



# **What is the Lord doing now?**

**Part C**

**Our Advocate**

## Introduction

We come now to the second aspect of our Lord's present ministry – His advocacy. It is a subject little understood, which probably explains why it is not often raised. Some take the Lord's ministry as our Advocate to be part of His priestly ministry. There are remarkable similarities no doubt: advocacy is confined to the saints of God, it is undertaken by the exalted Christ within the heavenly sanctuary and it is to do with the practical life of the believer. However, the nature and purpose of Christ's advocacy is very different to His ministry as our Great High Priest. Failure to apprehend this difference can result in practical failing in our lives.

## The Place of His Advocacy

Again we note that whereas the Lord's past ministry was on earth, the scene of His rejection and humility, His ministry as our Advocate takes place within the heavenly sanctuary – the place of His exaltation. However, as with His priestly ministry, the practical benefits are realized by the believers on earth.

## The Scope of His Advocacy

John's message in his first Epistle is directed to *believers* – all of whom belong to the family of God. His focus is our fellowship with the Father as His *children* and what happens to that fellowship if we sin. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn 2:1). We will say more about the scope of the Lord's advocacy as we proceed.

## Justification – Vital in understanding His Advocacy

Before we look into the nature of the Lord's advocacy, it is essential that we are persuaded about two vital truths. First, as in the case of His priestly work, the Lord's ministry as our Advocate is founded upon His past ministry. Sin was put away forever by the sacrifice of Himself and a holy God was vindicated and glorified by it. Second, that as redeemed saints we have come into the full blessing of this work. Upon our faith, our sins – past, present *and* future are put away. I stand in Christ *justified* before God – meaning that God is *unable* to lay any charge of sin against me now or ever. It is the eternal and unimpeachable judicial standing that believers have in Christ, for we are "accepted in the Beloved" even "the righteousness of God in Him" (Eph 1:6; 2 Cor 5:21).

## Why is this vital?

It is vital because it tells us what the Lord's ministry as our Advocate is **not**! It has nothing to do with our *salvation* and *standing* before God. Our eternal security is based on the truth of our justification and the finished work of Christ upon which it rests. If we lose sight of this blessed truth then we will court all manner of confusion and strife. The question then arises. "Why does John say that 'if we sin we have an Advocate with the Father'?" After all, if we are justified and all our sins have been put away and we have no more conscience of sins (Heb 10:29), why do we now need an Advocate for our sins? The answer is uncomplicated – *if* we keep in mind the truth of justification. As we noted, the Lord's advocacy is not about our spiritual *standing* before God. Rather, it is about our spiritual *state* or *condition* before the Father as His *children*. Though we are saved and secured eternally, the flesh is still in us. When we respond to the flesh we fall into sin. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal 5:17). John confirms this. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8). Sin causes us to lose *fellowship* with the Father. He is righteous and He hates sin and can have no fellowship with it.

The truth cannot be over-emphasized, that as a believer nothing can extricate me from my standing in God's family. My position – and that of every other child in that family cannot be challenged even by God Himself. This is the grand truth of justification. There is "no condemnation" for we are in Christ. However, *if* I sin, then my *fellowship* or communion with my heavenly Father is lost. This has to be restored. *This* is where the Lord's advocacy comes in. It is the blessed ministry that restores lost fellowship with the Father if I sin. And so John declares that "if we sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Have we owned it

beloved? Satan *cannot* touch our *union* with the Father as His children, but He *can* spoil the *communion* that we have with Him. He can do this to the point where *we* begin to question our union with the Father. As a result we become despondent in life and service and we spiral into a vortex of doubt and unbelief. And so John declares – “these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 Jn 1:4).

#### *An illustration*

If a child acts against the will of his father, then the father is grieved and the *fellowship* between the father and the child is marred. The *relationship* or union remains untouched. He is still a child of the father and will always remain a member of that family because of the irreversible biological tie. However, what has been lost is the communion that flows from that union. This fractured fellowship must be restored in order that the joy and blessings that flow from it resumes. What is to be done? How often we see the mother in her inimitable way intercede and speak to the child. Her words seek to convict the child of his wrongful ways and confess them. She has acted as the child’s advocate with the aggrieved Father.

### **Lost fellowship with the Father – what does this mean?**

What is forfeited when we sin and lose fellowship with the Father? Again, the question is not often asked because the nature of advocacy is little understood. As the sinless Man the Lord knew what it was to have unbroken fellowship with His Father. Though He was forsaken by God on the cross as the sin offering, there was never an interruption in fellowship with His Father. He was always in the blessing and joy associated with it. While on earth He experienced the unbridled joy of *doing* His Father’s will. “I do always those things that please Him” (Jn 8:29). “Jesus saith unto them, my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work” (Jn 4:34). Moreover, because of His pure and unceasing fellowship with His Father, He knew the joy that His sanctified life *brought* to His Father. “For He [Christ] received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (2 Pet 1:17 cf Matt 3:17 etc.). For these reasons He now shares His Father’s throne. In all this He is a fitting Advocate in regard to matters that concern our fellowship with the Father.

Can we see then, that if we sin we lose fellowship with the Father and in so doing we rob ourselves and we rob Him. John, the beloved disciple had our blessing in view when he urged, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (1 Jn 2:1).<sup>1</sup> And why? We mentioned it earlier - “that our joy may be full.” Again we must note that the *union* or *relationship* is not severed. It exists in spite of my sin. I retain my inalienable position as His child and He as my Father by virtue of my spiritual birth and standing in Christ. However, the practical privileges and blessings associated with that standing fail, as does the blessing derived from fellowship with the children of God. No less vital, is that a loss of fellowship with the Father disengages me from a life that serves to please Him. It therefore robs the Father of *His* joy. Is there a sad state of soul in us – a fallen countenance, perhaps mirrored in a forlorn face, feebleness in prayer or in feigned fellowship with one another? If the cause is sin, then we have an Advocate who will restore the reciprocal joy that comes from fellowship with the Father – our joy in a life serving Him and His joy of being glorified by our life of service for Him.

## **The Nature of His Advocacy**

### **It is with the *Father***

Unlike the Lord’s priestly ministry, His advocacy as we have often noted is with the *Father* and not with “God.” There are instructive distinctions in Scripture in its use of divine titles. We have an example in two statements of

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<sup>1</sup> Paul presents the matter of sin in the life of the believer in keeping with the polemic of his Roman Epistle and the practical lesson that flows from it - “walking in the newness of life.” “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?...Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

the Lord on the cross. First, we hear Him as the *Sacrifice* for sin. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). This was the cry of the perfect Man in *subjection* to God – for it was God in His tri-part Being that was offended by sin. Then, at the point of death the Lord utters words redolent of the unbroken fellowship that He enjoyed with His *Father* as the ever *Beloved Son*. “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46). And so, when we come to the Lord’s advocacy, the inspired Word is very particular. “We have an Advocate with the **Father**.” Our priestly service is not in view. Rather, it is our conduct as children before God our Father. Christ’s advocacy deals with our interests *as well* those of the Father, because our restored communion brings joy to Him.

### **It is available to every believer in Christ**

“We have an Advocate with the Father.” The collective pronoun and the context make it very clear that every believer is in view - specifically every child of God within the Church dispensation. Believers are not now seen as the “house of God,” whose house we are” as in the instance of the Lord’s priestly ministry. They are seen as children of the Father – in the family of God and with His Son as an Advocate with Him, even Jesus Christ the righteous. Contrary to popular belief in some quarters there is nothing here for the unsaved sinner. The disarming and fashionable notion that all men are God’s children and belong to His family is unscriptural. This is because all men have not accepted God’s way of salvation and been reborn into His family. The Lord’s teaching is as plain as the noon-day sun. “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power [the right] to become the sons [children] of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Jn 1:12).

### **It is accessible to every believer in Christ**

As with the Lord’s High-priestly ministry, the provisions of His advocacy are available to every believer. However, as we mentioned previously something may be universally available but not universally accessible. There are things in life that are available to us all, but not all of us have the means to access them. It is important therefore to remember that Christ’s High-priestly ministry and advocacy are not only available to every believer, but freely accessible to every believer as well. His advocacy is the unceasing birthright of every child born into the family of God through faith in Christ; accessible to all in **virtue** of His shed blood.

### **It is about *convicting, confessing and cleansing* from unrighteousness due to sin in life**

It is commonly believed that our Lord’s advocacy is about Him *pleading* for us before the Father. A familiar idea is that He operates as a “lawyer,” who argues our case before a grieved and righteous Father when we have sinned, with a view to appeasing Him and restoring our fellowship with Him. This adversarial role is sometimes extended to include the Lord as the One who opposes the Accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10). Others refer to all this as His *interceding* on our behalf. However, our Lord’s ministry as Advocate is neither pleading nor interceding along these adversarial lines – for two reasons. First, advocacy is to do with our “sins.” Our sins and our *responsibility* in regard to them (a no small thing that many seem to neglect), cannot be pleaded away. They must be dealt with on the ground of divine righteousness, which means that in the *first instance* I must admit to my sins and confess them. Once confession is made, cleansing can take place. The second reason relates to the meaning of advocacy given in the Greek word translated “advocate” in 1 John 2:1. We will observe that there is no “adversarial” aspect to it.

## **The Meaning of “Advocate”**

The Greek word is *parakletos* which is a composite of *para* (beside) and *kaleo* (to call). Taken together they mean “calling to one’s side” and, as others have noted can be used with a view to coming alongside a person in order to “exhort” or to “console” him or her.<sup>2</sup> The context must of course determine which it will be. In this case the context is sin, its dark nature and destructive effect, and so it cannot be a matter of drawing aside to console or comfort. Rather, it is a matter of drawing alongside to **convict**. Sin in life must be judged and dealt with. If, as a

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<sup>2</sup> W E Vine. *Expository Dictionary of NT Words* p 207

child of God I sin, I must be convicted of it before fellowship with my heavenly Father can be restored. So the Lord, as my Advocate, draws alongside me and His ministry seeks to awaken my responsibility as to my sins (similar to the wayward child’s mother in our illustration above).

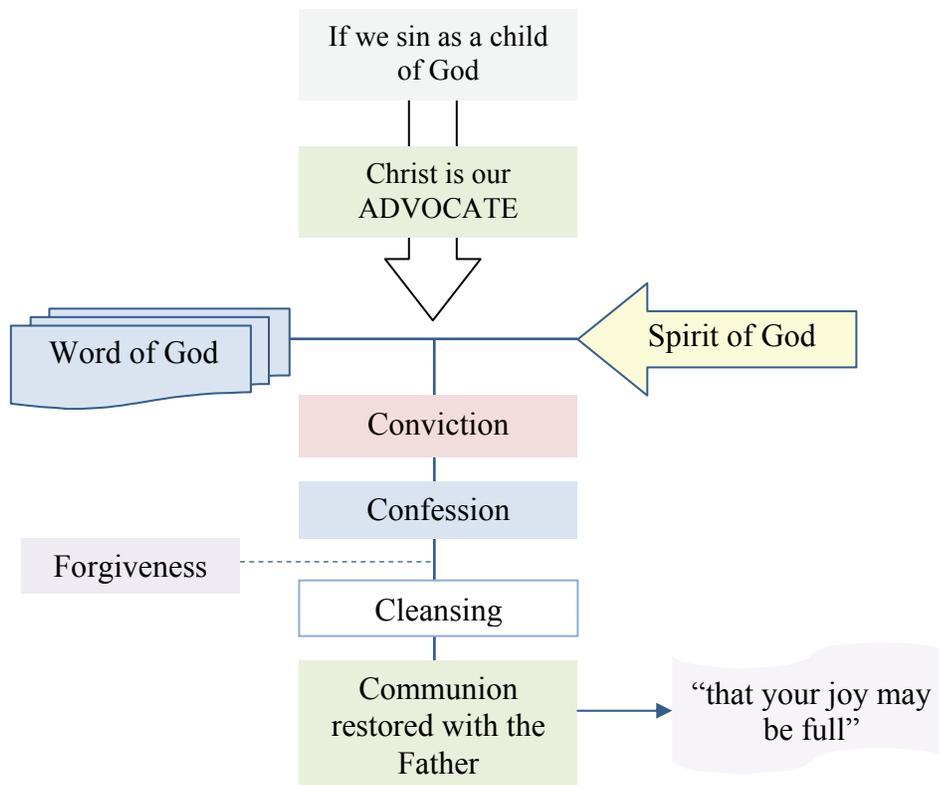
## The Method of Advocacy

The Lord moves alongside me through His *Spirit* to **convict** me of my sins. His Spirit does this by applying the **Word of God** to my conscience, reminding me of the Cross and Christ who died for me. And, when His Spirit and the Word of God have done their work of conviction, it results in my **confession** and **cleansing**. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8-9).

### A warning!

Advocacy is not entering a confessional booth and declaring my sins before another man ordained as a “priest” by man. It is never a case of “bless me ‘father’ for I have sinned.” Such practices blight the sacred principle of confession and repentance before God the Father. Even Christ’s ministry as our Great High Priest is not about my sins being forgiven, as noted in Part B of this Series. It is nothing short of sinful presumption that men cast themselves as priests and seek to perform a task that is unknown to the ministry of the Great High Priest – quite apart from the affront to the One appointed by God to be our Advocate for our sins – Jesus Christ the righteous. True confession and its solemn repentance must be in the light of Calvary – not before a cleric in a confessional booth who dispenses meaningless absolutions and penance. There must be a conviction of heart as to the gravity of sins, brought to light by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, prompting a true confession before God and then cleansing takes place. We see this foreshadowed in the OT which we take up below. The Israelite had to wait three days after defilement to apply the water of purification containing the ashes of the Red Heifer.

Conviction – Confession – Cleansing = Communion restored



## The Meaning of Cleansing in Advocacy

In advocacy cleansing is from **all unrighteousness**. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). It is a *practical* matter which relates to my spiritual **condition** or state before the Father. Again we must remember that this cleansing is *not* in regard to my spiritual **position** or righteousness in standing before God. As a person redeemed in Christ I have the righteousness of Christ imputed to me. I stand in His righteousness, accepted in the Beloved. I am the “righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). We can see again why it is important to claim the assurance given by the truth of justification when we consider the subject of Christ’s advocacy. My sins breach my *communion* with the Father – not my *union* with Him.

However, as noted, though I stand righteous before God in Christ, I may succumb to the flesh which is in me as the old man. If I do, then I sin and fall into a condition of unrighteousness in my life. I am defiled by it – I am in a state of unrighteousness and so a *righteous* Father cannot have fellowship with me. This unrighteous state is removed by cleansing through the advocacy of Jesus Christ the *righteous*. Then and only then is my fellowship with the Father restored.

### Righteousness – the sole determinant of standing and state

Man’s relationship with God as a sinner or a saint is *always* determined on the basis of divine righteousness. This is one of the grand themes of the Roman Epistle and of the Gospel itself, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). As long as a sinner refuses God’s salvation, he stands forever in the unrighteousness of the first man, Adam - condemned before God. If he decides to accept God’s salvation through faith in Christ, God imputes His righteousness to him on the *ground* of Christ’s shed blood. Note the vital truths woven into a precious threefold cord of propitiation, faith and the blood of Christ, brought out in Romans 3:25. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness... .” Because of this the believer *stands* eternally justified before God.

However, *after* justification a believer may stumble and fall into sin because the flesh – the old man that lies within is given liberty. His *life* as a child of God becomes unrighteous, marring his fellowship with the Father. Righteousness in his practical life must then be restored. This is done through the advocacy of Christ. Cleansing in advocacy is not about our righteous standing before God, which cannot be broken. The imputation of righteousness upon faith, we reiterate, is to do with our standing in Christ before God – justified! Advocacy is about our righteous communion with the Father which can be broken because of sin in life. It is a matter of righteousness indeed, but now in regard to our practical walk. And so we have Paul exhorting those who stand inviolably righteous before God in Christ, to “neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). Peter, too, brings in the aspect of righteousness in state and contrasts it with righteousness in standing. “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree [our judicial standing], that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness [our state]” (1 Pet 2:24).<sup>3</sup>

## The Means of Cleansing in Advocacy

Cleansing from unrighteousness in my life, as noted above is through the application of the Word of God to my conscience. The Word of God is sometimes referred to as “water” in Scripture because of its association with “washing” or “cleansing.” At this point it will be helpful to tabulate the two aspects of the Word of God in regard to washing or cleansing. The first relates to my conversion and spiritual standing before God; the second is to do with Christ as my Advocate after conversion and my spiritual state before the Father as a child of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul speaks of “being dead to sin” whereas Peter speaks of “being dead to sins.” Paul speaks of the “root” whereas Peter speaks of the “fruit.” The latter – the practical matter of righteousness in life is a consequence of the former. We have here righteousness as means of harmony between standing and state.

- **Positional** washing or cleansing – rebirth through regeneration: my spiritual standing before God
- **Practical** washing or cleansing – fellowship through restoration: my spiritual state before the Father

### The washing of the Word of God – the two aspects

Positional Aspect	Practical Aspect
Salvation - spiritual regeneration <sup>4</sup>	Advocacy - spiritual restoration
<p>The <b>initial</b> application of the washing of the Word of God in cleansing is in regard to my <b>spiritual conversion</b> or <b>rebirth</b>. It relates to my <b>spiritual position</b> or <b>standing</b> as a child of God. It is a <b>once only</b> application. The following verses illustrate this once for all washing by the Word of God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John 3:5: “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water [the Word of God] and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”</li> <li>• John 13:10: “Jesus saith to him [Peter], He that is washed [bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all [i.e., Judas].</li> <li>• John 15:3: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”</li> <li>• 1 Corinthians 6:11: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”</li> <li>• Titus 3:5: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration [the Word of God and rebirth], and renewing of the Holy Ghost [the imparting of the new nature].”</li> <li>• James 1:18: “Begot He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (cf Lk 8:11).</li> </ul>	<p>In this case the washing by the Word of God is in regard to my <b>spiritual condition</b> or <b>state</b> as one who <i>has</i> been converted. Here the washing or cleansing by the Word of God can be <b>repeated</b> - applied more than once for the cleansing from unrighteousness due to sins that I may commit <i>after</i> conversion.</p> <p>It is prefigured in the Lord washing Peter’s <i>feet</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John 13:8: “Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not [thy feet], thou hast no part [practical fellowship] with me.”</li> </ul> <p>It is also prefigured in the water of purification for the redeemed Israelite who, in his wilderness walk becomes defiled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numbers 19: 19-20: “And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.”</li> </ul>

*Sanctification by the Word of God.* The Word of God not only cleanses *from* but it also sanctifies *to* – meaning that it sets apart unto God. Sanctification is a related but distinct truth, and it too has a positional and practical aspect to it. The positional aspect is seen in 1 Corinthians 6:11 above – “ye are [were] sanctified.” We have the practical aspect in the Lord’s advocacy. The Word of God washes away our unrighteousness due to any sins that we may commit and at the same time sets our affections as children towards the Father.

<sup>4</sup> Regeneration presupposes death and a new life in place of it. The word here and which is used only again in Matthew 19:28 is *paliggenesia* meaning a rebirth or a new beginning. In Matthew it is applied to the new age – the millennial kingdom, the previous age having ended. Restoration on the other hand means a return to the first principles of the new life.

## The Basis of the Cleansing in Advocacy – the Blood

So far we have made no mention of the blood of Christ in regard to the cleansing from sins in advocacy. It is clear from all that we have considered that the “blood” is not the **means** of cleansing in regard to the sins we may commit in life. It is not the blood, but the Word of God that is *applied* to our conscience in order to bring *conviction, confession* and the *cleansing* from our sins after conversion. Where then is the blood? It is the **ground** upon which all cleansing takes place. It is found in the first Chapter of John’s First Epistle and, here too, we must be careful to observe the biblical distinction between our *standing* and *state*. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). This text refers to our standing in Christ – not to our state. It is one of three positional truths given in this immediate passage.<sup>5</sup> It corresponds to the positional truth that we are “clean every whit” – “bathed,” which is accomplished by the regeneration through the washing by the Word of God. It also corresponds to the positional truth of justification. We are “justified by his blood” (Rom 5:9). The blood and the Word of God cleanses us positionally at conversion “once for all.” The Word (together with the Spirit) is to do with our *moral* cleansing and moral standing before God; the blood of Christ is to do with our *judicial* cleansing and legal standing before God.

Having assured us of our righteous standing before God, John can then move to the practical aspect. Sin – the flesh, the old nature is still in us. He declares this in verse 8. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). He then brings in the specter of the believer succumbing to the flesh and falling into sin, breaching fellowship with the Father. What is the remedy? We have it verse 9. “If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). Now we have already established that the cleansing here is *not* by the blood. It is by the washing of the Word of God through the advocacy of Christ. It is applied to our hearts enabling a conviction of our sins, a confession of them and divine forgiveness because of it.

### The blood as the basis for forgiveness

However, the blood cannot be excluded in any matter where sin is found because sin has to be dealt with on the ground of righteousness, which is always according to shed blood. We noted this earlier. So we must have the blood in advocacy. The cleansing from unrighteousness due to sin is by the washing of the Word in **virtue** of the blood, i.e., it is on the *ground* of Christ’s shed blood. This truth is brought out in the principle of God’s forgiveness and its association with His *faithfulness* and *justice*. “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” This is the only instance in Scripture where this expression is found. Some apply it to God’s faithfulness and justice towards the *believer*. That is, He forgives us in order to be faithful and just toward us. This is not an incorrect conclusion. However, in order to come into its full light we must approach the expression from God’s standpoint – His righteousness and the doctrine of propitiation. It is here that we will find its primary interpretation.

The Pharisees were correct when they asked rhetorically, “Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7). Dealing with sins and their forgiveness is the sole prerogative of God. God’s prerogative to forgive sins however must be exercised in a way that is faithful to *five* principles, which reflect His holy and righteous character.

1. Divine *vindication*: The vindication of God’s righteousness when sin was put away by Christ’s shed blood.
2. Divine *glorification*: The glorification of God because the putting away of sin was done by His Son.
3. Divine *exaltation*: The exaltation of His Son because of it.
4. Divine *imputation*: The imputation of righteousness to all who believe in His Son (2 Cor 5:21).
5. Divine *justification*: The blessedness of the man to whom God will not impute sin (Rom 4:8).

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<sup>5</sup> 1. “We walk in the light, as He is in the light.”

2. “We have fellowship one with another.”

3. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

The leading expression “But if we” is not conditional. John is contrasting the saved (those who walk in the light as God is in the light) with the unsaved (those who walk in the darkness). It is “if we” in the sense of “as it is with us of a truth.” He is not making a contrast between the believer who walks in the light and one who does not. This he brings into view in Chapter 2 when he speaks of the need for Christ as our Advocate (vv 1-2).

These five principles – we may refer to them as the *five principles of righteousness*, can be grouped into three categories.

- What the *Son* has done **for God** by the shedding of His **blood** (principles 1 & 2).
- What *God* has done **for His Son** because of the shedding of His **blood** (principle 3).
- What *God* has done **for me** in *virtue* of principles 1, 2 & 3 (in virtue of Christ's shed blood, principles 4 & 5).

The first three principles are associated with Christ's work in **propitiation** through His blood. "He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 2:2). They establish my **position** in Christ before God. That is:

1. I stand *continually* and *eternally* in all that the Son has done **for God** – in all the virtue of His shed blood – His work in propitiation. I stand before God as one who *God* has Himself justified; having His righteousness imputed to me in Christ.
2. I stand *continually* and *eternally* in what God has done **for His Son** – His Son's exaltation.

Now what would happen if I confessed my sins and God refused to forgive me? He would be acting unfaithfully and unjustly in regard to *my* standing before Him, which in turn means He would be acting unfaithfully and unjustly in regard to the first three principles of divine righteousness – what His Son has done *for Him* and what He has done *for His Son*. All five principles of divine righteousness are thus compromised. God must act in accordance with His own righteous character and remain faithful to His exalted Son and His work of propitiation – a work that brought infinite satisfaction and glory to Him. In short, God cannot be unfaithful or unjust in regard to *Himself* or to His exalted *Son*.

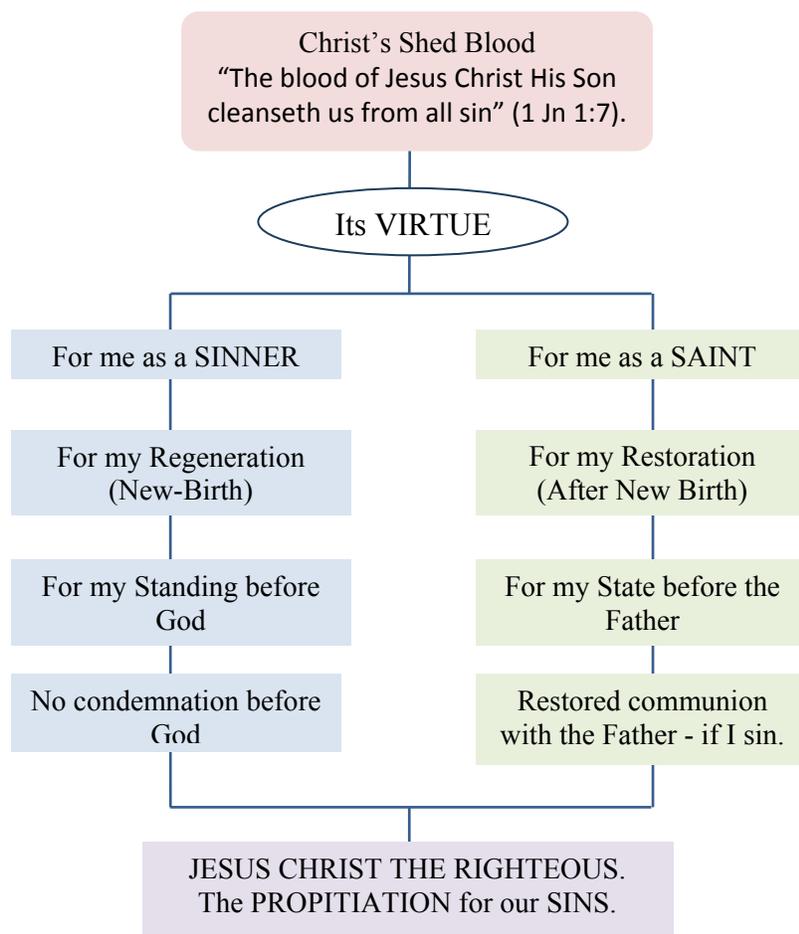
We see in all this again how the *practical* truth relating to our *state* and the *positional* truth relating to our *standing* is harmonized on the ground of righteousness and Christ's shed blood – even His work in propitiation. By forgiving and cleansing me from all unrighteousness should I sin, God remains just. It is consistent with Him having previously imputed righteousness to me – my justification. In forgiving and cleansing me from all unrighteousness He in fact *declares* His righteousness. It is, after all "God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33).<sup>6</sup> With this truth before us, we can *then* see how the expression in verse 9 can be taken as a cherished blessing of God's faithfulness and justice to the believer in Christ.

The blood of Christ then is the *basis* or the ground upon which **all** cleansing takes place – cleansing in regard to the **sinner** and the **saint**. In the case of the sinner the cleansing of the shed blood is in regard to a person's *standing* before God upon conversion. Every converted person can acclaim that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). In the case of the saint cleansing is in regard to *state* – the restoration of the fellowship with the Father *should* sin occur. Christ's blood *has* been shed – once for all in regard to my standing *and* state because propitiation *has* been made for my sins. Its efficacy *has* been acknowledged by the exaltation of Christ to heaven. Should I sin, Christ draws near through His Spirit, who applies the Word of God to my conscience as one who *has* been cleansed from all sin by virtue of the shed blood of Christ (1 Jn 1:7), as a person who has been born of water and of the Spirit (Jn 3:5). Words like those of Peter noted above and given to believers in the wilderness, are a prime driving force for the conviction of sins in life. He presents Christ, His sacrificial death, the believers standing as dead to sin because of it and the obligation of the believer unto pursue righteousness in his life in the light of it. "Who His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet 2:24). When the Spirit brings these sobering truths to bear upon the believer who has sinned, it leads to a conviction of sins. Confession is made. Forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness in life occurs, consistent with the five principles of divine

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<sup>6</sup> We see the same principles of righteousness apply pre-Calvary. It was His Son, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past ... that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). In forgiving the sins of the OT believer God therefore remains faithful to the propitiating work of Jesus Christ the righteous, and true to His own righteous acts and nature.

righteousness, all of which are grounded upon the infinite virtue of the shed blood of Christ. Fellowship with the Father is then restored. What an immeasurable provision of grace! Do we find anything like it outside of Christ?



### A critical caution

It is clear from the above that we must never for a moment entertain the idea that after conversion every time a child of God sins there is a *fresh application* of the blood of Christ. We never read in the NT of the blood of Christ being applied repeatedly for sin or sins. Equally wrong is the idea that the blood of Christ is *continually cleansing* us from sin or sins. Such an idea is foreign to Scripture and opposed to the truth of propitiation and justification.

It is the *washing of the Word of God* that is repeated for cleansing - in **virtue** of the blood that was *once for all shed*. It is in the *shedding* of the blood that propitiation was made and this shedding was and could only be done once.<sup>7</sup>

This means that it is the *virtue* of that shed blood that avails - its infinite *value*, *vindication* and *victory* which is continually and forever before the righteous sight of God. It is the *virtue* of the shed blood that enables a righteous God to grant me new life at conversion; it is upon the *virtue* of the shed blood that I stand before a righteous God; it is the virtue of the shed blood that cleanses me from all unrighteousness should I sin after it, and restores my fellowship with the righteous Father. This is, and how it must be.

<sup>7</sup> Strictly speaking virtue is not "in the blood." It opens the way to suppose all manner of applications of the blood. Virtue is in "the shed blood," which removes any such predilection. Christ's blood was and needed only to be shed once (L 22:20; Heb 9:12, 26; 10:10).

The grand and glorious truth that has been noted and venerated by many others, is that the *virtue* of Christ's shed blood on the one hand maintains the integrity of my new birth – my standing, by providing the ground for my cleansing by the washing of the Word. On the other hand it maintains the integrity of my fellowship before the righteous Father – my state, by providing the ground upon which the Word of God cleanses me if I commit sin.

## Intimations of the Lord's Advocacy

It is fitting that we conclude with an outline of two instances in Scripture where the Lord's ministry in advocacy is typified – one from the OT and the other from the NT. Both have already been referred to.

### The ordinance of the Red Heifer – Numbers 19

#### Its purpose

The ordinance of the red heifer (or cow) was a divine provision given to Israel in their journey through the wilderness. It was given “unto the children of Israel (v 1)” - to a pilgrim people. This is why we find the ordinance in the book of Numbers – the book of the wilderness and not in Leviticus, the book of the sanctuary and atonement. Atonement was for sins and trespasses *committed* by a person – sin from within. The ordinance of the red heifer was designed to cleanse a person who became symbolically *contaminated* by sin by touching a dead thing – sin from without. This is called a *ceremonial* defilement because no “actual sin” was committed by the person. Death is the result of sin and so coming into contact with death was considered defilement (Num 19:9). Touching a dead thing in God's sight placed the stain of sin upon a person. This defilement was inconsistent with the holy *character* that marked the ceremonial operations connected with the tabernacle, the place of fellowship with God. A ceremonially unclean person was, upon the penalty of death prohibited to enter this place of holy fellowship. In its purpose of restoring fellowship with God in connection with sin, the ordinance of the red heifer *typifies* the purpose of the Lord's ministry as our Advocate, as we walk as pilgrims in a wilderness scene.

#### Its performance

The ordinance in its performance typifies the *basis* and *means* of cleansing seen in the advocacy of Christ.

- *The basis of cleansing – the blood.* A red heifer without spot and blemish (typifying the perfection of Christ) was killed. Its blood was sprinkled seven times *towards* the *door* of the tabernacle - the entrance to the place of holy fellowship with God.<sup>8</sup> It was put there purely to signify that fellowship with God is on the *basis* or the ground of shed blood.
- *The means of cleansing – the water of separation or purification.* After the blood was sprinkled toward the door of the tabernacle, the red heifer was burnt in its entirety – the skin, the remaining blood and the whole carcass were all consumed by fire and reduced to ashes.<sup>9</sup> The ashes were then stored in a clean place and drawn upon as cases of defilement arose from time to time. The ashes remained as evidence that the heifer had been killed and its blood shed. Each time they were used, they looked back to the *ground* of cleansing – the past sprinkled blood, which was testified to by the store of ashes. It is for this reason the superiority of Christ's blood as the ground of cleansing is compared to the *ashes* of the heifer in Hebrews 9:13 – and not to the water. If a person became defiled, some of the ashes were taken and mixed with running water to make up a mixture known as the “water of separation or purification.” This water was

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<sup>8</sup> This we assume would only be repeated *if* the ashes ran out (a possibility not expressly contemplated in the ordinance – intimating 1 Jn 2:1, “*if* we sin we have an Advocate with the Father). Importantly, there was no fresh killing or sprinkling of the blood for every case of defilement, as in the case with other offerings where sin is implicated. There a fresh sacrifice and shedding of blood was mandatory for each instance of sin committed.

<sup>9</sup> The whole carcass was consumed on the altar but there was no sprinkling of the *blood* of the heifer on the altar or the mercy seat. This is because the ordinance of the red heifer was not about the atonement for sins, but about the *ceremonial* cleansing of those whose sins had been atoned. It was thus in the “similitude” of a sin-offering (Num 19:9).

then used by a clean person to wash the defiled person. The running water typifies the application of the Word of God by the Spirit of God in Christ's advocacy. The water of purification was sprinkled on the defiled person on the third day after defilement. On the evening of the seventh day he was again sprinkled and then pronounced clean, enabling him to resume sacred fellowship on the eighth day (suggestive of a new beginning).

The purifying by the water was in **virtue** (on the ground) of the shed blood (evidenced by the ashes). It was a purification of the *flesh* – that which came into contact with the dead thing (Heb 9:13). We are not dealing here with the blood upon the altar “that maketh atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11). The Day of Atonement and the sacrifices for sin upon the altar put the people in the right *standing* before God. Here it was to do with the *state* of the Israelite before Jehovah and fellowship with Him, and not about his standing before Him. For this reason the defiled person was never sprinkled with the blood. The sprinkled blood towards the Tabernacle signified the ground of access to God and, as noted, this was symbolized by the ashes. And so the recurring cleansing of the unclean Israelite with the water of purification was always in *virtue* of the blood previously shed and sprinkled at the door of the house of God. It is as we have seen in the Lord's ministry as our Advocate – but there it is in virtue of the infinite worth of His blood.

### Washing the disciples' feet

We have already noted the relevance of this occasion to our subject. The Lord arose from supper, laid aside his garments and took a towel with which He girded Himself. He then poured water into a basin and washed the feet of the disciples. His statement, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter,” would apply to His then future (but now present) ministry as Advocate. This He would take up upon His ascension and exaltation, sharing the throne of His Father. He was demonstrating on earth what He would do in heaven for those He left on earth. “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God” (Jn 13:3).

Peter, in his unassuming loyalty stumbled at the Lord's humility declaring, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” Whereupon the Lord replied, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” The Lord did not mean that Peter would lose His union with Him – only that His fellowship with Him will be fractured. Again, not understanding the full significance of the occasion, Peter requested what he thought would be a greater blessing. “Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” The Lord's reply informs Peter that he was already “bathed” and therefore he only needed to have his feet washed. “Jesus saith to him, he that is washed [bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean.”<sup>10</sup>

By using the word “bathed” the Lord was conveying the truth that Peter was a converted person – he was re-born. And, as a re-born and converted person he was “clean every whit.” That is, he stood before God morally cleansed and justified.<sup>11</sup> There was no condemnation upon Peter as far as his standing was concerned. It is the once for all positional cleansing that comes with the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit as we mentioned earlier.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The word wash in the first instance of verse 10 is *louo*, which means to bathe the person all over. In the second instance it is *nipto*, which means to wash only a part of the body.

<sup>11</sup> “But not all.” Judas was not “bathed” and did not have rebirth. He was not present at the institution of the Lord's Supper. Yet, the Lord washed his feet. Why? Because “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom 5:20). It was a fitting demonstration of the humility of Christ as the Servant of God; One whose ministry on earth was marked by humility. It was in keeping with His ministry associated with the “acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:19).

<sup>12</sup> “He that is washed [bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.” In these words of eternal security the Lord refutes the creed of the Arminian and the Calvinist. As others have noted, the former supposing the need for repeated bathing; the latter supposing that self-judgment associated with “perseverance” is required to be assured of salvation and divine election.

However, Peter needed his feet washed – which relates to his *state*. His feet were dirty – defiled if you like with the stain of the earth. They had to be washed – intimating the contamination that we as children of God sometimes acquire as we walk in this wilderness scene below. We are a heavenly people yet walk in a sin-ridden scene. The flesh within can rise up causing us to fall into sin. It is then we need the Lord as our Advocate to wash our feet – spiritually of course. This He does using the water – the Word of God, as we have noted. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1).

## Appendix

**1 John 5:18:** “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not.”

In his First Epistle John gives us what is true of the new life through rebirth. In chapter 1 he states a number of positional characteristics concerning the person born of God, as we noted earlier. We have it here as well in terms of the *nature* of a person born of God. When we are born again we obtain a new and divine nature from God (2 Pet 1:4). It belongs to the new man in Christ. God and His Spirit *cannot* be involved in a birth that imparts a divine nature which is capable of sinning. We have in John’s text an absolute positional truth relating to our new divine nature at rebirth. The new man cannot sin. We are told this very thing in 1 John 3:9. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” The truth that “whosoever is born of God sinneth not” is strategically placed in the passage to suit the context. It complements the *practical responsibility* we have to suppress the old man who, though crucified with Christ judicially, is present practically. Our *state* should correspond to our *standing*. This is why John goes on to say in the same verse, “he that is begotten of God keepeth himself and the wicked one toucheth him not.” In this verse the beloved apostle refers to the practical duty of the person born of God - to walk according to the character of that new nature. We are exhorted to keep down the “old man” – the flesh.

In this Series we have seen something of the way in which this is done. As children born of God we should be marked by the desire and effort not to sin. Yet, how we fail! May the Spirit of God give us the needed wisdom and strength not to do so – for His Name’s sake!