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THE DUTY

OF

PRAYER FOR MINISTERS.

BY THE

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PRAYER FOR MINISTERS.

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified.—2 THESS. iii. 1.

PAUL, the apostle to the Gentiles, often requested the prayers of his Christian brethren. In 1 Thess. v. 25, he writes, Brethren, pray for us. In Col. iv. 2—4, Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, &c. To the Ephesians, Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, &c. Eph. vi. 18—20. And the text, Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified. 2 Thess. iii. 1, 2. If Paul felt it necessary to request the prayers of his brethren, how much more needful is it for the ministers of Christ now to make the same request! Well may they adopt the language of the text as their own, and repeat it on all suitable occasions, Brethren, pray for us, &c.

Two prominent ideas are suggested:

I. *The duty of praying for ministers*; and

II. *The considerations by which the duty is enforced.*

In the opening and enforcement of these ideas, may the Lord himself be our Teacher and our Helper, that the considerations may move us to the performance of the duty!

I. *The duty*—Brethren, pray for us.

1. This duty is *implied* in those general directions of prayer which are contained in the Scriptures. Thus Paul to Timothy, I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving

of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority, &c. 1 Tim. ii. 1—3. To the Ephesians, in a passage already quoted, Praying always with all prayer . . . for all saints. If for all saints, then of course for them who stand as watchmen on the walls of Zion. The whole includes the parts; and when we are taught to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for the welfare of the church of God, Ps. cxxii. 6, the duty of praying for the ministry is implied. So it is when the prophet saith, Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Isa. lxii. 5—7. In this glorious consummation, how much depends upon the ministry of reconciliation! For though God gives the increase, Paul plants and Apollos waters—and the increase is given in answer to prayer. 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. Are we taught to pray for the establishment and extension of the church, and yet may we neglect to pray for them who must bear so important a part in her every onward movement? Never! The very reason why they who make mention of the Lord, are not to keep silence, is, because watchmen are set upon the walls of Jerusalem. Isa. lxii. 6. And with what earnestness does Paul address the Romans, Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me. . . . that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. Rom. xv. 30—32.

2. The duty is inseparable from the *relation* of minister and people. He is to seek their good, by imparting to them the instructions of the word of God, and by his intercessions and prayers in their behalf. They are to hear the word of God at his lips, and endeavour to receive profit from all his ministrations. He is their pastor; they his people. Mutual duties grow out of this relation. If the pastor has duties, so have the people. And whether the relation shall be comfortable and happy, and whether it shall be crowned with blessed results, must, under God, depend very

much upon two considerations:—1. whether the minister himself possesses the right spirit; and, 2, whether this spirit is possessed by the people. Now, the preparations of the heart in man, as well as the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord. Prov. xvi. 1. If the people are not much engaged in prayer for themselves and their minister, they are not prepared to be benefitted by the ministrations even of an angel; nor can they, without prayer, expect their minister to be prepared greatly to benefit them. The most profitable sermons, usually, are those in which the people feel most interested; but how can they be interested if they offer no prayer for him who breaks to them the bread of life? It is better to preach the gospel in the midst of the darkness of heathenism, than to a church which offers no prayer for its pastor, and thus manifests the most painful indifference to its own spiritual advancement. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you. Pray for us—which is the oft repeated and earnest request of the devoted and zealous Paul. Heb. xiii. 17, 18.

3. The peculiar *duties and trials* of ministers bespeak for them an interest in the prayers of their people. No class of men have more difficulties to encounter, more trials to meet, more discouragements to depress and overwhelm them. They have to meet constant drafts upon their intellectual powers, and they must come in contact with a thousand things which have a tendency to counteract the natural and cheerful flow of the animal spirits. They have every sort of taste to please, every kind of objection to meet, every degree of prejudice to overcome. They have to deal with the indifference of those who are out of the church, and with the coldness of those who are within. They must preach to those who are dead in sin, prophesy to the dry bones, and often see no signs of life, and be obliged to exclaim, Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord

revealed? Eph. ii. 1; Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10; Isa. liii. 1. And who is sufficient for these things? 2 Cor. ii. 16. Who can perform the duties and meet the trials of the ministry in his own strength? Our sufficiency is of God. 2 Cor. iii. 5. And shall they to whom we minister take no interest in our duties and trials? Shall they offer no prayer in our behalf? Shall they be informed that our sufficiency is of God, and yet not seek for us that grace by which we are enabled to do all things? 1 Cor. xv. 10; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Phil. iv. 13.—Brethren, pray for us!

But there is in your minds no question as to the duty. You need not to have it proved, but enforced. The duty is admitted. It is binding upon all Christians in every age. They who labour in word and doctrine are to be esteemed worthy of double honour; and that esteem will lead us to remember them at the throne of grace. 1 Tim. v. 17. Now observe, if it is duty to pray for all ministers, as is readily granted, then it must be duty to pray for your own. But while the duty is admitted in the general, and perhaps performed, how is it in this particular instance? Is your own pastor remembered in your prayers? Pause and think of your *closet duties*. Perhaps you have no closet, and no secret prayer! Then give up your hope as a Christian, and repent of your wickedness! If a Christian, you have a closet. Do you remember your minister there? Suppose now the growth of piety in your own soul, and the progress of your church in holiness, and the increase of its numbers by additions from the world, all depended upon your closet prayers for your minister. Would you not feel under such circumstances, that you ought to pray much more for him in secret than you now do? Or, suppose that a revival of religion among you were suspended upon the secret prayers of your church for its pastor. How long, think you, must you wait before receiving it? You go on the Sabbath to hear him preach; do you pray for him in your closet in the morning? When about to go up to the house of the Lord, do you retire to seek God's blessing on the ser-

vices of the sanctuary? Do you pray for your minister when going thither? Do you lift a prayer to God in his behalf, when in the place of worship? I ask not these questions by way of suspicion, but of honest self-examination. I would lead you to inquire of yourself whether you pray as much as you ought in your closet for your minister; for if you pray not for him there in secret, how can you expect God to bless you openly by his ministrations?

And how is it in your *family*? It may be you have no family altar! Then let not this day end before you have one! If once you had one, and it is fallen down, gather up its scattered and broken stones and rebuild it. A Christian family without prayer! Why, it is worse than the heathen! They worship their gods, and why should not you worship yours? How is it in those families where God is worshipped? Reader, how is it in yours? Is he remembered who ministers to you in holy things? If you pray not for him around your hearth, how can you expect your household to be interested in the messages of mercy which he delivers? Suppose the salvation of your family were suspended upon the prayers offered for your minister in your family devotions; would you not feel that you ought to be more full and earnest in prayer for him there? Suspicion dictates not these questions; but I would have you think of the exercises in your family, and inquire of your own heart whether your pastor has had as large a space in them as the interests of religion demand.

Turn now to your *meetings for prayer*, the monthly concert, the church meetings, the weekly prayer meetings, and how is it in each of these? Perhaps you do not attend them, and for that there may be good reason; but you will endeavour to be as regular and punctual in your attendance on them all as the providence of God will permit. Let such be your firm resolves; and inquire whether, heretofore, as much prayer has been offered in these meetings as there should have been for your minister? Aaron and Hur stayed up the hands of Moses. Ex. xvii. 12. So the members

of the church are to hold up the hands of their pastor. One way of doing this is by praying for him. This is duty; has it been performed? does not conscience bear witness of neglect? Then let us examine.

II. *The considerations by which the duty is enforced*—"that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified."

1. A proper regard for the *good of their minister*, should induce Christians to perform this duty. Ministers are men of like passions with other men. They live on the same food, and their souls must be nourished by the same means. They cannot go up into heaven and live through the week, and just come down and spend the Sabbath here on earth. They must live in the world, meet the trials and temptations of the world, take heed to their spirit, and keep their hearts with all diligence. Their peculiar circumstances, trials, duties, dangers, and difficulties, render a large measure of grace necessary; and they must live near to God, or be ill qualified to lead on "the sacramental host of God's elect." How much they have need to pray for themselves! And how much they need to have others pray for them! The Christian who has any sympathy for his pastor—who has any adequate conception of his responsibilities, duties, and trials—will not fail to pray much for him. I will not ask whether you have any regard for your pastor's good—whether you feel interested for his spiritual welfare. I will only say that such concern will cause you to pray often and much for him. Brethren, pray for us—for me!

2. This duty is enforced by a regard for *your own good*. You should be concerned to grow in grace. Soul-prosperity is what you should most earnestly and anxiously seek. But how can your soul prosper when you pray not for him who is to be the instrument in the hand of God of watering and nourishing it? Suppose you pray not for him in your closet, nor in your family, and you go to the sanctuary on the Sabbath without offering a prayer in his behalf; how can your heart be prepared to hear the word which

he may speak? Is it strange that you should think the sermon dry, and all the exercises dull and uninteresting? Is it strange that you should begin to find fault with him, and to think it would be better to have some one else in his place? Let it be remembered—write it upon the tablet of your heart, never to be obliterated or forgotten—that you *cannot have a good minister unless you pray for him*. Whether a minister, no matter what his talents or acquirements, shall be good, *i. e.* profitable to you, depends upon your prayerfulness. Without your prayers for him, no minister can be good for you, because you cannot be prepared to profit by his labours. Were those churches which become dissatisfied with their pastors, to examine themselves, they might find the whole cause of their dissatisfaction in their own want of prayerfulness. And were they to try what prayer can do, they might find it the restorer of peace and confidence, and the procurer of rich blessings to their own souls and the souls of the perishing around them. A prayerless people must be a fault-finding people; and a fault-finding people is a prayerless people. They who possess the spirit of prayer, see so many faults in themselves that they are ready to make due allowance for the failings of others. Besides they hear to be benefitted, and not as critics, or merely to be pleased. They are willing to hear the truth, the simple, unvarnished truth; and the truth, from whatever source it comes, does them good, as it doth the upright in heart. They are prepared to receive the truth in the love of it; and if they receive not advantage from the services of the sanctuary, they are quite as willing to suspect the difficulty to be in themselves, as in the preacher.

3. But the principal consideration by which the duty is enforced, is, *the success of the gospel*—"that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified," that success may attend the preaching of the word. Here is implied the power and efficacy of prayer. Pray for us, that the word may have free course, saith Paul. Prayer for ministers gives success to the gospel. Now the success of the gospel depends

much upon *the state of the Church*. But how miserable must be the state of that church, in which no prayer is offered for the pastor! How can the gospel have free course there and be glorified? The truth must freeze as soon as it touches the cold heart of the church, and fall powerless at the feet of sinners. As to any immediate results, the minister might almost as well preach to the icebergs of the arctic ocean! How chilling to his feelings to think that no prayer is offered for him! How depressing the thought that the truth he delivers meets no response in the hearts of his hearers!

The success of the gospel depends much upon *the spirit, the zeal and devotion of the minister*. But how difficult for him to keep alive when all are dead around him! And how can a people expect their minister to be what he ought, and do what he should, if they pray not for him? Is not his heart in the hands of the Lord? Cannot the Lord make him what he ought to be, and enable him to do in all things what he should? And the people, too, are not their hearts in God's hand, and cannot he open their hearts to receive the truth and give the preacher access to them? How earnestly, then, should Christians pray the Lord for these things! See why Paul so earnestly requested the prayers of his brethren—"that the word of the Lord may have free course." Pray for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, fearing neither men nor devils; that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ.

The success of the gospel depends *efficiently upon the Holy Spirit*. This is given in answer to prayer. Luke xi. 13. For this God will be inquired of. Ezek. xxxvi. 37. But is there likely to be prayer for the Spirit, where there is no prayer for the preacher? To pray for the Spirit is to pray that he may pervade the heart of the speaker and of the hearers, accompany the word to the heart, and lead all to feel its power and obey it. But when a people pray not for their pastor, they cannot be concerned for the outpouring of the

Spirit, nor for the success of the gospel. Yet its success is what every Christian should desire, and what every genuine child of God, who is in any measure awake to his duties and responsibilities, must desire. On its success depends the prosperity of the church and the salvation of souls. And are such consequences connected with the duty enjoined in the text? Then by what more weighty consideration could it be enforced? The salvation of precious souls may be suspended upon *your prayers for your pastor*. Shall the duty be neglected? and shall souls perish through this neglect? There is a fearful responsibility here; and it becomes every one to awake from his slumbers and call upon God. As you regard the welfare of Zion—as you desire the salvation of souls—as you love Christ and his cause—“brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified!”

In conclusion, I remark:

1. If there were more prayer for ministers, greater success would attend the preaching of the gospel. Let the church awake to this duty, and the work of God will soon revive; let it be neglected, and Zion will continue a desolation. For,

2. The success of the gospel is as really promoted by fervent prayer, as by faithful preaching. There must be preaching, for so hath the Lord ordained. There must also be prayer, for this too is according to his appointment. All cannot preach; but all can pray, and thus promote the success of the gospel as really as if they were preachers. In this respect every Christian can be a co-worker together with God—a fellow helper to the truth. 1 Cor. iii. 9; 2 Cor. vi. 1, 3; 3 John 8. How great the privilege! How gladly should it be embraced! God hears prayer. And let it be observed that prayers for the ministry, both at home and abroad, tend as really to promote the success of the gospel, as those which are offered directly for that object. Perhaps we are doing more to secure the ultimate triumph of the gospel of Christ, when we are praying for our pastors and missionaries, than

when we are praying expressly for that end ; because God works by means ; he employs the ministry in making known the gospel, and these prayers have a happy effect upon our own spirits ; they prepare us to receive the truth from the lips of those for whom we pray ; they lead us to feel our own responsibility, and to place a proper estimate upon the means which God has appointed for the conversion of the world. These prayers if sincere, have a tendency to cause us to make a becoming use of the means of his appointment, while, at the same time, we are constrained to feel our dependence for success upon his almighty arm. Then let the duty come home to every heart, and let it be performed. Brethren, pray for us in your closets, in your families, and in your meetings for prayer. Let every *Saturday night* be observed as a season of prayer for your pastor. Let every member of the church, let every Christian, then, intercede with God in behalf of him who speaks to you in the name of the Lord, and of all the ministers of Christ. In the *morning of the Sabbath*, too, let them have a large place in your supplications. When about to go up to the house of the Lord, remember, it is an earthen vessel to which the treasure of the gospel is committed, and retire to seek God's presence and blessing for him, that your own soul may be refreshed, and that success may attend the word of the Lord—that it may have free course—run from heart to heart—and be glorified in the conversion and salvation of perishing sinners !

THE END.