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**Treatise on
Prayer**

John Knox





Treatise on Prayer

Author(s): Knox, John (1514-1572)

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Description: Knox composed this treatise on the occasion of the death of Edward VI, King of England. Catholic Queen Mary Tudor, known to history as “Bloody Mary” succeeded him. In this work, Knox calls people to pray for Queen Mary, both for her wellbeing and for her to uphold her promise not to persecute Protestants. Unfortunately, she did not uphold it, and Knox fled to continental Europe for his life. Nevertheless, his prayers exhibit great maturity and compassion, and can serve to instruct Christians under tyranny.

Kathleen O'Bannon

CCEL Staff

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**A Treatise on Prayer,
or, a Confession, and Declaration of Prayers Added Thereto**

by John Knox

Minister of Christ's Most Sacred Evangel,
Upon the Death of that Most Virtuous and Most
Famous King, Edward VI, King of
England, France and Ireland,
in which Confession the said John
Does Accuse No Less His Own Offences,
Than the Offences of Others to be the Cause
of the Away Taking of that Most Godly Prince,
Now Reigning with Christ While
We Abide Plagues for Our Unthankfulness

1553

Extracted from: *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions
to the Year 1559*

Editor's Note

King Edward VI died on 6 July 1553. Knox was in London at that time, and the reformer "received the afflicting tidings of his majesty's decease with becoming fortitude and resignation to the sovereign will of Heaven. The event did not meet him unprepared; he had long anticipated it, with its probable consequences.

"Knox remained in London until the 19th of July when Mary was proclaimed queen. Immediately after this, he appears to have withdrawn from London and retired to the north of England, being justly apprehensive of the measures which might be pursued by the new government.

"To induce the Protestants to submit peacefully to her authority, Mary amused them for some time with proclamations, in which she promised not to do violence to their consciences. Though aware of the bigotry of the queen, and the spirit of the religion to which she was devoted, the Protestant ministers reckoned it their duty to improve the respite. In the month of August, Knox returned to the south, and resumed his labours. It seems to have been at this time that he composed the *Confession and Prayer*, commonly used by him in the congregations to which he preached. While he itinerated through Buckinghamshire, he was attended by large audiences, which his popularity and the alarming crisis drew together; especially at Amersham, a borough formerly noted for the general reception of the doctrines of Wycliffe, the precursor of the Reformation in England, and from which the seed sown by his followers had never been altogether eradicated. Wherever he went, he earnestly exhorted the people to repentance, under the tokens of divine displeasure, and to a steady adherence to the faith which they had embraced. He continued to preach in Buckinghamshire and Kent during the harvest months, although the measures of government daily rendered his safety more precarious; and in the beginning of November returned to London, where he resided chiefly with Mr. Locke and Mr. Hickman, two respectable merchants of his acquaintance." (M'Crie's *Life of Knox* [Edinburgh, 1855], pp. 55-56.)

The English government soon restored the popish religion; and after December 1553, Protestants were subject to prosecution as heretics. Knox was unable to preach without endangering himself and those who harboured him. Thus, at the urgent request of his friends, the reformer reluctantly withdrew from England, arriving in Dieppe in the beginning of March 1553-54. The *Treatise on Prayer* was first published in July 1554.

A Treatise on Prayer, or, a Confession, and Declaration of Prayers

A declaration what true prayer is, how we should pray, and for what we should pray; set forth by John Knox, preacher of God's holy word.

Unto the small and dispersed flock of Jesus Christ.

How necessary is the right invocation of God's name, otherwise called perfect prayer, [it] becomes no Christian to misknow; seeing it is the very branch which springs forth of true faith (Rom. 10:10-13);¹ whereof if any man is destitute, notwithstanding he is endued with whatsoever other virtues, yet, in the presence of God, is he reputed for no Christian at all.² Therefore it is a manifest sign, that such as are always negligent in prayer do understand nothing of perfect faith; for if the fire be without heat, or the burning lamp without light, then true faith may be without fervent prayer. But because, in times past, that was (and yet, alas, with no small number is) reckoned to be prayer, which in the sight of God was and is nothing less, I intend shortly to touch the circumstances thereof.

WHAT PRAYER IS. Who will pray must know and understand that prayer is an earnest and familiar talking with God, to whom we declare our miseries, whose support and help we implore and desire in our adversities, and whom we laud and praise for our benefits received. So that prayer contains the exposition of our dolours [*sorrows*], the desire of God's defence, and the praising of his magnificent name, as the psalms of David clearly do teach.

WHAT IS TO BE OBSERVED IN PRAYER.³ The consideration in whose presence we stand, to whom we speak, and what we desire, should provoke us that this be most reverently done; standing in the presence of the omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, and of all the contents thereof; whom a thousand thousand angels assist and serve, giving obedience to his eternal majesty; and speaking unto him who knows the secrets of our hearts, before whom dissimulation and lies are always odious and hateful; and asking that thing which may be most to his glory, and to the comfort of our conscience (Dan. 3:25, 28). But we should attend diligently, that such things as may offend his godly presence may be removed to the uttermost of our power. And first, that worldly cares and fleshly cogitations (such as draw us from contemplation of our God) be expelled from us, that we may freely, without interruption, call upon God.⁴ But how difficult and hard this one thing is to perform in prayer, none knows better than such as in their prayers are not content to remain within the bands of their own vanity, but, as it were, ravished, do intend [*strive*] to a purity allowed of God; asking not such things as the foolish reason of man desires, but [that] which may

1 Prayer springs out of true faith

2 Men negligent in prayer are not perfect in faith

3 What prayer contains

4 Note

be pleasant and acceptable in God's presence. Our adversary, Satan, at all times compassing us about (1 Pet. 5:8), is never more busy than when we address and bend ourselves to prayer. O! how secretly and subtly he creeps into our breasts and, calling us back from God, causes us to forget what we have to do;⁵ so that frequently when we (with all reverence) should speak to God, we find our hearts talking with the vanities of the world, or with the foolish imaginations of our own conceit.

HOW THE SPIRIT MAKES INTERCESSION FOR US. So that without the Spirit of God supporting our infirmities (mightily making intercession for us with unceasing groans, which cannot be expressed with tongue, Rom. 8:26), there is no hope that we can desire anything according to God's will. I mean not that the Holy Ghost does mourn or pray, but that he stirs up our minds, giving unto us a desire or boldness to pray, and causes us to mourn when we are extracted or pulled therefrom. Which things to conceive, no strength of man suffices, neither is able of itself;⁶ but hereof it is plain, that such as understand not what they pray, or expound not or declare not the desire of their hearts clearly in God's presence, and in time of prayer, to their possibility [*as far as they are able*], and do not expel vain cogitations from their minds, profit nothing in prayer.

WHY WE SHOULD PRAY, AND ALSO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE DO PRAY.⁷ But men will object and say, "Although we understand not what we pray, yet God understands, who knows the secrets of our hearts; he knows also what we need, although we expone [*explain*] not, or declare not, our necessities unto him."⁸ Such men verily declare themselves never to have understood what perfect prayer meant, nor to what end Jesus Christ commanded us to pray: which is, first, that our hearts may be inflamed with continual fear, honour, and love of God, to whom we run for support and help whensoever danger or necessity requires; that we so learning to notify [*make known*] our desires in his presence, he may teach us what is to be desired, and what not. Second, that we, knowing our petitions to be granted by God alone (to him only we must render and give laud and praise), and that we, ever having his infinite goodness fixed in our minds, may constantly abide to receive that which with fervent prayer we desire.

WHY GOD DEFERS TO GRANT OUR PRAYER. For sometimes God defers or prolongs to grant our petitions, for the exercise and trial of our faith, and not that he sleeps or is absent from us at any time, but that with more gladness we might receive that which, with long expectation, we have abidden [*awaited*]; that thereby we, assured of his eternal providence (so far as the infirmity of our corrupt and most weak nature will permit), doubt not but that

5 Let every man judge

6 Who prays not

7 Objection

8 Answer

his merciful hand shall relieve us in most urgent necessity and extreme tribulation. Therefore, such men as teach us that it is not necessarily required that we understand what we pray, because God knows what we need, would also teach us that we neither honour God, nor yet refer or give unto him thanks for benefits received. For how shall we honour and praise him, whose goodness and liberality we know not? And how shall we know, unless we receive and sometimes have experience? And how shall we know that we have received, unless we know verily what we have asked?

The second thing to be observed in perfect prayer is, that standing in the presence of God, we are found such as bear reverence to his holy law; earnestly repenting [of] our past iniquities, and intending to lead a new life; for otherwise all our prayers are in vain, as it is written, "Whoso withdraweth his ear that he may not hear the law of God, his prayer shall be abominable" ([Prov. 28:9](#)). Likewise Isaiah and Jeremiah says thus: "You shall multiply your prayers, and I shall not hear, because your hands are full of blood:" that is, of all cruelty and mischievous works ([Isa. 1:15](#); cf. [Jer. 11:14](#); [14:12](#)). Also the Spirit of God appears by the mouth of the blind (whom Jesus Christ illuminated), by these words, "We know that God heareth not sinners" ([John 9:31](#)): that is, such as do glory and continue in iniquity. So that of necessity, true repentance must needs be had, and go before perfect prayer, or sincere invocation of God's name.

WHEN SINNERS ARE NOT HEARD OF GOD. And unto these two precedents must be annexed the third, which is the dejection of ourselves in God's presence, utterly refusing and casting off our own justice [*righteousness*] with all cogitations and opinions thereof. And let us not think that we should be heard for anything proceeding of ourselves; for such as advance, boast, or depend anything upon their own justice, [God] repels from the presence of his mercy, and holds with the high proud Pharisee ([Luke 18:9-14](#)). And, therefore, we find the most holy men most dejected and humbled in prayer.

David says, "O Lord, our Saviour, help us, be merciful unto our sins for thy own sake. Remember not our old iniquities. But haste thee, O Lord, and let thy mercy prevent us" ([Ps. 79:8-9](#)). Jeremiah says, "If our iniquities bear testimony against us, do thou according to thy own name" ([Jer. 14:7](#)). And behold Isaiah: "Thou art angry, O Lord, because we have sinned, and are replenished with all wickedness; and our justice is like a defiled cloth. But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are clay, thou art the workman, and we the workmanship of thy hands. Be not angry, O Lord, remember not our iniquities for ever" ([Isa. 64:5-6, 8-9](#)). And Daniel, greatly commended of God, in his prayer, makes most humble confession in these words: "We are sinners, and have offended; we have done ungodly, and fallen from thy commandment. Therefore, not in our own righteousness make we our prayers before thee, but thy most rich and great mercies bring we forth for us. O Lord, hear! O Lord, be merciful and spare us! O Lord, attend, help, and cease not; my God, even for thy own name's sake do it; for thy city and thy people are called after thy own name" ([Dan. 9:5, 18-19](#)). Behold,

that in these prayers is no mention of their own justice, their own satisfaction, or their own merits; but most humble confession, proceeding from a sorrowful and penitent heart; having nothing whereupon it might depend, but the free mercy of God alone, who had promised to be their God (that is, their help, comfort, defender, and deliverer); as he has also done to us by Jesus Christ, in time of tribulation; and that they despair not, but after the acknowledging of their sins, called for mercy, and obtained the same. Wherefore it is plain, that such men as, in their prayers, have respect to any virtue proceeding of themselves, thinking thereby their prayers are accepted, never prayed aright.

WHAT FASTING AND ALMS-DEEDS ARE, WITH PRAYER. And albeit to fervent prayer are joined fasting, watching, and alms-deeds, yet none of them are the cause that God does accept our prayers; but they are spurs which suffer us not to vary, but make us more able to continue in prayer, which the mercy of God does accept.⁹ But here it may be objected, that David prays, "Keep my life, O Lord, for I am holy. O Lord, save my soul, for I am innocent; and suffer me not to be consumed" ([Ps. 86:2](#)). Also Hezekiah, "Remember, Lord, I beseech thee, that I have walked righteously before thee, and that I have wrought that which is good in thy sight" ([2 Kings 20:3](#)).¹⁰ These words are not spoken of men glorious, neither yet trusting in their own works.¹¹ But herein they testify themselves to be the sons of God, by regeneration; to whom he promises always to be merciful, and at all times to hear their prayers.

The cause of their boldness was Jesus Christ. And so their words spring from a wanted, constant, and fervent faith, surely believing that, as God of his infinite mercy had called them to his knowledge, not suffering them to walk after their own natural wickedness, but partly had taught them to conform themselves to his holy law; and that for the promised Seed's sake; so might he not leave them destitute of comfort, consolation, and defence in so great and extreme necessity. And so they allege not their justice to glory thereof, or to put trust therein, but to strengthen and confirm them in God's promises.

And this consolation I would wish all Christians in their prayers: a testimony of a good conscience to assure them of God's promises. But to obtain what they ask must only depend upon him, all opinion and thought of our own justice being laid aside. And moreover David, in the words above, compares himself with King Saul, and with the rest of his enemies, who wrongfully persecuted him; desiring of God that they prevail not against him, as [though] he would say, "Unjustly do they persecute me, and, therefore, according to my innocence defend me." For otherwise he confesses himself most grievously to have offended God, as in the preceding places he clearly testifies.

9 Objection

10 Answer

11 Note well

HYPOCRISY IS NOT ALLOWED WITH GOD. Thirdly, in prayer is to be observed, that what we ask of God, that we must earnestly desire the same, acknowledging ourselves to be indigent and void thereof; and that God alone may grant the petition of our hearts, when [it] is his good will and pleasure. For nothing is more odious before God than hypocrisy and dissimulation:¹² that is, when men do ask of God things whereof they have no need, or that they believe to obtain by others than by God alone. As if a man asks of God remission of his sins, thinking, nevertheless, to obtain the same by his own works, or by other men's merits, [he] does mock with God and deceive himself. And in such cases a great number do offend, principally the mighty and rich of the earth, who for a common custom, will pray this part of the Lord's prayer,¹³"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11): that is, a moderate and reasonable sustenance; and yet their own hearts will testify that they need not so to pray, seeing they abound in all worldly solace and felicity. I mean not that rich men should not pray this part of the Lord's prayer, but I would they understood what they ought to pray in it (whereof I intend to speak afterwards), and that they ask nothing whereof they feel not themselves marvelously indigent and needy. For unless we call in verity, he shall not grant; and except we speak with our whole heart, we shall not find him.

The fourth rule necessary to be followed in prayer is a sure hope to obtain what we ask. For nothing more offends God, than when we ask doubting whether he will grant our petitions; for in so doing, we doubt if God be true, if he be mighty and good. Such, says St. James, obtain nothing of God. And, therefore, Jesus Christ commands that we firmly believe to obtain whatsoever we ask; for all things are possible to him that believes.¹⁴ And, therefore, in our prayers, desperation always is to be expelled. I mean not that any man in extremity of trouble can be without a present dolour [*sorrow*], and without a greater fear of trouble to follow.

TROUBLES ARE THE SPURS TO STIR US TO PRAY. Trouble and fear are the very spurs to prayer; for when man, compassed about with vehement calamities, and vexed with continual solicitude (having, by help of man, no hope of deliverance, with sorely oppressed and punished heart, fearing also greater punishment to follow), does call to God for comfort and support from the deep pit of tribulation, such prayer ascends into God's presence, and returns not in vain.

GOD DELIVERS HIS OWN FROM THEIR TROUBLE AND ENEMIES. As David, in the vehement persecution of Saul, hunted and chased from every hold, fearing that one day or other he should fall into the hands of his persecutors, after he had complained that no place of rest was left to him, vehemently prayed, saying, "O Lord, which art my God, in

12 Mark well hypocrisy

13 Daily bread

14 Note

whom only I trust, save me from them that persecute me, and deliver me from mine enemies. Let not this man (meaning Saul) devour my life, as a lion does his prey; for of none seek I comfort but of thee alone" (Ps. 7:1-2).

In the midst of these anguishes the goodness of God sustained him, [so] that the present tribulation was tolerable, and the infallible promises of God so assured him of deliverance, that [his] fear was partly mitigated and gone, as plainly appears to such as diligently mark the process of his prayers. For after long menacing and threatening made to him by his enemy, he concludes with these words: "The dolour which he intended to me shall fall upon his own pate; and the violence wherewith he would have oppressed me shall cast down his own head. But I will magnify the Lord according to his justice, and shall praise the name of the Most High" (Ps. 7:16-17). This is not written for David only, but for all such as shall suffer tribulation, to the end of the world.¹⁵ For I, the writer hereof (let this be said to the laud and praise of God alone), in anguish of mind and vehement tribulation and affliction, called to the Lord, when not only the ungodly, but even my faithful brethren, yea, and my own self (that is, all natural understanding) judged my cause to be irremediable. And yet in my greatest calamity, and when my pains were most cruel,¹⁶ would his eternal wisdom that my hands should write (far contrary to the judgment of carnal reason), [that] which his mercy has proved true. Blessed be his holy name! And, therefore, I dare be bold in the verity of God's word, to promise that (notwithstanding the vehemence of trouble, the long continuance thereof, the desperation of all men, the fearfulness, danger, dolour, and anguish of our own hearts), yet if we call constantly to God, he shall deliver beyond the expectation of all men.

¹⁷WHERE CONSTANT PRAYER IS, THERE THE PETITION IS GRANTED. Let no man think himself unworthy to call and pray to God, because he has grievously offended his Majesty in times past; but let him bring to God a sorrowful and repenting heart, saying, with David, "Heal my soul, O Lord, for I have offended against thee. Before I was afflicted, I transgressed, but now let me observe thy commandments" (Ps. 41:4). To mitigate or ease the sorrows of our wounded conscience, our most prudent Physician has provided two plasters to give us encouragement to pray (notwithstanding the knowledge of offences committed): that is, a precept and a promise. The precept or commandment to pray is universal, frequently inculcated and repeated in God's scriptures. "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (Matt. 7:7). "Call upon me in the day of trouble" (Ps. 50:15). "Watch and pray, that ye fall not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). "I command that ye pray ever without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). "Make deprecations incessantly, and give thanks in all things" (1 Tim. 2:1-2,

15 A comfort to the writer, being in great adversity

16 A reference to the sickness and agonies Knox suffered during imprisonment on board the French galley

17 Note well

8).¹⁸ Which commandments, whoso contemns or despises does sin equally with him that does steal. For in this commandment, "Thou shalt not steal" ([Ex. 20:15](#)), is a precept *negative*; so, "Thou shalt pray," is a commandment *affirmative*. And God requires equal obedience of all and to all his commandments. Yet more boldly will I say: He who, when necessity constrains, desires not support and help of God, does provoke his wrath no less than such as make false gods or openly deny God.

HE THAT PRAYS NOT IN TROUBLE, DENIES GOD. For like as it is to know no physician or medicine, or in knowing them, to refuse to use and receive the same; so not to call upon God in your tribulation, is like as if you did not know God, or else utterly denied him.

NOT TO PRAY IS A SIN MOST ODIOS. O! why cease we then to call instantly to his mercy, having his commandment so to do? Above all our iniquities, we work manifest contempt and despising of him, when, by negligence, we delay to call for his gracious support. Whoso does call upon God obeys his will, and finds therein no small consolation, knowing nothing is more acceptable to his Majesty than humble obedience ([Jer. 7:23](#)).

To his commandment, he adds his most undoubted promise in many places: "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find" ([Matt. 7:7](#)). And by the prophet Jeremiah God says, "Ye shall call upon me, and I shall hear you." "Ye shall seek, and ye shall find me" ([Jer. 29:13](#)). And by Isaiah he says, "May the father forget his natural son, or the mother the child of her womb? and although they do, yet shall I not forget such as call upon me" ([Isa. 49:15](#)). And hereto the words of Jesus Christ correspond and agree, saying, "If ye, being wicked, can give good gifts to your children, much more my heavenly Father shall give the Holy Ghost to them that ask him" ([Luke 11:13](#)). And that we should not think God to be absent, or not to hear us, accuses Moses, saying, "There is no nation that have their gods so adherent, or near unto them as our God, who is present at all our prayers" ([Deut. 4:7](#)). Also the psalmist, "Near is the Lord to all that call upon him in verity" ([Ps. 145:18](#)). And Christ says, "Whosoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" ([Matt. 18:20](#)).

[THE] READINESS OF GOD TO HEAR SINNERS. That we shall not think God will not hear us, Isaiah says, "Before ye cry I shall hear, and while they speak I shall answer" ([Isa. 65:24](#)). And also "if at even come sorrow or calamity, before the morning spring, I shall reduce and bring gladness" ([Ps. 30:5](#)). And these most comfortable words does the Lord speak not to carnal Israel only, but to all men sorely oppressed, abiding God's deliverance. "For a moment and a little season have I turned my face from thee, but in everlasting mercy shall I comfort thee" ([Isa. 54:7-8](#)).

18 Note

THE HOPE TO OBTAIN OUR PETITIONS SHOULD DEPEND UPON THE PROMISES OF GOD. O! hard are the hearts whom so manifold, most sweet, and sure promises do not mollify; whereupon should depend the hope to obtain our petitions. The indignity or unworthiness of ourselves is not to be regarded; for albeit we are far inferiors to the chosen who are departed in holiness and purity of life, yet, in that part we are equal, in that we have the same commandment to pray, and the same promise to be heard. For his Gracious Majesty esteems not the prayer, neither grants the petition for any dignity of the person that prays, but for his promise sake only. And, therefore, says David, "Thou hast promised unto thy servant, O Lord, that thou wilt build a house for him; wherefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray in thy sight, now even so, O Lord, thou art God, and thy words are true. Thou hast spoken these things unto thy servant; begin, therefore, to do according to thy promise; multiply, O Lord, the household of thy servant" (2 Sam. 7:27-29). Behold, David altogether depended upon God's promise. As also did Jacob, who, after he had confessed himself unworthy of all the benefits received, yet dares he ask greater benefits in time to come, and that because God had promised (Gen. 32:10-12, 32:26). In the like manner let us be encouraged to ask whatsoever the goodness of God has freely promised. What we should ask principally, we shall hereafter declare.

OBSERVATION IN GODLY PRAYER. The fifth observation which godly prayer requires is the perfect [*complete*] knowledge of the Advocate, Intercessor, and Mediator.

OF NECESSITY WE MUST HAVE A MEDIATOR. For, seeing no man is of himself worthy to compare or appear in God's presence, by reason that sin continually rests in all men, which, by itself, does offend the majesty of God; raising all debate, strife, and division betwixt his inviolable justice and us: for the which, unless satisfaction be made by another than by ourselves, so little hope rests that we can attain anything from him, that no surety with him may we have at all. To exempt us from this horrible confusion, our most merciful Father has given unto us his only beloved Son, to be unto us justice, wisdom, sanctification, and holiness (1 Cor. 1:30; 1 John 2:2). If in him we faithfully believe, we are so clad that we may with boldness compare and appear before the throne of God's mercy; doubting nothing but whatsoever we ask, by our Mediator, we shall obtain most assuredly that same (Heb. 8:6; 4:14-16).

NOTE DILIGENTLY, BY WHOM WE MUST PRAY. Here is most diligently to be observed, that without our Mediator, Forespeaker and Peacemaker, we enter not into prayer; for the incalling of such as pray without Jesus Christ is not only vain, but also they are odious and abominable before God. Which thing to us, in the Levitical priesthood, was most evidently prefigured and declared; for as within the *Sanctum Sanctorum* (that is, the most Holy Place), entered no man but the high priest alone; and as all sacrifices offered by any other than by priests only, provoked the wrath of God upon the sacrifice maker (Lev. 16; Num 3:10; 1 Kings 12:31); so whoever does intend to enter into God's presence, or to

make prayers without Jesus Christ, shall find nothing but fearful judgment and horrible damnation.

TURKS AND JEWS. Wherefore it is plain that Turks and Jews, notwithstanding that they do, apparently, most fervently pray unto God, who created heaven and earth, who guides and rules the same, who defends the good, and punishes the evil, yet their prayers are never pleasing unto God; neither honour they his holy Majesty in anything, because they acknowledge not Jesus Christ; for whoso honours not the Son, honours not the Father ([John 5:23](#)).

WHEN WE ARE NOT HEARD. For as the law is a statute that we shall call upon God, and as the promise is made that he shall hear us, so are we commanded only to call by Jesus Christ, by whom alone we obtain our petitions; for in him alone are all the promises of God confirmed and complete ([1 Cor. 1:2, 10-13](#); [2 Cor. 1:20](#)). Whereof, without all controversy, it is plain, that such as have called, or call presently upon God, by any other name than by Jesus Christ alone, do nothing regard God's will, but obstinately prevaricate, and do against his commandments. And, therefore, they obtain not their petitions, neither yet have entrance to his mercy. "For no man cometh to the Father," says Jesus Christ, "but by me" ([John 14:6](#)). He is the right way; whoso declines from him errs, and goes wrong. He is our Leader, whom, without [*unless*] we follow, we shall walk in darkness; and he alone is our Captain, without whom neither praise nor victory shall we ever obtain.

INTERCESSION TO SAINTS. Against such as depend upon the intercession of saints, no otherwise will I contend; but [*will*] shortly touch the properties of a perfect Mediator. First, the words of Paul are most sure, "A mediator is not the mediator of one" ([Gal. 3:20](#)): that is, wheresoever is required a mediator, there are also two parties; to wit, one party offending, and the other party who is offended; which parties by themselves can in no wise be reconciled. Secondly, the mediator which takes upon him the reconciling of these two parties must be such a one, as having trust and favour of both parties, yet in some things must differ from both, and must be clear and innocent also of the crime committed against the party offended. Let this be more plain by this subsequent declaration. The eternal God stands upon the one part, and all natural men descending of Adam upon the other part. The infinite justice of God is so offended with the transgressions of all men, that in no wise can amity be made, except such a one be found as fully may make satisfaction for man's offences. Among the sons of men none was found able, for they all were found criminal in the fall of one. And God, infinite in justice, must abhor the society and sacrifice of sinners.

¹⁹ANGELS CANNOT BE MEDIATORS. And unto the angels what prevailed the prevarication of man, who (albeit they would have interposed themselves mediators) yet they

19 Our heavy and great sins exceed the strength of any of us: wherefore it is necessary that thou, O Christ, thyself make satisfaction for us.

had not the infinite justice. Who then shall here be found the peacemaker? Surely the infinite goodness and mercy of God might not suffer the perpetual loss and repudiation of his creatures; and therefore his eternal wisdom provided such a Mediator, having wherewith to satisfy the justice of God; differing also from the Godhead; his only Son, clad in the nature of manhood, who interposed himself a Mediator, not as man only.

JESUS CHRIST, GOD AND MAN, OUR MEDIATOR. For the pure humanity of Christ (of itself) might neither make intercession nor satisfaction for us, but God and man: in that he is God, he might complete the will of the Father; and in that he is man, pure and clean, without spot or sin, he might offer sacrifice for the purgation of our sins, and satisfaction of God's justice. So, without [unless] saints have these two, Godhead equal with the Father, and humanity without sin, saints may not usurp the office of mediator.

²⁰But here will be objected, "Who knows not Jesus Christ to be the only Mediator of our redemption? But that impedes or lets [*hinders*] not saints and holy men to be mediators, and to make intercession for us."²¹ As though Jesus Christ had been but one hour our mediator, and afterwards had resigned the office unto his servants!

WHO MAKES OTHER MEDIATORS NOR [THAN] JESUS CHRIST, TAKES HONOUR FROM HIM. Do not such men gently entreat Jesus Christ, detracting from him such portion of his honour? The scriptures of God speak otherwise, testifying him to have been made man, and to have proved our infirmities; to have suffered death willingly; to have overcome the same; and all to this end: that he might be our perpetual High Sovereign Priest, in whose place or dignity none other might enter. As John says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the Just" (1 John 2:1).

Mark well these words: John says, "We have presently a sufficient Advocate," whom Paul affirms to sit at the right hand of God the Father, and to be the only Mediator between God and man (Heb. 6-7, 9-10; Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5). "For he alone," says Ambrose, "is our mouth, by whom we speak to God. He is our eyes, by whom we see God, and also our right hand, by whom we offer anything unto the Father;"²² who, unless he make intercession,²³ neither we, neither any of the saints, may have any society or fellowship with God.²⁴ What creature may say to God the Father, "Let mankind be received into thy favour, for the pain of his transgression that I have sustained in my own body? For his cause was I compassed with all infirmities, and so became the most contemned and despised of all men;"²⁵ and yet

20 Objection

21 Answer

22 Libro de Isaac et Anima

23 True members

24 Note diligently

25 Obedience of the Saviour

in my mouth was found no guile, nor deceit, but [I was] always obedient to thy will, suffering most grievous death for mankind; and, therefore, behold not the sinner, but me, who, by my infinite justice, has perfectly satisfied for his offences." May any other (Jesus Christ excepted) in these words make intercession for sinners? If they may not, then are they neither mediators nor yet intercessors. "For albeit," says Augustine, "Christians do commend one another unto God in their prayers, yet they make not intercession, neither dare they usurp the office of a mediator; no not Paul, albeit under the Head he was a principal member, because he commends himself to the prayers of faithful men."²⁶

²⁷But if any do object, "Such is not the condition of the saints departed, who now have put off mortality, and bear no longer the fragility of the flesh:" which albeit I grant to be most true,²⁸ yet are they all compelled to cast their crowns before him that does sit on the throne, acknowledging themselves to have been delivered from great affliction, to have been purged by the blood of the Lamb; and therefore none of them do attempt to be a mediator, seeing they neither have being, nor justice, of themselves.

²⁹But in so great light of the gospel, which now is beginning (praise be to the Omnipotent!), it is not necessary upon such matter long to remain. Some say, "We will use but one mediator, Jesus Christ, to God the Father; but we must have saints, and chiefly the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, to pray for us unto him."

AGAINST SUCH AS WOULD HAVE MEDIATORS TO JESUS CHRIST. Alas! Whosoever is so minded shows himself plainly to know nothing of Jesus Christ rightly. Is he who descended from heaven, and vouchsafed to be conversant with sinners, commanding all sorely vexed and sick to come unto him [[Matt. 9:11-13](#)] (who, hanging upon the cross, prayed first for his enemies [[Luke 23:34](#)]) become now so intractable, that he will not hear us without a person to be a mean? "O Lord! open the eyes of such, that they may clearly perceive thy infinite kindness, gentleness, and love toward mankind."

Above all precedents is to be observed, that what we ask of God ought to be profitable to ourselves and to others, and hurtful or dangerous to no man. Secondly, we must consider whether our petitions extend to spiritual or corporeal things.³⁰ Spiritual things, such as deliverance from impiety, remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and of life everlasting, we should desire absolutely, without any condition, by Jesus Christ, in whom alone all these are promised. And in asking hereof, we should not pray thus: "O Father, forgive our sins if thou wilt;" for he has expressed his will, saying, "As I live, I desire not the death of a sinner,

26 Libro Contra [Epist.] Parmen

27 Objection

28 Answer

29 Note well

30 Spiritual things should be asked without condition

but rather that he convert and live;" which immutable and solemn oath whoso calls in doubt makes God a liar, and, so far as in him lies, would spoil him of his Godhead.³¹ For he cannot be God except he be eternal and infallible verity. And John says, "This is the testimony which God hath testified of his Son, that whoso believeth in the Son hath eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13); to the verity whereof we should steadfastly cleave, although worldly dolour apprehends us. As David, exiled from his kingdom, and deprived of all his glory, secluded not from God, but steadfastly believed reconciliation by the promise made, notwithstanding that all creatures in earth had refused, objected and rebelled against him: "Happy is the man whom thou shalt inspire, O Lord" (2 Sam. 15).

³²In asking [for] corporeal things, first let us inquire if we be at peace with God in our conscience by Jesus Christ, firmly believing our sins to be remitted in his blood? Secondly, let us inquire of our own hearts, if we know [that] temporal riches or substance do not come to man by accident, fortune, or chance, neither yet by the industry and diligence of man's labour; but to be the liberal gift of God only, whereof we ought to laud and praise his goodness, wisdom, and providence alone.

WHAT SHOULD BE PRAYED FOR. And if we truly acknowledge and confess this, let us boldly ask of him whatsoever is necessary for us: as sustenance of this body; health thereof; defence from misery; deliverance from trouble; tranquillity and peace to our commonwealth; prosperous success in our vocations, labours, and affairs, whatsoever they are; which God wills we [should] ask all of him, to certify [to] us that all things stand in his regiment and disposition. And also by asking and receiving these corporeal commodities, we have [a] taste of his sweetness, and are inflamed with his love, that thereby our faith of reconciliation, and remission of our sins, may be exercised and increase.

WHY GOD DEFERS OR PROLONGS TO GRANT US OUR PETITIONS.³³ But in asking for temporal things, we must observe, first, that if God defers or prolongs to grant our petitions, even so long that he seems apparently to reject us, yet let us not cease to call; prescribing him neither time, neither manner of deliverance; as it is written, "If he prolong time, abide patiently upon him." And also, "Let not the faithful be too hasty, for God sometimes defers and will not hastily grant, to the probation of our continuance," as the words of Jesus Christ testify; and also that we may receive with greater gladness that which, with ardent desire, we long have looked for: as Hannah, Sarah, and Elizabeth, after great ignominy of their barrenness and sterility, received fruit of their bosoms with joy. Secondly, because we know the kirk at all times to be under the cross, in asking temporal commodities, and especially deliverance from trouble, let us offer unto God obedience, if it shall please his

31 Note well

32 Corporeal things

33 Note well

goodness we be longer exercised, that we may patiently abide it; as David, desiring to be restored to his kingdom (what time he was exiled by his own son), offers to God obedience, saying, "If I have found favour in the presence of the Lord, he shall bring me home again; but if he shall say, 'Thou pleasest me not longer to bear authority,' I am obedient; let him do what seemeth good unto him" (2 Sam. 15:25-26).

BETTER IT IS TO OBEY GOD THAN MAN. And the three children did say unto Nebuchadnezzar, "We know that our God whom we worship may deliver us; but if it shall not please him so to do, let it be known to thee, O king, that thy gods we will not worship" (Dan. 3:17-18). Here they gave a true confession of their perfect faith, knowing nothing to be impossible to the omnipotence of God; affirming also themselves to stand in his mercy; for otherwise the nature of man could not willingly give itself to so horrible a torment. But they offer unto God most humble obedience to be delivered at his good pleasure and will; as we should do in all afflictions, for we know not what to ask or desire as we ought: that is, the frail flesh, oppressed with fear and pain, desires deliverance, ever abhorring and drawing back from giving obedience.

O Christian brethren, I write by experience. But the Spirit of God calls back the mind to obedience, that albeit it does desire and abide for deliverance, yet should it not repine against the good will of God, but incessantly ask that it may abide with patience. How hard this battle is, no man knows but he who in himself has suffered trial.

THE PETITION OF THE SPIRIT.³⁴ It is to be noted, that God sometimes does grant the petition of the spirit, while he yet defers the desire of the flesh. As who doubts but God did mitigate the heaviness of Joseph (Gen. 39), although he sent not hasty deliverance in his long imprisonment; and that as he gave him favour in the sight of the jailor, so inwardly also he gave him consolation in spirit. And moreover, God sometimes grants the petition of the spirit, where utterly he repels the desire of the flesh;³⁵ for the petition of the spirit always is, that we may attain to the true felicity, whereunto we must needs enter by tribulation and the final death, which both the nature of man does ever abhor, and therefore the flesh, under the cross, and at the sight of death, calls and thirsts for hasty deliverance. But God, who alone knows what is expedient for us, sometimes prolongs the deliverance of his chosen, and sometimes permits them to drink, before the maturity of age, the bitter cup of corporeal death, that thereby they may receive medicine and cure from all infirmity.³⁶ For who doubts that John the Baptist desired to have seen the days of Jesus Christ more, and to have been longer with him in conversation? Or that Stephen would not have laboured more days in preaching Christ's gospel, whom, nevertheless, he suffered hastily to taste of this general

34 Note well

35 Flesh strives against the Spirit

36 Persecution of the faithful

sentence ([Acts 7:59](#))? And, albeit we see therefore no apparent help to ourselves, nor yet to others [who are] afflicted, let us not cease to call, thinking that our prayers are vain.³⁷ For, whatsoever comes of our bodies, God shall give unspeakable comfort to the spirit, and shall turn all to our good beyond our own expectation.

IMPEDIMENTS COME OF THE WEAKNESS OF THE FLESH. The cause that I am so long and tedious in this matter is, for that I know how hard the battle is betwixt the spirit and the flesh, under the heavy cross of affliction, where no worldly defence, but present death does appear. I know the grudging and murmuring complaints of the flesh; I know the anger, wrath, and indignation which it conceives against God, calling all his promises in doubt, and being ready every hour utterly to fall from God: against which rests only faith, provoking us to call earnestly, and to pray for assistance of God's Spirit. Wherein if we continue, he shall turn our most desperate calamities to gladness, and to a prosperous end. "To thee alone, O Lord, be praise, for with experience I write this and speak it."

WHERE, FOR WHOM, AND AT WHAT TIME WE OUGHT TO PRAY, is not to be passed over with silence.

PRIVATE PRAYER. Private prayer (such as men secretly offer unto God by themselves) requires no separate place, although Jesus Christ commands when we pray to enter into our chamber, and to close the door, and so to pray unto our Father secretly ([Matt. 6:6](#)). Whereby he would that we should choose for our prayers such places as might offer least occasion to call us back from prayer; and also that we should expel forth of our minds, in time of our prayer, all vain cogitations. For otherwise Jesus Christ himself does observe no special place of prayer; for we find him sometimes pray in Mount Olivet, sometimes in the desert, sometimes in the temple, and in the garden. And Peter coveted to pray upon the top of the house. Paul prayed in prison, and was heard of God ([Acts 10:9](#)).³⁸ Who also commands men to pray in all places, lifting up unto God pure and clean hands; as we find that the prophets and most holy men did, whensoever danger or necessity required.

APPOINTED PLACES TO PRAY IN MAY NOT BE NEGLECTED. But public and common prayers should be used in [the] place appointed for the assembly, from whence whosoever negligently extracts himself is in no wise excusable. I mean not, that to be absent from that place is sin, because that place is more holy than another; for the whole earth created by God is equally holy. But the promise made, that, "Wheresoever two or three be gathered together in my name, there shall I be in the midst of them" ([Matt. 18:20](#)), condemns all such as contemn the congregation gathered in his name. But mark well this word "gathered;" I mean not, to hear piping, singing, or playing; nor to patter upon beads, or books whereof they have no understanding; nor to commit idolatry, honouring that for God

37 Comfort to the afflicted.

38 Private places to pray in

which is no god indeed. For with such will I neither join myself in common prayer, nor in receiving external sacraments; for in so doing I should affirm their superstition and abominable idolatry, which I, by God's grace, never will do, neither counsel others to do, to the end.

WHAT IT IS TO BE GATHERED IN THE NAME OF CHRIST. This congregation which I mean, should be gathered in the name of Jesus Christ: that is, to laud and magnify God the Father, for the infinite benefits they have received by his only Son our Lord. In this congregation the mystical and last Supper of Jesus Christ should be distributed without superstition or any more ceremonies than he himself used, and his apostles after him. And in distribution thereof, in this congregation, should inquisition be made of the poor among them, and support provided, during the time of their convention, and it should be distributed amongst them. Also, in this congregation should be made common prayers, such as all men hearing might understand; that the hearts of all, subscribing to the voice of one, might, with unfeigned and fervent mind, say, "Amen." Whosoever does withdraw himself from such a congregation (but alas, where shall it be found?) does declare himself to be no member of Christ's body.

FOR WHOM, AND AT WHAT TIME WE SHOULD PRAY. Now there remains, for whom, and at what time we should pray. Paul does command that we should pray for all men, and at all times (1 Tim. 2:1-2). And principally for such of the household of faith as suffer persecution, and for commonwealths tyrannically oppressed, incessantly should we call, that God, of his mercy and power, will withstand the violence of such tyrants.

GOD'S SENTENCE MAY BE CHANGED. And when we see the plagues of God, as hunger, pestilence, or war coming, or appearing to reign; then should we, with lamentable voices and repenting hearts, call unto God, that it would please his infinite mercies to withdraw his hand; which thing if we do unfeignedly, he will, without doubt, revoke his wrath, and in the midst of his fury think upon mercy; as we are taught in the scripture, by his infallible and eternal verity. As in Exodus, God says, "I shall destroy this nation from the face of the earth" (Ex. 32:10, 28). And when Moses addressed himself to pray for them, the Lord proceeded, saying, "Suffer me that I may utterly destroy them." And then Moses falls down upon his face, and forty days continued in prayer for the safety of the people, for whom at the last he obtained forgiveness (Deut. 9:14, 18). David in the vehement plague, lamentably called unto God (2 Sam. 24:17). And the king of Nineveh says, "Who can tell? God may turn and repent, and cease from his fierce wrath, that we perish not" (Jonah 3:9). Which examples and scriptures are not written in vain, but to certify us that God, of his own native goodness, will mitigate his plagues (by our prayers offered by Jesus Christ), although he has threatened to punish, or presently does punish. Which he does testify by his own words, saying, "If I have prophesied against any nation or people, that they shall be destroyed; if they repent of their iniquity, it shall repent me of the evil which I have spoken

against them" (Jer. 18:7-8). This I write, lamenting the great coldness of men,³⁹ who, under so long scourges of God, are nothing kindled to pray by repentance, but carelessly sleep in a wicked life; even as though the continual wars, urgent famine, and quotidian [*daily*] plagues of pestilence, and other contagious, insolent [*unaccustomed*], and strange maladies, were not the present signs of God's wrath provoked by our iniquities.

A PLAGUE THREATENED TO ENGLAND. O England! Let your intestine battle, and domestic murder provoke you to purity of life, according to the word which openly has been proclaimed in you. Otherwise you shall drink the cup of the Lord's wrath! The multitude shall not escape, but shall drink the dregs, and have the cup broken upon their heads. For judgment begins in the house of the Lord, and commonly the least offender is first punished, to provoke the more wicked to repentance.

"But, O Lord, infinite in mercy, if thou shalt punish, make not consummation, but cut away the proud and luxuriant branches which bear no fruit:⁴⁰ and preserve the commonwealth of such as give succour and harbour to thy contemned messengers, which long have suffered exile in deserts. And let thy kingdom shortly come, that sin may be ended, death devoured, thy enemies confounded; that we thy people, by thy majesty delivered, may obtain everlasting joy and felicity, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, to whom be all honour and praise, for ever. Amen.

John Knox

Hasten, Lord, and tarry not.

Hereafter Follows a Confession [or Prayer].

Omnipotent and everlasting God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by thy eternal providence disposes kingdoms, as seemeth best to thy wisdom: we acknowledge and confess thy judgments to be righteous, in that thou hast taken from us, for our ingratitude, and for abusing of thy most holy word, our native king and earthly comforter.

Justly may thou pour forth upon us the uttermost of thy plagues; for that we have not known the days and times of our merciful visitation. We have contemned thy word, and despised thy mercies; we have transgressed thy laws; for deceitfully have we wrought, every man with our neighbours; oppression and violence we have not abhorred: charity hath not appeared among us, as our profession requireth. We have little regarded the voices of thy prophets. Thy threatenings we have esteemed vanity and wind. So that in us, as of ourselves, rests nothing worthy of thy mercies; for all are found fruitless; even the princes with the prophets, as withered trees apt and meet to be burnt in the fire of thy eternal displeasure.

But, O Lord, behold thy own mercy and goodness, that thou may purge and remove the most filthy burden of our most horrible offences. Let thy love overcome the severity of

39 Weakness in prayer

40 The godly punished

thy judgments, even as it did in giving to the world thy only Son, Jesus, when all mankind was lost, and no obedience was left in Adam nor in his seed. Regenerate our hearts, O Lord, by the strength of thy Holy Ghost. Convert thou us, and we shall be converted. Work thou in us unfeigned repentance, and move thou our hearts to obey thy holy laws.

Behold our trouble and apparent destruction, and stay the sword of thy vengeance before it devours us. Place above us, O Lord, for thy great mercy's sake, such a head, with such rulers and magistrates as feareth thy name, and willeth the glory of Christ Jesus to spread. Take not from us the light of thy evangel, and suffer thou no Papistry to prevail in this realm. Illuminate the heart of our sovereign lady Queen Mary, with pregnant gifts of thy Holy Ghost; and inflame the hearts of her council with thy true fear and love. Repress thou the pride of those that would rebel; and remove from all hearts the contempt of the word. Let not our enemies rejoice at our destruction, but look thou to the honour of thy own name, O Lord; and let thy gospel be preached with boldness in this realm. If thy justice must punish, then punish our bodies with the rod of thy mercy. But, O Lord, let us never revolt, nor turn back to idolatry again. Mitigate the hearts of those that persecute us; and let us not faint under the cross of our Saviour, but assist us with the Holy Ghost, even to the end.

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