

Marty Leewright is a criminal defense attorney. It is his job to defend those who have been accused of criminal charges in a court of law. He sits at the right hand of the indicted person and acts as his advocate, presenting evidence in an attempt to convince a jury of his client's innocence. Sometimes Marty's job is near impossible for the indicted person has obviously done what he or she has been charged. In these cases, the jury should find the defendant guilty and he should pay the penalty for the crime that he has committed. But other times, Marty's job is a real challenge. For there is serious doubt concerning the indicted person's guilt. And there are a few times when Marty's job is remarkably easy. This would be one of those days for Marty. Because the prosecutor had admitted that the evidence that he had hoped to find just wasn't there and he had insufficient evidence to pursue a trial, the judge had put Marty's client at the top of the court agenda for dismissal. All Marty had to do was show up with his client and the case would be dismissed. Marty knew this, his client knew this, the judge and prosecutor knew this, but nobody else in the court knew what had already transpired behind the scenes.

After the bailiff ordered the courtroom to rise for the judge's entrance and the judge called the court into session, the judge called Marty's case number. Marty stood to his feet and replied, *I'm ready to present my case, your Honor*. The judge immediately responded, *State's case dismissed*. Then he turned to Marty's client and said, *You may go free*.

Those familiar with court proceedings recognized the process that had just occurred. But some who were unfamiliar were somewhat stunned by the abruptness of it all. Suddenly one man who was awaiting trial himself jumped to his feet and blurted out in a loud voice pointing at Marty, *I want that man to be my lawyer*.

Lawyers have been given something of a bum rap in our society today despite the years of education necessary and the difficult bar exams that must be passed. There are lawyer jokes that make the rounds. And we must admit that some of that reputation is deserved. As with any profession, there are some who use the system for their own advantage, some who charge exorbitant fees, some who are willing to twist and distort the truth without conscience to build a reputation for themselves.

But if any of us were wrongfully charged with a serious crime, we would want the best lawyer possible sitting by our side. For it is a fearful prospect to enter a courtroom and sit before a judge not knowing all the complicated procedures that are required without an advocate to plead our case for us. I know if I were falsely charged with a crime, I would want the best lawyer possible sitting at my side.

It should give us great comfort to know that in the spiritual realm, if we are a member of God's family, we have the best lawyer in the universe representing us all the time, 24/7. This lawyer is the very one who

paid the penalty for our sin so that we might be justified in God's sight. But just because we have been declared to be not guilty any longer by God Himself, this doesn't stop the accuser of the brethren from bringing charges against us. How thankful we are that seated at the right hand of God we have a personal lawyer, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself continuously representing us to God the Father.

This morning, I would like to talk with you about the present ministry that the Lord Jesus Christ is having on our behalf. This is something that we don't usually emphasize as much as we should. We usually speak more of the past ministry that the Lord Jesus Christ has had for us – his coming to this earth to provide the perfect example of godly living, his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross of Calvary for our sins, his bodily resurrection from the tomb, the inception of the church that is his body to carry on his ministry here on this earth. And it is, of course, right and proper for us to emphasize these ministries of the Lord Jesus Christ because they are foundational to our spiritual life and faith. But the danger is that we can begin to think that all that Christ has done for us is in the past, that he isn't actively involved in ministry any more. And this would be far from the truth. For the Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry as our advocate. We find this truth clearly given in several passages of Scripture, including the one we just read from 1 John 2:1,2:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Today, right now, the Lord Jesus Christ is appearing for us in God's presence as our advocate, as our defense attorney. And what better attorney could we possibly have than the one who made the payment for our sins in the first place so that we might be declared not guilty in the sight of God.

Now, how does this all work? Well, there are several passages of Scripture that crack open the door to heaven allowing us to get a glimpse of just part of what is transpiring there.

One of the names that is used of God's enemy in the Bible is accuser. Listen to these verses from Revelation 12:10-

REV 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

*"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the **accuser** of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.*

Now we can be thankful that one day Satan is going to be thrown out of heaven, that he won't any longer have access to the throne of God. There will be a cleansing of the heavenly temple at that time and there will no longer be any wickedness or defilement in heaven for all eternity. But this hasn't happened yet.

At this present time, Satan as a created being must continue to give an account to God of his activities. So periodically, he must appear before the throne of God. Because of his rebellious condition, Satan uses these opportunities to try to accuse God's children.

Something of this process is outlined for us in the book of Job.

READ Job 1: 6-11

JOB 1:6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. ⁷

The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

JOB 1:8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

JOB 1:9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. ¹⁰ "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

God is the creator and judge of all things. All of His creation give account to him. Just because Lucifer fell in pride from righteousness and became God's enemy doesn't free him from his accountability to God. God knows all things, of course. God knows where Satan is at all times and what he is doing. But there still must be formal accountability because God is the creator and Lucifer, even in his fallen state, still remains the created.

So with the other angelic beings, Satan periodically comes before the throne of God to give an account of his actions. From his name meaning accuser we know that the enemy uses these times to bring accusations against God's people. In this case, when God raised the issue of Job's integrity and righteousness, Satan immediately tries to discredit Job implying that Job is only obedient to God because of all of the blessings that God has bestowed upon him.

Now today, according to 1 John 2:1, we have someone that even Job didn't have. We have a defense attorney to represent our case before God the Father. Let me give a possible scene that might personalize what might be taking place in heaven right now.

Satan could be before the throne of heaven right now saying something like this: *Look at that child of yours, Larry Rowland, down there in Rockford. You've called him to be a pastor in one of your churches. But did you see what he did this morning? When he was getting ready to come and minister for you, he was so focused and intent on his sermon that he lost his patience and became irritated when he couldn't get his tie just right. He had to tie his tie twice and it irritated him. What kind of an example is that? What kind of a leader is this that you have chosen? How can he possibly be of any service to you?* And so Satan continues to make his case before God diverting attention, of course, from all of the evil and wickedness that he is promoting here on the earth and the simple fact that many of the sins that we commit as God's children are prompted by his own tempting of us.

But when Satan finishes presenting his case, I have a defense attorney on duty 24 hours a day. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. And he might very well answer something like this in my defense: *Yes, I know that my child became irritated today, but that sin has already been paid for in full. In fact, all of this child's spiritual debts have already been paid for. They were paid for by my own sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. When I died in his place, I paid for every single one of Larry Rowland's sins. So he now stands cleansed in the sight of God and not guilty from every charge that you can bring against him.*

What is Satan going to say to that? What further argument can he possibly bring? No wonder he leaves the throne of God in frustration and anger to vent his hostilities back on this earth. There is nothing that he can say or do to bring an accusation that will stick against one of God's forgiven children.

As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:33-39:

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . .

RO 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now the amazing thing is that where Satan fails time and time again in heaven he succeeds so often in dealing with us personally. Not that it is often or usually Satan himself that is involved in our personal

temptations. Most often it is one of his many army members who make up his demonic realm who actually does the tempting. But we can assume that the host of demons who work under Satan's command pattern their character and conduct after their leader.

Whereas Satan is never successful in accusing us before the throne of God because our advocate is there ready and willing to defend us, he so often is successful in his personal accusations against us. For instance, using the example that I gave earlier, having failed in his attempt to indict me before God the Father for my lack of patience, he might now come to me personally and accuse: *what kind of pastor and leader are you anyway, losing your patience over a stupid tie? How can you stand up behind a pulpit claiming to represent God when you are such a miserable failure yourself? You're nothing but a hypocrite.* Satan knows that discouragement and self-condemnation are effective tools in hindering our service for the Lord. If we become disheartened, we will not be effective in reaching out in ministry to others.

It is at this point that we all must learn to distinguish between the accusing attacks of the enemy and the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ upon his ascension back into heaven sent the Holy Spirit to indwell each believer. As He was preparing his followers from His departure, Jesus gave them this promise on the night before He left them to be crucified:

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18)

True to His word, the Spirit of God descended upon Christ's followers to indwell them on the Day of Pentecost. And ever since that day, God's Spirit comes to indwell each and every believer at the moment of the new birth. Now the Holy Spirit has many ministries in our lives. He gives special spiritual gifts to us, he leads and guides us, he gives comfort and strength to us, he teaches us divine truth opening our eyes to an understanding of the Bible, and so on. One of the very important ministries of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin. Jesus said to his disciples:

⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

(John 16:7-11)

When we sin and feel that uneasiness and guilt in our conscience, it is the Holy Spirit telling us that what we have done is wrong, urging us to confess our sins to God so that we might receive His cleansing. This is a good and important ministry in our lives. That's the reason for Jesus saying it was for our good that he left this earth and that the Holy Spirit came into our lives. Willful, unconfessed sin will destroy our lives faster than anything else. The conscience is to our spiritual souls what our nerve endings are to our physical bodies. When we place our hand on a hot stove, the nerve endings instantly scream at us "get your hand off this hot stove." This is for our good, isn't it? If we were to leave our hand on a hot stove, we would end up getting 3rd degree burns, perhaps needing a painful skin graft, or worse. By yanking our hand off the stove, we are protecting our bodies. So our conscience tells us to avoid a situation where a sinful act can bring damage to our spiritual lives. We need to listen to our consciences for God created us with a conscience for our good, to protect us from destroying our lives with sinful practices.

But in this fallen world, our consciences no longer are infallible spiritual guides. If we continue in sinful practices, our consciences can become seared so that they don't warn us as we should. We can rationalize away activities and actions overriding our consciences with faulty reasoning. And sometimes the expectations of our upbringing and cultural mores can mold our consciences in a perverted way.

But what is often most difficult for us is to distinguish between the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit and accusing assault of the enemy because both are pointing out our sins and shortcomings to us. When we feel guilty about something in our lives, how do we know whether it is the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin or the devil accusing and attacking us? The way that I have learned to distinguish between the Spirit's convicting ministry and Satan's slanderous attacks personally is in what happens after I confess my sin to God. If my conscience is bothering me because of some issue in my life, whatever that issue might be, my first response is to confess that area of my life to God. If I am confessing in response to the Spirit's convicting ministry, I have found the comforter begins to do His work, bringing assurance and encouragement to my heart. But the enemy doesn't care whether I confess my sin or not. He is only interested in nagging me with his slanderous accusations. So even after confession, he doesn't let up, but he even pours it on more and more. When that happens, I find it necessary to remind myself of my position in Christ, that even as I am being bombarded by accusations from the enemy, my advocate in heaven is defending me before the Father. If my creator and final judge does not condemn me, then who am I to condemn myself or allow the enemy to nag me with his unwarranted accusations. The enemy's accusations must be rejected. We must not allow him to badger us into thinking that we are a second-rate or inferior Christian. Rather, we must accept the position that God has given to us through the Lord Jesus Christ and not allow the enemy to have a foothold in our lives.

Now being a defense attorney before the throne of God for us is only one of the ministries that the Lord Jesus Christ presently has. The Lord willing, we will look at 2 more ministries that he now has in 2 weeks.

But what a critically important ministry this is. Having a defense attorney who has also paid all of the spiritual debts that we owe can bring new freedom and power to our lives.

Have you been born again into God's family? Have you accepted the free gift of salvation that God offers to you through the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you have the confidence that you have a defense attorney before the throne of God this morning?