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SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL
THE GOSPEL MINISTER

The Doctrine of the Cherubim
Opened and Explained

EZEKIEL 10:20

by John Gill

(London: George Keith, 1766)

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*

— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 73

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHERUBIM OPENED AND EXPLAINED

*A Sermon at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. John Davis, at
Waltham Abbey.
Preached August 15, 1764.*

 **EZEKIEL 10:20**

This is the living creature, that I saw under the God of Israel, by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the Cherubim.

Being desired to say something to you, my Brother, on this occasion, relative to the ministerial character you bear, and to the work you have been called to, and to the office you have been at this time invested with; my thoughts have been led to this passage of scripture, This is the living creature; or creatures, the singular for the plural for there were four living creatures which Ezekiel saw in the vision he refers to; these he saw under the God of Israel, under a firmament over the heads of these creatures; above which was the appearance of a man in a most glorious and illustrious form; and who was no other than the Son of God, who was to be incarnate, and here called the God of Israel; and which is no inconsiderable proof of our Lord's proper Deity, for the God of Israel must be the true God. This vision the prophet had by the river of Chebar; a river in Chaldea, where the captive Jews assembled, and Ezekiel with them; and when he had the vision, as now repeated to him, the objects in it became more familiar to him; and he more wistly looked at them, and perceived and was well assured, that the living creatures he saw were the cherubim; or were of the same form and figure with the cherubim in the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon; for though he was not a high priest, only a common priest, and so could never have seen the cherubim in the most holy place himself yet he might have had an account of them from a high priest who had seen them and besides there were figures of the cherubim carved upon the walls of the temple all around, and upon the doors of it; which, as his business was to be frequently in the temple, he

must have often seen, and full well knew them. See also verse 15, where the same is affirmed as here.

It may seem strange to you at first, that I should read such a passage of scripture on such an occasion; but it will not appear so long, when I inform you that *my intention is, by opening and explaining the emblems of the cherubim*, to lay before you the qualifications, duties, work, and usefulness of the ministers of the gospel; *to make way for which, it will be proper to inquire what the cherubim were, and what they signified; in order to which we must look both backwards and forwards, to the account of them in Scripture, both before and after these visions of Ezekiel.* The account begins early, proceeds gradually, and by degrees becomes more clear, distinct, and perfect. The first mention of the cherubim is in ~~<0WR34>~~Genesis 3:24, quickly after the fall of man, and at his expulsion from the garden of Eden;

when Jehovah placed at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life;

but we are not told what these cherubim were, whether real creatures or only figures, nor what their form, nor their number,^{f1} only their position at the east end of the garden of Eden, and their use, *to keep the way of the tree of life*, the meaning of which will be given hereafter; only it may be observed, that Moses calls them *the cherubim*,^{f2} for the word in the original has the pre-positive and emphatic article; as if they were well known, as they were to Moses, and might be to the people of Israel through him, who could inform them of them for the book of Genesis was written after Moses had the order to make the cherubim, and place them with the mercy-seat over the ark in the holy of holies, as related in ~~<02518>~~Exodus 25:18-22, from whence we learn, that the cherubim were figures of winged creatures; that they were in number two; that they were made of gold, of the same mass with the mercy seat; that they stood at both ends of it, looking to one another and to that, and overshadowed it with their wings; and were so placed as to make a seat for the divine Majesty, who took up his residence here, and therefore afterwards is often described by him *that dwelleth between the cherubim*. The same figures were set in the most holy place in Solomon's temple; and where also were, two others of a larger size, made not of gold, but of olive-wood gilded, and whose wings extended, and touching each other, reached from one side of the holy of holies to the

other; but still we are at a loss for the exact form of these figures: this is supplied in the visions of *Ezekiel*, related in this and in the first chapter; in which, four living creatures, he asserts to be the cherubim, are particularly described by their faces, their wings, their hands, and their feet, and by the shining appearance of the whole; ***but still we are left in the dark what these creatures were emblems of, until the gospel-dispensation took place, which brings dark things into light; when John had a vision similar to those of Ezekiel***, with a very little variation, in which he had a more perfect view of the living creatures, and which gives a more exact description of them, of their situation and employment; that they were round about the throne of God, were rational creatures, and spiritual and constant worshippers of the divine Being, or however, emblems of such; with other marks and circumstances, by which it may be known with some certainty, who they were or who are intended by them. ***The vision is related in ~~the~~ Revelation 4:6-9, and is the key to the interpretation of the cherubim. From whence it appears,***

First, That these were not emblems of the divine persons in the Godhead.

It is a fancy that some of late have embraced and are greatly elated with it, as a wonderful discovery; that the cherubim are an hieroglyphic, the three faces of the ox, lion, and eagle, of the Trinity of persons in the Deity, and the face of a man joined to them, of the incarnation of the Son of God; and would have the word *cherubim* pronounced *ce-rubbin*, and translated as *the mighty ones*; but this is a mere fancy and false notion: For,

1. *John's four beasts, or rather living creatures*, as the word should be rendered, for that of *beasts* is an uncomely translation, the same with *Ezekiel's* living creatures, and which he affirms to be the cherubim, are represented as worshippers of the divine Being, and therefore cannot be emblems of the object of worship. They are said not only to be about the throne of God, and to admire and adore the attribute of holiness, and ascribe it to the almighty Being; but to give glory, honour, and thanks to him; to fall down and worship God, yea, to fall down before the Lamb in a worshipping posture, and to give the lead to others in divine worship. See ~~the~~ Revelation 4:8-10 and verse ~~the~~ 8:14, and ~~the~~ 19:4.

2. The cherubim are in many places most manifestly distinguished from the divine Being; they are represented as the seat and throne on which he sits, and as a vehicle in which he rides; so they are described at the first mention of them in ~~the~~ Genesis 3:24, where the words may be rendered *he*, Jehovah,

inhabited the cherubim, or dwelt with, over, or between them;^{f3} and so he did in the cherubim over the mercy-seat, from between which he promised to commune with *Moses*; and therefore, as before observed, is often described as dwelling between the cherubim, and on which he is said to ride. See <1252>Exodus 25:22, <1801>Psalm 80:1 and <1980>18:10, and here the living creatures in my text are said to be *under the God of Israel*, and so distinct from him and in *John's* vision are described as about the throne of God, and as distinct from him that sat upon it; and the *seraphim* in *Isaiah's* vision, the same with the *cherubim* here, are also distinguished from the Lord *sitting on a throne high and lifted up*; and are represented as attendants on him, and worshippers of him, <2101>Isaiah 6:1-3.

3. If the cherubim could be thought to be emblems of a plurality in the Deity, they would be emblems, not of a trinity of persons, but rather of a quaternity, since the cherubim had four faces, each distinct from one another: yea, *John's* four living creatures were four distinct animals, each having a distinct head and face; and the face of a man, both in his and *Ezekiel's* living creatures, is as a distinct a face as any of the rest; and if they were emblems of persons; that must be so too; whereas the human nature of Christ; this is said to be an emblem of, is no person; Christ did not take an human person, but an human nature into union with his divine person, for reasons that might be given much less is it a person in the Godhead, as this supposed emblem would make it to be. Besides, the human nature in Christ is his inferior nature, whereas the face of a man in the cherubim is the superior face, the rest being faces of irrational animals.

4. If the cherubim were an hieroglyphic of the Trinity, this would give a similitude of the divine Being, and of that in him which is the most incomprehensible to us, a Trinity of persons in the Deity; and would furnish with an answer to such a question, suggested as unanswerable,

To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare with him? <2408>Isaiah 40:18, 25, and <2405>46:5,

for then it might be replied, To the cherubim; but there is no likeness of God, nor any to be made of him; though the Son of God often appeared in an human form, and in the fulness of time became incarnate; and the holy Ghost once descended as a dove; yet the Father's shape was never seen at any time, <4157>John 5:37. This notion also is repugnant to the second command, which forbids the making any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, <1204>Exodus 20:4, and then most certainly forbids the making

of any likeness of the divine Being. Supposing the cherubim at the garden of *Eden* were made by God himself, as those in the tabernacle and temple were made by his order; yet he would never make, nor order to be made, such as he forbid, which he must, if they bore the similitude of him; but the truth is, the cherubim were not a likeness of any thing above in heaven, nor of any thing on earth; there never having been seen nor known by any man on earth, as *Josephus*^{f4} affirms, any such creature whom they describe; and a certain Jewish writer observes,^{f5} the making of them came not under the interdict or prohibition of the second command; which if made in the likeness of God it would.

5. To all which may be added, if the cherubim were known emblems of the Trinity, it can hardly be thought that any man would take the name of Cherub to himself, or impose it upon any of his family, or should be so called by others; yet we find a man with his family of this name, ^{<1179>}Ezra 2:59; ^{<1176>}Nehemiah 7:61, and still less would it be given as it is, to Antichrist, the antitype of the king of *Tyre*, the man of sin and son of perdition, ^{<1184>}Ezekiel 28:14, where he is called *the anointed cherub*; which can never be in allusion to the divine Being, and the persons in the Godhead; but may be in allusion to the ministers of the word, the cherubim are the emblems of; as will be presently seen; since he is an ecclesiastical person, calls himself a bishop, an universal Bishop, Christ's anointed Vicar, and Head of the church, the sole and infallible interpreter of the sacred scriptures. *Nor*,

Secondly, Nor are the angels meant by the cherubim; though this is a much better sense than the former, and has been generally received by the Jews and Christians: and what has led many to embrace this sense is, the supposed allusion to the cherubim looking to the mercy-seat, ^{<1112>}1 Peter 1:12, where mention is made of angels being desirous to look into the mysteries of grace though it may be observed that ministers of the word are sometimes so called, and may be there meant: however, *John's* four living creatures cannot be angels, since they are so often distinguished from them not only by their names, the one being called *angels* and the other *living creatures* in the same place; but also by their situation, the living creatures are represented as nearest to the throne of God, and round about it, then the four and twenty elders next to them, and round about them, and then the angels as round about both; but what puts it out of all doubt is, that these living creatures are by themselves owned to be *redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb, out of every kindred and tongue, people and*

nation: which cannot be said of angels; for as they never sinned, they never stood in need of the blood of Christ to redeem them. See ^{<1188>}Revelation 5:8, 9, 11, and ^{<1171>}7:11, and ^{<1157>}15:7. Wherefore,

Thirdly, Since the four and twenty elders in the visions of *John* are the representatives of the gospel-churches, so called in allusion to the twenty-four courses of the priests, and the twenty-four stations of the Levites, fixed in the times of *David*; who, as they in turn attended the service of the temple, represented the whole body of the people of *Israel*; so these twenty-four elders before the throne, and the temple of God, represent the whole *Israel* of God, all the members of the gospel-church-state from first to last; and since the four living creatures are clearly distinguished from them both by name and by situation, and by giving the lead to them in divine worship, as ministers of the word do to the churches: ***It remains, that the ministers of the gospel only can be meant by the living creatures, or the cherubim.***^{f6} See ^{<1104>}Revelation 4:4, 6, 9, 10 and 5:8, 11, 14, and 7:11, and ***by considering the several places where they are made mention of; this will appear to be the truth of the matter. As,***

1. ^{<1094>}Genesis 3:24, where they are first spoken of; and are said to be placed *at the east of the garden of Eden*, with a flaming sword, *to keep the way of the tree of life*; I am quite content to have the phrase rendered, *to observe the way of the tree of life*, as the word is often translated by us.^{f7} (see ^{<19473>}Psalms 107:43; ^{<21104>}Ecclesiastes 11:4; ^{<23223>}Isaiah 42:20; ^{<3118>}Jonah 2:8) The flaming sword may be an emblem of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and which is sharper than a two-edged sword, and has itself two edges, *law* and *gospel*; by the one, when it enters and cuts deep, is the knowledge of sin, and of the sad consequences of it, and leaves a sense of wrath and fiery indignation; and by the other, the knowledge of Christ and salvation by him, and is called the gospel of salvation; and the flame of it may denote the light, heat and glory, which are in the word, when accompanied with a divine influence; so the cherubim may be an hieroglyphic of the ministers of it; and it is the sense of some, both Jews and Christians,^{f8} that the ministry of the word is referred to and intended by the whole. When *Adam* had sinned, he was driven out of the garden of *Eden*, to prevent his eating of the tree of life, lest he should imagine that by that action of his, his life was preserved and continued, and would be for ever; teaching him thereby, that he was not to expect salvation and eternal life by any acts and works of his own, nor by any creature, nor by any outward means: and cherubim were placed

without the garden, not to guard the way of the tree of life, literally understood, or to prevent *Adam's* access unto it; that was sufficiently done by his being driven out of it; but to observe and point out to him, for his comfort and relief, the way to a nobler tree of life than that in the garden; to the true and antitypical tree of life, Jesus Christ, that tree of life that stands in the midst of the paradise of God, the church, of which every overcomer of sin, Satan, and the world, may take and eat, ~~Rev~~ Revelation 2:7. Christ, the Wisdom and Word of God, who is a tree of life, the author and giver of life eternal to all those that lay hold by faith upon him; and happy is every one that so doing retains him, ~~Prov~~ Proverbs 3:18, even Christ the way, the truth, and the life, the true way to eternal life. Now the cherubim were in this emblems of ministers of the gospel, *the servants of the most high God; whose work it is to shew unto men the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ.*

And this is the business that you, my Brother, should be constantly employed in, in instructing men that they are not to be saved by their own works, duties and services; that God saves and calls men, not according to their works, but according to his purpose and grace; that men are to expect the pardon of sin, not on the account of their repentance and humiliation, but through the blood of Christ, and according to the riches of God's grace; that *by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified* in the sight of God but that a man is justified *by faith in the righteousness of Christ, without the deeds of the law*; that men are not saved by the best works of righteousness done by them, but by the abundant mercy and free grace of God, through Christ. You are to acquaint all that you are concerned with, that salvation is by Christ alone; that God has chosen and appointed him to be his salvation to the ends of the earth; and that he has appointed men to salvation alone by him; that he has sent him into the world to be the Saviour of them; this is the *faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance*, you are to publish and proclaim, that *Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners*; and that by his obedience, sufferings, and death, he is *become the author of eternal salvation* to them; and that there is salvation in him, and in no other; and that *there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby they can be saved*. Souls sensible of sin and danger, and who are crying out, *What shall we do to be saved?* you are to observe, and point out Christ the tree of life unto them; and say, as some of the cherubs did to one in such circumstances,

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,
~~<416>~~ Acts 16:31.

Your work is to lead men, under a sense of sin and guilt, to the blood of Christ, shed for many for the remission of sin; and in his name you are to preach the forgiveness of it to them; you are to direct believers, under your care, to go by faith daily to Christ the mediator, and deal with the blood of sprinkling for the remission of their sins, and the cleansing of their souls; which sprinkled on them speaks peace and pardon, purges the conscience from dead works, and cleanses from all sin. You are to point out the righteousness of Christ, as the only justifying righteousness of men, by whose obedience only men are made righteous; the ministration of the gospel is a ministration of righteousness, even of the righteousness of Christ, which is revealed in it from faith to faith; and such should be your ministration. You are to acquaint men, that this righteousness is unto all, and upon all that believe; and that, such are justified from all things by it, *from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses*; and that the acceptance of men with God, is only in Christ the beloved. You are to observe to men the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God and to direct them, as one of the cherubs did, pointing to him, and saying,

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!
~~<417>~~ John 1:29,

to bid them view the sin-bearing and sin-atoning Saviour, and look to the Lamb in the midst of the throne as though he had been slain; by whose slain sacrifice sin is put away, and they perfected for ever that are sanctified. But more of this may be observed.

2. In the account of the cherubim over the mercy-seat in ~~<12518>~~ Exodus 25:18, etc. there they are said to be *two*, and were emblems of the prophets of the Old Testament, and of the apostles of the New, with their successors, the ministers of the word in all generations; between whom there is an entire harmony and agreement; the prophets spoke of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; and the apostle *Paul*, and the other apostles, said no other things than what *Moses* and the prophets did say, that Christ should suffer, and be the first that should rise from the dead; they both agreed in laying ministerially Christ as the foundation, and in directing men to build their faith and hope upon him, as well as they themselves were laid on him; and therefore he is called *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, ~~<4120>~~ Ephesians 2:20, even as the mercy-seat was the basis on

which the two cherubim stood, and by which they were supported: and it may be observed, in agreement with the number of the cherubim, that the seventy disciples of Christ were sent forth by him *two by two* to preach his gospel; and the ministers of the word that prophesy in sackcloth during the reign of antichrist, are called the *two* witnesses, ~~QUB~~ Luke 10:1;

~~QUB~~ Revelation 11:3, and the addition of two other cherubim of a larger size in *Solomon's* temple, may signify the greater perfection of the gospel ministry, and the larger number of gospel ministers, in the gospel church of the New Testament, of which *Solomon's* temple was a type. The matter of which the cherubim over the mercy-seat were made, was pure *gold*, and of the same mass with the mercy-seat; denoting the rich gifts and graces of the spirit, with which ministers of the gospel are qualified for their work; and which are of the same kind and nature with those of Christ, as man; only in measure, his without; and the rich treasure put into these earthen vessels, and the precious truths of the gospel, comparable to gold, silver and precious stones, committed to their trust to minister. The use of the cherubim was to overshadow the mercy-seat, and therefore they are called the *cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy-seat*, ~~QUB~~ Hebrews 9:5, which they did with their wings; denoting in ministers their ministrations, the readiness and cheerfulness of them; the cherubim looked towards one another, and towards the mercy-seat, and pointed to that.

And this, my Brother, is a principal part of your work, as one of the cherubs, to direct to Christ the mercy-seat, the channel of the grace and mercy of God to the souls of men; as God *set forth Christ* in his eternal purposes and decrees *to be a propitiation*, *ιλαστηριον*, ~~QUB~~ Romans 3:25, the same word the Greek interpreters use for the mercy-seat in Exodus 25, so you are to set him forth in your ministrations as the propitiation, propitiatory, and mercy-seat: let the mercy-seat be ever in view; keep in sight in all your ministrations the doctrine of atonement and satisfaction by the blood and sacrifice of Christ; let this be the pole-star by which you steer the course of your ministry; direct souls to the throne of grace, to the mercy-seat, to God in Christ, where they may hope to find grace and mercy to help them in time of need: and, for your encouragement, observe the situation of the cherubim, they were upon the mercy-seat, at the ends of it, being beaten out of the same mass of gold with that; denoting the nearness of ministers to Christ, their union to him, and dependence on him, and support by him, who holds the stars in his right hand: and also his presence with them; for between the cherubim, the shekinah, or glorious majesty of

God, dwelt; and Christ has promised to be with his ministers unto the end of the world. *But I go on,*

3. To consider the *living creatures* in the visions of *Ezekiel* and *John*, called the *cherubim*; and who will appear to be proper emblems of the ministers of the gospel, by considering their names and numbers, their form in general, and the several parts by which they are described in particular.

1st, Their names and number.

(1.) What both *John* and *Ezekiel* saw are called *living creatures*; for the ζῶα in *John*'s vision exactly answer to the תַּוְיָּ in *Ezekiel*'s, and both signify animals that have life and breath: ministers of the word are *creatures*, both as men and as ministers; as men they are the creatures of God, as others; though they are the ambassadors of God, and stand in his stead, yet they are men and not gods, frail, mortal men; *the prophets, do they live for ever?* no: they are also sinful men, as the apostle *Peter*, one of the cherubs, owned himself to be; and men of like passions with others, as the apostle *Paul*, another of the cherubs, acknowledges; and therefore allowances must be made for their weaknesses and infirmities: and they are creatures as ministers, they are made so, not by themselves nor by other men:

Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, ~~800~~ Galatians 1:1,

he did not thrust himself into the ministry, but God put him into it; nor did he become a minister of the word by his own attainments, not by all the learning he acquired at the feet of *Gamaliel*, or elsewhere; but he was *made a minister*, as he himself says,

according to the gift of the grace of God given unto him, ~~400~~ Ephesians 3:6, 7,

and so all that are *made able ministers of the New Testament*, are made so of God; for they are not sufficient of themselves, but *their sufficiency is of God*, ~~400~~ 2 Corinthians 3:5, 6. And they are *living creatures*, they are regenerated, quickened, and have spiritual life in them; and so say the things which they have seen, and heard, and felt; which, if unregenerate, they would not be able to do: and it is requisite they should be lively in their ministrations; it is most comfortable to themselves, and best for those to whom they minister, when they are lively in their frames, lively in the

exercise of grace, and in the discharge of duty; when *they are fervent in spirit*, while they are *serving the Lord* their God; and under a divine influence, they are *the savour of life unto life*; the instruments and means of quickening dead sinners, and of reviving and refreshing drooping saints; and happy are those that sit under the ministry of the living creatures, regenerate men, the living and lively ministers of the gospel.

(2.) These living creatures are called *cherubim*. *Ezekiel* affirms they were the cherubim, and he knew them to be so. Many are the etymologies given of this word, and it is difficult to come at the true meaning of it. I shall not trouble you with every thing that is said,^{f9} only what may seem proper, suitable, and pertinent. And,

1. *Philo* the Jew says,^{f10} the cherubim signify *much knowledge*; and in which sense he is followed by many ancient writers,^{f11} who interpret the word of *large knowledge*; and *fulness* of it; but for what reason, I must own, I cannot see; but be it so, this I am sure of; the ministers of the gospel have need of a large share of knowledge, both of things natural and spiritual; knowledge of themselves, and of their state by nature and by grace, and an experience of the work of the spirit of God upon their hearts; knowledge of Christ, his offices, and grace; knowledge of the scriptures, which *Timothy knew from a child, which are able to make men wise to salvation, are profitable for doctrine and instruction*, and to fit and furnish ministers for the work they are employed in; knowledge of the mysteries of grace, of God, and of Christ; all which are quite necessary for them, since their business is to feed men with knowledge and understanding, and to train them up in it, till they come to the unity of the faith, to a perfect knowledge of the Son of God, and *to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*.—

2. Others think the word has the signification of *might, power, and strength*; in which sense the root of it is used in the Syriac language:^{f12} the ministers of the gospel are called strong; *we that are strong*, ~~ⲉⲥⲓⲣⲓⲁ~~ Romans 15:1, and they have need of all the strength they have, as to bear the infirmities of weak saints, so the insults, indignities, reproaches and persecutions of sinful men; they have need to be strong in the grace that is in Christ, that they may be able to do the duties of their office, and to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ; they have need to *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*; that they may be able to *wrestle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the*

darkness of this world; they ought to be strong to labour in the word and doctrine, to do the work of the Lord as it should be done: but who is sufficient for these things?—

3. Others^{f13} observe that the word *Cherub*, by a transposition of letters, is the same with *recub*, which signifies a *chariot*; in which form the cherubim are supposed to be, hence we read of *the chariot of the cherubim*, ^{<13318>}1 Chronicles 28:18, and nothing is more common in Jewish writers than the *mercavah*, the chariot of *Ezekiel*, meaning the cherubim; and the living creatures, and the wheels might be in such a form as to resemble a chariot; and those who plead for angels being meant by them, with pertinency enough to their hypothesis, apply the words in ^{<10817>}Psalms 68:17. *The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, the Lord is among them as in Sinai*. But why may not the cherubim, admitting this sense of the word, be applied to the ministers of the gospel; since they are represented as vehicles, as chosen vessels to bear the name of Christ, to carry and spread his gospel in the world? and, which conveys the same sentiment, are signified by the white horse on which Christ is said to sit, and go *forth conquering and to conquer*. See ^{<4015>}Acts 9:15; ^{<6112>}Revelation 6:2.—
But,

4. What I am most inclined to give into is, that the word cherubim is derived from *Carab*, which in some of the eastern languages signifies^{f14} to *plow*; and in plowing, oxen were used formerly, and so they are in some places at this day; now not only one of the faces of the cherubim is the face of an ox, but that face particularly is called the face of the cherub, as may be observed by comparing ^{<3010>}Ezekiel 1:10. with chapter ^{<25104>}10:14. See also ^{<10729>}1 Kings 7:29. So that the cherubim seem to have their denomination from this particular face of theirs: and that oxen were emblems of ministers of Christ, as will be considered more particularly hereafter, is evident from the apostle *Paul*, who having quoted the law concerning not muzzling the ox when it treads out the corn, adds, *Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes?* for the sake of us ministers? *for our sakes, no doubt, this is written:* and from oxen he catches at once the idea of plowing, and applies it to ministers, *that he that ploweth should plow in hope*, that is, enjoying the fruit of his labour, ^{<4009>}1 Corinthians 9:9, 10. There is a prophecy of gospel-times, and of ministers in them, which runs thus, *Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien*

shall be your plowmen; that is, Gentiles should be pastors of christian churches, and feed them as flocks are fed; and that some of such who are aliens from the commonwealth of *Israel* should be employed in the Lord's husbandry, and be instruments in breaking up the fallow ground of men's hearts, and of sowing the seed of the word in them, ^{<2306>}Isaiah 61:5.

(3.) To these names of the living creatures, the *cherubim*, may be added that of *seraphim* in ^{<2306>}Isaiah 6:2. The Jewish writers^{f15} are generally agreed that the visions of *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* relate to the same thing; and whoever closely compares them, will see a likeness between them: and have no doubt remain, but the Cherubim and Seraphim design the same persons; the ministers of the gospel may be called by the latter name, which signifies *burning*, because of their ministerial gifts, comparable to coals of fire; and because of their fervent love to Christ and the souls of men, and because of their flaming zeal for the cause and interest of their Master.

(4.) The number of the living creatures, both in the visions of *Ezekiel* and *John*, being four, as the four chariots and the four spirits of the heavens, in the visions of Zechariah chapter ^{<2306>}6:1, 5, may have respect to the four parts of the world; the commission of gospel-ministers being *to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*.

2dly, *The form of the living creatures, and the several parts by which they are described, agree with the ministers of the word.* The general form is not agreed upon on all hands: some think that it inclined mostly to that of the ox or calf:^{f16} to which they are induced by what has been observed, the face of the ox and of the cherub being the same; and some^{f17} suppose that the golden calf made by *Aaron* and the calves of *Jeroboam*, were made after the model of the cherubim upon the mercy-seat; but this is without foundation. Others suppose^{f18} them of a mixed form, and that their faces are not to be understood of their faces strictly taken, but of their general forms and appearances; as that they had the face of a man, the breasts and mane of a lion, the shoulders and wings of an eagle, and the feet of an ox or calf; which seems not probable: rather the general form of them was human, and most resembled that, except in the parts which are otherwise described; for it is expressly said, *they had the likeness of a man*, ^{<2306>}Ezekiel 1:5, and the ministers of the gospel are men: they are redeemed from among men; their business lies with men; they are sent to teach all nations of men, to preach the gospel to every human creature, and to and

among the Gentiles *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. But this will appear by considering the several parts by which the living creatures or cherubim are described.

(1.) By their faces, which are four. —

1. *The face of a man*; intimating, that the ministers of the word should be humane, courteous, and civil to all men they are concerned with; pitiful and compassionate to wounded consciences, tempted souls, troubled and distressed minds, as well as to backsliders, in restoring them; and be men in understanding, knowing, rational, wise and prudent; and be manly and courageous, quit themselves like men, and be strong and valiant in the cause and interest of their Master.—

2. *The face of a lion, the strongest among beasts*, ~~1880~~ Proverbs 30:30, the strength of ministers has been hinted at already: the lion is remarkable for its boldness and intrepidity; *the righteous* are said to be *bold as a lion*, ~~1881~~ Proverbs 28:1, to be bold and intrepid, and not fear the faces of men, is a proper qualification of the ministers of the gospel; such were *John* and *Peter*, and the apostle *Paul* was not inferior to them in boldness and courage; though to shew how necessary such a qualification was, he desires the *Ephesians* to pray for him, that utterance might be given him, that he might

open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, and therein speak boldly, as he ought to speak, ~~1882~~ Ephesians 6:19, 20.

Yet this was not wanting in him; for he elsewhere says,

We were bold in our God to speak of the gospel of God with much contention, ~~1883~~ 1 Thessalonians 2:2.—

3. *The face of an ox*; a creature made for labour, and when in a good state and plight, fit and strong for labour, and used to be employed in plowing the ground and treading out the corn; and is a fit emblem of gospel-ministers, employed in tilling God's husbandry, plowing the fallow ground of men's hearts, and treading out the corn of the word for their use, labouring in the word and doctrine; and, it may be, an emblem of them not only in labour but in patience; the ox that is accustomed to the yoke, patiently bears it; and which is seen not only in bearing the yoke of the ministry, but the weaknesses of the saints, and

the reproaches of wicked men; in *meekly instructing those that oppose themselves*, and in waiting for the fruit and success of their labours.

4. *The face of an eagle*; a creature that soars high, has a strong and clear sight, and can look steadfastly on the sun; it spies its prey at a great distance, scents the carcass where it is, and gathers itself and its young to it;

for wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered also, ^{<1018>}Matthew 24:28,

fitly represents gospel-ministers, who have a clear sight into the sublime mysteries of grace, and see things which eye has not seen, the vulture's eye, the most sharp-sighted among carnal men: and who make it their business to preach a slain crucified Christ, and direct souls to him to feed by faith upon him; *we preach Christ crucified*, etc. ^{<1013>}1 Corinthians 1:23, and 2:2.—

5. These faces were stretched upwards, for so the words may be rendered in ^{<1011>}Ezekiel 1:11, *thus their faces and their wings were stretched upwards*, towards heaven; signifying that ministers of the gospel look upwards to Christ in heaven for fresh supplies of gifts and grace, an increase of light and knowledge, of wisdom and strength, to fit them more for their work, and to enable them to perform it; being sensible that without him, his grace and strength, they can do nothing; but through him strengthening them they can do all things, ^{<1013>}Philippians 4:13.

(2.) The living creatures, who are the cherubim, are described by their eyes; particularly in *John's* vision of them, where they are said to be *full of eyes before, and behind and within*, ^{<1016>}Revelation 4:6, 8, see also ^{<1002>}Ezekiel 10:12. The eye is the light of the body; and what the eye is to the natural body, the ministers are to the church, the body of Christ; yea, they are *the light of the world*; and *if the eye be single*, if ministers be sincere, and have a single view to the glory of Christ and the good of souls, *the whole body will be full of light*, the church will be illuminated by them, ^{<1014>}Matthew 5:14, and ^{<1012>}6:22, they are *Argos-like*, have many eyes; and they have need of all they have to look into the sacred scriptures, which are a sealed book to learned and unlearned men, destitute of the Spirit of Christ; only to be looked into so as to be understood by such who have their eyes enlightened, their understandings opened by Christ, as were the disciples;

the scriptures are to be diligently searched into, and explored for the rich treasure that is in them; and those that search into them, as for hid treasure, shall find knowledge of great and excellent things; but these escape the sight of all but those who have spiritual eyes to see. Ministers of the gospel had need to be full of eyes, to look to themselves, and to the flocks committed to them; to take the oversight of them, and feed them with the words of faith and sound doctrine; to take heed to themselves and to their doctrine, that it be wholesome, pure and incorrupt; and to their lives and conversations, that they give no offence to Jew or Gentile, nor to the church of God, that the ministry may not be blamed and rendered useless; and also to espy dangers, and give warning and notice of them, arising whether from without or from within; to look diligently lest any *root of bitterness*, of error or heresy, or of immorality and profaneness, spring up in the churches, and trouble some and defile others; and to watch against false teachers, and to be careful to keep up the discipline of Christ's house. They have, as they should have, eyes *before* and *behind*; eyes *behind*, to observe things past, the fulfillment of prophecies, promises, and types in Christ: *before*, to look to predictions yet to be fulfilled relating to the church and kingdom of God; *behind* them to watch against Satan, who *goes about seeking whom he may devour*, and who comes upon the back of them at unawares; and *before* them, to watch over the flocks they have the oversight of; *behind* them, to the twenty-four elders, the members of the churches to whom they minister, so situated with respect to the four living creatures; and *before* them, to the throne of God and the Lamb, on whom is their dependence, from whom they expect supplies, and whose glory they are concerned for: and they have also eyes *within*, to look into the sinfulness and corruption of their nature, and which is a means of keeping them humble under all their attainments, gifts and usefulness; and into the state and ease of their own souls, and their inward experience; which qualifies them to speak to the cases of others, and by which they can make better judgment of the truth of doctrines, having a witness of them within themselves; and to look into the treasure that is put into them, in order to bring forth from thence things new and old, both for the profit and pleasure of those that hear them.

(3.) The living creatures, or cherubim, are described by their wings, The cherubim over the mercy-seat had wings, but how many is not expressed; but it is the opinion of some,^{f19} both ancient and modern, that they had six, and so many had the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision, chapter 6:2, and the same

number had the living creatures in Ezekiel's vision; for though they are said to have four, chapter 1:6, yet not four only from verses 11, 23, it seems as if they had two more, and it is certain the living creatures in *John's* vision had six, ~~6008~~ Revelation 4:8 and, —

1. With two of them particularly they flew, as *Isaiah's* Seraphim did; which in ministers denote their swiftness, readiness and cheerfulness to do the work of God, to minister the word, and to administer ordinances, to visit the members of the churches when needful, and to do all good offices for the saints, that lay in their power. The Greek version of ~~3007~~ Ezekiel 1:7, is, *their feet were winged*; expressive of the same thing, particularly of their readiness to preach the gospel, their feet *being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*; and for the same reason, a set of gospel-ministers are represented by an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to all nations, ~~6046~~ Revelation 14:6.—
2. With other two wings they covered their face; ministers, sensible of the purity and holiness of God, and the spirituality of his law, in comparison of which they see themselves unholy, carnal and sold under sin, blush at their sins and imperfections, and are conscious of their unworthiness to be employed in such service, looking upon themselves to be less than the least of all saints, the chief of sinners, and unfit to be ministers of the word; and are ashamed of their poor performances, and acknowledge that they have nothing but what they have received, and therefore have nothing to glory of at best.—
3. With other two wings the living creatures covered their feet: however beautiful the feet of gospel ministers may appear to others, to whom they come running with the good tidings of peace, life, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; yet they, sensible of their deficiencies, confess, that having done all they can, and in the best manner they could, they are but unprofitable servants. So *Isaiah's* Seraphim covered their feet with two of their wings, but *Ezekiel's* living creatures covered their bodies with them, and seem to have made use of four for that purpose, chapter ~~3011~~ 1:11, 23.—
4. Their wings were stretched upwards, verse 11, so ministers look towards heaven, up towards Christ, from whence are all their expectations of grace to help them to perform their works, and of all success in it: and their wings were also *joined one to another*; that is,

the wings of one living creature to that of another; denoting ministers affection to each other, their giving mutual assistance to one another, their concern in the same work of the Lord, preaching the same truths, and administering the same ordinance, having the same zeal for the glory of God, love to Christ and to the souls of men, and being of the same mind and judgment and specially they will be so in the latter day, when they shall *see eye to eye*, ~~<280B>~~ Isaiah 52:8.—

5. The sound of their wings is worthy of notice, and is repeated once and again, that it might be observed, said to be *like the noise of great waters; as the voice of the almighty, when he speaketh*, chapter ~~<202A>~~ 1:24, ~~<23B3>~~ 3:13. and ~~<2005>~~ 10:5, which is no other than the gospel ministered by them, a joyful sound, a sound of love, grace and mercy, peace, righteousness and salvation; and which, like the sound of waters, was heard at a distance, when by the ministry of the apostles it went into all the earth: the voice of Christ, and which is the gospel also, is compared to the same, ~~<6015>~~ Romans 1:15, for its rapidity and force, under the divine influence; and which is not the voice, sound and word of man, but of God himself; which appears by its powerful effects on the hearts of saints and sinners, when attended with a divine energy; and indeed it is the Lord God almighty that speaks in ministers, and speaks powerfully by them, ~~<3023>~~ 1 Thessalonians 2:13; ~~<473B>~~ 2 Corinthians 13:3.

(4.) These living creatures, or the cherubim, are described by having *the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides*, ~~<3008>~~ Ezekiel 1:8, and 10:8, this denotes the activity of gospel-ministers, who have not only the theory and knowledge of things, but are men of practice and business; they have much work to do all around them, on every side preaching the gospel, administering ordinances, visiting their people, praying with them, and giving them counsel and advice, instruction and exhortation, when needful; and they have hands to work with and strength given them, and which they employ, and are *steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*; and they do it with judgment, acting like men of understanding and reason: and their hands being *under their wings*, shew, that besides their public work they do much in private, in their studies and closets, in meditation and prayer, where no eye sees them but the eye of God; and also in private houses where they pray, instruct, counsel and advise, as the nature of cases that present require; and whatever they do, whether in private or public, they do it not to be seen of men; or in an ostentatious

way, as the Scribes and Pharisees; they boast not of their own performances, they ascribe all to the grace of God which is with them, and own that it is by that they are what they are, and do what they do; such is their modesty and humility, which this phrase is expressive of.

(5.) The living creatures, or cherubim, are described by their *feet*, which are said to *be straight*; and with them

they went every one straight forward, and they turned not when they went, ^{<400>}Ezekiel 1:7, 9, 12,

they made straight paths for their feet, and went not into crooked paths; they turned not, neither to the right hand nor the left; their eyes looked right on, and their eyelids right before them, and steered their course accordingly: thus faithful ministers of the word walk uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, and go in the paths of truth and righteousness; and neither turn to error on the one hand, nor to immorality on the other; and having put their hand to the plough of the gospel, neither look back nor turn back; for such that do so, are not fit for the kingdom of God, ^{<402>}Luke 9:62. Moreover, it is said of the living creatures, the cherubim, that *the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot*; round, the hoof divided, and fit for treading out the corn, and which is more firm and sure than the sole of a man's foot, which is apt to slip and turn aside; and so may denote the firmness, steadiness, and constancy of faithful ministers in their work, particularly in treading out the corn of the word for the nourishment of souls to whom they minister: and it is also added of the cherubim, that their feet *sparkled like the colour of burnished brass*; which may not only signify the strength and firmness of ministers to support under all the weight of work and sufferings, expressed by brass; so Christ's feet are said to be *like unto fine brass, as they burned in a furnace*, ^{<405>}Revelation 1:15, but also the brightness of their conversations, and the shining purity and holiness of their lives; and when the light of their works, as well as of their doctrines, shine before men, they look as bright as polished brass, and become

examples of the believer, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, ^{<502>}1 Timothy 4:12.

Moreover, the living creatures were directed by the Spirit,

whither the Spirit was to go, they went, ^{<402>}Ezekiel 1:12, 20,

so, as the prophets of the Old Testament spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, the ministers of the New Testament are led by the Spirit, and guided by him in their ministrations into all truth as it is in Jesus; as well as they are influenced by him in their conversations, to walk as becomes the gospel of Christ; and as they are qualified by him with gifts and graces for the work of the ministry, so he disposes of them where he pleases, and makes them overseers of such and such flocks in such and such places, according to his will; and they go as they are led by him, where he has a work for them to do. A remarkable instance of this see in ~~4466~~ Acts 16:6-10. where the apostles were forbid by the Holy Ghost preaching in one country; and, assaying to go into another, the Spirit suffered them not; but they were directed to steer their course another way, and to another place, where souls were to be converted, and a gospel-church planted. Once more when and where the living creatures went, the wheels went; and according to the motion and position of the one, were the motion and position of the other:

when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them; and when the living creatures were lift up from the earth, the wheels were lift up; when those went, these went, and when those stood, these stood, ~~2609~~ Ezekiel 1:19, 21 and ~~2606~~ 10:16, 17,

the wheels signify the churches; and where there is the ministry of the word by the living creatures, the ministers of the gospel, there generally churches are raised and formed by them; and as the ministry of the word is continued or removed, so is a church-state fixed or changed; it is in this way and by this means that the candlestick is either continued or removed out of its place: and it may be observed in *John's* vision, agreeably to this, that when the four living creatures gave glory to God, the four and twenty elders fell down before him and worshipped him, ~~6049~~ Revelation 4:9, 10 and verse 14. Ministers begin the worship of God, move first in acts of devotion, and then the churches and the members of them follow and join with them; and as they receive their doctrine, and are guided by them in matters of worship, so they copy after them in their conversations; and, generally speaking, as ministers be, churches are; if ministers have raised affections and elevated frames, so it often is with the churches, and the members of them, that sit under their ministrations; if ministers are active and lively, the churches are so too; but if dull, indolent, and inactive, so are church-members; if ministers are evangelical in their preaching, so are the people

that hear them; but if they minister in a legal manner, of the same complexion, spirit, and temper, will the members and hearers be.

(6.) The living creatures, or cherubim, are described by the appearance of them, *like burning coals*, and *like lamps*, ^{<4013>}Ezekiel 1:13, 14. Ministers of the gospel may be thus described, because of their ministerial gifts; the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are signified *by cloven tongues as of fire*, ^{<4013>}Acts 2:3, and ordinary gifts for the ministry are represented as *coals of fire*, which are to be stirred up and inflamed, and not lie neglected, disused, or quenched, ^{<5006>}2 Timothy 1:6; ^{<5059>}1 Thessalonians 5:19. And the cherubim or ministers may be set forth hereby, because of the clear light of truth that shines in them, and because of their ardent love to Christ and the souls of men, which is one qualification for the ministry; hence says Christ to *Peter*, when he had affirmed once and again that he loved him, and appealed to his omniscience for the truth of it, *Feed my lambs, feed my sheep*, ^{<4015>}John 21:15-17, intimating, that such a lover of him was a fit person to feed the flock or church of God; even one whose love is so ardent that *the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame, that many waters cannot quench*; even waters of afflictions, reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings for the sake of Christ and his gospel: and by coals of fire may they be described, because of their burning zeal for the glory of God and the interest of a Redeemer; hence they are called Seraphim, fiery or burning, as before observed; and it is not unusual for ministers of the gospel to be compared to *lamps*; the apostles are called the lights or lamps of the world; and *John the Baptist* was *a shining and burning light* or lamp; and so others have been, holding forth the word of light and life to men: and whereas it is said that *it, the fire, went up and down among the living creatures*; this is true of the word of God, compared to fire, ^{<4019>}Jeremiah 20:9 and ^{<4039>}23:29, by which the minds of ministers are enlightened, their hearts warmed, and are filled with zeal for God, and become the means of enlightening and warming others; which *fire was bright*, clear, as the word of God is; and *out of the fire went forth lightning*; denoting the quick and penetrating efficacy of the word, and the sudden increase of the kingdom and interest of Christ by it, which, like lightning, has been spread from east to west. Thus I have opened and explained the doctrine of the cherubim in the best manner I could, and have shewn the agreement between them and the ministers of the gospel.

And now, my Brother, from these emblems you may discern what is your principal work and business as a minister of the gospel; that it is to preach

salvation by Christ, the doctrines of pardon by his blood; of justification by his righteousness, and of atonement and satisfaction for sin by his sacrifice, with other truths of the gospel; that you are to be laborious in this work, diligent and industrious, constant and immoveable in it; that you are to be bold and intrepid in it, not fearing the faces of men; and to be watchful over yourself and others that are your charge, to be tender and compassionate to all in distress, whether of body, mind or estate, and to be humane in your deportment to all; that you are to walk uprightly, and be an example to the flock in your life and conversation; that you are to look up to heaven for fresh supplies of grace to carry you through your ministrations in all the branches of it; and through the whole express fervent love to Christ and the souls of men, and a zeal for his glory: and may you be a shining and burning light in your day and generation, and successful in the work of the Lord, and have many to be your joy and crown of rejoicing at the Coming of Christ.

FOOTNOTES:

- ^{ft1} In the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem on the place, they are said to be two.
- ^{ft2} μϋb rkh ta
- ^{ft3} Vide Texelii Phoenix, 1, 3. c. 7. p. 256, 257.
- ^{ft4} Antiq. 1. 3. c. 6. & 5.
- ^{ft5} R. Isaac Mosaides apud Selden. de Jure Nat. Gent. c. 6. p. 183.
- ^{ft6} I am not alone in this sentiment; Dr. Lightfoot is of the same opinion, Prospect of the Temple, c. 38, Pfeiffer. Dub. Vexat. cent. 4. loc. 4. p. 407. Osiander in ibid. and so Vitranga on Isa. 6:2, though of another mind are, Witsius in Aegyptiac. 1. 2. c. 13. & 35, and Oecon. Foeder. 1. 4. c. 6. & 44, and Marckius, Fascic. Dissertat. dis. 24. & 17. & C. BUT Dr. Goodwin, in his exposition of the Revelation, p. 5, 6, takes John's four living creatures to be the officers of the christian church.
- ^{ft7} rmçl See <9A78> Psalm 107:43. <21104> Eccles. 11:4. <23521> Isai. 62:2 <3118> Jonah 2:8
- ^{ft8} Vide Fagium in loc.
- ^{ft9} The Talmudists in Chagigah, fol. 13. 2. & Succah, fol. 5. 2. say, the Cherub is as if it was Ce-rubya, as a young man; in which form it was commonly supposed the Cherubim were; others, as Ce-rab, as a master; others as Ce-rub, as a multitude, one being as a large multitude. See Pfeiffer. Dubia Vexat. cent. 1. loc. 10. p. 27. Hillerus in Onomastic. Sacr. derives it from a word which signifies to cover, and interprets Cherub covering. See Ezek. 28:14.
- ^{ft10} De Vita Mosis, 1. 3. p. 668.
- ^{ft11} Clement. Alex. Stromat. 1. 5. p. 563. Suidas in vocc χερουβειμ. Hieron. Paulino, T. 3. fol. 3. F. de Nom. Heb. in Exod. fol. 98. F. & Comment. in Esaïam. c. 6. 2. Isidor, Origin. 1. 7. c. 5. Vide Fromme Dissert. de Cherub. & 3.
- ^{ft12} Vide Castel. Lexic. Heptaglott. in rad. brk.
- ^{ft13} De Dieu in Gen. 3:24. Gusse. Comment. Ebr. p. 401.
- ^{ft14} Charld. Syr. & Ar. vide Castel. ut supra.

- ^{ft15} T. Bab. Chagigah, fol. 13, 2. Maimon. Moreh Nevochim, par. 3. c. 6.
- ^{ft16} Bochart. Hierozoic. par. 1. col. 412.
- ^{ft17} Moncaeus de Vitulo aureo, 1. 1. c. 4. Gaffarel's unheard-of Curiosities, part 1. c. 1. & 6. 7.
- ^{ft18} Pradus and Villalpand. on Ezekiel.
- ^{ft19} Clement. Alex. Stromat. 1. 5, p. 563. Fortunat. Scacchi Eleochrysm. par. 2, c. 36. p. 474.