

1 John - Commentaries by William John Hocking

Our Advocate with the Father, Our Advocate With the Father: Part 1 (2:1)

Our subject this evening is Jesus Christ, our Advocate with the Father; and it may be as well at the outset for us to be clear as to what is meant in the Scripture by this word "Advocate." What are we to understand by the Advocate with the Father? Clearly it is here closely associated with the question of sin: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." And the thought comes to us at once that in the hour of our fall there is One acting for us on high, One that takes our place and pleads on our behalf, and restores that communion which was taken away. And this thought is perfectly just. The Lord so serves in our interest in the presence of the Father above.

The word, however, has a wider meaning than this, and you may see that it has a wider meaning by referring to the Lord's own use of it. When He was leaving the world we find that He spoke in view of His departure of sending them another Advocate or Comforter (for the words are the same). Now if the Lord on His departure promised to send another Comforter, who we know was the Holy Spirit, and who is referred to in those discourses, on more than one occasion, as the Comforter, then He Himself was a Comforter while He was here (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13).

The Lord had been continually in the midst of His disciples, and had acted towards them as their Advocate or Comforter. Now He was going away, and it looked as if they were about to lose what they had so constantly enjoyed by His presence. But He said, "If I go away, I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter."

WHAT IS AN ADVOCATE?

The meaning of the word is this. An Advocate (Paraclete) is one who undertakes the case of another, a strong person, for instance, who under-takes the case of a weak one. In the case of our Lord, it was One who was Almighty, taking up the case of those who followed Him.

If you look in the second of Luke you will find a reference to those pious Jews who were in Jerusalem, waiting for the Consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25, 38), that promised One, that gracious and glorious Person who was to come according to promise, and to be to Israel all that the nation needed. Well, the Lord came to be the expected Comforter, and He was such especially to the little company that gathered around Him. So that if you want to read what an Advocate or a Comforter really is, read the doings of our Lord as given in the four Gospels. See what the Lord did for His own. See how He gave everything to them that was requisite. There was not a thing that they wanted but what He supplied to them. At no time did they lack anything (Luke 22:35). The Master was one to whom they could come under any circumstances, and always find Him ready to help. Are we not expected to learn that the same blessed feature is in our Lord now? He is surely the same now; and the Lord prepared His disciples to learn that lesson before His departure, as He would have us learn it now. Why do I say 'now'? because, however brief or long your Christian career may be, you know right well that your great lack is that you think too little of our Lord Jesus Christ. You must be continuously finding out that you might have made more use of Him than you have done. It is because of your neglect of Him, of your forgetfulness of Him that you have missed so much, and that you have done so little. Remember therefore, that the Lord is all that we need, though He is absent from us.

Now I should like to draw your attention to two or three instances in the Gospel of John which illustrate our subject.

The Lord educated the disciples to think of Him in this way—that although they might not be able to see Him, although He was not visibly in their midst, yet still He was thinking of them. He was serving them, and devoting Himself to their interests, and to their well-being, and, moreover, He was able to work things out in a super-human way for their blessing and benefit. They were slow to learn this truth, and so are we.

NOT FORGOTTEN IN THE STORM

Now take the account we have in the sixth of John of the disciples on the lake. After the feeding of the multitudes they were told by the Lord to embark in the boat, and to cross the sea, but the Lord did not return in the boat with them. They put out from the shore and sailed across the sea, but two unexpected things happened before they had reached their destination. Darkness came on, and coupled with the darkness a storm arose. The darkness by itself was enough, but when the storm came, and the wind began to blow, then their difficulties were multiplied. They did not know where they were; and the fury of the sea and the wind was threatening their destruction, and Jesus was not present. He kept away from them. He had left them to fight the battle alone. Why did the Master leave them in that way? They struggled with all their energy to keep the boat straight, but how could they? They had no landmark, everywhere was black night, and the wind and waves were howling.

Now we read that at this juncture Jesus came to them walking on the sea, and they so little-expected Him, that when they saw Him they were alarmed. They were filled with fear; they did not recognize Him; they were so busy with their danger that they even shrank from Him who loved them so much, and had come to their rescue. They did not recognize Him in the storm. Depend upon it, beloved friends, we have been in similar straits ourselves. The darkness has been around us in our lives. Storms have come, and the sea has been in confusion. Dangers and death have threatened us. But we must not forget that the tempest also brought the Master to our side. Let not our hearts be so filled with fear that we fail to recognize Him in the midst of the storm. He is there, and He is working for our ultimate peace and safety. It has no terror for Him. He is the sovereign power above and over all.

He came to His disciples, and they received Him into the ship; they heard His word; and His word stayed the storm so that there was peace at once. What threatened their destruction was taken away from them. More than that, you will read that He brought them to their desired haven. When Jesus came to them, they found they were exactly where they wanted to go. How did all this come about? Through His power, that Almighty power that resides in the person of Jesus. His disciples were slow to believe it was so then, and they have always been slow to believe it from that day to this.

The blessed work of our Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of everyone here to-night is a service that we often forget. At any rate we are not as conscious of it as we should be. The Lord is always active for our sake. Difficulties and trials may be about us, but He is among them. He is supreme over them all, and He will bring us to our haven of rest in His own good time.

THE LORD'S ABSENCE FROM BETHANY

Take another case; you know these incidents very well, but I remind you of them to illustrate this faithful character of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is impossible for Him to leave one of His own. He would not forsake one of His own whom He has cleansed by His precious blood. What more beautiful instance of loving interest could you have than that recorded in John 11? You have death coming into a pious household. What is there that is so terrible as death in its power to destroy all happiness? Death had come into the house of Mary and Martha, and death had taken the beloved Lazarus. The sisters Mary and Martha had no resource in their sorrow just then, because Jesus was not with them. He was about twenty miles away, and they had previously sent a messenger, not with some importunate request, but just with the quiet announcement of what was the trouble: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." They did not ask Him to come or to interfere, or to stay the sickness. They probably felt somehow that He would come, but He did not. The messenger came back, and the Lord was not with him, but the Lord sent them a message: "This sickness is not unto death; but for the glory of God." And when the messenger arrived Lazarus was dead.

This sickness unto death, how was the sickness for the glory of God? This poor stricken man taken away from his dependent sisters, and from the coming kingdom, was that for the glory of God? Their hearts were torn with doubt; Jesus was not there. They were inclined to distrust and doubt the love of the Master, for the Master did not come to them in time, they thought. Was it because He did not care? Beloved friends, when He did come, remember how He groaned, how He burst into tears; He did care most surely. There was, however, a right moment in which His work was to be done, and He could not come until that moment. If they had only the faith to trust Him and had been able to lay hold of the truth and to say, "He does all things well," even in them the glory of God would have come out. Still they were not full of faith, and yet He was thinking of them all the while. He came, and as we know, at the graveside He said, "Lazarus, come forth" and restored the brother to the sorrowing sisters. It all came out for the glory of God after all; it was not death. He gave life, and you see the blessed Jesus was full of care, love and sympathetic power for these two sisters in the hours of their sorrow. He is the same now. At Bethany the Lord was preparing the hearts of His own for the time when He should be in heaven, and they upon earth. There would be no change in the manner of His love, whether present or absent.

THE SELF-APPOINTED TASK

Another instance you have in the twenty-first of John. There you have seven of the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus. They were in Galilee, and they started out on an enterprise of their own. Peter said, "I go a fishing." I think we may fairly gather that it was just a scheme originated by themselves. They thought it was about time they did something. Peter was a man that could not sit still. He said, "I go a fishing"; and the answer was, "We will all go a fishing." It was entirely an idea of their own. The Lord was away, and they thought they must manage their own affairs. That is how we often think, is it not so? If the Lord was in the house, well, we could come to Him, but as He is in the heavens it does not signify—I can do this, and that, and the Lord does not come into the matter at all, so far as my thoughts are concerned.

Well, they started off on their expedition; they worked hard but caught nothing. They did not ask the divine blessing upon their project, and they did not succeed. They toiled all night and got nothing. Now, what did the Lord do? He was away from them, but He knew their purpose. He had heard the words that fell from Peter's lips, "I go a fishing." The Master did not forsake them in their disappointment, but He went and stood on the shore. When the morning broke His voice came to them across the waves, "Children, have ye any meat? what is your success? what sort of fishing?" They had to confess they had nothing at all, and his words to them were, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." There was the very thing they had been seeking for all night in their own way, but which they had failed to find. And they came ashore, dragging the net full of great fishes, and the Lord was there to receive them, and more than that, He had made provision for their immediate needs. They were cold through the night's exposure, and there was a fire of coals. They were hungry, and the Lord had prepared refreshments for them. The Lord's care for His own, though absent from them, is strikingly illustrated.

Do not these incidents tell us what sort of an Advocate we have with the Father. Though on high, He takes this kind of loving interest in all that we do. I wish we could have it in our very souls that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ there is not a thing we need to do apart from Him. Indeed, why should we ever act independently? It is because we forget that our Lord is that great One in heaven, who is our Advocate, our Comforter, the One who said, "Without me ye can do nothing."

Well, now you will probably say that I have been a long time coming to this first of John, but I had it on my heart to lay first before you that our Blessed Lord as Advocate takes a tender interest and compassionate regard for us in all our ways, and more than that, He is the One who supplies the strength, wisdom, and blessings that we require, and in these things He will never fail us. We may fail Him, but He will never fail us, and that is something to know.

FELLOWSHIP IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

We now come to a greater matter—one of the greatest matters in the life of a child of God—the matter of sin in relation to fellowship. You will notice that in the verses I read, the subject of fellowship several times comes in. "Fellowship with us," says the apostle (ver. 3), "Fellowship one with another" (ver. 7), and that is spoken of the children of God generally. Again, "We have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (ver. 3). What does this mean? The idea of fellowship is of common interests, common thoughts, common affections and devotions. In these things believers have fellowship with the Father. Why? because the Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into

His hands. And is there one here to-night who does not love Christ? We love Him because He first loved us, and there is the essence of fellowship, which is developed in the power of the Spirit by whom we are sealed. The love of the Father for the Son, my love for the Son, and your love fixed also upon that same One, and there is our fellowship with the Father and the Son.

The Son loves the Father, and He loves to reveal the Father. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" He said, and do we not also love the Father by the Spirit of the Son sent forth into our hearts? Love which is the expression of the eternal life given to us is the energy of true fellowship.

We have fellowship with the Son and the Father, and we have fellowship one with another. And I hope everyone in this room tonight is a child of God. All then possess this common love, having believed on Christ and received eternal life through His name, so that there is a bond between all. This bond is not the result of fleshly descent. It is not nationality. It is nothing but the result of the new birth, that work of the Holy Spirit within our hearts. Our new nature loves God, who has given us of His Spirit; and, beloved friends, in these times it is of greater importance than ever that we should lay hold of this abiding truth.

This Epistle of John has a general character, and applies to Christians everywhere. It was not written to a particular assembly. Throughout it, there is no one named. It is addressed to the whole family of God from the time of Pentecost till now. The family of God is one, and none of the outward changes can sever the link between and child of God and the Son. It is of great importance to remember this love, arising out of relationship which we have in Christ Jesus which is the foundation of our fellowship. But I do not now want to speak about our fellowship one with another so much as our fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Our Advocate with the Father, Our Advocate With the Father: Part 2 (2:1)

IN THE LIGHT

You will observe that the apostle, after referring to the normal condition of the family life, speaks of sin. He speaks first of Light: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," and as children of God we are in this light.

It is difficult to explain what light means. We can easily think of it. We can imagine it better than explain it. In a pious home there is always light. People say there is no place like home, and if when they are at home they are in the place they like best in all the world, there is something in the saying. There is a feeling at home that they do not find anywhere else, and so it is in the family of God. There is that holy character which becomes the whole family of God, because God is light. Light reveals, light shows us what displeases God: "In him is no darkness at all."

Light does not, however, remove defilement. It shows it, if it is there, but it is not the function of light to cleanse. There may be all sorts of dust and dirt and cobwebs in a darkened room; these are not seen. Throw open the shutters and its condition is revealed. But the light shining in will not rid the room of the unwholesome accumulations.

John speaks here of this. He says that God is light, and he speaks of us as walking in the light. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light" are his words. People say that is just the difficulty. "I have been troubled over that verse for months—years. I cannot walk in the light, sometimes I think I am, but I cannot always be sure that I am, walking in the light." Now, if this is your thought you are making a mistake, and your mistake is that you are confounding two things. Walking in the light does not necessarily mean walking according to the light. There are two statements: one states where you are walking, and the other how you are walking.

If you are a Christian you are walking in the light, or else you would not be a Christian: "He that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). The question is, are you following Christ? How you are walking in the light is a different matter, but every Christian is walking in the light. "Ye are the light of the world" is said of the followers of Jesus.

Once we were sons of darkness, but we have now been brought into the light; some may not be walking according to the light, and that is why they are so uncomfortable. Just because you are in the light it brings before you the mistake you made. There may be an evil thought you have allowed, an improper word, an action that is not beautiful, and you feel troubled about these things. Once you did not mind. What makes you mind now? Because you are in the light. The light of God shines into your heart and you feel unhappy because you have done something contrary to Him.

I would speak very gravely to my friends this evening and implore them to be careful not to injure the sensitiveness of their conscience and heart. Let in the full light of God and His holy word, and if you feel within your own soul that things are not right in your life, do not listen to any false adviser who says it does not matter. You must get right in your personal communion with God. There are remedies for failure, and the remedies are stated in these verses.

SIN WORKING DESPAIR

There are those who, when they have sinned, feel that they must give up everything. They say, "Well, it was easy enough for me to expect forgiveness when I was an unbeliever, but having known the love of God and then to have sinned, my responsibility is so much greater. What can I do? A sinner can come to seek forgiveness, but I have sinned against the light. I must give it all up, for I am the more to blame."

I know this state of mind to be a fact, my friends. Christian men at the Front write and say, "We can keep straight at home, but out here a man cannot live a Christian life. It is a dog's life here. I have gone under and have now given it up. I will turn over a fresh leaf when I come home." They forget, poor men, that they may never come home. But the feeling is there, and it is what we have in some cases in London as well as in the Forces.

Beloved friends, these men know they have sinned, yet they go on sinning. Why? Because—they are afraid to come to the Father. They feel that the fellowship with the Father and Son is broken, and they know not what to do for restoration. Sometimes there is not a Christian friend to tell them what to do, but the Bible explains it all. Only they neglect the Bible and listen to the evil suggestions of their own hearts. This danger, beloved friends, is not only for those in France, or in Mesopotamia, but the danger is also here. It is indeed everywhere, for we are all liable to fall into the serious error.

THE POWER FOR CLEANSING

You have here in John the great foundation of Christian fellowship. You have things that never change—the blood of Jesus Christ and its cleansing power. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin. This does not imply that I, as a failing Christian, have to come and be washed again in the blood of Christ, but the phrase means that the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for a definite purpose. Has it cleansed you? If it has cleansed you it has cleansed you forever. It removes every defilement, and makes the soul whiter than snow. One application is sufficient. And when the apostle says "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth" he means that this character never alters through the ages. As light reveals, so blood cleanses. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from every sin, and this is therefore the great immutable foundation of my walk in the light.

The apostle goes on to write, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The truth shows that we have a root within us from which evil springs. You know perfectly well that without any effort on your part evil thoughts will arise within you when you wake up in the night. You may go along the streets, and evil thoughts may come, for there may be suggestions in the street. But in the darkness and quiet of your own chamber, how do these evil suggestions arise? There is but one answer, namely, that which the Lord Himself supplied: "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts." And this character of the old nature within never changes, so that the man who says he has no sin, deceives himself. It is a terrible delusion for a person to look into his heart where sin is, and to say "I am holy." He, in effect, calls an unclean thing a clean thing. Can anything be more deceitful? The heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

CONFESSION OF SINS

We need the warning word therefore: "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Herein lies our responsibility: "If we confess our sins." Is there a day passes without some sin? Shall we not own it with shame? I do not say that we should always be thinking of our sins, or our liability to sin, but on the other hand, there is no portion of Scripture to tell us that we should never think of our sins.

But we are also to think of the personal interest of the One against whom we have sinned. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. What is there that shows more beautifully the gracious and loving care of the Father and Son? Jesus Christ the righteous is faithful and just not only to forgive our sins, but to clear them away. We have therefore His work of blood-shedding, which is the basis of cleansing, and we have all the personal activities which rest on that basis for our cleansing wherein we have erred.

Now there is a practical difficulty which comes into the lives of a great many young Christians in this matter. They feel that although they may ask forgiveness, things are not as they were before they had fallen.

One describing this feeling, says, "It is like this: if you wrong your mother and ask her forgiveness, you cannot go to her just the same as before." But that is just the mistake; you can go; you ought to go to her. And it is also true in divine intercourse. If ever you need to go to God it is when you have sinned. And when He forgives, the whole thing is cleared away. All His heart is towards you in love, and He restores your soul. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, etc." So that defilement which was on your conscience is cleansed by His word of assurance. It is one of the subtleties of the devil to seek to keep a Christian from his knees, and from the presence of God his, Father, and of Jesus Christ the Advocate.

THE PERSONAL PROVISION FOR FAILURE

The great desire and hope of the apostle was that the children of God should be kept from the defilements of their nature, and that they should in no way get themselves entangled in the snares of the world, but should keep themselves pure and holy. If, however, any man sin he has an Advocate with the Father. There is great need for this, because a Christian either might not feel his sin, or feeling his sins might not confess them, and what a sad state would this be? what would become of us if we had not the Advocate with the Father? You know how proud and stubborn the will is, and how you like to turn the wrong way, and having taken the false step you still go on. And where would you go if there was not One to look after you? It is very comforting to think of Jesus coming to us in our troubles and conflicts, or in the hour of bereavement, or when we engage in an enterprise which ends in failure and distress, But this is not a question of trouble, or bereavement, or business methods. This is a question of sin, allowed and indulged.

But we here learn that even in such conditions He does not leave us or forsake us. He is prepared to do everything needful to bring us back to God and to communion with the Father. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father."

Now we see this advocacy beautifully illustrated in the case of Peter. He sinned deeply against his Master, he denied his Master in a terrible fashion, though he did not think he would. But Jesus, who loved him, said, "Satan desires to have thee to sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee."

The Master made intercession on his behalf. And at a given moment, the Lord looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the words of the Lord, and he went out and wept bitterly. Apart from the Advocate, where would he have gone? We know where Judas went, but Peter had an Advocate. He went out in contrition and wept bitterly. Tears, the tears of the strong man, were fitting. It was good for him to feel his sin, to learn what there was in that wicked heart of his, so that he might prove the abounding love of the Father and the Son.

Jesus Christ is just the same today, and we, you and I, have Him as an Advocate with the Father. His eye is upon us, He is watching us, and we do not know where we might have been to-night, if it had not been for the Lord's advocacy with the Father.

I am speaking now, of course, of our Christian career. There has ever been an unseen hand helping us, holding and bringing us back into safety. This work of our Lord is not always recognized; there is a danger that we overlook and forget that the blessed Master has been thinking and caring for us. We know not how, but in some way or the other He has been pre-serving us from sin. He has gently drawn us back from slippery ways. He has seen to it that our communion should not be destroyed forever, but restored again. Remembering this, our hearts should be quickened in love towards the One who is so faithful to us, and Who will not leave us nor forsake us. The Lord is our Advocate with the Father to bring us to a confession of sins, and to restore our souls to the joy of communion.

A WORD ON COMMUNION

Many persons have an idea that communion is something exclusively for old Christians. They say, "I suppose you mean that we have to think about the Lord all day long. But I have other things to attend to. I have correspondence, ledgers, housework, etc., to think about. I could not do my work faithfully if I had other things upon my mind."

But this all arises from a misapprehension as to communion. Take a familiar incident, by way of illustration: suppose you are sitting down at home writing a letter, and your wife or someone you love is also in the room. They are reading or doing something else. Now you are writing your letter, but you are conscious all the time that the person or persons is there. It is not necessary to converse. There is the joyous sense of the loved one being there. If that one was not present there would be quite a different feeling. Now this is a feeble illustration of divine communion. There is a sense of the Lord's presence which I may have throughout the day. There is a feeling that His eye is upon me, His hand guides me and that He is preparing everything for my ultimate good, and when strange, unexpected things come along I am not disturbed. So that the feeling of communion in this sense may be enjoyed by the youngest Christian, and that is what I am trying to convey.

If you are a son or a daughter, you have the sense of your duty to your parents, and of their loving interest and regard for you. You have the consciousness of all that without directly thinking of them all day long. They do not engage your thoughts definitely, but still there is the sense that they are about you. It is quite different if they should be removed from this world, but while they are here there is the sense of their presence, even if there is local separation.

Now, beloved friends, the great theme of my text is that we have Jesus Christ the righteous there with the Father, who has undertaken to see that all is well with us, to keep us right, to keep us in the joy of God's love throughout all the difficulties of this world, and more than that, if it should be that we drift into sin, even then He will not forsake us, but by His intercession and His power, He will bring us back to the enjoyment of God's own gracious law.

(Concluded from page 272)

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