

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0423 -- June 6, 2004 -- 1 John 2:2 -- Extent of Atonement--Part 1

Last week we looked at 1 John 1:10 and 2:1. We found that in verse 10 any and all believers, including the apostles could, while walking in the Light, discover personal sin in their life and deny it. When we do this, two things take place. Number one, *we make Him a liar*. To deny personal sin when we have sinned is to attack God, who is a God of light and in Him is no darkness, not even a bit (1:5). It is an outright attack on the character of God who cannot lie. Number two thing that happens is *His word is not in us*. This means that His word is not in us in a *dynamic* and *effective* way such that our *behavior* and *attitude* reflect God's character. We are not walking in the light when we deny personal sin. The light shows you the sin but you deny the light and consequently walk in the darkness. If and when you do this you need to get back in fellowship by confession of sin according to 1 John 1:9. Confession comes from the Greek word *homologeō* and means literally, "to say the same thing" about sin that God says about sin. It doesn't mean asking for forgiveness, forgiveness is the promise if we confess the sins. It doesn't say feel guilty, you may, but this doesn't obligate God to forgive you. 1 John 1:9 is a promise that you need to claim whenever you step out of the light. If the Light shows you your sin and you immediately acknowledge or confess it then fellowship with God goes on unbroken. If you deny what the light has revealed then you may get into compound carnality if you don't confess the sin. The answer for those in compound carnality, say you've been walking another path for months or years, the answer for you is repentance, a total change of mind, a one hundred and eighty degree about face turn and march in the direction of Christ.

John began verse 2 with a disclaimer. John has been stressing in verse 5-10 that no Christian can claim to be without sin. The argument there is so strong that John realizes some might take this as an excuse to not vigorously oppose sin. You might say, well, John said I'm not without sin so it's inevitable that I will sin so why try to restrain it. John says, that's not my purpose at all. In fact, *these things I write to you so that you do not sin*. John wants us to realize the seriousness of sin, not its inevitability. In light of John's purpose, he's trying to get us to realize that sin is a serious thing in the Christian life and we ought to re-double our efforts to avoid it! However, John does not leave reality. John realizes that

Christians can and do sin. So, with the comforting words of a father John says *little children...if we do sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*. John assures us that if we do sin, we're not left alone, we have an Advocate. The word for Advocate in the Greek is *paracletos*. It means "one called alongside". It is a legal term that really refers to Christ as your lawyer, your unpaid lawyer. I won't belabor that point. He's your legal representative in the courtroom of God, a courtroom which is in session day and night. According to Rev. 12:9-11, Satan is accusing you when you sin. He's the Prosecutor and you are the Defendant. Fortunately, if you're a believer here today you don't have to represent yourself, you have the #1 Lawyer representing you. He's never lost a case and never will lose a case. He's unbeatable because He's the creator of the universe and He is righteous. That He is righteous means that His character is the standard for what is right and wrong everywhere in the universe. Since He is immutable, He never does anything contrary to His character (you know, when I give you these attributes of God you ought to write down these definitions on a little card and put them in your pocket. I can't tell you how helpful they are to just pull them out throughout the day and reflect on who God is. Maybe it's the end of the day and you're tired but you still have things to do, just pull that card out and look to Omnipotence, a simple definition is "God doesn't get tired". We get tired but God is the source of all energy. Pray He'll give you the energy to finish your tasks. Pray He'll give you a good night's rest. These attributes of God have been a sustainer in my life time and again. This is just an example of how practical the attributes of God are in your daily life). So, back to our text. Jesus Christ, because He is righteous and immutable, will represent you with perfection even though the most brutal Prosecutor, Satan, accuses you of sin. Christ, your Advocate paid for that sin with His own precious blood. What a comfort. If you're not a believer here today then you are left on your own to defend yourselves. Christ has paid for your sin but you must appropriate Christ's death for you by faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Only then will He legally represent you before the Father.

Now we're going to look to 1 John 2:2 and we're going to spend several weeks here on this verse, probably the next 3-4 weeks so you'll have to stick with me. 1 John 2:2 is at the center of a controversial debate. We're going to have to deal with a very tough, but important area of theology. Lots of people think they know what the debate is all about and think they have it knocked out but I want you to follow me carefully. We're going to approach the cross and we want to find out what happened there. The ultimate question we want to find an answer for is who did Christ die for. Scholars call this "the extent of the atonement?" How far does the atonement extend? Did Christ die for each and every individual or did Christ die for only the elect. Now, let me give you the interpretation of 1

John 2:2 that is consistent with what I've been teaching in 1 John and then we'll begin to unravel the debate on the extent of the atonement.

1 John 2:2

(Extent of the Atonement)

and He Himself is the propitiation (hilasmos) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (kosmos).

Not only is He our Advocate but He is also *the propitiation for our sins*. The Greek word for propitiation (*hilasmos*) is under heated debate by modern commentators. What is under debate is the meaning of the word. Traditionally it has meant "satisfaction" but C.H. Dodd argued that it really means "forgiveness or expiation" as reflected in the New American Bible. This change would mean that propitiation was directed toward man rather than toward God. Dodd rejected the idea that God was angry about sin and His wrath needed to be satisfied in order to forgive sin. However, as Colin Brown and others have concluded it is impossible to remove the idea that God's anger had to be satisfied in order to forgive freely. Both the OT and NT are full of the concept that God is angry about sin and that He can't forgive sin until His wrath is satisfied. All this means is that God must judge sin before He can forgive sin. This verse tells us that Jesus Christ is that satisfaction. Jesus Christ took our sin on His body that we might be made the righteousness of God. Notice that it doesn't say that Christ's cross work is the satisfaction but that Jesus Christ Himself is the satisfaction. So, what this means is that right now in heaven the Father can look immediately upon the Lord Jesus Christ and He is satisfied by what He sees. The Father sees the wounds that were inflicted on His Son at the cross, still present in His resurrection body. God looks at His Son and is satisfied. He's not satisfied with you or me; He's satisfied with His Son. So, no matter what sin you have committed, Christ is the satisfaction for it.

EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT: *US* AND *WORLD*

Not only is Christ the satisfaction for all of the sins you as a believer have committed but John says ***not for ours only but also for the whole world***. John here blatantly denies the hyper-Calvinist view that Christ died only for the elect. The tortured attempts from John Owen to our present day to defend Limited Atonement are futile in light of this verse. No amount of ink can twist the word ***world*** to mean "world of the elect" or "all types of men" or "men from every tribe tongue and nation". The contrast here is between ***our sins*** and the ***sins of the whole world***. In keeping with the context, the ***we*** of 1:5-2:1 always refers to John, the apostles, and his readers who we have already proved in past weeks are believers.

Therefore, the *our* must refer to the same group, all of whom are genuine believers. The *whole world* therefore must be non-believers. Notice how John uses the word *world* elsewhere in this epistle. What I'm doing here is showing you the basic techniques of sound Bible study. Take a concordance and look up where John uses the word *world* in this epistle. It's the Greek word *kosmos* and it's used in 2:17; 3:1, 13; 4:15; 5:19, et. al. Especially look at 3:1 and 5:19. Who is *the world* referring to in 3:1? Is it referring to a subset of humanity? Who is *the world* referring to in 5:19? Is it referring to a subset of humanity? I don't think so. It makes much more sense to understand it as referring to all of humanity, each and every individual. Hyper-Calvinists comments on these other usages of *world* in John's epistle take it to mean all non-believers or the world system of paganism, so why the special interpretation in 1 John 2:2? Because their system demands it, not the Scriptures but their system of 5-Point Calvinism (TULIP). It is taught that the TULIP system is logically interconnected. They will tell you that if you believe in Total Depravity then you must also believe in Unconditional Election, therefore Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints logically follow. They say you can't be a 4-point or 3-point Calvinist without being illogical. Well, I beg to differ on the basis of the logic of the plan of salvation in Scripture. It seems here in 1 John 2:2 that Christ's death covers each and every human sin ever committed past, present and future. Some might argue here that if Christ paid for each and every human sin then all men must be saved (Universalism) but this is only true if the cross applies itself to the elect, that is, if the cross saves. A point we will prove from Scripture is untrue. The removal of sin as a barrier between God and men does not automatically bring regeneration to eternal life. The work of Christ on the cross must be appropriated by faith in order for a man to be saved. So, what about the extent of the atonement? For whom did Christ *intend* to die? You can see my position a bit already but this is a complex theological question and it's of supreme importance. Solving it helps us understand many other things about this universe and gives us a right view of God and salvation. So, we're going to benefit greatly by spending some time looking at the historical development of the doctrine, what they believe, and what the Scriptures say. Before we can jump to the question of the extent of the atonement, first we have to set the stage. We'll begin with establishing the Sinless-ness of Christ. Who cares about the extent of the atonement if Christ didn't qualify to be an atonement for sin?

SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST

Was Christ sinless? The abundant testimony of Scripture is that our Lord lived a sinless life. He was the only unique individual that has ever or ever will live. First of all, He Himself challenged His enemies to convict Him of sin.

CHRIST CLAIMED TO BE SINLESS

Turn to John 8:46ff. Here our Lord challenges the Jews to show Him His sin. Sin is anything not compatible with the character of God. No one was able to show Christ that He broke a single infraction of the Mosaic Law. They accused Him of being a half-breed (Samaritan) and being demon possessed because of the things He was saying (8:48, 52). His claim to sinlessness was tantamount to claiming to be God, and this is exactly what the Jews understood when they picked up stones to throw at Him (8:59). Christ claimed to be sinless and to be God.

FRIENDS OF CHRIST CLAIMED HE WAS SINLESS

John, the beloved disciple says in **1 John 3:5** “You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.” Paul says of Christ **2 Corinthians 5:21** “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Peter says of the Lord, **1 Peter 2:22** “WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH.” The author of Hebrews says **Hebrews 4:15** “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin.” A. T. Robertson says of this verse, “This is the outstanding difference that must never be overlooked in considering the actual humanity of Jesus. He did not yield to sin. But more than this is true. There was no latent sin in Jesus to be stirred by temptation and no habits of sin to be overcome. But he did have “weaknesses” (*astheneiai*) common to our human nature (hunger, thirst, weariness, etc.). Satan used his strongest weapons against Jesus, did it repeatedly, and failed. Jesus remained “undefiled” (*amiantos*) in a world of sin (Joh 8:46). This is our ground of hope, the sinlessness of Jesus and his real sympathy.”²¹ So, not only did Jesus have no personal sin, but the claim here is that He had no sin nature. The way Christ avoided a sin nature was the subject of our teaching Lesson 2 of this series, “The Seed of the Woman”. Christ came into the human race as a true human yet without a sin nature through the Seed of a Woman who had a sin nature. The female germ cells in every female are protected early on in development so that they do not come into contact with the sin nature which is transmitted by the male sperm. What this means is that the female gametes are therefore immortal. Scientists have observed in nature that female mammals can have a virgin conception resulting in a virgin birth. Scientists call this Parthenogenesis; meaning that the seed of a female mammal can give rise to a fully functioning organism WITHOUT being fertilized by a male seed. The male seed, even under favorable life-sustaining conditions, nevertheless dies. The only explanation is that the male seed carries the sin nature and the female seed does not. This demonstrates the immortality of the female

seed which God designed in order that the seed of Mary could be conceived by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus Christ would be born truly human yet without a sin nature so that He could be sinless in both nature and person and be an acceptable sacrifice before God. So, the friends of Christ; John, Paul, Peter, and the author of Hebrews all affirm that Christ didn't have a sin nature or personal sin. Jesus Christ had to be sinless in His life in order to qualify for a vicarious death.

ENEMIES OF CHRIST CLAIMED HE WAS SINLESS

Not only did Jesus' friends claim that He was sinless but also His enemies. Notice what Judas says in **Matthew 27:3-4** "Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." Pilate in the same chapter says, **Matthew 27:23-24** "And he [Pilate] said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!" When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood;" The words of the Roman military who guarded Jesus' tomb said **Matthew 27:54** "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" A claim to be the Son of God is equal to claiming that Jesus Christ is God and God is sinless. So, not only did Jesus Himself claim to be without sin, but also His friends and even His enemies recognized that He was sinless; free from both a sin nature and personal sin.

HIS LIFE SUFFERINGS WERE NOT VICARIOUS

Some theologians have assumed that because Christ was sinless in His life that His life as well as His death was substitutionary for man's sin. They say that His life sufferings constitute His active obedience and His death sufferings constitute His passive obedience. Now, it is certain that Christ suffered in both life and death but whether His life sufferings were vicarious is open to serious question.

The Scriptures seem to make a clear distinction between the life sufferings and death sufferings of Christ. Surely, Christ being righteous and holy without sin was detested by being in the midst of sinners. Surely this was a burdening agony. Even Lot was said to be disturbed by the wicked deeds of Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7-8). Much more than our Lord and Savior who was without sin. The sad condition of fallen humanity affected Christ so much

that He healed people out of His compassion. But were these life sufferings vicarious is the question. Turn to Isa. 53:4-6. This was our Scripture reading this morning. This is the most detailed account of the life and death of Christ in the Old Testament and perhaps the entire Bible. Written over 700 years before the crucifixion Isaiah clearly distinguishes between the life and death sufferings of the Messiah. Hold your place here and turn to Matt. 8:13-17. Here in Matthew, we have Jesus healing the Centurion's daughter, Peter's mother-in-Law, and casting out demons from those demon possessed. According to Matthew these constitute His life sufferings or sorrows. Jesus sees the terrible condition of humanity, a humanity which was created to be great and Jesus, out of His compassion, responds. But notice that Matthew sees only the first part of Isa. 53:4-6 as fulfilled, namely 53:4a. So, Isa. 53:4a was fulfilled during Jesus' life ministry *BEFORE* the cross when He healed people and cast out demons. Verses 5-6 correspond to Jesus' death but they are clearly separated by Isaiah and Matthew. Physical healing was performed in Christ's life; spiritual healing was performed in Christ's death. There is not one passage that declares that Jesus' obedience in His life was substitutionary. So, Jesus' sufferings in His life were non-atoning. Substitution for sin took place on the cross. Colossians 1:20 says that He *"made peace through the blood of His cross"*. Peter tells us He was made sin for us on the cross, not in His life (1 Peter 2:24; *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross*).

HIS DEATH SUFFERINGS WERE VICARIOUS

Christ's one righteous act of obedience on the cross is what provided justification. As **Romans 5:18** says *"So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men."* It was ONE ACT of righteousness that was substitutionary, not many acts. That ONE ACT took place on the cross. Also turn again to Isa. 53:5 and we'll compare that with 1 Pet. 2:24. The exact words are not used, Peter's not quoting, but it is obvious that he has Isa. 53:5 on his mind. What this means is that Peter identified spiritual healing with Christ's death on the cross and not with His life. We are healed spiritually because of Christ's death on the cross.

As a summary however, Christ's life of obedience, His absolute submission to the Father's will was a pre-requisite to qualify Him to be our sin substitute on the cross. But ultimately, the Bible teaches that it was Christ's death which was substitutionary, not His life. So, Christ's obedience in life is necessary but it is not substitutionary.

HIS DEATH WAS SUBSTITUTIONARY

Every benefit that you have as a Christian is based on what was accomplished in the Savior's death. The benefits of His death are applied in three directions; redemption is sinward by the paying of the purchase price (Gal. 3:13), reconciliation is manward, changing the relation of the world to God (2 Cor. 5:17-19), and propitiation is Godward, providing a satisfaction of God's justice. The most important aspect of the death of Christ and which all others depend is that it was His substitution for sin and sinners. He did not die to Ransom Satan, He did not die merely to morally influence men, He did not die merely to honor God, nor to merely demonstrate bravery in the hour of death, nor simply for the benefit of men. Rather He died in the place of sinners. The Savior took the sinners place and thus acted as the sinner's substitute. Robert Lightner adds, "The certainty and finality of this substitution is true whether anyone ever appropriates it by faith or not. In other words, its reality and value do not depend upon its application to the individual."ⁱⁱⁱ

Well, how do we know His death was substitutionary? The Scriptures use two Greek prepositions to denote substitution. The first of these is *anti*. *Anti* is the Greek preposition often translated *for*. It has the basic sense of "in the place of" or "instead of" clearly referring to substitution. For example, turn to **Mark 10:45**. Mark 10:45 is an important passage on substitution because the Liberals, who don't believe Christ's death was substitutionary, always say that Jesus never taught substitutionary atonement, that is solely a Pauline doctrine, they say, and Paul added that later, it was just Paul's view and not Jesus'. But, according to Mark 10:45, Jesus says, "***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.***" This verse is particularly devastating to the Liberal view because not only is *anti* used but it is coupled with *lutron*, the word for "ransom" or "purchase price" that was made ***in the place of*** the many. The word is used in non-soteriological (i.e., non-salvation) passages in the LXX (e.g., Gen 4:25...another seed ***instead of*** Abel, whom Cain slew; also Gen. 47:17...***in exchange for***). It is also used throughout the NT (e.g., Matt. 2:22; 5:38; Rom. 12:17).

The second Greek preposition that denotes substitution is *uper*. *Uper* means "in behalf of", "in the place of", clearly having a substitutionary sense. For example, turn to **1 Timothy 2:6** "***who gave Himself as a ransom for all***". Again, this time *uper* is used with *antilutron*, making it crystal clear that what Paul has in mind is a purchase price paid on behalf of all. Also look at **Hebrews 2:9** "***He might taste death for everyone***". Christ tasted death in behalf of everyone. Finally, **1 Peter 3:18** "***Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust***".

CONCLUSION

Today we have looked at the Sinlessness of Christ. Christ claimed He was sinless, His friends claimed He was sinless, even His enemies claimed He was sinless. The abundant testimony of Scripture is that Christ was sinless. Based on this testimony of sinless perfection of Christ some have argued that Christ's life, as well as His death were substitutionary, so that it was not his death alone that redeemed but His life as well. This is not taught in Scripture. What the Scriptures do teach is that Christ's life sufferings were fulfilled out of His compassion and through His healing ministry while on earth. Christ's suffering in death alone is substitutionary and redemptive. Christ's life was the necessary pre-requisite to make the one act of obedience on the cross acceptable before God. Phil. 2:8 seems to make a distinction between the type of obedience displayed on the cross and that displayed in His life. ***He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** There is the obedience that led to ***the point of death*** and there is the obedience of ***death on a cross***. The life obedience was necessary to qualify Him as a sin substitute, the death obedience was the substitute itself. Finally, we saw that the essence of all the benefits, and from which all else flows, is that Christ's death was substitutionary. We know this because of two Greek prepositions; *anti* meaning "in the place of" and *uper* meaning "in behalf of". Christ died "in the place of" and "in behalf of" sin and sinners. ***He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*** (2 Cor. 5:21).

ⁱ Robertson, A. T., *Robertson's Word Pictures of the Greek New Testament* (BibleWorks5) note on Heb. 4:15.

ⁱⁱ Lightner, Robert, *The Death Christ Died* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 23.

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