

SERMON CLXXXV.

WE are considering of the Political Orders, which God hath placed among Men, and the Relative Duties arising there-from, both in the Superiour & Inferiour, which hath been laid open in regard of the Civil Polity.

II. *W E may now proceed to take an Account of that which is Ecclesiastical.* The Doctrine of the Church in general, doth not belong to the Fifth Command, but it comes under the Head of Application; Nevertheless, to make way for the better stating of these Relative Duties, we must borrow a few Rules from thence, which are these that follow

1. *THAT God hath ordained a Visible Church State, in the World.* By a Church in a Theological sense, we are to understand a Number of Mankind, making an open Profession of the true Religion, and devoting themselves to the Service of God, according to his revealed Will; and this Church, in the general Notion of it, comprehends the total Collection of such as make this Profession, thro' the World; in which sense the Word *Church* is frequently used in the Gospel: and the reason of such a Church is grounded in the Law Moral, inasmuch as Man was made for Gods Service, and therefore ought openly to avouch him to be his God, and devote himself to him, as his Sovereign Lord, and last End. Nor is it sufficient that Men do serve this God in their Hearts, but they ought to call upon his Name, and not to be ashamed, of calling themselves by it. Hence that Precept, *2 Tim. 2. 17.* And God saith of his Church, *Hai. 43. 21. This people have I formed for my self, they shall show forth my praise.* But the Church under this general Consideration, is not the subject of our present enquiry; nor hath Christ appointed a Visible Head of it in this World, to be his Vicar general on Earth, and whosoever assumes it to himself, is an Anti-christ, of whom, *2 Thes. 2.*

HENCE,

2. *THAT God hath Instituted or Appointed particular Churches, for the Advancing of all the Ends of the true Religion among Men.* As God hath revealed the true Religion to fallen Man, so the first and great design of this Revelation, is their Salvation: which, because God will have it be advanced by means suitable to the Nature of Man, he hath ordained, that there shall be an orderly Combination of Men professing it, among whom these Means may be enjoyed, for the Conversion of Sinners, and Edification of Saints. *Eph. 4. 11, 12.* And he gave some, *Apostles and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastours and Teachers; For the perfecting of the Saints, &c.* Hence we so often read of *Churches*, in the Plural which must needs design several Companies of Christians, some way standing in a special Relation one to another, for Religious purposes; and the reason for this is also Moral, because Mankind do stand in need of the Means, for the obtaining of Salvation, which he hath seen meet to afford them in this, and is to be acknowledged & obeyed in it. 3.

3. **THAT** God hath seen meet in these Churches to ordain an Ecclesiastical Polity. The Law of Nature also requires this, that in all Societies there should be Order, nor can they consist without it, but all things will be brought to Confusion. That Christ hath ordained a Government in His Churches, is not to be disputed: There are the Keys which He hath given to some, both of Doctrine and Discipline; and there are others that ought to subject themselves thereto. There are some who are authorized to Rule, and consequently there are some that ought to Obey them, for these are Correlates: Hence that, Heb. 13. 17. *Obey them that have the Rule over you.*

4. **THAT** this Church State is a thing distinct and diverse from that which is Civil. Though Persons do stand in Relation to both, yet it is upon a different account. These differ in their Ends; that of the Civil is for the maintaining of the outward Peace and Prosperity of the People; the Ecclesiastical is for the Spiritual saving Good of Men. The Means also for procuring of these are various, the one by Temporal and outward ways, the other by those that are Spiritual, and accommodated to Treat with the Souls and Consciences of Men. The one useth the Civil Sword, the other the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. The Orders and Officers of them are diverse; in the Civil State, Men have a liberty to Constitute these according to their Prudence; but in the other, God hath reserved it to Himself, to appoint the Offices in His Church, and none may add thereto. And as it is the Duty of every Christian in a Professing Government, to acknowledge his Relation to both States, so a Man may be a Ruler in the one, and a Subject in the other: And as none invested with Ecclesiastical Power, are thereby discharged from the Subjection required of all Men, to those Powers under whom they live, so no Person in Civil Dignity, ought to exempt himself from the Laws of Christ in his Church.

5. **THE** Correlates in this Order, are the Eldership, and the People that are under their Watch. And here we may observe, That whatsoever prudental Combinations there may be between Churches for mutual Help, there is a peculiar Relation appointed by God, between these Elders and this People; and therefore there is a special Obligation of mutual Duty lying upon them; nor can the Ends of a Religious Society be otherwise carried on to the Glory of God and Benefit of Man. Here then,

First, **WE** may consider the Duties of Ministers to their People, over whom the Holy Ghost makes them Overseers; which are principally such as these,

(1.) **IN** General.

1. **THEY** ought to carry themselves towards their People, not as Lords, but as Stewards of Christ. It is the Advice given in, 1 Pet. 5. 3. *Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.* They are therefore called Stewards, 1 Cor. 4. 1. *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and*

stewards of the mysteries of God. There is a Power which Christ hath constituted on His Ministers, which is given them for the Good of the Flock, and so they ought to exercise it; but they ought not to Usurp a Dominion: They have not to do with the outward Man, but with the Conscience; they are not therefore to give Laws to their Flock, but to keep close to the Law of Christ in all their Dispensations.

2. **THEY** ought to get and maintain a tender Love to their Flock. Love indeed is the Vital Affection, which is to influence every Relation; but there is a special Love belonging to these, if ever they will discharge the Work they are called to, faithfully and profitably: They are therefore called Pastors or Shepherds. And this is a common Name given to the Ministry, and peculiarly to the Ordinary Ministers; nor doth it stand distributively with Teachers, as an Office distinct from them, for both are but One Office in the Gospel account, 1 Cor. 12. 28. *God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.* Eph. 4. 11. *And he gave some, apostles: and some, prophets: and some, evangelists: and some, pastors and teachers.* Now our Saviour tells us, that the Good Shepard Loves his Flock: They are compared to tender Mothers, on the account of their Love to them, 1 Thes. 2. 7. And indeed such are the Offices which they are commanded to discharge to their People, that requires a great deal of tender Affection in them. Hence,

(2.) **THE** more Particular Duties, are such as these,

1. **THEY** ought not to seek themselves, but the Glory of God and the Good of the Souls under their Charge. It is the Commendation given of Timothy, Phil. 2. 20, 21. *For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.* It is true, Gospel-Ministers ought so far to see to their outward Concerns, as to provide for their Families, which cannot Live on the Air; but the Burden of this Care ought to be taken from them by those for whom they Serve, as will be considered afterwards: But they ought not to make their Ministry a meer Design to advance their Worldly Interest, and raise themselves upon it, to the Neglect, or careless Attendance on the Work which they are called to; and he that doth not despise this as a little thing, compared with the Work it self, will be found an Unfaithful Steward when called to give up his Account: He is called to Serve God in this Station, and his great Business is to bring Glory to Him in it, and to count it his Happiness and Joy, if he may so do: And he is entrusted with the Charge of Souls, whose Salvation he is by all Means to endeavour the furtherance of; and therefore we read, Heb. 13. 17. *They that must give account.* And this awful Account ought always to bear hard upon their Minds, and be a Spur to quicken them to be Faithful in their Work: And if they Love the Souls under their Care, they will certainly do

do thus. In a word, all other Thoughtfulness ought to vail to that one, that they may discharge their Work; so it was with Paul, Acts 20. 24. *Neither count my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.*

2. **THEY ought to discharge their Ministerial Function, in all the parts of it with Faithfulness.** This seems to be the first Qualification required in those that are to be employed in this Work; 1 Cor. 4. 2. *It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.* It is true, There are Ministerial Gifts to be enquired after, in order to their Introduction; but in their Station, there is great Fidelity required: Their Charge is great; it is not the dying Bodies of Men, but t. or Immortal Souls; which if they Perish thro' their Infidelity, will be amazing. Now there are many things that go in to this Faithfulness; some whercof are counted up, 2 Tim. 4. 2. *Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.* There is Faithfulness in their Preparations; they ought not to spend the Week in Worldly Diversions and then come with their indigested Discourses; and so offer to God that which Cost them nothing; and it may be, obtrude Poyson on their Hearers, instead of wholesome Nourishment: but they ought to prepare themselves by diligent Study and Prayer, enquiring into the Mind of God, and well pondering what they have to deliver. It was Paul's direction given to Timothy, & it belongs to every one in such a Function, 2 Tim. 2. 15. *Study to show thy self approved unto God, a Workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* There is a Fidelity also in Studying for *seasonable Truths*, and those that are most needful and profitable according to the present Providences of God. A Word in Season is commended by the Wise Man more than once; and he tells us, Eccl. 12. 10. *The preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.* There is a Faithfulness necessary, in the *Dividing to every Hearer his Portion*; and this is mainly expressed in the forecited, 2 Tim. 4. 2. And we have that of Christ the great Pastour, Luk. 12. 42. *And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?* Some need Information, some Excitation, some Caution, others Reprehension, others Consolation; and all this belongs to him to Administer, as there is occasion: He must treat all Men faithfully; he must not *Sew Pillows under any Sinners Arms.* or encourage them in their Sins: Not may he be afraid of the Faces of Men, or say to the Wicked, *Thou art Righteous*: He must, tho' with Kindness, yet Fidelity too, bear a Testimony against every prevailing Iniquity, tho' he pulls the Rage of Proud Sinners on himself by it: He must not therefore baulk any Truth which he is called to dispense, for any smaller end; but be able to say as he, Acts 20. 26, 27. *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I*

have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. And eminently ought he to shew his Fidelity, in Preaching **CHRIST**, and those saving Doctrines which flow from Him; to be able to say as he, 1 Cor. 2. 2. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

3. **THEY ought to accommodate their Ministry to all sorts of Hearers.** This might have been annexed to the former, but it deserves a distinct *Meat*, being of very great Concern, and carefully to be observed by him who seeks the Good of Souls, more than his own Airy Applause. Every Soul in the Assembly comes under the Care of the Minister, and he ought to seek his Edification. Now every one is not of a like Capacity; some are good Proficients in Understanding, these are able to digest *strong Meat*; but others are Babes in Knowledge, and such are to be fed with *Milk*: Thus Paul suited his Preaching, 1 Cor. 2. 2. Every Minister ought to be Ambitious of the best and most accomplished Gifts; and when he hath attained to them, to sacrifice them to the Interest of Christ and the Good of Souls. One main part of this Work is described, Jer. 3. 15. *And I will give you pastours according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.* But if he will do this aright, he must suit himself to their Capacity: He should use *Plain* Words and Intelligible, to express the mind of God in. Paul said of himself, and of this Case, 1 Cor. 14. 19. *But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are passed up, but the power.* And to Study *Exotic* or new-fangled Words, (which scarce One of Ten understands,) is as if one spake in an *unknown Tongue*. It is true, There are the Mysteries in Religion, which are in themselves great Depths, and Terms that are necessary to be used, which every one doth not readily understand; but these are to be explained, & not more beclouded. To this also belongs their *Patience*, as well as *Condescendency*; and not to think it much to take a great deal of Pains, to distill Knowledge into the Minds of those that cannot receive but by Drops; so Paul, Heb. 5. 11. *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.* And here also the Minister ought prudently to suit a Portion for all: He ought to train up the *Ignorant* to Understanding; and he ought to lead forward those that do *know more*, to yet further Degrees of the Knowledge of the Mysteries of Godliness; for we are told their Work in this regard, Eph. 4. 11, 12. And to this Head belongs *Catechizing* of those that are Beginners, that they may have the first Foundation of saving Knowledge laid in them; which doth not only belong to *Parents*, but also to the *Pastors* of the Churches; and the faithful discharge of it, is a good Medium to establish Young Ones in the Truth, and fortify them against Errors.

4. **HE ought to Watch over them, by careful acquainting himself with their State, and applying himself accordingly.** This is included in that Admonition, Acts 20. 30. *And how I kept back*

nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house. And this comprehends not only his Publick, but his Private Managements too: He ought as far as he can to know their State, that he may the better apply himself to them: Hence that, Phil. 2. 19. *But that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.* Which doth not intend the State of their Souls, but how the Gospel flourished; whether they walked orderly, and kept in Peace, and each did his Duty; and whether any more were drawn over; and how each one behaved himself: And this is needful, because else how should he accommodate his publick Administrations? For this end, private Visits of his Flock, belong to his Charge, so far as he can have Opportunity; and in them he should call upon those who are Careless of their own Salvation, and admonish them of their Danger; warn such as lead loose Lives, contrary to their Profession, and shew them how unworthily they carry themselves, of the Name that is called upon them: Call upon Young Ones to Remember their Creator, and encourage them to Early Piety: Offer Counsel and Encouragement to such as are under Awakenings and Terrors of Conscience; and do all he can to further their Conversion: Remove the Doubts, and Answer the Cases of Conscience, which any are at a loss about; and ease their Scruples, as there is occasion: To endeavour to Recover such as are declining; and establish those that are Sound in the Faith: To Visit the Sick, and offer feasible Counsels to them, and do their utmost to prepare them for their great Change; and Pray over them, that their Sicknefs may turn to their Souls Advantage. These, and whatsoever things of like Nature, belong to their Office Charge; Acts 20. 18, 19, 20.

5. HE ought to endeavour by a well-Ordered Conversation, to set a good Example to his Flock. The Exemplary Carriages of Ministers, is very frequently inculcated in the Gospel, as a thing necessary to the good Success of their Ministry; 1 Pet. 5. 4. Tit. 1. 7. 1 Tim. 4. 12. *Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* Tit. 2. 7. *In all things shewing thy self a pattern of good works: in doctrine, shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.* It belongs to the Character of a Good Minister, that he be a burning, as well as a shining light, (Joh. 5. 35.) else he will like y prove an *Ignis fatuus*. It will be a poor Commendation of a Minister, when he cannot say with *Gideon*, *Follow me, and do as I do*; or with *Paul*, 1 Cor. 11. 7. *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.* To press Duties solemnly on his Hearers, as matters of greatest Importance, if they hope to be saved, and yet himself live in the neglect of them, as if they were matters of no moment, is in Works to deny, what in Words they Profess; and to bring themselves under the Wo which Christ denounced against the Scribes and Pharisees,

Luke 11. 46. *And he said, Ye write, ye say ye lawyers: for ye lide men with burthens grievous to be born, and ye your selves touch not the burthens with one of your fingers.* And how often do we find that Men can justify themselves against Reproofs, when they can bring in the Example of their Ministers to Patronize their Exorbitancies. *Paul* could Appeal to the Consciences of those among whom he had exercised his Ministry, whether his Life had not been Correspondent thereto, Acts 20. 18. 1 Thes. 2. 10. *Ye are my witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved our selves among you that believe.* They ought above all Men, to govern their Passions, to carry it Meekly, to shew the greatest Sobriety in their whole Conversation; to deny themselves of their lawful Liberty, for the Edification of others; because they are as Lights upon an Hill, and all Eyes upon them; and if by their ungiirt Lives, they should hinder the Good Success of their Ministry, many Souls will suffer Damage by it, and their own Account would be more fearful. They ought therefore to stand firm in the Times of Apostacy, and not run after, or have any fellowship with the foolish Vanities that creep in among their People, but Reprove them with their own Practise. This they ought to do, if they would Serve God with a Good Conscience, and reap the Joy and Comfort of their Work, and be able to take their leave of their Flock as he did, Acts 20. 26. *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.*

6. HE ought to be much in Prayer unto God in behalf of his Flock. As he ought to make it the Bottom Design of all his Works to advance God's Glory in their Salvation; so he is to remember that all his Help and Success depends upon God, who expects to be sought to for it. How often therefore have we *Paul* assuring of those whom he Writes to, that he was ever mindful of them in his Prayers; thus, Rom. 1. 9. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers.* So, 1 Thes. 1. 16. 1 Thes. 1. 2. 2 Tim. 1. 3. And for this he Commends *Ephbras*, Col. 4. 16. And there is great reason why he should thus do, both for their sake, and for his own: He depends entirely upon God, for all the Assistance whereby he may be able and faithful; it must come from God's Mercy, 1 Cor. 7. 25. --- *One that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be justful.* He ought therefore to Pray over all his Studies, that God would afford His Assistance in them; direct his Thoughts, and order his Preparations: For God's gracious Presence also in his Dispensatory; to give him a door of Utterance, that he may Pleasly and Profitably, and without slavish Fear, declare the Counsell of God. He also ought to Pray for his People, That God would open a door of Entrance into their Hearts; That He will open their Eyes, and subdue their Hearts, and teach them to Profit: They should Pray

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

U S E. *A N D* if all this belongs to Men in this Post, certainly then, It is no Easy Work that lies upon them; nor do they need Envy, but Pity. Surely, It becomes all that stand in this Relation, to maintain an Holy Awe of the Solemn Charge that belongs to it; and to wait humbly on God, for Pity, Pardon, Assistance, and Acceptance thro' Christ. And if any do in any measure Acquit themselves in it, they are to be accounted as the *Servants of J E S U S C H R I S T*.

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SERMON CLXXXVI.