, upon a sight of God in his glory, and hearing his holiness praised: *Woe is me, for I am undone;*^f I am *cut off*, so the word is; I deserve to be cut off from all my privileges and hopes as an Israelite; for *I am a man of unclean lips, unfit, una-*

^a 1 Cor. xii. 4, 11. ^b John xiv. 16. ^c Rom. xii. 6.

^d Rev. xxii. 9. ^e Joel ii. 28. ^f Isa. vi. 5.

ble to be employed in speaking for God : I dwell, indeed, in *the midst of a people of unclean lips*, who deserve to be reprov'd, and need to be reformed, but how unfit am I to be made use of as an instrument herein, who am myself a man of unclean lips ; and never saw so much of it, nor so much of the evil of it, as now that mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

God looks upon those as *fittest* to be honoured by him, and employed for him, who are humble and low in their own eyes. When a soul is brought to cry out, *Woe is me, for I am undone*, it is then in a fair way to be saved for ever. As Christ, so Christians, are first humbled, and then exalted ; like a corn of wheat, die first, and then revive.

And as to particular services, " Before honour is humility." When we see ourselves utterly unworthy of the honour, and unfit for the service, we are called to, then free grace will be the more magnified in passing by our unworthiness, and making us strong out of weakness. They who abase themselves under strong convictions of their own sinfulness and vile-ness, into an entire subjection to God's grace and government, and a cheerful condescension to the meanest services, these are they whom the King of kings delights to honour. *They stand fairest for preferment in the Messiah's kingdom*, and are likely to be great in it, who humble themselves like little children ;^g who do it naturally, and with sincerity, not artfully, affectedly, and with design.

2. He was likewise impressed with a comfortable assurance of the pardon of his sin, and his reconciliation to God. A coal from the altar was laid upon his mouth ;^h not to burn it, but to purify it, to take away the uncleanness of his lips which he complained of, for the sin that truly humbles us, shall not ruin us ; and it was said to him, *Lo, this has touched thy lips, thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged*. And *blessed is the man*, thrice blessed is the minister, *whose iniquity is forgiven*,ⁱ and who knows it, by the witness of God's Spirit with his spirit. They who are thus sprinkled from an evil conscience, are best prepared to serve the living God,^k and can come boldly to and from the throne of his grace.

None are so fit to display to others the riches of gospel grace, as those who have themselves received the comfort of it. They can best preach Christ crucified, who have known experimentally the power of his death, and are themselves clothed with that everlasting righteousness, which by it he brought in. And how feelingly may they preach repentance and remission of sins to others, who have themselves tasted the bitterness of discovered guilt, and the sweetness of a sealed pardon. And this is one reason why the ministry of reconciliation is com-

mitted to men like ourselves, who labour under the same burthens, and lie open to the same dangers, with the rest of mankind. The great prophet cries out, *Woe is me, I am undone*,—the great apostle cries out, *O wretched man that I am*,^l that others, who make the same complaints with them, may be encouraged to hope for the same relief that they found ; and that they may recommend to others the same foundation which they have themselves built upon, and comfort others with the same comforts where-with they themselves were comforted of God.

The prophet being thus prepared to have so great a work and so great a trust put into his hand, we have, in the text and the following verses, the committing of that *work* and that *trust* to him ; for as God sends none but those whom he has first prepared, so those whom he has by his grace prepared, he will some time or other find an opportunity to send, for God makes nothing in vain. Jeremiah, who is *formed* for a prophet, shall be *ordained* a prophet.^m

Now observe in my text the solemn treaty and transaction between God and Isaiah upon this matter. Behold a communion between God and man ; as, of old, God talked with Abraham.ⁿ *Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and wonder, O earth*, the Lord of life and glory converses familiarly with poor sinful dying worms of the earth, as one friend converseth with another. Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord, and understands it, returns a direct answer to it, and receives a reply ; and thus a correspondence is settled between him and heaven, in order to the carrying on of the work that was before him.

This communion with God is that which all Christians must keep up by faith ; both in receiving the word from God, and in lifting up their prayers to him. *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face*, I heard what thou saidst ; understood the meaning of it, applied it to myself, and complied with it ; my heart presently answered, *Thy face, Lord, will I seek*.^o *Return ye backsliding children—Behold we come unto thee*.^p

And it is that which ministers, particularly, are concerned to acquaint themselves with ; for an *experimental* knowledge of the mystery of communion with God, which the greatest part of the world are such utter strangers to, is, without doubt, a very *necessary* qualification for that office and work, which was instituted on purpose for the maintaining and carrying on of that communion. How can we expect that God should speak *by* us, if we never heard him speaking *to* us ; or that we should be accepted as the *mouth of others* to God, if we never spoke to him intelligibly and sincerely *for* ourselves ? How can we carry on the treaty of peace between God and man, if we have not, by searching the Scriptures, come to know something of the mind of

^g Matt. xviii. 4.

^h Heb. ix. 14.

ⁱ Pa. xxii. 1.

^k Rom. vii. 24.

^l Jer. i. 5.

^m Pa. xxvii. 8.

ⁿ Gen. xvii. 3.

^o Jer. xli. 22.

God, nor, by searching into our own hearts, come to know something of the case of man? Moses was first well acquainted with God himself; inquired concerning his name, and heard it proclaimed; before he was employed as a mediator between God and Israel. And Samuel was first brought to know the Lord and his word, and then was established a prophet.¹

Now, in the text we have two things concerning Isaiah's mission:

I. The counsel of God concerning it, *Whom shall I send?*

II. The consent of Isaiah to it, *Here am I, send me.* Each of these will furnish us with some useful observations, proper to the present occasion.

I. We have here *the counsel of God concerning it*; and it is good to trace all divine things to the divine counsels, the streams to the springs. God is here introduced, as it were, deliberating and advising with himself whom he should send, to show the house of Jacob their sins, and their misery and danger because of sin; as if he were considering and consulting about it, *Whom shall I send?* We have a like representation to Micaiah; when he saw the Lord sitting on his throne, surrounded with the host of heaven, and heard him saying, *Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up, and fall at Ramoth Gilead?* Now this is spoken *ἀνθρωποπαθῶς*—after the manner of men, and therefore, according to our rule, we must take care to understand it *θεοπρεπῶς*—so as becomes God, so as not to derogate from the glory of any of his infinite perfections.

As God needs not to be counselled by others; for *who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him;*² so he need not consult with himself; for deliberating supposes something of hesitation, which is not to be supposed in the Eternal Mind. As God never varies from himself, so he never wavers in himself; *Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world.* When Christ asked Philip, *Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?* he said it only to prove him, for he himself knew well enough what he would do.³

But sometimes the wisdom of God, though never at a loss, is expressed by a solemn consultation, to show that what God does is the result of an eternal counsel. And some have observed that God is never represented consulting with himself, but in cases wherein man was concerned, who is the particular care of the divine providence. As, about the creation of man, *Let us make man;*⁴ and after the fall, *The man is become as one of us;*⁵ and when the nations were to be dispersed, *Let us go and confound their languages.*⁶ God would hereby show that there is a counsel in his whole will;⁷ and would teach us to ponder the path of our feet,⁸ and to consider our ways,⁹ and to do nothing rashly, but to make use of

our own wisdom, by communing with our own hearts; and of the wisdom of others, by asking advice of them, for in multitude of counsellors there is safety.

And God's being introduced here *considering* whom he should send, intimates that the sending forth of ministers, is a work not to be done but upon very mature deliberation, and with good advice. Christ did not send out his apostles to preach, till he had kept them some time with him as his pupils; and our rule is, to lay hands suddenly on no man, lest we be partakers of other men's sins.¹⁰

Now we may here observe:

1. Who *it is that is here consulting*; "I heard the voice of the Lord" proposing the question: and it is God "*in his glory*;" and it is God in *Three Persons*.

(1.) It is God *in his glory*, the same that he saw in the first verse, *upon his throne, high and lifted up*. Not that he saw his essence, no man has seen that or can see it, but such a display of his glory in vision, as he was pleased at this time to manifest himself by, as to Moses and Israel at mount Sinai.

When God thus appeared in his glory and majesty, attended with a glorious retinue of holy angels and their adorations, then was he considering whom to send upon an embassy to man: and it tends very much to set off the condescension of God's grace to us, that he is so highly exalted, and yet so kindly takes cognizance and care of us. His goodness is his glory, and adds lustre to his greatness. And, among men, those are truly the greatest who are the best, and do most good; as it magnifies his goodness, that though he is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself, was so from eternity, and would have been so to eternity, if we had never been, or had been miserable, yet he has an eye to man, and a concern for him. Though he be infinitely above the possibility of being benefited by us, yet thus he visits and regards us.¹¹ Thus God's majesty makes his mercy shine the brighter; as where he says, that the same God who rides upon the heavens by his name Jah, is a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows.¹² Though God be high, yet he has respect unto the lowly; and though it be condescension to behold the things done *in heaven*, yet his regards stoop much lower, and he dwells *with men upon the earth.*¹³

And methinks it puts a great honour upon the work of the ministry, that when God was about to send a prophet to speak to his people in his name, he would thus appear in the glories of the upper world, upon a throne high and lifted up, as one who is God over all, blessed for evermore; higher than the highest. Though ministers are, themselves, men upon a level with you, despicable and despised, *the foolish things of the world, and the weak*; yet he

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 7, 20. ² 1 Kings xxii. 19, 20. ³ Isa. xl. 13, 14.
⁴ John vi. 5, 6. ⁵ Gen. i. 26. ⁶ Gen. xii. 22. ⁷ Gen. xl. 17.

⁸ Eph. i. 11. ⁹ Prov. iv. 26. ¹⁰ Hag. i. 5. ¹¹ 1 Tim. v. 22.
¹² Ps. viii. 1, 4. ¹³ Ps. lxxviii. 4, 5. ¹⁴ Ps. cxlii. 5, 6.

that *sends* them is enthroned, is greatly exalted. Though their original is mean, their character is truly great, they are the ambassadors of the King of kings.

Let this support and encourage faithful ministers under all the contempts that are put upon them, and the reproaches they are loaded with, that how much soever they are trampled upon and run down, he that sent them, and will bear them out, whose messengers they are, and whose messages they bring; who does protect them, and will reward them; is the Lord, high and lifted up. Such an honour does it put upon the gospel ministry, and such encouragement does it give to gospel ministers, that our Lord Jesus gave these gifts unto men, when he ascended on high, when he entered upon the glories of his exaltation, and rode in triumph, leading captivity captive.^c Ambassadors have respect paid them according to the dignity, not of their private families, but of the prince who sends them.

(2.) It is God in *Three Persons*; which is plainly intimated in the plural number here used, *Who will go for us?* It is *one God* who says, *Whom shall I send*; and yet this *ONE* is *three persons*, the very same who said, *Let us make man*; and it is intimated in the *plural* termination of "*Elohim*," yet joined with words of the *singular* number; as *In the beginning* ברא אלוהים *DII creat* IT. As sometime "*Eloah*," which is *singular*, is joined with a word *plural*, *Where is God my Maker*, אלוה עושי—*God my Makers*.^f Remember now thy Creator, בוראך—thy Creators. Which (says Coccejus) though they are not full proofs of the doctrine of the Trinity, yet they are memorials of it, intimations of it for the present, till it should be more fully revealed in the New Testament.

The adversaries of this truth seek to avoid the force of the argument from this text, and the like, by saying, That when God says, *Let us make man*, and *Who will go for us*, he speaks *more regio*—in the style of kings. "*We* will and command;" so the Socinians; but it was not so used in the Hebrew language. That it is God consulting with his *house of judgment*; so the Jews; but they know not, nor can tell us, what they mean by it;—with the angels; so says Grotius. But do prophets go on the service of angels? or are they sent on their errands? No, these are mere evasions. It is the *SAME* that says, *Whom shall I send?* in the singular number; and, *Who will go for us?* in the plural number.

And to throw more light upon, and add greater weight to, this, it is observable, that the *words* which follow in the two next verses, which the LORD said, *Go make the heart of this people fat*,^g are, in the New Testament, applied both to the SON, and to the HOLY GHOST. They are applied to the SON, where Esaias, when he said these things, is said to have

seen *HIS glory*, the glory of CHRIST, (for of him the evangelist is there writing,) and to have spoken of HIM;^a and, to the BLESSED SPIRIT, where it is said, *Well spake the HOLY GHOST*, by Esaias the prophet, unto our fathers; saying, *Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand*.^h

The three persons in the blessed Trinity gloriously concur, as in the creating of man, so in the redeeming and governing of man, and particularly in sending messengers to the children of men, to bring them revelations of the will of God. Ministers are ordained, in the same name into which Christians are baptized, *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*;ⁱ nor could they baptize in that name, if they were not commissioned by the authority, and devoted to the glory, of that name. The three that bear record on earth; the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood;^j that is, the Scriptures, and the two sacraments, are derived from the three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. And the last named of the three that bear record in heaven, is the same with the first named of the three that bear record on earth; as the nexus or bond of union between them. And the Spirit speaking to the churches:^m by ministers, as expositors of the Scripture, and stewards of the mysteries of God, they may therefore be justly looked upon as sent by, and going for, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

2. *What the consultation is, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Some think this refers to the particular message of wrath against Israel, which we have in the next verses: Who will be willing to go upon such a melancholy errand? Who can be prevailed with to carry a message which they cannot but carry, as the prophet Ezekiel did, in the bitterness of their souls;ⁿ and as St. Paul, with great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart?^o

But I rather take it, more largely, for all the messages which he was intrusted to deliver in God's name to that people; the secondary EFFECT of which was, the making of their "heart fat, and their ear heavy," but it was by no means the primary INTENTION. The proper tendency of the word, was to be a savour of life unto life; but, if it prove a savour of death unto death,^p that is their fault who make an ill use of it.

"Whom shall I send?" Some one must be sent, this perishing self-destroying people must have fair warning given them; but it was hard to find a proper messenger. Not that God was in doubt whom to send; when he has work to do, he will not want instruments to do it by, for he can either find men fit, or make them so; but it intimates, that the business was such as required a well accomplished mes-

^a Eph. iv. 8.

^f Job xxxv. 10.

^g Job ix. 15.

^b John xii. 40, 41.

^c Acts xxviii. 26, 26.

^d Matt. xxviii. 19.

^h 1 John v. 7, 8.

ⁱ Rev. ii. 7.

^j Ezek. iii. 14.

^k Rom. ix. 2.

^l 2 Cor. ii. 16.

senger, beyond those whom he had hitherto employed : he must exalt to this honour one *chosen* out of the people,^a and qualified with uncommon abilities. "*Who* is a chosen man," a choice man, "that I may appoint over her, and who is that shepherd that will stand before me?"^r

God now appeared attended with holy angels, bright and blessed seraphims, who had each of them six wings, and could make more haste, and deliver a message better, than any of the sons of men could ; and yet he asks, *Whom shall I send?* for he would send by a man like themselves. When Ahab's *false* prophets were to deceive him to his destruction, it was done by a lying spirit who went forth from before the Lord.^s But when gospel grace was to be prophesied of by a *true* prophet, no created spirit is employed, but God's own Spirit comes upon the prophets.

Now hence we may gather three observations :

(1.) It is the unspeakable favour of God to us, that he is pleased to communicate his mind to us, and to make it known by men like ourselves. Divine revelation is a signal token of the divine good will, and ought so to be accounted. Man, by reaching at forbidden knowledge, forfeited all that which would be saving and serviceable. And how well did he deserve to be deprived of all the *light* of divine revelation, who had hid his *light* of human reason under a bushel, and had almost buried it in darkness ; and by his ignorance had wilfully *alienated himself from the life of God.*^t Justly might God have said, 'that he would never *speaking any more* to such a rebel ; and then his case had been as desperate as that of fallen angels ; and he must have wandered endlessly, had not God been his guide.

But in pity to poor man, and in order to his recovery and redemption, beams of divine light are afresh darted from heaven ; the great Shepherd sends after this stray sheep to fetch it home ; *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ;*^u *unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ;*^v *unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.*^x Notice is given us of the displeasure of God against us, that we may avoid it ; of the kindness and good will of God to us, that we may improve it ; and of the duty God requires of us, that we may perform it. He has not hid from our eyes the things that belong to our peace and welfare, but has at sundry times, and in divers manners, given us to understand them, and put us in mind of them.

These notices he sends to us by those of the same nature with us. The people of Israel were so frightened at the terrors of Sinai, that they desired thenceforward God would speak to them by Moses ; *Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*^y Herein they spoke the sense

of all mankind, and God agreed to it ; and though, since then, angels have been often sent upon particular errands, yet the ordinary instructions of the church have been by *men formed out of the clay*, whose *terror shall not make us afraid*, nor their hand *be heavy upon us* ; and they are, *according to our wish, in God's stead.*^z And this is very agreeable to a state of probation ; in which, it were not a fair trial if, by the appearance of angels, those things were made sensible, which are now the objects of faith. The Scriptures were not written by angels, but by holy men of God, and the dispensing of the gospel is committed to faithful men.

How ungrateful are those to God, who, instead of giving him thanks for the favour of divine revelation, ridicule it, and asperse it ; and, under pretence of free-thinking, shake off all the sacred obligations of it, and thereby forfeit and renounce all the advantages of it. It is the greatest indignity that can be done to God, and the greatest injury to mankind. God has, in tenderness to us, sent us his mind by *men like ourselves*, and they abuse this favour, by making *themselves* equal with those who spake by divine authority. But if they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.^a

(2.) It is a rare thing to find one that is fit to go for God, to carry his messages to the children of men. God here asks, *Whom shall I send?* Where is the person who may be intrusted with such an errand ; *Who is sufficient for these things?*^b A skilful, faithful interpreter of the mind of God, who shall show unto man his uprightness, is one of a thousand.^c He must be an able man indeed, who is fit to be a minister of the New Testament.^d

Such a complication of gifts and graces, as are requisite to the right discharge of this great trust, is very seldom found. Such a degree of insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, as is necessary to make a man skilful ; and such a degree of courage for God, and concern for souls, as is necessary to make a man faithful ; is hardly to be met with. Many are willing enough to go, who yet are not fit to be sent ; as there are some fit to be sent, who are not willing to go. Solomon speaks of the inconvenience of sending messages by the hand of fools ; they who do so, he says, *cut off the feet and drink damage.* And though men have talents, it is little better if they have not application ; for *as vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to him that sends him.*^e Of what ill consequence is it then, to have God's messages sent by the hand of fools or sluggards ; so that considering how much folly and sloth prevail, we may well ask, as those at a loss, Who shall be sent, and who will go on God's errands ?

^a Ps. lxxxix. 19. ^r Jer. xlix. 19. Jer. l. 44. ^s 1 Kings xxii. 20, 23.
^t Eph. iv. 18. ^u Mic. vi. 8. ^v Job xxviii. 28. ^x Prov. viii. 4.

^y Exod. xx. 39. ^z Job xxxiii. 6, 7. ^a Luke xvi. 31. ^b 2 Cor. ii. 16.
^c Job xxxiii. 23. ^d 2 Cor. iii. 6. ^e Prov. x. 26.

(3.) None are allowed to go for God, but those who are sent by him. He will own none but such as he himself appoints. As the ordinances must be only such as are of his institution, so the ministers of the ordinances must be of his designation, else they cannot expect that his presence should be with them, or that his power should accompany their administrations. It is fit the master should nominate his own servants; he *knows whom he hath chosen*. When Christ would send forth apostles, he *called unto him whom he would*.^f

We are not now to expect *immediate* calls, such as the prophets and apostles had; called *not of men or by men*. Ministers have no extraordinary commissions to produce, nor any miraculous ratifications; they undertake not to foretell things to come, by the accomplishment of which to prove their mission; those were requisite to set the wheels in motion, both in the Old Testament and in the New, but they cease when the thing is settled. Nor do we think that the mission of a minister depends upon the uncertain thread of a lineal succession from the apostles, which we cannot believe to be either requisite on the one hand, or sufficient on the other. But there is some resemblance between God's calling of ministers now, and his calling of prophets of old. Prophets *were* called when they were qualified for the office, when the word of the Lord came to them; and there were schools of the prophets, in which young men were trained up in preparatory exercises; so, *now*, those whom God has by his Spirit qualified for the work of the ministry, have *one* considerable step toward a divine call: to which was, *then*, added a strong inclination to this work, purely for its own sake; Jeremiah says, that God's word was as a burning fire shut up in his bones;^g and that is, *still*, the *other* step toward a divine call,—a sincere desire to glorify God, and serve the interests of Christ's kingdom, and promote the salvation of precious souls, without regard to any secular advantage whatsoever. They in whom such qualifications for the work and such dispositions to it meet, may be accounted sent of God. And on these two the church of England seems to lay the stress of a *due call* to the ministry, in the question put to all who offer themselves to be ordained, whether they think themselves moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon them the office of the ministry? For it is certain, none are moved to it by the Holy Ghost, who are not in some measure fit for it, or who desire it for the sake of secular advantages. But those who are thus "called of God," ought to have their qualifications examined by proper judges; and, then, by the word and prayer, (in which they will have to be employed, whose office it is to give themselves to the word and prayer,) they must be solemnly

recommended to God, and to the word of his grace; and their dedication of themselves to God, and the service of his church, must be recognized. They who by office ministered unto the Lord, as prophets and teachers, were ordered, by fasting, and prayer, and the imposition of hands, to separate Barnabas and Saul to the work *whereunto God had called them*.^h

This is entering in by the door; as all who will approve themselves good shepherds must. *How shall men preach except they be thus sent?*ⁱ God complained of those who ran, and he did not send them;^j and he tells them (which is threatening enough) that therefore they should not profit the people at all: those who go without *sending*, will come back without *speeding*. God will own his own work, and his own appointments, but not men's usurpations. Both the external and internal call are necessary; and neither must be set up exclusive of the other. There must be an *internal* call, for God will be served with the spirit in the gospel of his Son; and there must be likewise an *external* call, for God is the God of order, and will have his own work done in his own way. And those in whom both these meet, may, with St. Paul, thank Christ Jesus for putting them into the ministry, and may expect that he will own them, and stand by them.

II. We have here the consent of Isaiah to this mission. When he heard God ask, *Whom shall I send?* he readily answered, *Here am I, send me*. How well does it become all who love God, and have a zeal for his honour, to step in to the service of his kingdom and interest, when there is most occasion, and when the necessity of its affairs calls most for it; to be ready to go on God's errand, when none else will, and there is a failure of messengers, "Do you as you will, *I will serve the Lord*." It is an honour (though it cannot but be a grief) to be singular, in appearing for God; and to appear active for him, when multitudes decline his service as mean and perilous; to make offers to work for him, when others seek, by excuses and evasions, to shift it off.

O what backwardness is there in many to a good work, when it has any thing of difficulty or disgrace attending it; or to any service for God, when other employments are more gainful and creditable in the world. Jonah is called to go to Nineveh, but he has no liking to the errand, and therefore flees to Tarshish. The tribes of Israel are summoned to appear in defence of the public liberty and property, against Jabin king of Canaan, to come in to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty; and, while Gilead abides beyond Jordan, and Dan cautiously remains in ships,^k for the princes of Issachar, that intelligent ^{as} as well as industrious tribe, bravely to

^f Mark iii. 13. ^g Jer. xx. 9. ^h Acts xiii. 1-3. ⁱ Rom. x. 15.

^j Jer. xxiii. 21.

^k Judges v. 17.

^l 1 Chron. xii. 3.

appear with Deborah, even Issachar and Barak; for Zebulun and Naphtali to *jeopard their lives to the leath in the high places of the field,*^a in the common cause, this is thankworthy. He is the truly Christian hero, who dares lay his hand to a despised plough, and a deserted one, who has courage to submit to a yoke, which so many, like the nobles of Isekoa, are ashamed and afraid to put their necks under.^b Those who thus boldly appear for the keeping up of religion's interest, are worthy of double honour. This was it that gained Levi the honour of being God's tribe, the holy tribe, that when Moses made proclamation in the gate of the camp, *Who is on the Lord's side, to avenge the quarrel of his covenant upon the makers of the golden calf,*^c that tribe distinguished themselves, and came in to Moses. Thus did Isaiah here; when every one was shy of the office, he was eager to receive it.

The errand on which Isaiah was to go, was a very melancholy errand, *Go make the heart of this people fat;* and yet he offered himself to the service. When we are called to act or speak for God, we must not say, We would go, if we were sure we should have good success, and our message would be acceptable; but we must go, and leave the success to God. Lord, make what use thou pleasest of me, I will not murmur or dispute. Though in the event our ministry should prove contrary to what it is in the intention,—to harden people instead of softening them, and to aggravate their condemnation instead of preventing it, which is a very uncomfortable, discouraging consideration, yet we must go on in it, knowing that in the issue God will be glorified.

Isaiah had been himself in a very melancholy frame in the 5th verse, *Woe is me, for I am undone,* much indisposed and burthened; yet now he has courage enough to offer himself to the work, which then he could not think of without terror; for he had been assured that his sins were pardoned, his iniquity taken away, and then his fears are silenced, the clouds are blown over, and all is well. Many have come to be eminently serviceable to God and his church in their day, that at first were low-spirited, and laboured under great discouragements. When God by his Spirit speaks to the heart good words and comfortable words, those who like Daniel were fallen with their faces to the ground, are wonderfully lifted up and encouraged, and are ready to say, as he did, *Now let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me.*^d

Isaiah's saying, *Here am I, send me,* speaks three things, for direction, to those who are setting out in the work of the ministry. His readiness; his resolution; and his referring himself to God.

1. His readiness. He does not make objections, as Moses did, *O my Lord, I am not eloquent, or,*

Send by the hand of him whom thou wilt send,^e any body but me; but, Behold me; I present myself to thee, to be employed as thou pleasest: *Here I am, send me.* He was a volunteer in the service; not pressed into it, but willing in this day of power:^f in this as in other things God loves a cheerful giver,^g a cheerful offerer. *My heart* (says Deborah) *is towards the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly.*^h It is recommended to the elders to feed the flock of God, not of constraint, but willingly, and of a ready mind.ⁱ In all acts of obedience to the calls of God, and assistance to the work of God, we must be free and forward, as those who know that we serve a good Master, whose work—not only his for us, but ours for him—is honourable and glorious; it is its own wages. Let us be brought under the yoke of Christ, by the constraining power of his love to us, drawing out our hearts in love to him again; and that is the acceptable sacrifice, that which is bound to the horns of the altar, with these cords of a man, these bonds of love.

How ready is God to hear and answer our calls; he says, *Behold me, behold me,*^j even to those who were not called by his name. Much more ready is he to say, *Here I am,*^k to those that call upon him. And should not we then be ready to answer his calls, though the service we are called to be never so difficult and hazardous? Desire not to be excused, when God has work for you to do, nor let any thing keep you back from that honour.

2. His resolution. He gives not only a free consent, but he is firm and fixed in it; does not hesitate or waver, but is ready both to swear to it, and to perform it; and he will not be beaten off it, no more than the people of Israel, when they said, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord;*^l or Ruth, when she said, *Entreat me not to leave thee, or to turn from following after thee.*

Here am I, not only ready to go, but resolved, in the strength of divine grace, to encounter the greatest difficulties, and to abide by the service to the end. Send me, and I will adhere to it whatever it cost me, and will never draw back. Thus Christians, thus ministers, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, should war the good warfare with courage and constancy; *Who is this that engageth his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?*^m What an acceptable servant is this, that binds his soul with a bond to the work of God, and is willing to have his ear bored to God's door-posts, to serve him for ever. And good reason have we, thus, to serve Christ, for with such a steady and unshaken resolution did he undertake to save us; when it was asked, Who will be man's redeemer? *who will take the book, and open the seals?*ⁿ and there was found none who would venture upon it; then said Christ, *Lo I come;* and finding it written of him

^a Judg. v. 15, 18. ^b Neh. iii. 5. ^c Exod. xxxii. 26. ^d Dan. x. 19.
^e Exod. iv. 10, 13. ^f Ps. cx. 3. ^g 2 Cor. ix. 7.

^h Judg. v. 9. ⁱ 1 Pet. v. 2. ^j Isa. lxxv. 1. ^k Isa. lvi. 9.
^l Josh. xxiv. 21. ^m Jer. xxx. 21. ⁿ Rev. v. 5.

in the volume of the book, he determines, he delights to do the will of God;^b and shall not fail or be discouraged.^c

We find this prophet, long after, reflecting with abundant satisfaction upon that steadiness of resolution with which he entered upon his prophetic office; and in it he was both a type of Christ, and a pattern to Christians. *The Lord God*, says he, *hath given me the tongue of the learned*, which he did by touching his lips with a coal from the altar; *he hath opened mine ear*, he has promised to *help me*, and *he is near that justifieth me*, and therefore *I have set my face like a flint, I know that I shall not be ashamed*.^d Those who thus set out with resolution, may depend upon God to bear them out.

3. His referring himself to God. His expressing himself thus generally, *Here am I, send me*, intimates this; Lord, employ me as thou thinkest fit; cut out what work thou pleasest for me. I will never prescribe, but ever subscribe. Here am I, ready to go to whom, and on what errand, thou wilt, whatever objections may be made against it. Lord, I am at thy service, entirely at thy disposal. Let the will of God be done by me, and done concerning me.

Thus we should address ourselves to the work of the Lord; with an entire resignation of ourselves to his wisdom and sovereignty. The heart must be *tabula rasa*—white paper to his pen, soft wax to his seal: let him write upon me what he pleases, and make what impressions he pleases upon me. We must enter upon the service of God, with Joshua's question, *What saith my Lord unto his servant?*^e And with St. Paul's, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* And with the implicit faith and obedience of the child Samuel, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*. I desire nothing more but the honour of receiving thy commands, and a heart to comply with them.

The mind thus entirely referred to God, is most easy and quiet to itself, as waiting to know his mind; in dependence upon his promise, that the meek he will guide in judgment, and teach his way. If we impartially search the Scriptures, we may thence learn, what, in general, God will have us to say and do for him; and if we keep our eye upon his providence, we may by that be assisted in the application of the general rules of the word, for in it God guides us with his eye; and thus by committing our way and works to the Lord, with, *Here am I, send me*, we may find a leading star in all our counsels, and firm footing for all our resolves; thus we stand in an even place.^f And certainly, we are most our own possessors, when we are least our own masters; and have the greatest enjoyment of ourselves, when we are most cheerfully and unreservedly devoted to God, with, *Here am I, send me*.

APPLICATION.

Of the many observable, useful hints we have given you from these words, I shall only resume two, upon which to ground a word of exhortation; which I trust may be profitable to all of us who are ministers, and particularly to you, brother, who are now devoting yourself to the service of our great Master in this high and holy calling, for the advancing of the common interests of his kingdom among men, and the common salvation of precious souls. We are here taught, 1. Whom we are sent by. It is God who says, *Whom shall I send?* and to him the prophet addresses himself, *Send me*. And, 2. Whom we go for; we go for God; *Who will go for us?*

1. Going forth into the ministry, we must look up to God to be sent by him. It is the work of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, to send ministers, the ambassadors of reconciliation; and therefore to him our eye must be: "Lord, send me. When thou art sending abroad thy messengers, let me be one; for unless thou send me, I cannot go." At our first setting out in the service of God, and when we go forth upon any particular errand, this must be our prayer, *Lord, send me*.

We who have been many years engaged in this work, are concerned to inquire, what manner of entering in we had,^g and whether we looked up to God at our setting out; whether we had our eye up unto him, and a single eye; whether our desire was toward him, and our dependence upon him? Whether we took our ministry from his hand, and devoted it to his praise? I hope we did; and we have had the comfort of it many a time, with reference to the infirmities we have laboured under, and the many difficulties we have struggled with. I am weak, I am forgetful, and meet with much discouragement from without, and from within, but, *O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant*. Let us still look up to him, and derive fresh encouragements from day to day, from his promise to be with his ministers always to the end of their day, and to the end of the world.^h If God sent us, he will stand by us, will own us, will carry us on, and bear us out, and will never leave us. Our Master often speaks of God, as of him that sent him, and for that reason doubted not but that he was with him; so that when all his disciples fled and left him alone, yet he was not alone. And as the Father sent him, so he sends his ministers, who, therefore, ought to have an eye to his hand, as he had to his Father's, which upheld him.

And you, brother, who are now to be listed under the banner of Christ, may from hence take direction; it is by prayer that you are to be set apart, not only

^b Ps. xl. 7, 8. ^c Isa. xlii. 4. ^d Isa. l. 4, 5, 7, 8. ^e Josh. v. 14.

^f Ps. xxvi. 12.

^g 1 Thess. i. 9.

^h Matt. xxviii. 20.

by ours for you, but by yours for yourself. That you may, therefore, take God along with you, and have him with you in this great undertaking, lift up your heart to God in this short but comprehensive petition, *Lord, send me; Lord Jesus, send me; for it is the Son of man that holds the stars in his right hand.*¹

Lord, send me, that is,

(1.) Lord, give me a *commission*. The gospel we are to preach is not our own, or of our own framing, but it is the gospel of God, *the glorious gospel of the blessed God*,² it is the contrivance of his wisdom, it is the proposal of his grace; and, therefore, from him we must receive our warrant to publish the covenant, to apply the seals to it, and take in subscriptions. All who are duly qualified for the work, and inclined to it, and enter regularly upon it, and obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful in the discharge of it, may look upon themselves as sent of God; and the honour of being of that number, is what you should be ambitious of.

Lord, send me, is, Lord, let me know that thou sendest me, and that I am a minister not of man, or by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.³ Let me know it by Christ's powerful, gracious *breathing on me*, and saying, *Receive the Holy Ghost*. Lord, let me have my credentials under the broad seal of heaven, and know myself authorized to be an ambassador, or resident, to carry on the treaty of peace and reconciliation between God and man; let me know it by the working of the Spirit upon my heart, as an enlightening, quickening, sanctifying Spirit, and that shall be the witness of the Spirit with my heart, that I have not taken this honour to myself, nor am an intruder, but am called of God to it.

We may not now ask for sensible signs, as Gideon did, who once and again proved God with the fleece; but we may and must ask to have more abundant satisfaction concerning our call, by the bestowing of spiritual gifts upon us, and the enriching of us with divine graces, and with strength in our soul. That the *ministry* is a divine institution, appears from the Spirit in the word; that *such a minister is of divine designation*, appears by the Spirit in the heart, which yet, sometimes, is such a new name, as *no man knows, saving he that receives it.*⁴

(2.) Lord, give me the necessary *qualifications* for this service. *Send me*, that is, fit me for this work, and enable me to do it as it should be done. God never sends any, but such as he gives to be in some measure well apprized of the errand they go upon; his ambassadors never have credentials without instructions. When the apostles were sent forth to preach, they were told *what to preach*, and were filled with the knowledge of the gospel mysteries. When

therefore we beg of God to send us, we beg of him full instructions what to say and do in pursuance of our commission, that we may give a good account of our stewardship, when we must be no longer stewards.

Lord, send me, is, Lord, give me a mouth, and wisdom; a door of utterance, that I may speak the word boldly; a spirit of wisdom, that I may know the things which are freely given us of God. Teach me what I shall say. Put that word into my mouth, which shall reach the consciences of those who hear me. The Hebrew phrase for consecration is, *filling the hand*; which intimates, not only the greatness of the work of the ministry, for they who are called to it have their hands full, but its dependence upon divine aids and supplies. We have nothing to give out to God's people, but what he gives in to us; nothing wherewith to fill their hearts, unless he fill our hands; as, in Ezekiel's vision, the man clothed with linen had his hands filled with coals of fire from between the cherubim.⁵

God gives ministers their *commission* by his Son, who, when he ascended on high, conferred those gifts upon men; but he gives them their *instructions* by his Spirit,⁶ who is given to make up the want of Christ's bodily presence, and to carry on his undertaking; and of whom Christ has said, *He shall take of mine, and show it unto you.*⁷ We must therefore pray for the Spirit; all Christians must, and are encouraged to do so by that promise: *He will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.*⁸ Ministers have special need of the Spirit, as a spirit of revelation, that they may know the things of God; and, as a spirit of truth, to rectify their mistakes, and to lead them into all truth.

And ministers' work being to speak not only *from* God to his people, but *to* God for his people, they have as much need of the Spirit to assist them in prayer as in preaching, and to be in them a spirit of supplication as a spirit of illumination. And for this, also, God will be *inquired of*; to him we must go with this request, Lord, teach me what I shall say, both in the word and in prayer, for I cannot, in either of them, order my speech by reason of darkness.⁹ Lord, give me the heart of the upright, and the tongue of the learned, and thus, *Lord, send me*. Ministers are stars that shine by a borrowed light: to the fountain of light they must therefore apply themselves; and he having said to us, *From him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away*, will not turn away from us, if we come to borrow of him; especially when it is to borrow a stock wherewith to trade, in his service, for his glory.

It is a very proper sign which some churches use in the investing of ministers in their office, to

¹ Rev. ii. 1. ² 1 Tim. i. 11. ³ Gal. i. 1.
⁴ Rev. ii. 17. ⁵ Ezek. x. 2, 7.

⁶ John xiv. 26.
⁷ Luke xi. 10.

⁸ John xvi. 14.
⁹ Job xxxvii. 19.

put the New Testament, or Bible, into their hands ; not only to signify, that they have authority to preach the word of God, but that they must fetch all their furniture for their work from the Scriptures ; those they must consult, those they must study. That is the rule they must go by, the model they must build by ; there is the pattern showed them in the mount ; that is the card and compass they must steer by. *Lord, send me*, is, Lord, put the Bible into my heart, Lord, make me ready and mighty in the Scriptures, that thence I may be thoroughly furnished for every good word and work.

(3.) *Lord, give me opportunity.* This door also God has the key of, as well as the door of the heart, and of the lips ; and our eye must be to him for the opening of it, and the making of it a wide door, and an effectual one, though there be ever so many adversaries.* *Lord, send me*, is, Lord, having hired me into thy service, find me but something to do for thee ; having sent me into thy vineyard, cut out work for me there, that I may not stand all the day idle, because no man has hired me.† Place me in what sphere thou pleasest, higher or lower, larger or narrower, only let me be some way serviceable to thy glory, and not thrown by as a despised broken vessel.

And in *this*, we must refer ourselves to God : Lord, send me whither thou pleasest, order me into what circumstances thou thinkest fit ; make any use of me, so that thou wilt but make some use of me ; let me have a place in the body, though it should not be a place of honour. Send me, with Jonah, to Nineveh ; with St. Paul to Macedonia, to *help there* ; to the highways and hedges, to pick up guests for the marriage, and I will cheerfully go. You must set out in the ministry, with an entire resignation of yourself to God : “ He shall *choose my inheritance*, my employment, for me.” Send me whither thou wilt, send me to a pulpit ; send me to a prison, (and it is good to think of that, and to provide accordingly ; we are not better than our fathers, nor know we what trying times may yet be before us,) I am ready to go, as St. Paul, bound in the spirit to Jerusalem : send me on what errand thou wilt, though ever sounpleasing to myself, ever so displeasing to others. Servants must go whither they are ordered, and do as they are bidden, and say what is put into their mouths, without murmuring or disputing, and so must we, as those who have no will of our own, but what is swallowed up in the will of our master, in all which we desire to stand complete.

And it is a great satisfaction to a minister in all his settlements and removals, to see God going before him, and leading him in a plain path ; as it is his duty to pray for direction, and his wisdom to follow providence, and not to force it, to do the

work of the present day and place, and leave to God what is to come : *Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord.* And if we see him setting before us an open door, we may comfort ourselves in this, that no man shall shut it.

(4.) *Lord, give me success.* *Send me*, and the message by me, as the rain and snow from heaven, which returneth not thither, but accomplisheth that for which it was sent.‡ *Send me* ; and let the Spirit go along with me to make the word effectual, that it may not be as water spilt upon the ground ; that I may not labour in vain, or spend my strength for nought. Those whom God sends, he sends armed with such weapons as are mighty through him, to the pulling down of Satan’s strong holds.¶ O let me be furnished with those weapons ! that I may see of the travail of my soul to my satisfaction.

Lord, send me to their hearts, let the word be quick and powerful for that purpose ; send it between the joints of the harness ; send it between the joints and the marrow ;‡ send it, and let a divine power go along with it ; send the report, and with it let the arm of the Lord be revealed ;‡ that many may be brought to believe it, for it is the *power of God to salvation to every one that believes.*‡ O that it might now appear so, as it appeared when the *word of the Lord*, at first, *grew and prevailed so mightily.* How can we expect that our labours should be successful, and that we should profit the people we preach to, if we do not sincerely design it, and earnestly desire it.

But we must go forth in the strength of the Lord God,‡ or we shall go to no purpose. If we think to succeed in the strength of our own parts or resolution, by our own wisdom or importunity, we do but deceive ourselves ; for St. Paul himself owns he can do nothing of himself, but *all things through Christ* strengthening him ;‡ this divine strength we must pray for and depend upon, and by faith must fetch it in, whenever we have any work to do for God. And this is our comfort, that God’s strength is often perfected, and most praised, in our weakness, for it is ordained *out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.*

Pray thus, pray daily thus, and you shall not seek in vain. If, when God calls to you to appear and act for him, you cheerfully say, *Here am I*, you may be sure, when you call to him to appear with you, and act by you, he also will say, *Here am I.* If you say, *Lord, send me*, he will say, *Go, and I will be with thee.* If you say, as Peter, *Lord, bid me come to thee upon the water* ;‡ he will say, *Come*, and will keep you from sinking.

2. Going on in the ministry, we must remember whom we go for. *Who will go for us* ; as agent for God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ? Not that God has need of us, or of our services ; he has angels at command ready to go on his errands, and to

* 1 Cor. xvi. 9. † Mark xx. 6, 7. ‡ Isa. lv. 10, 11.
 † 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. ¶ Heb. iv. 12.

‡ Isa. liii. 1. § Rom. i. 16. ¶ Ps. lxxi. 16.
 ‡ Phil. iv. 13. § Matt. xiv. 29, 32.

fly swiftly; but he is pleased to employ us, to bid us go for him. We go for God the Father, to bring the souls which he has made to him, as their chief good, and highest end; for God the Son, to bring the souls to him he has redeemed, as their Prophet, Priest, and King; for God the Holy Ghost, to bring the souls he has the charge of under his conduct, and his sanctifying power and influence.

Let us see how improvable this consideration is.

(1.) If we go for God, then we have no reason to be *ashamed* of our office, but to *magnify* it. Work for God cannot but be great work, and put honour upon them who are called to it. The preachers of a gospel, which, *to all that believe, is the power of God unto salvation,*^c how much reason soever they have to think meanly of themselves, as unworthy of the honour, yet have a great deal of reason to think highly of their work. St. Paul, who went for God to the Gentile world, though for that he was reproached by the Jews, yet magnified his office.^d The messengers of the churches are the glory of Christ,^e how scornfully soever they are looked upon by the children of men. If we be not a shame to our office, it is well; we have no reason to be ashamed of it.

Ministers are not common messengers; they are ambassadors for Christ,^f for the King of kings, and that is a high post of honour; in which though we pretend not, as ambassadors, to the title of *Excellency*, yet we ought to approve ourselves of an excellent spirit, and labour to excel in gifts and graces. And let not any think themselves too good to be thus employed, as if the lowest of the people were as fit to be messengers for Christ, as Jeroboam thought them to be priests to the calves; no, it is no disparagement, to the greatest, to go for God. King Solomon valued himself upon his being a preacher.

(2.) If we go for God, then we must *faithfully deliver his MIND, in his name*; and when we do so, we may speak as having authority. If we go on his errand, *THAT*, the whole of *THAT*, and *THAT* only we must deliver. Ezekiel must *speak God's words* to the people, and speak them *as his*; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.^g We must deliver that which we have *received of the Lord*, and our doctrine must be *not ours*, but *his that sent us*.

Let this therefore imbolden us in our work, and give us a holy, humble assurance. We pretend to no dominion over you, we are your fellow-servants; but *he who sends us*, and whose mouth we are to you, claims dominion over you, and commands your obedience. He is the God who gave you your being; and therefore has authority to give you law, and will not suffer his authority to be slighted, or his crown profaned.

If we obtrude that message in God's name which is not his, and say, *Thus saith the Lord*,^h when it is

a false dream, fancy, or forgery of our own, we cannot speak with any confidence; (what is the chaff to the wheat?) but as long as we keep close to our instructions, we may rely upon our commission; and as far as what we say agrees with the law and the testimony, it demands acceptance, *not as the word of man*, a poor, frail, dying man like yourselves, but *as the word of God*,ⁱ for so indeed it is; the word of a living God; a living word that abides for ever.

(3.) If we go for God, then far be it from us, that we should seek ourselves and our own things. One of the first lessons Christ will have his disciples to learn, is to deny themselves, that they make him all in all. Self will be apt insensibly to steal into the study to us, and into the pulpit with us, and as far as it is indulged, the ends of our office are perverted, and our work spoiled, and stript of its dignity and power. We are ministers of Christ; and therefore must not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord,—and [declare] ourselves your servants *for his sake*:^k that the Lord alone may be exalted in our ministry, that he may be *all in all*.

We must not seek our own praise and applause, but must humble and abase ourselves; must not aim at the making and maintaining of any secular interest for ourselves,—that is prostituting what is honourable, and profaning what is sacred. It is a sad complaint which Paul makes even of the ministers of his time, that all sought their own, not the things that were Jesus Christ's:^l I wish we have not all of us too much reason to charge the same upon ourselves; I am sure, we have all of us need to watch and pray against this sin. Ministers, of all people, must not live to themselves, nor please themselves, nor aim to enrich themselves; for thereby they contradict, and so depreciate, their office, which is intended to bring souls from self to God. None of us, if he lives like himself, lives to *himself*, but to the *Lord*.^m Let self therefore be abased, and annihilated, that to us to live may be Christ,ⁿ nothing but Christ. We are friends of the bridegroom, and are unworthy the honour, if we speak one word for him, and ten for ourselves, when we ought to be entirely devoted to him.

(4.) If we go for God, then to him we must give account of our negociation; if you send your servant on an errand, you expect when he comes back, he should tell you how he has done his errand, and how he sped. The Lord of those servants that are sent for him, will come and reckon with them, what they have done, and what they have gained by trading with the talents committed to them. Angels give account of their messages; they run and return, descend and ascend; and ministers are hastening towards their day of account.

^c Rom. i. 16.

^f 2 Cor. v. 20.

^d Rom. xi. 13.

^g Ezek. ii. 7.

^e 2 Cor. viii. 23.

^h Jer. xxiii. 31, 32.

³ R

ⁱ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 5.

^l Phil. ii. 21.

^m Rom. xiv. 6, 7.

ⁿ Phil. i. 21.

We must give an account of ourselves to God; it will be inquired into, whether we have faithfully delivered our message, whether we have declared the whole counsel of God, and whether we have not pulled down with one hand what we built up with the other. It concerns us therefore to do our work as those who know it will be reviewed.

We must give an account likewise of those to whom we have been sent; and a heavy account it will be if they perished through our ignorance, carelessness, or treachery. If the watchman warn not the sinner of his danger, the sinner shall die in his iniquity, but his blood shall be required at the watchman's hands. How pathetically did Augustus Cæsar upbraid the general, who, by his ill conduct, had lost him a brave army, *Quintili Vare redde legiones—Quintilius Varus, restore my legions.* Much more terribly will they be reckoned with, who by their treachery have been the ruin of precious souls. But how comfortable will the account be, of those who are the seals of our ministry, whom we have been instrumental to bring to Christ; as it was to this prophet, concerning some, of whom he said, *Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me;*^o though the generality believed not his report.

If we are sent for God, we must consider, as the prophet did, what answer we shall return to him who sent us;^p as the servant who was sent to invite to the wedding feast, when he met with repulses and slights, came and showed his Lord all these things.^q O that this thought might quicken us to the utmost care and diligence in our work, and that we might be found watching for souls, to win them over to Christ, as those who must give account, and who know not how soon.

(5.) If we go for God, then he will certainly bear us out, and stand by us, in all we do according to our commission. If we go for God, he will go with us; as he promised to go with Moses, when he sent him to Pharaoh. Those who are God's servants he will uphold; he will strengthen, according to their day;^r he will plead their cause, and not suffer them to be wronged. Kings shall be made to know, that it is at their peril, if they do his prophets any harm.^s Princes take injuries done to their ambassadors as done to themselves, and will resent and revenge them accordingly; and so does our Lord Jesus. *He that despiseth you, despiseth me.* Mocking God's messengers and misusing them, was once and again Jerusalem's measure-filling sin.

Ambassadors have their charges borne. God has provided, that as those who served at the altar might live, and live comfortably, upon the altar; so those

who as his messengers preach the gospel, should be suitably maintained, that they may live of the gospel.^t Yet sometimes the case is such, that ministers lose by their ministry: (the disciples left all to follow Christ, and preach the gospel:) but in that case, confide it to him to indemnify them; one way or other it shall be made up to them.

(6.) If we go for God, and approve ourselves true to the trust lodged in our hands, he will abundantly recompense all our services and sufferings. We shall not only be saved harmless, and have our losses made up, but we shall have God himself to be our bountiful rewarder, and our exceeding great reward. St. Peter encourages ministers, the under-shepherds, to feed the flock of God, and to do it willingly, with this, that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they shall appear with him in glory.

The labours of a few days shall be rewarded with everlasting pleasures and riches; God will be sure to pay his messengers well; nor will he keep back the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down his corn-fields;^u nor shall it abide with him all night, until the morning^v of the resurrection; but when the sun of their life goes down, and the day of their service is ended, the labourers are immediately called to receive their penny; even those who came in at the eleventh hour, who died young, and so did but an hour's work, as well as those whose labours were long, and who bore the burthen and heat of the day.^w St. Paul doubts not, but that when he departs he shall immediately be with Christ;^x and in the assurance of it pleases himself with the thought, That he was now ready to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand; and thenceforth was laid up for him an abundant recompence.^y

Encourage yourselves, brethren, and one another, with this word: you go for God. You aim at his glory, and make his work your business; you lay out yourselves in sincerity to advance his name, and honour, and interest, and his kingdom among men. And do you so indeed? *Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall you be glorious;*^z and a sweet savour to God, not only in them that are saved, but in them that perish.^a And therefore be of good courage, and lift up the hands that hang down; a particular account is kept of all your travels, toils, and tears in Christ's work, and they shall all be abundantly recompensed. *In due season you shall reap, if you faint not; be not weary then in well-doing.*^b Hold out faith and patience yet a little while, and your warfare will soon be accomplished; only be faithful unto death,^c and the crown of life is as sure to you as if it were already upon your heads.

^o Isa. viii. 18.

^p 2 Sam. xxiv. 13.

^q Luke xiv. 21.

^r 1 Cor. x. 13.

^s Ps. cv. 15.

^t 1 Cor. ix. 14.

^u Jam. v. 4.

^v Lev. xix. 13.

^w Matt. xx. 8, 9.

^x Phil. i. 23.

^y 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

^z Isa. xlix. 5.

^a 2 Cor. ii. 15.

^b Gal. vi. 9.

^c Rev. ii. 10.