

SERMON XXXV

THE FAITHFUL FRIEND AT THE BAR OF JUSTICE

Tobias Crisp

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." {1 Jn.2:1,2}

I have elsewhere made an entrance, in respect of some generals, these words afford; time being precious, we shall be as thriving of it as possible may be; only a few words, so far as may serve to bring us where we were, and then we shall bring you on {by God's assistance} through the particulars this text holds forth.

The main scope of the apostle is to endeavour to take the people of God off from running into sin; but, first, he useth an argument to prevail with them, which seems absurd unto the world, and doubtless goes for little less than foolishness among men, if not worse, "I write unto you that ye sin not." Well; but how will he prevail with them? "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins;" as much as to say, this is the best way to prevail with you, that you sin not, to know beforehand, that if you sin, you have an advocate with the Father, that will take away your faults, prevail over people from committing sin, to let them know how gracious God is unto them, even to the forgiving of their sins they shall commit; and that which we noted as the main body of the discourse, was; for such persons, who have fellowship with the Father and the Son, to know beforehand that they have "an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous, who is the propitiation for their sins," is so far from being the opening of the flood gates to sin, that it is a shutting them down, to stop the course of sin. The Holy Ghost is very plentiful, in this way of arguing, to prevail with people not to sin; showing clearly thereby, that the proclaiming of the free grace of God to men, in the pardon of their sins, and letting them know it, before they sin, doth not destroy obedience to the law of God, but establishes it better than any other can do. You will see it clearly, Rom.3:23-26, where the apostle preaches grace, in the absolute freeness of it, to persons that are utterly undone, and know not what to do; and, in verse 31, he brings in an objection, "do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law." The apostle making his conclusion that "we are justified by faith, without the deeds of the law;" says, this establishes the law, and doth not make it void; to know, that from all the sins we commit, we are freely justified by his grace, establishes obedience to it; so, in chapter 6:1,2, having gone on to declare the exceeding riches of the grace of God in chapter 4 & 5, makes the same objection in substance that he did before, "what shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Wherein he shows plainly, that though some may collect that this is a way to make men continue in sin, to preach the exceeding riches of the grace of God; yet, he saith, there can be no such conclusion drawn from it, by just inference, "how shall we that are dead unto sin, live any longer therein?" Wherein he puts it to the objectors themselves, whether they can make it out, how it is possible it should be; therefore, he makes use of it, as the strength of his argument to prevail with people. Likewise, in chapter 12:1, where the apostle says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, &c." You see he makes use of mercy, and what mercy is it? In chapter 11:33,34, he seems to intimate just what that mercy is, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Wherein? In that "he hath concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all;" therefore, I beseech you by these, and all other mercies of free grace "to present your

bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God," not conforming yourselves to this world; as if he had said, mercy is that which will prevail with you most of all, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, and not conform yourselves to the world; but I go on to that we have yet to consider. I have spent some time in objections and answers, but we cannot now dwell upon them. We are to consider now the specialties of the argument the apostle useth here to prevail with people that they sin not.

Beloved, this very text is the opening of the fountain for sin, and for uncleanness; it is a spring of water to revive a fainting and swooning spirit; it is the prop of a tottering soul, to keep it from sinking and perishing; in it the Lord Christ is revealed unto us, an all-sufficient succor to all his own, notwithstanding all their sins that ever they commit. Here we consider: 1. The matter of his argument. 2. The force and strength of it, in reference to the thing the apostle would argue from hence.

1. The matter of the argument itself that is contained in these words, "if any man sin," &c. The force of it lies in the reference of it to the thing the apostle calls for; wherein we may consider, what prevalency this position hath to keep from sin; namely, for persons to know, that when they sin, they have an advocate with the Father.

We begin with the matter of the argument, and in this proposition there are two things observable; a supposition, and a provision of indemnity against the mischief supposed. The supposition is in these words, "if any man sin;" the provision of indemnity is, "we have an advocate with the Father," &c. In the supposition you may note, the thing supposed, sin; and the time which illustrates it; he speaks of present and future sins; he doth not say, if any sin heretofore, in the preterit-tense, but he speaks of the time present, "if any man sin;" there are some things that are spoken of the present time, that are in force, but only that very instant in which they are spoken; and that instant being past, the thing itself is also past; but, for this expression, "if any man sin," it is not transient, but permanent; the apostle speaks not only of his time, and of the people of it, "if any man sin" now; the very words are not to be understood of that very instant only, and exclusively, as having reference only to those that did sin in his time, then these words should have been transient; but the meaning is, that the present of which he spake, should be a standing present time, and the words should be of force for present, even as long as the word of God should remain upon record; they are to be understood of this present time, and all present times that shall be in the next age that shall succeed; if any man sin now, or in the next age; there is to be understood a perpetuity of present time, in this expression. It is of great concern, beloved, that you receive this truth, unless you exclude yourselves from the benefit of the advocate-ship of Christ; for, if the words were intended only for that time wherein they were expressed; what should become of us that live so many ages after? They must therefore be of a perpetual and permanent being.

Note in the supposition, the nature of it, "if any man sin," saith the apostle; this word "if" admits of a double construction; either the supposition imports a thing possible, but not likely; or a thing that may be likely to come to pass, or rather that will come to pass. Either it is a supposition, in case a thing is, which, it may be, will not; or a supposition by way of confession and granting of the thing supposed. In this place, John puts not the word "if" by way of supposition, as if it were only likely there should be a sinning; and if there were a sinning, there were an advocate; but he puts the word here by way of concession, as if he had said, there must and will be sinning; we, God's own people, shall fall into sin, it cannot be denied; but for refuge, when such sins are committed, know that there is an "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Thus you have the first part of the text branched out unto you; namely, the apostle's supposition.

Consider the provision that the Lord, by the apostle, holds forth unto persons that are believers, the members of Christ, for their indemnity against sins they do, or shall commit; namely, "we have an advocate with the Father." In which observe, the office assigned for the making good such provision, "we have an advocate with the Father;" the person to whom this office of advocate-ship is given, and therein the ability and qualification of him to manage it effectually, "Jesus Christ the righteous;" and the issue, and the event of the execution of this office, "he is the propitiation for our sins."

In the office that the Lord sets on foot for the provision of indemnity against sin, being committed, you may observe, the office itself, and that is an advocate-ship; the propriety of this office, or the relation of it to the persons that are the members of Christ. The apostle doth not say, simply and abstractedly that there is an advocate, but he speaks relatively, we have an advocate, that is, our advocate, &c. This advocate is set forth, not only in his relation to men, as theirs, but also unto God; for he doth not say simply, we have an advocate; but declares the excellency of this office, by this circumstance, with the Father; that is, we have an advocate, he is our advocate; and not only so, but an advocate of ours with the Father; which notes unto us, that the plea of Christ for indemnity from sin, is not in any inferior court; where, if there be a sentence of acquittance procured, there may be a charge from an higher; but the advocate-ship of Christ is managed for our good, in the highest court of all, with the highest judge; that when he gets a sentence, it is definitive, and there is no other court that can take upon it the determination of the case; or call in question the trial of that which hath been determined there.

The provision in respect of the office assigned is excellently illustrated by the circumstance of time, when on foot, or when the officer manages it. The text doth not say, we had, or shall have an advocate, but he speaks in the present tense, "we have an advocate," that now is to act. It is but cold comfort for a man to say, being now a beggar, he had abundance of wealth; neither doth it give him fulness of comfort, to say, that he shall have abundance of wealth hereafter; but herein lies his comfort, that he can say in truth, I am rich, I have abundance of all things. It is but cold comfort for a man to say, I had a friend in court once, but he is dead now; if he had been alive now, it had been better with me than it is, I should have sped well; I had then carried the cause on my side; he would have done so and so for me; but here lies a man's comfort, that he hath a friend at court that will do him a good office at his need; the apostle saith here, "we have an advocate." As, therefore, I said of the present being of sin committed, so I say of the present being of our advocate; it must not be understood to be a transient, but a permanent sentence; it was in force in the apostle's time, it is as full in force in our time; and we may as well and truly say, "we have an advocate;" and, in after ages, the church of God shall say it to the end of the world in their times; as truly as we now and the apostle in his time.

Consider here the person managing this office of advocate-ship, who is described unto us by three notable titles that are proper and full for the comfort and encouragement of those, whose advocate he is; he is "Jesus Christ the righteous." He is Jesus, and that is a word that imports a Saviour, as the angel expounded it, "and they shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." {Mt.1:21} An admirable encouragement to lift up the heads of dejected and drooping spirits, when the advocate comes to plead; this advocate is their Saviour; that is, his plea is of such force and prevalency, that he saves his client.

But some may say, many times in suits of law, men might have skillful lawyers, which are able to save them, who are not admitted to plead for them, because they are not called to the bar.

Yea, but this Jesus is Christ too; this advocate does not rush into this office of his own head, without warrant, but is called to it for, as you shall hear afterwards, the word Christ imports anointing to the office. Many a good lawyer, indeed, may not be admitted to come to the bar of Common Pleas, although he can plead the cause of his client the best of all; he must be authorized and called unto the bar, or else he may not speak; but the advocate provided for the indemnity against sin, is Christ, he is called to it.

This advocate is "Jesus Christ the righteous;" and that imports the strength of the plea he hath, by which he becomes a propitiation for sin; it is his righteousness that prevails in heaven, to get the sentence on the side of the client.

Lastly, you may observe here, the issue what will become of this advocate-ship, what effect it will have at the last; many who have causes in suit, are restless to know how their cause will go; when they come to trial, fain they would know on which side the verdict will be given, and it is a great refreshing to persons, to know beforehand, that the cause will go on their side. Now, the apostle here intimates unto us, what will become of the cause before it is tried; he is such an advocate with the

Father, saith he, that he is become the propitiation for all the sins of God's people; and what that is, we shall show hereafter beloved, this is a large field of excellent variety of sweetness and fatness; we must take the particulars into consideration, that we may discuss them the more orderly; and I hope it will be no difficulty to gather some of the flowers in this garden; and the Spirit of the Lord assisting, there may be such sucking, that persons may be satisfied at the breasts of consolations. That we may the better lay our mouths to this breast, and draw more easily the milk of it, let us briefly consider these particulars.

The office here spoken of, what it is to be an advocate, and how Christ manages it, being in Heaven; whose cause it is, that Christ undertakes to be an advocate for; how he is qualified for the comfortable managing of this office; and what it is to have Christ to be the propitiation for the sins of his people; for this is the sum of the whole drift of the apostle, in these words.

What the office of advocate-ship is, and what it is for Christ to be an advocate, and how he now manages it in heaven for his elect. This office, as it is appropriated unto Christ, is not once more mentioned in all the scripture besides. Of an Intercessor and Redeemer, and the atonement, we read frequently in scripture, that Christ is all these; but that Christ is an advocate, is not mentioned in all the scripture but in this place; therefore it will be the more difficult to find out the intention of the Holy Ghost, what he means by it. The word advocate is used in John 15:26, and attributed unto the Holy Ghost, and is there translated the Comforter; saith the text, "the Comforter will come." Now the same word that we have here "advocate," is also and indeed the proper signification of the word "a comfortable advocate." But what is this advocate-ship, you will say? It is a borrowed expression, and an allusion, opening the prevalency of Christ with the Father, for his own people; it is taken from an office among men. Advocates in the common law, you call them counselors, but in the civil law, they have this very title of advocate. The office is, namely, being well experienced in the nature of the law, and the rules and principles of justice; whenever a cause comes to be tried, they are to make clear those principles, and so plead justice on the behalf of the client. I say, the office of an advocate is to plead the cause of a person as it stands in equity and justice, and to demand and require a sentence of acquittance from justice and equity itself; and herein an advocate differs from a suppliant; a suppliant makes only requests, and depends altogether upon favour alone; so as if he should stand to the rigor of justice, he must be gone, and his cause must miscarry; but an advocate stands to the justice of a person, whose cause he pleads, and puts the issue of the trial on justice itself; that as the cause can be cleared to be just, so the judge would pass a sentence upon it. Just so, I say, is it with Christ, pleading the cause of his own people with the Father, in respect of indemnity from sin; for his advocate-ship is this, namely, to lay the law to the Father, to plead justice in the discharge of the sinner that commits sin, that it is but right to discharge him; and it were injustice, if he should not; I say it is most certainly true, that Christ stands here upon justice, and he will in righteousness have God to discharge his own people from all the sins that they commit; and he pleads, that it is an unrighteous thing, to charge them with them, or to plague or punish them for them.

But some, peradventure, will be ready to say, this cannot be, that Christ, as an advocate, should plead for indemnity upon terms of justice; for in the strictness and rigor of justice, the soul that sins must die; and the gospel seems to say, it is only and solely grace, that any person is discharged from sin; for, in justice, there cannot be a claim made of pardon and discharge from sin; but all the plea must be merely bounty and favour.

This objection seems to have a great deal of strength in it. How may these two things stand together, that Christ pleading justice, God must forgive; and yet, notwithstanding, justice sentences a person unto death if he sins? For answer to this, you must learn to distinguish, and I desire you warily to observe this distinction, that so you may plainly see a reconciliation of that which seems impossible to be reconciled; namely, consider the pardon, or discharge from sin, in regard of anything laid down, in consideration of sin committed by the person who partakes of pardon; and this pardon, or discharge from sin, in reference unto Christ who gets it. Now, in respect of us that partake of this discharge from sin, and in regard of anything that we can bring in recompense for it, it is merely and only grace, that sinners, being the members of Christ, are discharged. When you, or I, commit a sin, that God

discharges us, doth not lay our sins to us, or doth not give sentence of damnation upon us for such sins committed, it is an act of mere grace alone; justice cannot be pleaded in this case.

But then, consider the indemnity from sin, in respect of Christ, who gets this discharge; then he is to be considered two ways; as he is allowed by the Father to stand in the room of such persons, whose cause he pleads; or, as he hath actually made full payment, his satisfaction being allowed and admitted before. Now, I answer, considering Christ, in his being allowed by the Father to stand in the room of the persons whose cause he pleads; this discharge from sin by him, is an act of grace; Christ cannot plead justice, that he should be allowed; there was not a tie upon the Father, that Christ should be in man's room, and that he should be unrighteous, if he did not ordain him to be so; it was an act of free grace in God, when men were under the curse, and became miserable bankrupts, that Christ should make satisfaction for them. When one man owes another money, it is not an unrighteous act in the creditor to refuse a surety; he may make the debtor pay the debt himself, if he will; it is matter of grace, mere courtesy so to do; even so it is matter of grace, that Christ is admitted to come in the room of man, and bear his sins; to be admitted to bear the wrath of God for these sins, that another hath committed, is an act of grace; and, in regard of these particulars, is the scripture so frequent in expressions of the free grace of God, in communicating this discharge and pardon of sin unto sinners.

But consider, Christ allowed of the Father to stand in the room of men, as he hath come forth, and paid down the utmost farthing that God in justice could demand for, or in consideration of these sins committed by his people. I say, when Christ hath deposited into the hands of his Father, the utmost farthing that he could charge upon, or demand of believers; this being received by the Father, and acknowledgment being made by him, upon the receipt of what Christ hath paid; this is an act of justice, that the Father should justify and acquit these persons, for whom he hath received of Christ this satisfaction, and accordingly hath acknowledged it, under his own hand, and acquitted them. You know, though it be in a man's power whether he will take a surety, or the principal, for his money; yet when he hath taken a surety, and he hath made payment, it is an act of unrighteousness in the creditor, after the acknowledgment of full satisfaction, to come upon the principal, and make him pay the money; and it is plea grounded in law, that if that cause come in trial, the judge ought to acquit the principal, if it be proved that the debt is paid by the surety.

Now, Christ hath paid all that the Father could ask, and he hath acknowledged full satisfaction for all. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." {Is.53:11} Now, being satisfied, it is an act of justice, that the Father should acquit a person in this manner. Suppose one should be brought before a judge, in a cause wherein he owes the judge himself such a sum of money; an advocate comes and pleads the cause before the judge, that it is true, there was so much money lent, and borrowed, but, saith the advocate, I myself became the surety for that man, I paid every farthing; here is the acquittance you gave under your own hand; now, I ask this question, the judge being convinced, and a righteous judge too, of the truth of the plea, whether in judgment he ought not to acquit that person, whose cause is pleaded before him? He took satisfaction, he acknowledged it, he could have it but of him, therefore in justice he must discharge him. The same case is between God and us; it is true, indeed, believers commit those things that are in their own nature debts; "forgive us our debts," as the word is; but when this cause came to be pleaded before God, the judge himself, to whom the debt was owing, Christ the advocate came, and stood up and pleaded, that he himself being become the Surety of a better testament, upon it he came, and paid the whole debt; and he, having satisfied his Father, received under his hand, that he had paid every farthing, and that he was completely satisfied, and that upon that satisfaction his people should be discharged. Now, this plea is grounded upon justice itself; for observe how fully and clearly the apostle speaks the same things, "the blood of Christ his Son, cleanseth from all sins;" and here, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins;" and again, "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Mark well, that the apostle grounds himself upon Christ's satisfaction; namely, his blood that cleanseth us from all sin;

upon this he concludes that it is an act of faithfulness and justice in God to forgive it. I dare say, none are so ignorant in these days of light, as to think there is such a proportion between confession of sin and forgiveness, that confession can balance forgiveness, and so, consequently, make it an act of justice; no, the apostle grounds the force of justice upon the blood of Christ that is shed; therefore, if you observe it well, you will find, that he speaks of confession, by way of prevention of fear; for you know the common proverb concerning a malefactor apprehended, "let him confess, and be hanged;" and why so? Because, if it be disclosed, the law lays hold upon him, and he shall be sure to die for it; and therefore, in natural policy, his safety lies in concealing it. But, if satisfaction hath been made by a friend of his to the law, and accordingly a pardon sued out for him, there is no danger in his confession. Now, the apostle in this place, having before said, that "the blood of Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sins," from hence gathers encouragement unto the people of Christ, that they should not fear, so as to conceal their sins, lest being known, they should do them a mischief; but, saith he, lay all open before the Lord, there is no danger to be suspected now, for God is faithful and just to forgive them; therefore the hiding of them should prevent no evil, because no evil should come upon them for them, though they were laid open never so naked. Therefore was this spoken by the apostle, to take away fear, and is the true meaning of the Holy Ghost I say, to take away fear from the damage that would ensue, if we should confess our sins. Paul writing to Timothy, mark what he ascribes to participating of the excellencies of Christ, even of righteousness and justice, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness;" {II Tim.4:7;} mark, "a crown of righteousness is laid up;" in which is included the discharge from sin, and participating of glory, and this prepared and laid up; but mark the foundation of his confidence, that he shall partake of it; it is a righteous judge that shall give it; he shall give it out of righteousness itself; justice shall prevail with him to do this thing. Whence it is, that Christ is called so frequently, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS;" {Jer.23:6; Jer.33:16; Is.54:17;} a prophecy concerning the righteous branch; and his name shall be called, "the Lord our righteousness;" that is, the Lord that is righteous, makes us one with God, and communicates his own righteousness unto us, that we may be the delight of the Father.

Give me leave to tell you, beloved, that God is so unchangeable in all his attributes, that even Christ himself is not able to obtain anything of him that may be any ways prejudicial to any attribute; he can get nothing of the Father, whereby his justice may suffer, or be violated. Christ must make it clear, that justice shall have its full due, and God shall not need to bate one grain of what it expects, or else Christ himself can have nothing of him; for he came not to destroy the law, much less that which is essential unto God. Justice is essential unto him; if Christ violate justice, he should destroy the very being of God himself; without giving justice satisfaction, this would be a derogation to the Father; hence when Christ pleads with him for the sons of men, that they might have a discharge from sin, he makes it manifest, that all he asks of him, is according to justice; nay, he makes it appear, that justice is as much satisfied in discharging of believers from their sins, as it is in the damnation of the reprobates in hell for theirs.

Justice hath no more right in their damnation, than it hath in the other's acquittance and discharge; in their damnation, to satisfy justice, there is no more but the wrath of God revealed from heaven, and executed upon them; now, for those that are the members of Christ, and discharged by him from their sins, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and poured out upon his Son in their behalf; who sustained, in respect of the proportion of justice, equivalently to all the torments the reprobates in hell do; so that Christ hath as fully satisfied the justice of God for his elect, as it is satisfied in the damned in hell, who suffer in their own persons; surely, there had been no need of his coming into the world, if believers might have been saved, and justice violated without satisfaction; but now justice had been violated, had not a proportional recompense been made, before the sin had been discharged from the person committing it. Therefore the psalmist speaks admirably, when he saith, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." {Ps.85:10} This place is appropriated unto Christ, showing, that in managing the work of redemption of the sons of men, as he exalts mercy, so he doth not diminish justice; but carries the business so,

that both of them have their due, and so their due, that they agree one with another; nay, embrace and kiss each other; they come to rejoice and triumph in the satisfaction of each ether.

And, therefore, it is but an ignorant imagination in the hearts of some men, that God will grow more remiss in respect of the sins of his own people; that he is not so much offended with sin, after Christ died, as before; for he hath all the abhorring, detesting thoughts of sin in the nature of it, since Christ is dead, as he had before; it is altogether as abominable unto him, as before; Christ did not come to make sin less filthy to the Lord, or to make a person, where sin is, more lovely, or less hateful to him, but rather declares, and sets forth the wrath of God against sin in the highest degree.

Wherever the Lord seeth sin, and not Christ upon the person taking away that sin, he cannot but hate both the sin, and the sinner. All the pleasure the Lord takes in the sons of men, proceeds from a purity Christ puts upon them; and the taking away of that sinfulness from them, which otherwise could not but stir up indignation and wrath in him against them, where he finds it, is the ground upon which Christ pleads justice, that so it might appear there is no violation of it; but the Lord is as well satisfied, as if the person transgressing had laid under the wrath deserved, in his own person. I could wish, I were able to speak to you in so full and clear language, that not one dram of this glorious mystery of this gospel of Christ might be hid, for the comforting and refreshing of your spirits; the thing I drive at, being, that all the people of Christ might know wherein lies their strong consolation, not in themselves, as if they did not sin, or could make amends for their sins; but in him who hath made perfect amends for them, and in whom they are accepted with the Father, {as if they themselves in their own persons had made this amends,} who hath presented them so complete in himself unto him, that he is pleased to look upon them as upon his own innocent Son, and to take pleasure in them, with the same pleasure that he takes in his own Beloved. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." {Mt.17:5} And, if ever you mean to have your consciences, and your consolations established, well grounded, concerning the pardon of your sins, you must see that Christ hath only pleaded, doth plead out your acquittance and discharge, and this your indemnity, even to the satisfying of justice itself. For if justice be not yet satisfied; if the Lord hath yet a plea against your souls, and Christ hath not fully answered it, but left this plea with God, who shall stand up before him, Christ being silent to plead for you? God's justice comes in, and pleads terribly against you, and will exact satisfaction of you; therefore you must receive this principle, if you will be established in consolation; that as there is mercy in respect of us, who bring nothing in consideration of our sins; so there is justice in forgiving sin, in respect of Christ our advocate, that manages his office, and makes it known for this very end, that we might have the stronger consolation.