

THE SINNER'S ADVOCATE

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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
 1 John 2:1.*

THE Apostle John presents us with a very clear and emphatic testimony to the doctrine of full and free forgiveness of sin. He declares that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleans us from all sin, and that if any man sins, we have an Advocate. It is most evident that he is not afraid of doing mischief by stating this Truth of God too broadly. On the contrary, he makes this statement with the view of promoting the sanctity of his “little children.” The object of this bold declaration of the love of the Father to His sinning children is, “that you sin not.” This is a triumphant answer to that grossly untruthful objection which is so often urged by the adversaries of the Gospel against the doctrines of Free Grace—that they lead men to licentiousness.

It does not appear that the Apostle John thought so, for in order that these “little children” should not sin, he actually declares unto them the very doctrine which our opponents call licentious. Those men who think that God's Grace, when fully, fairly, and plainly preached, will lead men into sin, know not what they say, nor what they affirm. It is neither according to nature nor to Grace for men to find an argument for sin in the goodness of God. Human nature is bad enough—and far be it from me to flatter that leprous criminal, that reeking mass of corruption—even a natural conscience revolts at the baseness of sinning because Divine Grace abounds!

Shall I hate God because He is kind to me? Shall I curse Him because He blesses me? I venture to affirm that very few men reason thus. Man has found out many inventions, but such arguments are so transparently abominable that few consciences are so dead as to tolerate them. Bad as human *nature* is, it seldom turns the goodness of God into an argument for rebelling against Him. As for souls renewed by Divine Grace, they never can be guilty of such infamy. The Believer in Jesus reasons in quite another fashion. Is God so good?—then I will not grieve Him. Is He so ready to forgive my transgressions?—then I will love Him, by His Grace, and offend no more. Gratitude has bands which are stronger than iron, although softer than silk.

Think not, Sirs, that the Christian needs to be flogged to virtue by the whip of the Law! Dream not that we hate sin merely because of the Hell which follows it! If there were no Heaven for the righteous, the sons of God would follow after goodness because their regenerated spirit pants for it. And if there were no Hell for the wicked, from the necessity of his new-born nature, the true Christian would strive to escape from all iniquity. Loved of God, we feel we must love Him in return. Richly, yes, Divinely forgiven, we feel that we cannot live any longer in sin. Since Jesus died to rid us from all uncleanness, we feel that we cannot crucify our Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame.

We need no nobler or more cogent arguments to lead a man to thorough consecration to God's cause and detestation of all evil than those fetched from the Free Grace of God. And what if some men do pervert the doctrine? Do not wicked minds corrupt everything? What Truth is there in Scripture with which a man may not ruin himself if he wills? Did not the prophetic eye of our Lord anticipate this when it was written that to some the Word of God is, “a savor of death unto death?” Have there not been in all ages men who hold the Truth of God in licentiousness? When were there not evil men to wrest Scripture to their own destruction? Shall we keep back the children's bread lest the dogs should steal the crumbs?

Shall we destroy health-restoring drugs because fools may poison themselves with them? Shall all the trees be cut down for fear the owls should build their nests in them? Shall the sea be dried up because sharks swim in it? Shall the pure virgin Truth be condemned because gross villains have forged her name and abused her character? God forbid! Let us never blush to preach the whole Gospel and to preach its full forgiveness of sin in the boldest and baldest manner, believ-

ing that the naked breasts of Truth are her best armor, and that she is least protected when she is encumbered with a coat of mail of human reasoning and prudence.

As God shall help me, then, believing that the doctrine of Free Grace and of God's infinite love to His people is a doctrine which will lead the "little children of God" to avoid all sin, I intend this morning to preach that doctrine. May God grant that the result may be according to His mind and will.

I. We commence our exposition of the text with the remark that THE SAINT IS STILL A SINNER. Our Apostle says—"If any man sins." The "if" may be written in as small letters as you will, for the supposition is a matter of certainty. "If any man sins"? Although the gentle hand of the beloved disciple uses such mild and tender terms, putting it as a supposition—as though it were an astonishing thing after so much love and mercy and kindness, that we should sin—yet John very well knew that all the saints *do* sin, for he has himself declared that if any man says that he does not sin he is a liar, and the Truth is not in him.

Saints are, without exception, still sinners. Far be it from us to deny that Divine Grace has worked a wondrous change—it were not Grace at all if it had not. It will be well to note this change. *The Christian no longer loves sin.* It is the object of his sternest horror. He no longer regards it as a mere trifle, plays with it, or talks of it with unconcern. He looks upon it as a deadly serpent whose very shadow is to be avoided. He would no more venture voluntarily to put his cup to his lip than a man would drink poison who had once almost lost his life through it. Sin is dejected in the Christian's heart, though it is not ejected. Sin may enter the heart and fight for dominion, but it cannot sit upon the throne. It haunts the town of Mansoul and lurks in dens and corners to do mischief, but it is no longer honored in the streets, nor pampered in the palace. The head and the hands of Dagon are broken, although the stump remains.

The Christian *never sins with that enormity of boasting of which the unregenerate are guilty.* Others wallow in transgressions and make their shame their glory, but if the Believer falls he is very quiet, mournful and vexed. Sinners go to their sins as children to their own father's orchard, but Believers slink away like thieves when they have been stealing forbidden fruit. Shame and sin are always in close company in a Christian. If he is drunken with evil he will be ashamed of himself and go to his bed like a whipped cur. He cannot proclaim his transgressions as some do in the midst of a ribald crowd, boasting of their exploits of evil. His heart is broken within him, and when he has sinned he goes with sore bones for many and many a day.

Nor does he sin *with the fullness of deliberation* that belongs to other men. The sinner can sit down by the months together and think over the iniquity that he means to perpetrate, till he gets his plans well organized and has matured his project. But the Christian cannot do this. He may put the sin into his mouth and swallow it in a moment, but he cannot continue to roll it under his tongue. He who can carefully arrange and plot a transgression is still a true child of the old serpent.

And again, *the Believer never chews the cud of his sin.* For after he has sinned, however sweet it may have been in his mouth, it becomes bitterness in his heart—and glad enough is he to be rid of it altogether. The retrospect of sin to a converted man is nothing but blackness and darkness in his heart. The Christian, unlike other men, *never finds enjoyment in his sin.* He is out of his element in it. Conscience pricks him. He cannot, even if he would, sin like others. There is a refined taste within him which all the while revolts at the apparently dainty morsel of sin. The finger of Divine Grace, with its secret and mysterious touch, turns all the honey into gall, and all the sweetness into wormwood.

If the Christian shall sin, and sin, I grant he will, yet it shall always be with half-heartedness—still he clings to the right. The evil that he would not, he does, while the good that he would do, he fails to perform. You will notice, too, how different the Christian is *as to the habit of sin.* The ungodly man is frequent in overt deeds of rebellion, but the Christian, at least in open acts of crime and folly, rather falls into them rather than abides in them. The swallow dips with his wing the brook and then he is up again into the skies, soaring toward the sun. But the duck can swim in the pool or dive under the water—it is in its element. So the Christian just touches sometimes with his wing—alas, for him—the streams of earth, but then he is up again where he should be.

It is only the sinner that can swim in sin and delight therein. You may drive the swine and the sheep together side by side. They come to some mire and they both fall into it, and both stain themselves. But you soon detect the difference in nature between them—for while the swine lies and wallows with intense gusto—the sheep is up again, escaping as soon as possible from the filth. So with the Christian. He falls, God knows how many times, but by His Grace, he rises up

again—it is not his nature to lie in sin. He abhors himself that ever he should fall to the ground at all—while the ungodly goes on in his wicked way till sin becomes a habit and habit like an iron net has entangled him in its meshes.

There are all these degrees of difference between the Christian and the ungodly man and far more, for the Believer is a new creature—he belongs to a holy generation and a peculiar people. The Spirit of God is in him and in all respects he is far removed from the natural man. But for all that we must come back to that with which we started—that the Christian is still a sinner. He is so from the *imperfection of his nature*. His nature is such that he cannot but sin until the old Adam shall die in him—and that will not be till the funeral knell is tolled for himself.

Sin, by reason of his imperfection, pollutes the best thing the Believer does. Sin mars his repentance. There is filth in our tears and unbelief in our faith. The best thing we ever did apart from the merit of Jesus only swelled the number of our sins, for when we have been most pure in our own sight, yet, like the heavens, we are not pure in God's sight. And as He charged His angels with folly, much more must He charge us with it, even in our most angelic frame of mind. The song that thrills to Heaven and seeks to emulate seraphic strains has still mortal infirmity in it. The prayer which moves the arm of God is still a sinful prayer, and only moves that arm because the Sinless One, the great Mediator, has stepped in to take away the sin of our supplication.

I dare to say it—the best faith or the highest degree of sanctification to which a Christian ever attained on earth, has still so much of the creature's infirmity in it as to be worthy of God's eternal wrath. In itself considered, there is so much sin about the highest and loftiest thing to which the creature can attain, that we mournfully confess—"We are altogether as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags."

As the Christian thus sins in his devout performances, so *he constantly errs in the everyday tenor of his life*. Sins of omission to wit—how many of these may be compressed into a single hour? Oh, what multitudes of things we have left undone! Remember that these make up a very great part of the sins which brings the curse. "I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, sick and in prison and you visited Me not." Have we no sins of commission? Our thoughts, our imaginations, our words, and must I not say our deeds—have these been what they should be? If any man dare to tell me that he lives for a single day without a sinful deed, I will dare to tell him that he never knew himself.

Do but look at your own chamber. If you disturb it I see but little dust floating about in it, but if a stray sunbeam shall enter through the window I see millions upon millions of little motes dancing up and down! And I discover that the whole of what I supposed to be clear, pure air, is filled with innumerable atoms of all sorts of things, and that I am breathing these even in the purest atmosphere. So is it with our heart and life. When the Spirit shines into us, we see that the atmosphere of life is as full of sin as it can hold. A man may sooner count the hairs of his head, or the sands upon the seashore, or the drops of the dew of the morning upon the grass, than count the sins of a single day.

O Lord, You know us, but we know not ourselves. Yet this much we know, that we are a people full of sin and laden with iniquity. You will tell me these are little sins, but I remind you that a multitude of grains of sand may overload a vessel quite as surely as bars of iron—and therefore these daily iniquities should be confessed with care and repented of with sincerity. The Christian, then, from the imperfection of his nature, sins. The old unchanged fountain of Harah must send forth bitter water. The old Adam can do nothing else but sin.

Fire can do nothing but burn. Water can do nothing but quench fire. Everything acts according to its nature. The new nature that is in us cannot sin, because it is born of God. It is so heavenly and Divine that it never stoops to anything like sin. There is a spark of the celestial and of the perfect within every Believer which never can be quenched. But the old Adam, that which made Paul cry out—"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—must sin and as certainly as sparks fly upward, so certainly the old nature will commit iniquity.

Moreover, many *Christian people sin from certain peculiar infirmities*. You know, each of you, what your own infirmity may be, at least I hope you have been watchful enough to discover it. Some sin *through shortness of temper*. They are not long-winded in patience with their fellow creatures. They are vexed. They grow hot—perhaps they imagine some cause for anger where there is none—and they wax warm and speak unadvisedly with their tongue. This gives much trouble to many of the most gracious of men. A hasty temper is a perpetual temptation.

There are others *who have a high and proud spirit* and if they fancy they are a little snubbed or put into the back ground, at once they feel inclined to resent it. There—listen to him—I am not to be thus trod upon! Who dares to treat me thus?" Many who have done good service for Christ have had to carry that thorn in their flesh even down to their

graves. Sensitiveness, a high spirit, a suspicious temperament—these are like blisters to the feet of a pilgrim—he will always walk painfully, if not slowly. Some of us have to contend with *sloth*. Perhaps we are afflicted with a torpid liver, and the physician has never been able to touch the complaint.

God help the man thus afflicted, for he will need to whip himself every day to his duty. And often he will feel so dull and sleepy, that he will wish for Cowper's "lodge in a vast wilderness, some boundless contiguity of shade," that he might hide himself in quiet from the toil of the spiritual harvest. How many we know, dear Friends, who have to contend with *constant unbelief brought on through depression of spirits*. Their nerves, perhaps, have experienced a great shock at some period in life and, constitutionally, they look always at the black side of affairs. If they see a grassy knoll they suspect it to be an extinct volcano. And if they happen to be in a green valley where the mountains frown like the battlements of Heaven, they are dreadfully afraid that an avalanche must certainly come down and destroy them.

They cannot help it. It is a peculiarity of their constitution, but it leads them into much sin, and should cause them much repentance before the face of the living God. So I might go on to mention the peculiarity of some who *are suffering from bashfulness*. They will often be tempted to hold back where they ought to go forward—and if not to disavow their Master—yet not to proclaim their love for Him as boldly as they should do. The Christian, when he reads this verse, "If any man sins," may well say—"Ah, indeed I do. Through these infirmities I constantly commit iniquity."

And then, dear Friends, we all sin from *the assaults of evil*. There are times when we are not watchful, and as Satan is always on his watchtower he is sure to attack us just then. We wear our visor up, and then in flies the stone from the infernal sling. We have forgotten a piece of our armor and the enemy spies our nakedness and cuts us deep, leaving a scar for years. The temptations of *the world*, when we are thrust into ungodly company, and *the trials of business, and even of the household—all these* in unguarded moments may take the Christian off his feet.

Ah, my Brothers and Sisters, Paul, who was not a whit behind the very chief of the Apostles, yet called himself the chief of sinners. And we with far inferior graces must take the lowest place, acknowledging that in us, that is in our flesh, there dwells no good thing. Sinner is my name, sinner my nature, but thanks be to Him who came to save sinners, I am a sinner *saved by Free Grace*.

II. I now leave that point for a second one full of comfort. OUR SINS DO NOT DEPRIVE US OF OUR INTEREST IN CHRIST. Note the text. "If any man sins we *have* an Advocate." Yes, we have Him though we sin. We have Him still. It does not say, "If any man sins he has forfeited his Advocate," but, "we have an Advocate." Sinners though we are, all the sin that a Believer ever did or can be allowed to commit, cannot destroy his interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. Into whatever he may be suffered to fall, yet none of these things can by any possibility touch his title deeds. Indeed, in some characters Jesus is only mine when I can claim the name of sinner.

I cannot have an Advocate unless I do sin, otherwise I do not need one. Who wants an advocate to plead his cause in a court of law if there is no suit against him? Sin is a charge against me. I am a sinner. I have an Advocate. I have today a Brother in Christ. "Go, tell my Brothers and Sisters," said He. And yet they had all forsaken Him, and therefore were all sinners—but He was their Brother still. I have a Husband in Christ too, though I sin. "Israel has forsaken Me," says God, "and played the harlot. She has gone whoring from Me, but return, return, for I am married unto you." She is His wife still, you see, though she had gone into adultery.

The Christian, even when he has stained and fouled himself, is the spouse of Christ still for all that. We are members of His Body, and if so, the members cannot be removed or taken off and on—limbs are not so easily removed. Did not Christ wash Peter? Peter was a member of Christ's own Body, and yet Peter wanted washing. O blessed picture, the Head washing the feet. So at this day, stained though we are, we are claimants of Christ as Head of our body. And, Beloved, we know that notwithstanding all our sin we are perfectly justified in Christ, for He justifies the ungodly. We know, too, that we are perfectly accepted, for we are accepted in the Beloved, and not in ourselves.

Notwithstanding all our iniquities we are pardoned, for the fountain is opened for sin and for all uncleanness—not for righteousness and purity—but for sin and for uncleanness. Therefore we conclude that all our sins do not deprive us of that which Christ is to us, namely, the Fountain of Life and light and purity and safety. Oh, my Brothers and Sisters, if our first title to Christ had depended on our good works, then it would fall when our works grew bad, but He loved us when we were as bad as we could be—

*“He saw us ruined in the Fall,
Yet loved us notwithstanding all.”*

He chose us when we were sinners. He bought us when we were sinners. He loved us when we were dead in trespasses and sins. And if we are as bad as that today, He loves us still.

If our right to Heaven rested on the Covenant of Works, that unstable tenure, it would soon fail us. But seeing it rests on the Covenant of Grace, which has no conditions in it, but which is of pure Immutable Grace from first to last, therefore be it known unto you, O sons of God, that notwithstanding all your faults and failings, wanderings and backslidings, He is your God and you are His children. He will be your God to all eternity and you shall be His children world without end. “What a bold thing to say!” says one. Yes, and did I not tell you that I meant to say it to the little children, that they sin not?

I believe that the bold open statement of the fact that all the sin that a Believer can commit cannot mar his interest in Christ, though it may mar his enjoyment of that interest for the present. Believing, I say, that this doctrine, instead of driving men to sin, will draw them to love that gracious and immutable God, who notwithstanding all our sins and cares and woe, will never suffer us to perish.

III. Now let us change the note a little. Our third point is THAT THE ADVOCATE IS PROVIDED ON PURPOSE TO MEET THE FACT THAT WE ARE STILL SINNERS.

If I am a sinner, then there is a court. And there is one who sits as Judge—the Father. There is a charge against me, otherwise I should not want an Advocate to meet it—and this implies that I have sinned. There is an adversary to press his suit against me, and he would hardly venture to do this if there were no sin. There must be a right of reply on my part. I must have the right to put in a disclaimer in court, and to stand up and plead before the bar of justice. He who has a right to plead in court is the man who is accused—the man who has some offense. If I were neither accused nor had been a sinner, then I should have no right to occupy the time of the court. But being a sinner, and being brought up upon that charge and having one who presses the charge against me, I have a right to reply and that reply, through God's good Grace, I have a right to make through my Advocate.

Let us say, concerning our Advocate, that He is ordained with a special view to sinners. All His names and attributes prove Him to be a suitable Advocate for such. You and I, who though saved, are still sinners, may safely put our case into His hands, for look who He is—“Jesus Christ *the righteous*.” “Jesus.” Ah, then He is an Advocate such as I want, for He loves me and takes an interest in me. Jesus is the name of one who became Man for my sake. He knows what sore temptations mean, He understands what trials mean, what afflictions mean. I am glad I have One who will be interested in my welfare, and will plead for me as a Friend for a friend, and as a Brother for a brother.

I thank God, that though I sin, I still have Jesus who is my, “Brother born for adversity,” the Friend of sinners, and will, therefore, plead the sinner's part. Is His name Jesus? Then He is sure to succeed, because, “they shall call His name Jesus, for *He shall save His people from their sins*.” His very name implies His success. Is His name Jesus? Then if He does not succeed in my case, His honor is compromised. He is called Jesus because He does save sinners—if He does not save me—He is not Jesus. If I, a sinner, trusting in Him, give Him my cause to plead as my Advocate, and I am tried, and the verdict is against me, He is not Jesus. He may lay down His claim to be Jesus, for He does not, and cannot save His people from their sins.

Beloved Friends, do you not see how the saint is regarded as a sinner because He who is his Advocate is the appointed Savior of sinners? He is put down as their Advocate, I say, because He is the *sinner's Friend*. I never heard of His pleading for the righteous. I never dreamed of His being the Friend of the *sinless*. I find Him always on the side of publicans and sinners—offenders, and those who have gone out of the way. And therefore I conclude, that sinner though I am, continually sinning as I am, I may leave my case with Jesus, for He is just the advocate the sinner wants.

Notice, next, it is “Jesus Christ”—Christos—the Anointed. This shows His authority to plead. There are only certain gentlemen who can plead in the Court of Chancery. And only certain others that can enter the Common Pleas, or the King's Bench. Jesus Christ has a right to plead, for He is the Father's own Appointed, the Father's own Anointed. My Soul, you have a good Pleader, One whom God Himself has chosen to plead the sinner's cause. If he were of your choosing, he might fail. But if God has laid help upon One that is mighty, feel safe to put your trouble where God has laid His help. He is Christ, and therefore authorized.

But I add, He is Christ and therefore *qualified*, for the anointing has also qualified Him for His work. He can plead better than Jacob pleaded when he spoke for Benjamin. He can plead so as to move the heart of God and prevail. What words of tenderness, what sentences of persuasion will He use when He stands up to plead for me! But more, He is Christ—that is, He is God's Messiah. Therefore God would not send Him unless He *guaranteed Him*. If God should send into this world a Savior who could not save, then God would have no mercy. God's appointing and sending Christ is a guarantee of Christ's success. Oh, my Soul, you have One well fitted to be your Advocate and One that cannot but succeed! Leave yourself entirely in His hands.

Notice next, it is "Jesus Christ *the righteous*." This is not only His Character, but it is His plea. It is His Character, and if my Advocate is righteous, then I am sure He would not take up a bad cause. I do not know, it may be right for a lawyer to plead for a villain when he knows him to be a villain. But this I think, the greater villain the lawyer is the better qualified would he be to do it. But my Lord and Master, the great Advocate, would not plead a bad cause, for He is Jesus Christ *the righteous*. Therefore if I sin, if I am put down among the many men that sin—if He pleads for me, my case must be good—for He would not take up a bad one.

But how can He do this? Why, because He meets the charge of unrighteousness against me by this plea on His part—that *He* is righteous. He seems to say to the great Father in the day when the sinner stands arraigned—"Yes, my Father, that sinner was unrighteous, but remember that I was accepted as His Substitute. I stood to keep the Law for him, and gave My active obedience. I went up to the Cross and bled, and so gave My passive obedience. I have covered him from head to foot with My doing and My dying. I have so arrayed him that not even the angels are adorned as he is, for though they may be clothed with the perfect righteousness of a creature, I have given him the righteousness of God Himself. I am become unto My people the Lord their righteousness.

"Look, I have taken the jewels out of My crown to bedeck them. I have taken the garments from My own back to cover them, and the blood from My own veins to make the dye in which I have dipped their garments, till they are purpled with imperial glory." What can there be asked more for the sinner than this? Jesus Christ the righteous stands up to plead for me, and pleads His righteousness. And mark, He does this not if I do *not* sin, but if I *do* sin. There is the beauty of my text. It does not say, "If any man does not sin we have an Advocate." But, "if any man sins we have an Advocate." So that when I have sinned and come creeping up to my closet with a guilty conscience and an aching heart, and feel that I am not worthy to be called God's son, I still have an Advocate, because I am one of the many men that sin. I sin and I have an Advocate.

Oh, I know not how to express the joy I feel in my soul to be able to put it so! It is not, "If any man is righteous, we have an Advocate." It is not, "If any man is prayerful, and careful, and godly, and walks rightly and in the light," and so on, but, "If any man SINS we have an Advocate." Oh, my Soul, there is the music of God's heart in those words! Music such as the prodigal heard at the festival which welcomed his return. "If any man sins we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

IV. And now we turn to our fourth point which is that THIS TRUTH, SO EVANGELICAL AND SO DIVINE, SHOULD BE PRACTICALLY REMEMBERED. It should be practically remembered, dear Friends, *at all times*. Every day I find it most healthy to my own soul to try and walk as a saint, but in order to do so, I must continually come to Christ as a *sinner*. I would seek to be perfect. I would strain after every virtue, and forsake every false way. But still, as to my standing before God, I find it happiest to sit where I sat when first I looked to Jesus, on the rock of His works, having nothing to do with my own righteousness, but only with His.

Depend on it, dear Friends, the happiest way of living is to live as a poor sinner, and as nothing at all—having Jesus Christ as All in All. You may have all your growths in sanctification, all your progress in graces, all the development of your virtues that you will. But still I do earnestly pray you never to put any of these where Christ should be. If you have begun in Christ, then finish in Christ. If you have begun in the flesh, and then go on in the flesh, we know what the sure result will be. But if you have begun with Jesus Christ as your Alpha, let Him be your Omega. I pray you never think you are rising when you get above this, for it is not rising, but slipping downwards to your ruin. Stand still to this—

*"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Your Cross I cling.*

Still a sinner. But still having an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous—let this be the spirit of your everyday life.

Make this essentially the rule of your life *on particular occasions*. Here let me say a word that may at once comfort and enlighten some here who are in darkness. When the Spirit of God gives you a clearer view of your own depravity, mind that you hold to this—“If any man sins we have an Advocate with the Father.” Perhaps when you were first converted you did not suspect the depth of wickedness that lay in your heart. Perhaps you did not believe that you could be so unutterably bad as you really were. But lately the fountains of the great deep have been broken up and you have been horrified. You are almost driven mad, or else into despondency and despair by this discovery of your innate corruption, until you fly to this—“Sinner as I am and never more consciously so than I am now that God's Spirit has enlightened me, I yet know that if any man sins we have an Advocate with the Father and I, black, foul and filthy—more foul and filthy than I ever thought myself to be— put my case into the hands of my Advocate and leave it there forever.”

When after this you have fallen into sin, and oh, I may address some member of this Church who has done this though the pastor knows it not—you have fallen into some sin that pricks your conscience. You carry about with you a something that will not let you sleep at night. There is a sin that disturbs you, and you wish you could forget that you had committed it. You have gone before God as David did. You have used the language of the fifty-first Psalm, but you cannot get rid of that sin. You believe you are a child of God sometimes, but that sin has got into your conscience and, like a cancer, is eating into your comfort.

My Brother, now is your time—“If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father.” Jesus Christ is of no use to you if He will only save you when you have no sin. Let me repeat it—now you are a *sinner*. Now you are condemned by the verdict of your own conscience. Now you have sinned, sinned willfully and foully—and God forbid that I should extenuate your sin. Yet, let your sin be as gross, and black, and hellish as it may be, if you believe in Jesus Christ you have an Advocate with the Father. And through that Advocate your cause shall rest and your sin shall be put away.

Perhaps you will tell me that your sin has had some gross aggravation about it. If you are a Christian it has, for a Christian always sins worse than other men. If the sin is not in itself so bad as other men's, it is worse in you. For a king's favorite to play the traitor is villainy, indeed. For one that has been highly favored, as you have been, with visits of love from Jesus—to be false to Him—oh, this is shame, double shame to Him! For you who have been washed in His blood to crucify Him afresh, what shall I say to that? You deserve the hottest wrath of God and the deepest Hell. But thus says the Lord unto you—I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities. Return unto Me.” “If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father.”

It does not say, “If some men sin we have no advocate.” Or, “If some men sin in an aggravated way.” No, it is not put so. It says, “If *any* man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father.” So that though you have heaped aggravations one upon another, and your crime has been as foul as any that could have been committed, still you can say, “we have an Advocate.” Fly with a humble, contrite heart, and throw yourself at the feet of that Advocate, and by His blood, and by His wounds He will plead for you, and you shall prevail.

What if I add to all this that you have so sinned as to bring a scandal upon the name of God, upon His Church, and upon His cause? Oh, my Brothers and Sisters, you may well weep in secret. You may weep tears of blood for having done this. But still, for all that, I cannot shut the gate where God sets it wide open. I have not a thunderbolt for you. If you are a child of God, mercy is still free, and still it is preached to you—“If any man sins,” publicly, like David, so as to make God's enemies to blaspheme, yet still, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Oh, what splendid mercy is this! Archangel never dreamed of such mercy as this to sinners, to real sinners, to hugely vile sinners, to black, hellish sinners, to devilish sinners, to such as no adjective can be found to describe them! Yet, if they believe in Jesus, sin as they may, they still have, “an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

I wish I could meet the case of that Brother yonder, who has long given up all hope of ever being restored. He has been excommunicated. He has been driven away from the society of the godly. He thinks, though he is in this house this morning, he has no business here. And sometimes the devil has tempted him to make away with himself, and he has said, if I must be lost I may as well be lost at once. Ah, but, my Brother, you dare not do it with such a text of Scripture as this before your eyes! The Lord loves you still, and if He ever loved you, all your sin cannot wean His heart from you. You

may have gone to the utmost length of your tether, but He has so tied you that you can never go beyond it! You may have gotten to the very extremity and edge of the precipice, but over that edge you must not, and you shall not go!

This day He sends me to stop you. Return! Return! Return! A Father bids you return! You are feeding swine today, and all foul and filthy as you are, you would desire fill your belly with their husks. But you cannot—you have a hunger that husks can never satisfy. Your Father waits to receive you. Come, He will meet you. He will fall upon your neck and kiss you. He will set you at His own table and there shall be music and dancing for you. The best robe awaits you, Prodigal! The fatted calf is killed for you! Come! O believe it! Believe that God is able to do this great thing for you. “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts above your thoughts, and His ways above your ways.”—

*“What though your numerous sins exceed
The stars that fill the skies,
And, aiming at the Eternal Throne,
Like pointed mountains rise,”*

yet still the red sea of Jesus' blood shall cover the tops of the mountains of your sins, till, like Noah's ark, that floated twenty cubits upwards, the tops of the mountains shall be covered. “If any man sins”—here, you see, there is nothing said about goodness, nothing about virtue, or tenderness of heart—it is only put, “If any man sins, we have an Advocate.”

O you that believe in Jesus, pray for those who believe not, that they, too, may have an Advocate. If you and I have come and put our trust in Him, and found a shelter in His wounds, let us never be satisfied till we see our children, our brothers, our sisters, our friends, our kinsfolk brought to this Advocate. Go and tell it wherever your voices can be heard, that Jesus Christ receives SINNERS, and that He eats with them. Go and say that He is the sinner's Friend, and that He is willing to take them as they are and wash them and make them whiter than snow.

Since you have proved it yourself, and need to prove it every day, try and bring others to the conviction of it, that they, with you, may sing to the praise of that Divine love which has given the Advocate to every Believer, whatever his guilt and condemnation may have been. The Lord bless you now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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