

SERMON XXXVI

CHRIST'S ADVOCATESHIP FOR ALL THE ELECT

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"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." {I Jn.2:1,2}

We have formerly {as some of you may remember} entered upon these words; wherein the apostle makes the proposal of the grace of God in Christ, the encouragement unto people to forbear sin. The first thing we noted from hence was, that the knowledge of an advocate that becomes a propitiation for sin, even for such as commit sin, is so far from opening a gap unto a licentious life, that indeed it is the best means to keep us from it. The last day we fell upon the matter of the argument, which the apostle useth to dissuade little children from sin, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Herein we proposed to be considered.

What this advocate-ship of Christ is and how he manages it? Whose cause it is that Christ here pleads? How he is qualified for this office? What the issue of this advocate-ship of Christ is, proposed in the last words of the text; "he is the propitiation for our sins?"

What this office of advocate-ship is, the sum is briefly this; the office of an advocate is to plead the cause of a man, as it is in justice and right; so that the advocate-ship of Christ consists in pleading the discharge of his people, even from the principle of right and justice.

Whereas it is objected, and indeed seems a thing irreconcilable, namely, that this discharge from sin, goes all along under the notion of free grace and pardon, how can this be, if it be merely an act of justice, for God to forgive sins?

This may easily be reconciled with distinction; discharge from sin, in respect of us, or what we can bring by way of recompense for the sin committed, is merely free grace, for we can bring nothing at all; also in respect of Christ, as he is allowed to stand in our room, it is grace too; but, Christ being allowed and admitted, and the Lord having taken the full payment he could ask at his hands, and acknowledging satisfaction upon such payment; this act of Christ makes it an act of justice, that God should forgive sins; and therefore the apostle in I John 1:7, tells us, "that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all our sins;" and concludes, that "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;" but, I cannot insist upon what I have formerly delivered now, peradventure some, {though I confess a little over-curious,} desire to understand how Christ, being now in heaven, executes this office of advocate-ship, or in what sense he is said to plead the cause of his people. I call it a curious query, because the scriptures are very sparing in declaring the manner of Christ's managing this office; that he is an advocate, is clear enough; how he deals with God in the execution of it, is more obscure. Frequent mention is made indeed of Christ's intercession in heaven; "he ever liveth to make intercession for us;" yet though this be frequently mentioned, and the comfort of God's people much laid upon this, yet the scriptures are very sparing as to what kind of intercession he makes, whether he prays to his Father in heaven, as he did upon earth; and the like I say, of this business of advocate-ship. Some few passages of scripture there are that will give some hint, at least have some glimmerings of the very manner of Christ's advocate-ship, and the execution of it. Hebrews 11:4, will give us some light, "by faith {saith the apostle} Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh;" that is, by which sacrifice. The sacrifices, you know, were Christ in the antitype; for all the life of them, from which men obtain testimony of God, that they are

righteous, is Christ himself; and it is Christ in sacrifice that speaks, even when the sacrifice itself is offered. I conceive therefore, beloved, as sacrifices speak, in respect of a prevailing power they have with God, when he sits in judgment; so likewise the advocate-ship of Christ, which is nothing else but the speaking of Christ, is managed after such a manner. Christ speaks as sacrifice speaks; for, indeed, he as advocate pleads only as a sacrifice for man. In chapter 12:22-24, you have another expression, a little more clear. "But ye are come {saith the apostle} unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Here you see, whereas he in the former chapter, put a voice, or a plea in the mouth of sacrifices, in this, he speaks more plainly, and puts a voice, or plea, to that which is the life of sacrifices; namely, the blood of sprinkling, the blood of Jesus Christ; and, this is that which speaks better things than the blood of Abel. You know that there was a strong plea in his blood, which cried from earth to heaven, till it brought vengeance upon the head of Cain; the blood of Christ, hath a stronger plea, and cry, and is for better purposes; so that under favour, {for in this I shall not contend much,} so far as I can see, the value and desert of the bloodshed of Christ is the plea that he makes as advocate in heaven; that when a believer commits sin, the efficacy of the blood shed is fresh in the presence of the Lord, in the behalf of that poor wretch that hath thus sinned; I say, the blood is present, and the whole efficacy, and virtue of it, is fresh in the thoughts of the Lord; and, as it is thus effectual and powerful, brings the discharge and acknowledgment of it to his thoughts too, if I may so speak, whereby he is pacified towards them, and pleased with them. This is always before him; and present with him; yea, when the sins that a believer commits are present; and the counter-plea of the value of the blood of Christ overcomes the natural plea of the sin itself; but I will not dwell upon this, but hasten to another thing very considerable, which is.

Whose cause it is that Christ pleads with the Father; or, for whom the value and virtue of his blood pleads? I remember the disciples, when Christ spake generally concerning his betraying, were very inquisitive, "is it I," saith one; "is it I," saith another. I doubt not, but in regard of the prevalency of the plea of the blood of Christ, many persons present will fall upon this enquiry; "is it I" that he means? Is he my advocate? Am I his client? I shall endeavour to make it clear, and to resolve it, as the apostle here proposes it.

The plea that Christ puts up for the persons, whose cause he undertakes, are all sorts of believers whatsoever, high or low, rich or poor, nay, strong or weak; he pleads their cause, he is the advocate of the weakest believer in the world; nay, more, when he is the greatest sinner, I mean, when he falls foully; when he falls, it may be, through the weakness of his faith, making him suspect that Christ will be silent in his cause, in regard of such failings, and sinfulness, he is then as properly the advocate of such a believer, who peradventure, falls into some scandalous evil. Mark but the apostle, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father;" he makes no exception, neither in respect of persons, nor sins; he doth not say, if any man sin merely of infirmity and common frailty; but in general, "if any man sin;" as if he had said, there must something be done by believers, that goes beyond the being of sin, before they can be excluded from having interest in the advocate-ship of Christ; here he speaks expressly, there is an advocate-ship of Christ, for believers sinning, without exception. I know it is too frequent among many, that more gross sins than ordinary in a believer, not only waste the conscience, but also interpose between such a person and Christ, of which we shall have occasion to speak elsewhere. For the present, there is a conceit that if a believer sins more than ordinarily, presently there is a just cause for him to suspect Christ will not sufficiently manage his office for him, at least hath not sufficiently managed it already; so that there is cause of fear. But, let me tell you, to the everlasting consolation of God's people, that there is no sin, which a believer can commit, which can exclude him from the benefit of this advocate-ship of Christ, or bring him beyond the bounds of this large grant, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father;" and, if it be any man, you will say, it extends to all men in the world, as well as believers. Nay, there is a restraint in

the words, and you shall easily see it; "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father;" if any of us that have fellowship with the Father and the Son; it is not every one that hath Christ for an advocate, but those that are believers; those that have right to fellowship with the Father and the Son, are only spoken of in this place. I speak this, to the end that those, who through fear of death, are subject unto bondage all their lives long, may know that Christ is come to deliver them, and reveals this truth, on purpose to deliver them from the fear of death, and bondage, by being their advocate for their sins; he is an advocate, he is a propitiation for every sin of his elect. The words run in the general to the end, for the apostle doth not say, he is not an advocate for such and such believers, that sin so and so; if they commit sin so and so aggravated, and their sins rise to such an height, there is no propitiation for them; but he speaks in the general stile, "if any man sin," and he is the propitiation for our sins; yet, beloved, I must be bold to go a little further, in respect of the persons whose cause Christ pleads, and in whose behalf he is an advocate; for I say, it is for all sorts of believers; nay, I go further, it is for more than present ones, even for some who are not so for the present, but remain, as yet, in a state of unbelief.

In brief, Christ is the advocate of the cause of every person for whom he paid the price, of redemption, whether they be already called, or not yet acquainted with the grace of God; for every elect person, as well unconverted, as converted, Christ equally, in respect of the substance of his plea, interposes; but, when I say, he pleads as well for the unconverted, as for the converted, I mean for such unconverted persons as belong unto the election of grace, and have their portion in the price of his blood.

Beloved, for my own part, I cannot yet conceive any other considerable difference, between the plea of Christ for converted persons, and the elect unconverted, but this circumstantial one; namely, that the value of his blood is equally of force, to believers and unbelievers, being elected; saving that believers have this privilege, that Christ pleads for the manifestation of this discharge unto them, but not for the present unto the unconverted; till such time as they shall be called to the faith, and, by that faith, that thing be made evident, which before was hid. I say, the pardon of sin, by the blood of Christ, is as full for the unconverted, as fully passed over in grant, I mean, as to the believer himself. God adds never a tittle of pardon itself more to him that is a believer, than to him not yet converted to the faith, in regard of the substance of it.

For the clearing of this, I beseech you to note, what is the rise or ground-work of the pardon of sin, and when it is complete with God. These two things considered, you will perceive that all the pardon, in respect of the substance of it, that God passed over unto men is before their conversion. Look, I say, upon the rise, or original, of the pardon of sin, it is the gracious grant of God, upon the blood of Christ shed; this is the only foundation of pardon; and there is no pardon applicable to any person, but what is to be found in the word of grace. Thou, that art a believer at present, hast the pardon of thy sins in thy spirit, thou art assured of it; where hast thou this pardon? Didst thou not fetch it out of the word of grace? Then, as soon as that was first published, this grace of pardon was held forth. If thou found it not here, then somewhere else; but where will you have this grant to build upon, if you have it not in the word of grace? You will say, the Spirit of God will reveal it unto you. It is true indeed; but if he reveals a grant of grace, it is according to his word. The Spirit speaking out of the word of grace to men, speaks not otherwise, but according to it, in men; and if there be a contradiction between the inward voice, and this word of grace, it is enough to give you cause of suspicion; yea, you may be confident, that this voice within you, being a contradiction, is false; I say, Christ sends us unto his word, and from that we take out the pardon of sin.

Now, beloved, I beseech you to consider, if all pardon to all the elect, to the end of the world, be contained in this word of grace, there is no more pardon than what is written there; then it must needs follow, that God passed over this at that instant, when he entered it in the volume of his book. Is there no pardon till thou art converted? Then it is not to be found in this word of grace, because this was written before thy conversion; so that either you must deny the pardon that is properly and truly revealed in the word, and must seek out some newer than is revealed; or you must acknowledge

that which is granted unto men, is, in regard of the substance of it, as soon as it was in the volume of his book.

Hence it is plain, that as believers coming to believe, fetch out of this word of grace their pardon; so unconverted persons elected, have their grace equally in it, only the Lord hides the publication of it to them, till such time as he is pleased to call them, and give them faith to read their portion here, as other believers have before. It is true, indeed, though the pardon of every unconverted elect person be equally passed over by the Lord, yet, till their conversion, he gives no more hint of it than he gives to the reprobates themselves. This is that which will take away the suspected inconveniences that may follow upon pardon already granted before conversion; for whereas, men may think this will make unconverted men presume, to know their pardon before; I say, it is true, there is such a pardon for them, but they know it not, nor ever shall know it, till they be brought out of darkness to the glorious light of the Lord Jesus Christ; otherwise, how can it be true, that all the sins of God's people, past, present, and to come, are all of them at once pardoned, as the godly learned protestants say? Whence shall a believer, coming to believe, fetch all his comfort, that all his sins, while he was in rebellion, were pardoned, if there were not a grant of this extant before; upon which, as upon a sure foundation, his believing might stay itself?

How comes it to pass, that persons are not cut off before they are called, if their sins are not pardoned; which stand between the wrath of God and them? Nothing else but the blood of Christ stands between them, even between the destroying wrath of God, and his people that commit sin, even before conversion. In a word, where will you find a new act of God since the grants registered in his book? Certain I am, that the persons pardoned were not converted, when this was made; and if there be, or come, after this was first made, a new grant, either it must be entered anew here, or be in a new book by itself.

If, therefore, all pardons are as ancient as this record, then they are more ancient than the present believing of any person that now liveth. Hence, we may let persons know, that it is but a rash expression to say, that such and such a person is in the state of damnation {if it be meant he is so before God} while he remains in the state of un-conversion; and the wrath of God abides upon that person, though elected, till he be called. Beloved, let me tell you, the state of the unconverted elect persons is as sure from danger of final miscarriage, as the estate of a saint in glory; saints stand there by the blood of Christ alone, which hath purchased the pardon of sin for the unconverted elect person; so that the same discharge of them, by the blood of Christ, concerns the one as much as the other; but, I say, still the unconverted person cannot make any conclusion from all this, because he cannot know his portion till he believes.

How is Christ qualified for such a vocation as this? His office is of admirable use to men; to be a propitiation for their sins, and to get the discharge of God manifested to a person, for whom he pleads it, is of great consolation; so then it must needs be, that the advocate that is to plead the cause be well gifted for that employment. It is too well known, that a righteous cause many a time miscarries in the world, through the deceitfulness or simplicity of the counsel. When men come upon life and death, it concerns them much to have a skillful lawyer to plead for them; or else for lack of urging that, which is most necessary to be pleaded, they miscarry and perish. The Holy Ghost therefore, beloved, is pleased to impart unto us, not only that Christ is an advocate, and whose cause it is that he pleads; but also communicates unto us, the largeness of the gifts of Christ, for the managing of this office. I will not go beyond the text itself, to observe to you the fullness of the gifts of Christ, to manage this advocate-ship, even to that effect and issue, that his heart can desire, that is, more than thy heart can desire. There are three titles appropriated in this place unto Christ, all of them very aptly and sweetly manifesting his excellent gifts, as mediator, or as advocate for, or on the behalf of poor believers, to wit, "Christ Jesus the righteous;" every title setting forth how he is gifted.

The title Christ contains much in it to strengthen our confidence in him, which is to plead our cause; it is a word that properly signifies anointed. Now, anointing carries two things along with it; the separation, or calling of such a person anointed to some special office; and the abilities of the person for the office that he is called unto; so that our advocate being Christ, and called so here, imports

unto us, the lawful call of Christ unto it, by him that authorizes him; and the large abilities he hath to manage it.

The title Christ imports unto us, his lawful call to plead; as the apostle saith, Heb.5:4-6, that "no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." Where he further clears, how Christ was lawfully called unto it; for "the Lord sworn, {saith he,} and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." {Heb.7:21} Here is calling. Of what moment is this, will you say? I answer, of great moment; let Christ be ever so able to plead, except the Lord admit him to it, he must hold his tongue. You know in common law itself, there are students in it, and counselors, then sergeants at law; a student in the law, it may be, is more able to plead a cause, and can do it better than some sergeant at law, or some others that are called; but yet, because he is not called, he must hold his tongue. Beloved, were Christ our advocate a novice, and not graduated; if he were not called to the bar, though he can plead never so excellently with God, he could not be heard. God will give a call before he hears; and thus Christ is called.

Yet again, when men are called to be counselors, they cannot plead at every bar; at the Common Pleas none plead but a sergeant at law; though many counselors be able lawyers, and better gifted than some sergeants, yet this will not suffice, as he is not called to the bar in special; and therefore, they must not come till they have the call as the sergeants have. The Lord doth not bid us to seek his face without a mediator; but he that is the advocate at the court in heaven, is the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the man Christ; he that hath the best rhetoric in the world to plead his case, must have him as a sergeant to plead for him; he cannot be admitted in this court to plead for himself. The ministers of God are in some sort the pleaders of our cause, yet they themselves, must have this sergeant to plead for them, when they come to this tribunal of God, and he alone is admitted to it. And it is a great matter to know what kind of Christ he is, that is singled out; and then you must know, that if the world offer this service unto you, to plead your cause before God, it would not avail; if this man Christ were not freely assigned, and called to plead your cause, you are gone forever, for nothing and no one can be heard but him. You will say, the servants of God are heard when they pray. I say, Christ is only heard when he prays; you must pray in faith, saith James, "let him not think that he shall obtain anything at the hand of the Lord that wavers;" he must ask in faith, that is, he must ask in Christ, for faith rests not upon itself, but entirely upon him. It is Christ that gets everything for men; it is not they themselves, nor their prayers, but it is Christ that prevails. Now, this advocate speaks his mind, and is admitted to do it to the full; but this is not all, he is qualified that he may plead effectually. There may be some unrighteous judge in the world, that may call men for favour, as a father calls his son, whether he be qualified or no, that is not regarded; this man for some bye respects, shall come to the bar; but God is a righteous judge, that hath no partiality; Christ indeed is his Son, but he is not called merely for favour, but as he calls him so he breeds him; you know, beloved, that at the inns of court, the judges and prime lawyers are teachers of students, and when they find them proficient, they call and admit them to the bar; so Christ is the student, and the Father instructs and tutors him; he breeds him up, if I may speak, after the manner of men, to be fit for the advocate-ship, and when fit, he puts him into it.

You will find anointing, as in the word Christ, imports gifting of men, when they are called out. Aaron was anointed and gifted to make atonement; and so Saul, when Samuel anointed him, the text saith that God gave him another {a regal} heart; when he made him a king, he gave him the heart of one, a kingly spirit. {I Sam.10:9} And this was that which Solomon prayed for, when the crown was set upon his head, that God would give him a wise and understanding heart, to go in and out before his great people; and the Lord answered him, and gave him wisdom; so that there was none before him, nor after him, like unto him; {I Kgs.4:29;} even so God did with Christ, as he was anointed to be our advocate, and as he anointed him, he gifted him for it, as he saith, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty." {Ps.89:19} Christ is the person that must bring help, and therefore must be mighty. You see that God gifted Christ, when he called him forth, "thou hast ascended up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men." Here the office of Christ is to deliver captives, and for this purpose must be gifted; if he be not qualified, he will fail in the execution of it. But above all,

Isaiah 42:1-8, manifestly clears this matter; "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles, &c." Here you see how many expressions the Lord uses to show how he qualified his Son Christ that so he may be fit to manage his business.

He is not only called Christ, but he is Christ Jesus, and the title further illustrates the excellency of his qualifications to be an advocate; Jesus, is a name importing the effectual prevalency of Christ in his plea. I will not stand to clear the signification of it by the etymology of the word; but for a more sensible understanding of it, the word is taken up and examined by the Holy Ghost himself, Matt.1:21, when the angel brings the tidings of his birth, he gave his name; "they shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins;" Jesus, is as much as to say, a Saviour of people from sin.

Now, see how admirably our Saviour is qualified; he hath not only rhetoric and law at his fingers ends, as we say, but he hath an admirable prevalency in it; there is not any cause that he yet took in hand, that miscarried; not any client that he ever pleaded for, that at any time was cast, but he that pleads is still the Saviour of his people; he pleads so, that he saves them from their sins. It is admirable to consider; let the sins produced against a person be ever so many, or heinous; let the witnesses come in, and swear ever so punctually, and prove ever so fully the crimes committed against such a law; yet such is the faculty of this advocate with the Father, that he stops the judgment, the sentence cannot go forth; this Christ, as he is Jesus, is first the bail of all believers, till the day of payment. You know the nature of bailing; persons should go to prison upon the trespass, but bail takes men off till judgment be given, or perfect satisfaction be made. As we have sinned, so in legality we ought to lie by it presently; but Christ comes before-hand, even the advocate, and passes his word for us, that there shall be current payment in due time, binding himself body for body, that there shall be appearance at the day; but that is not all, when the day is come, though most witnesses prove point-blank, the crime objected, and the law pleads the just desert of the punishment provided in that behalf, yet this advocate steps in, and pays all it can demand; I myself have satisfied the law on their behalf, saith he, therefore there can be no more asked of them. You know, that if a man have borrowed an hundred pounds, and he be sued never so violently, and witnesses come in, and prove the debt never so clearly; yet if a surety comes in, and enters bond for him, yea, and pays the debt for him; if he hath been discharged, and hath an acknowledgment of satisfaction made on the behalf of that person, then there is no judgment comes out against him that borrowed the money. This is the case with our advocate, he is the Surety of a better testament, and pleading, when matter of fact is proved, and the law speaks directly against it, and justice pleads for such a penalty to be inflicted; yet then is the Saviour produced that makes current and full payment. There could not be expected any stopping of the sentence for the client, by pleading, but there must first be a satisfying of all; this is the Saviour's office, and as a Saviour, so he is the Satisfier.

The advocate is "Jesus Christ the righteous;" and this title imports two things very considerable; and they have either respect unto us, or unto God, and both of them show how admirably and sufficiently he is qualified for this office of advocate-ship; it hath reference unto us, he is "Christ Jesus the righteous;" as much as to say, the true and faithful. Faithfulness and righteousness are taken for one and the same thing, for dealing truly with persons. Many a one loses a good cause for the unfaithfulness of his counsel; they make against their clients for bribes, and play on both sides; they deal not honestly with men; they carry the business in a dilatory way; they will not dispatch, but delay the suit; but this our advocate, is the faithful and true witness, he deals ingenuously and uprightly; this one you may trust with things in his hand. Many times men put their whole business into their counsel's hands, to sink or swim; but here is an advocate that is faithful, here is no danger of sinking; you may put all into his hands, you need not fear at all, he is the righteous and faithful advocate. But the principal thing, I intend in this righteousness, is that wherein the strength of his argument lieth, he pleads in the behalf of his client; that is, the advocate Christ, is so righteous, that this very righteousness of his shall carry the cause on your side, even to a full discharge from all sins whatsoever.

Beloved, the whole security of persons from wrath and hell, from sin and death, hangs upon this one hinge of his righteousness; as there is force enough in it, so the cause prospers on the client's side; and if that should fail, nothing can uphold it. It will be therefore of mighty concern to consider, how clear the scripture is, that lays all the burden of the task in pleading upon his righteousness; and further, what kind of righteousness of Christ that is, that carries such a strength in his pleading for his people; both of them need to be cleared, especially the latter. For the first, the scriptures will be clear of themselves; only, the latter, what kind of righteousness it is that hath that prevalency is to be made apparent. A righteousness, and his righteousness, most grant but some mistake there is, in the minds of some, that reach not the height of the gospel, what that righteousness is, that hath such a prevalency. The present time will not give me leave to handle it fully, and I will not do it by halves; and, therefore, I will leave it to another time.