

The Advocacy of Christ

Lecture on 1 John 2: 1, 2

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The distinctive character and object of Christ's priesthood has been already set out. In scripture it stands in relation exclusively to those who by the work of Christ are brought to God. It is therefore in no way an association of the Lord with the world or those of it. Its aspect is not to the wants of the sinner as such, but rather to those of the sanctified, whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren. For God's design by it is not to give a standing, but to sustain and succour those whom grace has already brought nigh to Him by the blood of Jesus. This makes the matter sufficiently plain for the priesthood of Christ. Grace would thereby maintain a holy people according to that nearness which He has already given them; and hence therefore in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as we saw, it is assumed that they have free access to God, a privilege never taken away from the saints.

We are brought to God by Him Who "suffered once for sins," by Christ's one offering. This nearness the Christian never loses. We may fail and act with grievous inconsistency; and it is most sorrowful when we do. But for the believer access to God (being founded, not on legal conditions, but on Christ's blood) remains, and this too of a kind quite absolute, because its measure is the value which God puts upon the work of His own Son; and it is impossible that God could slight that sacrifice. In virtue of it then He acts in our favour, according not merely to our thoughts but to His estimate of what the Lord Jesus has done for us in His sight. Hence, we who believe being thus brought nigh, its efficacy abides unchanged evermore, as scripture carefully and clearly insists.

It is possible indeed, as we are warned, that some who have confessed the Lord, and been sanctified too by His blood, might give Him up (Heb. 10). Such is the solemn admonition to those who from among Hebrews had been baptised; and a like danger of course applies to the Gentiles also, as we hear in 1 Cor. 10. Evidently, however, not failure is here in question, but abandoning Christ. It is apostasy, though no doubt the Holy Spirit speaks to check the incipient tendency to turn aside, pointing out the awful result. The renewed man heeds the word of God; whereas the warning is lost on the unconverted man, perhaps only attracted by the novel and intrinsic beauty of the gospel as an intellectual scheme; and so much the more in those days when it was first heard by the Jews so long inured to Rabbinical traditions — dry as their parchment rolls, as Gentiles were to the clashing vanities of Greek philosophy.

We can readily understand what refreshing power was in the facts of the Son of God come in flesh, His life, His death, His resurrection and His ascension — facts as wondrous as the heavenly principles of Christianity, which could not but exercise an immense charm on candid minds as minds. But this of itself never lasts; neither, if alone, does affection touched by the sound of God's mercy, unless it lead to repentance. Nothing abides short of a new nature, when the conscience is reached by God's Holy Spirit, Who brings in a man before God as nothing but a sinner, to find his one resource, remedy, and deliverance in the Lord Jesus. Where this is laid hold of by faith, nearness to God is given by the blood of Christ. And the priesthood of the Lord Jesus is that office of divine grace which is carried on by the Lord risen, living, and interceding for us at the right hand of God; whereby His word is applied to keep us up, and to lead us on, in the face of all trial, difficulty, opposition, and suffering, as well as of our own weakness. This is contemplated and provided for by God in giving us such a Priest as His Son in His presence on high, so that we may see it to be sustaining and seasonable

mercy. It is that which perfectly meets and keeps, but keeps us a holy people in the midst of dangers as great as our weakness.

Again, we must never confound infirmities with sins, or call sins infirmities. The essence of sin is self-will, not necessarily transgression of law. Whether there be known law or not, self-will is sin; it is acting without a divine motive; if not against the authority or will of God, it is independence of Him and His word as that which prompts the action. When we do not even seek Him, are we not acting without Him and pleasing ourselves? All this is sin, it matters not how fair our ways may seem in the eyes of men. This is not what the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ was meant to meet, but the need of those who suffer in striving against sin.

When we suffer for His name or for righteousness, when we are tried just because we seek to follow the Lord, we do need His sympathy and comfort. We shrink from trial and cannot but suffer from it, sometimes with mixed feelings. Our blessed Lord ever felt it holily and perfectly. Not an atom of sin was in His sorrow and suffering, and all His path was full of it; for He was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So with Christians in their measure. It is quite right that we feel the contrariety of things here to God. We wrong Him and yield to the enemy whenever we seem to make up our minds to the awful state that surrounds us now, as if it were any adequate reflection of God, or of His moral government. For, though He does govern in secret providence, and this most wisely and righteously too, carrying on His will in the face of the subtlest foes and of apparently insuperable difficulties, and in the conflict of circumstances, yet is the actual state of the world as far as can be from a due manifestation of God's government. In the midst of such a condition His own must suffer; for there is our weakness, and a hostile world, and a malignant foe, the accuser of the brethren and the deceiver of the whole world. Here it is that the priesthood of the Lord Jesus applies to us — as a people holy, but feeble and persecuted — who feel what is around, and are tried by it, and suffer through it; but the priesthood of Him, Who is all-competent, is established on high to carry us through in spite of all.

But now we have to look at another part of the subject. May we not sin, although we are a holy people? And when "we" is used, the family of God is meant — none the less or more; that is, all saints are those who now bear the name of the Lord Jesus, and love Him in incorruption; all that call out of a pure heart. And may not such fail? May they not slip through unwatchfulness in such a way as to grieve the Holy Spirit of God? Most assuredly. "In many things we all stumble." This is sin. Call it not infirmity but rather sin. Do not use "failure" in such a way as to imply something between infirmity and sin for what is really sinful. Call things by their true names. Grace emboldens us to be thoroughly truthful and upright, to be honest with God and man, and above all to hold the right and title of God against that nature which (whilst ourselves are held for dead to it), not being treated as utterly evil, has been allowed to work out to God's dishonour.

Should one sin, what is the resource according to scripture? The advocacy of Christ. Therein is just the importance of these two dealings of divine mercy and living grace in our Lord Jesus, now at the right hand of God; for they belong to Him there, and they are both viewed as reaching us here. But they are not the same office; and to confound them is to lose the characteristic power of each of them; and as is always the case when you muddle together truths which are distinct, both are enfeebled, if not lost. You may have perhaps a general vague sense of them both, but you have not the precision and full comfort of either. Yet the Lord freely gives us both, as we need both.

In 1 John 2 we find to what the advocacy of the Lord applies, and what it assumes. We are not merely brought into the presence of God, but have communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus

Christ. We have a new life or divine nature, and along with the possession of this previously unknown spiritual being, given us by divine love in and through the Lord Jesus, there is the enjoyed fellowship with the Father and the Son. Evidently, when we speak of communion, we have before us that which is very delicate and sensitive exceedingly. For we have only to reflect a moment, and we must see that God the Father could have no communion with sin, or with us in it.

We who understand the gospel know that our being the most wretched of sinners did not hinder God from applying the blood of Christ in all its efficacious power to us. It was for such that His Son shed His blood; nor would there have been sufficient ground for it except for such. The sin-offering of the Lord Jesus supposes our utter vileness and distance from God. But now we are through that one offering not only sanctified but perfected for ever. This has been done by His death; and once done, the work for ever stands. But it is quite another thing when you speak of communion in the practical sense. Confound these, and you destroy either confidence as to your soul, or enjoyment of God, if not both.

What then is the basis of our communion? It is Christ; but this being so, whatever is not of Him, whatever is of self, whatever is of sin, interrupts the enjoyment of communion. And what restores it when broken? The advocacy of Christ. It is not therefore, observe, the ministration of that which strengthens, consoles, or gives courage to a holy people who are brought into absolute nearness to God, while walking in a world where all is counter to Him and to them because they are His; for it is not yet in fact under His sway, but rather under that of His enemy. Here it is a question of the practical state of our souls. And this is just as true in its place, and of the greatest possible moment for the saint. For you will find that the persons who merely dwell on such truth as is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, or rather on that part of it which discusses the effect of atonement (as the early part of Romans does our justification), and make this, momentous as it is, to be the sum and substance of Christianity, are apt to be indeed a cold set of people, in danger of becoming formal and dry doctrinally, as well as deficient in sensitiveness of heart and conscience for the glory of God.

The work of Christ is not all. When we rest on it, the priesthood of the Lord Jesus applies to our need day by day. If I am brought into holy nearness with God, Christ's ministration of grace does not fail to act, so as to conciliate my practical condition with my standing by grace in Christ before God, to maintain me here according to such a title of holy access to Him there. But may I not sink to, or even allow, what is positively evil — be betrayed into bad feelings, bad thoughts, bad words, bad ways? It is too true. And what then? Am I to despair because I have sinned after baptism, as a child and saint of God delivered from the guilt and power of sin? Am I to quiet my conscience with the plea that I must sin, as being still in the body and the world? Neither the one nor the other would be according to God.

This let me add, dear brethren: knowledge in itself does not preserve, but rather, when alone, it endangers; and the Christian who is most liable, yea sure to slip, is he who knows most, but least seeks to walk in dependence on God. No position is more critical. Indeed we may say he who ceases to walk dependently is morally ruined already. What worse therefore than when a vast deal of truth is taken in without the continued exercise of conscience before God? We need that self-judgment continually go on, and this too in the sense of weakness and waiting on God. For as the essence of sin is the desire to be independent, so also that on which godliness turns, and of which it practically consists, is the spirit of constant reference and subjection to God in things small or great. Without waiting on Him, acceptable obedience cannot be; and when that is found, obedience surely follows; and obedience is of the very essence of the walk to which we are called and sanctified. So the apostle Peter says, "Elect through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of

Jesus Christ." That is, we are the chosen of the Father as well as sanctified by the Spirit for the purpose of obeying as Christ obeyed. We have all the comfort of His blood-sprinkling and washing us clean from every spot; and we are sanctified to obey, not like Israel under law, but sons under grace as He obeyed.

When the soul enters into this, tenderness of conscience will be cherished, distrust of self, and watchfulness before God, with a spirit of prayer, which is the simple expression of our dependence on God. But one may be easily unwatchful; then open sin ensues ere long. Therefore says John the apostle, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." This is the word of God to the Christian practically. I speak of His word now, of course, as the ordinary rule of our daily ways. His servant writes, "that ye sin not."

But then, if all are warned against sin, the Spirit of God fully provides for any one that may stray; not as if evil were coolly looked for, but with guarded terms and careful regard to holiness; "And if any man sin." He does not say, "If we sin." How could he say of the family, "If we sin"? Had it been said, "And if we sin," it would be as good as allowing the thought that all must sin. Never does the Spirit of God say anything of the sort. And if any man — any one — "sin," it is a lamentable alternative to the Spirit of God; but still such a fact may be. It is, alas! in the believer's history what one has to face and feel and humble one's self before God for. "If any man sin, we have an advocate." He does not merely say "he," but "we." How perfect is His word, even in that which to a Grecian would be sure to sound an irregular or peculiar phrase! Can one doubt that they of old criticised John's words, or Paul's, just as much as or more than anything that we poor creatures might write now? This clause would have sounded harsh enough to Attic ears. Yet the men who flatter themselves that they understand writing so well, know but little about the divine accuracy of scripture. Let us delight in the perfection of that sentence, and maintain against all comers the accuracy of what the Spirit of God has written there. Not all the world could improve on it; and the very singularity too, which embarrasses them — which they count so strange in the structure of it — seems to be one proof of its perfectness.

An ordinary man of letters, if writing the sentence, might have said, "If any man sin, *he* has an advocate with the Father;" or if he had intended "*we* have," he would have changed it to "If we sin." But no; the Spirit of God has exactly given the right thing; because by saying "If any one sin," He makes it a sorrowful individual case. He keeps up the sense that it ought never to be. It is a contingency that may be, and it is always to be regarded as a most painful humiliation for our own souls, the sense of which we ought to maintain undimmed — in no way making light of sin, or treating it as if it were a common thing that we must all do sometimes. We may fall, doubtless; and we should never lose sight of the danger. On the other hand, we have an Advocate with the Father. There He is; and *we* have Him as Advocate: that is, Christ belongs thus to every Christian. He acts thus in the presence of God. It is the fulness of love which has given Him there to meet this great and distressing need of the soul. But still *we* have, not merely *he* has. If it had been said, "he has," this might have given the idea that it was his need that created the office, so to speak, or that it was this which set Christ to work as an advocate. No; He is always there, not simply as Priest with God, but as Advocate with the Father. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate." He is the common portion of all in the blessed fulness of the grace that takes up the deepest want of *any* created by sin. And this is exactly what is expressed best by the language of the Holy Ghost in the sentence — "If any man sin, *we* have an advocate with the Father."

Now observe how he goes back to the language of grace. He introduced the coming down of divine love in the person of the Lord Jesus, the Eternal Life which was with the Father before the world was, to spend Himself upon us, to give us what He alone possessed, what was peculiar to Him;

for no man, nor angel, had it. Neither Adam, fresh created, nor the archangel, had that eternal life: only the Son of God. "In him was life," and "he that hath the Son hath life." Communion with the Father and with the Son was the consequence. "And these things write we unto you, that your joy might be full." It is not merely a question of peace with God, nor anything which only tends to that end, as we have said, but the great and blessed truth of a communion which flows out of having Christ the Son of God, and eternal life in Him.

Thus, whatever in our conduct may be inconsistent with the action of divine life, Christ, as Advocate, takes up. Nor is the result uncertain. The effect is revealed to us. So absolute is the grace that the apostle says, "If any man *sin*, we have an advocate with the Father." If any uninspired Christian had written such a sentence as this, can one hesitate to affirm, that men would have called it downright antinomianism? I am persuaded that the only thing which shields many a word of the apostles from such a calumny is because most are as yet unprepared openly to speak ill of the Bible. There are men that so much the more do so, and not a few, and they are growing; and in this country, as in others, they lose shame and become bolder. In some neighbouring lands, Romanist and Protestant alike, they are practised in modern forms of the scepticism once rampant here, but abashed till of late; alas! now it spreads, the reaction from ritualism — this the religious, that the profane, enemy of the gospel; and you must be prepared for it and far greater abominations than these.

Many godly people then, but, if godly, not established in grace, are just such as find most difficulty in the fulness of God's provision. Incredulous minds are not troubled in general by such things, being rather glad to fasten on any inspired words which might seem to give them a loophole and excuse for sin; for so it is that they wretchedly pervert the scriptures to their own destruction. I speak now of such as love the Lord, but have never been brought to nought in their own eyes, nor to rest only in the grace of God; and such are apt to be particularly tried by what exceeds their measure.

For instance, take such a word as this, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under law, but under grace." What can they make of it? For their part they had been diligently trained to think, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or any others, that, saved by grace, they were now put under that very law as a rule to live by. This the apostle declares they are not under; yea more, because they are not under law but under grace, that sin shall not have dominion over them. As it never occurs to them to suspect the prevalent tradition, they are thereby incapable of understanding this scripture. So, lack of appreciating the fulness of redemption hinders souls from attaching any intelligible idea to that great privilege of the Christian — "no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10: 2).

It is the same here again: "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father." Wondrous way of God, in such a connection to tell us that we have Christ in all righteousness, making good our cause with the Father! There is precious assurance of communion in John 14, 15. to such as walk in obedience; but here it is, "If any man *sin*," — not if any man adhere to the good and holy and acceptable will of God. "If any man sin," says the apostle; not even "If he be made sensible of his sins;" nor yet, "If he spread it out, and humble himself for his sins." It cannot be that the holy and true God could lessen one's moral horror of evil: how comes it then that He should set forth our having an Advocate with the Father, and such an Advocate — "Jesus Christ the righteous"? There is a confessor of Christ who, we will suppose, has fallen into some deed of unrighteousness: what then does he need? "Jesus Christ the righteous;" not the miserable idea of substituting His perfect ways for his own evil ones.

Most precious truth in its own place is the scriptural doctrine of Christ's substitution, the true Azazel, on the cross. Viewed as a sinful man, I have my substitute in Him there, suffering for my sins,

not sympathy then. Even He must suffer for them to the uttermost — Just for unjust. God forbid that any one should look for sympathy in his sins! There we have the *Substitute*. And there, in my sorrow and trial and suffering, I have that blessed Priest Who Himself suffered, and is "able to succour them that are tempted." But now, after God's grace to me, is found a sad practical contradiction to my place as His child and saint. Here is that with which God can have no fellowship — sin. I have sinned, and in the most bitter sense too, sinning against His grace, because I failed to walk watchfully and humbly in prayer and self-judgment, and so fell to the Lord's dishonour. "If any man sin" — not "he must begin again;" nor "he has lost his blessing;" nor "let him apply afresh to the Saviour for life eternal." Nothing of the sort "we have an advocate with the Father."

Thus, it is not the poor thought of comforting us because He was righteous, wherein we were all wrong. This is not God's way; but "we have an advocate with the Father." It ought to be plain that the Puritan notion of substituting His rights for each wrong of ours would act as a continual destruction for the conscience. No; "we have an advocate with the Father." We have One that takes up all our business, One that acts for us where we could not, One that enters thoroughly into the case with the Father. Men know what it is to have in court a man of business worthy of all confidence in what they might compromise through many causes, and what would certainly be for them a source of the greatest possible perplexity. Here you, a Christian, are in exceeding trouble through your own fault; and you hate yourself the more, because you know His love against Whom you have sinned. Yet oh, the comfort of grace! He tells you of One in Whom you have the fullest trust, Who, knowing all your history, state, and heart, is entirely identified with you, and gives what is more — the perfect certainty that, as He is all-prevailing and righteously so before God, so surely He will extricate you to God's praise, if to your humiliation. This, and no less, is what our Advocate is; and this He is too, not "with us," though He does wash us every whit clean, but "with the Father."

It is not said "with God" in this case, as if it were a question simply of our justification. But is all hope of communion gone after such failure? after having so disgraced His name and our own confession of it? No; "we have an advocate with *the Father*." It is for the restoration of the communion that had been interrupted. For though the sin of the believer in his walk may not destroy his nearness to God (his access to God being made good by the sacrifice of Christ on which he rests), it does interrupt the enjoyment of communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; and it is the very Son Himself who does set Himself as Advocate to enter into this otherwise hopeless necessity of the soul. Nothing shall separate from His love.

"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." How blessed! His advocacy is as perfect to restore the saint's broken communion, as His blood to cleanse the once guilty sinner. But it is not simply the fact that He is my righteousness, which remains most true, unimpaired, and unimpeachable. The evil is dealt with, not spared. Not only does the *Father* feel that His child has so sinned, though there was grace to have kept right through, but I judge *myself*. And, in point of fact, this is the way in which the advocacy of Christ works. He is an Advocate with the Father; but then He deals with my soul also. It is not merely an exercise of what He is for me, though this is quite true and important, nor can one be too firm in holding fast one's standing. This abides according to its own perfection through Christ's work; but then it is not His advocacy. So here we have the standing supposed in "Jesus Christ the *righteous*," in whom, as St. Paul tells us, we are made God's righteousness. Even as advocate He probes the wound, and in very love to my soul does what makes me feel, more truly and hence acutely, my failure; for He heals me by the Spirit as well as manages my cause with the Father. He is Patron or Advocate no less than the Propitiation for my sins, and this too abides intact. The work is done by which the sins of the believer are effaced. But such riches of

grace only cause the soul, where there is living faith, and so divine life, to feel the more anguish and shame for the sin against God; not because one dreads His judgment of ourselves, but just because we know His love so true and faithful, spite of unfaithfulness.

It remains that I should seek to show a little how this truth stands in the application of Christ's advocacy to the saint. We have seen the main fact, the doctrine, and its relation to the truth of Christ our righteousness and of the propitiation, into which, of course, we need not enter now. It is a subject which is more or less familiar to all here. Let us then endeavour to adhere to the special truth that claims a somewhat fuller illustration just now, that is, Christ's advocacy; and now not only the truth in itself, but in its application to the soul. This too we find in the writings of the same apostle John. It is not doubted that we find the principle elsewhere, but we are indebted to the apostle John for its brightest presentation. Just as Paul lets us best see the priest, and in this connection with our being a sanctified, purged, and perfected people by virtue of the blood of Christ, so here we have the advocacy of the Lord Jesus for those who, having eternal life, are brought into communion with the Father and His Son.

Here let me direct your attention more particularly to John 13, where it is said of the Lord Jesus, when He was about to depart out of this world unto the Father, that "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." What blessed comfort for the needy! He loved them unto the end. Even when He goes out of the world, it is only to work for His own in another way. On the one hand we have the enemy in all the malice of his activity against the Lord Jesus. He had put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him. On the other hand, we have the Son of God in all the fulness of divine love to His own, spite of defiling influences, "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands," etc. Thus it is not only that He goes back to God in all the purity in which He came from Him as God, but also with the glory which the Father had conferred upon Him.

"Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God, and went to God, he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself." He is the servant still. It is the task divine love must take up for such a world as this. Man loves to figure and be somebody for a little while; God humbles Himself, and becomes a man, yea, a bondman, in order to deliver from self and Satan, loving and serving to the end, not merely as now because of wretchedness and sin. It could not be otherwise. It is exactly what Jesus did, and does, and will do. Love serves, and seeks the good of others. We see it not only in the Son, but in the Father Himself also, though in another way. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

Such is love, but it was displayed above all in the Son. Jesus would intimate what would occupy His heart about us when He should be on high; especially as it would prove no small difficulty for the Jewish mind or any other. Further, it was meant to form the heart and ways of the saints in their mutual relations. He shows them in this significant act that He was still to be their Servant in divine love. His cross would in no way exhaust the ever-flowing and fresh spring, for it was not a question of expiation only; but, if He was going up into glory, He would work so that they might have part with Him, even while they were upon earth, being destined to share that glory into which He was gone, and would come thence for them. Therefore "he took a towel and girded himself, and after that poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet."

Carefully remember that all through the context it is the washing of water by the word, and not by blood. In no case, so far as this scene typifies, have we propitiation here. The doctrine of the chapter is exclusively grounded on cleansing by water. No doubt the very same Son of God shed His

blood for His own; but this was, observe, to wash us from our sins and expiate guilt before God. Here it is the cleansing by water of these when reconciled to God, meeting the failures and sins of saints in their daily walk. "If any man sin;" but it is as saints that the Lord here regards them — as His own; not those that grace seeks and brings to Christ out of the ranks of a rebellious world, but such as were already His own, and loved accordingly. And this was the way in which He would prove His love: He would cleanse them in divine grace when He went up on high. He showed them here what He would do there. He washes the feet of those already bathed — bathed in water, and washed with water. It is the word used at first, then throughout the believer's career. The bathing that He supposes as a ground for washing their feet is water, not blood, although there was blood at first too and of everlasting efficacy. But here water only is meant.

For remember "This is He that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." This is the more important to recall, because it is one of the truths that has well-nigh dropped out of the professing church of God. Whoever met a man yet in the ordinary profession of Christianity that understood well the washing of water by the word? But few indeed have any just idea of it whatever. Some may count this plain speaking; but is there not a cause? At any rate it is quite evident that the truth intended is of no less value for saints. It is the provision of grace against what defiles in our walk. One is far from meaning that the godly persons included in the previous statement have not had some real effect of the truth itself; for we may be quite sure grace has secured that. But I am now speaking of intelligence in the word which rightly implies it, and so avoids utter misconstruction of a really important part of divine truth. Refer it to baptism, and you have absurdity as well as false doctrine; use it as the symbol of new birth, and of the subsequent cleansing by the word for the saints when defiled and you have the truth most needed.

For that which the Lord then and there represented is exactly what the Holy Ghost is carrying on here below in answer to Christ's advocacy on high. For evidently another truth is intimately connected with it, the action of the Holy Ghost now sent down from heaven, and this, we know, grounded upon Christ's ascension. For having accomplished redemption, He went on high, and is glorified at God's right hand, whence He sent down the Holy Ghost here, Who, in answer to His advocacy with the Father, works in us by the word. Hence therefore is readily seen how it applies to the soul. "If any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father." Carrying out the purposes of that advocacy, as far as concerns the saints in their need, the Spirit of God brings home the word in power to the conscience and in every detail of our practice day by day.

Let us just refer to a clear instance in another Gospel, which may show that the principles run through scripture. We have seen that the doctrine and the application are particularly found in John, as bound up with divine life and communion. But now take an instance from the great moralist among the four Evangelists, who was inspired to give us his account how Peter fell into a public and scandalous offence, calculated to shake the confidence of all weak believers. For, as he was a weighty man, and a well-known leader, the public fall of such a one denying his own Master in the hour of His greatest need, and this with oaths so solemnly and repeatedly and openly as in Peter's case, could not but necessarily be a tremendous shock to the infant company of the disciples who were then gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus. This being so flagrant a case, and recorded for our admonition, the Spirit of God shows us how it was dealt with by the Lord. First, he had been solemnly warned. When boasting of his love, he was told of the fall that was at hand — told of it in the presence of his fellows undisguisedly, but also with the most tender desire, if peradventure he might only be wise enough to profit by it. Alas! it is part of the state of him who is about to fall that he does not realise his danger.

Here it was Peter's own Master Who told him what impended; and he had confessed before that

Jesus was a divine person, for he had owned Him to be the Son of the living God. Nevertheless, our ears are but heavy when we like not to hear, and we do not understand what we do not at the present time feel to be our own need. Unpalatable truths pass over us: what is then said is "a parable," as we find with the disciples on a previous occasion. Peter therefore had no deep impression left on his soul, no vivid sense of need produced. Indeed such a fall, an aggravated outward evil, is always the effect of inward or secret failure before God. It neither comes alone nor all at once. Before this, Peter's case, though a man singularly fervent and of earnest purpose, had not wanted certain traces of unjudged forwardness and self-confidence. And this it was that furnished the occasion; for the apostle was so sure of himself and of his own courage that, if everybody else denied the Master, it was impossible to his own mind that Peter could. Yet this was the man that denied the Christ of God through fear of a mere servant-girl. So it is: if unbelieving and unwatchful, we fall into the very thing in which we are proudest, and in the way that is most humbling to us.

But look at the merciful ways of the Lord Jesus: for this it is of all things we want most to see — not Peter's fall, but Christ's fulness of grace. Before it He had said (Luke 22: 31), "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Satan demanded to have the disciples to sift them in general as wheat; and the Lord said to Simon individually, "But I (emphatically) have prayed for *thee*," not merely "for you." Ah! did not Peter need it? How sweet soon would be the proof of such interest and deep concern on the Lord's part about himself under such circumstances, as if there had not been another to care for, and all His love were concentrated on the one on the point of such-grievous dishonour of His name. "I have entreated for thee, that thy faith fail not quite. And thou, when thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brethren." The word rendered "converted" means the turning to God, whether it be conversion originally, or the turning back when one has departed from Him. The latter is of course what is meant here. It is what we commonly call "restoration" of soul rather than what people in general understand by "conversion." The word is suitable to either. "Thou, when once thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brethren."

But the point I would now press and clear is the grace of the Lord that could so provide for a wanderer, and that would give the certainty of it to the soul in such an hour of distress and humiliation. That flesh and hypocrisy might take advantage is true; but such grace is needed and shown. How comforting is the truth of God! Observe that this rich grace does not appear in answer to a penitent cry. Not for a moment does one doubt that the Lord hears and answers such; but there was in the case before us a reason for speaking otherwise, and, to my mind, of no small importance. If one had only the consolation of the word of the Lord, and of His appearing on our behalf when we begin to repent of any sins and judge ourselves before God, one might perhaps think it was one's own repentance, or prayers, that drew out His grace and awakened His care. And such is the thought of many a soul around us. It is exactly where people ordinarily find themselves in Christendom. That is, they make out that a man's conversion, as well as his restoration, is in answer to his prayer, a substitution throughout of human merit for grace. Where is Christ in such a scheme? It is semi-Pelagianism.

It is not so scripture speaks. There God ever takes the first place. It was God that began the good work when the soul sought Him not; as here it is the Lord evidently that entreated even before Peter fell, not the failing man after it, though of course he did pray and weep bitterly. But the stress is thrown on the prayer of Christ, not of Peter, however men may reason. "If any one sin," we *have* — not shall have when he repents — "If any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father." It is the settled possession that Christians always have. Sin is inexcusable always in a saint; but if one should

be guilty, "we have an advocate with the Father." His advocacy brings us to repentance. It is not our repentance that makes Him our advocate, but His grace which puts all in effectual activity.

Have you seized the truth? Thus, as grace it is at the beginning, so is it throughout every step of the way. The spring is mercy all through. Far I am from implying there is no righteousness; for indeed without it not anything else were good. Without the full maintenance of God's character and ways, all must be wrong; but this we have in Christ Himself, Who is our life, "Jesus Christ the righteous." And besides, as we know, the fullest account has been taken of all that we were. "And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." It may not be in precisely the same way as for the believer; but still He died for all. The blood is on the mercy-seat, and this is not limited to the people of God merely, but embraces the largest outlook over God's creation, so that the gospel can go out righteously in His grace to all, commanding "all everywhere to repent" no doubt, but appealing in love, persuading and warning souls far and wide that they may be saved.

It appears to me then, that we have the subject distinct thus far in God's word. We are born of water and of the Spirit. It is that action of the Holy Ghost by the word of God, carrying out the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which first of all the soul is set apart to God. Hence we read that He saved us "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." There we find what is clearly from the starting-point of the Christian's career. For "God chose us from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." So also Christ "loved the church, and gave himself up for it, that he might sanctify it, cleansing it with the washing of water by the word." The disciples were clean through the word Jesus spoke to them; certainly not in baptism, a heathen idea, leading to antinomianism and self-deception, and bound up with sacerdotalism, but by the Spirit through the word of God.

The truth too is often taught without the figure, as where we read in James 1, that we are "begotten by the word of truth." It is the same principle in 1 Peter 1: "We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible," which is true from the very first.

The same distinction is maintained in the symbolic action of John 13, to which I have already referred. "He that is washed" (or bathed) "needeth not save to wash his feet." "Bathed" also is in the water of the word. It is not in blood, but in water still. Only this is when a man is first converted, or set apart unto God. He is bathed, as it were all over. Afterwards, when there is a particular case of failure, the word is applied by the Spirit to convict us of that failure, and to humble us for it in self-judgment. So we see in Luke 22: 61, that the Lord turned and looked upon Peter when he fell. "And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." It was the washing of water by the word. The words of Jesus were recalled in all their life and power to his soul. "And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

There is another remark, too, that I have to add as to this. We come to further details in the practical application to this particular instance. The work was not completely done when Peter went out and wept bitterly. This was right and seasonable; it was of God; but it was not complete. And therefore we find that the Lord Jesus afterwards deals with the inmost soul of this very Peter. As far as the apostles were concerned, His first interview was with Peter, with him alone. But even after this we learn what must be to make the work complete, and this not judicially, but in the perfection of His love. "Simon, son of Jonas," said He, "lovest thou me more than these?" Simon protests He knew that he dearly loved Him. The Lord repeats the question of his love, and the third time takes up his claim of special attachment; on which Peter was grieved that He said the third time, Dost thou love me dearly? Well he might feel; for it became evident that his threefold denial was before the Lord's eye,

and its root also. And now Peter gets to see how it came to pass. Not but that he had wept over it, and felt already his great sin and the Lord's great grace; but had he thoroughly judged himself?

It is not a question therefore of merely judging the particular offence. Never do we reach the bottom of that which has misled us if we but look at the outward act. What exposed one to it? And what was it that exposed Peter? He thought he loved the Lord better than anybody; *he* could go where the others could not; *he* could trust himself who loved Him so truly: never should he deny the Messiah. Peter was satisfied that he loved Jesus more than all, and could face prison, death, anything for His sake. The Lord thus brought to light the root of his failure. There, without one harsh word, without even an ostensible reference to the threefold denial, without the smallest needless exposure to others, the root was laid bare and dealt with; and Simon Peter was perfectly restored, and the Lord now could commit His sheep and His lambs to his tending and feeding. "When thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." He was converted (restored) now, and had the promise in the end, when nature's strength should wither, that he should follow Himself even to the death of the cross. Nor is it only in the New Testament that we find this truth. We have there, of course, the doctrine and the application, and such a special instance as I have just cited; but now I go farther, and affirm that it is a principle which is no less true of the Old Testament, though it is only the New Testament which gives us to understand it clearly. The water of separation which the law enjoined on the children of Israel — what did it mean? Water was mingled with the ashes of an heifer that was wholly burned, skin and all, even what was most offensive. The whole was reduced to ashes, being one of the few sacrifices where this was done completely; and why? For the very important reason of vividly expressing in a figure the consuming judgment of God. In no sacrifice was this more fully carried out than in the burning of the red heifer. The ashes (for that was the point) were kept mixed with running water, and the Israelite, if defiled, was ordered to be sprinkled with this as a water of separation. There were two sprinklings; the first on the third day, and the second on the seventh day if the defiled one had been sprinkled on the third. The meaning I take to be that he was sprinkled on the third day, not the first, because one does not show a due sense of sin by being over quick to get through it. You have seen a child who, directly she has been guilty of a fault, readily tells you how sorry she is. But the same child will fall into the fault again no less quickly. Would you not rather see a child that showed more shame, and remained for a while under the feeling of it, than one so very hasty to ask pardon, and then forgetting the sin the very next moment? Alas! we are but naughty children ourselves, and sometimes we have behaved as ill to God our Father.

The only wise God provided this institute for the people passing through the wilderness; for, remark, it appears only in Numbers, the book of the wilderness journey. And there it was, and is, wanted. It contemplates the people, not in Egypt, nor in Canaan, but on their march through the wilderness. Accordingly the Israelite was called to abide under the sense of his uncleanness; he must bear the feeling of defilement till the third day. There must be no haste. The man who was unclean must abandon life to the pain of it for two days, and only on the third day, when there was a full witness ("in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established") is he sprinkled. Such I believe to be the force of the third day here. It has nothing to do with resurrection. It signifies, it would seem, an adequate testimony to his having been unclean; and it is when he feels it before God, and abides under it thus, that the seventh day sprinkling takes effect and the man is clean. Thus it is the reverse of trying to escape and have done with it, as a man would like to do; just as Saul, when he said, "I have sinned," and then forgot all. Here the unclean was not sprinkled till the third day, and then afterwards on the seventh. This one case gives us sin in the presence of grace, as the other grace in the presence of sin. Thus all defilement was now judged and gone. The once defiled Israelite is now fully cleansed. Grace triumphs.

How great, then, the grace of our Lord! Who, while making the fullest provision in case of sin nevertheless in no case makes light of it; even in the very provision for restoring, grace turns all to holy account. Thus is the soul made to feel its sin as it never did before, not the particular act simply, but that which exposed to it, so that one may be profited and strengthened as well as humbled, in a way and degree which had not been the previous experience. Thus, too, where sin abounded, grace yet more, giving a better state to the Lord's praise alone, which could not be if there were no more than the open evil act seen; for we may be as liable to fall again, if not more so. What riches of grace thus meets us! Assuredly it does meet us in the particular act that disgraces and pains us: only according to both Old and New Testament it does not stop there, but would go to the root of the matter, that the defiled might judge self in its roots, and the soul gather strength for itself, minister grace to others, and God be glorified in all things by Jesus Christ our Lord.

May we, then, rejoice in the Lord, and rejoice always. May we know how to hold every particle of His truth, in the confidence of His grace. May we look to it, that all the grace and truth we know in Him be used to maintain and vindicate the revealed will and word of God, that it may deal with our own souls as with others, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

W. K.