

*The compassion of the dying Saviour to those that crucified him,
considered and improved,*

IN A

SERMON

ON

LUKE xxiii. 34.

By BENJAMIN WALLIN.

*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for
us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. 1 Peter
ii. 21.*

LONDON:

Printed For A. W A R D, at the *King's-Arms*,
in *Little Britain*.

1746.

LUKE xxiii, 34.

Then said Jesus, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

THIS prayer of our Lord, while under his dying agonies on the cross, discovers his earnest breathing of his soul after the salvation of sinners: it is short, but very comprehensive; the love and generality expressed in it are much to be admired, and imitated by all his disciples. Here we behold the tenderness and compassion of the Redeemer's heart towards impenitent transgressors, and such who were imbruing their hands in his most precious blood.

SOME have thought, that one reason why providence so overruled the sufferings of our Lord, that he should die on the cross, was, that he might have liberty of speech to the last, and so might glorify his Father, and edify those about him. This seems to me to be going too far in a way of conjecture, because I do not find any such intimation in sacred writ; and indeed he said but little through the

whole of his sufferings. His patience and silence were amazing, in which he answered the description given of the Messiah by the prophets; and though the method his enemies took to shed his blood lest him a natural freedom of speech, he opened his mouth but sparingly, and not at all by way of complaint or reviling: this clearly demonstrated his voluntary resignation, and hereby a testimony arises for the confirmation of our faith in him as the Son of God, and an example to us under those sufferings allotted us in the present state: his not using the liberty he had, is a circumstance by which I apprehend he brought glory to his Father, and which affords matter of edification to his followers. However we have reason to be thankful, that his gracious lips were at liberty on this extraordinary occasion his dying words were few, but full of instruction and consolation; nor did they fail of most compassionate intimations for the encouragement of poor trembling sinners: such is the petition before us, as I shall endeavour particularly to make appear in the following discourse. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* In opening of which Words I propose,

I. BRIEFLY to enquire into the time when, and the circumstances under which our Lord put up this petition.

II. To consider the petition itself.

II. To explain the plea made use of, in favour of those for whom he intercedes. And,

III. AND lastly, to show you what this conduct of our Lord, under such circumstances, points out for the instruction of his disciples.

I. I would enquire briefly into the time when, and the circumstances under which our Lord put up this petition.

THE sacred historian introduces the account with a particle, which naturally leads us to consider the season when these words were spoken; a circumstance that greatly sets off the wonderful compassion and forgiveness of the intercessor: *Then said Jesus, &c.* It was at a time when he was under great suffering and affliction; when his malicious enemies had prevailed, through fraud and treachery, to get him apprehended; when, through false witness, and the cowardice or covetousness of the civil magistrate, he had been delivered from the judgment seat into the hands of those, the baseness of whose disposition towards him had been just now exercised in mocking, scourging, and treating his innocent person with the greatest cruelty and indolence; it was then, when after all the injustice and barbarity he met with in his mock trial, and under the sporting of their lusts in the hall, his nature was almost spent with grief, and stripes and wounds; when he was brought to the place of public execution, and

there nailed to an accursed tree, between two infamous malefactors; it was even in that *hour and power of darkness*, the prospect of which not long before had brought him into an agony of blood, and when those execrable wretches, who had been crying out *crucify him, crucify him*, were eagerly filling up their iniquity in putting the finishing stroke to his precious life; under Rich circumstances of sorrow and provocation, a little before he expired, through the merciless hands of his avowed enemies, our Lord put up this wonderful and excellent petition; *Then said Jesus, &c.*

* A modern and eminent expositor renders our Lord's plea in these words, *They know not what they are doing*; he observes that **τίς ποιέω** carries in it the exact import of the present tense, and this translation he apprehends is most expressive of the circumstance Christ was under at this time. According to this, it points out what these wicked men were about, at the instant in which our Lord put up this request, *viz.* (as the fore mentioned expositor represents it in his paraphrase) “when they were distorting his limbs as on a rack, and nailing his hands and his feet on the full stretch to the wood.” That Christ breathed this prayer during the anguish of his soul under his sufferings, is, I think, undeniably evident, and though it is not

* See Dr. *Doddridge* on the place.

absolutely certain in what critical minute of his crucifixion this request was made, it seems to me, by the manner of the expression, and the place the Evangelist gives it in the history, it might very probably be, while their wicked hands were employed in driving the nails, and fastening his body to the accursed tree; however it most certainly was when Christ was under his deepest humiliation, while he was enduring the cross, and while his enemies were doing their utmost to express their malice, and unshaken resolution to pursue him to destruction. But,

II. I proceed to consider the petition itself: and this you see is addressed to his Father, *i. e.* God the Father, who is the Father of Christ, as our Lord is his own, and his only begotten Son, the Son of himself, and therefore he *thought it no robbery to be equal with him*, being possessed of all the same divine perfections: he is also the Father of Christ, considered as Mediator, and clothed with the human nature: Christ is the *first born among many brethren*; the elder brother of that family which God has chosen for himself; on this account, in the days of his flesh, he often addressed himself to God, and spake of him as his Father. Thus, after his resurrection, he sends *Mary* to tell his brethren, and *Peter*, **saying, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.*

** John xx. 17.*

BUT the principal thing Under this head to be regarded, and which calls for special observation, is, that Christ does not apply to his Father for himself, or for his own deliverance upon this important occasion, but for his most barbarous, enemies. While he was in the garden, we find him *sorrowful* and *sore amazed*, *beseeching his Father, *if it were possible to let this cup pass*. In this Instance the aversion of his human nature to sufferings was expressed, and thereby he appeared to be truly the son of man: but now being delivered, according to the determinate council of God, into the hands of sinners, we find no petition for a release from his sufferings; he had freely surrendered himself, and was firmly revolved to finish the work he came to perform. He wanted not indeed for the strongest natural motives to engage him to address his Father for such a deliverance: the dreadful pain and anguish he felt in his body, and the daring insolence of his persecutors, while he hung bleeding on the cross, might have naturally engaged him in another kind of address; but our Redeemer was proof against such temptations; his magnanimous heart was too much set on the salvation of his people, and his own glory as Mediator, to be removed by any influence of this land. His concern is in relation to his enemies, those very persons who

*Mark xiv. 35.

those very persons who were now imbruing their hands in his innocent blood; piercing him without mercy, and persecuting his soul unto death; and his petition for these men is not for justice, but for mercy, not for punishment, but for pardon. “*Father, forgive them.*” One Might have expected under such circumstances he would have called for divine justice to have seized them, for the righteous vengeance of his Father to have fallen upon their guilty heads; that he would rather have said, “Father behold the Cruelty of these ungrateful sinners to thy dear Son, see how they hate and persecute me without a cause, pour out thy wrath upon them, give them judgment without mercy, and let them go quick down to hell.” But, lo! in the midst of all their brutal cruelty, his bowels moved with the most tender compassion towards them; *Father, forgive them*, as if he had said, “Lay not this sin to their charge, impute not this iniquity to them, let not the guilt of it lie upon them, but freely pardon these wretches, and have pity on their precious souls; Father, release them from those bonds they have laid themselves under, saying, *his blood be upon us and our children*; enter not into judgment With them, but consult the bowels of thy mercy towards them.” This seems to be the purport of the petition, and it is considered by some as put up by

our Lord in his mediatorial character; and hence it is suggested, that this petition is to be added to his prayer, *John xvii.* to complete the specimen he gave of his intercession within the vail. If it is to be taken in this light, I conceive there must be a limitation with respect to the objects. I think it cannot be understood to regard every individual person concerned in his crucifixion; since every part of Christ's intercession as Mediator, is, and must be effectual, provided he has fulfilled the engagements he was under, of which there can be no doubt; it would then follow, that every person who was concerned in the crucifixion of our Lord had his sins pardoned; which supposition, though it may bear the specious show of exalting the grace of God, is without any foundation in scripture. It is a sufficient display of the infinite merit of Christ's blood, and the abounding grace of God through him to the vilest of sinners, that any of those persons were saved by the blood they so wickedly shed, much more that such a number of them were, as we may reasonably conclude were converted under *Peter's* sermon, an account of which we have recorded in *Acts ii.* But that every individual was pardoned, cannot be allowed from the relation we have there of the first fruits of the Gospel after Christ's ascension: it does not appear that every one received the word, and we have reason to believe that the most and greatest, even the chief priests and rulers concerned in the fact

remained in unbelief, and under that dreadful prejudice mentioned *Rom. x. 3.* that they never submitted to God's, way of salvation; and so perished under the guilt of this, and of all their other sins. If therefore we consider this as a prayer of *Christ* in his mediatorial capacity, it must have respect to those present, who were appointed to obtain salvation by him, of which, through boundless mercy, there appeared a considerable number, even of those who were actually concerned in his crucifixion; and our Saviour, according to this, seems to plead that the sin of shedding his blood, aggravating as it was, should not stand in the way of their salvation, that it might not be the cause of their being *precluded repentance, by sudden destruction, or final obduration,* as* a very learned man explains it. All grace is imparted to the chosen people of God, through the intercession of *Christ*, at the time of conversion, was well as afterwards; and he concerns himself for his sheep before they are actually brought home: our Redeemer offers up many a prayer for his people before they have understanding or grace to pray for themselves.

BUT I am rather inclined to think this prayer should be considered as put up by *Christ* in his human nature, and as such, it relates to all his persecutors; and which, though not effectual to the eternal salva-

**Grotius in loc.*

tion of every individual, is strongly expressive of the patient and forgiving spirit, with which our Saviour endured the greatest cruelties from the sons of men, together with the tender compassion he had, considered as man, for the eternal welfare of immortal souls. He gave several proofs of this disposition when upon earth; as when he wept over *Jerusalem*, beheld with affection the young man in the Gospel, and was grieved for the unbelief and hardness of men's hearts: these and such like things are recorded of him in the new testament, and in this view, the petition under our consideration shows how ready he was to pass by every injury done to himself, that he freely forgave them as man; and it is as if he had said, "Father forgive them, notwithstanding their provoking insolence and cruelty; I desire no vengeance may be taken on my account; I pity them in their sins, have no resentment in my heart against them, but intreat thou wilt pass by their iniquity." Thus our lovely *Jesus* returned the greatest good his present circumstances, as a man, would admit of, for the greatest evil. But,

III. I proceed to explain the plea *used by *Christ*, in behalf of those

*This plea I apprehend is a confirmation, with other things, that the prayer is not to be understood as put up by our Lord, in the character of Mediator for

for whom he intercedes, and this is their *ignorance*. Two things I propose to enquire into under this head. *1st.* In what sense these persons might be said to be ignorant; and, *2d.* How this ignorance is pleaded in their favour.

First. In what sense these persons might be said to be ignorant.

THEY knew they were shedding of blood, this was their design, and what they eagerly executed, they were not ignorant that they were actually taking away the life of *Christ* as a man, when they distorted, and nailed his tender limbs to the cross, where they abused and insulted him in this Shameful manner; they were conscious of these inhuman and barbarous actions. Many of them also knew they were shedding innocent blood; the pains taken to suborn witnesses, the challenge our Lord gave his enemies, on their attempts upon him, to prove sin against him, the declaration of *Pilate* after examination that he found no fault in him worthy of death, and many other circumstances show, that the consciences of those, however, who were deep in the plot, as well as that of *Pilate*, were convinced, **that they had delivered him for envy, and without any just cause, into his hands;* This also the apostle seems to charge them with, when he tells them, they + *denied him, (i. e. his release) in the presence of*

pardon, because *Christ* as the advocate of his people, does not plead any thing short of the merit of his blood, for the remission of sins.

+ *Mat. xxvii. 18. +Acts iii. 13, 14.

Pilate, *when he was determined to let him go*; adding in the next verse, *they denied the holy one, and the just*. Nay, they knew him not only to be innocent, but had convincing proofs of his being an excellent person, as the same apostle expressly says; **Ye men of Israel hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, among you, by miracles, and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know, &c.* They were not so ignorant, therefore, as not to be chargeable with an obstinate willful murder, in killing *the Lord of life and glory*, yet in this prayer it is urged, *they knew not what they did*. Their ignorance seems to me to be this, *viz.* They did not know, or were not convinced, that he was the Son of God, or that *Messiah* the prophets gave witness to from the beginning, which was not for want of our Lord's producing sufficient evidence that he was the person foretold by the prophets, in these great characters; but to their blindness and prejudices, to their perverting the scriptures, and those lusts that prevailed on their minds. They had promised themselves worldly honours, and temporal advantages upon the coming of the *Messiah*, and looked for civil rather than spiritual salvation, therefore they stumbled at his outward condition, they were a sinful and adulterous generation, who thought more of gratifying than mortifying their lusts; and

*Acts ii. 22.

so the circumstances and doctrine of our Lord offended them: thus enslaved to corruption, lest under the power of unbelief, and given up to a judicial blindness and darkness, *they knew him not*; this seems to have been the case both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and even of their princes and rulers; notwithstanding all their boast of wisdom and learning, *they knew him not*. * As the scripture testifies, (says an excellent writer) there were two veils, *viz.* one on *Christ*, and the other on their hearts, through which they could not discern the person of the *Messiah*; *they knew him not* as such. But,

Secondly, How is this their ignorance to be pleaded in their favour.

AND here I would observe, that it is not a plea of merit: our Lord does not argue that because they knew not what they did, therefore they must be pardoned; he is not showing cause why they ought to be forgiven. Their ignorance was owing to the lusts of their hearts, whereby they were prejudiced, and rejected *Christ*, of which God was not the author: it was their shame and reproach, and by no means excusable, especially as they wanted not for means of better knowledge. They had *Moses* and the prophets, *Christ* came at the time, and was attended with all the characters given in their writings

* 1 Cor. ii. 8. compared with Acts iii. 17.

of the true *Messiah* to come: in him every circumstance was accomplished, nothing was wanting as a means; but they were abandoned, the god of this world had blinded their eyes, their ignorance was chargeable upon themselves, though not removeable by themselves, and therefore I think their ignorance can by no means be urged by way of merit. But,

THIS plea must be considered in another light, and, as I apprehend, should be rather understood as an observation of our Lord, from whence encouragement arises, though no occasion of boasting; the purport of which seems to be, to show, that from this circumstance it appeared their sins were pardonable; that although the guilt of shedding his blood was of a deep and crimson dye, and attended with horrid aggravations, yet it did not exceed the purpose of God, or the merit of that propitiation, through which he declares himself righteous in the remission of sins. It did not follow that their sins *must*, but it followed that they *might* be forgiven; even his murder, atrocious as it was, and full of dreadful guilt, yet it was not the unpardonable fin, for it was not against a clear knowledge of his being the *Messiah*. The apostle *Paul* uses the like expression, when, after having spoken of his being a *blasphemer* and a *persecutor* before conversion, he says, but * *I obtained mercy, because I did it*

* 1 Tim. i. 13.

ignorantly in unbelief., q. d. “These great and provoking sins being done in ignorance, were within the compass of divine mercy through *Crist Jesus*, and this mercy God was pleased to bestow upon me”. Thus there was room to hope, and consequently to pray for these bloody sinners, because *they knew not what they did*.

THIS was our Lord’s prayer for his persecutors, while he was extended on the cross, and when under the most sorrowful and distressing circumstances: at the time when his avowed enemies were in the height of their rage, gratifying their envy and malice on his innocent and excellent person, he intercedes with his Father in their behalf, pleading, that notwithstanding all their wickedness, their sins, were pardonable, being committed in ignorance, and earnestly entreats they might receive his forgiveness. Astonishing kindness indeed! how beautiful does our Redeemer appear, when thus, according to antient prophecy, though *he was numbered with transgressors*, he *made intercession* for such. But I proceed,

IV. To show what this conduct of our Lord, under such circumstances, points out for the instruction of his disciples.

THE principal design of *Christ*, indeed, in humbling himself to the death of the cross, was, that he might put away the guilt of sin; and in this view none of the sons of men are to endure sufferings, or

submit to death. It would be a fruitless attempt, as might easily be shown. The blood of a sinner can never atone for sin; it is not what the christian is called to, since our Lord hath by his *one offering for ever perfected them who are sanctified*. The end of *Christ's* sufferings, as bearing the guilt and punishment of his people's sins, is not to be copied after, since that would reflect on him, as not having fully answered the end for which he suffered; this would favour of ignorance, and be both vain and impertinent. But the conduct of our Lord under his sufferings, and the spirit and temper with which he endured them, is the best and greatest example to his followers, who should earnestly pray and strive, in this sense, to be *conformable to his death*. And in this view, the instance before us holds forth several things for our instruction and imitation; particularly those that follow I apprehend to be important, *viz.*

First, We are taught that no outward affliction or trouble in this life should hinder the true believer from applying to God, as his Father. Surrounded with distress, and encompassed with darkness, as *Christ* was when he hung upon the cross, he addresses God under this character, and thereby encourages his people to do the same. When we are under the rebukes of providence, especially if attended with darkness of soul, and that the light of God's countenance is withdrawn, we are prone to question our interest in his paternal care,

fears arise, and we are presently discouraged from coming to the throne of grace; at least our hearts are wavering, and we cannot approach the footstool of our Father with that filial boldness, that becomes those who draw nigh by faith in the blood of *Christ*. But this is our great weakness, for as no degree of trouble, or severity of dispensation in the present state dissolves the relation God has taken the believer into with himself, so none of his dealings should dishearten him from styling God his Father: his affections are unchangeable, his faithfulness remains, although *he makes his pavilion darkness*. Therefore, O believer, when tempted and hurried, through the tossings of an afflicted state, to hesitate about your interest in the love of God, and when afraid to use a holy freedom with him in prayer, consider your Redeemer in this instance of his application to God; hear with what liberty he pleads for the desire of his soul, even while it pleased the Lord to bruise him, while *he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*. He knew it was his Father who gave him the cup, and that it was his Father's pleasure he should drink it up, he therefore will not petition for its removal; yet through all his sufferings, he eyes this relation, and having a request, craves it as a Son. In the same character he addresses God, then in that dreadful agony

in the garden, saying, *Father * Abba Father, all things are possible with thee, take this cup from me, nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.* And thus he breaths out his soul at last, + *Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.* It becomes us to follow his example, and not let chastisements cherish unbelief, but like children who know we have a parent unchangeable in his love, infinite in wisdom, and able to support us under all our sorrows, and to deliver us out of them, let us, I say, cleave to God as our Father, and unbosom our selves to him; and this we may do with the greatest freedom, and confidence, since *we have an high priest who is passed into the heavens,* since this our elder brother, having died for our sins, and thereby fully satisfied divine justice, is ascended *to his Father and our Father. Christ,* in almost every instance of his application to heaven in the days of his flesh, teaches his disciples to draw nigh to God as their Father; and his addressing him thus on the Cross, and while his Father thus afflicted him, directs, and greatly encourages the christian to do so, under the most trying providences, even when God hides his face, and when his afflicting hand seems to be in a special manner upon him.

Secondly, No injury we receive from the worst of our enemies should hinder our pleading with God for their spiritual good. It is

* Mark xiv. + Luke xxiii. 46.

the peculiar doctrine of the * *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.* He that laid down this precept for his follower, enforces it by a most lively instance; interceding with his Father for the most ungrateful and cruel enemies, at a time when their lusts were raging, and he felt the most dreadful effects of their malice and envy. We may, and cannot but be sensible of the injuries done us by our fellow creatures, nor is every degree of notice we take of such injuries contrary to a christian spirit +. If any

* Matt. t. 44.

+ The pious Mr. *Burkitt*, in his exposition of the text; has this observation, *viz.* “The gospel (says he) requires not an insensibility of wrongs and injuries, *that* allows us a sense of offered evils; though it forbids us to revenge them; yet the more tender our resentments are, the more excellent Our forgiveness is: So that a forgiving spirit doth not exclude a sense of injuries; but the sense of injuries graces the forgiveness of them; neither doth the gospel requite us, under the notion of forgiving injuries, to deliver up our rights and properties to the lusts of every one that will invade them, but meekly to receive evil, and readily to return good.”

They seem to take a very improper method to set off the power of divine grace in the soul; who represent the believer as insensible of the injuries he receives; and therefore not prone to revenge; for it is certain where there is no trial; no virtue can appear; and it is very unreasonable to explain the moderation of a christian to temporal enjoyments, in such a way, as to

attempt to wound our good name, through false accusation, we ought to be zealous for the vindication of our characters, detest the slanderer, that others may be aware of him, that he himself may be brought to shame, and a sense of his evil, and our own usefulness may be preserved. If any, by fraud, or violence, unjustly withhold, or wrest from us our civil property, we may use lawful methods for obtaining our right. Indeed to be litigious is very unbecoming a christian, and believers should show great moderation in this respect; yet in some cases it may be very decent, and highly incumbent on the Christian to call in the assistance of the civil magistrate, who is the minister of God, and providentially set for the defence of the innocent, and for the recovery of the rights of the injured.

But in all these things we have need to watch our hearts, lest under a pretense of doing our selves justice, we are betrayed into the gratification of our lusts. For if while we are thus showing our sense of injury, and vindicating our cause, we find we cannot pray sincerely and earnestly for the salvation of those who have injured us, we exceed bounds, and deviate from a true christian spirit. We should take heed we do not indulge hatred to a man's person, how hateful soever

render it inconsistent with his character to make use of an ordinance of God for the defence of his property, which is one talent with which he is to be useful in the station in which his heavenly Father has placed him.

his actions may be; and let the conduct of our fellow creatures towards us, be ever so provoking, it is a sign our minds are under the government of a very bad principle, when we cannot plead for their salvation, because they have injured us. Then are we in a right christian frame, when, though sensibly affected with the injustice, ingratitude; and, cruelty of our neighbour, we are unfeignedly desirous he should be brought to a sense of his evil, and can find our hearts disposed to wrestle with our heavenly Father, for his forgiveness of those very sins he is guilty of, in his evil treatment of us. In proportion to our real conce for the pardon of heaven to our enemies, and our own forgiveness of them, as men, is our conformity to the image *of Christ*.

Nor let, anyone say, this is good doctrine, but what man alive can practice it? It is most certainly practicable, and this will be our disposition, so far as the spirit of *Christ* and the grace God rules in our Hearts: it was practiced by *Stephen*, when the enraged *Jews* ran upon him with one accord and stoned him; when he was thus launching into eternity through their merciless and cruel treatment, we read, he * *kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.* The apostle *Paul* is also an instance of

such a spirit, when, notwithstanding he had been, and continued to be persecuted by his kinsmen the *Jews*, who pursued him from place to place, hunting for his life, he declares the disposition of his mind towards them in these words, * *I say the truth in Christ, and lie not, &c. That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, far I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren my kinsmen according to the flesh:* and again, *Brethren my heart's desire, and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*

Such desires and petitions are delightful to God, where they are sincerely felt, and affectionately offered up, and they afford us a good evidence of our title to the character of his children. We may boldly call God Father, when through the influences of his spirit, we approach him in such a disposition. It is remarkable, when our Lord gives forth the precept mentioned in the beginning of this head, to *love our enemies, &c.* he immediately adds, + *that ye may be the*

* *Romans ix. 1, 2, 3, compared with chap. x. 1.* We are not to argue from the difficulty of a Gospel precept with our weak and depraved minds, to the neglect of it, or discourage ourselves from attempting what is difficult, as though it were impossible; 'tis indeed to be feared some do so, and therefore though they bear the name of the children of God, are very unlike their heavenly Father in their conversation.

+ *Matthew v. 45.*

children of your Father that is in heaven; i. e. That ye may appear to be so, by such a spirit and conduct.

It must be allowed that this is hard work for flesh and blood, and that our corrupt natures violently oppose it. To be earnestly employing ourselves at the throne of grace for their pardon and salvation, who are eagerly endeavouring our destruction, is strange conduct in the eyes of a carnal man, and what nature is far from relishing; yet this is our duty, and so we ought to act, as we would appear to be the children of our heavenly Father, or the followers of the meek and compassionate *Jesus*. The best of us, through the remaining power of, too often experience a disposition to the contrary. Upon every offence and opposition we meet with from our fellow creatures, and even our fellow christians, how prone are we to passion hatred and revenge? But this is to be lamented; these lusts are not to be cherished, but mortified; nor is a serious consideration of this great example of our Saviour, an unlikely means to check our forward spirits. When under any trials of this sort, believer, upon feeling the fire of these lusts begin to burn in your heart, look to *Christ*, and observe in this remarkable instance, under what provocations, and with what compassion and fervency he wrestled in his dying moments for his murderers, saying, *Father forgive them*. This may, Under a divine

blessing, become a means of transforming the frame of your hearts into patience and love. Many great advantages usually attend the overcoming of our hearts in such seasons; hereby the devil is disappointed, who finds, great account in a professed christian's giving way to his passions; especially if it be against those who are under the like profession with himself: through these victories, by the assistance of divine grace, the power of indwelling sin is greatly weakened; and as this has a natural tendency, so it sometimes becomes a means of converting, and winning over to repentance our offending brother. Such noble ends cannot but be most desirable to a true christian, when in a spiritual frame.

Thirdly, We see from this prayer, that sinners are naturally, and very justly chargeable with those sins which they commit in a state of ignorance and unbelief, and that for such sins, forgiveness is necessary; *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. You see they are charged with the action, and this action being cruel and wicked, is here plainly pointed out as criminal, and naturally deriving guilt on their heads: this appears, from the very petition for pardon; *they did not know*, *i. e.* because of the hardness of their hearts, their prejudices and blindness, they could not discern or believe this person was the *Christ*: nevertheless, having taken him, and nailed him with their wicked hands to the accursed tree, they were

tree, they were guilty of the body and blood of *Christ*, and dreadful will be their condemnation who obtained not true repentance for that aggravated crime. This fact being done in ignorance, might encourage the perpetrators of it, under a conviction of their guilt, to hope for mercy, but the deceit, malice and wrath of their hearts, under the influence of which they acted, righteously exposed them to the divine vengeance, and the injustice and cruelty of the action itself, fell with all their weight of guilt on their persons, notwithstanding their ignorance and unbelief.

It does not alter the nature of the sin we commit, or render, it the less ours, that we know not what we do in the commission of it. To commit a sinful action against light, is more heinous, and the heavier condemnation follows it; but the ignorance of a sinner, though it secures him from that heinous aggravation, does not excuse him from the guilt of the sin he commits, or in the least take off from his obligation to punishment for that crime. * All men are by nature blind, through the fall, in a spiritual sense. When an unregenerate

* If this were the case, ignorance would be the cause of happiness; whereas our ignorance is one branch of our misery, moral evil cannot produce spiritual good, as the cause produces the effect, though it may be the occasion, or ever-ruled for the bringing it to pass.

person is living in the willful gratification of his lusts, he knows not what he does, *i. e.* he does not understand or believe what a bitter thing sin is, and what dreadful consequences it brings on his precious soul. A man that obstinately indulges sin in this sense, knows not what he is about, whom he offends, or what injury he does to his own soul, and what wrath and misery he exposes himself to; but this will not by any means excuse him from punishment, if he is found impenitent in the day of judgment. We are not to think, that ignorance of the extent and aggravations of our crimes, will excuse us from the guilt of them. Our ignorance is owing to our apostacy from God, and in itself base and sinful, and therefore rather renders us obnoxious to the displeasure of an infinitely wise and holy God, than otherwise. Thus I hope you see that mere ignorance will not secure us the mercy and favour of God, according to that awful passage *Isaiah xxvii. 11. It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will show them no favour.* The adversary has many devices for deluding men into false notions to their ruin; and this is one, to persuade them that their sins of ignorance, are venial sins; so indeed they are in one sense, *viz.* that they are pardonable; but the intention of this insinuation is to make persons imagine that God will take no

notice of such sins in a way of justice, and that no danger will arise from them. But be not deceived, this is to beget in you a fatal contentment in your ignorance, a sloth and neglect of means, in order to your eternal ruin. Always remember, it is one thing to be ignorant, and another to be innocent. The sins we commit in the greatest ignorance, stand in need of the blood of *Christ* to purge them away, and the rich and free mercy of God to pardon them. This ignorance attending the commission of sin, will not screen you from divine vengeance, if you are found out of *Christ* in the great day of account; for many will then *perish for lack of knowledge* Again,

Fourthly, We learn from what has been said, that there is room for the vilest of sinners, upon a deep sense of those crimes they have committed in a time of ignorance and unbelief, to seek after forgiveness, and good hope that they may obtain it. Forgiveness in this case, was possible, as appears from this prayer, and certain, as is evident from the success of *Peter's* sermon, which some have thought was an answer to it: forgiveness I say, was possible for the execrable fact of crucifying the Lord of life and glory: a fact in which there were more lusts exercised and sins committed, than ever did, or ever will centre in any one execution of villainy: yet this impious and cruel deed, was not absolutely unpardonable, nor did it

utterly exclude those who were guilty of it from the mercy of God. Here is then surely abundant encouragement for poor sinners to conclude, that there is forgiveness for all manner of sin, to them that truly repent. *It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save even the chief of sinners: Paul, who in his natural state had been a blasphemers and an injurious person, having partook of pardoning mercy, sets himself forth thus, as a pattern for the encouragement of returning penitents, adding, * obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. Peter mentions the same thing for the encouragement of the convinced Israelites, who were near-ly, or more distantly concerned in the death of Christ; And how + brethren (says he) I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. Ignorance will not alter the nature of a guilty action, or screen a man from the punishment due to those facts he is chargeable with; yet there is no sin, how great soever any man commits in a state of ignorance, but God can pardon through Jesus Christ: no manner of sin is excepted in the proclamation of divine grace, through the righteousness of the Mediator; and surely this news must be acceptable to a convinced sinner. Upon being roused out of their natural stupidity, you shall hear some bewail their foolishness and ignorance. What have I done, says such*

* 1 Timothy i. 13 + Acts iii. 17.

an awakened soul, in taking pleasure in sin ? I apprehended no danger, but now I see I was provoking the wrath of almighty God; death and everlasting destruction were at my heels; sure none have been so ignorant and brutish as myself; I have despised the proclamations of divine grace, slighted the blood of *Christ*, and abused his love, though it has been so gloriously displayed to me in the gospel; and I have such a wicked heart, that I cannot tell but if the appearance of *Christ* upon earth had been in my time, I should have treated him in the same manner the *Jews* did. Is there any hope left for me? The devil will perhaps suggest that there is none. But hear! oh trembling sinner, I say, hear *Christ* praying for those who actually did take away his life, and even while they were barbarously committing the fact, hear him say, *Father forgive them*, and then reflect and consider whether there is any room for thee to despair. The infinitely wise and good Redeemer, who knew his Father's will, would not have put up such a petition if there could have been no forgiveness for them:., fear not therefore, but go to this who *Jesus*, thus cried to his Father, and having been crucified, is now *exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins*; he invites all distressed souls to him saying, * *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*, and has without

* *Matthew xi. 28.*

exception assured us, that the person who comes to him, he will * *in no wise cast out*. I shall close what I have said, with a short reflection or two. And,

First, What reason have we to pray for knowledge, and press earnestly after an increase of light, and that our remaining blindness and ignorance may be removed. Guilt is much aggravated in sins that are committed against light; but we see ignorance is the cause of much iniquity, of which, if not pardoned, we shall not be found innocent in the day of God's wrath. This also shows the piteous case of blind sinners, who devoted to their lusts, drink in iniquity like water, and are daily immersing themselves in guilt; *they know not what they do*. How precious is the Bible, and a standing ministry as the means of light? and what unspeakable obligations are they under to bless and honour God, into whose hearts the Spirit has caused this light to shine, so as to enable them to embrace a crucified Redeemer?

Secondly, Let us admire the love and compassion of our Lord *Jesus Christ* to his persecutors. How amazing is it, that the heart of a crucified Redeemer should be thus tenderly concerned, even in the agonies of death, for those very wretches, who were at that time imbruing their hands in his blood? what a compassionate and sympathizing heart has our Saviour? he knew what they did, he knew the demerit of their heinous sin; and the fearful consequence to their

John vi. 37.

precious souls, if not prevented by rich grace in their forgiveness. Suitable is the observation of an author before mentioned, on this circumstance, * This is, says he, “one of the most striking passages in the World: while they were actually nailing him to the cross,” he seems to feel the injury these poor creatures did to their own souls, more than the wounds they gave him; and as it were to forget his own anguish, in a concern for their salvation.” There is some faint resemblance of this in the conduct of many pious ministers, parents and other superiors, who, under the influence of the divine spirit, are longing in the bowels of *Jesus Christ*, after the salvation of those to whom they stand related, and who are frequently pleading with the Lord to forgive those sins, which in spite of all their care, they are committing without remorse; as *Job* seems to do for his sons and daughters. Their hearts thus melt for their ignorant charge, when they have no pity, or concern for themselves, but are running down headlong to destruction. Obstinate sinners fetch many a painful groan from the hearts of those gracious persons, under whose eye they are, and many a prayer is by them put up to their heavenly Father on their behalf. Woe be to those ungodly children and servants, who, under such advantages, continue hardened and impenitent!

* See Dr. *Doddridge* on the place.

To conclude, let those who have received the tokens of pardoning mercy, remember it is owing to *Christ's* intercession, and consider the obligations they are under to him for pleading, as well as shedding his blood. And from hence also encouragement arises to backsliders, who are bewailing the iniquities by which they have been overtaken. If through inadvertency and weakness any have thus fallen by temptation, and contracted fresh guilt on their consciences, let them go to *Christ*, and intreat him to pray to his Father to forgive their iniquities, to heal their backslidings, and to send the Comforter down into their hearts. Intercession is his employment in heaven; for * *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* And the wonderful instance of our Saviour's compassionate intercession, that has been under our consideration, may well rejoice the true believer, and encourage him to have continual recourse to his Redeemer by faith. Certainly he that without being desired, thus intercedes for the forgiveness of his most cruel enemies, will never fail to plead for it, and to apply it to those who love him, and who earnestly seek it at his hands.

* I *John* ii. 1.

FINIS,