

as that expression, "The lower parts of the earth," may be diversely understood: for the *τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς*, "The lower parts of the earth," are either the whole earth,—that is, those lower parts of the creation,—or some part of it; for the word "lower" includes a comparison either with the whole creation or with some part of itself. In the first sense, Christ's state of humiliation is intended, wherein he came down from heaven into these lower parts of God's creation, conversing on the earth. In the latter, his grave and burial are intended; for the grave is the lowest part of the earth into which mankind doth descend. And both of these, or his humiliation as it ended in his death and burial, may be respected in the words. And that which the apostle designs to manifest is, that the deep humiliation and the death of Christ are the fountain and original of the ministry of the church, by way of acquisition and procurement. *It is a fruit whose root is in the grave of Christ*; for in those things, in the humiliation and death of Christ, lay the foundation of his mediatory authority, whereof the ministry is an effect, Phil. ii. 6–11. And it was appointed by him to be the ministry of that peace between God and man which was made therein and thereby, Eph. ii. 14, 16, 17; for when he had made this peace by the blood of the cross, he preached it in the giving these gifts unto men for its solemn declaration. See 2 Cor. v. 18–21. Wherefore, because the authority from whence this gift proceeded was granted unto Christ upon his descending into the lower parts of the earth, and the end of the gift is to declare and preach the peace which he made between God and man by his so doing, this gift relates thereunto also. Hereon doth the honour and excellency of the ministry depend, with respect hereunto is it to be esteemed and valued,—namely, its relation unto the spiritual humiliation of Christ,—and not from the carnal or secular exaltation of those that take it upon them.

3. It appears to be an eminent and signal gift from the immediate cause of its actual communication, or the present qualification of the Lord Christ for the bestowing of it; and this was his glorious exaltation upon his ascension. A right unto it was acquired by him in his death, but his actual investiture with all glorious power was to precede its communication, Eph. iv. 8, 10. He was first to ascend up on high, to triumph over all his and our adversaries, put now under him into absolute and eternal captivity, before he gave out this gift. And he is said here to "ascend far above all heavens,"—that is, these visible and aspectable heavens, which he passed through when he went into the glorious presence of God, or unto the right hand of the Majesty on high. See Heb. iv. 14, with our Exposition thereon. It is also added why he was thus gloriously exalted, and this was that he might "fill up all things;" not *φυσικῶς*, but *ἐνεργητικῶς*,—not

in the essence of his nature, but in the exercise of his power. He had laid the foundation of his church on himself in his death and resurrection, but now the whole fabric of it was to be filled with its utensils and beautified with its ornaments. This he ascended to accomplish, and did it principally in the collation of this gift of the ministry upon it. This was the first exercise of that glorious power which the Lord Christ was vested withal upon his exaltation, the first effect of his wisdom and love, in filling all things, unto the glory of God and the salvation of his elect. And these things are mentioned, that in the contemplation of their greatness and order we may learn and judge how excellent this donation of Christ is. And it will also appear from hence how contemptible a thing the most pompous ministry in the world is, which doth not proceed from this original.

4. The same is manifest from the nature of the gift itself; for this gift consisteth in gifts: "He gave gifts," Eph. iv. 8. There is an active giving expressed, "He gave;" and the thing given, that is, "gifts." Wherefore the ministry is a gift of Christ, not only because freely and bountifully given by him to the church, but also because spiritual gifts do essentially belong unto it, are indeed its life, and inseparable from its being. A ministry without gifts is no ministry of Christ's giving, nor is of any other use in the church but to deceive the souls of men. To set up such a ministry is both to despise Christ and utterly to frustrate the ends of the ministry, those for which Christ gave it, and which are here expressed; for,—(1.) Ministerial gifts and graces are the great evidence that the Lord Christ takes care of his church and provides for it, as called into the order and unto the duties of a church. To set up a ministry which may be continued by outward forms and orders of men only, without any communication of gifts from Christ, is to despise his authority and care. Neither is it his mind that any church should continue in order any longer or otherwise than as he bestows these gifts for the ministry. (2.) That these gifts are the only means and instruments whereby the work of the ministry may be performed, and the ends of the ministry attained, shall be farther declared immediately. The ends of the ministry here mentioned, called its "work," are, the "perfecting of the saints, and the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all come unto a perfect man." Hereof nothing at all can be done without these spiritual gifts; and therefore a ministry devoid of them is a mock ministry, and no ordinance of Christ.

5. The eminency of this gift appears in the variety and diversity of the offices and officers which Christ gave in giving of the ministry. He knew there would, and had appointed there should, be a twofold estate of the church, Eph. iv. 11,—(1.) Of its first election and foundation; (2.) Of its building and edification. And different both offices