



Mr. *Tucker's*

CONVENTION

S E R M O N.



Ministers considered as Fellow-workers,
who should be Comforters to each
other, in the Kingdom of God.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED

Before the MINISTERS of the Province

OF THE

Massachusetts-Bay in New-England,

AT THEIR

Annual CONVENTION

In BOSTON,

May 26. 1768.

By JOHN TUCKER, A M.

Pastor of the First Church in NEWBURY.

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AT the Anniversary Convention of the Ministers of the Province of the *Massachusetts-Bay*, in *Boston*, *May 26. 1768.*

“ VOTED, That the Thanks of the Convention be given to the Rev. Mr. *John Tucker*,
“ for his Sermon, preached before them, this
“ Day.”

A true Copy,

Test.

A. ADAMS, Scribe.

A Convention SERMON.

COLOSSIANS, IV. 11.

— *These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.*

IT was manifestly one design of Jesus Christ, the divine founder of our holy religion, to inspire his disciples, in conformity to his own most amiable temper and example, with those benevolent and friendly dispositions, whereby they should be distinguished from the rest of the world; according to that declaration of his, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.**

And however some of his professed subjects have shamefully disgraced this part of the christian character, yet, in others, and especially, in the primitive times of christianity, it appeared in its proper eminency and lustre. Agreeable specimens of this, we meet with, in Paul's epistles; and particularly in the beginning and close of them; where he salutes his christian brethren, in the language of warm affection, and tender concern for their welfare. Nor did he appear alone, or singular in this; but the same benevolent spirit breathed in, and warmed the breasts of his fellow christians, and taught their lips the same language of undissembled love: For writing now to the Colossians, while he was in bonds at Rome, a number who were with him, took the opportunity of sending, by letter, their kind
salutations

salutations to their Colossian brethren. *Aristarcus, my fellow-prisoner* (says he) *saluteth you—and Marcus, and Jesus which is called Justus—and Epaphras, and Luke the beloved physician, &c.*

And how refreshing must have been this brotherly concern, and friendly intercourse among the primitive christians, when hated by the world and surrounded by their enemies? How amiable must it be at all times, and in all circumstances? And particularly, how comforting must such harmony and love always be among ministers of the gospel, who, if not in bonds, like St. Paul, yet are ever exposed to some peculiar labours and difficulties above others, and stand in need of uncommon supports?

Such support this apostle had amidst his trials: And as he was sure the knowledge of it must be agreeable to his absent friends, who would rejoice in all his consolation, he makes particular mention of it to them in this letter;—letting them know he had those labouring with him, in the kingdom of God, who were a comfort to him,—*These only* (i. e. of the Jews,—of the circumcision, as appears by the foregoing words)—*These only are my fellow-workers, unto, or in, the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.*

It is not here said *how*, or in what respects, these had been a comfort to the Apostle: but it is easy to conceive how ministers may be so to one another, when influenced by the benevolent spirit of St. Paul, and of Jesus, *his* master, and *theirs*; and when acting agreeable to their common character, as fellow-workers in the kingdom of God. And it is now hoped, that my fathers and brethren in the ministry, with the rest of this respectable audience, will, in the exercise of such a temper, bear with me while I attempt, to shew,

I. What may be intended here by the kingdom of God, and hint at some important truths it may naturally suggest.

II.—What may be implied in ministers being fellow-workers in this kingdom. And,

III.—How

III.—How they may, and ought to be a comfort to one another : and conclude with some brief reflections upon the whole, suitable to the subject and the present occasion.

It is proposed,

- I. To shew what may be intended in the text by the kingdom of God, and to hint at some important truths it may naturally suggest.

And by this, I apprehend, may be intended the church of God, in this world, under the gospel dispensation :—the christian church ;—including therewith, that divine constitution, or form of moral government, which is set before us in the new testament, by Christ and his Apostles.

The kingdom of God, is sometimes to be understood, indeed, in a very different and much more extensive sense :—It may mean his universal dominion and government over all his works ; and thus he rules in the natural, as well as moral world ; for he is Lord of all.

He who erected the grand fabrick of the universe,—he alone could form the wonderful plan, and establish the various laws, by which it is governed, even from the regular, yet amazing revolutions of the heavenly bodies, down to the smallest vegetable that springs out of the ground.

But, as the high author of all things, whose wisdom, power, and goodness are displayed, in an infinite variety of ways, hath endued some of his creatures with understanding and liberty ;—with a capacity of knowing him and his authority ;—of acting freely and from rational motives, and of yielding to him a voluntary obedience ; over these he exercises a moral government, suited to their superior nature and capacities : And this, in some more special sense, may be called his kingdom ;—the subjects of which, in an enlarged view, are all the excellent, wise and virtuous of intelligent creatures, through the whole creation ; who are obedient to the universal Father, —the Parent of good.

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By the abuse of liberty, it seems, some of the intelligent creatures, of superior rank and dignity to the human race, and therefore under stronger obligations to the great creator, first revolted from their maker and supreme Lord, and fell under his awful displeasure.

The sacred scriptures intimate, that the head of this rebellion, who is stiled *the old Serpent, Satan, and the Devil*; and who, as 'tis probable, drew after him, in his revolt, numbers of the heavenly inhabitants, afterwards seduced the first human pair; and brought them into a state of guilt and ruin. But the infinitely wise God, the father of mercies, who perfectly knew the comparative weakness of our first parents, and the strength and power of the temptation with which they were assaulted, was pleased to compassionate their unhappy state; and, instead of taking their forfeited lives, according to the threatening annexed to that constitution under which they were placed, greatly to recede from what the criminals had reason to expect; and, as it were, even to incorporate with his righteous frowns, that glorious promise of a redeemer, that *the Seed of the woman should bruise the Serpent's head.**

For the support and comfort of our first parents, especially, in their guilty and wretched condition, this seems to have been designed as a clear intimation of the forming and introduction of a mediatorial plan of grace, more fully to be opened and explained in future ages; in consequence of which plan, their lives were prolonged; they were put upon a new state of trial;—the human race has been propagated; and a foundation laid, upon which our first parents and their sinning posterity, might be recovered to virtue and goodness, and obtain pardon and happiness.

Upon the foundation of this gracious plan, early intimated, I conceive, it is, that God hath made use of various methods, or introduced several dispensations, in different ages of the world, to promote the holiness and happiness of men, in which his kingdom has, in some respects,

respects, had various appearances. For, though the fundamental laws of the moral kingdom of God, are, and must be always the same, enjoining reverence, love, submission, &c. to the Supreme Being; with the sincere practice of truth, righteousness, benevolence and other virtues, in conformity to the moral perfections of the Deity; and the subjects of this kingdom must ever bear a moral likeness to one another, in their willing and hearty subjection to the authority and government of God, yet, in a limited view, and as this kingdom of God has respect to mankind, in this world, it has, as to particular things, appeared variously in different places and ages, as seemed most fit to the great ruler of the world, in carrying on the designs of his wisdom and grace.

Whatever was the perfection and moral excellencies of our first parents, in their state of innocency, the sacred scriptures, with our own experience teach us, that we their posterity are here in a state of great moral weakness;—exposed to temptations from Satan and the world, and from our own lusts and passions:—that all mankind, capable of moral action, corrupt their way, so as to need the assisting and sanctifying grace, and pardoning mercy of God.

The great author of our beings, infinitely wise and good, has accordingly consulted our welfare, by adapting himself to our state and circumstances; and using suitable means and methods, to lead us to repentance,—to form us to virtue and goodness, and to prepare us for happiness.

In this, however, he hath not dealt alike with all. While, in his unsearchable wisdom, the ways of which we may not pretend fully to judge of, he hath left some of the human race without any special revelation of his holy will, others he has placed under peculiar advantages for moral improvements, and high advancement in honor and felicity.

The Jews, formerly, to whom he committed his sacred oracles, were, by this advantage, distinguished from the rest of the world. Among these God sat up his king-

dom in a very visible and remarkable manner :—These he formed into a society by themselves; and gave them laws and ordinances, by which they were characterized his peculiar people. Over these he presided, as their divine legislator,—their king and governor; and frequently sent to them his heavenly messages, by the inspired prophets. But this, though a divine constitution, and graciously adapted to the purposes of holiness and happiness, was not designed for the most perfect model of the kingdom of God in this world, and was therefore to endure but for a while.

The gracious scheme of salvation by the seed of the woman, early intimated to our first parents, had been gradually opening in the revelations of God: And according to many predictions and promises, respecting the Messiah and the gospel-state, God, in the fulness of time, sent his own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the world; in some measure to change and new model this kingdom; or to erect one of a somewhat different and more perfect form.—For, *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things.*† — He who was in the bosom of the Father hath most clearly and fully revealed him; and, as divinely commissioned and authorized, hath, by the gospel dispensation, erected a new kingdom; i. e. a religious, moral constitution, in many respects different from, and much more excellent and glorious, than the mosaic which preceded it :—more excellent, as revealing the substance, or important ends, to which many of the religious services under the preceding dispensation pointed, which were but shadows of good things to come :—as being free from those burdensome ceremonies which were enjoined upon the Jews :—more excellent, on account of the fullness, clearness and perfection of many of its doctrines and precepts :—of the greatness of its motives and encouragements to holiness and obedience; and more excellent for the enlargement

† Heb. i. 1, 2.

largement and extensiveness of its plan, as being designed to comprehend all nations; and uniting them under one head, to constitute a glorious body, who in the exercises of piety and virtue, should be trained up for more perfect services, and for sublime enjoyments in the kingdom of heaven, to which this kingdom of God on earth, is similar, and preparatory.

This, I conceive, is intended by the kingdom of God in my text. The laws and ordinances;—the privileges, immunities and blessings of it;—its whole frame and constitution we have in the gospel: And the subjects of this kingdom, who are entitled to the privileges and blessings of it, are all who believe in Christ;—all who profess allegiance to him, as their divine head and ruler; who, repenting of their sins, devote themselves to the obedience of the gospel.

This, in the new testament, and with just propriety, is called both the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Christ. It is the kingdom of God, constituted and set up by his Son, whom he hath sent into the world for this purpose; and with whom he has entrusted the administration and government of it; for to him he hath committed all power, and given him to be head over all things to the church.

And this may be called the kingdom of God, not only on account of its being erected by divine authority, but from the excellency of the constitution: For, if we look into the gospel, what a glorious scheme is there presented to our view, full of grace and truth? With an admirable plainness, it proposes to us the first and great principles of religion: It gives us such instructions concerning the Deity, his perfections and providence; concerning our obligations to piety, virtue and goodness, as are most answerable to the natural sentiments of mankind; and which our own hearts, if we seriously attend to them, cannot but approve. It prescribes such a pure, simple, and reasonable worship, as is worthy of God to accept, and of men to perform. The terms of our ac-

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ceptance with God, by Jesus Christ, are there declared in a manner so adapted to the weakness and imperfection of our present state, and to the conscious sense we have of guilt, as gives the greatest encouragement to sinners, to reform their lives, and return to their duty; and our obedience to the laws of God, is there enforced in the strongest manner, and by the most powerful motives.

If we view and consider these things, as, in their original and unadulterated form, they are set before us in the gospel, certainly we must discern in them, strongly marked, the signature of divine wisdom and goodness.

And this account of the kingdom of God may, I apprehend, naturally suggest to us such important truths as these;—That the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who by commission and appointment of the Father, hath erected this kingdom; and to whom the administration of it is committed, is the sole legislator, and judge of the subjects of it; i.e. of all christians.—That he only hath authority to make laws, and to appoint ordinances for them,—and to annex sanctions to these laws. That he only hath authority to determine and fix the terms, upon which any shall be intitled to the privileges and blessings of this kingdom. And, that, as all christians of whatever rank; and however characterized, and distinguished by human determinations and appointments, are equally his subjects, and accountable to him; and, in this respect, perfectly upon a level with one another, none of them can have any authority even to interpret the laws of this kingdom for others, so as to require their assent to such interpretation. These, with other truths of a similar nature, must be obvious upon a moments reflection. For if others, besides Jesus Christ, have a right to make and establish laws in this kingdom, obligatory upon christians;—to appoint ordinances;—to decree religious rites, &c. they have then authority to alter the very constitution and nature of it; and so far as thus altered, it would cease to be the kingdom of God.

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The same consequence must follow, on supposing any have authority to fix terms of admission to privileges and blessings in this kingdom; or to annex sanctions to the laws of it, not found in the gospel. By such ungodly terms of admission, the true subjects of Jesus Christ might be excluded, while those who are not so, might be admitted, which might leave him only the title of a King where he had no subjects. And, as the force of laws depends upon their annexed sanctions; they who have power to alter these sanctions, or to add new ones, have power to alter the very nature of such laws, or to set them entirely aside: And so far as any do this, they, and not Jesus Christ, are rulers in this kingdom; and it is, so far, not his, but a kingdom of their own.

And authority to interpret the laws of this kingdom, so as to oblige others to assent thereto, will at once bring us to the same point: For he that hath power to put his own sense upon any doctrine, precept, or law, whether human or divine, and to oblige others to receive the same in *that* sense; hath power to alter such doctrine or law, just as he thinks fit; which is the same thing, in effect, with a power absolutely to annihilate such doctrine or law, and to publish others in the room thereof. Such an one would, to all intents and purposes, be the legislator, and supreme ruler and judge in this kingdom.

From all which it evidently follows, that every subject of this kingdom, i. e. every christian, has, and must have a right to judge for himself of the true sense and meaning of all gospel truths; and that no doctrines therefore; —no laws; —no religious rites; —no terms of acceptance with God, or of admission to christian privileges, not found in the gospel, are to be looked upon by him, as any part of this divine system; nor to be received and submitted to as the doctrines and laws of Christ. And to make any article of faith, or mode of worship essential to the christian character, and a term of admission to christian privileges, not made so in the gospel, is manifestly an unwarrantable, and rebellious usurpation of ecclesiastical power, which cannot be answered for to the great head of the church.

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These conclusions, are, I conceive, perfectly agreeable to the instructions thus given us by our blessed Saviour. *But be not ye called Rabbi : for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth : for one is your father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called master : for one is your master, even Christ.** The sentiments of St. Paul exactly harmonized with these divine instructions, and must become every christian, and every minister of the gospel. *Not (says he) that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.† We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake.‡* And again, *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? to his own master he standeth or falleth.§*

The next thing proposed, was,

II. To shew what may be implied in ministers being fellow-workers in this kingdom of God.

Their being workers, or labourers herein, may imply in general, their studying, and in their proper place and sphere of action, endeavouring to promote its prosperity and wellfare ;—to support its divine constitution ;—the honor and dignity of its sacred laws :—To increase the number of its subjects, and to improve their virtues, in all loyalty and obedience to Jesus Christ, the exalted and glorious head of the church.

But though ministers of the gospel are an order of men appointed by Christ, to serve, in some special manner, the great purposes of his kingdom :—Though they are distinguished as officers in the church, and their employment is high and honorable, they being sometimes stiled ambassadors for Christ, and workers together with God, yet they are not heads and rulers in a kingdom of their own, nor Lords over God's heritage. They are equally with other christians the subjects and servants of Christ, and are to act by his authority, and under his direction.

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* Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. † 2 Cor. i. 24. ‡ Ch. iv. 5. § Rom. xiv. 4.

And manifest it must be, from what has been offered, that to teach any doctrines,—to publish any laws,—to appoint any religious ceremonies,—to lay down any qualifications of Christ's subjects; or to fix any terms of admission to rights and privileges in the christian church, not plainly found in the gospel, cannot belong, in the least measure, to their office, nor be any part of their business.

They are, indeed, to be teachers and guides to their people; but then, their divine master has particularly prescribed to them in their work.—*Go teach all nations—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I HAVE COMMANDED you.** His doctrines, i. e. those of the gospel, they are to teach;—his laws, they are to publish:—By these sacred rules, and their own pious and virtuous example, they are to lead and guide their people.

Nor let it be imagined, that without claiming greater authority, and seizing upon higher employments in the church, ministers can have little to do. They may find, in their proper places, business enough for all their zeal and activity, without invading either the office of the great head of the church, or the particular charges of one another.

They must give themselves to reading, meditation and prayer:—They must seek a large and intimate acquaintance with the inspired writings, that they may be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual;—to elucidate one part of scripture by another, and to represent divine truths in their just and necessary consistence with each other; and may prove themselves workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

For although they are not authoritative interpreters of the word of God, and have no power to impose their sense of scripture on their hearers, which would exclude the right of private judgment; yet a part, and an important part of their business, is to assist the understanding of their people, and to lead them into the knowledge
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* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

and belief of the truth. They are to do this, not by asserting, that what they declare is the truth, and demanding assent to it, on the authority of their declaration,—or,—of its having been proved, and declared to be so, by others, but by shewing how the truth they are pleading for, is connected with, and justly flows from, some plain declaration in the word of God : or, if founded on passages of a more uncertain and doubtful meaning, then, by laying before their hearers the reasons persuading them they have given the true sense of scripture ; leaving it with them, after all, to examine their explications,—the justness of their deductions, and force of their reasoning ; and to receive for divine truth, only what they see to be founded on the oracles of God.

And thus to explain and teach the doctrines of the gospel, and to publish the laws of the kingdom of God, is but a part of their duty and employment, as ministers of Christ. They are to labour, not only to open men's eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, but likewise, from the power of Satan unto God. By serious and animated addresses to their hearers, they are to inculcate and impress upon their minds, the truths of the gospel, endeavouring to engage their practical regard thereto ; for neither knowledge nor faith can be of any importance, but as they have regard to practice, or serve to mend the heart and life.

Laying before their people, therefore, in the simplest and plainest manner, the gospel terms of acceptance with God ; and placing in their view, in a clear and strong light, their duty, in the various parts and branches of it, they are to make use of the great arguments and motives, exhibited in the gospel, to persuade them to a compliance with these terms ; and to engage and quicken them in the practice of these duties :—Arguments, collected especially from the unreasonableness, as well as odious and destructive nature of sin ;—from the intellectual and moral nature of men ;—from their relation to God, and his authority over them ;—from the reasonableness of his
service ;

service;—from the importance of salvation; and from the wonderful grace of God in the Redeemer, and the mighty encouragement offered to sinners, to seek their true happiness.

These are arguments pointed out by the great author of our beings, who perfectly knows our frame:—pointed out, not only in the sacred oracles, but by our very constitution, as rational and moral:—They are manifestly suited to the nature and feelings of the human mind, and designed to affect the heart:—They are fitted to reach and move the hopes and fears of men,—these great springs of action;—to agitate and rouse the soul, and to put it upon the most vigorous exertions, in pursuit of glory and felicity:—And in such applications to their people, they will comport with that example for gospel ministers,—*But have renounced the bidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.**

And ministers, as workers in the kingdom of God, have more to do than all this amounts to. If they are the true ministers of Jesus Christ, the prosperity of Zion will lie near their hearts, and they will daily seek her good. A concern for the honor of God, and longing desire of the salvation of souls, will make them men of prayer. Their own flocks, in particular, they will often bear upon their hearts at the throne of grace. They will endeavour to know their state; and in their public ministrations, so to adapt themselves to their condition and circumstances, as may be most likely to answer the best purposes, and to promote their welfare.

In private life, they will study to be instructive and encouraging examples to their people, in all piety and virtue:—ready, at all times to labour for their good,—by instructing the ignorant,—warning the vicious,—comforting and strengthening the feeble-minded, and edifying believers in a life of holiness; aiming hereby to promote and build up the kingdom of God. *Warning every man,*

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(says St. Paul) *and teaching every man in all wisdom ; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* † Upon this view of things, how great and important must appear the employment of ministers ! and how large the field, in which they are to work ! Happy they, happy, indeed, who acting worthy of their office and character, shall be approved of God.

But that expression in the text, descriptive of gospel ministers—*fellow-workers in the kingdom of God*—naturally suggests several things, which may deserve a farther and more particular notice. It may intimate that equality there is, or ought to be, among ministers, in the church of Christ. Their office and employment is the same. Human authority, 'tis true, and human establishments have made a difference among these ; but as this is not of Christ's appointment, nor to be found any where in the gospel, it can be only human. According to the scripture-plan of the kingdom of God, ministers are all equally, and without distinction, *Pastors, Elders, Overseers, Bishops, &c.* in the christian church. Their divine master has given to none of these any superiority over others, but says to them all—*one is your master even Christ, and all ye are brethren.* † And happy would it have been for the christian world, had this equality been preserved, and none had aspired after dominion and lordship over others. None of those steps had then been formed, by which dignities, unknown to the gospel, un-named in it, have been gradually raised in the church of Christ ; and which, at last, elevated *his holiness* to his present height of unlawful power and grandeur ;—of spiritual tyranny, oppression and cruelty. Again :

The expression—*fellow-workers in the kingdom of God*—may intimate, that ministers have one common business to prosecute ;—one common cause to promote, respecting which they should act with agreement and harmony ; and in the advancement of which their labours should unite and centre ;—and that is the cause of true religion—the honor of God and happiness of men. I do not mean here, that they should have just the same sentiments ;

† Col. i. 28.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 8.

ments; or that they should think, believe and teach, in every thing, exactly alike: for this is not to be expected in the present state of weakness and imperfection. But, that charitably bearing with one another, in their differences of opinion, respecting disputable and lesser matters, they should, as *fellow-labourers*, heartily unite, in promoting that *kingdom of God, which is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the holy Ghost.**

Without this charitable forbearance, there is not,—there cannot be union, harmony and peace among them. When they lay great stress, therefore, upon disputed, and comparatively little points;—when they run into hot and unchristable contentions about things but obscurely delivered, if delivered at all in the sacred oracles; and which are of a dubious and uncertain nature, they manifestly mistake their business, and forfeit their characters, as servants of the same Lord, and fellow-workers in the kingdom of God;—they neglect their proper work to contend and quarrel about trifles.

And lastly here,

The expression *fellow-workers in the kingdom of God*—may intimate that mutual and brotherly concern, ministers ought to have for each others welfare. Their standing upon a level;—their being servants of the same Lord, and engaged in the same work, naturally tends to lead them into an intimate acquaintance, and familiarity with one another;—to conciliate their affections;—to unite their hearts in love, and to inspire them with a friendly and benevolent concern for each others happiness. And behold, how good, and how pleasant it must be, for these brethren to dwell together in unity! This will instamp a beauty and glory upon their character:—It must unite their strength;—give force and energy to their labours, and promise great and happy success to their ministry.

But I come now to shew,

III. How ministers may and ought to be comforts to one another.

These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me. And

And they must be so, from their very office and employment, as fellow-workers in the kingdom of God. It belongs to their character, as true ministers of the gospel, that they are lovers of God, and of souls:—that they are ardently desirous of promoting the honor of God, and the happiness of men. And having their hearts warmly engaged in their work, it must yield them an high satisfaction;—it must afford them great support and consolation, that they are not alone in this;—that others are united with them, in the same important work, whose fervent wishes and prayers they have for their prosperity. Next to the visible success of their ministry, and their hope of being approved of God, this surely must exhilarate their spirits, and refresh and comfort their hearts. Again.

Ministers may be comforts to one another, by their friendly society and converse. Such is their situation and employment;—such their peculiar labours and trials, that they greatly need the countenance, and friendly society of one another. Those words of a very judicious and critical observer of the human mind, may be applied to this case with great pertinency—*Iron sharpeneth iron ; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.* † Their wasted and tired spirits are hereby recruited and refreshed, and they are prepared to prosecute their labours, with greater vigour and alacrity. Like St. Paul, upon meeting their brethren and friends, with whom they may converse with freedom and in love, they will be ready to *thank God and take courage.* ‡

And at such interviews they may be comforts to one another, by their friendly council and advice under discouragements. Ministers often stand in need of such kind offices from their brethren, when exercised with some grievous and perplexing trials, and their hearts are cast down and ready to sink within them. The encouraging language, and kind assistance of a friend, and fellow-labourer in the kingdom of God, will now revive and strengthen the soul, and enable it to surmount difficulties, that were ready to overwhelm it. *We were troubled*

*troubled on every side, (says St. Paul) without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless, God who comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.**

I shall take notice of but one instance more, in which ministers may be comforts to one another, though others might be added; and that is, by supporting and defending one another, so far as they can with justice, against the malevolent and injurious.

This is a service they owe to each other as brethren, and as ministers of the gospel. The honor of their divine master, and the interest of religion, are nearly concerned in it:—And they, perhaps, more than any order of men, are exposed to reproach and slander, and suffer this kind of abuse from unreasonable and wicked men; and sometimes from men who bear another character.

That tender concern ministers have, in common with others, for their own reputation, must cause them to receive with a very sensible pleasure, the generous kindness of their brethren, in defending them against the attacks of cruel enemies:—against stigmatizing reproaches uttered, it may be, with a seemingly pious zeal, by men of uncatholic and narrow minds:—in screening them from the effects of undeserved malice, and healing the wounds they receive from the envenomed tongue.

Such a faithful generous friend will appear to them like the good Samaritan, to the man who fell among thieves and murderers. But, how pitiable the case of such sufferers; and how culpable the conduct of their brethren, if *these*, like the Priest and Levite, in the sacred story, turn aside from them, and leave them to the mercy of their enemies? How much more pitiable their case, and how much more criminal their brethren, if, instead of acting the friendly part, they join their enemies, and endeavour their ruin? Such a want of friendship and kindness;—so base and ungenerous a behaviour, it is hoped, will seldom or never be seen among ministers of the gospel,

Improvement.

Improvement.

Upon what has been offered, my fathers and brethren, in the ministry, will now permit me,

1. Humbly to recommend it, as what may be of great and happy advantage to us, to keep in mind the nature of this kingdom of God, in which we are fellow-workers;—its divine constitution, and glorious design. This will place our proper business continually in view, and encourage and animate us in our work.

When we consider our Lord Jesus Christ, as the divinely appointed, and only head of the church:—When we consider him as the sole legislator and judge of christians:—When we conceive of him as alone having authority to determine the qualifications of his subjects, and so fix the terms upon which any shall be admitted to the privileges and blessings of this kingdom of God:—And when we consider christians, of whatever rank or character, as equally his subjects; and that, as his subjects, none of them can have any authority over others, either to make *new* laws for them, or, which amounts to the same thing, to impose upon their brethren, *their* sense of the laws which Christ has made; or to judge, censure, or punish his servants, in matters relating purely to conscience and salvation:—Our thus keeping in mind the nature of this kingdom of God, directly tends to keep us in our proper place and sphere of action. It will restrain us, on the one hand, from assuming to ourselves an unlawful authority, and lording it over others; and will guard us, on the other, against submitting to the unjust and imperious claims of such, as would aspire at dominion and lordship over us. And, thus acknowledging subjection to our common Lord, and to him only:—challenging and insisting upon the liberty of his subjects; and readily yielding the same to all our brethren, we shall keep within our line;—we shall avoid giving offence to one another;—We shall act in harmony and love, and be likely, in the best and most effectual manner, to answer the great and important ends of our ministry.

And

And when we consider again, the great and glorious design of that constitution of God, we have in the gospel;—that it is to bring light and happiness to an ignorant, depraved and miserable world;—that it is to reduce reasonable beings,—ourselves and others, our fellow-men, from error and misconduct;—to prepare us, by a penitent return to our duty, for the pardoning mercy of God, by Jesus Christ.—To refine, improve, and exalt our rational powers:—to form us to habits of piety, virtue and goodness; and thereby to prepare us for higher and more perfect services; and for sublime and everlasting delight and happiness, with saints and angels in heaven:—When we keep in view this design of the gospel scheme, and tendency of that divine polity erected by the Son of God:—When we consider it thus, in its relation to a future state, and to the moral improvement, and high and endless felicity of reasonable beings;—of our fellow creatures;—of our brethren, and of ourselves,—how must it warm our hearts! How must it animate us in our work! Have we in us the generous sentiments of humanity? Have we in us the kind, benevolent feelings of the christian temper? Do we wish the happiness of our brethren?—Do we wish our own?—Must not such apprehensions and views inspire us with a fervent zeal, and put us upon the most active and vigorous exertions?—make us willing to spend and be spent in the service of the gospel;—in promoting the kingdom of God;—the salvation and happiness of men?

2. May we always be concerned to act up to our character, as *fellow-workers* in the kingdom of God: and in these two respects especially:

1. By attention to our proper business, and diligence in it; and

2. By being comforts to one another.

1. Let us aim at acting up to our character, by attention to our proper business, and diligence in it.

We are solemnly separated to the gospel-ministry, and should therefore give ourselves to it;—attending chiefly

to this very thing. It is just and reasonable, that they who live of the altar, should wait on the altar ; and that, while we reap the carnal, or worldly good things of our people, we should be diligent in sowing to them spiritual things.

We have little to do with politicks, farther than to exhort our people, while they maintain a just regard for their natural and civil rights and privileges, to be subject to the higher powers ; and to pray for kings and all in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty.

Nor can we approve ourselves faithful to Christ, and to our particular charges, if, without just necessity, we much entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life.

Our business is in the study,—in the pulpit, and in friendly and pastoral visits among our people, for their assistance in the ways of God, not in the shop, in the warehouse, or the field.

Ministers, indeed, are sometimes obliged to concern themselves much with worldly business ;—their circumstances require it. And when this is owing to the negligence of their people, *these* are greatly in fault, and such ministers excusable :—The Levites were not blamed for flying every man to his field, when their portions were not given them.*

But, when by a suitable provision, they are free from this necessity, and, nevertheless, neglect their proper ministerial work ; and from a covetous desire of the world, spend a great part of their time in secular employments ; in this no doubt, they are in an high degree culpable. Such a *Demas*, who, from a love to this present world, forsakes his proper business, can scarcely be ranked among his brethren, and be called a *fellow-worker* in the kingdom of God.

And certainly, the important nature of our work ;—its important nature, both as to our people and ourselves, should make us active and diligent in it. The character of the slothful ill becomes us, in an employment, where the happiness of rational and immortal beings is concerned ; and upon our fidelity and diligence in which, depends our own acceptance with God.

Let

* Heb. xiii. 16.

Let us labour to have impressed upon our minds a lively and affecting sense of the worth of souls.—Let us often call to mind the account we must presently give of our ministry ; and be solicitous to save both ourselves and them that hear us. O, what an home-felt satisfaction,—what a transporting one, must it give us, having acted our part well, to receive that approbation from our divine master—*Well done good and faithful servants ; ye have been faithful—enter ye into the joy of your Lord !*

And let us be concerned to act up to our character likewise,

2. By being *comforts* to one another in our work.

Our own experience of the greatness and difficulty of that employment in which we are engaged, and of the peculiar trials we meet with in it, may have convinced us all of the need we stand in of this consolation ; and, doubtless, we, as well as others, are formed for the pleasing and supporting endearments of friendship ; and are capable of giving and receiving its blessings : And it must really reflect no small dishonour upon us, if less of social virtue is found among us, than among those, of almost any order of men, while our peculiar business calls us more constantly to converse with those divine doctrines and amiable examples of the gospel, which are fitted to inspire the soul with the most friendly and generous sentiments.

But is this really the case with us ? are we thus unsociable and unfriendly ? I ask pardon of my fathers and brethren. I meant not to suggest a general charge, nor, indeed, to accuse any one. However, a more general and perfect harmony, friendship, and love, is doubtless desirable. This, I presume, we wish for ; in this we should rejoice and be comforts to one another.

But, without assuming the airs of a dictator to my superiors, I may venture to say, this cannot be expected, whenever we are of such contracted and narrow minds ;—or, are filled with such uncharitable suspicions and jealousies of each other ;—or, are chargeable with such insincerity, and addict ourselves to such mean and low

arts, as destroy the foundation of friendly trust and confidence, and render intimacy dangerous.—

This cannot be expected, whenever we are ready hotly to contest and wrangle about disputable and lesser matters in religion;—when we are forward to insist upon, as of great weight and importance, and uncharitably to contend about certain points, not clearly revealed, or the importance of which, is not manifest in the gospel.—

This cannot be expected, if we aim at lording it over others;—if we challenge authority to interpret the doctrines and laws of Christ for our brethren, and to impose upon them our particular sense:—if we place our own decisions upon a level with the plain declarations of the word of God, by censuring and condemning those, who will not assent to our particular dogmas.—

This cannot be expected, if, from a restless and meddling turn of mind; or from a childish love of popularity, and a desire to raise our character among the people, we eagerly listen to the disaffected in other churches, and officiously encourage and assist them, in giving disturbance to their particular pastors:—or if, from a fond opinion of our own superior knowledge or sanctity, or from worse motives, we invade the particular charges, and enter into the labours of our brethren;—if we endeavour to make room for,—to crowd ourselves in, and to build ourselves up, upon the ruin of our brethren, and of the church's peace, &c.

Such things as these, it is obvious, are destructive of all friendly agreement, harmony and peace:—they preclude that trust and confidence in one another, which are the foundation of intimacy and free conversation:—They tend to make us fearful of one another,—watchful and shy. And, with such dispositions, and such manners, instead of being comforts to each other, we must, in a natural course of things, be disturbers and troublers of each other; and the promoters of strifes, contentions, and divisions, to the dishonour of Christ, and of ourselves, and to the scandal of religion.

Sensible, therefore, of our common weaknesses and imperfections, and of the difficulties attending the ministerial

sterial office, let us have compassion one of another :—love as brethren,—be pitiful and courteous.

As fallible creatures, and liable to mistakes, let us candidly bear with one another ; and, as becomes labourers together in the kingdom of God, endeavour to encourage each other's hearts, and to strengthen each other's hands.

Let us carefully guard against that spirit of domination and censoriousness, which so ill becomes us, as fellow-servants of Jesus Christ, and equally accountable to him : And while we honestly endeavour to understand his doctrines and laws, in the best manner we can, let us readily yield to others the same liberty ; without censoring and condemning them, because they do not see, and understand, and believe just as we do, knowing that to our common master, but not to us, they stand or fall.

Let us, as becomes brethren, cherish in our breasts a catholic and charitable temper, and a friendly, generous concern for each other's welfare : And, in all the plain and most important things of religion, wherein we are agreed, heartily unite in promoting and building up the kingdom of God :—in instructing, guiding, and encouraging our people, in the way to blessedness by Jesus Christ. Thus, I conceive, we shall act up to our character, as fellow-workers in the kingdom of God :—Thus, it is likely, we shall be comforts and blessings to one another, and blessings to our people. And,

Finally, May it be the concern of us all, both ministers and others, that we are the true subjects of this kingdom of God, and that we promote it in the world.

Being favoured with the gospel revelation, it is of the highest consequence to every one of us, that we receive the testimony which God hath given of his Son :—That we receive *him* as our divine teacher and Lord :—That while we hope for the pardon of our sins, thro' the blood of atonement, we cordially receive his instructions ;—submit to the government of his laws, and make it our serious care, to live agreeable to the sacred rules and precepts of the gospel.

And

And of great importance it must be, and highly become us, as christians, that we labour to promote this kingdom of God in the world. As ministers, this is, indeed, our special business; but, private christians may be our fellow-helpers unto the truth, without quitting their proper stations, or acting out of character. They may do this, by cheerfully supporting and encouraging their ministers in their work; and by their readiness to stand up for, and defend them against dispiriting abuse, from evil-minded men; and sometimes even from good men, under the influence of mistaken apprehensions, and a wrong misguided zeal. They may do this by their own diligent and exemplary attendance on their ministry:—by their religious and virtuous conversation in the world; and by their liberal contributions for the promotion of pious and charitable designs, and the support and propagation of the gospel in the world.

In such ways people in general may be helpful to enlarge this kingdom;—to increase the number of its subjects;—to promote the honor of God, and the happiness of men.

They may be helpful, in bringing to the enjoyment of everlasting felicity, numbers of their fellow-creatures, who are made for eternity, and are in danger of endless wretchedness. How transporting a thought! How glorious a design!—Herein you will concur and act with the greatest and best of Beings, in the best and most important work upon earth;—in banishing vice and misery, and promoting virtue and happiness among reasonable beings.

This, surely, may warm the heart;—this may well fire the breast of every good man, and lead him to cheerful, zealous, and vigorous endeavours, to spread the knowledge of the truth, and to promote the kingdom of God.

And may such apprehensions—such views, and hopes, greatly quicken and animate us all in our duty;—support us under trials, and make us steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.
