

# CHRIST OUR ADVOCATE

BY Charles Grandison Finney

THE OBERLIN EVANGELIST, JANUARY 16, 1861

"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." --1 John 2:1, 2

The Bible abounds with governmental analogies. These are designed for our instruction; but if we receive instruction from them, it is because there is a real analogy in many points between the government of God and human governments.

**I propose to inquire,**

**I. What is the idea of an advocate when the term is used to express a governmental office or relation?**

An advocate is one who pleads the cause of another, who represents another, and acts in his name; one who uses his influence in behalf of another by his request.

**II. Purposes for which an advocate may be employed.**

1. To secure justice, in case any question involving justice is to be tried.
2. To defend the accused. If one has been accused of committing a crime, an advocate may be employed to conduct his trial on his behalf; to defend him against the charge, and prevent his conviction if possible.
3. An advocate may be employed to secure a pardon, when a criminal has been justly condemned, and is under sentence. That is, an advocate may be employed either to secure justice for his client, or to obtain mercy for him, in case he is condemned; may be employed either to prevent his conviction, or when convicted, may be employed in setting aside the execution of the law upon the criminal.

**III. The sense in which Christ is the advocate of sinners.**

He is employed to plead the cause of sinners, not at the bar of justice; not to defend them against the charge of sin, because the question of their guilt is already settled. The Bible represents them as condemned already; and such is the fact, as every sinner knows. Every sinner in the world knows that he has sinned, and that consequently he must be condemned by the law of God. This office, then, is exercised by Christ in respect to sinners; not at the bar of justice, but at the throne of grace, at the footstool of sovereign mercy. He is employed, not to prevent the conviction of the sinner, but to prevent his execution; not to prevent his being condemned, but being already condemned, to prevent his being damned.

**IV. What is implied in his being the advocate of sinners.**

1. His being employed at a throne of grace and not at the bar of justice, to plead for sinners, as such, and not for those who are merely charged with sin, but the charge not established. This implies that the guilt of the sinner is already ascertained, the verdict of guilty given, the sentence of the law pronounced, and that the sinner awaits his execution.
2. His being appointed by God as the advocate of sinners implies a merciful disposition in God. If God had not been mercifully disposed towards sinners, no advocate had been appointed, no question of forgiveness had been raised.
3. It implies also that the exercise of mercy on certain conditions is possible. Not only is God mercifully disposed, but to manifest this disposition in the actual pardon of sin is possible. Had not this been the case, no advocate had been appointed.
4. It implies that there is hope, then, for the condemned. Sinners are prisoners; but in this world they are not yet prisoners of despair, but are prisoners of hope.

5. It implies that there is a governmental necessity for the interposition of an advocate; that the sinner's relations are such, and his character such, that he can not be admitted to plead his own cause in his own name. He is condemned, he is no longer on trial. In this respect he is under sentence for a capital crime; consequently he is an outlaw, and the government can not recognize him as being capable of performing any legal act. His relations to the government forbid that in his own name, or in his own person, he should appear before God. So far as his own personal influence with the government is concerned, he is as a dead man--he is civilly dead. Therefore he must appear by his next friend, or by his advocate, if he is heard at all. He may not appear in his own name and in his own person, but must appear by an advocate who is acceptable to the government.

**V. I next call attention to the essential qualifications of an advocate under such circumstances.**

1. He must be the uncompromising friend of the government. Observe, he appears to pray for mercy to be extended to the guilty party whom he represents. Of course he must not himself be the enemy of the government of whom he asks so great a favor; but he should be known to be the devoted friend of the government whose mercy he prays may be extended to the guilty.

2. He must be the uncompromising friend of the dishonored law. The sinner has greatly dishonored, and by his conduct denounced, both the law and the law-giver. By his uniform disobedience the sinner has proclaimed, in the most emphatic manner, that the law is not worthy of obedience, and that the law-giver is a tyrant. Now the advocate must be a friend to this law; he must not sell himself to the dishonor of the law; nor consent to its dishonor. He must not reflect upon the law; for in this case he places the law-giver in a condition in which, if he should set aside the penalty and exercise mercy, he would consent to the dishonor of the law, and by a public act himself condemn the law. The advocate seeks to dispense with the execution of the law; but he must not offer as a reason, that the law is unreasonable and unjust. For in this case he renders it impossible for the law-giver to set aside the execution without consenting to the assertion that the law is not good. In that case the law-giver would condemn himself instead of the sinner. It is plain, then, that he must be the uncompromising friend of the law, or he can never secure the exercise of mercy without involving the law-giver himself in the crime of dishonoring the law.

3. The advocate must be righteous; that is, he must be clear of any complicity in the crime of the sinner. He must have no fellowship with his crime; there must be no charge or suspicion of guilt resting upon the advocate. Unless he himself be clear of the crime, of which the criminal is accused, he is not the proper person to represent him before a throne of mercy.

4. He must be the compassionate friend of the sinner. Not of his sins, but of the sinner himself. This distinction is very plain. Every one knows that a parent can be greatly opposed to the wickedness of his children, while he has great compassion for their person. He is not a true friend to the sinner who really sympathizes with his sins. I have several times heard sinners render as an excuse for not being Christians, that their friends were opposed to it. They have a great many dear friends who are opposed to their becoming Christians and obeying God. They desire them to live on in their sins. They do not want them to change and become holy, but desire them to remain in their worldly-mindedness and sinfulness. I tell such persons that those are their friends in the same sense that the devil is their friend. And would they call the devil their good friend, their kind friend, because he sympathizes with their sins, and wishes them not to become Christians? Would you call a man your friend, who wished you to commit murder, or robbery, to tell a lie, or commit any crime? Suppose he should come and appeal to you, and because you are his friend should desire you to commit some great crime, would you regard that man as your friend?

No! No man is a true friend of a sinner, unless he is desirous that he should abandon his sins. If any person would have you continue in your sins, he is the adversary of your soul. Instead of being in any proper sense your friend, he is playing the devil's part to ruin you.

Now observe: Christ is the compassionate friend of sinners, a friend in the best and truest sense. He does not sympathize with your sins, but his heart is set upon saving you from your sins. I said he must be the compassionate friend of sinners; and his compassion must be stronger than death, or he will never meet the necessities of the case.

5. Another qualification must be, that he is able sufficiently to honor the law, which sinners by their transgression have dishonored. He seeks to avoid the execution of the dishonored law of God. The law having been dishonored by sin in the highest degree, must either be honored by its execution on the criminal, or the law-giver must in some other way bear testimony in favor of the law, before he can justly dispense with the execution of its penalty. The law is not to be repealed; the law must not be dishonored. It is the law of God's nature, the unalterable law of his government, the eternal law of heaven, the law for the government of moral agents in all worlds, and in all time, and to all eternity. Sinners have borne their most emphatic testimony against it, by pouring contempt upon it in utterly refusing to obey it. Now sin must not be treated lightly; this law must be honored.

God may pour a flash of glory over it by executing its penalty upon the whole race that have despised it. This would be the solemn testimony of God to sustain its authority and vindicate its claims. If our advocate appears before God to ask for the remission of sin, that the penalty of this law may be set aside and not executed, the question immediately arises, But how shall the dishonor of this law be avoided? What shall compensate for the reckless and blasphemous contempt with which this law has been treated? How shall sin be forgiven without apparently making light of it?

It is plain that sin has placed the whole question in such a light that God's testimony must in some way be borne in a most emphatic manner against sin, and to sustain the authority of this dishonored law.

It behooves the advocate of sinners to provide himself with a plea that shall meet this difficulty. He must meet this necessity, if he would secure the setting aside of the penalty. He must be able to provide an adequate substitute for its execution. He must be able to do that which will as effectually bear testimony in favor of the law and against sin as the execution of the law upon the criminal would do. In other words, he must be able to meet the demands of public justice.

6. He must be willing to volunteer a gratuitous service. He cannot be called upon in justice to volunteer a service, or suffer for the sake of sinners. He may volunteer his service, and it may be accepted; but if he does volunteer his service, he must be able and willing to endure whatever pain or sacrifice is necessary to meet the case.

If the law must be honored by obedience; if, "without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission;" if an emphatic governmental testimony must be borne against sin, and in honor of the law; if he must become the representative of sinners, offering himself before the whole universe as a propitiation for sin, he must be willing to meet the case and make the sacrifice.

7. He must have a good plea. In other words, when he appears before the mercy-seat, he must be able to present such considerations as shall really meet the necessities of the case, and render it safe, proper, honorable, glorious in God to forgive.

**VI. I now come to inquire, what his plea in behalf of sinners is.** It should be remembered that the appeal is not to justice. Since the fall of man, God has plainly suspended the execution of strict justice upon our race. To us, as a matter of fact, he has set upon a throne of mercy. Mercy, and not justice, has been the rule of his administration, since men were involved in sin.

This is simple fact. Men do sin, and they are not cut off immediately and sent to hell. The execution of justice is suspended; and God is represented as seated upon a throne of grace, or upon a mercy-seat. It is here at a mercy-seat, that Christ executes the office of advocate for sinners.

2. Christ's plea for sinners cannot be that they are not guilty. They are guilty, and condemned. No question can be raised as it respects their guilt and their ill-desert; such questions are settled. It has often appeared strange to me, that men overlook the fact that they are condemned already, and that no question respecting their guilt or desert of punishment can ever be raised.

3. Christ as our advocate cannot, and need not, plead a justification. A plea of justification admits the fact charged; but asserts that under the circumstances the accused had a right to do as he did. This plea, Christ can never make. This is entirely out of place, the case having been already tried, and sentence passed.

4. He may not plead what will reflect, in any wise, upon the law. He cannot plead that the law was too strict in its precept, or too severe in its penalty; for in that case he would not really plead for mercy, but for justice. He would plead in that case that no injustice might be done the criminal. For if he intimates that the law is not just, then the sinner does not deserve the punishment; hence it would be unjust to punish him, and his plea would amount to this, that the sinner be not punished, because he does not deserve it. But if this plea should be allowed to prevail, it would be a public acknowledgment on the part of God that his law was unjust. But this may never be.

5. He may not plead anything that shall reflect upon the administration of the law-giver. Should he plead that men had been hardly treated by the law-giver, either in their creation, or by his providential arrangements, or by suffering them to be so tempted--or if, in any wise, he brings forward a plea that reflects upon the law-giver, in creation, or in the administration of his government, the law-giver cannot listen to his plea, and forgive the sinner, without condemning himself. In that case, instead of insisting that the sinner should repent, virtually the law-giver would be called upon himself to repent.

6. He may not plead any excuse whatever for the sinner in mitigation of his guilt, or in extenuation of his conduct. For if he does, and the law-giver should forgive in answer to such a plea, he would confess that he had been wrong, and that the sinner did not deserve the sentence that had been pronounced against him.

He must not plead that the sinner does not deserve the damnation of hell; for, should he urge this plea, it would virtually accuse the justice of God, and would be equivalent to begging that the sinner might not be sent unjustly to hell. This would not be a proper plea for mercy, but rather an issue with justice. It would be asking that the sinner might not be sent to hell, not because of the

mercy of God, but because the justice of God forbids it. This will never be.

7. He can not plead as our advocate that he has paid our debt, in such a sense that he can demand our discharge on the ground of justice. He has not paid our debt in such a sense that we do not still owe it. He has not atoned for our sins in such a sense that we might not still be justly punished for them. Indeed such a thing is impossible and absurd. One being cannot suffer for another in such a sense as to remove the guilt of that other. He may suffer for another's guilt in such a sense that it will be safe to forgive the sinner, for whom the suffering has been endured; but the suffering of the substitute can never, in the least degree, diminish the intrinsic guilt of the criminal. Our advocate may urge that he has borne such suffering for us to honor the law that we had dishonored, that now it is safe to extend mercy to us; but he never can demand our discharge on the ground that we do not deserve to be punished. The fact of our intrinsic guilt remains, and must forever remain; and our forgiveness is just as much an act of sovereign mercy, as if Christ had never died for us.

8. But Christ may plead his sin-offering to sanction the law, as fulfilling a condition, upon which we may be forgiven.

This offering is not to be regarded as the ground upon which justice demands our forgiveness. The appeal of our advocate is not to this offering as payment in such a sense that now in justice he can demand that we shall be set free. No. As I said before, it is simply the fulfilling of a condition, upon which it is safe for the mercy of God to arrest and set aside the execution of the law, in the case of the penitent sinner.

Some theologians appear to me to have been unable to see this distinction. They insist upon it that the atonement of Christ is the ground of our forgiveness. They seem to assume that he literally bore the penalty for us in such a sense that Christ now no longer appeals to mercy, but demands justice for us. To be consistent they must maintain that Christ does not plead at a mercy-seat for us, but having paid our debt, appears before a throne of justice, and demands our discharge.

I cannot accept this view. I insist that his offering could not touch the question of our intrinsic desert of damnation. His appeal is to the infinite mercy of God, to his loving disposition to pardon; and he points to his atonement, not as demanding our release, but as fulfilling a condition upon which our release is honorable to God. His obedience to the law and the shedding of his blood he may plead as a substitute for the execution of the law upon us--in short, he may plead the whole of his work as God-man and mediator. Thus he may give us the full benefit of what he has done, to sustain the authority of law and to vindicate the character of the law-giver, as fulfilling conditions that have rendered it possible for God to be just and still justify the penitent sinner.

9. But the plea is directed to the merciful disposition of God. He may point to the promise made to him in Isaiah, chap. 52, from v. 13 to the end, and chap. 53, vs. 1-3.

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.

"As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:)

"So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

10. He may plead also that he becomes our surety, that he undertakes for us, that he is our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; and point to his official relations; his infinite fullness, willingness, and ability to restore us to obedience, and to fit us for the service, the employments, and enjoyments of heaven. It is said that he is made the surety of a better covenant than the legal one; and a covenant founded upon better promises.

11. He may urge as a reason for our pardon the great pleasure it will afford to God, to set aside the execution of the law. "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Judgment is his strange work; but He delighteth in mercy.

It is said of Victoria that when her prime minister presented a pardon, and asked her if she would sign a pardon in the case of some individual, who was sentenced to death, she seized the pen, and said, "yes! with all my heart!" Could such an appeal be made to a woman's heart, think you, without its leaping for joy to be placed in a position in which it could save the life of a fellow-being?

It is said that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" and think you not that it affords God the sincerest joy to be able to forgive the wretched sinner, and save him from the doom of hell? He has no pleasure in our death.

It is a grief to him to be obliged to execute his law on sinners; and no doubt it affords him infinitely higher pleasure to forgive us, than it does us to be forgiven. He knows full well, what are the unutterable horrors of hell and damnation. He knows the sinner can not bear it. He says, "Can thine heart endure, and can thine hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee? And what wilt thou do when I shall punish thee?" Our advocate knows that to punish the sinner is that in which God has no delight--that He will forgive and sign the pardon with all His heart.

And think you such an appeal to the heart of God, to his merciful disposition, will have no avail? It is said of Christ, our Advocate, that "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame." So great was the love of our Advocate for us that he regarded it a pleasure and a joy so great to save us from hell, that he counted the shame and agony of the cross as a mere trifle--he despised them.

This, then, is a disclosure of the heart of our Advocate. And how surely may he assume that it will afford God the sincerest joy, eternal joy, to be able honorably to seal to us a pardon.

12. He may urge the glory that will redound to the Son of God, for the part that he has taken in this work.

Will it not be eternally honorable in the Son to have advocated the cause of sinners? to have undertaken at so great expense to himself a cause so desperate? and to have carried it through at the expense of such agony and blood?

Will not the universe of creatures forever wonder and adore, as they see this advocate surrounded with the innumerable throng of souls, for whom his advocacy has prevailed?

13. Our Advocate may plead the gratitude of the redeemed, and the profound thanks and praise of all good beings.

Think you not that the whole family of virtuous beings will forever feel obliged for the intervention of Christ as our Advocate, and for the mercy, forbearance, and love that has saved our race?

## REMARKS

1. You see what it is to become a Christian. It is to employ Christ as your advocate, by committing your cause entirely to him. You cannot be saved by your works, you cannot be saved by your sufferings, by your prayers--in any way except by the intervention of this Advocate. "He ever lives to make intercession for you."

He proposes to undertake your cause; and to be a Christian is to at once surrender your whole cause, your whole life and being to him as your Advocate.

2. He is an Advocate that loses no causes. Every cause committed to him, and continued in his hands, is infallibly gained. His advocacy is all-prevalent. God has appointed him as an advocate; and wherever he appears in behalf of any sinner, who has committed his cause to him, one word of his is sure to prevail. Hence you see,

3. The safety of believers. Christ is always at his post, ever ready to attend to all the concerns of those who have made him their Advocate. He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him; and abiding in him, you are forever safe.

4. You see the position of unbelievers. You have no advocate. God has appointed an Advocate; but you reject him. You think to get along without. Perhaps some of you think you will be punished for your sins, and not ask forgiveness. Others of you may think you will approach in your own name; and, without any atonement, or without any advocate, you will plead your own cause. But God will not suffer it. He has appointed an Advocate to act in your behalf, and unless you approach through him, God will not hear you.

Out of Christ, he is to you a consuming fire. When the judgment shall set, and you appear in your own name, you will surely appear unsanctified and unsaved. You will not be able to lift up your head; and you will be ashamed to look in the face of the Advocate, who will then sit both as Judge and Advocate.

5. I ask, Have you retained him? Have you by your own consent made him your Advocate?

It is not enough that God should have appointed him to act in this relation.

He cannot act for you in this relation, unless you individually commit yourself and your case to his

advocacy.

This is done, as I have said, by confiding, or committing the whole question of your salvation to him.

6. Do any of you say that you are unable to employ him? But remember the fee, which He requires of you, is your heart. You have a heart. It is not money, but your heart that he seeks.

The poor, then, may employ him as well as the rich; the children, who have not a penny of their own, as well as their rich parents. All may employ him, for all have hearts.

7. He tenders his services gratuitously to all, requiring nothing of them but confidence, gratitude, love, obedience. This the poor and the rich alike must render; this they are alike able to render.

8. Can any of you do without him? Have you ever considered how it will be with you? But the question comes now to this--will you consent to give up your sins, and trust your souls to the advocacy of Christ? to give him the fee that he asks, your heart, your confidence, your grateful love, your obedience?

Shall he be your Advocate, or shall he not? Suppose he stood before you, as I do, and in his hand the book of life with a pen dipped in the very light of heaven, and should ask, "Who of you will now consent to make me your Advocate?" Suppose he should inquire of you, sinner, "Can I be of any service to you? Can I do anything for you, dying sinner? Can I befriend and help you in any wise? Can I speak a good word for you? Can I interpose my blood, my death, my life, my advocacy, to save you from the depths of hell? And will you consent? Shall I take down your name? Shall I write it in the book of life? Shall it today be told in heaven that you are saved? And may I report that you have committed your cause to me, and thus give joy in heaven? Or will you reject me, stand upon your own defense, and attempt to carry your cause through at the solemn judgment?"

Sinner, I warn you in the name of Christ, not now to say me nay.

Consent now and here, and let it be written in heaven.

9. Have any of you made his advocacy sure by committing all to him? If you have, he has attended to your cause, because he has secured your pardon; and the evidence you have in your peace of mind. Has he attended to your cause? Have you the inward sense of reconciliation, the inward witness that you believe that you are forgiven, that you are accepted, that Christ has undertaken for you, and that he has already prevailed and secured for you pardon, and given in your own soul the peace of God that passeth understanding to rule in your heart? It is a striking fact in Christian experience, that whenever we really commit our cause to Jesus, he without delay secures our pardon, and in the inward peace that follows, gives us the assurance of our acceptance, that he has interposed his blood, that his blood is accepted for us, that his advocacy has prevailed, and that we are saved.

Do not stop short of this; for if your peace is truly made with God, if you are in fact forgiven, the sting of remorse is gone; there is no longer any chafing or any irritation between your spirit and the Spirit of God; the sense of condemnation and remorse has given place to the spirit of gospel liberty, peace, and love.

The stony heart is gone; the heart of flesh has taken its place; the dry sensibility is melted, and peace flows like a river. Have you this? Is this a matter of consciousness with you?

If so, then leave your cause, by a continual committal of it, to the advocacy of Christ; abide in him, and let him abide in you, and you are safe as the surroundings of Almighty arms can make you.