

II. The importance of holding scriptural views on this subject.

III. The danger of detracting from the influence of the ministry, or injuring God's servants.

I. The dignity of the ministerial office. The high and responsible position of the minister of the gospel is indicated in our text and context in a threefold manner. They are acting for God—instead of Christ—and engaged in the most important work ever entrusted to man.

First: We are the constituted ambassadors of the great G.O.L. "God hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." "Ambassadors—through whom God beseech you." The proper idea of an Ambassador is that of a person sent by a prince or king to transact important matters in his name, and according to his instructions, with those at a distance. In this way a peace is usually concluded between contending nations, not by kings in person, but by their ambassadors, acting in their name and with their authority. And while these plenipotentiaries observe their instructions, the business which they transact is as binding as if carried on by their masters in person. The position of these ambassadors is to be estimated according to the position of the kings for whom they act. If employed by the most distinguished of this world's potentates, their position must be regarded correspondingly high. The ministers of the Gospel are the commissioned ambassadors of the King of kings, and Lord of lords: the supreme Ruler of the Universe, whose power extends over all worlds, all time, onwards through eternity. The fact that He has many ambassadors sent forth in His name, adds lustre to His Kingdom: and each one acting for Him is to be regarded His ambassador with the same authority as if He had no other employed in our world. The infinitely wise and true God has sent His ambassadors forth on an embassy of love to beseech you.

"Second: "Ambassadors for Christ"—in Christ's stead." The pre-eminent dignity of the Person, whose place ministers occupy, indicates the dignity of the office. Had we to do the work, to supply the place of the ancient prophets, and the honored Apostles; the place of Moses or Elijah; of Isaiah or Jeremiah; of a John or Paul, the position might be regarded entitled to respect. We are delegated in "Christ's stead" to do the work of the ministry. The Lord Jesus is not now personally in our world to treat of peace and to manage the affairs of His Church, but He has appointed first the Apostles, and then the ministers of the gospel, through every age, to carry on the work of reconciliation in His name, and with His authority. Christ has furnished His ministers with a commission to make overtures of reconciliation to a rebel world, and to watch over the interests of His

Church on earth. Therefore the Apostle enjoins, "Let a man account of us, as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God;" and knowing that some would charge him with overrating the position of the minister of Christ, he warns such, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come"—as if he had said, Let no one be too ready to pre-judge us; wait until the great day, when it shall be clearly seen what our motive is in undertaking the work of the ministry, and seeking to "magnify the office." And the Apostle would have them to receive the important lesson, that their proper reception of the message will depend on their regarding ministers the ambassadors of Christ. "We pray you in Christ's stead"—as if he had said, If Christ were now present in person, this is what He would urge upon you, "be you reconciled to God."

Third: The dignity of the Christian Ministry may appear when we rightly consider the nature of the work. "He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation—we pray you be ye reconciled to God." Great and marvellous are all the works of God. Great and marvellous were the works of Christ Jesus during his state of humiliation. But the work on which He set all the powers of His soul—that to which all His other works pointed and were designed to illustrate, was the salvation of souls; and the special means which He instituted to carry on this work, is the ministry of the gospel. This is clearly brought out in our Catechism, "The spirit of God maketh the reading, but *especially the preaching of the Word*, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation." This is abundantly sustained in the holy Scriptures. Two quotations may suffice to establish this. The great Apostle declares that the preaching of Christ crucified is the "power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation." "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The history of the Church, moreover, affords manifold proofs that the preaching of the gospel is the main agency which God blesses in our world, both in disseminating a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and inspiring a vigorous, manly piety in the Church. And, on the other hand, where His Word is not faithfully preached, all manner of open wickedness abounds. And this might readily be believed when it is considered that the last command of Him who is head over all things to His Church, supported with His last promise ere He left our world, is, "Go and preach the gospel to every creature, and so I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world."

II. The importance of cherishing scriptural