

## ***Christ — Our Hiding Place***

1 John 2:1-2 (NASB)

***My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.***

In the last few years, my family has become quite efficient at taking long road trips. When we return to Memphis to visit family, it is about a 14 hour drive from my current home...that's a long time in the car for 7 people. One way we have determined to make the most of our time is to listen to audio books. On a recent trip, we listened to *The Hiding Place*, which recounts the biographical story of Cornelia ten Boom, a Dutch Christian lady whose family created a "hiding place" in their home in Holland to hide Jews during the Holocaust.

Eventually the ten Booms were themselves captured and sent to prison camps because of their aid to the Jews. They faced terrible circumstances...interrogations, beatings, hunger, illness, lack of sunlight, solitary confinement, terrible circumstances for any human to endure. But the Lord gave Corrie grace on many occasions, providing her ways to smuggle her Bible into her cell, and having the word of God, the Lord renewed her joy from one day to the next...

While in solitary confinement, Corrie found encouragement from the Lord by observing ants crawling in and out of a crack in the floor (though that may seem insignificant, it demonstrates the desperation of her situation). On one occasion, as she was frantically preparing to depart one prison for another, she looked for one last sighting of her new-found friends, only to recognize they were staying safe in their underground refuge. In that moment, the Lord provided her a reassuring thought about her situation. She said, "I realized...that I, too, had a hiding place when things were bad. Jesus was this place, the Rock cleft for me."<sup>1</sup>

Even amidst the terrors of a life that some would call worse than death, Corrie ten Boom found in Christ what what the Psalmist wrote of the Lord, **He is a hiding place and shield (Ps. 119:114), a rock and refuge and fortress, and deliverer (Ps. 18:2).**

John shows us Christ in a similar light. He is to his people—our hiding place. He is a place of calming trust in our trials, but more importantly, John is reminding us that Christ is our hiding place from God's justice against the sin in our hearts. Far above earthly afflictions, which affect life in this body, it is sin in the heart which affects the soul.

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<sup>1</sup>Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, Guideposts edition. (Carmel, NY: Guideposts Assoc., 1971), 196.

Don't think of sin first of all as failure or mistakes. Think of sin first of all like some preachers of the past:

- "Sin is contrary to God and all that is dear to him or has his name upon it;"<sup>2</sup>
- "Every sin is a kind of cursing God in the heart; an aim at the destruction of God."<sup>3</sup>
- Sin [is]... "rebellion against, defiance of, retreat from, and consequent guilt before God the creator."<sup>4</sup>

Scripture is the source of those assessments...

The Apostle Paul declares that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Glory of God and sin, are like oil and water, they do not mix. Better yet, they are like fire and gasoline, one readily consumes the other! To attempt to bring sin into the presence of God is hopeless.

So when the Apostle John describes fellowship with God in this letter, we understand why he decries sin—

Anyone who would be in fellowship with God must not be defined by sin:

**1 John 1:5 — ...God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.**

He concludes, then, in 1 John 1:6 - that if you walk in darkness you cannot claim to be in fellowship with God and tell the truth. He later says in chapter 3:

**1 John 3:6 — 6 No one who abides in Him sins...**

**1 John 3:8 — 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil...**

**1 John 3:9 — 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.**

Sin is not characteristic of a child of God.

Because we have been born of God, we are now marked by the character of God: our thinking about sin, our love for sin, and our practice of sin has fundamentally changed. We are new creations, what resides in us is the attitude of God. God is opposed to sin, so we are opposed to sin. So we resist sin! That's why verse 1 emphasizes: *I write that you may not sin.*

**And yet**, if breath continues in your lungs, even though your relationship to sin has changed, sin is not yet eradicated. Do you experience sin?!

- Impatience with people??
- Lacking of self-control??
- Bouts with anger??
- Not trusting the Lord's provision??
- Struggling with Improper desires??

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*

<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

- Anxiety and worry??
- You are not alone!

Now some would say that John is actually teaching a sort of sinlessness—that if you are a Christian, then you don't sin anymore—at all. And if you do, then you have not been redeemed. That error digs two ditches: one says Christians can live in sinless perfection. The other says that Christians can't have assurance of salvation in this life. In just one verse, John backfills both ditches and leads us to the truth.

Certainly the perfectionist is wrong, otherwise the phrase "if anyone sins," would not be present. And reassurance is precisely the point of the whole sentence that begins with "And." You will not be sinless in this life, but even so, you can be confident in your position before God on the basis of Christ! We have been saved from the penalty of sin and we are no longer bound by the power of sin, but sin's presence in our flesh will persist as long as we live in the body. That doesn't make sin acceptable, it makes us very needy. It makes us more dependent on Christ.

John reminds us of our redeemer who is greater than our sin. A Savior who is more powerful than our flesh. A great high priest who not only died for our sin but also continues to pray to God for us. He is the only hope for lost sinners, **but don't forget he is also the only hope for God's redeemed children.** If you are a child of God who still faces sin, run into the strong tower of the Lord for safety.

If you are overwhelmed with your struggles over sin, find in Jesus a hiding place. Our hope in the Christian life is not: Work harder at not sinning...Certainly there is a measure of striving against sin. But here's John's point: **Resist sin, but REST in the person & work of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Brothers and sisters, when you recognize in yourself the very sin that you hate... **be more overwhelmed by Christ than by the weight of that sin. For His sufficiency far outweighs your guilt.**

Exemplifying a faithful pastor, John applies the doctrine of Christ to the concern of sin—because only Christ restores our fellowship with God, both when we are initially saved from sin and everyday thereafter.

John writes to "my little children", he uses that phrase several times in 1 John. Not to treat them like kids, but to endear himself to those he considers his children in the faith. That sets the tone of this passage. It is counsel, consolation, comfort to those who would be sensitive to sin...not just the readers then, but for us now. John is consoling because even as there is this great weight about sin, this great prohibition to sinning, because it is terrible, and it cuts us off from God. Sin doesn't get the last word. In Christ there is grace greater than all our sin. Our fellowship with God is restored because of Christ.

Just to be sure, this is not sin as “walking in darkness” of 1:6, nor is it the “practicing sin” of chapter 3. Those styles of life have changed. John would never say, “He who practices sinful living has an advocate”—that sinner has no warrant for that assurance. That is the point—if you are someone living in sin, practicing sin, content to follow your own desires above the command of God, you have no reason to be assured of eternal life. John is speaking to those who practice the pattern of 1:9 -

***if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

What John is speaking of is the possible occasions of sin. As if to say,

- “I write that you may avoid individual sinful actions.”
- If anyone does commit a sin...we have an advocate...

It's the difference Jesus spoke of when he washed the disciples feet. Peter wanted Jesus to wash not only his feet but also his head and hands. But Jesus explained that was not necessary. “The one who has bathed need only wash his feet. He is completely clean otherwise.” The one who practices sin is not clean and indeed does need entire cleansing, but John speaks here of those who have already been washed from their sin, who need simply to have their “spiritual feet washed.”

And though uses the word “if” he speaks with expectation, as if it will happen. You could even read that “when anyone sins” because it will happen. That's the reality of the fallen flesh. Christ has solved our sin problem, but it still lingers in the flesh. We know sin's terror, we aim to steer clear of sin, but if and when anyone sins...we have an advocate with the Father...

John gives us really just 1 reason to rest in Christ...because He is our **Advocate**. Like a divine defense attorney standing before the holy judge. He comes quickly to our aid, to speak for us. He takes the opposite stance of the devil—who is the accuser! The devil appears before God to mount up the case against God's children (like with Job), slandering, accusing, an adversary reminding of the guilt of breaking God's law.

That's not the ministry of Christ! He stands as a help, coming to represent his people. He presents our case in the court of God's justice. An Advocate is one called in to help. In John's gospel, this word is translated *Helper*, you remember when Jesus spoke of his departure, he said, “I will send you another Helper.” As if he is the first, and he would send the HS after his ascension. In that way, we have not only an advocate in heaven at the right hand of God, but with the ministry of the HS, we have an advocate in us while on the earth. William Perkins elaborates on this when he says, “Jesus' intercession for you in heaven is demonstrated by the Spirit's bearing fruit in you on earth.” If that is true, and I think it is...then Christ's advocacy concerns not only God's reception of you, but concerns God's work in you!

Don't mistake the magnitude of this truth. No matter how lonely or how weak you may feel in this world, to be in Christ means that you are not alone! You have an advocate with the Father!

The adage holds true in heaven as much as it does on earth - "He who defends himself has a fool for a client." No human is wise to go before God on his own...

**Hebrews 10:31 - It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

If you come before him alone, you will shall not endure that encounter.

**Psalm 1:5 - the wicked will not stand in the judgment...**

**Psalm 76:7 - who may stand in your presence when you are angry?**

Consider Nineveh's case. Nahum was a prophet of the Lord to the city of Nineveh...Nineveh repented after Jonah preached there 100 years earlier. But the city had reverted back to its wicked ways—evil people. Nahum came and prophesied the destruction of the city...God would overthrow the Ninevites in much the same way they oppressed others. The whole book sounds a lot like Paul's explanation of God's wrath in Romans 1—their own sinful desires come back to destroy them.

The foundation for this whole judgment work of God is found in chapter 1.

**Nahum 1:2 - A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; the Lord is avenging and wrathful . The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries. And He reserves wrath for his enemies...**

**Nahum 1:6 - Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him.....**

That is the experience of those who would stand before God on their own...an expectation of vengeance and wrath, but...Nahum speaks hope for God's people who will be spared such judgment...

**Nahum 1:7 - The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.**

We are not like those against whom Nahum prophesied. John is speaking in his letter to the same kind of people Nahum encourages—those who take refuge in the Lord. We know the Lord as none other than Jesus Christ. And he is that refuge, our advocate!

When you ask the question, how is it that my sin doesn't overtake me? How is it that my sin isn't too much for God? Your first and sufficient answer is: because I do not stand before God alone, Christ stands as a worthy advocate.

Everything else in these 2 verses demonstrates his worthiness. If I could use a building analogy...sinners hide away in the advocacy of Christ, but the other details here give structure to the building

- "He is an Advocate **with the Father**" - like walls to this hiding place
- "He is Jesus Christ the **Righteous One**" - like the foundation

- “He is the **propitiation** for our sins” - like the roof, the covering of the structure, and it is a broad roof!
- “And not for our sins only, but **for those of the whole world**”.

These elaborations simply perfect Christ’s role as our Advocate, the defense in which we might hide!

### **With the Father**

We may expect here something different—an advocate with *Almighty God*, or with the *righteous judge*...or something similar, but instead Christ is an advocate with the father.

Notice: Our advocate is actually the son of the judge! The Son whom the Father sent is the advocate on our behalf. The Father appointed our defense attorney, who is his very own son!

**1 John 4:10 — 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

Christ is the remedy to our sin sent by the Father himself. And that sending is an act of his love for the elect. But there’s more, because *the* Father is also *our* Father, for those in Christ!

We are not like those to whom Nahum spoke—adversaries, enemies of God—but his children.

This divine court of law then is not so cold as it may seem. In the world, these circumstances may lead to corruption, but in the heavenly court, we recognize that this is the best possible scenario!

Psalm 103 describes how God treats the sins of his children differently.

**Psalm 103:10–13 — 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.**

We come as it were like the prodigal son, to a loving Father ready to forgive, and we come standing behind our older brother, not like the brother in the parable in the background with bitterness and resentment, but to one who is like his Father, gracious and merciful and self-sacrificing for the good of all his father’s children. He is not interested in his own estate, but he gladly stands in our interest.

So when God deals with your sin, he no longer does so as if you are a sinner to be judged, but as if you are a son to be corrected toward righteousness. His purposes will not be to punish, but to perfect, that you his adopted son, might be more like His only begotten Son, who, at the end of v. 1 is the Righteous One, John says.

### **Righteous**

He is the righteous one.

A defendant wants an attorney who knows the law! But Christ is even better than that. He has completely honored the law. He doesn’t simply know the ins and outs of legal defense, he

stands with integrity in his own righteousness! He does not plead our righteousness. No, Our defense attorney knows we are guilty! And He would indeed confess before the father that we are guilty! But, Christ stands up and pleads the merits of his own righteousness for us.

He is (as Hebrews 7:26 says):

***holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.***

And so, this defense is perfect. He is like the high priest who met with God on behalf of the people. But he is altogether different than the high priest because he needed no sacrifice to cover his own sin. Christ came into the presence of God on his own merit, and has the privilege to stay there forever because he is worthy to be there. He is a priest forever; he always lives to make intercession for his people; so those who draw near to God through him he is able to save to the uttermost. So that every moment you face another sin in this life, Christ constantly represents you before the Father. In Christ, not even sin will ultimately separate you from God.

But if our Advocate only brought his own righteousness to the table, it would not be enough. It would be great! No doubt. But there would still be the stain of our own sin. Christ's righteousness is not like the kids painting smock that protects their otherwise proper clothes. No, the clothes underneath are already soiled. But the good news of the gospel is that the soiled robes of our sin have been removed. He has taken our filthy robes, and given us his righteous robe.<sup>5</sup>

Christ is a perfect advocate, because not only does he present his righteousness as ours, but he takes on our sin and its punishment as his own.

### **Propitiation**

That simply means that Christ satisfied God's demands against sin, he paid the price God demanded for justice.

Sin cannot be forgiven without a payment. There is always a cost, always a loss, always a sacrifice, that is either absorbed by the sinner or absorbed by a redeemer.

Think of when someone offends you. In an extreme case, say someone steals your car and wrecks it. They can repent and ask forgiveness and even buy you a new car. They absorb the loss that way. Or, if they never come to you, never repent, never repay...you can forgive them... But there is still a payment for the offense—only now you have absorbed the cost.

The same is true of God. He cannot simply forgive—as no one can simply forgive—there is always a cost to sin. God is sometimes criticized that he won't just forgive people... "why won't he just forgive?" It's not that He doesn't want to...it is not possible! How can the eternal, unchanging spirit suffer loss? He cannot and remain God. But he could take on flesh and blood...He could send his Son in the form of sinful flesh...This way of salvation IS the way that

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<sup>5</sup> compare the vision of Joshua and the Angel of the Lord in Zechariah 3:1-5

God forgives. Christ HAD to take on flesh and blood in order to suffer for sin. As the God-man, Christ suffered all the burden of God's wrath against our sin. And God was satisfied with Christ's suffering.

### **He Himself**

Christ willingly gave up himself for the good of unworthy sinners. He is like the high priest in that he brought a sacrifice for sin. But he is far better than the OT priests because what he brought was himself. He is both the priest and the sacrifice.

That just points to the perfect nature of Christ's work. He fulfilled in himself, through his own righteousness, in his own person, everything your sin demanded. He didn't just deal with sin, but he received from God what your sin deserved. Propitiation describes the power in Christ's saving work, Jesus didn't only deal with sin. Hold tightly to the fact that Christ also dealt with God.

Jesus took on himself not only all our sin, but all God's wrath against our sin. He quenched the thirst of God's anger. He absorbed the crushing blow of God's judgment. He faced the full and final weight of God's punishment for our sin. He has wiped away our sin, and he has made peace with God for us. All of Scripture points us to this way of salvation. In the NT—for example...

***1 Peter 2:24 — 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross...by His wounds you were healed.***

In the OT too...

***Isaiah 53:5 — 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.***

When you sin, it is as if our Lord Jesus stands before the Father and says

- "this one is not liable to your wrath. I've already paid the price."
- "I, Father, have already satisfied your justice."

That is propitiation.

***Romans 8:1 — 1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***

It is in this way that God could be both just and justifier. He upholds justice in punishing your sin. But by punishing it in Jesus, He is able to justify you.

This is so much better than the simple just-as-if-I-never-sinned explanation. No...it is as if you have sinned, you have been found out, and you are utterly without recourse, nowhere to turn, nowhere to hide, and yet God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. He put forward his own Son, Jesus as a propitiation. All sinners do is receive it by faith.

So who can condemn you if you are trusting in Christ? The devil can't. God won't. You should not. No one else has the privilege!

Christ's payment is plenty. That is John's point at the end of v. 2.

### **For those of the whole world**

I must recognize that these two verses have stirred up lots of theological questions through the ages...not the least of which includes the end of verse 2. And no doubt, some of you are wondering, what is the conclusion here? Did Jesus die for everyone on the earth? Indeed I could give you three or four different views of interpreting this phrase...

But let me point out that John's purpose here is not to clarify the extent of the atonement. This is pastoral encouragement not so much theological treatise. But John's expression in no way disagrees with the rest of Scripture, to which we turn if a verse in question is difficult.

He is adding weight to Christ's ability as an advocate. He defends us before the Father, he stands in his own righteousness. Though he is righteous, he actually paid the price for our sin. And his payment extends far and wide, for God's plan was that salvation would be effective for all his people all over the world.

He paid not just for the sins of John's readers, but for the sins of all God's people no matter their ethnic heritage!<sup>6</sup>

So, when you sin, let me encourage you—Confess your sin, repent of your sin, do your best to resist that sin, but then trust that Christ defends you. Don't hold sins over your own head when Jesus Christ the Righteous has already advocated for you!

Christians have struggled with the question of the sin that remains throughout the ages...

John Newton was a man well-acquainted with his own sin, and gives good counsel to turn to Christ as the remedy:

"...after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, willfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they [Believers recognizing their own sin] find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ, Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not ascribe anything to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished (if possible) a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Savior, their Shepherd, and their Shield."<sup>7</sup>

Brothers and sisters, rest securely, rest easily, rest thankfully, in Christ, our hiding place.

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<sup>6</sup> Compare Caiaphas' speech at John 11:52, "and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."

<sup>7</sup> John Newton and Josiah Bull, *Letters of John Newton*, First publ. [London: Religious Tract Society], 1869. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 98.