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**INTERCESSORY PRAYER  
ITS NATURE AND EFFICACY**

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**A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Systematic Theology**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity**

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by  
**Robert John Hoyer**

**May 1944**

Approved by:

*John H. ...*  
*Alfred ...*

*A clearer presentation  
would have been desirable.*

*R. J. H.  
A. H. B. G.*



**INTERCESSORY PRAYER, ITS NATURE AND EFFICACY.**

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The Bible, it has been said, is not a systematic book. Had it been written in the style of a doctrinal outline, fully categorized and subdivided, it would probably not enjoy its present prominence on the World's best seller list. But its lack of any but historical arrangement, without even its fundamental division of Law and Gospel noted by position in the book, has placed the problem of organization into the hands of the systematic theologian. Human fallibility is the cause of most of the divisions of denomination and sect in the Christian church today.

Prayer is one of the less controversial subjects, as far as logical sequence of its presentation is concerned. It has been divided on many fundamenta dividendi, private and public, personal and impersonal, for temporal and spiritual blessings, subjective and objective. For the purposes of this thesis, two of these fundamenta have been adopted; we are to treat of objective personal prayer. This has been given the convenient name: intercessory prayer, from the Latin inter: between, and cedere: to pass. To intercede is defined by Webster: To act between parties with a view to reconcile differences, to make intercession; to beg or plead in behalf of another; mediate.

Prayer is the conversation of a Christian with God. It is a religious act, consisting in speaking to God.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Dr. W. Arndt, Christian Prayer, p. 7.



In intercessory prayer, then, the Christian passes between God and a fellow man, with a view to reconcile differences, to mediate, to beg or to plead on behalf of his brother. As in subjective prayer he faces God to ask a special favor for himself, in intercessory prayer he faces God to ask special grace for another human being. It is our purpose to examine the nature and efficacy of such a prayer, determining that it is true prayer, that it is indeed the highest form of prayer, with special characteristics, promises, and problems, and that it brings special benefits both to prayor and prayee.

Intercessory prayer is a division of prayer, and is therefore to be classed as such. It is subject to all the general promises given to prayer, included in all the commands for prayer, limited by the same rules that govern all prayer. It's higher form than that of subjective prayer; its additional commands, promises, and limitations do not in any way except it from the general category of prayer.

Intercessory prayer is a work of sanctification. It is not a means of grace, since it promises and offers no forgiveness of sins, works no faith, except through the application of the Word and Sacrament. A man may pray to be given greater faith, through the Word and Sacrament, but it is these, not the prayer, that convey grace to him. Similarly, a man may pray that his friend be brought to grace but the answer must come through Word and Sacrament,



not by prayer alone. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians was not only that God should perfect their faith, but: night and day praying that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith,<sup>1</sup> through the preaching of the Word. Of his fellow Jews he said: My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. But he goes on to say the obstacle presented is their lack of knowledge of Christ, given thus: The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the Word of faith which we preach.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus himself recognized this limitation, that we must pray for the faith of another through the Means of Grace. In His high-priestly prayer, He prayed that He might glorify His Father: That He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent... Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given me are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me. Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word.<sup>3</sup> And when, during His Galileean ministry, He saw the multitudes, He had pity on them, and instructed His disciples: Pray ye therefore the Lord of

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1. I Thessalonians 3:10.

2. Romans 10:1.8.

3. John 17:2-3.7-8.17.20.



the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.<sup>1</sup> The laborers Christ sent were sent to preach the Gospel to every creature.

Prayer is a means by which the believer deals with God, the means of grace are God's work upon us.<sup>2</sup> It is an abomination when a man makes his own prayer his hope of eternal life, for as many as are under the works of the law are under the curse.<sup>3</sup> It is even more an abomination when a man would strive by his own prayer to lift another man to heaven. The answer to intercessory prayer must, like the answer to all prayer, use the established channels of answer.

Prayer is, however, a help to the divine life. "God can do more in a praying soul than in another, because that soul is more open and responsive to His grace. Prayer is then the most direct of all helps to the divine life."<sup>4</sup>

Intercessory prayer must be done in faith. From the very nature of the prayer this is more usual than in the case of subjective prayer. A man may tentatively place his own affairs partially in the hands of

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1. Matthew 9:38.

2. J.T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, p. 467.

3. Galatians 3:10.

4. Wm. N. Clarke, Outline of Christian Theology, p. 413.



an untrusted helper, as a last resort, or in the endeavor to fulfill all requirements for a Christian life. He is less likely, however, to ask a source whose power and interest he cannot fully accept to aid a friend in need. This would work a harder strain on the logical faculties. Thus when we read of Christ in His home town: He could there do no mighty work;<sup>1</sup> it was for lack of faith, and, consequently, lack of prayer. Other cities lined their streets with sick and crippled, believing He could and would help. In His own country they didn't believe, and none came for help. The few sick folk that prayed, He cured, and marvelled at the unbelief which prevented miracles, not in that it stopped His almighty power, but in that it didn't desire it. The other side of the picture is shown by numerous examples: the faith of the four men with their friend sick of the palsy, faith which penetrated great difficulties to reach Jesus' side; the faith of the Syro-phenician woman which swept scorn and rebuke aside; the faith of Jairus which prayed in spite of death.

Intercessory prayer must be in submission to the will of God. We are accustomed to saying that those prayers for the good of our neighbor and the spread of God's Kingdom carry God's special blessing. Intercessory prayer is per se always for the good of our neighbor, Christian intercessory prayer will always aim at strengthening the

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1. Mark 6:5.



Kingdom. Yet this does not release it from the larger duty of submission to the will of God. Peter prayed for his readers: the God of all grace...after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.<sup>1</sup> Peter does not here pray for their suffering. He prays in submission to the will of God, which his prophetic vision saw would bring suffering. This is shown in the preceding chapter. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye,<sup>2</sup> he tells them. The future less vivid construction shows that suffering had not yet come, and the verse with its context is a warning admonition.

Intercessory prayer must be humble, as any prayer must. The fact that the prayer is beseeching God on behalf of another in no way enhances his own stand before God. The centurion, praying for his servant, was commended when he prayed: Lord trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.<sup>3</sup> Nor was he obsequious, for he was well aware of his own position of authority. Moses lost his chance to lead the children of Israel to the land of promise because he put his own authority in the foreground, in mediating between God and man.

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1. 1 Peter 5:10.  
 2. 1 Peter 4:14.  
 3. Luke 7:6,7.



The curse came, "because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, intercessory prayer is included in all commands to pray, and specific commands are added thereto. It is included in all promises of answer to prayer, and additional promises are added thereto.

The special considerations connected with intercessory prayer, however, make it the highest form of supplicatory prayer, and separate it from other, general prayer. Henry Ward Beecher said: "God...loves, without doubt, to hear us plead for our own wants,... but when we plead for others there is an element of magnanimity, there is a grace, in it, which God, it seems to me, must love, and be more inclined to favor than petitions in our own behalf."<sup>2</sup> Luther, in his Treatise on Good Works, in treating the Third Commandment, says much on the part prayer is to take in the service. He especially commends common prayer, for reasons which may well transfer the commendation to intercessory prayer:

"All this has been said of prayer for personal needs, and of prayer in general. But the prayer which really belongs to this commandment, and is called a work of the Holy Day, is far better and greater, and is to be made for all Christendom, for all the need of all men, of foe and friend, especially for those who belong to the parish or bishopric.

"Thus St. Paul commanded his disciple Timothy: I exhort thee, that thou see to it, that prayers and intercession be made for all men, for kings,

1. Numbers 20:12

2. Lecture Room Talks, p. 45.



and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.<sup>1</sup> For this reason Jeremiah commanded the people of Israel to pray for the city and land of Babylon, because in the peace thereof they should have peace, and Baruch: "Pray for the life of the King of Babylon, and for the life of his son, that we may live in peace under their rule."<sup>2</sup>

"This common prayer is precious and the most powerful, and it is for its sake that we come together. For this reason also the church is called a House of Prayer, because in it we are as a congregation with one accord to consider our own need and the needs of all men, present them before God, and call upon Him for mercy.... For what sense is there in our coming together into a House of Prayer, which coming together shows that we should make common prayer and petition for the entire congregation, if we scatter these prayers, and so distribute them that every one prays for himself, and no one has regard for the other, nor concerns himself for another's needs? How can that prayer be of help, good, acceptable and a common prayer....which they make who make their own petty prayers, one for this, the other for that, and have nothing but self-seeking, selfish prayers, which God hates?"<sup>3</sup>

In support of his claim that this prayer has great power, Luther continues:

"The power of this prayer we see in the fact that in olden times Abraham prayed for the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, etc., and accomplished so much that if there had been 10 righteous people in them, two in each city, God would not have destroyed them. What then could many men do, if they united in calling upon God earnestly and with sincere confidence.

"St. James also says 'Dear brethren, pray for one another, that ye may be saved. For the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, a prayer that perseveres and does not cease.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. I Timothy 2:1ff.

2. Baruch 1:11 f.

3. Holman, vol. I, Treatise on Good Works. "The Third Commandment.", p. 233-234.

4. Ibid p. 235.



Luther is here speaking of common prayer, which he terms far better and greater than other. But it may well be demonstrated that the real fundamentum dividendi which determines the value of the prayer in his distinction, is not the difference: private or public prayer; but the difference : subjective or objective prayer.

He does not say: the prayer which is far better and greater is to be made by all Christendom, but for all Christendom, for all the need of all men, etc. The exhortation to Timothy which he adduces speaks not of public prayer, but only of intercessory prayer. Timothy is to promote such prayer, but not necessarily as a congregational act. Thus Paul continues, I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah's command to pray for Babylon is not to a collected congregation, but closely succeeds instructions to the captives as individuals, to build houses, plant gardens, and take wives. And common prayer, Luther says, is not to be commended as common prayer, where every individual prayer has his own interests at heart. Common prayer is the best prayer, only when it is also intercessory.

This is further brought out when he speaks of the power of such prayer. Abraham's prayer was not a common prayer, he prayed alone. It is used in this context not

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1. I Timothy 2:8.



because it was common, but because it was intercessory.

Thus also James' command to pray is: pray one for another, and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avail-eth much. Luther here plainly indicated that intercessory, not common, prayer, is a better and greater prayer.

Nor is all public, or common prayer, intercessory.

When the psalmist prays, in a public hymn: Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved,<sup>1</sup> or: Show us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation,<sup>2</sup> or: Satisfy us early with Thy mercy,<sup>3</sup> this is intercessory prayer, for the prayer has the interests of his fellows at heart. A man who truly prays is a man who believes, and when such a man prays: turn us, i.e. bring us again to faith, he prays for the nation, for his fellows. Thus also in the prophecy of Zechariah: The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts,<sup>4</sup> it is an intercessory prayer, for the recipient of blessing, he who has heard of Christ, prays in order to share his blessing. But at some point indefinable to all but God, common prayer too becomes subjective. The ten lepers who lifted up their voices and said: Jesus, Master, have mercy

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1. Psalm 80:3,7,19.

2. Psalm 85:7.

3. Psalm 90:12ff.

4. Zechariah 8:21.



on us<sup>1</sup> probably prayed objectively, for in their misery, they had a community feeling of love of their brethren. In that sense it was intercessory. But can we truly say this when we see the nine, cured of their leprosy, interested only, each in his own restoration? Many such prayers must depend solely on the attitude of the prayer, as when the psalmist prays God be merciful unto us and bless us. Let all the people praise Thee, O God, then shall the earth yield her increase.<sup>2</sup> A worthy prayer, which, truly prayed in its context, is intercessory, but which allows an equally worthy subjective interpretation. It shows that not all common prayer is intercessory.

Or can we say that the disciples, on storm-tossed Galilee, were praying objectively, when they prayed in common: Lord, save us, we perish?<sup>3</sup> And certainly the prayer of the Jews after the feeding of the five thousand: Lord, evermore give us this bread,<sup>4</sup> was for self-interest alone, as was the prayer of the Gadarenes, who began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts.<sup>5</sup> It is true, these last two examples may be ruled out as not prayers of any sort, since they do not come, perhaps, from Christian hearts. But what may we say of the prayer of Capernaum, when the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He

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1. Luke 17:13.
  2. Psalm 67:6.
  3. Matthew 8:25.
  4. John 6:34.
  5. Mark 5:17.



should not depart from them.<sup>1</sup> A worthy prayer, from Christians to Christ, yet Jesus corrected it: And He said unto them, I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also: For therefore am I sent.<sup>2</sup> The prayer should have speeded Jesus on His way to spread His glorious message, in the spirit of Zechariah's prophesy.

This is not written in an effort to discredit common prayer. There is no more beautiful thing, no more powerful force, given to the hearts and minds of men. But it does demonstrate that not all common prayer is objective, and that common prayer possesses much of its commendable character only when it is intercessory. The prayers of our church are preeminently beautiful in this respect, especially the collect for the church, the general prayers and the bidding prayer.

Others have testified to the superior nature of intercessory prayer. E. M. Goulburn says:

The consideration of intercessory prayer properly follows that of self-examination. They are at opposite poles of the Christian's devotional exercises...very necessary to keep one another in check... By...self-inspection the mind is apt to become morbid...the man a valetudinarian in religion, full of himself, his symptoms, his ailments, the delicacy of his moral health... One tonic adapted to remedy this...state of mind is an active sympathy, such as comes out in intercessory prayer, with the wants and trials of

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1. Luke 4:42.

2. Luke 4:43.



others, a sympathy based upon that precept of the Holy Apostle's, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."<sup>1</sup>

C. A. Buttrick says:

Ever since gentleness entered our world, worthy folk have practised intercession. These are man's most ardent prayers...Not only is intercession apparently universal, but - and this is a vital consideration - it lives in our worthiest motive. There are today many earnest folk who are burdened by the war-madness of the nations, but who cannot speak any conspicuous word, or lay any potent hand on the levers of state action. From very pity they are driven to their knees. Human motives are always mixed, but their motive in that pang of prayer is nearly selfless.<sup>2</sup>

Thus even the modernists truncated view of prayer recognizes the better nature of the intercessory prayer. But we have a greater and more acceptable authority.

Scripture itself corroborates these views, by treating intercessory prayer in a special manner. It carries, first of all, a special command. These commands are simple, explicit, repeated. Paul wrote to Timothy, committing to him a charge, a congregation, instructing him in the methods "that thou by them mightest war a good warfare." First of all, the exhortation is given: that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.<sup>3</sup> These are, according to some, four types of prayer, but the qualifying clause makes them all intercessory, and the duty of intercessory prayer is placed first on the list

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1. E. M. Goulburn, Thoughts on Personal Religion, p. 97. Philimon 2:4.
  2. G. A. Buttrick, Prayer, pp. 100-102.
  3. I Timothy 2:1.



for a Christian congregation. As has been stated above, Paul amplifies this command. After saying that God gave himself for all, that he, Paul, was a minister to all, he adds that his will is for all men to pray - that men pray everywhere,<sup>1</sup> that those who pray, pray for all.

James concludes his epistle with a powerful and repeated command to intercessory prayer: Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry?<sup>2</sup> let him sing songs. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him.... pray for one another, that ye may be healed.<sup>2</sup> The passage raises many questions: who should pray, for whom and for what should he pray, what benefit is there to such prayer. One thing is clear. In addition to the general command to pray, - in specific cases, special need, with special benefits promised - James gives the command for intercessory prayer.

David commands: pray for the peace of Jerusalem. He reinforces the command with the example: For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, peace be within thee. Because of the House of the Lord our God I will seek thy good.<sup>3</sup> The thought is powerfully and more cogently repeated

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1. I Timothy 2:8.
  2. James 5: 13.14.
  3. Psalm 122:6.8.9.



by Jeremiah in the passage quoted by Dr. Luther: Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it, for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.<sup>1</sup> Instead of the hatred the children of Israel must have felt for their captors, Jeremiah commands them to pray for the peace of land of their exile. The last clause, pointing out that their own peace depended on their prayer, does not weaken the passage. In pointing out that they should desire peace in the new setting, Jeremiah iterates the command to forget their hatred. The command is a dim precursor of Christ's more startling: pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you?<sup>2</sup> He makes this a qualifying test of Christianity, that ye may be the children of your Father, which is in heaven.

Christ not only commanded, He welcomed intercessory prayer. Mothers brought young children to Him, that He should touch them, and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> His displeasure rebuked the disciples, not only for keeping the children away, but for forbidding the mothers who sought to bring the children to His attention,

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1. Jeremiah 29:7.  
3. Mark 10:13.14.

2. Matthew 5:44



who came to pray for their children, that He might touch them. His love for the children who comprise His Kingdom embraces also those who commend them to His care, and the prayers with which they do so.

Again, Jesus reproved a man for not praying objectively. When the Gadarene madmen, cured of his obsession, prayed that he might accompany Him across the lake, Christ told him: Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee.<sup>1</sup> The command might have been worded: Think first of others. A great task is before you, to share your blessed knowledge, gained while sitting at the feet of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Paul exhorted his churches often to pray for him. Brethren, pray for us.<sup>3</sup> Finally brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.<sup>4</sup> Paul embodies an intercessory prayer for all his hearers in this command. The mission spirit, love for all the redeemed, should prompt prayer for the minister who brought the Word. I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for

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1. Luke 8:39.

2. Luke 8:35.

3. I Thessalonians 5:25.

4. II Thessalonians 3:1,2.



the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me...that I may be delivered from...(unbelievers) in Judea, that my service (collection) ...may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God.<sup>1</sup> Pray also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ...that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.<sup>2</sup>

Intercessory prayer is a special duty of the Christian. The children of Israel made the breastplate double... And they set in it four rows of stones, and the stones were according to the names of the children of Israel.<sup>3</sup> The breastplate, resting on the heart of the High Priest as he performed his office before the altar of God, was the symbol of his position of interceder for the Old Testament church of God. In the New Testament church, the duties of the priesthood have come to the individual Christian, as Peter told them: ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,<sup>4</sup> and the duty of the priests intercessory office has been given to the present incumbents.<sup>5</sup> To seek to avoid this duty is to sin. The children of Israel displeased God by asking for a King. When Samuel

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1. Romans 15:30-32.

2. Colossians 4:3.

3. Exodus 39:9,10,14.

4. I Peter 2:9.

5. Figure from Goulburn, op. cit. p. 96.



pointed out God's displeasure, by calling down thunder and rain, the people asked him, pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not. Samuel's answer showed his attitude toward objective prayer: Fear not, ye have done all this wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the Lord. Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.<sup>1</sup> Such a motto was his clear statement of duty. Such a motto the Christian of today would do well to accept, in the light of the command to intercessory prayer. The duty of intercessory prayer is clearly emphasized in the passage noted above, where we are commanded to pray for even our enemies, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven... For if ye love them which love you what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?<sup>2</sup> The duty is made coincident with Christianity. Prayer for our brethren is taken for granted; even the unbeliever will regard that as necessary. The Christian's obligation includes also his enemies and mockers.

Intercessory prayer is based on a special primary purpose. Briefly stated, it is the same purpose that governs all God's dealings with man - the preservation

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1. I Samuel 12:19-20, 23.  
2. Matthew 5:44-47



and growth of His Kingdom. God Himself established this dual foundation for the world's continued existence. Paul said: All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose,<sup>1</sup> and Christ said, This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.<sup>2</sup> All God's acts, His dealings with men, individuals or groups, whatever their immediate purpose, fit into the framework of this greater, basic program. All things work toward this end. Therefore the answer to every prayer, since it is an act of God toward man, must also fit within this plan.

This affects intercessory prayer more than other prayer, because of the fact that two persons are involved - prayer and prayee. When a Christian truly prays, he is thereby witnessing his true Christianity, exercising himself in a work of sanctification. He is fulfilling the world-plan of God. Thus he always prays Thy will be done. But when he prays for another, a soul of which he has no personal knowledge, over which he has no personal control, enters the picture, and his first thought is that this soul, too, should partake of the blessings of God's expanding Kingdom. Intercession, therefore, in

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1. Romans 8:28.  
2. Matthew 24:14.



almost every example the Bible presents to us, has the primary purpose of the preservation and spread of the Kingdom of God. Prayers are offered first for grace in the forgiveness of sins, for the strengthened faith of the prayee, for blessings upon the members of the church, for the Church's growth by the addition of unbelievers. Prayers for other specific temporal blessings are appended to this primary prayer.

Intercessory prayers for forgiveness of sins are abundant especially in the Old Testament. From Moses on, special individuals stood as mediators between Man and God, to plead for the sins of the people.

The phrase: And Moses prayed for the people<sup>1</sup> is repeated often in the story of the Exodus, until it becomes to the reader an indictment of Israel. The people complained of the manna, and God sent the fire of the Lord to their camp. The people cried unto Moses, and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched.<sup>2</sup> They murmured at the rough journey, and did'nt trust God. He sent fiery serpents, and the people said: Pray unto the Lord, and Moses prayed for the people.<sup>3</sup> Moses prayed for alleviation of temporal pain, but he prayed first for

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1. Numbers 21:7

2. Numbers 11:2

3. Numbers 21:7



removal of the cause for these troubles, the forgiveness of sins. He himself was deeply conscious of this, as he told the Israelites in his final writing: And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned. He also prayed for individuals for the same blessing: And the Lord was very wroth with Aaron to have destroyed him; and I prayed for Aaron also the sametime. He was conscious that this forgiveness fitted into the larger purpose of God's care for His church, for he based his prayer on this: They are Thy people, and thine inheritance.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel continually interceded for his people's sins. When danger of destruction at the hand of the Philistines was imminent, Samuel said: Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And when the people gathered, they fasted, and said: We have sinned against the Lord.<sup>2</sup> When the people asked for a King, and God's displeasure was shown, they came to Samuel and said: Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask for a King.<sup>3</sup> When Samuel prayed, it was for forgiveness.

Perhaps the Old Testament's outstanding example

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1. Deuteronomy 9:18.20.29.
  2. I Samuel 7:5.6.
  3. I Samuel 12:19.



of intercession's basis on the prayer for forgiveness is the great intercessory prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the temple. Solomon prays that God would lend a favoring ear - Hear Thou in heaven - to the prayers of the people directed to His House, in a long category of hypothetical troubles. But always the prayer is couched in these terms: Hear Thou in heaven, and forgive.<sup>1</sup> God's answer, in a special revelation, was given in the same terms: If (they pray)... then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.<sup>2</sup>

When Hezekiah reformed the religious observances of the Kingdom of Judah, a multitude of the people... did eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying: The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his Fathers...<sup>3</sup> When Judah returned to the promised land from exile, they forgot the ordinance that forbade their mingling with the inhabitants, and married strange wives. Ezra's most moving prayer is for forgiveness of this sin: behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses, for we cannot stand before Thee because of this.<sup>4</sup> Nehemiah, before praying for favor in the eyes of Artaxerxes as he asked to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, prayed for

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1. I Kings 8:34.36.39.50.
  2. II Chronicles 7:14.
  3. II Chronicles 30:18-19.
  4. Ezra 9:15.



his people's forgiveness, that God would be inclined to grant the further, temporal favor.<sup>1</sup>

Such intercession for sins was vitally necessary in the Old Testament. Without a man to stand between the nation and its God, and pray for its sins, the nation would be destroyed. Ezekiel reported the Word of God: The people of the land have used oppression...and I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them.<sup>2</sup> But in the New Testament church, has need for a human prayer, for such on high priest became us... who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the people's, for this He did once, when He offered up Himself; wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.<sup>3</sup> He has made up the hedge, and stood in the gap, once for all. He constantly prays as He did on the cross, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.<sup>4</sup>

But this does not release the Christian from his duty. Stephen echoed Christ's prayer: Lord, lay not this

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1. Nehemiah 1:6.
  2. Ezekiel 22:29-31.
  3. Hebrews 7:26.27.25.
  4. Luke 23:34.



sin to their charge.<sup>1</sup> James commanded the elders of the church, in visiting the sick: let them pray over him... And the prayer of faith shall save the sick,... and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. And to each Christian: Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.<sup>2</sup> Job's mistaken cry: O that one might plead for a man with God<sup>3</sup> was answered by the command of God that he pray for his friends.<sup>4</sup> Our objections, too, are answered by the command.

Forgiveness of sins comes only through faith, thus the prayer for forgiveness becomes perfected in the prayer for faith. Jesus told Peter: Satan hath desired to have thee... but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.<sup>5</sup> Peter's faith and conversion took primary place in Jesus' prayer for his welfare. Paul's epistles are filled with such prayers, his intercessory prayer life must have been a busy one. To the Thessalonians he wrote: night and day praying that we might see your face, and perfect that which is lacking in your faith.<sup>6</sup> He prayed for the things that would instill and increase this faith: we do not cease to pray for you...to desire that ye might

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1. Acts 7:60.  
2. James 5:14-16.  
3. Job 16:21.

4. Job 42:8.  
5. Luke 22:32.  
6. I Thessalonians 3:10.



be filled with the knowledge of His will in wisdom and understanding.<sup>1</sup> He prayed that his converts would be established and confirmed in faith to the end: The Lord make you increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men... to the end that He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God.<sup>2</sup> He prayed in the confidence that these were proper prayers, according to the will of God: In every prayer for you making request... for your fellowship... being confident of this... that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> He enlisted the prayers of his fellow-workers in the same cause: Epaphras saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.<sup>4</sup>

God controls and governs the world for the sake of a group, and only moves history for individuals in such a way that the group may be benefitted. Intercessory prayer fits itself into God's world plan, when the Christian prays for blessings upon that group, the Church of Christ. This includes prayer for the church and its members, prayers for the leaders both by their own congregation members, and by all Christians, and common prayer, member for mem-

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1. Colossians 1:9.

2. I Thessalonians 3:12.

3. Philippians 1:4-6.

4. Colossians 4:12.



ber, all for the whole.

Prayer for the members of the church, is peculiarly a duty of the pastor of the congregation. Into his care a group of souls is given; his is the task of leading them to life through the means of Grace. For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.<sup>1</sup> The pastor who attempts to accomplish this task by his own powers, who underwrites the project on his own responsibility, is guilty of gross neglect of duty. The higher power under which he works can alone fulfill the requirements of the office, and the pastor must enlist that power or face failure and condemnation. Once again Paul is the example to which men would do well to look. Every one of his epistles recounts a prayer for the members of the church to which he writes; most begin and end with benedictions; in most of them he assures the recipients of his constant and earnest prayer for their welfare. And always his prayer enlists the help of God in furthering his pastoral duty. We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill the good pleasure of His goodness...that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you.<sup>2</sup> We do not cease to pray for you...and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in wisdom and

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1. Hebrews 13:17.

2. II Thessalonians 1:11.12.



understanding. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing being fruitful in every good work.<sup>1</sup>

This pastoral duty of prayer for the flock answers to the will of God's children, who ask and expect such prayer, tho the object of prayer is against the will of the pastor. The duty of prayer transcends the lack of natural inclination to prayer. The thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a King to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.<sup>2</sup> His inclination was to refuse the request. He knew the course he wanted to take. But he sought counsel from his God before he took the step, and God reversed his decision.

A pastor prays for a congregation, for the entire church, that his work may be effectively sped. But the pastors hands, too, need the lifting help of intercessory prayer to speed them in their tasks. For this reason Paul so frequently asks the prayers of his churches on his behalf, as we have quoted above. The apostolic ministry placed great confidence and reliance in such prayer, as they prayed at the election of Matthias: Thou, Lord, show whether of these two men Thou hast chosen<sup>3</sup>; and the result of the lot was unquestionably regarded as the choice of God, the answer to their prayer. Paul fulfilled his task

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1. Colossians 1:9.10.  
 2. I Samuel 8:6.  
 3. Acts 1:24.



as a Christian, in praying for the leaders of the Church, and his task as minister in praying for his people. In his first missionary journey, as in all, he appointed leaders for the established congregations, and we read: when they had ordained elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.<sup>1</sup> The collect for the ministry, and the general prayers, are excellent examples of intercessory prayer for the leaders of the church.

There is a third pattern of intercessory prayer in and for the church of Christ. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord.<sup>2</sup> This is the pattern of public prayer, for the church by the church. Such prayer came often to Christ in his ministry. As the Samaritans, many groups besought Him that He would tarry with them.<sup>3</sup> The Psalms abound in these prayers, the common desire of God's children for the protection and blessing of their divine head: Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance, feed them also, and lift them up forever.<sup>4</sup> Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation.<sup>5</sup> Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good.<sup>6</sup>

The special intercessions read before our altars,

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1. Acts 14:23.  
2. Zechariah 8:21.  
3. John 4:40.

4. Psalm 28:9.  
5. Psalm 85:7.  
6. Psalm 125:4.



to comfort the bereaved, to bless the betrothed, the mothers, for success in church undertakings are such prayers. The collect for Grace, the collect for peace, for the Word, for many specialized calamities or groups in need of prayers, are all intercessions of the congregation for members of the corporate bond.

In seeking as its first and basic purpose the fulfillment of God's great plan, intercessory prayer extends beyond the boundaries of the church, and seeks to draw the unbeliever into those bonds. This is the theme of the greatest of all intercessory prayers, incorporated into the greatest of all prayers of any type. When in the Lord's Prayer we pray, Thy Kingdom come, we pray for the extension of the church to every nation. We obey Christ's command, pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.<sup>1</sup> Many regard this as the intensive coming of the Kingdom, when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His Holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity.<sup>2</sup> Yet the words have a broader meaning, for the Kingdom of God has always been pictured as coming to every nation, every tribe; to it shall the Gentiles seek,<sup>3</sup> and the coming of the Kingdom synonymous

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1. Matthew 9:38.

2. Dr. Martin Luther, Small Catechism. Second Article, explanation.

3. Isaiah 11:10.



with its phenomenal growth.

Prayer for the growth of the Kingdom is direct and indirect. Direct prayer asks that God's Word be sent to heathen and unbeliever to work there faith and salvation. Paul asked, Pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course,<sup>1</sup> that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ...that I may make it manifest.<sup>2</sup> He stated: My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved,<sup>3</sup> through the gaining of more perfect knowledge by the Word of faith which he preached. The apostolic church prayed with Peter: Now Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto Thy servants that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word.<sup>4</sup> In Christ's great high-priestly prayer, He prayed for the preservation of His followers, but He added: Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one.<sup>5</sup>

Intercessory prayer for the growth of the Kingdom is indirect when it asks, <sup>primarily</sup> not for the faith of the unbeliever, but for an answer, which God will use to lead the unbeliever to faith. Elijah the Tishbite lived with a woman of Zarephath during a famine. His presence

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1. II Thessalonians 3:1.2.  
2. Colossians 4:3.4.  
3. Romans 10:1.

4. Acts 4:29.  
5. John 17:20.21.



greatly benefitted her, in that it enabled her to live through the famine. But her son died, and her faith in the God of Elijah was broken. What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? she asked him. Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? Elijah said to her, Give me thy son, and retiring to his private room he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. The child was restored and the woman brought to faith: Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.<sup>1</sup> Her conversion was complete, for Christ used her story in a rebuke to the men of Nazareth for not accepting Him as Savior.<sup>2</sup> In the same manner Elisha healed the son of the Shunamite, by intercessory prayer.<sup>3</sup> Jesus, too, performed miracles which had just this purpose, stated in the conclusion to his first miracle: This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him.<sup>4</sup> It was a driving purpose in His ministry of healing, so urgent that He prayed for its success, when He raised Lazarus from the dead. He lifted up His eyes and said: Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I know that Thou hearest me always, but because of the

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1. I Kings 17:18, 21, 24.

2. Luke 4:25, 26.

3. II Kings 4:33.

4. John 2:11.



people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me.<sup>1</sup>

The special, stated purpose of intercessory prayer is the gaining of another member for God's Kingdom, the strengthening of a soul already converted to faith in God. Thus it fulfills its place in God's historic scheme on this earth, and reconciles itself to the great pattern within whose bounds all prayers are answered. But the question arises, must all intercessory prayer be exclusively for the spread and strengthening of the Kingdom? The answer, on the basis of Scripture must be no. Prayer can be made for anything, as long as it does not violate that program. God will direct the answer to the good of His Kingdom, either apparently, or in a way we cannot fathom. The larger special purpose of intercessory prayer must temper and control our praying; it need not prescribe the form.

Many prayers are shown as where the prayers had no thought for the Kingdom, but God answered in such potent benefit to the Kingdom that its import cannot be ignored. Four men brought a friend sick of the palsy to Christ. Their faith was great; they went to great trouble to bring their concrete prayer to Christ's attention. But Jesus' first answer was: Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.<sup>2</sup>

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1. John 11:41,42.

2. Luke 5:20.



The four prayed thought of their friend in his sickness; Jesus saw another soul to add to His church. There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. He prayed to Christ for help. With a great purpose in mind, Jesus refused to go to his house, but only spoke a word, and the nobleman's son lived. And the father himself believed, and his whole house.<sup>1</sup>

Peter, arrested for boldly preaching Christ, was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him.<sup>2</sup> The prayers perhaps had in mind the tremendous work Peter was to do as a leader in the church; more probably they merely prayed for the bodily deliverance of a man they all loved dearly. They did not even fully believe in the efficacy of their prayers, for when God, fulfilling His larger purpose, also answered their prayers, they told Rhoda, who answered Peter's knock, and told them of it, Thou art mad, and it is his angel.<sup>3</sup> These Christians prayed in love for a man; God answered in love for His church. Peter himself prayed such a prayer, and received an answer larger than the prayer. Dorcas, at Joppa, died, and the Christians there sent to Peter to conduct the burial, for their weeping reception showed little faith in the power

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1. John 4:53.
  2. Acts 12:5.
  3. Acts 12:15.



he soon manifested. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed, and turning him to the body said, Tabitha arise, and she opened her eyes. Peter prayed for a woman whom he knew had been, and would be, a great benefit to the church. But God used the very act in a way not included in the prayer: And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Eli atoned for his rebuke of Hannah with the intercessory prayer: the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him.<sup>2</sup> Little did he or Hannah know the magnitude of the blessing the answer to their prayers would bring to the children of Israel in the person of Samuel, last of the judges. In a similar prayer Zacharias prayed for himself, but even more for his wife, for hers was the greater burden to be borne in their childlessness. Had Zacharias known he was asking for the forerunner of Christ he would have doubted even more the efficacy of his prayer, yet God, in love for his church, sent him the answer by an angel: Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.<sup>3</sup>

These examples show us that God's governorship of the church demands that all intercessory prayer serve

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1. Acts 9:40.42.  
 2. I Samuel 1:17.  
 3. Luke 1:13.



that church. But God's power to turn prayer to His church's benefit is omnipotence, as in all His works. The true Christian will not pray for something outside the scheme of God, and, beyond this, is not limited in any way as to what he may request for his neighbour. Intercessory prayers in Scripture range from almost completely altruistic prayers to prayers which, though objective, are prayed in self-interest. And God hears them all.

Prayers for temporal blessing, especially for physical healing, met Jesus at every turn of the road. The story is repeated often: At even when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils, and He healed many that were sick.<sup>1</sup> These were no well-organized prayers, with carefully worded notations as to how their answer would benefit the Kingdom. That thought scarcely occurred to the prayers. Many scarcely knew what the Kingdom meant. They only knew that here was a Man who was more than man, with help to offer. They brought their sick and helpless in silent prayer for their friends' needs, and each and every answer did serve God's great purpose. In like manner, Jairus prayed: come and lay Thy hands on (my daughter) that she may be healed;<sup>2</sup> the centurion interceded in humility through others

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1. Mark 1: 32-34  
2. Mark 5: 23



for the health of his servant,<sup>1</sup> disciples besought Him for Simon's wife's mother,<sup>2</sup> the man in Galilee appealed to Him as to a higher court, when His disciples failed to cure his son.<sup>3</sup> The Syro-phenician woman prayed, that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.<sup>4</sup> And Mary, His mother, asked for something far less important than a possessed son, or a dying servant, in one of the simplest of recorded prayers: They have no wine.<sup>5</sup> All of these prayers pleased God; all brought to His attention the sufferings of mankind, without a thought for the spiritual, so urgent was the temporal. If any had presumed to rebuke them: you must not pray for these things, but for spiritual blessings, they would have continued to call with blind Bartimeus: Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.<sup>6</sup> And Jesus would have stood still, and commanded them to be called. The prayers these people prayed did serve the greater purpose of God; if we examine them closely we can see it working. But the purpose in no way altered the form of the prayer.

Many other examples even less illustrative of purpose may easily be adduced: The ten lepers prayed Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,<sup>7</sup> Babylon's captivity of Judah

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1. Luke 7:7.

2. Luke 4:38.

3. Luke 9:38.

4. John 4:47.

5. Mark 7:26.

6. John 2:3.

7. Mark 10:47.

8. Luke 17:13.



were commanded: Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it - for the subjective reason - in the peace thereof ye shall have peace.<sup>1</sup> Paul asked that prayer be made for him that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men,<sup>2</sup> and Lot prayed for the preservation of Zoar, one of the wicked pentapolis condemned by God. This decision God reversed, for the preservation of His child Lot, though Lot prayed with none of the noble compassion which actuated Abraham.<sup>3</sup>

The manner in which intercessory prayer must answer to the larger purpose of God's care for His church is better shown in the consideration of the question: for whom to pray, than in the question for what to pray. Prayer is not truly prayer unless voiced by a Christian. Since intercessory prayer involves two souls, at least two individuals, are we to conclude that both must be Christians to validate the prayer? Must we limit our intercession to the prayer of the psalmist: Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good?<sup>4</sup> The question has already been answered with a definite no. Paul exhorted that intercession be made for all men.<sup>5</sup> Jesus and Stephen prayed for their unbelieving persecutors.<sup>6</sup> Paul's prayer

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1. Jeremiah 29:7.

2. II Thessalonians 3:2.

3. Genesis 19:20.

4. Psalm 125:4.

5. I Timothy 2:1.

6. Acts 7:60, Luke 23:34.



for Israel was, that they might be saved,<sup>1</sup> hence they could not have been Christians at the time of the prayer. Abraham prayed for people so wicked that God sent special messengers, nay came down Himself, to destroy them, in the interest of <sup>a possible</sup> ten righteous men, two in each city.<sup>2</sup> A man of God prayed for Jeroboam, who was usurping the right of the priest against God's will, in sacrificing at the altar, who had just demanded the arrest of the man of God for denouncing him, and had been punished for it.<sup>3</sup> If God hears prayers for Sodom and Gomorrah, and for kings who openly defy His majesty, are there any limitations to intercessory prayer? Here the answer is yes.

A Christian may not pray for anyone who is outside the bounds of God's care for the church. When a human will has been firmly and finally set in opposition to God's will, intercession is of no avail, for such we are not to pray. This automatically and finally rules out prayers for the dead; they are beyond the power of prayer, either confirmed a member, or confirmed outside the limits of God's Kingdom. It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this, the judgment.<sup>4</sup> When God judges, He judges for eternity, and any attempt of man's

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1. Romans 10:1.

2. Genesis 18:32. Dr. Martin Luther, Treatise on Good Works, in loco cit, p. 235.

3. I Kings 13:6.

4. Hebrews 9:27.



to reverse that judgment is sinful presumption.

The practical application of this limitation, however, presents some difficulties. We cannot see a man's faith or obduracy. John lays down a general rule: If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death, I do not say that he shall pray for it.<sup>1</sup> The first rule we have already covered, for the sins of our neighbors we should pray, in full confidence, with full assurance of a favorable answer. But, John tells us, a distinction exists: There is a sin unto death, where forgiveness is not desired. For only this sin, the rejection of forgiveness through grace, is completely unto death. For such a sin John does not encourage prayer. This does not obviate the difficulty, for whom shall we pray? It merely states it. We cannot determine who has sinned unto death, and who has not. John does not tell us, do not pray for those whom you think have sinned the sin unto death, but: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

None but God can determine the extent of a man's sins, our only criteria in prayer must then be: do not pray where God has expressly forbidden prayer. This opens an interesting vista in the study of intercessory prayer.

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1. I John 5:16.



for God has seldom forbidden it, and in one case has reversed his decision when a man disobeyed His forbidding.

Moses on Mount Sinai was far removed from the camp he had left behind in the hands of Aaron. It was probably a great shock, therefore, when God told him the details of the revelry at the base of the mountain, summed up in the condemning sentence, They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. The shock was increased at the anger of God, shown in the surprising command: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them, and I will make of thee a great nation. Moses, despite the command, interceded for the people, and the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people.<sup>1</sup> The questions that arise are these: was this a direct command of God which Moses disobeyed? Did Moses have a right to intercede on the basis of the general command, against this seemingly more specific command?

The Pulpit Commentary denies that this was a command of God:

"This was not a command, but rather a suggestion; or at any rate, it was a command not intended to compel obedience - like that of the angel to Jacob - "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Moses was not intended to take

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1. Exodus 32:8.10.14.



the command as absolute. He did not do so - he "wrestled with God," like Jacob, and prevailed. (If God had made of Moses a great nation)...all that had been as yet done would have gone for naught, and His purposes with respect to His "peculiar people" would have been put back 600 years and more."<sup>1</sup>

His argument is apparently this: that God could not have meant the command, because He could not have meant the offer in v.10b. A similar interpretation is put on the verse by Matthew Henry:

"That the intercession of Moses might appear the more illustrious, God fairly offers him that, if he would not interpose in this matter, He would make of him a great nation...Had Moses been of a narrow, selfish spirit, he would have closed with this offer, but he prefers the salvation of Israel."

He makes of the command an anthropomorphism:

"God would thus express the greatness of His just displeasure against them, after the manner of men, who would have none to intercede for those they resolve to be severd with. Thus also He would put an honour upon prayer, intimating that nothing but the intercession of Moses could save them from ruin."

He weakens the power of Moses' intercession, however, in thus making it a conditional offer. He Himself indicates this:

"What did Moses, or what could he do, to hinder God from consuming them? When God resolves to abandon a people, and the decree of ruin has gone forth, no intercession can prevent it."<sup>2</sup>

In reply to these, certain facts must be remembered.

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1. G. Rawlinson, Pulpit Commentary, Exodus 32:10.
  2. Matthew Henry, Commentary, Exodus 32:10.



It was Moses intercession which turned God in favor of the children of Israel. And the rejection which God seemingly proclaims was not in any way the final rejection. That came later, in the time when the Lord said to Jeremiah, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people.<sup>1</sup>

Moses' intercession did carry weight, and at least yet another great intercessor was theirs before the children of Israel received final rejection. It could not have been a mere testing of Moses' faith, through the offering of a great prize were he to desist from prayer. That would be to weaken the prayer. That it was not an absolute command seems certain, yet what marks it as a command not intended to compel obedience?

God here was forbidding something that was a definite part of His great plan for His church. Moses knew the rejection of Israel was not yet final, because specific temporal promises, the inheritance of the land of Canaan, had not yet been fulfilled. Moses knew, when he prayed, that he was praying for the children of God, on whom God's blessing still rested. The command must have been, as Matthew Henry suggests, an anthropomorphism, revealing His great wrath at a sin not unto death. Moses understood this, and though trembling at the terrible possibility, he earnestly interceded with

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1. Jeremiah 15:1.



God on their behalf. He not only had a right to intercede, he saw his greater duty, and performed it.

A very pertinent sequence of a similar nature is reported in the book of Jeremiah. He is commanded no longer to pray for the people, and is, under different circumstances, at least twice thereafter asked to do so by the people. Jeremiah's actions and the answer of God shed much light on the limitations to intercessory prayer. In one chapter, Jeremiah is sent to call the people to repentance, reprove their self-righteous sinning, and deliver the terrible judgment: Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me, for I will not hear thee.<sup>1</sup> God had, for their sins, for their idolatry (cf. ch. 11) for their refusal to listen to God's words, rejected them, and all intercession was useless. A year or so later, King Zedekiah, son of Josiah, reigned in the land of Judah, but neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the Lord, which He spake by the prophet Jeremiah. And Zedekiah the King sent... to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, pray now unto the Lord our God for us.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Kretzmann says of this request:

"This was, in the first place, an act of

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1. Jeremiah 7:16.  
2. Jeremiah 37:1-3.



amazing stupidity in view of the King's deliberate disobedience, but also one of revolting hypocrisy, since Zedekiah feigned an allegiance to Jehovah which he was far from possessing. (He)...did not seem to notice that his act was a further insult to Jeremiah, after the manner in which his messages had been received."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah, acting under orders from God, acted fittingly. No word is said of a prayer being offered, but he prophesied the return of the Chaldeans, the lifting of whose siege by the Egyptians had occasioned the embassy from Zedekiah.

Eleven years later another request came to Jeremiah. Babylon had led their captives away, those who remained were ill treated. A group under Johanan organized to resist. They came to Jeremiah with a humble request: pray for us unto the Lord thy God...that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah, seeing their evident faith and submission to God's will, promised to pray for them, perhaps thinking that these men, seemingly repentant, no longer came under the former curse. But he remembered the command, and exacted from them the promise that, whatever God's answer would be, he would tell it to them fully, and they must obey. They agreed,

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1. Dr. P.E.Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, Jer. 37:1-3.  
2. Jeremiah 42:2.3.



Jeremiah prayed, and God answered, that they must remain in Judah to have peace. If they fled to Egypt war would come. And God showed Jeremiah that the original command still held, for he had to tell them, ye dissembled in your hearts when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, pray for us... Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die.<sup>1</sup> Despite Jeremiah's words, they went to Egypt.

Dr. Kretzmann renders this verdict:

"It seems clear from the first that the leaders of the refugees had already decided not to remain in Judea, but to go to some neighboring country. They acted just as many people do in our days, who call upon the Lord to direct them, but only along the lines which they themselves have chosen."<sup>2</sup>

The whole sequence leads us to the same conclusion. Jeremiah's command from God was based on this: these people had rejected God; prayer for them would no longer serve the purposes of God's Kingdom. While this condition was obvious, Jeremiah refrained from prayer. When the condition was seemingly removed, Jeremiah gave them the benefit of the doubt, and prayed. That he was mistaken in supposing their repentance genuine was no great fault of his; God cared for that in His answer to the prayer. Jeremiah is not censured for praying for a people he had been told not to pray for; as far as he could see, the conditions of that prohibition no longer applied.

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1. Jeremiah 42:20,22.

2. Dr. P.E.Kretzmann, Popular Commentary, Jer. 42.



The limitations on the prayer of the Christian of today is the same. While it will serve the purpose of the Kingdom of God, the prayer is righteous and acceptable. Since no man can see into another's heart and judge the blackness of his sin, the ultimacy of his rejection, we must, in the manner of Jeremiah, give him the benefit of the doubt, and, as Paul bids us, pray for all men. One notable exception is, however, given us, where it is not necessary to look into man's heart: If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.<sup>1</sup> When a man is openly working aginsst the Kingdom of God, proselytizing from the true church, we are not to bid him God speed in his work, we are not to pray for his success. The sentence in the original reads: καὶ χαιρετεῖν αὐτοὺς μὴ λέγετε. And do not say to him: Greetings, or have grace. The question has been asked, is this a prayer? It probably can be so construed. It was a common form of greeting used by Christian and heathen alike. But probably in a Christian's mouth it meant just what the King James translators saw there - God speed, even as our universal good-bye from a Christian tongue includes a prayer for protection. But whether prayer or not, the passage for-

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1. II John 10.11.



bids prayer. If a mere greeting is prohibited, how much greater an infraction would a prayer be?

We are not forbidden, however, to pray for the person, only for his work. Probably a great amount of America's sectarianism would go if her true churches would pray more earnestly that all who profess themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.<sup>1</sup> But when we include in our prayers the prospering of his work of proselytizing, we become partakers of his sin, and may be accused of leading men astray from the saving word.

Some have called this unchristian counsel, contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ, basing their judgment on the words of Christ, when the disciples would not allow a man to cast out devils, since he was not one of Christ's followers: Forbid him not, for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.<sup>2</sup> This passage, however, speaks of those working for Christ under no particular denominational name. It does not bid us give proselyters a home base in our home or heart, or to wish them God speed in activities which John calls wicked, with emphasis on the

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1. General Prayer, Lutheran Hymnal, p.110.

2. Mark 9:39.



wicked.

What then are the limitations to intercessory prayer to the praying Christian today? The question for what? has none other than those connected with every prayer, that things sinful and against the will of God are not to be prayed for, and every answer is to be expected within the will of God. The question for whom? has the same limitations, more specifically defined. Old Testament interceders were limited by direct command of God; New Testament interceders are to be guided by a principle laid down by God. We are to pray for all men, but we are to pray that all men work in the will of God to preserve and increase His Kingdom. All work against this will goes forward without our blessing or intercession.

One other consideration sets off the intercessory prayer as the highest form of prayer. It is perhaps the most obvious consideration, one which has before been alluded to. This is the special motive which leads to subjective prayer, the selflessness of true Christian love for ones neighbors.

Dr. Goulburn states this motive in a highly practical way:

"Thus plain, then, is the duty of intercessory prayer. And the grounds of it are equally plain. The duty is based upon the fact that men are one body, and members one of another...In his moral nature, (man) has certain affections... which have reference to others, and show clearly



that, in the design of the Creator, he is no isolated creature. And in...his constitution by grace and in Christ there are brotherly kindness and charity, which show that in the new creature also, man is one Body. And if this be so, the weal and the woe of other men, of other Christian's, must be, to a certain extent, our weal and woe.<sup>1</sup>

G. A. Buttrick's well worded opinion on prayer has already been quoted: Intercession...lives in our worthiest motive... Human motives are always mixed, but their motive in that pang of prayer is nearly selfless.<sup>2</sup> The Pulpit Commentary remarks: "If any prayer can be made with confidence of success, surely it is this. It is an unselfish prayer; a prayer of love."<sup>3</sup> The motive of love is plainly visible in Luther's judgment:

"we... are priests, which is far more excellent than being kings, because as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others, and to teach one another the things of God. This Christ has obtained for us, if we believe on Him, that we... may boldly come into the presence of God in the Spirit of faith and cry "Abba, Father," pray for one another..."<sup>4</sup>

But how do the Scriptures reveal these grounds for intercessory prayer? Jairus prayed for his daughter, the Syro-phenician woman for hers, because of one of the highest of natural loves - that of parent for child.

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1. Op. cit., p. 100.

2. Op. cit., p. 102.

3. Rev. A. Plummer, The Pulpit Commentary, in Exposition of I John, p. 142.

4. Holman, II, On Christian Liberty, p. 325.



The thousands who brought their sick, lame, blind, and possessed did so because they brought friends, men and women whom they loved. It may be argued that this is still a somewhat selfish prayer, because it embraces a very tight circle of loved ones. But just such a deep and selfless love should mark the relation of every Christian to his fellow Christian, which alone may overshadow his love for all men. This is my commandment, Jesus said, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.<sup>1</sup> Jesus demonstrated such love in the parable of the fig tree: Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the wayward fruitlessness of the tree, He still found love to intercede for it. He commanded: Love your enemies,...pray for them which despitefully use you<sup>3</sup> and Himself fulfilled His command to the last degree: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.<sup>4</sup> His disciples caught an echo of this love; though they had no faith in Jesus' ability to provide, their love for the five thousand led them to interrupt His teaching to say: send them away, that they may... buy themselves bread, for they have nothing to eat.<sup>5</sup> They prayed in

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1. John 15:12.13.
  2. Luke 13:8.
  3. Matthew 5:44.
  4. Luke 23:34.
  5. Mark 6:36.



love, it was their lack of trust which made them prescribe the manner of answer.

A great and moving love is apparent in all of Paul's intercessory prayers: I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you,<sup>1</sup> so deep and earnest was his prayer in love. He wrote Timothy: I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day,...being mindful of thy tears,<sup>2</sup> tears which could not fail to move the heart of his teacher in love. Moses' tremendous love of the people for whom he prayed was self-sacrificial: Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin -; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book, which Thou hast written.<sup>3</sup> He prayed, even while trembling at the command, Now therefore let me alone.<sup>4</sup> Daniel's love for the temple led him to open his windows toward Jerusalem and pray in that direction; the same love led him to pray: Cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate.<sup>5</sup>

A conflict, however, arises, especially when reading the prayer book of the Old Testament. What are we to say of such prayers as that of David: Let death sieze upon them, and let them go down quick (alive) into hell.<sup>6</sup> David himself calls this a prayer: Give ear to my prayer,

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1. Colossians 2:1.  
2. II Timothy 1:3,4.  
3. Exodus 32:32.

4. Exodus 32:10.  
5. Daniel 9:17.  
6. Psalm 55:15.



O God, in the first verse of the psalm, and certainly he is placing himself between the object of his prayer and God. By definition, then, this is an intercessory prayer. Is it based on love?

Some have said the psalmist neither meant nor expected a literal fulfillment of his imprecation.<sup>1</sup> But whether literal or not, he looked for fulfillment, or he would not have prayed thus. Rev. C. Short says David wanted a judgment upon the corrupt private life of the period, and "knew of none but violent means and temporal judgments by which such wickedness could be removed."<sup>2</sup> This comes nearer the correct solution, which is revealed by Matthew Henry: "This prayer is a prophecy of the utter, the final, the everlasting ruin of all those who, whether secretly or openly, oppose and rebel against the Lord's Messiah."<sup>3</sup> In praying against the enemies of the church David prays for the church; in asking for their destruction, he asks for the church's prosperity. The prayer is still in love, but the greater love for the church completely overthrows our common love for all men. That David in praying condemns these men only in-so-far as they work against the church is shown by other passages: Give them according to their deeds, and according to the

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1. R.G.Rawlinson, Pulpit Commentary, Psalms 55:15.

2. Ibid p. 421.

3. Op. cit., Psalm 55:15.



wickedness of their endeavors.<sup>1</sup> For without cause they have hid for me a net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.<sup>2</sup>

In the same spirit of love Hosea prayed against the Northern tribes, to call them from their sins: Give them, O Lord, what wilt Thou give: give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.<sup>3</sup> Elisha prayed that Syria's army be smitten with blindness, then led them astray, and proved his love by causing them to be fed, and sent back unharmed to their own country.<sup>4</sup> Love is the basis for intercessory prayer, but it is love primarily for God's great purpose - that the church be preserved and prospered. And through this greater love, this special purpose; a special duty, a special command, intercessory prayer is revealed the highest form of prayer.

K.R.Stolz gives his opinion: "At its best, prayer is man's supreme venture of faith, his whole hearted response to the impact of God."<sup>5</sup> Which is, rightfully understood, correct. Without faith a man cannot pray, and especially intercessory prayer demands almost unreasoning confidence in a personal God. But the same author reveals his own abysmal lack of faith:

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1. Psalm 28:4.
  2. Psalm 55:7.
  3. Hosea 9:14.
  4. II Kings 6:18-23.
  5. Op. cit. p. 257.



"Intercessory prayer which is offered by intelligent persons is not by them supposed to be a means of reconciling a vengeful deity to those who oppose his will. Intercessions... are answered when those whom they are calculated to influence co-operate. So long as the individual for whom one prays does not respond...intercession cannot accomplish its major mission."<sup>1</sup>

This major mission he seems to see in the solicitation of funds, regards answer as largely coincidental, suggests cooperation of prayer and prayee by telepathy, and reduces the part of God to the carrier of these telepathic thoughts.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the story goes too frequently today. Men know the name of intercessory prayer; they never learn the power. Too many problems stand between. Yet an examination of these problems cannot but lead to a stronger faith in prayer's efficacy. They are based on all too subjective a reasoning.

Buttrick, though he never really answers it, well states the objection of human reason when he writes:

"If you were to ask the man in the street, 'Do you believe in intercessory prayer?' he might echo blankly, 'Intercessory?' If you were then to explain that theology is fond of long words, and that you meant prayer on behalf of other people, he might answer in a silent skepticism...Behold the intercessor. He kneels in some church to pray...for his

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1. Ibid. p.271.

2. Ibid. p.275.



son...There he kneels, alone so far as eye can see. What can he do? If a shell should fall on London, can he shield his son? To our skeptical sight, the intercessor may be a lovable and even a saintly figure, but he is pathetic and futile. Airplanes might help us - though we would be nonplussed to prove it...But the intercessor: how can his mumblings redeem a violent world?"<sup>1</sup>

The first problem to confront the intercessor is that posed by materialists. This is a world, they say, of natural law, where an irrevocable law moves sun, earth, planets, and their moons, where cause always precedes effect, where every effect has a cause in nature. It leaves no room for the interfering hand of God. To the materialist's mind, prayer and science are irreconcilable. One must give way. We must answer science, falsely so called, or science will obliterate our prayer.

The argument that what the popular mind calls natural law will not allow prayer has special force when the prayer is intercessory. The argument is that of an unbeliever, but the Christian of the needs an answer to preserve his own tottering faith in prayer's efficacy. The unbeliever can readily explain the answer to subjective prayer on the basis of psychology, but when a third person is introduced, who knows nothing of the prayer, only the intervening hand of God or coincidence can bring an answer to the prayer. The intervening hand of God the materialist will not recognize. Every

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1. Op. cit. p. 96.



intercessory prayer, therefore, is either a violation of "natural law" or a coincidence, to the unbeliever. Both of these objections of human reason can easily be answered.

Science can really point to natural law. The Creator has made these, the Creator knows them, but Science does not. Science's only knowledge is the summing up of instances: every 24 hours the world makes one complete turn on its axis. A low pressure area on lake or ocean will result in storm when air rushes in to fill it, and only the complete filling of the area will induce the storm to stop. When an organism dies, decay sets in, and the remains must be disposed of. These are examples of "natural law" which might interfere with intercessory prayer. But they are not laws, they are tabulations. They cannot tell us that nature is absolute, wholly mechanical and invariable. They only prove that hitherto she has been faithful. Science can say with certainty that on a certain morning the sun will rise at a given time, not because an immutable law swings the earth on an inexorable schedule, but only because heretofore the sun has risen at that given time on that given day. The sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and her minutest life are obedient to no natural law except the ever-operating will of God. The sun rises and sets, not of its own volition, nor because of unchangeable law, but only because God wants it to.



The praying Christian can point to a tabulation just as cogent, just as secure. When a righteous man prays a fervent prayer, it accomplishes much. The sun stood still at the prayer of Joshua,<sup>1</sup> the storm was stilled when the disciples prayed,<sup>2</sup> Jairus' prayer restored his daughter.<sup>3</sup> What scientists term natural law, is merely their observation of the will of God. If then, prayer can influence the will of God, it is no longer contrary to the law of nature, but "itself one of these laws upon whose working God has determined that a certain result shall follow."<sup>4</sup> That prayer can influence the will of God may be stated on the basis of a greater authority than that of any scientist - God himself assures us so: Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.<sup>5</sup> Those who argue against prayer's efficacy on the basis of natural law are left without an argument, for prayer is the most potent of nature's causes. The prayer of the intercessor and God's answer is a sequence just as well established in the promise of God as the fall of the rain and the growth of the crops.

Materialism's answer to our tabulation of answered prayer has always been: coincidence. This is made easy

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1. Joshua 10:12  
2. Mark 4:38  
3. Luke 8:55

4. Zwemer, Taking Hold of God, p.70.  
Quoted by Dr. Arndt, Op.cit.p.38  
5. John 16:23.



by the fact that God nearly always answers by natural means. At Moses' prayer the Israelites received meat, but it came in the form of quail, blown to their camp by a wind.<sup>1</sup> Abraham and Zachariah received sons by natural means, though "natural law" prohibited it,<sup>2</sup> and even the five thousand were fed on five natural loaves and two fishes.<sup>3</sup> But coincidence is never mere. Two things happen together, prayer and answer, certainly that is coincidence - that is the meaning of the word. Why do they happen together? That has only one answer: thru the efficacy of intercessory prayer.

An objection to intercessory prayer very similar to that of natural law, more often found in Christian minds, is its reconciliation to the eternal decrees of God. God has, from eternity, determined the course of events on His earth. Those determinations He has embodied in His eternal decrees, they are unalterable. The course of history is established from creation to judgment. How can an unchangeable God alter His will, how shall He hesitate to fulfill His decrees at the beck and call of the intercessor? This is, they say, not only absurd, but presumption.

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1. Numbers 11:31.

2. Genesis 21:1-2; Luke 1:24.

3. Matthew 14:17.



On close examination, however, their arguments become some of the most cogent in intercessory prayer's favor. God has predetermined history, but He has predetermined all of it. A determining factor in the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo was a sunken roadway, unseen by the emperor. Did God know that road was there, or was Napoleon's defeat a surprise to Him? An eternal decree also foresaw that road. The King of Syria sent an army to take Elisha, in the city of Dothan. But they didn't recognize Elisha when he himself came and led them to Samaria, saying he would lead them to the man they sought. The army was captured. Was it an accident that they recognized neither Elisha nor the road to Samaria? Was Syria's defeat a surprise to God, or had he predetermined it? It was no surprise, for it was an answer to Elisha's prayer.<sup>1</sup> Was the foreknowledge of God shortened by Elisha's prayer, or must we say that He foresaw also the prayer? If a Christian can see an eternal decree of God in raindrops and snowstorms,<sup>2</sup> why not foreknowledge of our prayers? Dr. Walther has answered the problem:

"These people do not consider that God can hear all our prayers without acting contrary to His eternal decrees; for since God is omniscient and all wise, He not only from eternity knew that we would pray and what would be the objectives of our prayer, but from eternity He has so arranged everything

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1. II Kings 6:18.

2. Genesis 8:22.



and given it its place in His government of the universe that these very things must come to pass which we request of Him<sup>1</sup>

God's eternal decrees do not prohibit intercessory prayers; on the contrary, they establish them. For history has been predetermined in consideration of intercessory prayer.<sup>2</sup>

This raises another problem - what moral right has one man to intrude his wishes on the life of another? If by secret prayer we can change the course of his life, are we not dishonorably breaking his freedom? A partial answer to this may be found in John's command: If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.<sup>3</sup> The repetition of the words not unto death clearly indicate that such as have sinned unto death, that is, those who have obstinately and finally rejected the will of God, intercession will not change. A Christian must pray, Thy will be done, and in the will of God, no man can act dishonorably.

But such influence on another man's life as intercessory prayer must have if answered, is not only not dishonorable, it is directly commanded. Look not every man on

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1. Quoted by Dr. Arndt, op. cit. p. 35.

2. Dr. Arndt, op. cit. p. 35.

3. I John 5:16.



his own things, but every man also on the things of others.<sup>1</sup> Surely no better supervision of any man's work can be done than enlisting the almighty power of God. But another thought is added in the preceding verse, let each esteem other better than themselves. The true intercessory prayer is done in love, and this is never dishonorable interference. Every true prayer is for good, David's prayers against his enemies were for the preservation of the church. If any man would discourage intercession on the grounds that this is dishonorable, would do just as well to reprimand the architect and contractor who built his house for interfering with his personal freedom. If there were no walls, he could walk out into the open air.

Another great problem, one which deters the best of Christians from intercession, is the feeling of inadequacy. Dr. Goulburn has worded it well:

"What am I, that I should plead the cause of others - I, who have so much to ask for myself, and who have no native right to ask at all? Or, how can I think that prayers from me, like those from righteous Abraham, can win anything from God for my brethren?"<sup>2</sup>

The objection has two parts: How can I presume to ask? and: How can I expect an answer to my feeble prayer?

The first is a misstatement. It would be presump-

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1. Philippians 2:4.  
2. Op. cit., p. 102.



tion not to intercede for others, and more than presumption, for God has commanded it. This puts us in the same class with Samuel, who regarded it as sin not to pray for his people.<sup>1</sup> How this can be, that omnipotent, omniscient God would deign to bend His ear to our prayers, would listen to our plans for the government of His universe, we do not presume to say. But every Christian is as welcome and as potent at the throne as any. Faith as a grain of mustard-seed can move a mountain.<sup>2</sup> The words that Peter heard: What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common,<sup>3</sup> may be applied to every member of the Kingdom - What God hath accepted, that call not thou impotent. All intercessions are heard by God.

The second part of the problem amounts to a doubt of the efficacy of intercessory prayer in general. It sounds noble and self-effacing at first, even as Ahaz's answer to Isaiah: I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. But it is in reality an affront, and deserves Isaiah's answer: Hear now, O (Christian)...is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?<sup>4</sup> God commands us to pray, and he who hides behind the shield of his own unworthiness is doubting and disobeying God.

But one might say: First I will become more worthy, a better Christian, then I will pray for my brother. Or,

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1. I Samuel 12:23.

2. Matthew 17:20.

3. Acts 10:15

4. Isaiah 7:12-13



first I must pray for myself, that my prayer for another might be more acceptable. A man cannot make himself more worthy to be heard by the Holy God. The only growth the Christian knows is that of sanctification, and prayer is one of the most potent aids to that. The objection is like attempting to put out the darkness before letting in the light. Certainly, prayer should be first for our own faults, but such prayer must never supplant objective prayer. The Christian by praying is not made more worthy to face God, and he who expects his subjective prayer to make his objective prayer acceptable is near to synergism. Every Christian is worthy to pray, able to pray, should pray intercessory prayer.

To those who find no answer here, this comfort may be given - they do not pray alone. Praying for ourselves, our prayer is unsupported; Praying for others, we join our voices to those of many intercessors, and the prayer is by so much increased. This is especially true of common prayer, to which the promise is given: Again I say unto you, if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.<sup>1</sup> The cumulative power of many small efforts is tremendous - the pyramids were built by millions of human hands lifting together. But

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1. Matthew 18:19.



divine concurrence is also promised as it is to every prayer. The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.<sup>1</sup>

Many have objected, that Christ's promise of specific answer to prayer applied to the period of the founding of the church. The age of miracles is past, they say, and God will not break the established order of nature when it serves no purpose in founding the Kingdom. The thought of breaking the established order of nature does not move us. This has already been answered. And we know that all things God turns to the good of His Kingdom. But even without this consideration - what are we to say of the answers to the prayers of Moses, of Elijah, of Elisha? These were not included in Christ's New Testament promise of answer to intercession, and yet they were answered. The promise antedates the New Testament era, it knows no bounds of time.

Now has the age of miracles ceased. History abounds in examples as cogent as those presented by Scripture. Any man who argues against intercession by saying no evidence to its efficacy can be adduced thereby reveals

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1. Romans 8:26.



that he has not truly used intercessory prayer, because it is still a tremendous force in the world. Moses, almost as long before Christ as we are after, advanced the same argument, and was answered: Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.<sup>1</sup>

In the final analysis, all problems in prayer are traceable to a fundamental error - doubt of a personal, interested God. This is especially true of intercessory prayer, because we ask God to project His interest and power beyond the communion we have established with Him. This doubt becomes the ultimate discouragement of the prayer. Prayer, for an atheist, an evolutionist, a Modernist, is absurd; because he has left himself no one but himself to pray to, and no one but himself to pray for. The case against intercessory prayer, then, is the case of the Modernist - we doubt God, or we're too interested in ourselves, when we refuse to intercede. To him who finds a lack of love for others in himself, a lack of interest to keep him from praying, it can only be said: pray for others as a duty of the Christian, for intercessory prayer is a work of sanctification, and will breed interest. To those who find it hard to overcome their doubts of such detailed personal interest in their God, Scripture and

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1. Numbers 11:23.



history give tremendous promise of the efficacy of prayer.

Scripture takes no note of the problems of intercessory prayer. It knows none. Its only answer is a long list of fulfillment. Whether the prayer asks for spiritual or temporal blessings, the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers.<sup>1</sup> Four men prayed for their friend sick of the palsy, and unhesitatingly the prayer was answered. The man received forgiveness of sins, and took up his bed and walked.<sup>2</sup> And again and again we hear: all they that had any sick with diverse diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them.<sup>3</sup> The objection might be raised that these were brought to the eye and hand of the Incarnate Son of God, and therefore received special consideration. The premise is correct, the conclusion wrong. We, too, bring our intercessions to the same Incarnate Son of God. All prayers are answered in like measure. Another objection might be advanced that these were cures wrought by the pitying love of Christ, irrespective of prayer, since no prayer is mentioned. But prayer is the bringing of needs to God, not the repetition of words, and a goodly percentage of these cures

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1. I Peter 3:12.

2. Luke 5: 18ff.

3. Luke 4: 40.



wore like the miracle which restored the demoniac, whose father had asked help of the disciples and got none. He appealed to Christ, and his son was healed. When the disciples asked why their efforts had been unavailing, Christ answered: This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.<sup>1</sup> The disciples had not prayed, they were at fault. The demoniac could not have prayed. The prayer was the father, who came with his prayer straight to God, who cured the son. Here was a case where, in Jesus own words, nothing but intercessory prayer could help.

That power of prayer did not stop when Christ removed His visible presence. Its continuation was promised, both for spiritual blessings;—if any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death<sup>2</sup>;—and for temporal blessings;—the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.<sup>3</sup>

Paul showed great confidence in these promises. He believed that his preaching, the preaching of those whom he had taught, and his very bonds which led them to preach, would benefit him in time and eternity; not in themselves, but through intercessory prayer. For he wrote to the Phil-

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1. Mark 9:29.

2. I John 5:16.

3. James 5:15.



ippians: I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer.<sup>1</sup> And again, to Corinth: We... trust in God, who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver,...that he will yet deliver; ye also helping together by prayer for us.<sup>2</sup> He acted in confidence on these promises. The father of Publius, chief man of the island of Melita, lay sick of a fever and a bloody flux, to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.<sup>3</sup>

This confidence in the efficacy of intercessory prayer is not limited to the early Christians, nor even to believers in general. The natural knowledge of the existence of a god tells man that God might hear prayer. The unbeliever shows his acceptance of prayer's power by asking the righteous to pray in his behalf. Darius, King of Persia, granted permission to the returning exiles, nay, decreed that they should rebuild the temple, that they may...pray for the life of the King and of his sons.<sup>4</sup> Zedekiah, though he did not hear the words of the Lord as spoken by Jeremiah, nevertheless asked Jeremiah: pray now unto the Lord our God for us.<sup>5</sup> And even Dives in hell besought Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house, there to testify to his brothers, never doubting that the "prayer" would be answered.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Philippians 1:19.

2. II Corinthians 1:9-10.

3. Acts 28:8.

4. Ezra 6:10.

5. Jeremiah 37:3.

6. Luke 16:27-28



Many found their distrust of intercession's efficacy in the apparent failure of God to answer. In this respect prayer is subjected to tests which are applied to no other media. Because many people die even though taking medicine, we hear noone say that all medicine is ineffectual. Or because some recover without doctors, very few will say that doctors are unnecessary. But these are the judgments on prayer. Except they see signs and wonders, many will not believe.<sup>1</sup>

Yet prayer is always answered, though not always obviously so. As was stated above, the answer must come fixed by the plan of God for the government of the world. The people of Capernaum who stayed Christ, that He should not depart from them were answered by the better program of Christ: I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly the Christians in Jerusalem prayed for James as they later prayed for Peter, yet Herod killed him.<sup>3</sup> This was another step in the process started by Saul, the results of which are reported - they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.<sup>4</sup> Figures testify to the apparent futility of Jewish missions, yet Paul's prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be saved.<sup>5</sup> The prayer was

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1. John 4:48.  
2. Luke 4:43.  
3. Acts 12:2.

4. Acts 8:4.  
5. Romans 10:1ff.



answered for the good of the church, as Paul himself realized; for he said through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

Scripture is not alone in testifying to intercession's efficacy. History is filled with startling revelations of God's ruling hand intervening in answer to prayer. When Melancton was at the point of death, Luther was called to the death bed. Dr. Arndt tells the story:

"Luther burst into tears and an exclamation of agony. This aroused Melancton, who said 'O Luther, is this you? Why don't you let me depart in peace?' 'We can't spare you yet, Philip' was the Reformer's answer. And then he spent more than an hour on his knees, pleading for his recovery, until he felt his prayer was heard... Luther had some soup brought, and...(said) in his droll way, 'Philip, take this soup, or I will excommunicate you.' The soup was taken, Melancton revived, and he lived to labor many years. When Luther went home, he told his wife with triumphant joy, 'God gave me my brother Melancton back in direct answer to prayer.'"<sup>2</sup>

Monica fervently prayed that Augustine, her son, should not depart from Africa, where, she thought, her influence would restrain and eventually convert him. Her prayer, in its spirit, and for the good of the church, was answered. Augustine went to Italy, met Ambrose in Milan, and was converted.

Simple Christians, too, take part in this historical power of prayer. H.W.Beecher tells of a woman in the parish of his father who complained that she was so useless.

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1. Romans 11:11.

2. Patton, Prayer, and Its Remarkable Answers, p. 245, quoted by Dr. W.Arndt, op.cit., p. 30.



When asked how she spent her bed-ridden hours, she replied that she prayed for everyone in the village. "I pray," she said "down one side of the street, and up the other side; and then, if I am not too tired, I go over the whole ground again." Dr. Beecher said she was the most useful person in his society.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Luther wrote in his "Reply to the Answer of the Leipzig Goat": I have so much work that six years ago three of me would have had more than they could do, and yet, by God's grace, I am now hale and hearty...All of which is, without doubt, the doing of my Lord Jesus Christ through the prayers of pious people, without any merit of mine.<sup>2</sup> And in the "Treatise on Christian Liberty", he wrote: "Through his priestly glory (the Christian) is all powerful with God, because God does the things which he asks and desires."<sup>3</sup> G.A. Buttrick bases the entire argument of his book "Prayer" on this chief argument: History testifies that the prayers of the saints are answered. Rev. C.H. Spurgeon illustrated the power of Christian prayer:

"A certain preacher whose sermons converted many souls received a revelation from God that it was not his sermons or works by all means, but the prayers of an illiterate lay brother who sat on the pulpit steps pleading for the success of the sermon. It may be in the all-revealing day so with us. We may believe after laboring long and wearily that all honor belongs to another builder whose prayers were gold, silver, and precious stones, while our sermonizings being apart from prayer are

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1. Op. cit., p. 48.

2. Holman, III, p. 294.

3. Holman, II, p. 325.



but hay and stubble."<sup>1</sup>

Truly, intercessory prayer is a power in our world, and the man who does not avail himself of that power puts himself in the position of the people of Nazareth. Christ could there do no mighty work.<sup>2</sup> There was no prayer; hence there was no miracle, and the people rejected Christ.

But in advancing the cause of intercessory prayer, a more cogent argument may be found in its benefit to the man who prays. This benefit is recognized by all who write of it, even by those who deny a personal God.

K.R.Stolz writes: "Prayer purges the personality of incompatible elements and promotes attitudes and habits which are in accord with the established master motive, or a newly gained religious insight."<sup>3</sup> It is the first benefit seen by Buttrick:

"Then what befalls our intercessor? There is little doubt that he himself becomes a nobler man. His night becomes day; he steps with the assurance of those who forget themselves in the remembrance of their neighbors and God. His winter becomes summer; a new climate conquers the snows, and brings buried seeds to glory. His weakness becomes power; he is strong, not in the psuedo power which slays an enemy, but in the real power which slays the enmity and turns the enemy into a friend."<sup>4</sup>

But this is mere psychological benefit, not by any means the purpose of our prayer. Intercession helps

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1. Quoted by Rev. Ed. M. Bounds, in Prayer and Praying, p.97.
  2. Mark 6:5.
  3. Psychology of Religious Living, p. 258.
  4. Op. cit., p. 99.



the interceder also as a prayer, as a result of the thing for which he prays. This is true because of its power as a special aid to the sanctified life, and because of special promises of God.

Its chief power as a good work lies in the fact that it is external - outside the prayer. It takes the interest of the prayer away from himself, prohibits his despair over his own sins. It is an answer to Christ's new commandment to love one another. It is even, because of its special purpose, the answer to the injunction, Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> This power, too, nearly every writer recognizes. Buttrick continues:

"There is gain also in the direct line of his intercession. Grudges are cancelled, for bitterness and intercession have no common dwelling. Human need is more clearly understood, for intercession gives insight and a purer sympathy."<sup>2</sup>

Henry Ward Beecher, in regretting the habit of evil gossip says:

"The habit of taking each other before God in prayer, familiarly and by name, is a habit that I think is eminently beneficial, - in the first place, to yourselves. It will cleanse you. It will sweeten your disposition. It will take away from you every particle of the raven, that loves to feed on carrion."<sup>3</sup>

This is not without support from Scripture. When Christ tells us to: pray for them which despitefully use you, He adds: that ye may be the children of your Father

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1. Matthew 6:33.

2. Loco cit.

3. Op. cit., p. 46.



which is in heaven.<sup>1</sup> The prayer will not work our justification to gain us our sonship, but it will certainly exercise our faith, keep it from dying.<sup>2</sup> Let us keep our title of children of God. We sin if we don't intercede for our neighbor;<sup>3</sup> we do the will of God when we do.

But in addition special blessings will come to the man who intercedes. Paul exhorted to intercede for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.<sup>4</sup> God through Jeremiah told the Babylonian captives to seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it, for in the peace thereof ye shall have peace.<sup>5</sup> These are primarily promises of direct answer to prayer, with a reflection of benefit to the prayer. But they are more than that. The peace desired by Judean captives was the quiet and peaceable life, <sup>of primarily</sup> inward qualities, which could not be enjoyed while the people lived in dread or hatred of the government which ruled them, and which, in each case, deserved the anger of the church, to some extent. In praying for their peace, the hatred was not only erased; new qualities of happiness were added.

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1. Matthew 5:45.
  2. James 2:20.
  3. I Samuel 12:23.
  4. I Timothy 2:2-3.
  5. Jeremiah 29:7.



But we have examples to give reason for hope of more specific blessing than this. Solomon was faced with the duty of ruling the people of God, a responsibility he feared. He was told by God in a dream to ask anything he desired. In a prayer that was essentially intercessory, Solomon admitted: I am but a little child, I know not how to go out or come in. And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen... Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people. God's answer to the prayer was abundant: Lo I have given thee ✓ a wise and an understanding haart... and I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor.<sup>1</sup> Solomon sought first the Kingdom of God, and all these things were added unto him.<sup>2</sup>

Consider the case of Job, who, stricken by Satan, did not lose faith, but spent his time in introspection, looking for the cause of his suffering. When God finally spoke, He did not answer Job's questions. He did not try to. He told Job that his manner of thinking was wrong, that his suffering was unimportant in the great scheme of creation. And so Job understood it. He did not fully know the cause of his suffering, but he did confess: Behold, I am vile...I have uttered that I understood not,

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1. I Kings 3:7-9,12-13.

2. Matthew 6:33.



things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.<sup>1</sup> Job's prosperity did not return when he ceased his questioning; it returned when he forgot himself to pray for others, for we read: And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.<sup>2</sup> He prayed for them who despitefully used him, and was the child of God in so doing.

Examples may be added to examples, to establish the efficacy of Intercessory Prayer, both to the prayer and to the prayee. Down through the ages, the saints have prayed, and have been answered. But every prayer has been a venture of faith, prayed in opposition to man's logical makeup. Every prayer has had to conquer the tendency of his brain to rule his heart, has had to remove reason from the path of faith. And with whatever logic reason is faced, whatever arguments are advanced to support the cause of intercessory prayer, there remains one final and unanswerable proof - the pragmatic test. A personal matter like prayer will best gain the personal confidence it needs by personal experience. No argument of the infidel will move the man who can say: My prayer was answered.

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1. Job 40:4, 42:3.6

2. Job 42:10



The consensus of Scripture extends the invitation: Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts.<sup>1</sup> If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.<sup>2</sup> A broad statement to the effect that not enough Christians are praying, or that Christians are not praying enough, is only probable; since prayer is a private matter. But for him who hesitates in doubt, intercession's ultimate proof of efficacy is intercession.

Prayer's efficacy is not to be measured by the importance of the job it does, nor by the number of people benefitted. The prayer of the mothers who brought their children to Christ for blessing was just as efficacious as that of Moses for the children of Israel, and was answered by the same power. But the importance of the cause it advances, the number of people influenced, do increase the value of prayer, and hence more evidently show its efficacy. This is perhaps the reason for the cogency of the great Old Testament examples - Moses, Solomon, Isaiah - they prayed for nations, their prayers moved history. This is also probably the reason for the importunate exhortation throughout Scripture to pray for kings and all that are in authority, for the peace of the land.

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1. Malachi 3:10.

2. John 7:17.



The same consideration makes the intercession of the Christian of today for his country among the most important of his prayer tasks, especially in troubled times. The judgment pronounced by God upon Judah: And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them,<sup>1</sup> may well be repeated for our nation, if the Christian Church ceases her intercession for her country. The intercessor who kneels with this prayer in mind: Wilt not Thou, O God, go forth with our hosts: Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man,<sup>2</sup> is a heroic figure, placing himself in the gap, defending his country where defense is most needed, seeking pardon for her sins; allying to her the power that rules the world, enlisting the aid of God.

Intercessory prayer is true prayer. It is distinguished from all other prayer, not doctrinally, but only logically. Yet logic, on the basis of Scripture, will tell the student that intercessory prayer is a little nobler, and more ennobling; to human eyes a better work of sanctification. For intercessory prayer has a special

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1. Ezekiel 22:30-31.

2. Psalm 108:11-12

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command of God, it is appointed as the special duty of a Christian. It furthers in every instance God's great will to save the world, and to preserve His kingdom, more palpably than other prayer. It is always and in the best way, obedience to Christ's new commandment that we love one another, and even our enemies.

Men have arisen with many seemingly powerful arguments against intercessory prayer, saying that it cannot be answered in the true sense of the word. "Natural law" and the decrees of God preclude His hearing the prayer effectively, they tell us. The prayer has no moral right, nor any sufficiency in himself, to intrude upon another's life by prayer, if it be answered. Intercession, they say, is an instrument of the past, and God no longer performs miracles at the request of His children.

But all these arguments are in essence, the arguments of unbelief, and under the examination of faith, they lose their cogency. The intercessor stands triumphant, benefitting his fellow men in the power of God, benefitting himself in the blessing of God.

But reasoned argument and essay can never fully persuade. The human mind is first of all empirical, and trial is the surest proof of any thesis. Let the Christian pray-- and learn that God is faithful and powerful.



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