

The Necessity and Benefits of Religious Society

by George Whitefield

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe be to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Eccles. 4:9-12

Among the many reasons assignable for the sad decay of true Christianity, perhaps the neglecting to assemble ourselves together, in religious societies, may not be one of the least. That I may therefore do my endeavor towards promoting so excellent a means of piety, I have selected a passage of scripture drawn from the experience of the wisest of men, which being a little enlarged on and illustrated, will fully answer my present design; being to show, in the best manner I can, the necessity and benefits of society in general, and of religious society in particular.

"Two are better than one, &c."

From which words I shall take occasion to prove,

FIRST, The truth of the wise man's assertion, "Two are better than one," and that in reference to society in general, and religious society in particular.

SECONDLY, To assign some reasons why two are better than one, especially as to the last particular. 1. Because men can raise up one another when they chance to slip: "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow." 2. Because they can impart heat to each other: "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat, but how can one be warm alone?" 3. Because they can secure each other from those that do oppose them: "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." From hence,

THIRDLY, I shall take occasion to show the duty incumbent on every member of a religious society.

And FOURTHLY, I shall draw an inference or two from what may be said; and then conclude with a word or two of exhortation.

FIRST, I am to prove the truth of the wise man's assertion, that "two are better than one," and that in reference to society in general, and religious societies in particular.

And how can this be done better, than by showing that it is absolutely necessary for the welfare both of the bodies and souls of men? Indeed, if we look upon man as he came out of the hands of his Maker, we imagine him to be perfect, entire, lacking nothing. But God, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, saw something still wanting to make Adam happy. And what was that? Why, and help meet for him. For thus speaketh the scripture: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make an help meet for him."

Observe, God said, "It is not good," thereby implying that the creation would have been imperfect, in some sort, unless an help was found out meet for Adam. And if this was the case of man before the fall; if an help was meet for him in a state of perfection; surely since the fall, when we come naked and helpless out of our mother's womb, when our wants increase with our years, and we can scarcely subsist a day without the mutual assistance of each other, well may we say, "It is not good for man to be alone."

Society then, we see, is absolutely necessary in respect to our bodily and personal wants. If we carry our view farther, and consider mankind as divided into different cities, countries, and nations, the necessity of it will appear yet more evident. For how can communities be kept up, or commerce carried on, without society? Certainly not at all, since providence seems wisely to have assigned a particular product to almost each particular country, on purpose, as it were, to oblige us to be social; and hath so admirably mingled the parts of the whole body of mankind together, "that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the hand to the foot, I have no need of thee."

Many other instances might be given of the necessity of society, in reference to our bodily, personal, and national wants. But what are all these when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, in comparison of the infinite greater need of it, with respect to the soul? It was chiefly in regard to this better part, no doubt, that God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." For, let us suppose Adam to be as happy as may be, placed as the Lord of the creation in the paradise of God, and spending all his hours in adoring and praising the blessed Author of his being; yet as his soul was the very copy of the divine nature, whose peculiar property it is to be communicative, without the divine all sufficiency he could not be completely happy, because he was alone and incommunicative, nor even content in paradise, for want of a partner in his joys. God knew this, and therefore said, "It is not good that the man shall be alone, I will make a help meet for him." And though this proved a fatal means of his falling; yet that was not owing to any natural consequence of society; but partly to that cursed apostate, who craftily lies in wait to deceive; partly to Adam's own folly, in rather choosing to be miserable with one he loved, than trust in God to raise him up another spouse.

If we reflect indeed on that familiar intercourse, our first parent could carry on with heaven, in a state of innocence, we shall be apt to think he had as little need of society, as to his soul, as before we supposed him to have, in respect to his body. But yet, as God and the holy angels were so far above him on the one hand, and the beasts so far beneath him on the other, there was nothing like having one to converse with, who was "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh."

Man, then, could not be fully happy, we see, even in paradise, without a companion of his own species, much less now he is driven out. For, let us view him a little in his natural estate now, since the fall, as "having his understanding darkened, his mind alienated from the life of God;" as no more able to see his way wherein he should go, than a blind man to describe the sun: that notwithstanding this, he must receive his sight ere he can see God: and that if he never sees him, he never can be happy. Let us view him in this light (or rather than darkness) and deny the necessity of society if we can. A divine revelation we find is absolutely necessary, we being by nature as unable to know, as we are to do our duty. And how shall we learn except one teach us? But was God to do this himself, how should we, but with Moses, exceedingly quake and fear? Nor would the ministry of angels in this affair, be without too much terror. It is necessary, therefore (at least God's dealing with us hath showed it to be so) that we should be drawn with the cords of a man. And that a divine revelation being granted, we should use one another's assistance, under God, to instruct each other in the knowledge, and to exhort one another to the practice of those things which belong to our everlasting peace. This is undoubtedly the great end of society intended by God since the fall, and a strong argument it is, why "two are better than one," and why we should "not forsake the assembling ourselves together."

But further, let us consider ourselves as Christians, as having this natural veil, in some measure, taken off from our eyes by the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and so enabled to see what he requires of us. Let us suppose ourselves in some degree to have tasted the good word of life, and to have felt the powers of the world to come, influencing and molding our souls into a religious frame: to be fully and heartily convinced that we are soldiers lifted under the banner of Christ, and to have proclaimed open war at our baptism, against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and have, perhaps, frequently renewed our obligations so to do, by partaking of the Lord's supper: that we are surrounded with millions of foes without, and infected with a legion of enemies within: that we are commanded to shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation: that we are traveling to a long eternity, and need all imaginable helps to show, and encourage us in our way thither. Let us, I say, reflect on all this, and then how shall each of us cry out, brethren, what a necessary thing it is to meet together in religious societies?

The primitive Christians were fully sensible of this, and therefore we find them continually keeping up communion with each other: for what says the scripture? They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, Acts 2:42. Peter and John were no sooner dismissed by the great council, than they haste away to their companions. "And being set at liberty they came to their own, and told them all these things which the high priest had said unto them," Acts 4:23. Paul, as soon as converted, "tarried three days with the disciples that were at Damascus." Acts 9:19. And Peter afterwards, when released from prison, immediately goes to the house of Mary, where there were "great multitudes assembled, praying," Acts 12:12. And it is reported of the Christians in after ages, that they used to assemble together before day-light, to sing a psalm to Christ as God. So precious was the Communion of Saints in those days.

If it be asked, what advantages we shall reap from such a procedure now? I answer, much every way. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor: for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe be to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Which directly leads me to my SECOND general head, under which I was to assign some reasons why "two are better than one," especially in Religious Society.

1. As man in his present condition cannot always stand upright, but by reason of the frailty of his nature cannot but fall; one eminent reason why two are better than one, or, in other words, one great advantage of religious society is, "That when they fall, the one will lift up his fellow."

And an excellent reason this, indeed! For alas! When we reflect how prone we are to be drawn into error in our judgments, and into vice in our practice; and how unable, at least how very unwilling, to espy or correct our own miscarriages; when we consider how apt the world is to flatter us in our faults, and how few there are so kind as to tell us the truth; what an inestimable privilege must it be to have a set of true, judicious, hearty friends about us, continually watching over our souls, to inform us where we have fallen, and to warn us that we fall not again for the future. Surely it is such a privilege, that (to use the words of an eminent Christian) we shall never know the value thereof, till we come to glory.

But this is not all; for supposing that we could always stand upright, yet whosoever reflects on the difficulties of religion in general, and his own propensity to lukewarmness and indifference in particular, will find that he must be zealous as well as steady, if ever he expects to enter the kingdom of heaven. Here, then, the wise man points out to us another excellent reason why two are better than one. "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone?" Which was the next thing to be considered.

2. A Second reason why two are better than one, is because they can impart heat to each other.

It is an observation no less true than common, that kindled coals, if placed asunder, soon go out, but if heaped together, quicken and enliven each other, and afford a lasting heat. The same will hold good in the case now before us. If Christians kindled by the grace of God, unite, they will quicken and enliven each other; but if they separate and keep asunder, no marvel if they soon grow cool or tepid. If two are three meet together in Christ's name, they will have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

Observe, "How can one be warm alone?" The wise man's expressing himself by way of question, implies an impossibility, at least a very great difficulty, to be warm in religion without company, where it may be had. Behold here, then, another excellent benefit

flowing from religious society; it will keep us zealous, as well as steady, in the way of godliness.

But to illustrate this a little farther by a comparison or two. Let us look upon ourselves (as was above hinted) as soldiers listed under Christ's banner; as going out with "ten thousand, to meet one that cometh against us with twenty thousand;" as persons that are to "wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places." And then tell me, all ye that fear God, if it be not an invaluable privilege to have a company of fellow soldiers continually about us, animating and exhorting each other to stand our ground, to keep our ranks, and manfully to follow the captain of our salvation, though it be through a sea of blood?

Let us consider ourselves in another view before mentioned, as persons traveling to a long eternity; as rescued by the free grace of God, in some measure, from our natural Egyptian bondage, and marching under the conduct of our spiritual Joshua, through the wilderness of this world, to the land of our heavenly Canaan. Let us farther reflect how apt we are to startle at every difficulty; to cry, "There are lions! There are lions in the way! There are the sons of Anak" to be grappled with, ere we can possess the promised land. How prone we are, with Lot's wife, to look wishfully back on our spiritual Sodom, or, with the foolish Israelites, to long again for the flesh-pots of Egypt; and to return to our former natural state of bondage and slavery. Consider this, my brethren, and see what a blessed privilege it will be to have a set of Israelites indeed about us, always reminding us of the folly of any such cowardly design, and of the intolerable misery we shall run into, if we fall in the least short of the promised land.

More might be said on this particular, did not the limits of a discourse of this nature oblige me to hasten,

3. To give a third reason, mentioned by the wise man in the text, why two are better than one; because they can secure each other from enemies without. "And if one prevail against him, yet two shall withstand him: and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Hitherto we have considered the advantages of religious societies, as a great preservative against falling (at least dangerously falling) into sin and lukewarmness, and that too from our own corruptions. But what says the wise son of Sirach? "My son, when thou goest to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation:" and that not only from inward, but outward foes; particularly from those two grand adversaries, the world and the devil: for no sooner will thine eye be bent heavenward, but the former will be immediately diverting it another way, telling thee thou needest not be singular in order to be religious; that you may be a Christian without going so much out of the common road.

Nor will the devil be wanting in his artful insinuations, or impious suggestions, to divert or terrify thee from pressing forwards, "that thou mayst lay hold on the crown of life." And if he cannot prevail this way, he will try another; and, in order to make his temptation the more undiscerned, but withal more successful, he will employ, perhaps, some of thy nearest relatives, or most powerful friends, (as he set Peter on our blessed

Master) who will always be bidding thee to spare thyself; telling thee thou needest not take so much pain; that it is not so difficult a matter to get to heaven as some people would make of it, nor the way so narrow as others imagine it to be.

But see here the advantage of religious company; for supposing thou findest thyself thus surrounded on every side, and unable to withstand such horrid (though seemingly friendly) counsels, haste away to thy companions, and they will teach thee a truer and better lesson; they will tell thee, that thou must be singular if thou wilt be religious; and that it is as impossible for a Christian, as for a city set upon a hill, to be hidden: that if thou wilt be an almost Christian (and as good be none at all) thou mayest live in the same idle, indifferent manner as thou seest most other people do: but if thou wilt be not only almost, but altogether a Christian, they will inform thee thou must go a great deal farther: that thou must not only faintly seek, but "earnestly strive to enter in at the strait gate:" that there is but one way now to heaven as formerly, even through the narrow passage of a sound conversion: and that in order to bring about this mighty work, thou must undergo a constant, but necessary discipline of fasting, watching, and prayer. And therefore, the only reason why those friends give thee such advice, is, because they are not willing to take to much pains themselves; or, as our Savior told Peter on a like occasion, because they "savor not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

This then, is another excellent blessing arising from religious society, that friends can hereby secure each other from those who oppose them. The devil is fully sensible of this, and therefore he has always done his utmost to suppress, and put a stop to the communion of saints. This was his grand artifice at the first planting of the gospel; to persecute the professors of it, in order to separate them. Which, though God, as he always will, over-ruled for the better; yet, it shows, what an enmity he has against Christians assembling themselves together. Nor has he yet left off his old stratagem; it being his usual way to entice us by ourselves, in order to tempt us; where, by being destitute of one another's help, he hopes to lead us captive at his will.

But, on the contrary, knowing his own interest is strengthened by society, he would first persuade us to neglect the communion of saints, and then bid us "stand in the way of sinners," hoping thereby to put us into the seat of the scornful. Judas and Peter are melancholy instances of this. The former had no sooner left his company at supper, but he went out and betrayed his master: and the dismal downfall of the latter, when he would venture himself amongst a company of enemies, plainly shows us what the devil will endeavor to, when he gets us by ourselves. Had Peter kept his own company, he might have kept his integrity; but a single cord, alas! how quickly was it broken? Our blessed Savior knew this full well, and therefore it is very observable, that he always sent out his disciples "two by two."

And now, after so many advantages to be reaped from religious society, may we not very justly cry out with the wise man in my text, "Woe be to him that is alone; for when he falleth, he hath not another to lift him up!" When he is cold, he hath not a friend to warm him; when he is assaulted, he hath not a second to help him to withstand his enemy.

III. I now come to my third general head, under which was to be shown the sever duties incumbent on every member of a religious society, as such, which are three. 1. Mutual reproof; 2. Mutual exhortation; 3. Mutual assisting and defending each other.

1. Mutual reproof. "Two are better than one; for when they fall, the one will lift up his fellow."

Now, reproof may be taken either in a more extensive sense, and then it signifies our raising a brother by the gentlest means, when he falls into sin and error; or in a more restrained signification, as reaching no farther than whose miscarriages, which unavoidably happen in the most holy men living.

The wise man, in the text supposes all of us subject to both: "For when they fall (thereby implying that each of us may fall) the one will lift up his fellow." From whence we may infer, that "when any brother is overtaken with a fault, he that is spiritual (that is, regenerate, and knows the corruption and weakness of human nature) ought to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness." And why he should do so, the apostle subjoins a reason "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted;" i.e. considering thy own frailty, lest thou also fall by the like temptation.

We are all frail unstable creatures; and it is merely owing to the free grace and good providence of God that we run not into the same excess of riot with other men. Every offending brother, therefore, claims our pity rather than our resentment; and each member should strive to be the most forward, as well as most gentle, in restoring him to his former state.

But supposing a person not to be overtaken, but to fall willfully into a crime; yet who art thou that deniest forgiveness to thy offending brother? "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." Take ye, brethren, the holy apostles as eminent examples for you to learn by, how you ought to behave in this matter. Consider how quickly they joined the right hand of fellowship with Peter, who had so willfully denied his master: for we find John and him together but two days after, John 20:2. And ver. 19, we find him assembled with the rest. So soon did they forgive, so soon associate with their sinful, yet relenting brother. "Let us go and do likewise."

But there is another kind of reproof incumbent on every member of a religious society; namely, a gentle rebuke for some miscarriage or other, which though not actually sinful, yet may become the occasion of sin. This indeed seems a more easy, but perhaps will be found a more difficult point than the former: for when a person has really sinned, he cannot but own his brethren's reproof to be just; whereas, when it was only for some little misconduct, the pride that is in our natures will scarce suffer us to brook (endure, tolerate) it. But however ungrateful this pill may be to our brother, yet if we have any concern for his welfare, it must be administered by some friendly hand or other. By all means then let it be applied; only, like a skillful physician, gild over the ungrateful pill, and endeavor, if possible, to deceive thy brother into health and soundness. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and malice, and evil speaking, be put away" from it. Let the patient

know, his recovery is the only thing aimed at, and that thou delightest not causelessly to grieve thy brother; then thou canst not want success.

2. Mutual exhortation is the second duty resulting from the words of the text. "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat."

Observe, the wise man supposes it as impossible for religious persons to meet together, and not to be the warmer for each other's company, as for two persons to lie in the same bed, and yet freeze with cold. But now, how is it possible to communicate heat to each other, without mutually stirring up the gift of God which is in us, by brotherly exhortation? Let every member then of a religious society write that zealous apostle's advice on the tables of his heart; "See that ye exhort, and provoke one another to love, and to good works; and so much the more, as you see the day of the Lord approaching." Believe me, brethren, we have need of exhortation to rouse up our sleepy souls, to set us upon our watch against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; to excite us to renounce ourselves, to take up our crosses, and follow our blessed master, and the glorious company of saints and martyrs, "who through faith have fought the good fight, and are gone before us to inherit the promises." A third part, therefore, of the time wherein a religious society meets, seems necessary to be spent in this important duty: for what avails it to have our understandings enlightened by pious reading, unless our wills are at the same time inclined, and inflamed by mutual exhortation, to put it in practice? Add also, that this is the best way both to receive and impart light, and the only means to preserve and increase that warmth and heat which each person first brought with him; God so ordering this, as all other spiritual gifts, that "to him that hath, i.e. improves and communicates what he hath, shall be given; but from him that hath not, or does not improve the heat he hath, shall be taken away even that which he seemed to have." So needful, so essentially necessary, is exhortation to the good of society.

3. Thirdly, The text points out another duty incumbent on every member of a religious society, to defend each other from those that do oppose them. "And if one prevail against him, yet two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

Here the wise man takes it for granted, that offenses will come, nay, and that they may prevail too. And this is not more than our blessed master has long since told us. Not, indeed, that there is any thing in Christianity itself that has the least tendency to give rise to, or promote such offenses: No, on the contrary, it breathes nothing but unity and love.

But so it is, that ever since the fatal sentence pronounced by God, after our first parents fall, "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed;" he that is born after the flesh, the unregenerate unconverted sinner, has in all ages "persecuted him that is born after the spirit:" and so it always will be. Accordingly we find an early proof given of this in the instance of Cain and Abel; of Ishmael and Isaac; and of Jacob and Esau. And, indeed, the whole Bible contains little else but an history of the great and continued opposition between the children of this world, and the children of God. The first Christians were remarkable examples of this; and though those troublesome time, blessed be God, are now over, yet the apostle has laid it down as a general rule, and all who are sincere

experimentally prove the truth of it; that "they that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must (to the end of the world, in some degree or other) suffer persecution." That therefore this may not make us desert our blessed master's cause, every member should unite their forces in order to stand against it. And for the better effecting this, each would do well, from time to time, to communicate his experiences, grievances, and temptations, and beg his companions (first asking God's assistance, without which all is nothing) to administer reproof, exhortation, or comfort, as his case requires: so that "if one cannot prevail against it, yet two shall withstand it; and a threefold (much less a many-fold) cord will not be quickly broken."

IV. But it is time for me to proceed to the fourth general thing proposed, to draw an inference or two from what has been said.

1. And first, if "two are better than one," and the advantages of religious society are so many and so great; then it is the duty of every true Christian to set on foot, establish and promote, as much as in him lies, societies of this nature. And I believe we may venture to affirm, that if ever a spirit of true Christianity is revived in the world, it must be brought about by some such means as this. Motive, surely, cannot be wanting, to stir us up to the commendable and necessary undertaking: for, granting all hitherto advanced to be of no force, yet methinks the single consideration, that great part of our happiness in heaven will consist in the Communion of Saints; or that the interest as well as piety of those who differ from us, is strengthened and supported by nothing more than their frequent meetings; either of these considerations, I say, one would think, should induce us to do our utmost to copy after their good example, and settle a lasting and pious communion of the saints on earth. Add to this, that we find the kingdom of darkness established daily by such like means; and shall not the kingdom of Christ be set in opposition against it? Shall the children of Belial assemble and strengthen each other in wickedness; and shall not the children of God unite, and strengthen themselves in piety? Shall societies on societies be countenanced for midnight revelings, and the promoting of vice, and scarcely one be found intended for the propagation of virtue? Be astonished, O heavens at this!

2. But this leads me to a second inference; namely, to warn persons of the great danger those are in, who either by their subscriptions, presence, or approbation, promote societies of a quite opposite nature to religion.

And here I would not be understood, to mean only those public meetings which are designed manifestly for nothing else but revellings and banquetings, for chambering and wantonness, and at which a modest heathen would blush to be present; but also those seemingly innocent entertainments and meetings, which the politer part of the world are so very fond of, and spend so much time in: but which, notwithstanding, keep as many persons from a sense of true religion, as doth intemperance, debauchery, or any other crimes whatever. Indeed, whilst we are in this world, we must have proper relaxations, to fit us both for the business of our profession, and religion. But then, for persons who call themselves Christians, that have solemnly vowed at their baptism, to renounce the vanities of this sinful world; that are commanded in scripture "to abstain from all appearance of evil, and to have their conversation in heaven:" for such persons as these to

support meetings, which (to say no worse of them) are vain and trifling, and have a natural tendency to draw off our minds from God, is absurd, ridiculous, and sinful. Surely two are not better than one in this case: No; it is to be wished there was not one to be found concerned in it. The sooner we forsake the assembling ourselves together in such a manner, the better; and no matter how quickly the cord that hold such societies (was it a thousand-fold) is broken.

But you, brethren, have not so learned Christ: but, on the contrary, like true disciples of your Lord and Master, have by the blessing of God (as this evening's solemnity abundantly testifies) happily formed yourselves into such societies, which, if duly attended on, and improved, cannot but strengthen you in your Christian warfare, and "make you fruitful in every good word and work."

What remains for me, but, as was proposed, in the first place, to close what has been said, in a word or two, by way of exhortation, and to beseech you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to go on in the way you have begun; and by a constant conscientious attendance on your respective societies, to discountenance vice, encourage virtue, and build each other up in the knowledge and fear of God.

Only permit me to "stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance," and to exhort you, "if there be any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the spirit," again and again to consider, that as all Christians in general, so all members of religious societies in particular, are in an especial manner, as houses built upon an hill; and that therefore it highly concerns you to walk circumspectly towards those that are without, and to take heed to yourselves, that your conversation, in common life, be as becometh such an open and peculiar profession of the gospel of Christ: knowing that the eyes of all men are upon you, narrowly to inspect every circumstance of your behavior: and that every notorious willful miscarriage of any single member will, in some measure, redound to the scandal and dishonor of your whole fraternity.

Labor, therefore, my beloved brethren, to let your practice correspond to your profession: and think not that it will be sufficient for you to plead at the last day, Lord have we not assembled ourselves together in thy name, and enlivened each other, by singing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs? For verily, I say unto you, notwithstanding this, our blessed Lord will bid you depart from him; nay, you shall receive a great damnation, if, in the mists of these great pretensions, you are found to be workers of iniquity.

But God forbid that any such evil should befall you; that there should be ever a Judas, a traitor, amongst such distinguished followers of our common master. No, on the contrary, the excellency of your rule, the regularity of your meetings, and more especially your pious zeal in assembling in such a public and solemn manner so frequently in the year, persuade me to think, that you are willing, not barely to seem, but to be in reality, Christians; and hope to be found at the last day, what you would be esteemed now, holy, sincere disciples of a crucified Redeemer.

Oh, may you always continue thus minded! And make it your daily, constant endeavor, both by precept and example, to turn all your converse with, more especially those of your own societies, into the same most blessed spirit and temper. Thus will you adorn the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all things: Thus will you anticipate the happiness of a future state; and by attending on, and improving the communion of saints on earth, be made meet to join the communion and fellowship of the spirits of just men made perfect, of the holy angels, nay, of the ever blessed and eternal God in heaven.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honor and praise, might, majesty and dominion, now and for ever. Amen.