

# FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

*Systematic Theology Series*

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## CHRISTOLOGY

*The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ*

### UNIT 9: THE ASCENSION, SESSION, AND INTERCESSION OF CHRIST

#### Lesson 29

## The Intercession of Christ

### Our Advocate with the Father

*He Always Lives to Make Intercession for Them*

*Key Texts: Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:33–34; 1 John 2:1–2; John 17:9–26; Hebrews 4:14–16*

*“He Is Able to Save Forever Those Who Draw Near to God Through Him, Since He Always Lives to Make Intercession for Them”*

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#### SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves  
but Christ Jesus as Lord,  
and ourselves as your bond-servants  
on account of Jesus.”*

**2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995**

## INTRODUCTION

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The session of Christ established in Lesson 28 answers the question of the exalted Lord's position: He has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, in the posture of the completed high-priestly sacrifice and the supreme royal authority. This lesson answers the question of His activity: what is the exalted Lord doing right now, at this moment, in that supreme position, for the people He purchased with His blood? The answer is at once theologically precise and personally consoling beyond all expectation: He is interceding. The Son of God, who is at the right hand of the Father, who laid down His life for the sheep, who bore the penalty for those He came to save, this one is, at this very moment, speaking on behalf of every one of His people before the Father who sent Him.

The intercession of Christ is the present, continuous, personal, priestly activity of the exalted Lord on behalf of His people. It is not a past event (like the cross) or a future hope (like the return) but a present reality, happening right now, sustained by the indestructible life of the one who lives forever. Hebrews 7:25 declares it with the most comprehensive possible scope: "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (NASB 1995). 'Always lives' (πάντοτε ζῶν, *pantote zōn*), the intercession is not occasional, not seasonal, not dependent on the believer's spiritual condition or the urgency of the moment. It is as continuous as the risen life of the one who intercedes; and since He lives forever, the intercession is forever.

This lesson examines the intercession of Christ under six headings: the Old Testament background in the Levitical high-priestly ministry and the Day of Atonement; the New Testament's primary intercession texts (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:33–34; 1 John 2:1); the nature of the intercession, what Christ actually does in the intercession and what He does not do; the High Priestly Prayer of John 17 as the most detailed and the most personally searching account of the intercessory content; the practical implications for the believer's prayer life and assurance; and the doxological conclusion that the intercession of Christ is the most personally present and the most perpetually active dimension of the gospel for every believer in the present age. The one who knows that Christ is interceding for them, right now, will pray differently, trust differently, and face the present age differently from one who does not.

## I. THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND: THE HIGH PRIEST IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES

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*The Levitical Typology That Illuminates the Nature and Necessity of Christ's Heavenly Intercession*

## A. The Day of Atonement and the High-Priestly Intercession

The New Testament's account of Christ's heavenly intercession is set against the Old Testament background of the Levitical high-priestly ministry, and it is impossible to fully understand the one without the other. The Levitical high priest was the appointed mediator between the holy God and the sinful people of Israel. He alone could enter the Most Holy Place; he entered it once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16); and when he entered, he carried the blood of the sacrifice and the incense of intercession. The cloud of incense was to cover the mercy seat so that he would not die in the divine presence (Leviticus 16:13): the intercession accompanied the sacrifice, and the sacrifice was the ground on which the intercession could be offered and received.

The structure of the Levitical high-priestly ministry on the Day of Atonement, sacrifice, blood-presentation, intercession, emergence, provides the typological framework within which the New Testament interprets the intercession of Christ. He has offered the once-for-all sacrifice (the cross); He has entered the heavenly Holy of Holies with His own blood (Hebrews 9:12: 'through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption', NASB 1995); and He now presents the completed sacrifice before the Father as the perpetual ground of the intercession He makes on behalf of His people. The critical difference between the type and the antitype is that the Levitical high priest's intercession was annual and impermanent (limited to the Day of Atonement), while Christ's intercession is perpetual and permanent ('He always lives'). The sacrifice has been offered once; the intercession never ceases.

## B. Hebrews 5–7: The Melchizedekian Priesthood as the Ground of Perpetual Intercession

Hebrews 5–7 provides the most sustained account of why Christ's intercession is perpetual where the Levitical intercession was temporary. The argument turns on the contrast between the Levitical priesthood (instituted by the law, limited by mortality, requiring constant replacement) and the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ (instituted by divine oath, grounded in an indestructible life, never requiring replacement). Hebrews 7:23–25 states the conclusion with precise parallelism: "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing; but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (NASB 1995). The argument is: death prevented the Levitical priests from continuing their ministry; Christ lives forever; therefore, His priestly ministry continues forever; and the specific priestly ministry He perpetually exercises is the intercession.

The word translated 'permanently' (*ἀπαράβατον*, *aparabaton*) in Hebrews 7:24 is a rare legal term meaning 'non-transferable,' 'inviolable,' 'not passing to another.' The priesthood of Christ is not temporary; it does not pass to a successor; it is held by the living Christ and by the living Christ alone, for as long as He lives, which is forever. The permanence of the priesthood is the ground of the permanence of the intercession, and the permanence of the intercession is the ground of the

completeness of the salvation: ‘He is able to save forever’ (σώζειν εἰς τὸ παντελές, sōzein eis to panteles, ‘completely,’ ‘perfectly,’ ‘to the uttermost’). The completeness of the salvation is grounded in the permanence of the priesthood; the permanence of the priesthood is grounded in the indestructible life of the Priest.

## II. THE PRIMARY INTERCESSION TEXTS: HEBREWS 7:25, ROMANS 8:33–34, AND 1 JOHN 2:1

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*Three Perspectives on the Same Perpetual Ministry of the Exalted Lord*

### A. Hebrews 7:25: He Always Lives to Make Intercession

Hebrews 7:25 is the magisterial statement of the intercession’s scope and ground: “Throne of grace, let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16, NASB 1995), but it is Hebrews 7:25 that provides the theological ground of that confident approach: “He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (NASB 1995). Every dimension of this verse deserves sustained attention. ‘He is able’ (δύναται, dynatai), the intercession is not merely an offer or an intention; it is the exercise of the omnipotent priestly authority of the one who holds all things together by the word of His power. ‘To save forever’ (eis to panteles), completely, to the uttermost, without remainder, leaving nothing of the salvation unaccomplished. ‘Those who draw near to God through Him’, the scope is defined by the means: it is those who come through Christ, the only Mediator, who receive the benefit of the perpetual intercession. ‘Since He always lives to make intercession for them’, the ground of the ability to save forever is the perpetual living of the one who perpetually intercedes.

### B. Romans 8:33–34: Who Will Bring a Charge Against God’s Elect?

Romans 8:33–34 approaches the intercession from the angle of the legal accusation: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (NASB 1995). Paul’s rhetorical questions presuppose the scenario of the divine court: someone might bring a charge against God’s elect; someone might attempt to condemn them. And Paul’s answer is the four-part christological declaration that makes both accusation and condemnation impossible: Christ died (the penalty for the charge has been borne), yes, rather He was raised (the penalty’s bearing has been vindicated), He is at the right hand of God (the completed work is permanently presented in the supreme position of authority), and He intercedes for us (the one who bore the penalty on our behalf continues to present the completed work as the permanent ground of our acceptance).

The intercession in Romans 8:34 is not a supplementary activity appended to the completed atonement; it is the present, perpetual expression of the completed atonement. The cross provides the ground; the intercession presents that ground before the Father continuously. The accusation that might be brought against God's elect is answered not only by the past event of the cross but by the present reality of the one who intercedes on the basis of that cross at the right hand of the Father. The charges are not merely historically refuted (the cross happened); they are perpetually and presently refuted (the intercession continues). No accusation can stand against those for whom the one who bore the penalty is perpetually interceding; no condemnation can fall on those whose Advocate is the risen, exalted, interceding Lord.

### C. 1 John 2:1: Our Advocate with the Father

1 John 2:1 provides the most personally intimate description of the intercession in all of the New Testament: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (NASB 1995). The context is striking: John is writing about sin, about the possibility that believers will fall into sin after the new birth. His pastoral strategy is not to minimize sin's seriousness (he has just declared that he writes 'so that you may not sin') but to provide the specific resource that the sinning believer most urgently needs: the knowledge that they have an Advocate. The Advocate is present, personal, and qualified: 'Jesus Christ the righteous', the one whose righteousness is the ground of His advocacy and whose personal identity is the guarantee of its effectiveness.

The word translated 'Advocate' (παράκλητον, parakletos) is the same word used in John's Gospel for the Holy Spirit as the 'Helper' or 'Comforter' whom Jesus promised to send (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The use of parakletos for both the Spirit (who indwells the believer on earth) and for Christ (who advocates for the believer in heaven) establishes a comprehensive double advocacy: the Spirit advocates within the believer (Romans 8:26–27: 'the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words', NASB 1995) and Christ advocates for the believer before the Father. The sinning believer is not alone; they are enveloped in a double intercession, the Spirit within and the Son above, both presenting their needs and their claims before the God who justifies.

*"He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." | "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*

**HEBREWS 7:25; 1 JOHN 2:1, NASB 1995**

## III. THE NATURE OF THE INTERCESSION: WHAT CHRIST DOES AND WHAT HE DOES NOT DO

*Not Pleading with a Reluctant Father but Presenting the Completed Sacrifice Before the Father Who Sent Him*

## A. What the Intercession Is Not

Before the positive account of the intercession can be given with theological precision, certain misunderstandings must be excluded. The intercession of Christ is not the pleading of a reluctant Father into generosity by an aggrieved Son. This misunderstanding, common in popular piety but theologically disastrous, creates a division within the Trinity that the New Testament everywhere excludes: the Father who sends the Son (John 3:16), who does not spare the Son (Romans 8:32), who is himself well-pleased with the Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5), is not a reluctant judge who must be persuaded by the Son to show mercy. The same God who sent the Son to die for sinners is the Father to whom the Son's intercession is directed. The intercession is not the Son overcoming the Father's resistance; it is the Son presenting the completed work of the Trinitarian plan of redemption before the Father who ordained it.

Nor is the intercession a second work of redemption that supplements or completes an insufficient atoning sacrifice. The sacrifice is complete, *tetelestai*, and the session is the posture of the completed sacrifice. The intercession does not add to the completed sacrifice; it presents the completed sacrifice as the perpetual ground of the believers' ongoing acceptance. The intercession is not a continuing sacrifice (this would be to deny the once-for-all character of the cross that Hebrews emphatically affirms) but the perpetual presentation of the once-for-all sacrifice as the permanent, sufficient, and never-to-be-supplemented ground of the believers' standing before God.

## B. What the Intercession Is

Positively, the intercession of Christ is the presentation of the completed atoning work before the Father as the perpetual ground of the believers' acceptance and the perpetual basis for the provision of everything they need for their ongoing salvation, sanctification, and preservation. The high-priestly image from Hebrews illuminates the content: the Levitical high priest entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of the sacrifice and the incense of intercession, presenting both before the divine presence as the ground of the people's atonement. Christ enters the heavenly holy place with His own blood, the completed, once-for-all, infinitely sufficient sacrifice, and presents it before the Father as the ground of the people's ongoing acceptance. The intercession is the high priest's perpetual standing in the divine presence with the evidence of the completed sacrifice, so that the benefits of the sacrifice continue to be applied to those for whom it was offered.

The intercession is also the personal, sympathetic, specific advocacy of the one who knows the believers' needs from direct personal experience. Hebrews 4:15–16 grounds the confident approach to the throne of grace in the specific sympathy of the High Priest: 'For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (NASB 1995). The sympathy is not general; it

is the specific sympathy of the one who experienced every dimension of human weakness and temptation in the fullest possible way. The intercession is therefore not merely the formal presentation of a legal ground (the completed sacrifice) but the personally engaged advocacy of the one who knows the specific needs of those He represents from the inside.

## IV. THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER: JOHN 17 AS THE WINDOW INTO THE INTERCESSORY CONTENT

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*The Most Extended and Most Theologically Revealing Account of What Christ Prays for His People*

### A. John 17 as the Pattern of the Heavenly Intercession

The High Priestly Prayer of John 17 is the most detailed and the most theologically searching account of the intercessory content available in the New Testament. Scholars have long recognized it as the pre-ascension form of the intercession that the exalted Christ continues to offer before the Father, the prayer of the one who is about to complete the atoning work and enter the Father's presence as the perpetual Intercessor. Its content, therefore, provides the most direct window into what the heavenly intercession encompasses: the subjects for whom Christ prays, the specific petitions He makes, and the ultimate goal toward which the intercession is directed.

The prayer is organized around three movements: the Son's petition for Himself (vv. 1–5: the glorification of the Son so that He may glorify the Father), the Son's petition for the immediate disciples (vv. 6–19: their preservation, sanctification, and sending), and the Son's petition for all who will believe through their word (vv. 20–26: the unity, love, and final vision of glory that will characterize the whole community of the redeemed). The scope of the intercession is explicitly particularist in one dimension and universal in another: 'I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours' (v. 9, NASB 1995). The intercession is directed toward those the Father has given the Son, the specific, definite, Father-given community of the elect, consistent with the particularist scope of the atonement established in Lesson 22.

### B. The Specific Petitions of John 17

The specific petitions of John 17 provide the most concrete account of what Christ prays for His people. He prays for their preservation: 'Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are' (v. 11, NASB 1995). The keeping is specifically in the Father's name, kept in the sphere of the divine character and the divine covenant commitment. He prays for their protection from the evil one: 'I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one' (v. 15, NASB 1995). The intercession does not request the removal of

believers from the world's dangers but their preservation through those dangers by the power of the Father. He prays for their sanctification: 'Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth' (v. 17, NASB 1995). The specific instrument of the sanctification prayed for is the Word, the intercession is for the sanctifying work of the Spirit through the truth of Scripture.

He prays for their unity: 'that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me' (v. 21, NASB 1995). The unity prayed for is not organizational uniformity but the unity of genuine love and shared life that reflects the Trinitarian unity itself and that functions as the church's most powerful evangelistic testimony. And He prays for their final glorification: 'Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world' (v. 24, NASB 1995). The ultimate aim of the intercession is the beatific vision, the face-to-face knowledge and enjoyment of the glory of the Son that is the final destiny of every one of those for whom He intercedes.

## V. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: THE INTERCESSION AND THE BELIEVER'S PRAYER AND ASSURANCE

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*How the Knowledge That Christ Intercedes Changes Everything About Prayer, Guilt, and Confidence*

### A. The Intercession and the Believer's Prayer Life

The intercession of Christ transforms the believer's understanding of prayer. Prayer is not the believer's unaided attempt to break through the divine distance and persuade a reluctant God to attend to their needs; it is the believer's participation in the intercessory ministry of the one who stands at the right hand of the Father, whose advocacy accompanies every prayer addressed to the Father, and whose authority as the unique Mediator ensures that every prayer offered in His name (John 14:13–14; 16:23–24) is brought before the Father with the full weight of His completed sacrifice and His perpetual intercession. When the believer prays, they do not pray alone: the High Priest who sympathizes with their weakness (Hebrews 4:15) is simultaneously advocating for them before the Father, and the Spirit who indwells them is simultaneously interceding within them (Romans 8:26–27). Every act of genuine prayer is therefore enclosed within a double intercession, the Son above and the Spirit within, and presented before the Father by the most authoritative possible Advocate.

Romans 8:26–27's account of the Spirit's intercession provides the experiential complement to the heavenly intercession of the Son: "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (NASB 1995). The Spirit's intercession addresses the

limitation of the believer's prayer (we do not know how to pray as we should) with a form of advocacy that goes beyond the believer's own articulation: the 'groanings too deep for words' (ἀλαλήτοις στεναγμοῖς, *alalētois stenagmois*) are the Spirit's advocacy presented before the Father who searches hearts and who knows the mind of the Spirit. The believer who cannot find the words prays in the Spirit, and the Spirit who knows the will of God prays for what the believer needs but cannot yet articulate.

## **B. The Intercession and the Believer's Assurance**

The intercession of Christ is the most specific and the most permanent ground of the believer's assurance available in the entire gospel. The cross provides the objective ground of justification; the intercession provides the present, perpetual, personally engaged application and maintenance of that justification before the Father. The believer who doubts their standing before God, who fears that their sin has exhausted the divine patience or that their failures have forfeited the divine acceptance, is directed by 1 John 2:1 to the specific resource most directly applicable to their need: 'we have an Advocate with the Father.' The Advocate is present ('we have', not 'we had' or 'we might have' but 'we have', in the permanent, ongoing sense), the Advocate is personal ('with the Father', not a general divine disposition toward believers but a specific personal ministry of the specific Person of the Son), and the Advocate is qualified ('Jesus Christ the righteous', His advocacy is grounded in His own righteousness, which is the basis of the double imputation of Lesson 21).

Luke 22:31–32 provides the most personally moving account of the intercession's application to a specific believer in a specific crisis: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (NASB 1995). The intercession is for the preservation of faith through the specific crisis, not the prevention of failure (Peter will deny; the intercession does not prevent the fall) but the sustaining of faith through the fall so that repentance and restoration follow. The one who knows that Christ intercedes for them knows that their faith is held not only by their own grip on Christ but by Christ's intercessory grip on them. The intercession guarantees not sinlessness in the present age but the preservation of faith and the certainty of final restoration for all those for whom Christ prays.

## **VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE ENDLESS INTERCESSION OF THE ENDLESS LIFE**

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The intercession of Christ is, in one sense, the most ordinary dimension of the gospel, the ordinary, moment-by-moment, continuous activity of the exalted Lord on behalf of every one of His people in every place in every age. There is no moment when the intercession ceases; there is no circumstance

in which the believer is without the Advocate; there is no sin so great that it exhausts the ground on which the intercession rests (the infinitely sufficient completed sacrifice); there is no accusation brought against God's elect that the Intercessor cannot answer. The intercession is as continuous as the risen life of the one who intercedes, and the risen life is indestructible.

And yet the intercession is not ordinary in the sense of being unremarkable. It is the most personal, the most present, and the most perpetually active expression of the love of the Good Shepherd for His sheep available in the entire Christological account of what God does for His people. The shepherd who left the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep (Luke 15:4–6) is the same Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep and who, having laid it down, takes it up again and now intercedes for the sheep at the right hand of the Father, presenting the completed laying-down as the perpetual ground of their preservation. The one who loved us to the point of the cross loves us still at the point of the session, not with a love that has been satisfied and completed by the cross, but with a love that expressed itself at the cross and continues to express itself in the ceaseless intercession of the exalted Lord.

The pastoral consequence of this reality is the most comprehensive possible ground of confident, persistent, humble, and expectant prayer. The one to whom the believer prays is the one who prays for the believer; the throne to which the believer approaches is the throne occupied by the one who is their Advocate; the mercy and the grace available at the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) are available precisely because the one who sits at that throne is simultaneously the one who has borne the penalty for every sin that would disqualify the believer from approaching. The intercession transforms every act of prayer from a tentative approach to a distant God into a confident drawing-near to the God who has drawn near to us in the Son who stands at His right hand and speaks on our behalf. To the one who always lives to make intercession, to the Advocate who never sleeps and never ceases, to the Good Shepherd who laid down His life and who now lives to intercede for the sheep, to Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Key Texts:** *Hebrews 7:23–25; Hebrews 4:14–16; Romans 8:33–34; Romans 8:26–27; 1 John 2:1–2; John 17:1–26; Luke 22:31–32; Hebrews 9:12; Leviticus 16:1–34*

## THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Intercession of Christ	The present, continuous, personal, priestly activity of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father on behalf of His people. Not a past event

Term	Definition
	<p>(like the cross) or a future hope (like the return) but a present reality, sustained by the indestructible life of the one who lives forever (Hebrews 7:25: 'He always lives to make intercession for them'). The intercession is: (1) grounded in the completed atoning sacrifice (He presents His own blood before the Father as the perpetual basis of the believers' acceptance); (2) perpetual (as continuous as the risen life of the one who intercedes); (3) personally sympathetic (the Intercessor knows the believers' weaknesses from direct personal experience, Hebrews 4:15); (4) particularist in scope (directed toward those the Father gave Him, John 17:9); and (5) effectual (He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him).</p>
<p><b>Pantote Zōn (Hebrews 7:25)</b></p>	<p>Greek: 'always lives,' 'perpetually lives.' The adverb pantote ('always,' 'at all times') combined with the present participle zōn ('living') from zaō. Used in Hebrews 7:25 for the ground of Christ's perpetual intercession: 'since He always lives to make intercession for them.' The intercession is not occasional or contingent on circumstances; it is as continuous as the life of the one who intercedes. The ground of the perpetual intercession is the indestructible life of the Melchizedekian High Priest whose priesthood is 'non-transferable' (aparabaton, v. 24) precisely because He lives forever. The pantote zōn establishes that there is no moment when the believer is without the intercession; no crisis so severe that the Intercessor has ceased to advocate; no sin so great that it has caused the Intercessor to withdraw.</p>
<p><b>Eis to Panteles (Hebrews 7:25)</b></p>	<p>Greek: 'to the uttermost,' 'completely,' 'perfectly,' 'to the fullest possible extent.' Used in Hebrews 7:25 for the completeness of the salvation that Christ is able to accomplish: 'He is able to save forever (eis to panteles) those who draw near to God through Him.' The phrase establishes that the salvation secured by the perpetual intercession is not partial or provisional but complete in every dimension, nothing of the saving work is left unaccomplished, no enemy is left undefeated, no need is left unmet. The completeness of the salvation is grounded in the permanence of the priesthood: the intercession never ceases, therefore the salvation is never incomplete.</p>
<p><b>Aparabaton (Hebrews 7:24)</b></p>	<p>Greek: 'non-transferable,' 'inviolable,' 'not passing to another.' A rare legal term used in Hebrews 7:24 for the permanent, non-transferable character of Christ's priesthood: 'Jesus... holds His priesthood permanently (aparabaton).' The Levitical priesthood passed from father to son because death prevented the continuation of the individual priest's ministry. Christ's priesthood is aparabaton, it does not pass to another, it is not transferable, it is held by the living Christ alone for as long as He lives, which is forever. The aparabaton priesthood is the ground of the pantote intercession: because the priesthood is permanent, the intercession is perpetual; because the intercession is perpetual, the salvation is complete.</p>

Term	Definition
<p><b>Parakletos (1 John 2:1)</b></p>	<p>Greek: ‘advocate,’ ‘helper,’ ‘comforter,’ ‘one called alongside.’ Used in John 14–16 for the Holy Spirit as the Helper whom Jesus promises to send (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and in 1 John 2:1 for Jesus Himself as the Advocate before the Father: ‘we have an Advocate (parakletos) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ The use of the same term for both the Spirit (who advocates within the believer on earth) and for Christ (who advocates for the believer before the Father in heaven) establishes a comprehensive double advocacy: the Spirit intercedes within (Romans 8:26–27) and the Son intercedes above (1 John 2:1; Romans 8:34). The believer is enveloped in a double intercession.</p>
<p><b>Melchizedekian Priesthood</b></p>	<p>The priesthood of Christ as described in Hebrews 5–7, grounded in Psalm 110:4 (‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’) and in the Genesis 14 account of Melchizedek. Distinguished from the Levitical priesthood by: (1) not being genealogically derived from Aaron; (2) not being temporary or requiring succession (Melchizedek appears in Genesis without recorded beginning or end of priestly service, typifying the eternal priesthood of Christ); (3) being based on an indestructible life rather than a legal requirement (Hebrews 7:16); and (4) being instituted by divine oath rather than by law (Hebrews 7:20–22). The Melchizedekian priesthood is the grounds of Christ’s perpetual intercession: because the priesthood is eternal, the intercession never ceases.</p>
<p><b>Double Intercession</b></p>	<p>The comprehensive double advocacy that envelops the believer in the present age: (1) the Son intercedes for the believer before the Father in heaven, presenting the completed atoning work as the perpetual ground of their acceptance (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1); (2) the Spirit intercedes for the believer within their own heart on earth, presenting the believers’ needs before the Father in ‘groanings too deep for words’ according to the will of God (Romans 8:26–27). The two Persons of the Trinity who were sent by the Father into the world, the Son in the incarnation and the Spirit at Pentecost, both continue their ministries on behalf of the believer: the Son from above and the Spirit from within. The believer who prays does not pray alone.</p>
<p><b>Luke 22:31–32: Intercession for Peter</b></p>	<p>The most personally specific account of the intercession in the Gospel narratives: ‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’ Theologically significant for: (1) the specificity of the intercession, for the preservation of Simon Peter’s specific faith in a specific crisis; (2) the content of the intercession, not the prevention of the fall (Peter will deny) but the preservation of faith through the fall; (3) the certainty of the outcome, the intercession does not make failure impossible but makes final apostasy impossible (‘when once you have turned again’ assumes the turning). The intercession preserves faith, not sinlessness; it secures the final restoration, not the prevention of every failure.</p>

Term	Definition
<p><b>High Priestly Prayer (John 17)</b></p>	<p>The extended prayer of Jesus on the night of His betrayal (John 17:1–26), widely recognized as the pre-ascension form of the intercession He continues to offer before the Father as the exalted High Priest. Organized in three movements: the Son’s petition for Himself (vv. 1–5: glorification for the purpose of the Father’s glory), for the immediate disciples (vv. 6–19: preservation, protection from the evil one, sanctification through the Word, sending into the world), and for all who will believe through their word (vv. 20–26: unity, love, and final glorification in the vision of the Son’s glory). The prayer’s particularist scope (v. 9: ‘I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me’) is consistent with the definite atonement’s account of the intercession’s scope.</p>
<p><b>Throne of Grace (Hebrews 4:16)</b></p>	<p>The description of the heavenly seat of divine authority as a ‘throne of grace’ in Hebrews 4:16: ‘Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.’ The throne is a throne of grace (rather than merely a throne of judgment or power) because it is occupied by the one who is simultaneously the universal sovereign and the compassionate High Priest who has borne human weakness from the inside. The ‘confidence’ (παρρησία, <i>parrēsia</i>, ‘boldness,’ ‘freedom of speech,’ ‘open access’) with which believers are invited to approach is grounded in the combination of the completed sacrifice (the atoning work is done) and the sympathetic Advocate (the Intercessor knows our weakness from experience).</p>

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

### A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the intercession of Christ is a present, continuous, personal reality, not a theological concept to be affirmed in the abstract but a pastoral resource to be inhabited in the specific moments of the specific crises that the specific believer faces. The one who sins today has an Advocate with the Father today, not tomorrow, not after a period of penitential discipline, not when the spiritual condition has improved sufficiently to merit the Advocate’s attention. The Advocate is present now, with the Father now, speaking on the believer’s behalf now, on the basis of the completed sacrifice that never needs to be repeated and the indestructible life that never ceases to sustain the intercession.

We must also believe that the intercession is not supplementary to the cross but is the present, perpetual expression of the cross’s completed work. The cross purchased the forgiveness; the intercession presents the purchased forgiveness before the Father as the permanent ground of the believer’s ongoing acceptance. The assurance that flows from this understanding is not the vague hope that God is generally inclined to be favorable; it is the specific, legally grounded, personally

engaged assurance that the one who bore the penalty for the believer's sins is at this moment presenting that completed bearing before the Father as the ground on which the believer stands.

## **B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?**

Let the knowledge of the intercession transform the affective register in which you approach God in prayer. Prayer is not the believer's attempt to break through divine indifference or to persuade an otherwise reluctant God; it is the believer's participation in the intercessory ministry of the one who stands at the right hand of the Father and who has already spoken on their behalf before they opened their mouths. The theology of the intercession should produce not the timid, half-expecting-to-be-refused approach of one who is uncertain of their welcome, but the 'confident drawing-near' of Hebrews 4:16, the bold, unhesitating, expectant approach of those who know they have an Advocate and that the throne they approach is a throne of grace.

Desire also for your congregation the specific, practical, moment-by-moment awareness of the intercession in the experience of the Christian life. The believer who falls into sin needs to know immediately, in the moment of the fall, before the spiral of guilt and shame and self-recrimination begins, that they have an Advocate. The believer who faces a circumstance of overwhelming trial needs to know that the one who governs all things is simultaneously interceding for them. The believer who is struggling to pray, whose words will not come, whose spiritual articulation has collapsed under the weight of suffering, needs to know that the Spirit within and the Son above are both interceding on their behalf with an authority and an effectiveness that their own inarticulate groaning could never achieve.

## **C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?**

- Teach 1 John 2:1 explicitly and repeatedly as the specific resource for the sinning believer. Many evangelical congregations have an implicit theology of sin management: sin is to be confessed, repented of, and overcome through disciplined effort, and the gospel is primarily the resource for the pre-conversion guilt rather than the post-conversion failure. 1 John 2:1 corrects this implicit theology with striking directness: 'if anyone sins', not 'if anyone would sin before conversion' but 'if any believer falls into sin after the new birth', 'we have an Advocate.' The first resource for the sinning believer is not more intense moral effort but the knowledge of the Advocate. Teach this, preach it, apply it in pastoral care.
- Preach Luke 22:31–32 as the most personally specific and the most pastorally tender account of what the intercession looks like in a specific believer's specific crisis. The sermon's central pastoral aim: the believer who knows that Christ prayed for Peter's specific faith in Peter's specific crisis will know that Christ prays for their specific faith in their specific crisis. The intercession is not generic; it is personal. And the content of the intercession, not the prevention of failure but the preservation of faith through failure and the certainty of restoration afterward, provides a far more realistic and far more pastorally honest account of

what the Advocate provides than the alternative: the hope that Christ's intercession will prevent all spiritual failure.

- Use John 17's specific petitions as the curriculum for teaching the congregation what Christ is praying for them right now. The congregation that knows that the exalted Lord is praying for their preservation, their protection from the evil one, their sanctification through the Word, their unity with each other, and their ultimate glorification in the vision of His glory will understand the Christian life with a fundamentally different frame than the congregation that has never encountered the High Priestly Prayer as the window into the heavenly intercession. Teach John 17 slowly, petition by petition, as the most authoritative possible account of the Lord's will for His people, because it is literally the prayer that the Son addresses to the Father on their behalf.
- Ground the congregation's corporate prayer in the theology of the double intercession. When the congregation gathers for prayer, they do not gather to inform God of their needs or to persuade Him to pay attention; they gather to participate in the intercessory ministry of the Son who is already at the right hand of the Father and the Spirit who is already within each believer, both interceding according to the will of God. A brief theological framing of corporate prayer that reminds the congregation of the double intercession before they pray will transform the character and the expectancy of their prayer.
- Preach Hebrews 7:23–25 as the definitive account of why the intercession is perpetual, sufficient, and grounds the completeness of the salvation. The logic of the passage, the Levitical priests died and the ministry passed to successors; Christ lives forever and His ministry never passes to another; therefore, the intercession never ceases; therefore, the salvation is complete to the uttermost, is as compelling in the pulpit as it is on the page. The congregation that follows the logic of Hebrews 7:23–25 will understand that the salvation they have received is not merely commenced but perpetually sustained by the living Lord whose indestructible life guarantees the permanence of the priestly ministry that guards their standing before God.

## STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### OPENING QUESTION

1. Have you ever explicitly meditated on the fact that Christ is interceding for you right now, at this moment, at the right hand of the Father? What difference does it make to your prayer life, your experience of guilt after sin, and your confidence in approaching God when you hold this truth not as a theological fact in the background but as a living reality in the foreground? When have you most

urgently needed the specific pastoral resource of the knowledge that you have an Advocate, and did you have access to that resource in the moment you needed it?

### **OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)**

- 2.** Read Hebrews 7:15–25. Identify: (a) the specific contrast Hebrews draws between the Levitical priesthood and the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ, specifically regarding what prevented the Levitical priests from continuing (v. 23) and why Christ’s priesthood is permanent (v. 24, identify the specific Greek term *aparabaton* and what it means); (b) the logical connection between the permanent priesthood and the complete salvation in verse 25; (c) the specific description of the intercessory ministry in verse 25 (‘He always lives to make intercession’, identify what the adverb ‘always’ establishes about the character of the intercession).
- 3.** Read Romans 8:31–39. Identify the series of rhetorical questions Paul asks in verses 33–35 and the answers he supplies. What is the four-part description of Christ in verse 34, and how does each element of the description address the accusation/condemnation scenario? What is the relationship between the past event of the death (‘Christ Jesus is He who died’) and the present reality of the intercession (‘who also intercedes for us’) in Paul’s answer? How does Romans 8:34 relate to Romans 8:33’s assertion that ‘God is the one who justifies’?
- 4.** Read 1 John 2:1–2 and John 14:16–17; 16:7. Identify the specific term *parakletos* used in both passages (for Christ in 1 John 2:1 and for the Spirit in John 14 and 16). What does the use of the same term for both Christ and the Spirit establish about the relationship between Christ’s advocacy before the Father and the Spirit’s advocacy within the believer? In 1 John 2:1, what is the specific context in which John introduces the Advocate (what has just been said about sin in 1:8–10), and what does the placement tell you about the specific pastoral situation for which the knowledge of the Advocate is most immediately relevant?
- 5.** Read John 17:6–26. Identify the three movements of the prayer and the specific people for whom Christ prays in each movement. In the petitions for the disciples (vv. 11–19), identify at least four specific things Jesus prays for. In the petition for all believers (vv. 20–26), identify the specific ultimate aim of the intercession stated in verse 24. How does verse 9 (‘I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me’) establish the particularist scope of the intercession, consistent with the definite atonement established in Lesson 22?

### **INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)**

- 6.** The lesson argues that the intercession is not the pleading of a reluctant Father by an aggrieved Son but the presentation of the completed atoning work before the Father who ordained it. How does this understanding of the intercession protect the doctrine of the Trinity at the cross and the session from the distortion that makes the Father and the Son appear to be in conflict (the angry Father vs.

the loving Son)? What specific New Testament texts establish the Father's own loving initiative in the atonement in a way that prevents this misunderstanding?

**7.** The lesson argues that the intercession of Christ and the Spirit's intercession together constitute a 'double intercession' that envelops the believer. How do the two intercessions relate to each other, are they addressing the same needs from different angles, or do they address different dimensions of the believer's need? What specific aspects of the believer's prayer life does the Spirit's intercession (Romans 8:26–27) address that Christ's heavenly intercession does not specifically address, and vice versa?

**8.** The lesson presents Luke 22:31–32 as the most personally specific account of the intercession: Christ prays not for the prevention of Peter's failure but for the preservation of Peter's faith through the failure. What does this distinction reveal about the specific content and the specific purpose of the intercession? How does this understanding of the intercession address the pastoral experience of believers who have sinned seriously after the new birth and who wonder whether the intercession failed (because they fell) or whether it is still operative (because they have turned again)?

**9.** The lesson draws on the High Priestly Prayer of John 17 as the most detailed account of what the exalted Christ intercedes for. The petition of John 17:21 ('that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me') identifies the unity of believers as both the content of the intercession and the most powerful evangelistic testimony the church can offer. How does the knowledge that Christ is interceding for the unity of His people shape: (a) the individual believer's posture toward other believers with whom they differ; (b) the church's approach to ecumenical questions?

**10.** The lesson concludes by presenting the intercession as the 'most ordinary' dimension of the gospel, the continuous, moment-by-moment ministry of the exalted Lord, and yet the most personally present and the most perpetually active expression of the Lord's love for His people. How do you reconcile the continuity of the intercession (it never ceases) with the personal, specific, crisis-responsive character of the intercession (Christ prays for Peter's specific faith in Peter's specific crisis)? Is the intercession a general, standing advocacy or a specific, responsive, situationally engaged ministry?

### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)**

**11.** The lesson recommends teaching 1 John 2:1 explicitly as the specific resource for the sinning believer. Think of a specific pastoral conversation you have had with a believer who was struggling with guilt and shame over a sin committed after the new birth. Did you have access to 1 John 2:1's specific pastoral resource in that conversation? If you were to have the same conversation now, how would you present the Advocate, the specific name ('Jesus Christ the righteous'), the present tense

(‘we have’), the relational location (‘with the Father’), as the most immediately relevant resource for the specific need of the sinning believer?

**12.** The lesson recommends preaching Luke 22:31–32 as a sermon on the intercession. Design the outline of such a sermon: what is the main point, what are the major moves, and what is the pastoral aim? Specifically: how would you present the specific content of Christ’s intercession for Peter (not the prevention of failure but the preservation of faith through failure and the certainty of restoration) in a way that is both theologically honest (the intercession does not prevent all sin) and pastorally consoling (the intercession guarantees the final outcome for those for whom Christ prays)?

**13.** The lesson recommends using John 17’s specific petitions as a curriculum for teaching the congregation what Christ prays for them. Select one of the specific petitions of John 17 (preservation in vv. 11–12, protection from the evil one in v. 15, sanctification in v. 17, unity in vv. 21–23, or glorification in v. 24) and design a fifteen-minute teaching on that specific petition. What is the theological content of the petition? How does it ground the pastoral implication you are drawing from it? And how does the knowledge that Christ is praying this specific thing for the congregation change the way they receive it?

**14.** This lesson completes Unit 9 on the Ascension, Session, and Intercession of Christ, and with it the theological account of the exalted Lord’s present ministry. Unit 10 will turn to the Return of Christ (Lessons 30–31), and Unit 11 to the Conclusion (Lesson 32). Looking back over the entire Christology series from Lesson 1 to this point, twenty-nine lessons across nine units, what single dimension of the Person and Work of Christ has most transformed your understanding, your preaching, and your pastoral practice? And how does the doctrine of the intercession, the perpetual, personal, present ministry of the exalted Lord on behalf of His people, provide the theological bridge between the completed work of the cross and the resurrection and the completed glory of the return?

## PRAYER FOCUS

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Open this lesson’s prayer time with a slow, meditative reading of John 17 in its entirety, not as a historical document about what Jesus once prayed on the night of His betrayal but as the living content of the intercession that the exalted Lord is presenting before the Father at this moment on behalf of every one of His people. Read each petition as addressed to the Father on behalf of the group gathered: ‘Holy Father, keep them in Your name’, He is praying this for us, now. ‘Keep them from the evil one’, He is praying this for us, now. ‘Sanctify them in the truth’, He is praying this for us, now. ‘That they may all be one’, He is praying this for us, now. ‘Father, I desire that they also... be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory’, He is praying this for us, now. Let the present-tense reality of the intercession settle on the group with its full weight: you are being prayed for by the Son of God at this moment.

Spend time in specific prayer shaped by the awareness of the double intercession. Begin by receiving the intercession: let the group quietly receive the specific petitions of John 17 as addressed to them personally, the preservation, the protection, the sanctification, the unity, the final glorification. Then move from receiving the intercession to participating in the intercession: pray the petitions of John 17 back to the Father as your own prayers, grounded in the knowledge that the one who prays them for you is the same one who stands at the Father's right hand with infinite authority to present them. The group's prayer and the Lord's prayer are not competing efforts; they are participating together in the same intercessory ministry before the same Father.

Pray through the specific pastoral needs that the intercession most directly addresses. Bring before the Advocate those in your congregation who are carrying the weight of guilt over sins committed after the new birth, and present for them the 1 John 2:1 assurance: we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. Bring before the Intercessor those whose faith is under the sifting pressure that Satan demanded against Peter, and trust for them the Luke 22:32 promise: He has prayed for their specific faith in their specific crisis, and when they have turned again, they will strengthen their brothers. Bring before the one who prays for the unity of His people the specific divisions and tensions in your congregation, and receive for your community the John 17:21 petition: that they may all be one.

Close with Hebrews 7:25 spoken together as the corporate declaration of those who know they have a Perpetual Intercessor, and who draw near with confidence to the throne of grace on the basis of His indestructible life:

*"He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*

HEBREWS 7:25, NASB 1995

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
*To God Alone Be the Glory*

**FAITHFUL TO THE WORD**

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