

TWO SERMONS:
THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN
AND INTERCESSION
EVERY CHRISTIANS DUTY

GEORGE WHITEFIELD



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



Two Sermons: The Almost Christian and Intercession Every Christian's Duty presents two influential messages by George Whitefield that examine the nature of genuine faith and the responsibility of prayer. In *The Almost Christian*, Whitefield distinguishes true conversion from mere outward religion, urging self-examination and heartfelt devotion. *Intercession Every Christian's Duty* emphasizes prayer for others as an essential mark of Christian love and obedience. Together, these sermons reflect Whitefield's evangelical preaching, calling readers to sincere piety, active faith, and dependence on God's grace.



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TITLE PAGE



Two Sermons.

The Almost Christian, and Intercession Every
Christian's Duty.

By the Reverend George Whitefield.

Elizabethtown: Printed by Shepard Kollock—1794.

THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN



THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN.

ACTS 26:28.—Almost you persuade me to be a Christian.

THESE words contain the ingenuous confession of King
—— Agrippa, which having some reference to what went before,
it may not be improper to relate to you the substance of the pre-
ceding verses, to which these words are so closely connected. The
chapter, then, out of which the text is taken, contains an admirable
account the great Saint Paul gave of his wonderful conversion from
Judaism to Christianity, when he was called to make his defense
before Festus and another Gentile governor. Our blessed Lord had
long since foretold, that, **when the SON OF MAN should be
lifted up, his disciples should be brought before kings for
his name's sake, for a testimony unto them;** and very good
was the design of Infinite Wisdom in thus ordaining it, for
Christianity being, from the very beginning, a doctrine of the cross,
the princes and rulers of the earth thought themselves too high to
be instructed by such mean teachers, or too happy to be disturbed
by such unwelcome truths, and, therefore, would have always con-
tinued strangers to Jesus Christ, and him crucified, had not the
apostles, by being arraigned before them as criminals, gained op-

portunities of preaching to them Jesus and the resurrection. Saint Paul knew full well that this was the main reason why his blessed Master, at this time, permitted his enemies to arraign him at a public bar, and, therefore, in compliance with the divine will, thinks it not sufficient barely to make his defense, but endeavors, at the same time, to convert his judges. And this he did with such demonstration of the spirit, and of power, that Festus, unwilling to be convinced by the strongest evidence, cries out, with a loud voice—**Much learning does make you mad**—to which the brave apostle, like a true follower of the Holy Jesus, meekly replies—**I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.** But, in all probability, seeing King Agrippa more affected with his discourse, and observing in him an inclination to know the truth, he applies himself more particular to him, **the King**, says he, **knows of these things, before whom also I speak freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him;** and then, that impossible he might complete his wished-for conversion, he, with an inimitable strain of oratory, addresses himself still more closely **King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe them:** At which the passions of the king began to work so strongly, that he was obliged, in open court, to own himself affected by the prisoner's preaching, and ingenuously to cry out, **Paul, almost you persuade me to be a Christian;** which words taken with the context, afford us a lively representation of the different reception the doctrine of Christ's ministers, who come in the power and spirit of Saint Paul, meets with now a-days in the minds of men; for notwithstanding they, like this great apostle, speak forth the words of truth and soberness, and with such

energy and power, that all their adversaries cannot justly gainsay or resist, yet too many, with the most noble Festus before-mentioned, being like him, either too proud to be taught, or too sensual, too careless, or too worldly-minded to live up to their doctrine, in order to excuse themselves, cry out, that much learning, much study, or what is more unaccountable, much piety has made them mad; and though, blessed be God, all do not thus disbelieve our report, yet amongst those many others, who gladly receive the word, and confess that we speak the words of truth and soberness, there are so few, who arrive at any higher degree of piety than that of Agrippa, or are any farther persuaded than to be almost Christians, that I cannot but think it highly necessary to warn my dear hearers of the danger of such a state; and therefore, from the words of the text, shall endeavor to consider these three things: 1. What is meant by an almost Christian. 2. What are the chief reasons why so many are no more than almost Christians. 3. I shall consider the ineffectualness, danger, absurdity, and uneasiness that attends those that are but almost Christians. 4. I shall conclude with a general exhortation, to set all upon striving not only to be almost, but altogether Christians.

1. And first I am to consider what is meant by an almost Christian.

An almost Christian, then, if we consider him in respect to his duty to God, is one that halts between two opinions, that wavers between Christ and the world, that would reconcile God and Mammon, that is, light and darkness, Christ and Belial. It is true, he has an inclination to religion, but then he is very cautious how he goes too far in it: His false heart is always crying out—Spare thyself, do thyself no harm. He prays, indeed, that God's **will may**

be done on earth, as it is in heaven; but then, notwithstanding he is very partial in his obedience, and fondly hopes that God will not be extreme to mark every thing that he willfully does amiss, though an inspired apostle has told him, that he that **offends in one point is guilty of all.** Above all, he is one that depends much on outward ordinances, and upon that account looks upon himself as righteous, and despises others; though, at the same time, he may be as great a stranger to the divine life, as any other person whatsoever. In short, he is fond of the form, but never experiences the power of godliness in his heart: He goes on, year after year, feeding and attending on the means of grace; but then, like Pharaoh's lean cows, is never the better, but rather the worse for them.

If you consider him in respect to his neighbor, he is one that is strictly just to all; but then this does not proceed from any love to God, or regard to man, but only out of a principle of self love, because he knows dishonesty will spoil his reputation, and consequently hinder his thriving in the world.

He is one that depends much on being negatively good, and contents himself with the consciousness of having done no one any harm, though he reads in the gospel, that **the unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness,** and the barren fig-tree cursed and dried up from the roots, not for bearing bad, but no fruit.

He is no enemy to charitable contributions in public, if not too frequently recommended; but then he is unacquainted with the kind offices of **visiting the sick and imprisoned, clothing the naked, and relieving the hungry** in a private manner. He thinks that these things belong only to the clergy, though his own

false heart tells him, that nothing but pride keeps him from exercising these acts of humility, and that Jesus Christ, in the 25th chapter of Saint Matthew, condemns persons to everlasting punishment, not for being fornicators, drunkards, or extortioners, but for neglecting these charitable offices. **When the Son of Man, says our blessed Lord himself, shall come in his glory, he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left. And then shall he say to them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels: For I was hungry, and you gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and you took me not in; naked, and you clothed me not; sick and in prison, and you visited me not. Then shall they also say, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall be answer them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you have not done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you did it not unto me: And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.** I thought proper to give you this whole passage of scripture at large, because our Savior lays such a particular stress upon it; and yet, notwithstanding it is so little regarded, that were we to judge by the practice of Christians, one should be tempted to think there were no such verses in the Bible.

But to proceed in our character of an almost Christian. If we consider him in respect of himself; as before we said he was strictly honest to his neighbor, so he is likewise strictly sober in himself; but then both his honesty and sobriety proceed from the same principle of a false self love. It is true he runs not into the same ex-

cess of riot with other men, but then it is not out of obedience to the laws of God, but either because his constitution will not away with intemperance, or rather because he is cautious of forfeiting his reputation, or unfitting himself for temporal business. But though he is so prudent as to avoid intemperance and excess, for the reasons before-mentioned, yet he always goes to the extremity of what is lawful. It is true, he is no drunkard, but then he has no Christian self-denial. He cannot think our Savior to be so austere a master, as to deny us to indulge ourselves in some particulars; and so by this means he is kept out of a sense of true religion, as much as if he lived in debauchery, or any other crime whatever. As to settling his principles as well as practice, he is guided more by the world, than by the word of God. As for his part, he cannot think the way to heaven so narrow as some would make it; and, therefore, considers not so much what scripture requires, as what such and such a good man does, or what will best suit his own corrupt inclinations. Upon this account, he is not only very cautious himself, but likewise very careful of young converts, whose faces are set heavenward, and, therefore, is always acting the Devil's part, and bidding them spare themselves, though they are doing no more than what the scripture strictly requires them to do; the consequence of which is, that he suffers not himself to enter into the kingdom of God, and those that are entering in he hinders.

Thus lives the almost Christian; not that I can say I have fully described him to you, but, from these out-lines and sketches of his character, if your consciences have done their proper office, and made a particular application of what has been said to your own hearts, I cannot but fear that some of you may observe some features in his picture, odious as it is, resembling your own, and,

therefore, cannot but hope, at the same time, that you join with the apostle in the words immediately following the text, and wish yourselves not only almost, but altogether Christians.

2. But I proceed to the second general thing proposed, namely, to consider the reasons why so many are no more than almost Christians.

1. And the first reason I shall mention is— because so many set out with false notions of religion, and though they live in a Christian country, yet know not what Christianity is. This, perhaps may be esteemed a hard saying, but experience sadly evinces the truth of it; for some place religion in being of this or that communion, more in morality, most in a round of duties, and a model of performances, and few, very few, acknowledge it to be what it really is, a thorough inward change of nature, a divine life, a vital participation of Jesus Christ, an union of the soul with God, which the apostle expresses by saying, **He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.** Hence it happens that so many, even of the most knowing professors, when you come to converse with them concerning the essence, the life, the soul of religion, I mean our new birth in Jesus Christ, confess themselves quite ignorant of the matter, and cry out with Nicodemus, **How can this thing be?** And no wonder then, that so many are only almost Christians, when so many know not what Christianity is: No marvel so many take up with the form, when they are quite strangers to the power of godliness, or content themselves with the shadow, when they know so little about the substance of it. And this is one cause why so many are almost, why so few are altogether Christians.

2. A second reason that may be assigned why so many are no more than almost Christians, is a servile fear of man. Multitudes there are, and have been, who, though awakened to a sense of the divine life, and **have tasted and felt the powers of the world to come**, yet out of a base, sinful fear of being counted singular, or contemned of men, have suffered all those good impressions to wear off again. It is true, they have some esteem for Jesus Christ, but then, like Nicodemus, they would **come to him only by night**: They are willing to serve him, but then they would do it **secretly, for fear of the Jews**: They **have a mind to see Jesus**, but then **they cannot come to him because of the press**; for fear of being laughed at, and ridiculed by those with whom they used to sit at meat. But well did our Savior prophesy of such persons, **How can ye love me which receive honor one of another?** Alas! Have they never read, that **the friendship of this world is enmity with God**; and that our Lord himself has threatened, **Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, or of my words, in this wicked and adulterous generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, and of his holy angels**. But no wonder that so many are no more than almost Christians, since so many **love the praise of men more than the honor which cometh of God**.

3. A third reason why so many are no more than almost Christians, is a reigning love of money. This was the pitiable case of that forward young man in the gospel, who came running to our blessed Lord, and kneeling before him, inquired what **he must do to inherit eternal life**; to which our blessed Master replied, **Thou knowest the commandments, do not kill, do not**

commit adultery, do not steal; to which the young man replied, **All these have I kept from my youth.** But when our Lord proceeded to tell him, **Yet lackest thou one thing, go sell all that thou hast and give to the poor; he was grieved at that saying, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions!** Poor youth! He had a good mind to be a Christian, and to inherit eternal life, but thought it too dear, if it could be purchased at no less an expense than of his whole estate! And thus many, both young and old, now-a-days, come running to worship our blessed Lord in public, and kneel before him in private, and inquire at his gospel, what must they do to inherit eternal life; but when they find they must renounce the self-enjoyment of riches, and forsake all in affection to follow him, they cry—The Lord pardon us in this thing!—We pray thee have us excused.

But is heaven so small a trifle in such men's esteem, as not to be worth a little gilded earth? Is eternal life so mean a purchase, as not to deserve the temporary renunciation of a few transitory riches? Surely it is. But however inconsistent such a behavior may be, this inordinate love of money is too evidently the common and fatal cause, why so many are no more than almost Christians.

4. Nor is the reigning love of pleasure a less uncommon, or a less fatal cause, why so many are no more than almost Christians. Thousands and ten thousands there are, who despise riches, and would willingly be true disciples of Jesus Christ, would parting with their money make them so; but when they are told, that our blessed Lord has said, that **whosoever will come after him must deny himself.** Like the pitiable young man, before-mentioned, **they go away sorrowful;** for they have too great a love for sensual pleasures. They will, like Herod, perhaps send for the

ministers of Christ, as he did for John, and **hear them gladly**; but touch them in their Herodias, tell them they must part with such or such a darling pleasure, and with wicked Ahab they cry out —**Hast thou found us, O our enemy?** Tell them of the necessity of mortification, fasting, and self-denial, and it is as difficult to them to hear, as if you were to bid them cut off a right hand or pluck out a right eye: They cannot think our blessed Lord requires so much at their hands, though an inspired apostle has commanded us to **mortify our members which are upon earth**; and he himself, even after he had converted millions, and was very near arrived to the end of his race, yet professed that it was his daily practice to **keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway!**

But some men would be wiser than this great apostle, and chalk out to us what they falsely imagine an easier way to happiness. They would flatter us we may go to heaven without offering violence to our sensual appetites, and **enter into the strait gate** without striving against our carnal inclinations. And this is another reason why so many are only almost, and not altogether Christians.

5. The fifth and last reason I shall assign why so many are only almost Christians, is a fickleness and instability of temper.

It has been, no doubt, the misfortune that many a minister and sincere Christian has met with, to weep and wail over numbers of promising converts, who seemingly began in the spirit, but after a while have fallen away, and basely ended in the flesh, and this not for want of right notions in religion, nor out of a servile fear of man, nor out of love of money or sensual pleasure, but out of an

instability and fickleness of temper. They looked upon religion merely for novelty, as something which pleased them for a while, but after their curiosity was satisfied, they have laid it aside again. Like the young man that came to see Jesus, with a linen cloth about his naked body, they have followed him for a season, but when temptations have come to take hold on them, for want of a little more resolution, they have been stripped of all their good intentions, and fled away naked. They at first, like a tree planted by the water-side, grew up and flourished for a while, but having no root in themselves, no inward principle of holiness and piety, like Jonah's gourd, were soon **dried up, cut down, and withered**. Their good intentions are but too like the violent motions of the animal spirits of a body newly beheaded, which, though impetuous, are not lasting. In short, they set out well in their journey to heaven, but finding the way either narrower or longer than they expected, through an unsteadiness of temper, they have made an eternal halt, and so **returned like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire!**

But I tremble to pronounce the fate of such unstable professors, **who, having put their hands to the plow**, for want of a little more resolution, shamefully look back. How shall I repeat to them that dreadful threatening, **If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him:** And again, **It is impossible**, that is, exceedingly difficult at least, **for those that have been once enlightened, and have tasted the good gift of God's holy spirit, and the powers of the world to come, if they should fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance.** But notwithstanding the gospel is so severe against apos-

tates, yet many that began well, through a fickleness of temper, (Oh that none of us here present may ever be such!) have been, by this means, of **the number of those that turn back unto perdition**. And this is the fifth and last reason I shall give, why so many are only almost, and not altogether Christians.

3. Proceed now to the third general thing proposed, namely, to consider the folly of being no more than an almost Christian.

And the first proof I shall give of the folly of such a proceeding is—that it is ineffectual to salvation. It is true, such men are almost good, but almost to hit the mark, is really to miss it. God requires us to **love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength**: He loves us too well to admit any rival, because so far as our hearts are empty of God, so far must they be unhappy. The Devil, indeed, like the false mother that came before Solomon, would have our hearts divided, as she would have had the child, but God, like the true mother, will have all or none. **My son, give me thy heart**, thy whole heart, is the general call to all; and if this be not done, we never can expect the divine mercy.

Persons may play the hypocrite, but God, at the great day, will strike them dead, (as he did Ananias and Sapphira by the mouth of his servant Peter) for pretending to offer him all their hearts, when they keep back from him the greatest part. They may, perhaps, impose upon their fellow-creatures for a while, but he that enabled Elijah to cry out, **Come in thou wife of Jeroboam**, when she came disguised to inquire about her sick son, will also discover them through their most artful dissimulations, and if **their hearts are not whole with him, appoint them their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers**.

But, **secondly**, what renders a half-way piety more inexcusable is, that it is not only insufficient to our own salvation, but also most prejudicial to that of others.

An almost Christian is one of the most hurtful creatures in the world; he is a wolf in sheep's clothing—he is one of those false prophets our blessed Lord bids us beware of in his sermon on the mount, who would persuade men, that the way to heaven is broader than it really is; and thereby, as it was observed before, **enter not into the kingdom of God themselves, and those that are entering in they hinder.** These, these are the men that turn the world into a lukewarm Laodicean spirit—that hang out false lights, and so shipwreck unthinking benighted souls in their voyage to the haven of eternity. These are they that are greater enemies to the cross of Christ, than infidels themselves; for of an unbeliever every one will be aware, but an almost Christian, through his subtle hypocrisy, draws away many after him, and therefore must expect to receive the greater damnation.

But, **thirdly**, as it is most prejudicial to ourselves, and hurtful to others, so it is the greatest piece of ingratitude we can express towards our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. For did he come down from heaven, and shed his precious blood, to purchase these hearts of ours, and shall we only give him half of them? Oh how can we say we love him, when our hearts are not wholly with him? How can we call him our Savior, when we will not endeavor sincerely to approve ourselves to him, and so let him see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied!

Had any of us purchased a slave at a most expensive rate, that was before involved in the utmost miseries and torments, and so must have continued for ever, had we shut up our bowels of com-

passion from him; and was this slave afterwards to grow rebellious, or deny giving us but half his service—how, how should we exclaim against his base ingratitude? And yet this base ungrateful slave you are, O man, who acknowledge yourself to be redeemed from infinite unavoidable misery and punishment by the death of Jesus Christ, and yet will not give yourself wholly to him. But shall we deal with God, our Maker, in a manner we would not be dealt with by a man, like ourselves? God forbid!— No.

That I may come to the last thing proposed, namely, to add a word or two of exhortation to be not only almost, but altogether Christians, let us scorn all such base and treacherous treatment of our King and Saviour—nay, our God. Let us not take some pains all our lives to go to heaven, and yet plunge ourselves into hell at last. Let us give God our whole hearts, and no longer halt between two opinions: If the world is God, let us serve that—If pleasure is a God, let us serve that; but if the Lord, He is God, let us—Oh let us serve Him alone! Alas! Why, why should we stand out any longer? Why should we be so in love with slavery, as not wholly to renounce the world, the flesh, and the Devil, which, like so many spiritual chains, bind down our souls, and hinder them from flying up to God? Alas! What are we afraid of? Is God not able to reward our entire obedience? If He is, as the almost Christian's lame way of serving Him seems to grant—Why, then, will we not serve Him entirely? For the same reason we do so much, why do we not do more? Or do you think that being only half religious will make you happy, but that going further will render you miserable and uneasy? Alas! This, my brethren, is delusion all over; for what is it but this half piety—this wavering between God and the world, that makes so many that are seemingly well disposed, such utter

strangers to the comforts of religion? They choose just so much of religion as will disturb them in their lusts, and follow their lusts so far as to deprive themselves of the comforts of religion: Whereas, on the contrary, would they sincerely leave all in affection, and give their hearts wholly to God, they would then (and they cannot till then) experience the unspeakable pleasure of having a mind at unity with itself, and enjoy such a peace of God, which, even in this life, passes all understanding, and which they were entire strangers to before. It is true, if we will devote ourselves entirely to God, we must meet with contempt, but then it is because contempt is necessary to heal our pride. We must renounce some ... pleasure, but then it is because those unfit us for spiritual ones, which are infinitely better. We must renounce the love of the world, but then it is that we may be filled with the love of God: And when that has once enlarged our hearts, we shall, like Jacob, when he served for his beloved Rachel, think nothing too difficult to undergo, no hardships too tedious to endure, because of the love we shall then have for our dear Redeemer. Thus easy, thus delightful will be the ways of God even in this life; but when once we throw off these bodies, and our souls are filled with all the fullness of God, Oh! What heart can conceive, what tongue can express, with what unspeakable joy and consolation we shall then look back on our past sincere and hearty services. Do you think then, my dear hearers, we shall repent we had done too much; or rather do you not think we shall be ashamed that we did no more, and blush we were so reluctant to give up all to God, when He intended hereafter to give us Himself?

Let me, therefore, to conclude, exhort you, my brethren, to have always the unspeakable happiness of enjoying God set before you: And think as well, that every degree of holiness you neglect—

every instance of piety you pass by, is a jewel taken out of your crown, a degree of blessedness lost in the vision of God. Oh! Do but always think and act thus, and you will no longer be laboring to compound matters between God and the world, but, on the contrary, be daily endeavoring to give yourselves more and more unto Him; you will be always watching, always praying, always aspiring after further degrees of purity and love, and so consequently always preparing yourselves for a fuller sight and enjoyment of that God, in whose presence there is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. Amen! Amen!

INTERCESSION EVERY CHRISTIAN'S DUTY



INTERCESSION EVERY CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

1 Thessalonians 5:25.— Brethren, pray for us.

— If we enquire, why there is so little love to be found among Christians, why the very characteristic, by which every one should know that we are disciples, of the holy Jesus, is almost banished out of the Christian world—we shall find it, in a great measure owing to a neglect or superficial performance of that most God-like part of secret prayer Intercession, or imploring the divine grace or mercy in behalf of others.

Some forget this duty of praying for others, because they seldom remember to pray for themselves; and even good people, who are constant in praying to their Father, which is in heaven, are often so constrained and selfish in their addresses to the throne of grace, that they do not enlarge their petitions for the welfare of their fellow Christians as they ought, and thereby fall short of attaining that Christian charity, that unfeigned love of their brethren, which their sacred profession obliges them to aspire af-

ter, and without which, though they would **bestow all their goods to feed the poor, and even give their bodies to be burned, yet it would profit them nothing.**

Since then these things are so, I shall, from the words of the text, (though originally intended to be more confined) endeavor to show, 1. That it is every Christian's duty to pray for others, as well as for himself. 2. Who are those that we ought to pray for, and in what manner we shall do it. And, 3. I shall offer some motives to excite all Christians to abound in this great duty of Intercession.

1. First, then, I shall endeavor to show, that it is every Christian's duty to pray for others, as well as for himself.

Now prayer is a duty founded on natural religion; the very heathens never neglected it, though many Christian heathens among us do; And it is so essential to Christianity, that you might as reasonably expect to find a living man without breath, as a true Christian without the spirit of prayer and supplication: Thus, no sooner was Saint Paul converted, but **behold he prayeth**, says the Lord Almighty. And thus will it be with every child of God, as soon as he becomes such, prayer being truly called— **The natural cry of the new born soul.**

For in the heart of every true believer there is a heavenly tendency, a divine attraction, which as sensibly draws him to converse with God, as the loadstone attracts the needle.

A deep sense of their own weakness, and of Christ's fullness; a strong conviction of their natural corruption, and of the necessity of renewing grace, will not let them **rest from crying day and night** to their Almighty Redeemer, that the divine image, which

they lost in Adam, may, through his all-powerful mediation, and the sanctifying operations of his blessed spirit, be begun, carried on, and fully perfected both in their souls and bodies.

Thus earnest, thus importunate, are all sincere Christians in praying for themselves; but then, not having so lively, lasting, and deep a sense of the wants of their Christian brethren, they are, for the most part, too remiss and defective in their prayers for them; whereas was the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and did we love our neighbor in that manner in which the Son of God, our Savior loved us, and according to his command and example, we could not but be as importunate for their spiritual and temporal welfare, as for our own, and as earnestly desire and endeavor that others should share in the benefits of the death and passion of Jesus Christ as we ourselves.

Let not any one think, that this is an uncommon degree of charity, an high pitch of perfection, which every one cannot attain unto, since it is no such thing: For if we are all commanded to **love our neighbor**, that is every man, nay to **lay down our lives for the brethren**, it is the duty of all to pray for their neighbors as much as for themselves, and by all possible acts and expressions of love and affection towards them, at all times, to show their readiness even to lay down their lives for them, if ever it should please God to call them to it.

Our blessed Savior, as he has set us an example, that we should follow his steps in every thing else, so has he more especially in this: For in that most divine, that most perfect and inimitable prayer, recorded in the 17th of Saint John, which he put up just before his passion, we find but few petitions for his own, though many for his disciples' welfare: And in that most perfect form

which he has been pleased to prescribe us, we are taught to say—not **my**, but **our Father**; thereby to put us in mind, that, whenever we approach the throne of grace, we ought to pray not for ourselves alone, but for all our brethren in Christ.

Intercession then is certainly a duty incumbent upon all Christians.

2. Whom we are to intercede for, and how this duty is to be performed, comes next to be considered, under my second general head.

1. And first, our intercession must be universal. **I will**, says the apostle, **that prayers, supplications, and intercessions be made for all men:** For as **God's mercy is over all his works**, as **Jesus Christ died to redeem a people out of all nations and languages**; so we should pray, that **all men may come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved**. Many precious promises are made in holy writ, that **the gospel shall be published through the whole world**, that **the earth shall be covered with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea**: And therefore it is our duty not to confine our petitions to our own nation, but to pray that all those nations, who now sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, may have the glorious gospel shine out upon them, as well as upon us. But you need not that any man should teach you this, since ye yourselves are taught of God, even of Jesus Christ himself, to pray, that his kingdom may come; part of the meaning of which petition is, that God's ways may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations.

2. Next to the praying for all men, we should, according to Saint Paul's rule, pray for those in authority, that we may lead quiet lives, in all godliness and honesty. For if we consider how heavy the burden of government is, and how much the welfare of any people depends on the zeal and godly conversation of those that have the rule over them: If we set before us the many dangers and difficulties to which governors, by their station, are exposed, and the continual temptations they lie under to luxury and self-indulgence, we shall not only pity but pray for them—that he who preserved Esther, David, and Josiah **unspotted from the world**, amidst the grandeur of a court, and gave success to their designs, would also preserve them holy and unblamable, and prosper all the works of their hands upon them.

3. But, **thirdly**, you ought, in a more especial manner, to pray for those, whom **the Holy Ghost hath made overseers over you**. This is what Saint Paul begs, again and again, of the churches to whom he writes. **Brethren**, says he in the text, **pray for us**; and again, in his epistle to the Ephesians—**Praying always**, says he, **with all manner of supplication; and for me also, that I may open my mouth boldly, to declare the mystery of the gospel**. And in another place, to express his earnestness in this request, and the great importance of their prayers to him, he bids the church **strive**, or, as the original word signifies, **be in an agony, together with him in their prayers**. And surely, if the great Saint Paul, that chosen vessel, that favorite of heaven, needed the most importunate prayers of his Christian converts, much more do the ordinary ministers of the gospel stand in need of the intercession of their respective flocks.

And I cannot but, in a more especial manner, insist upon this branch of your duty, because it is a matter of such importance; for, no doubt, much good is frequently withheld from many by reason of their neglecting to pray for their ministers, which they would have received, had they prayed for them as they ought. Not to mention, that people often complain of the want of diligent and faithful pastors: But how do they deserve good pastors, who will not earnestly pray to God for such.

The church has set apart four seasons in the year for this purpose, and to call down a blessing on those who are to be ordained to any holy function; but by how very few are the **ember days** observed! And if we will not **pray to the Lord of the harvest**, can it be expected, **he will send forth laborers into his harvest?**

Besides, what ingratitude is it, not to pray for your ministers! For shall they watch and labor in the word and doctrine for you, and for your salvation, and shall not you pray for them in return? If any bestow favors on your bodies, you think it right, meet, and your bounden duty, to pray for them; and shall not they be remembered in your prayers, who daily feed and nourish your souls? Add to all this, that praying for your ministers will be a manifest proof of your believing, that though Paul plant and Apollos water, yet it is God alone who gives the increase. And you will also find it the best means you can use, to promote your own welfare; because God, in answer to your prayers, may impart a double portion of his Holy Spirit to them, whereby they will be qualified to deal out to you larger measures of knowledge in spiritual things, and be enabled more skillfully to divide the word of truth.

Would men but constantly observe this direction, and when their ministers are praying in their name to God, humbly beseech him to perform all their petitions: Or, when they are speaking in God's name to them, pray that **the Holy Ghost may fall on all them that hear the word**; we shall then find a more visible good effect of their doctrine, and a greater mutual love between ministers and their people. For ministers' hands would then be held up by the people's intercessions, and the people will never dare to vilify or traduce those who are the constant subjects of their prayers.

4. Next to our ministers, our friends claim a place in our intercessions; but then we should not content ourselves with praying in general terms for them, but suit our prayers to their particular circumstances. When Miriam was afflicted with a leprosy from God, Moses cried and said—**Lord heal her**: And when the nobleman came to apply to Jesus Christ, in behalf of his child, he said—**Lord, my little daughter lieth at the point of death, I pray thee come, and heal her**. In like manner, when any of our friends are under any afflicting circumstances, we should endeavor to pray for them, with a particular regard to those circumstances. For instance—is a friend sick? We should pray, that if it be God's good pleasure, it may not be unto death; but if otherwise, that he would give him grace, so to take his visitation, that, after this painful life ended, he may dwell with him in life everlasting. Is a friend in doubt, in a matter? We should lay his case before God, as Moses did that of the daughters of Zelophehad, and pray, that God's Holy Spirit may lead him into all truth. Is he in want? We should pray, that his faith may never fail, and that in God's due time, he may be relieved. And in all other cases, we should not

pray for our friends, only in generals, but suit our... difficult duty, yet not impracticable to those who have renounced the things of this present life, (from an inordinate love of which alone all enmities arise) and who, knowing the terrible woes denounced against those who offend Christ's little ones, can, out of real pity, and a sense of their danger, pray for those by whom such offences come.

6. Lastly, and to conclude this head, we should intercede for all that are any ways afflicted in mind, body, or estate; for all who desire, and stand in need of our prayers, and for all who do not pray for themselves.

And Oh! that all who hear me, would set apart some time every day for the due performance of this most necessary duty!—In order to which,

I shall now proceed to the third general thing proposed, namely,

3. To show the advantages, and offer some considerations to excite you to the practice of daily intercession.

1. And **first**, it will fill your hearts with love one to another. He that every day heartily intercedes at the throne of grace for all mankind, cannot but in a short time be filled with love and charity to all; and the frequent exercise of his love in this manner, will insensibly enlarge his heart, and make him partaker of that exceeding abundance of it which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! Envy, malice, revenge and such like hellish tempers, can never long harbor in a gracious intercessor's breast; but he will be filled with joy, peace, meekness, long-suffering, and all other graces of the holy spirit. By frequently laying his neighbor's wants before God, he will be touched with a fellow-feeling of them; he will rejoice with them

that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep. Every blessing bestowed on others, instead of exciting envy in him, will be looked on as an answer to his particular intercession, and fill his soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Abound therefore in acts of general and particular intercessions, and when you hear of your neighbor's faults, instead of relating them to, and exposing them before others, lay them in secret before God, and beg of him to correct and amend them. When you hear of a notorious sinner, instead of thinking, you do well to be angry, beg of Jesus Christ to convert and make him a monument of his free grace; and you cannot imagine what a blessed alteration this practice will make in your heart, and how much you will increase, day by day, in the spirit of love and meekness towards all mankind!

But, further to excite you to the constant practice of this duty of intercession, consider the many instances given us in holy scripture of the power and efficacy of it. Great and excellent things are there recorded as the effects of this divine employ. It has stopped plagues, it has opened and shut heaven, and has frequently turned away God's fury from his people. How was Abimelech's house freed from the disease God sent amongst them, at the intercession of Abraham! When Phineas stood up and prayed, how soon did the plague cease! When Daniel humbled and afflicted his soul, and interceded for the Lord's inheritance, how quickly was an angel dispatched to tell him his prayer was heard! And to mention but one instance more, how does God own himself, as it were, quite overcome with the importunity of Moses, when he was interceding for his idolatrous people—**Let me alone**, says God!

This sufficiently shows, I could almost say, the omnipotency of intercession, and how we may, like Jacob, wrestle with God, and by an holy violence prevail both for ourselves and others. And no doubt it is owing to the secret and prevailing intercessions of the few righteous souls who still remain among us, that God has yet spared this miserably sinful nation; for were there not some such faithful ones, like Moses, left to stand in the gap, we should soon be destroyed, even as was Sodom, and reduced to ashes like unto Gomorrah.

But, to stir you up yet farther to this Godlike exercise of intercession, consider that, in all probability, it is the frequent employment even of the glorified saints; for though they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, and restored to the glorious liberty of the sons of God, yet as their happiness cannot be perfectly consummated until the resurrection of the last day, when all their brethren will be glorified with them, we cannot but think they are often importunate in beseeching our heavenly Father shortly to accomplish the number of his elect, and to hasten his kingdom. And shall not we, who are on earth, be often exercised in this divine employ with the glorious company of the spirits of just men made perfect? Since our happiness is so much to consist in the communion of saints in the church triumphant above, shall we not frequently intercede for the church militant here below, and earnestly beg, that we may all be one, even as the holy Jesus and his Father are one, that we may also be made perfect in one?

To provoke you to this great work and labor of love, remember that it is the never ceasing employment of the holy and highly exalted Jesus himself, who sits at the right hand of God to hear all

our prayers, and to make continual intercession for us! So that he who is constantly employed in interceding for others, is doing that on earth, which the eternal Son of God is always doing in heaven.

Imagine, therefore, when you are lifting up holy hands in prayer for one another, that you see the heavens opened, and the Son of God in all his glory, as the great high priest of your salvation, offering up and pleading for you, the all-sufficient merit of his sacrifice before the throne of his heavenly Father? Join then your intercessions with his, and beseech him, that they may, through him, come up as incense, and be received as a sweet smelling savor, acceptable in the sight of God! This imagination will strengthen your faith, excite a holy earnestness in your prayers, and make you wrestle with God as Jacob did, when he saw him face to face, and his life was preserved; as Abraham, when he pleaded for Sodom; and as Jesus Christ himself, when he prayed, being in an agony, so much the more earnestly the night before his bitter passion!

And now, brethren, what shall I say more, since you are taught of Jesus Christ himself to abound in love, and in this good work of praying one for another. Though ever so mean, though as poor as Lazarus, you will then become benefactors to all mankind; thousands, and twenty times ten thousands, will then be blessed for your sakes! And after you have employed a few years in this divine exercise here, you will be translated to that happy place, where you have so often wished others might be advanced, and be exalted to sit at the right hand of our all-powerful, all-prevailing Intercessor, in the kingdom of his heavenly Father hereafter!

However, I cannot but in an especial manner press this upon you now, because all ye, amongst whom I have now been preaching, in all probability will see me no more; for I am now going (I trust under the conduct of God's most holy spirit) from you, knowing not what shall befall me: I need therefore your most importunate intercessions, that nothing may move me from my duty, and that I may not count even my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy; and the ministry I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God!

Whilst I have been here, to the best of my knowledge I have not failed to declare unto you the whole will of God. And though my preaching may have been a savor of death unto death to some, yet I trust it has been also a savor of life unto life to others; and therefore I earnestly hope that those will not fail to remember me in their prayers. As for my own part, the many unmerited kindnesses I have received from you, will not suffer me to forget you: Out of the deep, therefore, I trust, shall my cry come unto God, and whilst the winds and storms are blowing over me, unto the Lord will I make my supplication for you. For it is but a little while, and we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where I must give a strict account of the doctrine I have preached, and you of your improvement under it. And Oh! that I may never be called out as a swift witness against any of those, for whose salvation I have sincerely, though too faintly, longed and labored!

It is true, I have been censured by some as acting out of sinister and selfish views; but it is a small matter with me to be judged by man's judgment: I hope my eye is single, but I beseech you,

brethren, by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, pray that it may be more so! and that I may increase with the increase of grace in the knowledge and love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now, brethren, what shall I say more? I could wish to continue my discourse much longer, for I can never fully express the desire of my soul towards you! Finally, therefore, brethren, **Whatsoever things are holy, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any consolation in Christ, if any fellowship of the Spirit,** if any hopes of our appearing to the comfort of each other at the awful tribunal of Jesus Christ, think of the things that you have heard, and of those which your pastors have declared, and will yet declare unto you: and continue under their ministry to **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;** so that, whether I shall see you any more, or whether it shall please God to bring me back again at any time, I may always have the satisfaction of knowing that your conversation is such as becomes the gospel of Christ.

I almost persuade myself, that I could willingly suffer all things, so that it might any ways promote the salvation of your precious and immortal souls: And I beseech you, as my last request, obey them that have the rule over you in the Lord, and be always ready to attend on their ministry, as it is our bounden duty. Think not that I desire to have myself exalted at the expense of another's character, but rather think this—Not to have men's persons too much in admiration, but esteem their ministers highly in love, as they justly deserve for their work's sake.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance amongst all them that are sanctified. May God reward you for all your works of faith, and labors of love, and make you to abound more and more in every good word and work towards all men. May he truly convert all that have been convinced, and awaken all that are dead in trespasses and sins! May he confirm all that are wavering! And may you all go on from one degree of grace unto another, till you arrive unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, and thereby be made meet to stand before that God, **in whose presence is the fullness of joy, at whose right hand there are pleasures forevermore!** AMEN!
AMEN!

THANKS FOR READING



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