

“ And he that saith he abideth in him, ought also himself to walk even as he also walked,” 1 John ii. 6.

*Fifthly*, How studious should you be of peace among yourselves, who are so nearly united to such a Head, and thereby are made fellow-members of the same body! The Heathen world was never acquainted with such an argument as the apostle urges for unity, in Eph. iv. 3, 4.

*Sixthly*, and lastly, How joyful and comfortable should you be, to whom Christ, with all his treasures and benefits, is effectually applied in this blessed union of your souls with him! This brings him into your possession: O how great! how glorious a person do these little weak arms of your faith embrace!

*Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ.*

### SERMON III.

Of the Nature and Use of the Gospel-ministry, as an external Mean of applying CHRIST.

2 COR. V. 20.

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

**T**HE effectual application of Christ principally consists in our union with him; but, ordinarily, there can be no union without a gospel-tender, and an overture of him to our souls; for, “ How shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?” Rom. x. 14.

If God be upon a design of espousing poor sinners to his Son, there must be a treaty in order to it; that treaty requires interlocation betwixt both the parties concerned in it; but such is our frailty, that, should God speak immediately to us himself, it would confound and overwhelm us: God therefore graciously condescends and accommodates himself to our infirmity, in treating with us in order to our union with Christ, by his *ambassadors*, and these not *angels*, whose converses we cannot bear, but *men* like ourselves, who are commissioned for the effecting of this great business betwixt Christ and us. “ Now then, we are ambassadors for God,” &c. In which words you have,

*First*, Christ's ambassadors commissioned.

*Secondly*, Their commission opened.

*First*, Christ's ambassadors commissioned. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ." The Lord Jesus thought it not sufficient to print the law of grace and the blessed terms of our union with him in the scriptures, where men may read his willingness to receive them, and see the just and gracious terms and conditions upon which he offers to become theirs; but hath also set up and established a standing office in the church, to expound that law, inculcate the precepts, and urge the promises thereof; to woo and espouse souls to Christ, "I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 20. and this not simply from their own affections and compassions to miserable sinners, but also by virtue of their office and commission, whereby they are authorised and appointed to that work. "We then are ambassadors for Christ."

*Secondly*, Their commission opened: Wherein we find,

1. Their work appointed,
2. Their capacity described,
3. And the manner of their acting in that capacity prescribed.

*First*, The work whereunto the ministers of the gospel are appointed, is to *reconcile the world to God*; to work these sinful, vain, rebellious hearts, which have a strong aversion from God naturally in them, to close with him according to the articles of peace contained in the gospel, that thereby they may be capable to receive the mercies and benefits purchased by the death of Christ, which they cannot receive in the state of enmity and alienation.

*Secondly*, Their capacity described: They act *in Christ's stead*, as his *vicegerents*. He is no more in this world to treat personally with sinners, as he once did in the days of his flesh; but yet he still continues the treaty with this lower world, by his officers, requiring men to look upon them, and obey them as they would himself, if he were corporeally present, Luke x. 16. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."

*Thirdly*, The manner of their acting in that capacity prescribed; and that is, by humble, sweet, and condescending entreaties and beseechings. This best suits the meek and lamb-like Saviour whom they represent: thus he dealt with poor sinners himself, when he conversed among them; he "would not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax," Isa. xlii. 3. This is the way to allure and win the souls of sinners to Christ.

From hence the note is,

Doct. *That the preaching of the gospel by Christ's ambassadors, is the mean appointed for the reconciling and bringing home of sinners to Christ.*

This is clear from Rom. x. 14. 1 Cor. i. 21. and many other scriptures.

Here we shall take into consideration these three things.

*First*, What is implied in Christ's treating with sinners by his ambassadors or ministers.

*Secondly*, What is the great concernment they are to treat with sinners about.

*Thirdly*, What, and when is the efficacy of preaching, to bring sinners to Christ.

*First*, We will open what is implied and imported in Christ's treaty with sinners, by his ambassadors or ministers.

And here we find these six things implied.

1. It necessarily implies the defection and fall of man, from his estate of favour and friendship with God: If no war with heaven, what need of ambassadors of peace? The very office of the ministry is an argument of the fall. Gospel-ordinances and officers came in upon the fall, and expire with the Mediator's dispensatory-kingdom, 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25. "Then shall he deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father:" Thenceforth no more ordinances, no more ministers; What use can there be of them, when the treaty is ended? They have done and accomplished all they were ever intended and designed for, when they shall have reconciled to God all the number of his elect, that are dispersed among the lost and miserable posterity of Adam, and have brought them home to Christ in a perfect state, Eph. iv. 12, &c.

2. It implies the singular grace and admirable condescension of God to sinful man. That God will admit any treaty with him at all, is wonderful mercy, it is more than he would do for the angels that fell, Jude, ver. 6. "*They are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.*" Christ took not on him their nature, but suffered myriads of them to perish, and fills up their vacant places in glory, with a number of sinful men and women, to whom the law awarded the same punishment.

But that God will not only treat, but entreat and beseech sinful men to be reconciled, is yet more wonderful. Barely to propound the terms of peace had been an astonishing mercy; but to woo and beseech stubborn enemies to be at peace, and accept their pardon, oh, how unparalleled was this condescension.

3. It implies the great dignity and honour of the gospel-ministry. *We are ambassadors for Christ*\*? Ambassadors represent and personate the prince that sends them; and the honours or contempts

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\* We are ambassadors among those who serve the king of Kings; we represent the person of God and Christ: never any yet despised us with impunity, nay, without being injurious to God and Christ. *Bowles' Prefat. ad Past. Evan.*

done to them, reflect upon, and are reckoned to the person of their master, Luke x. 16. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."

Neither their persons, nor parts, are the proper ground and reason of our respects to them; but their office and commission from Jesus Christ.

We are fallen into the dregs of time, wherein a vile contempt is poured, not only upon the persons, but the very office of the ministry; and I could heartily wish that scripture, Mal. ii. 7, 8, 9. were thoroughly considered by us; possibly it might inform us of the true cause and reason of this sore judgment: but surely Christ's faithful ministers deserve a better entertainment than they ordinarily find in the world; and if we did but seriously bethink ourselves, in whose name they come, and in whose stead they stand, we should receive them as the Galatians did Paul, Gal. iv. 14. as angels of God, even as Christ Jesus.

4. Christ's treating with sinners by his ministers, who are his ambassadors, implies the strict obligation they are under to be faithful in their ministerial employment. Christ counts upon their faithfulness whom he puts into the ministry, 1 Tim. i. 12. They are accountable to him for all acts of their office, Heb. xiii. 17. If they be silent, they cannot be innocent: "Necessity is laid upon them, and woe to them, if they preach not the gospel," 1 Cor. ix. 16.

Yea, necessity is not only laid upon them to preach, but to keep close to their commission in preaching the gospel, 1 Thess. ii. 3, 4, 5. "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile, but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who trieth our hearts:" the word is not to be corrupted to please men, 2 Cor. ii. 17. their business is not to make them their disciples, but Christ's; not to seek theirs, but them, 2 Cor. xii. 14. to keep close to their instructions, both in the matter, manner, and end of their ministry. So did Christ himself, the treasure of wisdom and knowledge; yet, being sent by God, he saith, John vii. 16. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." And so he expects and requires that his ambassadors keep close to the commission he hath given them, and be (according to their measure) faithful to their trust, as he was to his. Paul is to deliver to the people, that which he also received from the Lord, 1 Cor. xi. And Timothy must keep that which was committed to him, 2 Tim. i. 14.

5. It implies the removal of the gospel-ministry to be a very great judgment to the people. The remanding of ambassadors presages an ensuing war. If the reconciling of souls to God be the greatest work, then the removal of the means and instruments

thereof, must be the sorest judgment. Some account "the falling of the salt upon the table," ominous; but surely the falling of them whom Christ calls *the salt of the earth*, is so indeed.

What now are those once famous and renowned places, from whence Christ, (as he threatened) hath removed the candlestick, but *magna latrocinia*, dens of robbers, and mountains of prey!

6. And lastly, It implies both the wisdom and condescension of God to sinful men, in carrying on a treaty of peace with them by such ambassadors, negotiating betwixt him and them. Without a treaty, there would be no reconciliation; and no method to carry on such a treaty like this; for had the Lord treated with sinners personally, and immediately, they had been overwhelmed with his awful Majesty. The appearances of God confound the creature, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, (saith Israel) neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not: Yea, so terrible was that sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake," Deut. xviii. 16. Heb. xii. 21.

Or, had he commissioned *angels* for this employment, though they stand not at such an infinite distance from us as God doth, yet such is the excellence of their glory (being the highest *species* and order of creatures) that their appearances would be more apt to astonish than persuade us; besides, they being creatures of another rank and kind, and not partaking with us, either in the misery of the fall, or benefit of the recovery by Christ, it is not to be supposed they should speak to us so feelingly and experimentally, as these his ministers do; they can open to you the mysteries of sin, feeling the workings thereof daily in their own hearts; they can discover to you the conflicts of the flesh and Spirit, as being daily exercised in that warfare; and then, being men of the same mould and temper, they can say to you as Elihu did to Job, chap. xxxiii. 6, 7. "Behold, I am according to thy wish, in God's stead, I also am formed out of the clay; behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee."

So that, in this appointment, much of the Divine wisdom and condescension to sinners is manifested: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us," 2 Cor. iv. 7. God's glory and man's advantage are both promoted by this dispensation.

*Secondly*, Next we are to consider that great concernment about which these *ambassadors* of Christ are to treat with sinners; and that (as the text informs us) is their reconciliation to God.

Now reconciliation with God, is the restoring of men to that former friendship they had with God, which was broken by the

fall \*, and is still continued by our enmity and aversation whilst we continue in our natural and unregenerate state. Now this is the greatest and most blessed design that ever God had in the world; an astonishing and invaluable mercy to men, as will clearly appear, by considering these particulars following.

*First*, That God should be reconciled after such a dreadful breach as the fall of man made, is wonderful; no sin, all things considered, was ever like to this sin: other sins, like a single bullet, kill particular persons, but this, like a chain-shot, cuts off multitudes as the sand upon the sea-shore, which no man can number.

If all the posterity of Adam in their several generations, should do nothing else but bewail and lament this sin of his, whilst this world continues, yet would it not be enough lamented; for a man so newly created out of nothing, and admitted the first moment into the highest order, crowned a king over the works of God's hands, Psal. viii. 5. a man perfect and upright, without the least inordinate motion, or sinful inclination: a man whose mind was most clear, bright, and apprehensive of the will of God, whose will was free, and able to have easily put by the strongest temptation: a man in a paradise of delights, where nothing was left to desire for advancing the happiness of soul or body: a man understanding himself to be a public, complexive person, carrying not only his own, but the happiness of the whole world in his hand: so soon, upon so slight a temptation, to violate the law of his God, and involve himself and all his posterity with him, in such a gulf of guilt and misery; all which he might so easily have prevented! O wonderful amazing mercy, that ever God should think of being reconciled, or have any purposes of peace towards so vile an apostate creature as man.

*Secondly*, That God should be reconciled to *men*, and not to *angels*, a more high and excellent order of creatures, is yet more astonishing; when the angels fell they were lost irrecoverably; no hand of mercy was stretched out to save one of those *myriads* of excellent beings, but chains of darkness were immediately clapped on them, to reserve them to the judgment of the great day, Jude 6.

That the milder attribute should be exercised to the inferior, and the severer attribute to the more excellent creature, is just matter for eternal admiration. Who would cast away vessels of gold, and save earthen potsherds! Some indeed undertake to shew us the reasons, why the wisdom of God made no provision for the recovery of *angels* by a *Mediator* of reconciliation; partly from the

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\* To reconcile is nothing else than to make up that friendship which was broke by some grievous offence, and thus to bring enemies back into their former state of concord. *Dav. on Col. i. 20.*

high degree of the malignity of their sin, who sinned in the light of heaven; partly because it was decent, that the first breach of the Divine law should be punished, to secure obedience for the future. And besides, the angelical nature was not entirely lost, *myriads* of *angels* still continuing in their innocence and glory; when as all mankind was lost in Adam.

But we must remember still the law made no distinction, but awarded the same punishment, and therefore it was mercy alone that made the difference, and mercy for ever is to be admired by men; how astonishing is the grace of God, that moves in a way of reconciliation to us, out of design to fill up the vacant places in heaven, from which angels fell, with such poor worms as we are! Angels excluded, and men received. O stupendous mercy!

*Thirdly*, That God should be *wholly* and *thoroughly* reconciled to man, so that no fury remains in him against us; according to that scripture, Isa. xxvii. 4. is still matter of further wonder.

The design he sends his *ambassadors* to you about, is not the alaying and mitigating of his wrath, (which yet would be matter of great joy to the damned) but thoroughly to quench all his wrath, so that no degree thereof shall ever be felt by you. O blessed embassy? "Beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring such tidings." God offers you a full reconciliation, a plenary remission.

*Fourthly*, That God should be *freely* reconciled to sinners, and discharge them without any, the least satisfaction to his justice from them is, and for ever will be, marvellous in their eyes.

O what mercy would the damned account it, if after a thousand years torment in hell, God would at last be reconciled to them, and put an end to their misery! But believers are discharged without bearing any part of the curse, not one farthing of that debt is levied upon them.

*Object*. If you say, how can this be, when God stands upon full satisfaction to his justice before any soul be discharged and restored to favour? freely reconciled, and yet fully satisfied, how can this be?

*Solut*. Very well, for this mercy comes freely to your hands, how costly soever it proved to Christ; and that free remission, and full satisfaction, are not contradictory and inconsistent things, is plain enough from that scripture, Rom. iii. 24. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" freely, and yet in the way of redemption.

For though Christ, your Surety, hath made satisfaction in your name and stead, yet it was his life, his blood, and not yours, that went for it, and this Surety was of God's own appointment, and

providing, without your thoughts or contrivance. O blessed reconciliation! happy is the people that hear the joyful sound of it.

*Fifthly*, and lastly, that God should be finally reconciled to sinners, so that never any new breach shall happen betwixt him and them any more, so as to dissolve the league of friendship, is a most ravishing and transporting message.

Two things give confirmation and full security to reconciled ones, viz. the terms of the covenant, and the intercession of the Mediator.

The covenant of grace gives great security to believers, against new breaches betwixt God and them. It is said, Jer. xxxii. 40. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." The fear of the Lord is a choice preservative against second revolts, and therefore taken into the covenant. It is no *hinderance*, but a special *guard* to assurance.

There is no doubt of God's faithfulness: that part of the promise is easily believed, that he will not turn away from us to do us good: all the doubt is of the inconstancy of our hearts with God, and against that danger, this promise makes provision.

Moreover, the *intercession* of Christ in heaven secures the saints in their reconciled state, 1 John ii. 1, 2. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the Propitiation." He continually appears in heaven before the Father, "as a lamb that had been slain," Rev. v. 6. And as the bow in the clouds, Rev. iv. 3. So that as long as Christ thus appears in the presence of God for us, it is not possible our state of justification and reconciliation can be again dissolved.

And this is that blessed *embassy* gospel-ministers are employed about; he hath committed to them the word of this reconciliation.

In the last place, we are to enquire what, and whence is this efficacy of preaching, to reconcile and bring home sinners to Christ.

That its efficacy is great in convincing, humbling, and changing the hearts of men, is past all debate and question. "The weapons of our warfare (saith the apostle) are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. No heart so hard, no conscience so stupid, but this sword can pierce and wound; in an instant it can cast down all those vain reason-



ings and fond imaginations, which the carnal heart hath been building all its life long, and open a fair passage for convictions of sin, and the fears and terrors of wrath to come, into that heart that never was afraid of these things before. So Acts ii. 37. "When they heard this, they were pricked to the heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

*What shall we do?* is the doleful cry of men at their wits end; the voice of one in deepest distress: and such outcries have been no rarities under the preaching of the word; its power hath been felt by persons of all orders and conditions; the great and honourable of the earth, as well as the poor and despicable. The learned and the ignorant, the civil and profane, the young and the old, all have felt the heart-piercing efficacy of the gospel.

If you ask, whence hath the word preached this mighty power? The answer must be, neither from itself nor him that preaches it, but from the Spirit of God whose instrument it is, by whose blessing and concurrence with it, it produceth its blessed effects upon the hearts of men.

*First,* This efficacy and wonderful power is not from the word itself; take it in an abstract notion, separated from the Spirit, it can do nothing: it is called "the foolishness of preaching," 1 Cor. i. 21. Foolishness, not only because the world so accounts it, but because in itself it is a weak and unsuitable, and therefore a very improbable way to reconcile the world to God; that the stony heart of one man should be broken by the words of another man; that one poor sinful creature should be used to breathe spiritual life into another; this could never be, if this sword were not managed by an omnipotent hand.

And besides, we know what works naturally, works necessarily; if this efficacy were inherent in the word, so that we should suppose it to work as other natural objects do, then it must needs convert all to whom it is at any time preached, except its effect were miraculously hindered, as the fire when it could not burn the three children; but alas, thousands hear it, that never feel the saving power of it, Isa. liii. 1. and 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

*Secondly,* It derives not this efficacy from the *instrument* by which it is ministered: let their gifts and abilities be what they will, it is impossible that ever such effects should be produced from the strength of their natural or gracious abilities, 2 Cor. iv. 7. "We have this treasure (saith the apostle) in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

The treasure of the gospel-light is carried *εν οσπριαινωις σκευειν, in earthen vessels*, as Gideon and his men had their lamps in earthen pitchers, or in *oyster-shells*, for so the word also signifies; the *oyster-*

*shell* is a base and worthless thing in itself; however, there lies the rich and precious pearl of so great value. And why is this precious treasure lodged in such weak, worthless vessels? Surely it is upon no other design but to convince us of the truth I am here to prove, that the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us; as it follows in the next words. To the same purpose speaks the same apostle, 1 Cor. iii. 7. "So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

Not any thing! What can be more diminutively spoken of the gospel-preachers? But we must not understand these words in a simple and *absolute*, but in a *comparative* and relative sense; not as if they were not necessary and useful in their place, but that how necessary soever they be, and what excellent gifts soever God hath furnished them with; yet it is neither in their power nor choice to make the word they preach effectual to men; if it were, then the damnation of all that hear us must needs lie at our door; then also, many thousands would have been reconciled to God, which are yet in the state of enmity, but the effect of the gospel is not in our power.

*Thirdly*, But whatever efficacy it hath to reconcile men to God, it derives from the Spirit of God, whose co-operation and blessing (which is arbitrarily dispensed) gives it all the fruit it hath.

Ministers, saith one\*, are like trumpets which make no sound, if breath be not breathed into them. Or like Ezekiel's wheels, which move not unless the Spirit move them; or Elisha's servant, whose presence doth no good except Elisha's spirit be there also. For want of the Spirit of God how many thousands of souls do find the ministry to be nothing to them? If it be something to the purpose to any soul, it is the Lord that makes it so. This Spirit is not limited by men's gifts or parts; he concurs not only with their labours who have excellent gifts, but oftentimes blesses mean, despicable gifts with far greater success.

Suppose, saith † Austin, there be two conduits in a town, one very plain and homely, the other built of polished marble, and adorned with excellent images, as eagles, lions, angels; the water refreshes as its water, and not as it comes from such or such a conduit. It is the Spirit that gives the word all that virtue it hath: he is the Lord of all saving influences: he hath dominion over the word, over our souls, over the times and seasons of conversion; and if

\* Mr. Anthony Burgess.

† What is the reason why of two adult ungodly persons, the one is so called as to follow him who calls, the other not? Do not thou judge, if thou wouldst not err: the judgments of God are unsearchable, and he hath mercy on whom he will. *Aug. de bono persec. cap. 8.*

any poor creature attend the ministry without benefit, if he go away as he came, without fruit, surely we may say in this case, as Martha said to Christ, in reference to her brother Lazarus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died; so, Lord, if thou hadst been in this prayer, in this sermon, this poor soul had not gone dead and carnal from under it. And what now remains, but that we apply this truth in those uses that it gives us.

*First use of information.*

Is the preaching of the gospel by Christ's *ambassadors*, the way which God takes to reconcile sinners to himself? *Then how inexcusable are all those that continue in their state of enmity, though the ambassadors of peace have been with them all their lives long, wooing and beseeching them to be reconciled to God?*

O invincible, obstinate, incurable disease, which is aggravated by the only proper remedy! Hath God been wooing and beseeching you by his ambassadors so many years to be reconciled to him, and will you not yield to any intreaties? Must he be made to speak in vain, to charm the deaf adder? Well, when the milder attribute hath done with you, the severer attribute will take you in hand.

The Lord hath kept an account of every year and day of his patience towards you, Luke xiii. 7. "These three years I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none;" and Jer. xxv. 3. "These three and twenty years have I spoken unto you, rising early and speaking, but you have not hearkened."

Well, be you assured, that God hath both the glass of your time, and the vials of his wrath, by him? and so much of his abused patience as runs out of one, so much of his incensed wrath runs into the other. There is a time when this treaty of peace will end, when the Master of the house will rise up, and the doors be shut, Luke xiii. 25. Then will you be left without hope, and without apology.

We read, indeed, of some poor and ineffectual pleas that will be made by some at the last day; so Matt. vii. 22. "We have prophesied in thy name," &c. These pleas will not avail; but as for you, what will you plead? Possibly many thousand *idcots*, or poor weak-headed persons, may perish; many young ones that had little or no time in the world to acquaint themselves with matters of religion, or understand the way of salvation. Many millions of Heathens that never heard the name of Christ, nor came within the sound of salvation, who will yet perish, and that justly.

Now whatsoever apologies any of these will make for themselves in the last day, to be sure you can make none. God hath given you a capacity and competent understanding; many of you are

wise and subtle in all your other concernments, and only shew your folly in the great concernments of your salvation. You cannot plead want of time, some of you are grown grey-headed under the gospel; you cannot plead want of means and opportunities, the ordinances and ministers of Christ have been with you all your life long to this day; sure if you be Christless now, you must also be speechless then.

*Inf. 2.* Hence it also follows, *That the world owes better entertainment than it gives to the ministers of Christ: Christ's ambassadors deserve a better welcome than they find among men.*

Your respects to them is founded upon their office and employment for you, Heb. xiii. 17. and 1 Thes. v. 12. They watch for your souls, dare any of you watch for their ruin? They bring glad tidings, shall they return with sad tidings to him that sent them? They publish peace, shall they be rewarded with trouble? O ungrateful world! We read in Eph. vi. 20. of an *ambassador in bonds*, and he no ordinary one neither. We read also of a strange challenge, made by another at his own death, Acts vii. 52. "Which of all the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before the coming of the just One." Some that brake the bread of life to you, might want bread to eat, for any regard you have to them. The office of the ministry speaks the abundant love of God to you; your contempt and abuse of it, speaks the abundant stupidity and malignity of your hearts towards God. What a sad protestation doth Jeremiah make against his ungrateful people, Jer. xviii. 20. "Shall evil (saith he) be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul; remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them."

God's *mercy* is eminently discovered in the *institution* of, and Satan's *malice* is eminently discovered in the *opposition* to, the ministerial office. Satan is a great and jealous prince, and it is no wonder he should raise all the forces he can to oppose the *ambassadors* of Christ; when, saith \* one, the gospel comes into his dominions, it doth, as it were, by sound of trumpet and beat of drum, proclaim liberty to all his slaves and vassals, if they will quit that tyrant that hath so long held their souls in bondage, and come under the sweet and easy government of Christ. And can the devil endure this, think you? If Christ sends forth *ambassadors*, no wonder if Satan sends forth *opposers*; he certainly owes them a spite, that undermine his government in the world.

*Infer. 3.* Hence it follows, *That it nearly concerns all Christ's*

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\* Mr. Gurnal's Christian Armour.

*ambassadors, to see that they be in a state of reconciliation with God themselves.*

Shall we stand in Christ's stead by *office*, and yet not be in Christ by union? Shall we entreat men to be reconciled to God, and yet be at enmity with him ourselves? O let us take heed, "Lest after "we have preached to others, we ourselves should be cast-a-ways," 1 Cor. ix. 27. Of all men living we are the most miserable, if we be Christless and graceless: our consciences will make more terrible applications of our doctrine to us in hell, than ever we made to the vilest of sinners on earth. O, it is far easier to study and press a thousand truths upon others, than to feel the power of one truth upon our own hearts; to teach others *facienda quam faciendo*: duties to be done, than duties by doing them.

They are sad *dilemma's* with which a learned \* writer poses such graceless ministers; If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? If it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you trouble men needlessly with them, and put them into such frights without a cause?

Take heed to yourselves, lest you should cry down sin and not overcome it; lest while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: it is easier to chide at sin than to overcome it. That is a smart question, Rom. ii. 21. "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? A profane minister was converted by reading that text once, but how many have read it as well as he, who never trembled at the consideration of it as he did!

## 2. *Use for conviction.*

Is this the method God uses to reconcile men to himself; O, then examine yourselves, whether yet the preaching of the gospel hath reconciled you to God. It is too manifest that many among us are in a state of enmity unto this day. We may say with the prophet, Isa. liii. 1. "Who hath believed our report? and to "whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" We offer you peace upon gospel-terms and articles, but our peace returns to us again; enenies you were to God, and enemies you still continue. The evidence is undeniable: for,

1. *Evidence.* Many of you were never convinced to this day of your state of enmity against God; and without conviction of this, reconciliation is impossible; without repentance there can be no reconciliation, and without conviction there can be no repentance. When we repent, we lay down our weapons, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. But

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\* Gildas Salv. p. 15, 16.

how few have been brought to this? Alas! if a few poor, cold, heartless, ineffectual confessions of sin, may pass for a due conviction, and serious repentance, then have we been convinced, then have we repented; but you will find, if ever the Lord intend to reconcile you to himself, your convictions and humiliations for sin, will be other manner of things; and will cost you more than a few cheap words against sin, 2 Cor. vii. 11. "In that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge?"

2. *Evidence.* Many of us never treated seriously with the Lord about peace, and how then are we reconciled to him? What, a peace without a treaty? Reconciliation without any consideration about it? It can never be. When was the time, and where was the place, that you were found in secret upon your knees, mourning over the sin of your nature, and the evils of your ways? Certainly you must be brought to this; you must with a broken heart bewail your sin and misery.

Friend, that stony heart of thine must feel remorse and anguish for sin, it will cost thee some sad days and sorrowful nights, or ever thou canst have peace with God: it will cost thee many a groan, many a tear, many a hearty cry to heaven. If ever peace be made betwixt God and thee, thou must "take with thee words, and turn to the Lord, saying, Take away all iniquity and receive me graciously." O for one smile, one token of love, one hint of favour! The child of peace is not born without pangs and agonies of soul.

3. *Evidence.* Many of us are not reconciled to the duties of religion, and ways of holiness, and how then is it possible we should be reconciled to God? What, reconciled to God, and unreconciled to the ways of God? By reconciliation we are *made nigh*: in duties of communion we *draw nigh*; and can we be made nigh to God, and have no heart to draw nigh to God? It can never be.

Examine your hearts, and say, Is not the way of strictness a bondage to you? Had you not rather be at liberty to fulfil the desires of the flesh, and of the mind? Could you not wish that the scriptures had not made some things else your sins, and other things your duties: do you delight in the law of God after the inner man, and *esteem his judgments, concerning all things to be right*? Do you love secret prayer, and delight in duties of communion with God: or rather, are they not an ungrateful burden, and irksome imposition? Give conscience leave to speak plain.

4. *Evidence.* Many of us are not enemies to sin, and how then are we reconciled to God? What, friends with God, and our lusts too? It cannot be. Psal. cxvii. 10. "Ye that love the Lord

“hate evil.” The same hour our reconciliation is made with God, there is an everlasting breach made with sin: this is one of the articles or conditions of our peace with God, Isa. lv. 7. “Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.”

But it is manifest in many of us, that we are no enemies to sin; we secretly indulge it, what bad names soever we call it. We will commit ten sins to cover one: we cannot endure the most serious, faithful, seasonable, private tender, and necessary reproofs for sin, but our hearts swell and rise at it; sure we are not reconciled to God, whilst we embrace his enemy in our bosoms.

5. *Evidence.* We love not the children of God, nor are we reconciled to them that bear his image, and how then can we be reconciled to God? 1 John v. 1. “He that loveth him that begat, loveth them also that are begotten.” What, at peace with the Father, and at war with the children? It cannot be. Do not some that hope they have made their peace with God, hate, revile, and persecute the children of God? Surely, in that day we are reconciled to the Lord, we are reconciled to all his people: we all then love a Christian as a Christian, and by this we may know that we are passed from death to life.

6. *Evidence.* Lastly, How can any man think himself to be reconciled to God, who never closed heartily with Jesus Christ by faith, who is the only days-man, and peace-maker: the alone Mediator of reconciliation betwixt God and man.

This is a sure truth, that all whom God accepts into favour, are “made accepted in the beloved,” Eph. i. 6. If any man will make peace with God, he must take hold of his strength, accept and close with Christ who is the power of God, or he can never make peace, Isa. xxvii. He must be made “nigh by the blood of Christ,” Eph. ii. 13. But alas! both Christ and faith are strangers to many souls, who yet persuade themselves they are at peace with God: O fatal mistake!

### III. Use of Exhortation.

*Lastly,* This point deserves a close, vigorous application in a threefold exhortation.

*First,* To Christ’s ambassadors, who treat with souls in order to their reconciliation with God.

*Secondly,* To those that are yet in their empty and unreconciled state.

*Thirdly,* To those that have embraced the terms of peace, and submitted to the gospel-overtures.

First, *To the ambassadors of reconciliation.* God hath put a great

deal of honour upon you in this high and noble employment ; great is the dignity of your office ; to some you are “ the savour of death unto death, and to others a savour of life unto life ; and “ who is sufficient for these things ? ” 2 Cor. ii. 16. But yet the duty is no less than the dignity. O what manner of men should we be for judgment, seriousness, affections, patience, and exemplary holiness, to whom the management of so great a concern betwixt God and man is committed.

*First,* For judgment and prudence, how necessary are these in so weighty and difficult a business as this ! He had need be a man of wisdom that is to inform the ignorant of the nature and necessity of this great work, and win over their hearts to consent to the articles of peace propounded in the gospel ; that hath so many subtle temptations to answer, and so many intricate causes of conscience to resolve : there are many strong holds of Satan to be battered, and many stout and obstinate resistances made by the hearts of sinners, which must be overcome ; and he had need be no novice in religion, to whom so difficult a province is committed.

*Secondly,* Let us be serious in our work as well as judicious. Remember, O ye ambassadors of Christ, you bring a message from the God of heaven, of everlasting consequence to the souls of men. The eternal decrees are executed upon them in your ministry : to some you are “ the savour of life unto life, and to some the savour of “ death unto death,” 2 Cor. ii. 16. Heaven and hell are matters of most awful and solemn consideration. O, what an account have we also shortly to give unto him that sent us !

These are matters of such deep concernment, as should swallow up our very spirits ; the least they can do, is to compose our hearts unto seriousness in the management of them.

*Thirdly,* Be filled with tender affections toward the souls of men, with whom you treat for reconciliation : you had need be men of bowels, as well as men of brains\* : you see a multitude of poor souls upon the brink of eternal misery, and they know it not, but promise themselves peace, and fill themselves with vain hopes of heaven : and is there a more moving, melting spectacle in the world than this ! O think with what bowels of commiseration Moses and Paul were filled, when the one desired rather to be blotted out of God’s book, and the other to be accursed from Christ, than that Israel should not be saved, Exod. xxxii. 33. and Rom. ix. 3. Think how the bowels of Christ yearned over Jerusalem, Mat. xxiii. 37. And over the multitude, Mat. ix. 36. “ Let the same mind “ be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus.”

*Fourthly,* Be patient and long-suffering towards sinners : such is

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\* See Bowle’s Pastor, Evang. p. 136.



the value of one soul, that it is worth waiting all our days to save it at last: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance," 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. The Lord waits with patience upon sinners, and well may you. Consider yourselves, how long was God treating with you, ere you were won to him? Be not discouraged, if your success presently answer not your expectation.

*Fifthly*, and lastly, Be sure to back your exhortations with drawing examples; else you may preach out your last breath before you gain one soul to God. The devil, and the carnal hearts of your hearers, will put hindrances enough in the way of your labours; do not you put the greatest of all yourselves. O study not only to preach exactly, but to live exactly; let the misplacing of one action in your lives, trouble you more than the misplacing of words in your discourses; this is the way to succeed in your embassy, and give up your account with joy.

*Secondly*, The exhortation speaks to all those that are yet in a state of enmity and unreconciled to God unto this day. O that my words might prevail, and that you would now be entreated to be reconciled to God! The *ambassadors* of peace are yet with you, the *treaty* is not yet ended, the Master of the house is not yet risen up, nor the door of mercy and hope finally shut: hitherto God hath waited to be gracious; O that the long-suffering of God might be your salvation: a day is hastening when God will treat with you no more, when a *gulph shall be fixed* betwixt him and you for ever, Luke xvi. 26. O what will you do when the season of mercy, and all hopes of mercy shall end together! When God shall become inaccessible, inexorable, and irreconcilable to you for evermore.

O, what wilt thou do, when thou shalt find thyself shut up under eternal wrath! when thou shalt feel that misery thou art warned of! Is this the place where I must be! Are these the torments I must endure! What, for ever! yea, for ever: Will not God be satisfied with the sufferings of a thousand years? no, nor millions of years? Ah, sinners, did you but clearly see the present and future misery of unreconciled ones, and what that wrath of the great and terrible God is, which is coming as fast as the wings of time can bring it upon you, it would certainly drive you to Christ, or drive you out of your wits. O it is a dreadful thing to have God for your eternal enemy: to have the great and terrible God causing his infinite power to avenge the abuse of his grace and mercy.

Believe it, friends, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God: knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men: an eternal weight hangs upon an inch of time. O that you

did but know the time of your visitation ! that you would not dare to adventure, and run the hazard of one day more in an unreconciled state.

*Thirdly*, and lastly, This point speaks to those who have believed our report, who have taken hold of God's strength, and made peace with him : who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy : who once were afar off, but now are made nigh by the blood of Christ : with you I would leave a few words of exhortation, and I have done.

First, *Admire and stand amazed at this mercy.* " I will praise thee, O Lord, (saith the church, Isa. xii. 1.) Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." O how overwhelming a mercy is here before you ! God is at peace, at peace with you that were " enemies in your minds by wicked works," Col. i. 21. At peace with you, and at enmity with millions as good by nature as you ; at peace with you that sought it not : at peace for ever ; no dissolving this friendship for evermore. O let this consideration melt your hearts before the Lord, and make you cry, What am I, Lord, that mercy should take in me, and shut out fallen angels, and millions of men and women as capable of mercy as myself ! O the riches ! O the depths of the mercy and goodness of God !

Secondly, *Beware of new breaches with God* : God will speak " peace to his people and to his saints, but let them not turn again to folly, Psal. lxxxv. 8. What though this state of friendship can never be dissolved, yet it is a dreadful thing to have it clouded : You may lose the sense of peace, and with it all the joy of your hearts, and the comforts of your lives in this world.

Thirdly, *Labour to reconcile others to God* : especially those that are endeared to you by the bonds of natural religion : When Paul was reconciled to God himself, his heart was full of heaviness for others that were not reconciled ; for his " brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh," Rom. ix. 2, 3. When Abraham was become God's friend himself, then, " O that Ishmael might live before thee !" Gen. xvii. 18.

*Fourthly*, and lastly, " Let your reconciliation with God relieve you under all burdens of affliction you shall meet with in your way to heaven : " Let them that are at enmity with God droop under crosses and afflictions ; but do not you do so. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia*, Rom. v. 1, 2, 3. Let the peace of God keep your hearts and minds. As nothing can comfort a man that must go to hell at last ; so nothing should deject a man that shall, through many troubles, at last reach heaven.

## SERMON IV.

Concerning the work of the Spirit, as the internal, and most effectual Mean of the Application of CHRIST.

JOHN vi. 44.

*No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.*

**O**UR last discourse informed you of the usefulness and influence of the preaching of the gospel, in order to the *application* of Christ to the souls of men. There must be (in God's ordinary way) the external ministerial offer of Christ, before men can have union with him.

But yet, all the preaching in the world can never effect this union with Christ in itself, and in its own virtue, except a supernatural and mighty power go forth with it for that end and purpose. Let Boanerges and Barnabas try their strength, let the *angels* of heaven be the preachers; till God draw, the soul cannot come to Christ.

No saving benefit is to be had by Christ, without union with his person, no union with his person without faith, no faith ordinarily wrought without the preaching of the gospel by Christ's *ambassadors*, their preaching hath no saving efficacy without God's drawings, as will evidently appear by considering these words and the occasion of them.

The occasion of these words is found (as learned \* Cameron well observes) in the 42d verse, "And they said, is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" Christ had been pressing upon them in his ministry, the great and necessary duty of faith; but notwithstanding the *authority* of the preacher; the *holiness* of his life; the miracles by which he confirmed his *doctrine*; they still objected against him, "is not this the carpenter's son?" From whence Christ takes occasion for these words; "No man can come unto me, except my Father which hath sent me, draw him," q. d. In vain is the authority of my person urged; in vain are all the miracles wrought in your sight, to confirm the doctrine preached to you; till that secret, almighty power of the Spirit be put forth upon your hearts, you will not, you cannot, come unto me.

The words are a negative proposition,

In which the author, and powerful manner of divine operation in working faith, are contained: there must be drawing before

\* Cameronis *Myrothec.* p. 159.