

On Wednesday the xxvii. of March. 1555.

The third Sermon upon the first Chapter.

9 And at the same time I spake to you, saying, I cannot beare you my selfe alone:

10 The Lord your God hath multiplyed you: and behold, you are this day in number as the starres of the skye.

11 The Lord the God of your fathers make you to increase a thowsand times as many as you be, and blesse you as he hath sayd unto you.

12 How shall I alone beare you comberance, charge, and strife?

13 Bring me from among you, men of wisdom and understanding, and tryed men, according to your trybes, and I will make them your heades.

14 Then answered you me and sayd: It is good to doe as thou hast sayd.

15 Then tooke I the heades of your tribes, men of wisdom and skil, and made them governers over you, rulers over thowsandes, over hundreds, over fifties, over tennes, and officers among your tribes.



mong the benefites that God bestowed upon the people of Israel after his delivering of them from the thraldome of Egypt, one is that he did always lay hold on them to governe them. For without that, what would become of men? If all thnges be well considered, there is lesse government in them, than in brute beastes. So then, it was needeful that God should take order for the governing of them. And now Moses putteth the people in remembrance how God had bin their guide at all times, and had not onely bin contented to rid them out of the horrible thraldome wherein they had bin held, but also had established such a government and state among them, as there was no let but in themselves, that they

might not live in quiet, and also walke in all kind of uprightnes. It is all one therefore as if Moses should say, See how greatly ye be beholden to your God: For he hath every way provided well for you: he hath continually pitied you, and by all meanes procured your welfare. And in very deede, the remembrance of Gods benefites, ought to provoke us continually to serve him the better: and when we see that he hath not fayled us in any thing, is it not reason that we shoulde be the more disposed to yeele our selves wholly to his obeisance? For he sheweth how deere we be unto him, what love he beareth towards us, and what a care he hath of our weldoing, when he procureth it after such maner.

And by the way, wee have to note here for a speciall poynt, that when God setteth a

good order among us, and appointeth men to have the guiding of us: it is a singular president of his goodnesse and love towards us. True it is that the thing which is rehersed here by Moses, proceeded of the counsel of Jethro his father in law, as he himself sheweth in the eyghteenth of Exodus¹. And although Jethro was an heathen man: yet did God serve his owne turne by him in this behalfe. And so we see, that God applyeth all thinges and all persons to our benefite. Who would have looked that a man which had none acquaintance with the people of Israel, saving that Moses had maryed a wife out of his house, should have come and given such counsell? But so doth God apply all his creatures to the benefite of his people, as I sayd afore.

Besides this, we have to note the lowlynesse of Moses, in that he held not scorne of the counsell that was given him by one that was not so excellent as he himselfe, nothing neere. Moses might have replied and sayd, what fellowe is this? For I am chosen of God to governe his Church, and to be the chiefe of it. I have published his lawe in his name, I have represented his majestie, yea and he hath given mee such a visible signe thereof in my face, as though I were an Angell come downe from heaven, rather than any earthly man. I have bin separated from the companie of mortall men by the space of fortie dayes, as though God had glorified me already: and shall a common person presume now to teach me? Moses then might have cast fourth such wordes: but he submitted himselfe to reason. Why so? for he knew that God dealeth his gracious giftes as it pleaseth him, insomuch that the little ones may divers times further the greatest and excellentest. And therein God intendeth to try the sobernesse and mildnesse of those whome hee hath advaunced to degree of

sovereintie. God when they forget not themselves, but are alwayes pliable, and if a man bring them any better advice than they themselves wist of, they receive it willingly, and yeld unto it: it is a true tryal of their obedientnesse [unto God.] Seing then that Moses, who was chiefe among all the auncient prophets, could finde in his heart to yeeld to the counsell of his father in lawe Jethro, who never knew what true Religion ment, but had only a little taste of it in a shadow: what shal we do which are not come to the like glorie that Moses had? Wherefore let us understand, that although God have bestowed his spirit most plentifully uppon us: it is not to the end that we should hold skorne of the advice and counsell of such as are meaner than our selves. For the meane and very knot wherewith God will have us knit and joyned together: is that the greate ones should stoope to the least, and all agree in one. Moreover, as hath beene declared already, although Jethro was the instrument to put Moses in mind of it: yet ought it to be imputed unto God, who had a care to provide for the benefite and safetie of his people, that he might not faile them in any thing. And to this intent is it that Moses speaketh thereof. Now let us come to the words that are set downe here.

First he sayth, *that he himselfe is not able to beare them any more alone, because they were greatly increased: for you be (sayth he) mo than the starres of the sky:* and we knowe that hey were moe than seven hundred thowsand persons. Seeing it is so then, I am no more able (saith he) to beare your charges, your incumbrances, and your strifes: and therefore you must bee faine to choose some men to bee in office with me, men of wisdome and understanding, and well tryed. First of all, whereas Moses protesteth that he was no longer able to beare the charge of the people: therein he sheweth us, that such as are advaunced to any degree of honor or

¹ Exodus 18:17

dignitie, must not be as Idols without doing any thing at all, but [are set in that state] with condition to take paynes, yea and to doe service for the welfare of the commons, in asmuch as God hath layed that burthen upon their shoulders, for the upholding of the common weale. And it is a poynt of doctrine well woorthie to be observed. For we see how all men are given to ambition, so as every man seekes to be esteemed and honored, and all indeavour to growe great. And why? Because wee consider not, that Gods advauncing of us is to the intent we shoulde represent his person in this worlde. And surely that cannot be without incumbrance. The more honorable therefore that any charge or office is, the more paynful and cumbersome is it. But for asmuch as men imagine an idle honor: that fancie of theirs caryeth them into so fond or rather furious overlustinesse, that they passe for no more but to have their owne swindge, and to mount up on high, yea even (diverse times) to breake their owne neckes.

And on the other side it behoveth us to marke well, how Moses sayeth that he is not able to beare so great a charge: for it doth us to wit, that he bewrayeth his owne infirmitie, or at leastwise sheweth it to be such, as he must be faine to beare a lower sayle. Thus then the second consideration which we ought to have to correct all ambition and foolish loftinesse in us with all, is that we must examine well our owne abilitie, and then shal we finde that it were more for our behoofe to creepe belowe upon the ground, than to covet to growe great to overrule our neyghbors. These (say I) are the two respectes that may abate our pryde and fond desire of superioritie. The one is, that we assure our selves that the hygher a man is exalted, the more also is he bound both to God and to them over whom he is set, inasmuch as there is no preheminance without burthen, yea or rather without bondage as I sayd afore. Marke that for one poynt. But we must also

beare in minde, that wee have no abilitie at all of our selves, and therefore much lesse is any man to be found sufficient to beare so great a burthen. There cannot so small a charge be committed unto us, but the same is able to make our shoulders shrinke, yea and even to bow too. For our infirmitie is so great, that whosoever sifteth himselfe throughly without hypocrisie and soothing, shall see that he is able to doe as good as nothing at all. Therefore if we think wel upon such weaknesse, it wilbe as a bridle to restraine us from clymbing so high. For what followeth but utter confusion, when men will needes be honored, and yet in the meane while not discharge their duetie, but rather make themselves as Idols, and moreover not have any regard at all of their owne abilitie?

Furthermore wee must marke also for a thyrd point, that although Moses sawe the burthen to be overheavie for him: yet he did not quite and cleane renounce his calling, to give over the office that God had committed unto him: but fought to be helped and succored, saying, *Let men be chosen etc.* And this is well worthie to be noted: for there might have bin two faultie extremities. The one is that which wee have condemned already: that is to wit, that men have not an eye to their owne slendernesse, but beare them selves in hand that it is a matter of no importance to be in authoritie. And that is it, that maketh him so rashe and bolde to gripe more that they be able to weelde, by reason whereof they see themselves confounded in the ende, but it is too late first. For this foolish overweening maketh men to forget them selves, and to take too much upon them for want of considering their owne unabilitie: and of such fonde enterpryses can come nothing but evill, because God punisheth them for them.

Nowe there is also an other evill extremitie, which is, that when men see themselves to be very fraile, they become

faintharted and thereupon, if God call them to anie office of charge, they plucke backe their neckes because they see the burthen cumbersome for them, and woulde faine shake off the yoke, and shun the vocation that God calleth them unto. That is a vice whereof we must beware. But there is a meane betweene both, which is, when we see that the cumbersomnesse therof passeth our power: then to take as much therof as we be able to beare, measuring our selves by our owne span, and moreover to pray unto God to make us meete to go through with the thinges that shall be commaunded us. Those are the thinges that are shewed us here by the example of Moses. For he did not fling away the governement of the people: because that in so doing he should have bin a rebell against God. We see how God delt with Jonas, for he overtooke him though he fled away. Therefore we must not refuse to obey God under pretence of our owne feeblenesse, though the charges or offices which he allotteth unto us be so troublesome, that we must be faine to grone under them. What soever come of it, let us hold this rule: namely to submit our selves to Gods calling, and to followe him whither soever he will have us. And above all thinges let us pray unto him to supply our wantes: and in the meane time let us not take too much upon us, but let us measure our charge by our abilitie.

Were this wel followed, wee should not see so many outrageous disorders everywhere as ther be. For what hath caused so barbarous tyranny in the Church, as is to be seene in the Popedome? Behold, the Pope hath usurped an universall supremacie over the whole world. For there must needes be one head sayth he. Verily as who should say that Jesus Christ were discharged, who is ordeined to be the head both of men and Angels. No: but the Pope will needes thrust the Sonne of God out of

his place². But if he wist what it is to reigne over the whole world: would he not be loath to take upon him so unpossible a charge? yes: but it cost him nothing to call himselfe the universal head, and to spread out his winges every way. Therefore that divelish pride of his was the cause of the breaking and renting assunder of the order which God had set, according as S. Paul speaketh of it in the fourth to the Ephesians³, where he sayth that our Lord Jesus Christ is gone up into heaven to fill all thinges, and yet in the meane while hath not forsaken his Church. For he hath ordeyned Shepherdes (sayth he) and men meete to teach. And he addeth that that is according to the measure of every member, that we might al grow together, and Jesus Christ reigne over us in cheefe place.

Thus doth Saint Paul distribute the offices in such wise, as every man must have his portion of them, because there is not any one man that is able to doe all. But this order which ought to be unviolable, is rent assunder by the divelish pryde of the Pope.

And afterward his taile, and the vermin of his clergie have followed the same: for there is none of them all that mindeth his charge. When they angle for their benefices, doe they consider that Gods calling of them is with condition, that they shall yeeld an account of the soules that are committed to them? There is no talke among them but what a benefice is worth: and anon after, pomp and credite must be matched therewithall: and so they give themselves to all lycentiousnesse. A man shall see, not onely Byshops, but also Archbishops and Primates, which passe for nothing but for humting, or drinking, or playing, or chambering: those are their ordinarie trades. And why? for it never came in their thoughtes, that the honour which they have

² Ephesians 2:20; Colossians 2:10

³ Ephesians 4:10

usurped, shoulde bee matched with any bond of duetie. And this hath happened, not onely in the Churchmen, but also in all estates.

If Princes nowadaies did mind the charge which they have taken in hand: thinke you that the whole world should be so turmoyled with warres, and that every of them would be catching and snatching to inlarge his territories? No: for there is not any one which hath but a countrie of one leage to rule, which findeth not himselfe throughly incumbered, if he have a regarde of his office and dutie, as well towards God as towards his subjectes. And yet notwithstanding he that hath a countrie of two hundred leages under him, woulde faine subdewe the whole world to him. And why is that? Because he thinketh not upon the furthen that Moses speakes of here. As who should say, there were not a rule given to all such as are in any preheminance or authoritie, which is uttrered and declared of God by the mouth of Moses as of his herault: namely that they be not Idols to sit over their people in pompe only: but that they must beare the burthen of the people, which cannot be without an honorable kinde of bondage as is sayd afore.

Also this extendeth even unto private persons. There is not that man which seeketh not to get still more and more: and when he hath three times as much renews as hee needeth for his housholde, yet is he stil laying of baytes, to joyne peece to peece. For no man bethinketh himself, How discharfe I my selfe of that which God hath given me already? I have goods under my hands, I have an houshold, I ought to occupy my selfe in trayning my wife, my children, and my servantes in the feare of God: I ought to have mine eyes always open, to see that nothing be done in my house whereby God my be offended. As touching my goods, I ought to use them in such wise, as they may be imployed according to Gods will. If I have

aboundance, I ought to relieve such as have want and neede. Howbeit, no man looketh to this geere, but such as have goods are as gulfes to swallowe up all that ever they can finger: there is no other talke with them, but how they may bring all thinges under their pawes, so as no man may be succoured at his neede. For all is one with them, so they may make their hand. As for Gods honor, they passe not so much for it, but that they had liver to be sotted in the world, and to reigne in it at their peasure. And in the meane while they be still set upon gathering, and they consider not that in so doing they doe but plunge themselves continually into greater cursednesse.

Wherefore let us marke well the doctrine that is given us here by the example of Moses: which is, that first of all every of us must consider, that when God vouchsafeth to put any goods into our handes, or to advaunce us to any degree: hee bindeth us with the straiter bond, and we have the harder account to make: to the ende we may learne thereby to holde our selves within the boundes of our owne slender abilitie, when it pleaseth God to have it so. Moreover let us also have a continuall eye to our owne infirmitie, so as we may acknowledge that our abilitie is very small: and if it please not God to advaunce us, let us not beare envy towards them that are in that daunger, and have that heavy burthen uppon their shoulders. If they feele it not: it is so much the woorse for them. And for our owne part (as I sayd afore) let us be contented that our Lord let us alone sitting as it were upon the ground, and let us not covet to climbe higher. Also therewithal let us have compassion uppon such as beare the hard burthen, and let us pray God to give them strength and might at their neede: for wee see that if God let them alone, they must needs be utterly undone. And thirdly, if it please God to put us in any office, let us be ready to obey him, at leastwise according to our abilitie.

Howbeit, let us not take too much upon us, least this olde sayd saw be verified upon us, that he which grypeth too much can hardly holde it. But let us advisedly offer our selves unto God that he may governe us by his holy spirit, so as every of us may doe his duetie, and every of us imploy himselfe according to his measure and abilitie, referring all our doings to the common weale, to the ende that God may be served thereby, and our labor may redound to the benefite of the people committed to our charge. Thus ye see in effect what wee have to marke.

Now must wee also marke this saying of Moses, *Choose ye men of wisdom and of good skill, men well tryed, that they may be set over you according to your tribes, even over Thousandes, over Hundreds, and over Fifties*, as wee shall see afterward. Hereby it is shewed us, that when men are to be chosen to beare office in the common weale, they must be chosen with discretion, and not taken at aladventure whosoever can thrust in himselfe first: neither must they be preferred at any mans pleasure for favor or for some fond bravery: but in such wise as God may overrule the choyce, and such men be picked out as are knowen to be meete to occupy the roomes that they be called unto. And specially wee must observe that which is rehearsed in the eighteenth chapter of Exodus heretofore alledged⁴: for there Jethro sayth that we must take such men as are stout, fearing God, lovers of the trueth, and haters of covetousnesse. Who is he that speaketh this? A poore heathen man, as I have sayd already: and yet God governeth his tongue in such wise, as we cannot have a better teacher than him, when we be about to choose men to governe a people. First of all he requireth men that are stout, such as are not womanish, but have wherewith to go through with such a charge, and have both good zeale, courage,

and noble-mindednesse. Howbeit, forasmuch as without the feare of God all the vertues in man doe turne to evill: behold, Jethro who never heard anie one worde of holy scripture, doth notwithstanding perceive ful wel that it is impossible for a man to discharge his duetie in governing a people, unlesse he feare God. If a heathen man could speake after that manner: what a shame is it for us nowadayes, that wee should have lesse discretion than he? And yet a man may see with his eyes how the worlde goeth. Have men this consideration with them when they goe about to choose officers of Justice, that they will needes have the feare of God to be the first thing in the partie? True it is that men wilprofesse so, and even nature compelleth us to say, that we had neede of men that are wise, and stout, verily as graunting covertly that there is neither wisdom nor courage, without the feare of God beare sway. Againe, to expresse the fruites of the feare of God yet the better, Jethro addeth, that there must be uprightnesse and trueth. As if he should say, that a man shall never be meete to govern, unlesse he have soundnesse in him, so as hee be not hollowharted, but walke on with a good conscience. And because that brybes doe blinde the eyes of the wise, and make good men to swarve from uprightnesse: he sayth that if we will have men fit to beare authoritie, they must hate covetousnesse and despise the goods of this worlde, so as they can finde in their hearts to forbear them. Seing then that such a lesson is told us by a heathen man: I pray you what a shame shall it be, that we which professe our selves to be brought up in the lawe of God and in his Gospell, and have our eares so much beaten with it, should still be novices in the doctrine, or at leastwise put it so ill in practise among us? And yet for all that, if we use it not to our profite, it is written to be kept to our great confusion, and to make us unexcusable.

⁴ Exodus 18:17

So then, let us wey wel this saying where Moses exhortheth the people *to shoose men of understanding and wisdom, and tryed men*. For if a man be put on the office but upon hope, without good knowledge and experience had of him: is it not a defiling of the seate of God and of Justice? In deede God reserveth to himselfe the sovereintie over all men, as he is also worthe to have: and yet notwithstanding he wilbe served by mortal men as by his ministers and officers: and therefore the seate of justice is (as ye would say) consecrated or hallowed unto him, as shall be shewed in the next lesson. Now, there is taking of men at aladventure, and they know not what they ought to doe, nor how to behave themselves. Well, such a one must needs make a tryal what he can do, and when he is once set in his seate, he wil have an eye to himselfe. yea? Shal he that would not take a Cowheard or a Shepheard into his house upon bare hope, without knowledge or understanding of him what he is: shall he (I say) go set a man in Gods seate, of whom he hath no knowledge, and of whom he hath no experience to judge what he is? Now then, let us be well advized, and forasmuch as God graunteth us the grace or rather priviledge of choosing officers to governe us, which is not common to all people: in any wise let us not abuse that gift of God, or els we shal be amazed to see our selves bereft thereof. And soothly the very cause why so many tyrannies are crept into the world, is that all nations have forgone their freedome, so as there is no more election, by reason whereof Princes do sell the offices of Justice, and thinges are so out of order as is horrible to see. And whereof commeth that, but that when the people had the election in their hands, they abused it, and so were worthy that God should bereave them of the honor that he had done them? For is it not as good as a wilful provoking of Gods wrath, and spyting of him, when folke having free election,

whereas they should choose men to serve God and to be as his officers, doe in stead thereof keepe rowtings in Taverns or Alehouses, and even as it were in skorne and mockerie of God, choose such as are most unthriftes and furthest out of order? See ye not how it is a perverting of all order? To be short, it should seeme that men intended to thrust God out of his seat, when they set his enemies in it after that sort, and such as despise him, and such as seeke nothing else but to treade his name and Majestie under their feete. When men deale so, is it any wonder that God sendeth such disorder into the world as wee see there is? Now then, it standeth us so much the more on hand to marke wel this doctrine, where it is saide that when God giveth a people libertie to choose officers, they must not abuse it, but must use discretion in choosing of them. Yea and forasmuch as we may often times be deceived, it behooveth us to resort unto God, that he may give us discretion and governe us with his holy spirite, as though he had poynted them out with his finger whom we ought to choose. And that is the cause why I said that elections shal never be wel ordered, except God overrule them by his holy spirit.

Last of al Moses saith, *I wil set them over you to rule you*. He sheweth that God had given him atheritie, and yet a man may see that he imparted it unto the people, and shewed by his doings, as we have seene afore, that he chalenged not to himselfe an inordinate power, but acknowledged that God had bound him to the common weale. So then, Moses hath atheritie and knowes well enough that Gods wil was to preferre him above the rest of the people, and yet doth not he abose his right for al that, but referreth all unto the people. As if he should say, I will but onely shewe the way how to guide, and in so doing I will take the payne to my selfe, as for the honor, I give it over unto you. And the same mind ought to be in

all good magistrates and governors of people, that they may be able to maintaine the authoritie that is requisite: for even to that end also hath God set them up. But howsoever the world goe, let them not seeke their owne profite, but let them indeavour to make themselves fit ministers as nere as is possible, alwayes maintaining the chiefe charge that is committed unto them.

But now let us come to that which Moses interlaceth concerning the multitude of the people. *Your God* (saith he) *hath increased you, in such wise that you be now as the starres of the skye, and I beseech him to increase you a thousand times moe:* or els, he will increase you a thousand times more, according as he hath promised you. Here Moses, in alledging the hardnesse that he had to decide all cases, doth also shewe the people Gods blessing and grace. And thereby a man may see, that his chiefe travell was to make the people conceive the benefites that they had received at Gods hande and that is a lesson which we cannot be put in minde of too often. For on the one side wee see what unthankfulness is in us, how we shut our eyes at the benefites that God bestoweth upon us, Not that we lyke not to have them: but for that we consider not from whence they come, that we might glorify the giver of them. And on the other side wee abuse the giftes that wee gave received, because wee bethinke not our selves how it is God that hath put them into our handes. Nay, which worse is, wee see how men do so vaunt themselves of them, that Gods glorie is darkened thereby, as though they were not beholden to God at all. And not onely that, but it should seeme also that they arme themselves against him to bid him battell, for shewing of himselfe so bountifull towards them: and as shall bee shewed in the two and thirtieth Chapter⁵, they play the overpampered Jades, which fall to kicking

against their maisters. See (I say) how God is unacknowledged of us in his benefites. And afterward when wee have forgotten him, wee grow after a sort heathenish, and all his giftes are defiled by us. Sith wee see this, let us consider that this doctrine cannot bee too often set afore us: namely, that when God chooseth us to doe him service, he bindeth us to him the more exceedingly. And therefore his opening of his benefites unto us, and his setting of them before our eyes, is to the ende wee should knowe that he is readie to continue them still towards us, if wee let him not through our unthankfulness. Therefore if we be often told of the free goodnesse of our God, and it be shewed us how richly he hath powred out his benefites upon us: although it seeme to be a very common matter, and that we have heard ynough of it before: yet let us assure our selves, it cannot bee spoken too much. Wee see howe Moses, who is the true patterne of all Prophets and true ministers of Gods worde, behaved himselfe in that case. And forasmuch as he stode so much upon that point: let such as have the charge of teaching in the Christian Church, bee sure that they can never be too lavish in that behalfe: and let all people also understand, that the often putting of them in remembrance of Gods benefits is not a needlesse and unprofitable doctrine. Marke that for one point.

Furthermore Moseses intent is that the people should perceive and have it manifestly proved, that the great increase of them came not of the common order of nature, as we see that the world doeth multiply: but that it was a very myracle of God. And for the same cause doeth he also set downe the similitude that was behighted to their father Abraham. For God had shewed him the starres of the skie in a vision, and sayde unto him: thy seede shall be as the starres of the skie. Like as the number of the starres is infinite, so shall thy seede be after thee. Now then to the intent

⁵ Deutereonomy 32:15

to magnifie Gods grace, and to print it the better in the peoples heartes: Moses sayeth thus unto them: you know what was promised to your father Abraham, how that his ofspring should bee in number as the starres of the skie. Now therefore, see what a multitude is of you. For in very deede it is a wonder, considering howe small an number went downe into Egypt. When they went thither they were byt one houshold, and little above threescore persons. But when they came out, they were not any longer sixtie, but welneere seven hundred thousand, and it was within lesse than three hundred yeeres, that this number was so increased. For the foure hundred and thirtie yeeres are to bee reckened from the promise make unto the people. And wee see that Abraham was long time without child. In the end he had Isaac, who by all likelyhood should have bene made away. There was some likelyhood that Jacob should be increased: he had twelve sonnes: but what was that in respect of such a multitude? So then, Moses ment purposely to declare unto the people, that their multiplying came of the grace of God, yea even after an extraordinarie maner, and not after the course of nature. And yet notwithstanding, (which shall serve for an end) Moses prayeth unto God to increase the people still, or rather assureth the people that he will increase them more and more. Although this multitude was a great trouble to Moses: yet doeth he not grudge at it, but receivet it as a blessing of God joyfully, and glorifieth him for accomplishing so his promise. And therewithall he hath a care to provide for them by good meanes, seeking nothing but that God might be served and honoured, and that the favour which he had begun to shewe to his people, might continue till it were come to full perfection.

Now let us kneele downe in the presence of our good God with acknowledgement of our faultes, praying him to vouchsafe to make us so to feele

them, as we may come to him with true repentance to crave forgiveness of them, and he release them in such wise, as wee may seeke nothing but to give over our selves wholly unto him, forsaking all the lustes of our flesh, and all the untoward desires which plucke us backe to the worlde, and turne us away from the obeying of righteousness. And so let us all say, Almighty God heavenly father, etc.