

Christ Our Advocate with The Father

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College
Lecture II
February 1, 1854

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

Text.--1 John 2:1: "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."

In remarking upon this passage, I must,

I. Explain the sense in which the term "advocate" is here used;

II. Show what is implied in the existence of this office;

III. Explain the essential qualifications of an advocate;

IV. State some of the conditions of his success.

I. In which the term "advocate" is here used

An advocate is one who undertakes for another, and represents his case. He stands up in plead for his friend, and to use his own influence in his behalf. The office is readily explained by reference to the common judicial proceedings, in which each side is managed before the court by one or more advocates. We must suppose the term is used in our text in the same general sense.

II. In the existence of this office it is implied,

- 1. That there is an accusation against us. We are all indicted and summoned for trial. We are held as sinners, and must appear to answer for this high offense. There is a question pending which implicates us all, and the influence of this advocate is needed in the case.
- 2. The existence of the office shows that the case as between sinners and their God is not altogether hopeless. It is not like that of the fallen angels. If it were, there could be no place for an advocate. It is the case of sinners, yet not of hopeless sinners. If the question of relief were

entirely foreclosed, there would be no propriety in having any advocate at all.

- 3. The existence of such an office evinces a compassionate disposition on God's part towards us. It should be considered that this Advocate is provided by God, not by the sinner. Why then should He furnish us an advocate at all if He were really implacable?

Some persons seem to think that the compassion displayed in the gospel plan belongs wholly and alone to Jesus Christ--that the Father had no other than an implacable spirit. But it should be considered that Christ was appointed to this office by the Father--a fact which shows that the difficulty in the way of any sinner's being forgiven lies not in the Father's heart, but in the exigencies of His government.

- 4. Sinners are in such a condition that they cannot help themselves. If they could, there would be no demand for an advocate. If they could be saved upon the bare mercy of God, as some have supposed, there would be no need of an advocate.

III. The essential qualifications of an advocate for sinners.

- 1. He must not be so implicated with the transgressors that he is a transgressor himself. He must be righteous before God; else he will himself need an advocate. Consequently we read of our Advocate--"Jesus Christ, the righteous." It is altogether essential that he should come with clean hands before the great tribunal.
- 2. He must be willing to undertake the advocacy, to whatever amount of self-denial, pain, or expense it may subject him. He must be willing to assume all the responsibility, or of course he will not succeed. For what can the sinner do for himself before the court of the Holy and pure One?
- 3. He must take an interest in the race or people for whom he pleads. If he lacks this, he will not succeed, especially if there are great obstacles to be overcome, and such as demand great labor, suffering and trial. Such is the case of sinners that whoever undertakes to be their advocate must encounter great obstacles--as everyone who had ever been convicted of sin must know.

IV. As to the conditions of his success, it may be said:

- 1. He must be willing to undertake. We are assured that such is the fact.
- 2. He must be "retained" by each sinner for himself. This is a legal term and implies that the party needing the services of an advocate, engages him to undertake it, and agrees for himself to commit his case into the advocate's hands. It is indispensable that the advocate should have the entire consent of those for whom he undertakes. They must commit their whole case to him. If he sees there are certain things they must do, or certain confessions they must make in order to success, as he supposes, they must promptly do those things and make those confessions. They must put themselves entirely in his hands. For example, if He insists that they must give up all sin, they must do it; or if He insists they must repent, they must do it without hypocrisy and without delay. If he insists they deny themselves, they must cheerfully meet the demand.

- 3. He must have some prevailing plea. He must have something to produce before the court that will come with power and influence.

Now what plea can Christ make for the sinner? Can He say, "This is a righteous man, and not an offender against God's law or against His gospel"? No. Can he plead any justification or apology? Ah, He can neither deny nor excuse the fact of sin. Sometimes a criminal denies the fact, and sometimes he pleads some apology, or that he had a right to do the deed. But in the sinner's case, Christ can plead nothing of this sort at all.

Christ as an advocate will use no trickery, no deception; nothing of the kind. No sinner should make the least reliance on anything of this character.

- 4. The pleas in this case is not made on the question of guilt or innocence. The question made is not as is common in human courts--guilty or not guilty; Christ does not come forward to plead on that question. Our text reads, "If any man sin, we have an advocate," --implying of course that the question of sin is settled past all debate. As to the fact of sin, there is no dispute. There is no need of a jury upon the fact. The only question is whether mercy can be given. The question is not at all whether the man deserves to die, or is under condemnation; this fact is fully settled and the sinner knows it. He is condemned and knows he ought to die. There is no lack of real guilt, and the question therefore does not at all need to be asked whether he is guilty nor how much guilt he had incurred. But the question comes up in entirely another shape. There is no apology to be made at all. The only question is, Can mercy be shown and the guilty man be pardoned? Can the execution be arrested, and can the sentence of death be set aside?
- 5. Christ will not attempt to set aside the penalty on legal grounds. By no means. Sometimes before human courts an advocate appears and makes a motion to arrest proceedings on the ground of some error in fact or in law. But here in the sinner's case there has been nothing done on God's part to be corrected--nothing wrong or in error.
- 6. Christ does by no means interpose because He fears that the Father will not treat you with all the forbearance which your case will any wise allow. But the appeal is to God's own compassion for you--to His own disposition to show mercy if by any means He can safely do it under the circumstances of the case. Our Advocate knows that as to the Father, judgment is His strange work and mercy His delight; and He assumes that the Father is entirely sincere in these declarations and in calling you all to repentance. Yet Christ does not take it for granted that because God loves to pardon, therefore He will be able to do so, consistently with the demands of His government. He knows that God will show mercy if He wisely can--if it can be done benevolently, in consistency with the support of law.
- 7. But how is this to be done? Exactly here is the necessity for an advocate, to settle the question that it can be done with safety to the divine government.

The Bible often brings out the fact that there was an understanding between the Father and the Son, that Christ should do certain things to honor the law and to persuade the sinner to turn from his sins, and then God would on certain conditions forgive. In

theological terms, this is often called, "the covenant of redemption." It was made before the world began. It provided that if the world were made--if the race should sin--then if Christ would interpose for them to bear their sins in His own body on the tree, doing so much as would render it proper for the Father to forgive, then forgiveness should be freely granted to all those who would repent of their sins and believe in Christ as their Redeemer. This was the understanding and to it Christ makes His appeal. Hence Christ comes forward and pleads this condition--that He has done all that was agreed on. The great work, at least in its chief department was completed when, suspended on the cross, He cried aloud, "It is finished!" and gave up the ghost. All along in the previous history we see Him intent on doing up His work. "Know ye not," said He, "that I must be about My Father's business?" He felt that He had a certain work to do; it was the business of His life and His soul was pressed down with a heavy burden, until it be done. "I have," said He, "a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" He struggles under the burden. He must needs go up to Jerusalem at the last great festival. He must be in haste to teach His great doctrines, daily in the temple, and by night as He retired from public scenes, He explained these things to His disciples. Near at hand were the more solemn and fearful scenes of His betrayal, His mock judgment, from which He is led away, bearing His own cross, to the final scene of crucifixion. These were, all of them, points in the covenant of redemption.

It is curious to see to what an extent these intimations are dropped all along the track of the sacred narrative. Plainly no one could write His history without bringing out continually this ruling idea--that He lived as one who had a great work to do, and felt Himself solemnly and stringently bound in spirit until it should be done. His disciples could not understand these intimations for a long time, but looked on often with wonder and sometimes presumptuous rebuke, until they saw Him die so strangely, and saw that He had certainly risen from the dead, and had appeared to them openly and re-explained these great things of His kingdom; then, after He had really finished all that part of His work which pertained properly to His human relations, then they began to understand what these things should mean. Christ had gloriously honored the law; He had perfectly obeyed it; yet had He suffered, the just for the unjust. He had thrown a halo of mercy around the upper throne; He had filled the heavenly sanctuary as with the incense from the altar of His own sacrifice, so that now God's law being every way honored, mercy can be shown to the guilty and no peril accrue to the interests of His throne.

All these things entered into the great work of Christ as our Advocate before the Father.

We must suppose also that Christ makes His appeal to His own appointment by the Father to this office. He might say, Hast Thou not called Me to this work, and now wilt not Thou hear My plea for the perishing whom I died to save?

- 8. The things of which I have thus far spoken relate chiefly to God and to His government. There is yet another distinct and vital department in His work--He must secure the hearty consent of the sinner. If you would avail yourself of His advocacy, you must admit that you deserve to die--that you can make no apology for your sin--that no one can make any apology for you--and that you fully sustain your Advocate in making this statement of your case. He

must be able to affirm that you do sincerely repent of all your sin, for He cannot save you in your sins; He has made no engagement to this effect and could not carry it through if He had. He must be able to show that you honestly intend to do right as God's subject--that you do truly repent of your sins--do obey God and honor the gospel of His Son, and hope for your salvation only through this plan of God's own providing.

- 9. Moreover, He must stand as your surety. It would be of no avail for Him to say, You do repent, unless He can also become your surety, for else you would surely fall again. He therefore pledged Himself to uphold you and "keep you from falling, that He may present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." He thus undertakes to assure the Father that He will be your surety for present repentance, and for your being upheld in faith and love unto the end.

Then He pleads God's gracious promise, and on this ground urges that God should be propitious. These promises are all made to and through Christ. They all presuppose His atonement and His availing advocacy. Because Christ undertook for sinners, therefore God gave promises and therefore He fulfills them in answer to Christ's advocacy.

God has signified His willingness to forgive, yet will not allow the sinner to appear in his own name. He can receive and hear a righteous advocate, for such an arrangement comports with the honor of His throne and the support of law.

Christ can plead the governmental safety of this arrangement. By the sacrifice of Himself, He has rendered it safe to pardon and set aside the execution of the penalty. The fact that He has rendered it safe by His own sacrifices and sufferings, makes it specially fitting that He should Himself become our advocate to plead for our pardon.

REMARKS.

1. It is easy to see what a simple thing it is to become a Christian. It is not going about to do some great work of your own, but it is simply to accept of God's prepared righteousness. It is said of the Jews that, going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. They did not understand that righteousness, considered as a ground of their acceptance with God, is something to be prepared and provided for them and by them appropriated. I never can forget the brightness with which this was revealed to me at my conversion--so brightly that probably this vital distinction between doing myself, and accepting what Christ had done for me, can never be forgotten, nor indeed can ever be made more clear than it was then. The question had come up with great force--What are you doing here? I had said I would attend to nothing else. But I had a multitude of errors in my views of the gospel and of my duty. For example, I was supposing that I must be a long time working out my own salvation--a long time under conviction before I could be accepted of God--that I did not see my sins plainly enough--that I did not pray enough--had not done enough to earn the salvation I needed. In this state of perplexity, the question came up all at once--What are you waiting for? The atonement is already made--this is a prepared salvation; the question is not whether you are going now to work out a salvation of your own, but whether you will accept a prepared salvation, made ready to your hand. What a contrast! How plain was this simple proposition! There it was, plain before me; atonement is made and an advocate stands ready; your

consent alone is wanted. This was just as plain to me as if a proposition had been made in writing and it only required my signature to close the contract. This is the case. You are altogether condemned; you can do no works of righteousness to help yourself; yet a remedy is provided; will you accept it? The salvation of the gospel is all provided and ready; will you have it? I said I will accept it this very day, or I will die. All my self-righteous thoughts disappeared at once. God's method of making me righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, by my taking Him as my Advocate and Mediator, came before me with amazing clearness and beauty. I saw and I accepted, and here I found peace. Then I understood that wonder language--"being found in Him." The union, by which a sinner, penitent and pardoned, is by faith brought into the closest possible relation to Christ--this became a present reality to my mind. The sinner is brought into Christ as into some shelter from storm or danger. He is compared to the cleft of a great rock, in which by faith the sinner hides away from the fearful storm which violated law would else bring down upon us. Not by any means that Christ takes our part against God's government; but, showing what He has Himself done to sustain law--showing His own wounded side and bleeding heart--revealing at once His own love for us and His own infinite regard for God's law, He shows that God can safely forgive now, and thus He lays the foundation for His availing plea that He should.

What a simple thing to be a Christian! O how simple! You have thought it would take a long time. You say, I have not time; I must study; or I must do this or that business. It doesn't need a long time; it requires almost no time at all.

But you say--I have not conviction enough. Yet you know you have committed sins enough; you know all you need to know. I remember how these notions were rebuked in my case. I said to myself--I can get nothing ready; I am all wrong; I have no such conviction as I need. But God placed the matter before me in a very different form. He asked me if I would admit my guilt and accept of Christ as a mere gratuity--as a real favor, an undeserved mercy.

How very simple then is this! You need only to make up your mind to consent to God's way of salvation, and to renounce your own will and way, and shelter yourself under His advocacy. Hear Him cry--"How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but ye would not." How often thus does He propose to throw all round about you that shield of His advocacy! Will you accept it?

Did you ever attend a court of justice? Did you mark the manner in which the client would hang on the lips of his advocate? See too how his advocate feels! See how he looks--pale as ashes--cannot sleep nights--he sympathizes so intensely in the case of his client. See how the criminal leans on him; it seems as if he would hide himself within his advocate, so dependent does he feel and so confiding! What Christian has not felt this? What Christian does not understand it all? He hangs on his Advocate.

2. You see the safety of the Christian, resting on Christ. He has an Advocate who never lost a case. How many criminals have groaned out--O that I had a powerful advocate who could not fail!

3. How infinitely inexcusable you are if you lose your soul! You need not waste time in looking after some other remedy--some other savior. It is settled, as surely as if you had been a thousand years in hell, that unless you accept of this Savior in this way, you are lost! There is no other name under

heaven, given among men, whereby any can be saved. Christ now offers to undertake for you; will you allow Him to do so?

4. The poor and the rich alike may have the services of this Advocate. Sometimes in human affairs, men fail of getting a good advocate and of getting justice done them, for want of money. But here is One who will not be bribed to favor the rich, nor will He reject the poor for their poverty. The one great condition is such as you can all fulfill--"My son, give Me thy heart"--give Me thy confidence. Do you believe that I can and will save you?

The thing that Christ requires then is simply that you will give Him your confidence, and let Him manage your case. Can you not say--Jesus, Thou knowest that I believe, and that I do give Thee my confidence?

The rich and the poor alike must do this; the rich can buy no dearer way and the poor need not fail of this.

5. See here also the madness of self-dependence. Whoever depends on himself rejects this Great Advocate, and flies in the very face of God, as if he could manage his own case there! Alas, what folly!

6. This Advocate opens an office in every town, in every city. His sign is displayed before all eyes. O what a place is this! Think how Christ sends out His people all abroad and bids them invite all to receive Christ as their Advocate. You have heard the offer. Will you accept?

7. Ye who complain that God cannot forgive your sins because of their greatness, quite overlook the real difficulty. It is not that your sins are great, for He can "save to the uttermost." He has said--"Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

8. But you will say--It is not a sense of the greatness of my sins that discourages me, but because I have so little sense of my sin. It was so in my own case. I was oppressed with the same difficulty. I was on my way home from my office, when all at once, as if I heard a voice behind me, saying, this is the way, it came into my mind--Do you not know that Christ has prepared a full salvation, and holds it in waiting for your acceptance? There it was. Will you have it?

Let this offer console sinners of every class who will come to this Savior. Do not wait. If you have sinned, flee to this Advocate. Say to Him,--I have sinned, but I condemn my sin, and I flee to thee--I cleave to thee alone. I have no other refuge. Undone in myself, I fly to Thee. Again, O sinner, let me urge you that, salvation being near, and freely offered, you now embrace for once and forever.

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets,

apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.

2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral

relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.

9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.