

## XLIII.

## Prayer for and with Each Other.

“Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”—*James v. 16*.

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Let our last article touch once more the key of love wherein the article preceding that of prayer was set. To speak of the Spirit’s work in our prayers, omitting *the intercession of the saints*, betrays a lack of understanding concerning the Spirit of all grace.

Prayer for others is quite different from prayer for ourselves. The latter is indeed lawful; God even commands us “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known unto God.” Yet it may contain refined egoism even tho it be followed by thanksgiving; hence to prayer is added *intercession*, that in prayer the breath of love may quench gently, yet effectually, remaining egoism, and lead us to the still holier prayer for the heavenly King and His Kingdom.

Christ prays for us, but the Bride must also pray for her heavenly Bridegroom. David’s prayer for Solomon points beyond Solomon to the Messiah: “Give the King Thy judgments, O God” (*Psalms lxxii. 1*). In the Twentieth and Sixty-first Psalms the same thought is expressed. However, this is not a prayer for His Person (for as such He is glorified already), but for the coming of His Kingdom, for the extending of His Name to the ends of the earth, for the gathering in of the souls of His elect.

In the Lord’s Prayer, this most holy petition stands even in the foreground; for when we pray, “Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done,” (*Luke xi. 2*) we are inspired, not by love for self or for others, but by love for Him who is in heaven. It is true, we realize that the fulfilling of that prayer is most desirable for others and ourselves; still it is the *love for God* that stands here in the foreground. It is the summary of *prayer* eminently fitting the summary of the *law*: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” (*Matt. xxii. 37*) This is the first and great *commandment*. Then, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (*Matt. xxii. 39*) And so in our prayer: first, for the cause of God, this is the first and great *petition*; then, prayer for the neighbor as for ourselves. Our *prayer* is the test of our relation to the first and great *commandment*.

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And what is the work of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of intercession?

It is necessary here, for a clear understanding, to distinguish between a *twofold intercession*: (1) there is a prayer for the things that pertain to the body of Christ; and (2) another for the things that do not belong to that body, according to our impression and conception of the matter.

Prayer for kings, and for all that are in authority, does not concern the things that pertain to the body of Christ; neither does the prayer for our enemies, nor that for the place of our habitation, for country, army, and navy, for a bountiful harvest, for deliverance from pesti-

lence, for trade and commerce, etc. All these pertain to the *natural* life, and to persons, whether saints or sinners, in their relation to the life of creation, and not to the Kingdom of Grace. But our prayer does concern the body of Christ, when we pray for the coming of the Lord, for a fresh anointing of the priests of God, for their being clothed upon with salvation, for success in the work of missions, for a baptism of the Holy Spirit, for strength in conflict, for forgiveness of sin, for the salvation of our loved ones, for the effectual conversion of the baptized seed of the Church. The first intercession has reference to the realm of nature, the second to the Kingdom of Grace. Hence in each of these two we must look for the bond of fellowship from which springs our prayer of intercession.

For every prayer of intercession presupposes *fellowship* with them for whom we pray; a fellowship which casts us into the same distress, and from which we look for deliverance, and that in such a way that the sorrow of one burdens us, and the joy of another causes us to give thanks. Where such vital fellowship does not exist, nor the love which springs from it, or where these are temporarily inactive, there may be a formal intercession of words, but real intercession from the heart there can not be.

With reference to the intercession in the realm of nature, the ground of this fellowship is naturally found in the fact that we are created *of one blood*. Humanity is one. The nations form an organic whole. It is a mighty trunk with leafy crown; the nations and peoples are the branches thereof, successive generations the boughs, and each of us is a fluttering leaf. Belonging together, living together upon the same root of our human nature, it is one flesh and one blood, which from Adam to the last-born child covers every skeleton and runs through every man's veins. Hence the desire for universal philanthropy; the claim that nothing be alien to us that is human; the necessity of loving our enemy and of praying for him, for he also is of our flesh and of our bones.

If we were like grains in a heap of sand, each grain might possibly send forth a sigh; but the mutual prayer of intercession would be out of the question. Being leaves, however, of the same tree of life, there is, apart from the groaning of every leaf, also a prayer for one another, a mutual prayer of the entire human life; "the whole creation groaneth."

But in the Kingdom of *Grace* the fellowship of love is much stronger, firmer, and more intimate. There is here also an organic whole, even the body of Christ under Him the Head. It is not one converted person independent of another, and the two united by a mere outward tie of sympathy; nay, but a multitude of branches all springing from the same root of Jesse; growing from the one vine; all organically one; saved and redeemed by the same ransom of His blood; proceeding from the one act of election; born again by the self-same regeneration; brought nigh by the same faith; breaking one bread and drinking from one cup.

And let us notice it well, this unity is doubly strong; for it is not independent of the fellowship of nature, but added to it. They who become members of the body of Christ are with us created from the one blood of Adam, and with us they are redeemed by the one



blood of Christ. Hence there is here *double* root of fellowship. Flesh of our flesh, bones of our bones. Moreover, born from one decree; sealed by one baptism; joined together in one body; included in one promise; by and by sharers with us of the same inheritance.

In this double fellowship of life is rooted the *love* which mutually unites the children of God, especially in their prayers of intercession, a union which appears sometimes in their mutual prayer. Vital fellowship does not spring from our love for the people of God, but that love springs from the fellowship of the life of grace, common to all His saints. That which grows not from one root, and, therefore, shares not the same life, can not attain to love in higher sense. Prayer for one another is born of the love to one another; and the love which unites us ascends from the one root of life upon which we all are grafted through grace, upon which by virtue of our creation from Adam we all were set. And thus the work of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of intercession will appear in clearest light.

In the realm of nature, our vital *power* is from the *Father*, our *human kinship* through the *Son*, and the conception of that kinship from the Holy Ghost. Hence in the ordinary manifestations of benevolence, such as helpfulness in distress, friendliness in daily life, and the desire for social intercourse, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to keep alive in us the conception of our human kinship. It is true that sin has terribly disturbed this conception. Yet the Holy Spirit has not forsaken His work; but, when a man seeing a strange child drowning, and, without considering his own life, jumps into the water and saves him, then it is the constraining power of the Holy Spirit that must be honored in this heroic act of philanthropy.

But much more apparent is the work of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of intercession which belongs to the domain of grace. For with reference to the fellowship of the body of Christ, it is again the *Father* from whom *proceeds* our redemption, the *Son* in whom we are *united*, and the *Holy Spirit* who imparts to us the conception and consciousness of this unity and holy fellowship. The mere fact of being chosen by the Father and redeemed by the Son does not constrain us to love; it is the act of the Holy Spirit, who, revealing to our conception and consciousness this wonderful gift of grace, opening our eyes for the beauty of being joined to the body of Christ, kindles in us the spark of the love for Christ and for His people. And when this double work of the Holy Spirit effectually operates in us, causing our hearts to be drawn to all that belong to us by virtue of our human kinship, and much more strongly to the people of God by virtue of our kinship in the Son, then there awakes in us the love of which the apostle says that it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

And yet this is not all of the Holy Spirit's work. Love can be tender without compelling one to prayer. This is evident from the universal love of benevolence. A man may rush into a burning building to save another from perishing by fire, while he is a perfect stranger to prayer for others. And, on the contrary, there are people who always talk of praying for others, who constantly enlarge the phylacteries of their own prayer of intercession, who ever say to others, "Pray for me," and who would yet, in the hour of danger, quietly allow

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us to drown or perish in the flames; who carefully guard their pockets lest mercy call upon them to assist us with their money.

From which it is evident that there must be a connecting link between *love* and *the prayer born of love*. As soon as *love* begins to pray it is joined to *faith*; and by this union prayer becomes active. Love alone is not yet prayer. And the mere prayer of intercession is not the evidence of love. Then alone is there real intercession, when love, being joined to faith, constrains us to carry the object of love before the throne of grace.

Let us, therefore, be careful in our prayers of intercession; especially when the person for whom we pray is *present*. For then there is danger lest our prayer in his behalf have the tendency to show him how much we think of him and love him, rather than constrain us to ask something for him of God. Methodism<sup>14</sup> has often sinned in this respect, and many a prayer has been desecrated by this insincere intercession.

This shows clearly what is the additional work of the Holy Spirit in this respect: not merely that He quicken in us general faith, nor that He fan in us the flames of brotherly love; but that He also cause faith to join love in holy wedlock, directing them thus united to the brother for whom we are to pray. This is the object of St. Paul, when he desires that there shall be a fellowship of saints, not only in the gift of God, but also in the prayer of thanksgiving; not only for our sakes, but “That the abounding grace might through the thanksgiving of many rebound to the glory of God” (1 Cor. iv. 15).

Just as in a drawing-room whose walls are lined with crystal mirrors the light of the chandelier is reflected not only by every mirror, but also from mirror to mirror, so that there is an endless reflection of the light, so also is it with reference to the prayer of intercession and thanksgiving in the body of Christ. In this chamber of glory Christ is the Light which is reflected in the mirror of the soul. But it is not sufficient that every soul-mirror receive the light, and reflect it in thanksgiving; but from mirror to mirror this glory of the Son must be reflected here or there until there is an never-ending scintillation of increasing brightness; and everything is baptized in the overflowing luster in which the Son glorifies Himself.

And this leads us to speak of *mutual prayer*.

Mutual prayer is intercession of the richest sort; for its value is enhanced by the consciousness of its being mutual. In ordinary intercession, one prays for another not knowing whether the other also prays for him, but in the mutual prayer, “I “ is turned into “we,” as in the Lord’s Prayer. It is no longer *one* wrestling before the throne of grace, but *all together*, thus giving expression to the unity and fellowship of the body of Christ. They cry from one distress; they bless Him for the same grace; they plead the same promise; they look forward to the same glory; they come to the same Father in the name of the one Mediator, leaning upon the same atoning blood. Then it is that the work of the Holy Spirit attains its highest



14 See section 5 in the Preface for the author’s explanation of Methodism.

glory. Then He joins faith and love, not in one heart, but in many; then He opens the hearts and unites the souls of the saints; then He causes them to meet together in the audience-chamber of the Lord God, one people, a multitude of believers, who in their spiritual kinship reflect the unity of the body of Christ.

Hence there is nothing so difficult as mutual prayer. Prayer in the closet is easy; to pray for others is not hard; but to pray with each other requires such exalted spiritual tone, such pure love, such clear perception of the unity of the body, as, alas! in the midst of this sinful life is rarely attained by large bodies of believers. And the leader, if he be indeed the mouthpiece of the people, has a very difficult task, and must himself be in a thoroughly spiritual frame of mind.

Surely if the Holy Spirit left us to ourselves, every activity of faith, love, and prayer would soon be paralyzed. But, blessed be God! He knows our infirmity, and with divine pity He looks upon our painful helplessness. He is and remains the Comforter; His work is never ended. When we slept, having no oil in our lamps, He watched over our souls. When our love failed, He loved us just the same. When our faith became dull and faint, and prayer became dumb upon our lips, He prayed for us with groanings that can not be uttered.

And this is His work continually. It is He that is the divine Bearer of every higher conception and holier consciousness in the children of men; He, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, that exhibits all the riches of the Mediator to the Bride, making her eager to possess them; He that quickens the treasures of the Word by the spark of His holy fire, bringing them to the consciousness of the inward man.

Blessed is the man to whom has been given a taste of the work of the Holy Spirit in his own experience. Blessed is the Church which in its service has proved the inworking of the Spirit of grace and of supplication. Blessed is he who, constrained to love by the love of the Holy Spirit, has opened his heart in thanks, praise, and adoration, not only to the Father who from eternity has chosen and called him, and to the Son who has bought and redeemed him, but also to the Third Person in the Holy Trinity, who has kindled in him the light and keeps it burning in the inward darkness; to whom, therefore, with the Father and the Son, belongs forever the sacrifice of love and devotion of all the Church of God.



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