

Christ Our Advocate

1 John

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I am really glad you're here. I hope you can settle in because I'm really excited about what we have to look at today as we return to our study of 1 John. We are in the book of 1 John 2 and I invite you to turn there. I don't know what number this is in our series in 1 John, but we're just going through it verse by verse, that's what we do at Truth Community Church, we teach God's people God's word. It's real simple here and we're delighted with what the Lord is doing and glad that you can be here and let me just read the first two verses of chapter 2 in 1 John. We're going to spend a couple three more weeks after today in these two verses because they are so crucial and so fundamental to understanding the totality of Christian doctrine and what it means to walk by faith as a Christian.

So John says in chapter 2, verse 1, he says,

1 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; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Now, we've been saying all along and nothing has changed, the Apostle John wrote this book in order to help Christians attain spiritual victory as they live in the midst of a hostile world. It is not an easy thing to live the Christian life. We live in a hostile environment. We live in a world that hates Christians. John says it's so in chapter 3, he talks about how the world hates Christians; there is an innate inbred hostility toward Christ that is reflected in the way the world responds to Christians, and so we live in the midst of a hostile environment just from that perspective. And it's not only hostile, the world tempts us, the world seeks to lead us astray with its sinful environment in which we live, and then we find also that we have difficulty walking in this life because we have temptation within us as well that rises up. We have the remnants of indwelling sin and that works against and goes against the flow of our desire to live a godly Christian life. So both within and without, there are elements of hostility, there are elements of temptation all designed and all that operate against our innermost desire to walk in holiness in this life and that gets to be discouraging; that starts to weigh down on us as we go along. John understands that and not only are those external and internal elements, but

there are the spiritual elements of false teaching that come along. Men stand up and proclaim and say that, "I'm speaking for God," when actually they are speaking for the devil. It is sometimes hard to discern false teachers, hard to discern false teaching, and so all of those things make it very difficult to live the Christian life. It makes it difficult but not impossible. It makes it difficult but Christians are marked by being able to overcome all of that because of the provision that God has given us in our salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ and what John is doing here in this letter, is he is writing this letter to help Christians understand their resources in Christ in order to discern true from false teaching, and to know how it is that they are to go about living this Christian life with doctrinal underpinnings that are necessary to make that happen. So this is a book that is filled with hope for true believers and we want to appropriate that hope and that power as we are developing our life together as a body of believers in Christ. So it's very exciting to be here. It's very exciting to be in this text, and what you see as we go to chapter 2, verse 1, is that John here at this point has your personal holiness, your sanctification in mind as he's writing.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1 with me. He says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." He realizes that Christians are subject to sin; that they are subject to temptation; that they sometimes stumble and fall and he says, "I am writing to help you." So if you're a believer in Christ here today and you've been struggling in your Christian life, well, understand that God has brought you to this passage today in order to assist you, in order to take you from that realm of discouragement into the realm of sanctified living. And let me say this, not just in terms, because it's so easy to think about that just in external terms, in external sins, if you are here this morning and you know that you have wandered away, you have strayed from your first love for Christ, you have lost your first love as a Christian, God has brought you here this morning in order to bring things to your mind that will most certainly refresh that love and motivate you to see Christ afresh all over again and I am just delighted to be the voice of these things from God to his people here as we look at his word.

Now, last time we said that John's purpose in writing was to help us avoid sin in our Christian living, and we said that...and I'm not going to spend much time with review here, but we said that there were four fundamental convictions that you as a Christian need to have settled, anchored in your mind and through which you view all of life. This is the way that you frame a Christian mind is with some of these things that John has been saying, and we've said that the fundamental cornerstone conviction of the Christian life, the cornerstone of Christian joy, the cornerstone of Christian holiness, is a firm commitment and conviction about the holiness of God; that God is holy, lofty, exalted, separated from sinners, unable to tolerate sin, has no element of sin in his being and we saw that from verse 5 when John said, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Understand that that fundamental premise of the holiness of God is John's starting point for the whole rest of the letter. Everything in the subsequent chapters through chapter 5, verse 21, all flows from that fundamental statement that God is holy. So you have a settled reverence for God. You have a high end lofty view of God that doesn't tolerate sin, that doesn't tolerate a superficial approach to the Christian life. Your view of God is too high and

lofty to trivialize it; to take it in a superficial way. God is holy and therefore my life must conform to that and my thinking must conform to that.

The second thing that we said in light of that, in light of God's holiness, light exposes darkness, we said that you have to have a settled confession of sin. Anyone who understands the holiness of God immediately and going side-by-side with that is a recognition of your own personal sin. You can't look on the holiness of God without having a sense of almost shrinking away and realizing that you have sinned against that holiness; that you do not conform to the perfection of God; to this lofty, high perfection of the holiness of God, none of us conform to that. And as a settled part of the way that you view yourself, as you view the whole matrix through which you interpret life, it is settled in your mind, "I am a sinner. I have fallen short of the glory of God and even as a believer, I still sometimes sin." So you have this settled confession of sin. Look at chapter 1, verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins," having the idea based on the present tense in the Greek text, if we have an ongoing confession of sin, "Christ is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So there is this settled reverence, this settled confession of sin, and then we also said that there is this sense that we have no compromise. There is a settled resistance to sin as we see in chapter 2, verse 1, settled resistance to sin, no compromise with sin, "Even though I am a sinner, I don't tolerate that. I don't accept it as inevitable. I don't accept it as something that I'm just going to live with. I am the sworn enemy of my own sinfulness." And we saw that in chapter 2 verse 1, John said, "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." And so God's holiness exposes our sin. We confess that openly, freely as a believer and as a body of believers here at this church. We realize we are sinners that fall short of the glory of God, but we resist it. We realize that we are meant to overcome sin, not tolerate it; not to accommodate it would be a good way to put it. We're not going to accommodate sin because God is holy and therefore if he doesn't accommodate sin, we as his people can't accommodate it either, right? This is all just very evident. It's plain right on the face of the text there as you go through it. But then we ended last week on this note: we said that we also carry with us in the midst of all of these things, and you have to hold all of these things without qualification, without compromise in your mind, you hold them all in balance. We said that along with that there is a settled trust; that there is no despair. There is no denial of sin, there is no compromise with sin, and yet there is no despair over sin, and a Christian can say that because Jesus Christ has accomplished our salvation on our behalf, and that's why we don't despair when we see our sin. Our sin causes us to look up and look outside of ourselves and say, "Ah, yes, I remember again. I remember afresh. Christ came to save me and I rest in him, not in my own righteousness." That's where we're at as we come to chapter 2, verse 1 this morning, that all just kind of a bit of refreshment for this wonderful verse and this wonderful concept that we're going to see in chapter 2, verse 1.

Look at it with me again because we've said there is this settled confession, we realize that we still sin even as believers, and this is so magnificent, chapter 2, verse 1, John says, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

righteous." What happens when you sin from God's perspective? What does your sin do to God's attitude toward you, you might say? What happens when a believer sins? And here's a really important question and this is going to hit you right where you live in the heart of your walk with Christ. Does God's favor toward you rise and fall depending on your own personal conduct? Is he happy one moment with you but unhappy the next moment when you sin? Is his attitude toward you as variable as your imperfect faithfulness to him? Is it driven, is God's perspective on you driven by your own conduct? Well, let me say this speaking from my own personal experience and I would venture to say the personal experience of the vast majority of you, is that if you view God as a somewhat irritable deity who gets upset and unhappy with you because you sin and struggle in your spiritual life, if you believe that his attitude toward you depends on your own shifting conduct and variable faith, then your spiritual life is going to be a source of great frustration to you because you're stuck with this indwelling sin, you're stuck with the reality of a confession of sin and yet when you sin, if you think that God is, "Oh, he was happy a moment ago but now I said a bad word and now he's unhappy," and it's up and down, up and down, that's really frustrating. And what we have in this passage here today is the Apostle John writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the help that we all need to deal with that ongoing reality in our life. The Apostle John, God himself knows and perfectly understands that sin in your life undermines your joy and assurance. He knows that perfectly. He understands that dynamic better than you do and what you see here in this verse is that God has given to us an explanation of our position before him so that when you sin, you can remain steadfast even when you fall short.

Now, having said that, I want to go back to the review for just a second. Please remember that we said that one of the fundamental convictions of the Christian life is that we do not compromise with sin. We are going into this passage having a settled conviction, a settled resistance to sin. We're not looking for excuses. We're not looking for ways to compromise the holiness of God to accommodate our favorite pet sin that we never seem to quite get serious about dealing with. That's not what we're doing here at all. No, we're doing something quite different. God is explaining our position before him so that we would not fall into that kind of despair that comes when we wrestle with our sinfulness. This is not a passage for the careless person who doesn't care about the holiness of God, this is a passage which I trust is for you, someone who is deeply serious about loving God and pursuing his holiness and wanting to be sanctified and yet feeling the weight of indwelling sin and wanting to rise above it. John has a targeted audience here and he has targeted his audience, not to superficial seekers who just want a free cup of coffee on Sunday morning, he's writing to people who are serious about spiritual life and this is to whom it is directed, and I trust because you're here, that it is directed to almost all of you here today, the need, a word of understanding and encouragement that would refresh your heart and give you joy as you seek to walk with Christ.

So, we're going to structure this message around three points, I think, something like that, and basically we're going to deal with a couple of questions to start with so that we can get into this passage and really understand what's going on here, and the first question is this if you're taking notes, if you're taking notes, we're going to answer this first question: what is the sin involved in chapter 2, verse 1? What kind of sin is it that John is

addressing here? Who is it that he is addressing? What kind of sin is it? You need to know what manner of sin he is describing here in order to understand the passage.

Look at verse 1 with me again here as we dive into the text this morning. I'm so delighted and grateful to God that you're here to hear these things. Chapter 2, verse 1, "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." Now notice this, first of all, by addressing them as "little children," John makes it clear that he is addressing believers here. He's talking to true Christians in this passage. He is not making an evangelistic appeal to the lost. There is time and place for that but that is not what he's doing right here. Right here, he's addressing his spiritual children. He's addressing those that share a common life in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is writing to his spiritual children whom he leads in the faith and he is writing to prevent sin in their life, but he recognizes, he understands, he sympathizes with the fact that sin can and does occur in a believer's life and so first thing, if you're here this morning and you're a Christian, this is addressed to you. This is addressed to you. This is God's word to you in particular, "My little children, beloved," he says, "brethren," he calls them. Throughout he has this pastoral attitude toward true believers while on the same hand, he looks at false teachers and calls them liars and antichrists. So the distinction as John writes as you're going to see as we go through 1 John, the distinction between true and false believers is very clear in his mind. Here he's addressing true believers.

Now, he says, "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Well, the grammar here, what is he addressing here? The grammar indicates that he's describing individual acts of sin. He is not talking about an ongoing lifestyle of unbroken sin that he's trying to address and prevent because he says throughout this letter that someone who has an unbroken lifestyle of sin, a total disregard of God's commandments, is someone who is not even a Christian at all. So what he's doing here is he's writing to people who love God's word, they are true Christians but they're dealing with that element of sin in their life that comes from a settled confession of sin; that comes from a refusal to deny the reality of sin in our lives. He's addressing that area. Sin occurs from time to time in a believer's life. We're not perfected yet. We haven't been glorified yet. We are living in the midst of fallen flesh and a fallen world. Sin is going to occur but here's what you have to understand both from this passage and from the whole tenor of the New Testament, is that sin is contrary to the true tenor of a believer's life. It is contrary to the deepest aspirations of his heart. In one sense, we almost sin contrary to our own nature when we sin and so what he's doing here as we answer the question what sin is he addressing, here in this verse, chapter 2, verse 1, John is addressing those occasional sins that crop up from time to time in your life as a believer in Jesus Christ. That's what he's addressing here. He said, "My little children," so he's talking to Christians, "I realized that sin occurs. If anyone sins," if and when sin crops up in your life, here's how you need to view it, is what he's saying.

Now, let's call a little timeout. I get like three timeouts each half of the sermon, I think, so this is my first timeout in the first half of the sermon. Understand this, don't miss a really big basic fundamental point that is a profound encouragement: it is a great

encouragement to understand that God and our Lord Jesus Christ, has anticipated from all of eternity, when Christ was dying on the cross 2,000 years ago, they were anticipating your sins as a believer and made provision for them. God anticipated. God knows the future with perfection, and so God knew that you were not going to live an absolutely perfect sinless life as a Christian here on earth. Going a step further than that, God made provision for that in his design of the plan of salvation. Step back and marvel at the wonder of that. This is something that goes beyond anything that you and I would do. God didn't save you and then put you on probation to see whether you would comply with the terms and conditions and then maybe grant you final salvation at the end. No, quite to the contrary, God understood your weakness before you were even born and he made provision for your sin that is so comprehensive that it results in a once-and-for-all forgiveness for all time and provides also for an ongoing flowing of forgiveness toward you as you walk in this life in Christ.

Listen, keeping in mind, you have to keep in mind those four fundamental things that we were talking about: no denial, no compromise, no despair in the context of a settled reverence for God. You have to understand something: yes, you have sinned. Some of you probably sinned on your drive into church today as you were interacting with your spouse and family. Yes, you have sinned and we're not minimizing that. Welcome to a very large club. You sin, so do I. Let's get real about it. We're not minimizing it but what we're saying is that that is not the stopping point in your Christian life. That's not the stopping point even in your day to day. The whole point is that God has understood and anticipated your need and made provision for it so that you could walk in spiritual victory in the midst of this hostile world and part of the hostile world in which you live is your own weakness and inherent sinfulness and God has provided for you to walk in victory even in the midst of that. This is amazing. We're pulling back the veil and peering into the Holy of Holies of spiritual truth as we do that, and we're going to see even more deeply into the holiness of these things in just a few minutes. John wants you to know, wants Christians to know, that God has provided for the solution to a believer's sin in God's comprehensive gift of salvation to us. It's a total complete package, a perfect package and nothing is missing.

Now, so what does he say? That's what he's talking about, sins in the life of a believer. When you find yourself in that position which you don't accept but you find yourself in it, "Oh, I've sinned, now what? Now God is mad at me. Now I not only have to overcome the sin, I've got to wait around until God's not angry with me and after he cools off a bit, I guess." Listen, that mindset, however you want to express it and whether you have articulated it like that or not, that mindset is so completely unworthy of Christ that we have to have our minds transformed by what the reality is from God's perspective. That's why John gives us this passage right here. Okay, you've sinned. Alright. Alright, let's deal with it, okay? Let's not sit down and wallow and cry in the mud. What do I do to get up and clean myself off and move on? To progress in this spiritual life that God has called me to? What do I do? He says it right here. This is where your mind is to go, "And if anyone sins." Okay, you've got my attention. That's me. I've settled in my mind a settled confession of sin. I maintain no pretense of spiritual superiority or spiritual perfection. I am that sinner. I want to know what John, what is it that should captivate my attention?

"And if anyone sins, we," all believers, including the Apostle John, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." An awareness of sin in your life is designed to turn your focus to a particular aspect of the work of Christ on your behalf. When you sin as a believer, what are you to think? Where are you to go? Where is your mind to go? Here's where it's to go: remember this, remember that Jesus Christ is your Advocate in heaven. Jesus Christ is your Advocate in heaven and what does that mean? What does that mean? We're finished with point 1, we're drifting, actually we're making a clear pivot to point 2 right now. Point 2: what does it mean that Jesus is our Advocate? That's not the point. Here is the way I want you to write the point down if you're taking notes. This is going to change your life. The second question, the second point is this and I'm asking a question here, not making an indicative statement: is Jesus our defense attorney? Is Jesus our defense attorney in heaven? If you've studied at all this passage, you've heard people explain the verse that way. Many commentators say that the Apostle John is using legal language here to describe Christ. These commentators say, "What John is saying is that Jesus acts like a divine defense attorney in the courtroom of heaven who represents us before the bar of God when we sin." Now, why do they say that? Why do they believe that? Well, outside of the New Testament, the word for "advocate" or however that particular term is translated in the version you may have on your lap there, this Greek word for advocate was often used outside of the New Testament in legal settings of someone who pleads the case of someone before a judge, like an attorney, and this word is used that way. There are a lot of secular Greek writings from that era of time that help us understand what words mean in the New Testament, and this word is often used or occasionally used in legal settings to describe someone like we would know as an attorney. So here's the way the explanation goes, the explanation goes something like this: Jesus is the divine defense attorney in heaven. God is the judge. And Satan is the prosecuting attorney. And the believer is the accused. So you have this whole courtroom scene that is constructed and the explanation goes further and says: God always dismisses the charges because of Christ's work on our behalf. Christ represents us, he's a really good attorney, and he gets us off every time when Satan accuses us in the courtroom of God.

Now, that is a plausible view as shown by the good men who hold to it but listen, if you think through this with me this morning, it's going to really help you walk with Christ and deal with sin. That is a plausible view but as you read this passage, I want to tell you I personally cannot find all of that here and I think that view has created some of the very problems that John was trying to solve as I'll explain. We're going to walk through why this is not the best way to view this passage. I'm going to give you three problems. Is Jesus the divine defense attorney? Problem number 1 with that view. First of all, the word "advocate" usually has no legal overtones. It can but it doesn't always. I'm going to walk you through all of this. Stay with me. I want you to see this thoroughly. Now, the defense attorney idea in this passage stems from a belief that the mere use of that word "advocate" invokes a legal setting; simply using that word "advocate" invokes the whole courtroom setting and because of that, because of that view thinking that it's a precise technical term that always means that, that controls the way that you have to interpret the entire verse. You have to find all of the participants in a courtroom setting in order to

make the verse work that way. But listen, my most important Greek lexicon, the one that I go to the most says this, it says and I quote, "The technical meaning 'lawyer or attorney' for this term is rare. In the few places where the word is found in other literature," meaning the other Greek secular literature, "it has for the most part a more general meaning, one who appears in another's behalf; a mediator; an intercessor; a helper." Now, understand what it's saying here, an attorney helps you in the courtroom, right? No one wants to go into a courtroom without a good attorney by his side. An attorney helps you in a courtroom but not every helper is an attorney. That's the distinction that we're making here. Helper, intercessor, one who pleads for you, can have a broader sense than simply what an attorney does. This Greek word is not a technical legal term period. It's not. And so you do not have to see Jesus as a divine defense attorney here in chapter 2, verse 1 simply because the word "advocate" is used. You don't have to see it that way. It is well documented that it's used in more general, less specific ways throughout Greek literature.

Now, stay with me. The first problem with this is that the word usually has no legal overtones. Well, so far I've just giving you stuff from a lexicon that you've never seen and you say, "Okay, I have to take your word for it. Good enough." But listen to this: this term for "advocate" as it's translated here in chapter 2, verse 1, is used four other times in the New Testament; each time it describes the Holy Spirit as the helper of believers and I want you to see these verses.

Turn over to the Gospel of John, Gospel of John starting in verse 14. We won't spend much time here but you're going to see enough to see the point here. Just stay with me. John 14:16, Jesus speaking to his disciples says, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper." There is our word. Some of you will have a marginal note that says this can also be translated as comforter, advocate or intercessor, indicating the broad use of the term. "My Father will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." Ha, that's interesting. I thought this was a technical term that meant divine defense attorney. It doesn't mean that here. There is no courtroom there in John 14:16.

Look down at verse 26 in John 14, "But the Helper," there it is again translated as helper, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." A helper. A helper.

Look at chapter 15, verse 26, "When the Helper comes," there it is again, "whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning." The helper, not the advocate. The helper, not the attorney.

One more. John 16:7. This is the final place where this word is used outside of 1 John 2:1. He says, "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." Four times the Holy Spirit is described as the helper, using that same word, this is the key point, using the same word that we find in chapter 2, verse 1. Each time, he is a helper. He is

one who intercedes. The Holy Spirit is described as one acts on our behalf and does things for us, right? It's not that complicated. It's not a technical term.

So that's the first problem with the defense attorney view. We are building a case here which is ironic, you know, I'm refuting a defense attorney view and here I am presenting it like an attorney but I can't help that either. The first problem with the defense attorney view is that it makes a general term for "helper" carry a technical legal meaning that isn't justified even in the biblical usage of the term. It forces that term to be technical when it's not. Outside of the Bible and inside of the Bible, it is not a technical legal term. This is really important because this goes to the heart, this is why I want you to stay with me, understanding what we're talking about and going through it goes to the heart of the way that you live your Christian life and I think that as a pastor, as your pastor, I think that's important for you and so I want to be careful with it. I want to handle it carefully so that you will profit from it. That's why we're taking this time.

Now, secondly, problem 2 with the defense attorney view is this. Problem 1: the word usually has no legal overtones. Problem 2: the attorney view violates the context and it violates it badly. It violates it badly. Look at our verse again, look at chapter 2, verse 1. This is such a simple observation, it's astonishing to me that it's so easily overlooked. John says, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the fiery judge." Is that what it says? It doesn't say judge at all. It says, "we have an Advocate with the Father." We have an advocate with the father. This is a simple observation that John in this passage is not describing God as a judge. He is a judge but that's not what he's talking about here. We want to understand what he's talking about here.

Look at chapter 1, verse 3, actually look at chapter 1, verse 2, notice John is talking about the realities of salvation to believers here. Chapter 1, verse 2, "we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." God is the Father. Verse 2, verse 3, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you so that," here's my purpose, "so that you may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." And then he says again in chapter 2, verse 1, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Listen, context is the key to biblical interpretation and John has said throughout this whole context that leads up to this verse that his purpose is to promote and enhance our common life with God the Father. Listen, that is describing a family relationship, not a courtroom setting. That is just obvious and I am emphatic and I get animated about this because it has implications for you. Why do I need an attorney to represent me to my own Father? That doesn't make any sense.

Now, John is saying, "I'm writing to help you with the Father." That's a whole different realm of context. Problem 3, and this is where you can see the practical implications of this. Problem 3: the attorney view violates good theology. The attorney view violates good theology. Listen, when you call Jesus a defense attorney in the throne room of God representing you before the Father, you invariably create the picture of God the Father being someone who is somehow reluctant to grant forgiveness. It has to be wrested from him, wrested, w-r-e-s-t-e-d. You get the picture that the Father is somehow reluctant to

grant forgiveness. One writer, one commentator who actually holds to the defense attorney view summarizes the problem this way, he says, "This picture," speaking about the defense attorney, "is in danger of presenting God as an unwilling judge from whom forgiveness has to be wrested by the Advocate for sinners." Do you see and understand that this goes to the fundamental way that you view God? This goes to the fundamental way, your fundamental understanding of what is happening in heaven when you sin. What is the response of heaven to your sin? And it creates this picture of Satan almost being in control of the divine courtroom and saying, "I'm here to present a charge against Barbara again?" And Christ speaks up and says, "No, I've covered Barbara's sin," and the Father waits and says, "Okay, charge dismissed." And every time, if you hold that view, that defense attorney view and you take it to its logical conclusion, there is this unending cacophony of charges and dismissals and charges and intercessions and dismissals. Is that what happened? Is that what Christ purchased for us on the cross? Was that kind of chaotic scene in heaven? I don't think so. In fact, I believe that nothing could be further from the truth. This idea that God the Father is somehow unwilling to grant forgiveness and Christ has to plead with him, nothing could be further from the truth and you can see that by things that you can see with your own eyes right here in the book of 1 John. I want you to see and understand all of these things are very liberating. I'm not giving you anything that you can't see for yourself.

Look at chapter 3, verse 16 of 1 John and stay with me as I read just two verses here. Chapter 3, verse 16, is speaking about our Lord Jesus Christ. He says, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Here's how you know love, Christ came from heaven and laid down his life for sinners. Christ is motivated by love in your salvation. He always was, he always will be, he is right now.

Look at chapter 4, verse 10, "In this is love, not that we loved God," speaking of God the Father here, not that we loved God, "but that God the Father loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Listen, this is so crucial. The Son, God the Son, Jesus Christ, loved us and laid down his life for us. Understand this: God the Father equally with the same intense element of perfect divine love, loved us and sent his Son to die for us. They were both animated by love in the plan of salvation. They both – here's the point – they both equally seek our spiritual welfare. They are acting in accordance with one unified divine purpose and the defense attorney view obscures that reality, not deliberately, not intentionally but it obscures that reality. Christ isn't trying to get something from God the Father that he otherwise wouldn't grant, the whole plan of salvation proceeded from the Father's throne. God the Father sent the Son because he wanted you delivered from sin. He wanted to give a love gift of redeemed people to his Son. He wanted you to be a part of that and he loved you, he loved us and that's why he sent Christ in the first place. Now that Christ has finished his work on the cross, has he somehow morphed into an unwilling judge who has to be persuaded again and again and again to grant forgiveness when you sin? No. No way. I don't accept that view.

But still, John meant something when he said this, right? All I've done so far is say, "I don't think that's what the verse means." What does it mean? Point 3. What is he talking

about then? If Jesus isn't our defined defense attorney, if he's somehow our helper in heaven with the Father, but if it's not a defense attorney view, what is it then? Listen, you've heard, if you've followed Bible teaching at all, you have heard over and over again that the best commentary on Scripture is what? Scripture. The best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible and that's how we're going to interpret this verse here today. John just gives a little shorthand reference to Jesus being before the Father on our behalf using a word that means a helper. I think that's probably pretty important and so the question is: what does the Bible say Jesus is doing right now? Point 3: Jesus is the high priest who helps us before the Father. I want you to put the divine defense attorney view out of your mind and think about it from this perspective because I think this is the right perspective: Jesus is our great high priest who helps us before the Father. How do you know that? How can we see that? What are the clues and the context? What does the rest of Scripture say that would help us see? This is all going to come together in something very very practical. Listen, I don't think John is talking about a legal atmosphere in this passage at all. There has been no mention of Satan in this context at all so how am I supposed to find him if I'm just reading this verse by verse. I can't find Satan there at all. He hasn't been mentioned. God the judge hasn't mentioned. A courtroom hasn't been mentioned. What has been mentioned, though? What has John been describing? He has been describing the language of sacrifice.

Look at chapter 1, verse 7, he says, "we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Blood. It's the language of sacrifice. The Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world for sinners. Bloodshed. You don't see bloodshed in a courtroom usually.

Chapter 2, verse 2, right after he says Advocate, he's our Helper with the Father, he goes on and says right after that, you can see it, this is so clear, right after he says what he's talking about, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation, the atoning sacrifice that turns away wrath. He's talking about a sacrifice and the context of a sacrifice suggests the picture of a priest who intercedes on our behalf. A priest. A great high priest. Mindful of the background of many of you, this has nothing to do with the Catholic concept of a priest as you know it today. Just put Catholicism out of your mind. That's not what we're talking about here. The Bible calls Christ our great high priest.

Now, in the simplest of terms, a priest is someone who represents people before God. Simple. This isn't complicated. A priest offers sacrifice. Think of the Old Testament, the priests were continually slay bulls and rams and offering all kinds of sacrifices, thousands upon thousands if not millions upon millions over the course of Old Testament history. A priest offers sacrifice on behalf of those whom he represents and then intercedes for them based on what he has done. So God is here, the people are here, there is a gap because of sin and we need a priest to intercede for us before God; someone who can represent us to God, someone that can represent God to us, but because sin creates guilt, there needs to be a sacrifice, there needs to be bloodshed to erase that guilt so that the barrier can be removed. The priest offers that sacrifice and then intercedes based on the sacrifice that he just made. Here's what Christ did: Christ, Son of God, son of man, came from heaven, represents God to us, reveals God to us and now based on his settled work on the cross,

his finished work on the cross, represents us before God as a priest. It's not that complicated but it changes the whole way that you view what's going on here.

Now, I want you to see this from Scripture. We're going to interpret Scripture by Scripture, okay? Turn to the book of Hebrews 7. The question is: what does John mean when we sin, what does he mean that we have a helper in heaven? Now listen, we should...no, we shouldn't really do this. I was going to say we should take off our shoes because we're walking on really holy ground here but I don't want to take off anybody's shoes here. I just want you to be impressed with the absolute holiness of what we're discussing here. We can only know this by revelation from the Scripture. You and I have no direct personal eyewitness account of anything that's going on between God the Son and God the Father in heaven, only if God tells us can we know what's happening there. We can't project our own thinking about it into what's happening, "Well, I think it's like this, and Jesus is like a fairy," or whatever. I don't know. It doesn't matter. All that matters is what God's word says and look at how often Hebrews makes this clear. Chapter 7, verse 24, "Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Notice this, stay with me, verse 26, "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." Okay, stay with me here: Christ is clearly called our high priest here. Christ has offered a once-for-all sacrifice and he holds that priesthood from which he offered that sacrifice. He holds it permanently. He is always our great high priest.

Now, look at chapter 9, verse 11, "when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood," there it is again, the blood of Jesus. You see it in 1 John 1, you see it explained in greater detail here in Hebrews 9. And look at what it says, talking about his priesthood, talking about his sacrificial blood, "He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." He entered into heaven representing us as our great high priest on the merits of his own sacrifice.

We're not done. Look at 9:24. This is so clear. "Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Isn't this obvious? Isn't this just really clear of the picture that the Bible is trying to create for us? And look at verse 25, he says, "nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. But Christ," verse 28, "having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him." So you have this picture of Christ having shed his blood and on the basis of that sacrifice as our priest, entering into heaven, making intercession on our behalf.

Look at chapter 10. There is so much and we can't rush through this because I know how dogged your sense of despair can be when you sin and we have to address that with the clear teaching of Scripture so that you can overcome that sense of despair and live in the joy and peace and glory and honor to Christ that your salvation was meant to accomplish and that's all rooted right here in the work of Christ on your behalf. Chapter 10, verse 11, he goes on and on about this, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." He's looking back at the Old Testament priests and their repeated animal sacrifices but he pivots, verse 12, "but He," meaning Christ, "having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet." He's there at the right hand of God, work so finished that he can sit down because there is nothing left to do.

Look at verse 19 here and then we'll pivot back to 1 John. Chapter 10, verse 19, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God," we have this great priest having offered a perfect sacrifice for our sins right in heaven, what do we do then? Well, you belong there. Do you realize that? Based on the merit of Christ, because you belong to him, you belong in the throne room of God. That's what he says here, verse 22, based on all of that, "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Let us draw near. A great high priest represents us in heaven.

Beloved, that's the idea that I'm convinced John is communicating here in 1 John 2:1. Follow me here. Jesus Christ, your Lord Jesus Christ right now at this very moment is in the Father's presence, right? He ascended up into heaven. He is there as your great high priest, having offered the sacrifice of his own life to effect and bring about your reconciliation with God. Not only that, God the Father has accepted his sacrifice once for all. Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished," and then God tore the veil of the temple in two. Earlier on he said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." God accepted his sacrifice we know that forever for all time because he raised him from the dead.

Here's the point, keep all of that stuff in your mind and go back to 1 John 2:1 for just a second because I want you to see it right here, chapter 2, verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins," keeping everything in mind we've been talking about as Jesus as our great high priest, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." God the Father has so completely accepted the work of Christ on your behalf that even your sins as a believer are no barrier to fellowship with him. That's the point. There is no barrier, there could never be a barrier to your fellowship with God which, as we saw earlier, that's what John is writing to promote here in this entire chapter, "I want you to know this fellowship, this shared common life with God the Father." That's what he's writing to promote and what he's saying here is, "There could not possibly be any barrier to that as a believer because Christ has redeemed you and reconciled you forever with God the Father." And therefore,

get this, the joint purpose of God the Father and God the Son in your salvation has been accomplished. It is finished. There is nothing to be added to it. Your imperfect life that follows can't detract from it; what you perceive to be your great times of devotion and obedience can't add to it. You can't diminish the work of Christ, you can't add to the work of Christ. It's perfect and it's on that basis that you can approach God when you sin as a believer in Christ. He represents you and helps you before a holy God. It is not that he repeatedly makes a different intercession every time you sin. I don't believe that because his sacrifice was once-for-all. It's not a repeated intercession in the sense that something new happens every time you sin, rather, get this, we've used the word "settled" here, we're talking about things that settle your approach and free you to walk in liberty and newness of life here. That's why this is so urgent. We're not talking about a repeated intercession that Christ makes, rather we're talking about a settled intercession that Christ has made for you once-for-all. Jesus Christ stands before God as your personal representative, your personal helper, and he has forever removed the barrier of sin that would otherwise hinder the fellowship which John writes in this book to promote. The barrier is gone.

Christ is exalted to heaven representing you, representing you by name. Not some indistinguishable mass of humanity like some teach. Christ did this for you by name. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "Christ loved me and gave Himself up for me," first-person singular. You can think with perfect biblical justification and you should think with perfect biblical justification that Christ saved you by name; Christ came to earth for you by name and now having given his life, been raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, he represents you by name. By name. Not just a mass of believers who constitute the church, he represents you by name. He put your name there and that's what's happening in heaven, Christ on your behalf. That is holy. That is high. That is lofty. That is magnificent and that's what Scripture teaches.

I want to give you a picture that will seal this to your mind. Turn back to the book of Exodus. I want to give you a picture that will seal this to your mind, a very tangible way to seal that personal representation that Christ makes on your behalf as your brother in heaven. In the Old Testament, the high priest wore garments that symbolized his intercession for the people. Look at Exodus 28. You already turned there, I think. I hadn't yet. Exodus 28, describing the garments of the high priest. Exodus 28:9. I know when you're reading through the Bible in a year, a Bible reading plan, this is where you have to kind of prop your eyes open because it doesn't seem too relevant. This is massively relevant. It says, "You shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel," remember, there are 12 tribes of Israel and the high priest was representing them in the holy place. He says engrave, "six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth. As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree settings of gold." Now, watch this, watch what happens. This is going to get really good later on. "You shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for a memorial." So the high priest wore this ephod on his shoulders and as he did, there were these two stones

with the 12 names of the tribes of Israel engraved on the stones and that's what he carried in. He wore that as he entered into the most holy place to make intercession for them.

Hold the thought, the high priest carried on his shoulders the names of the sons of Israel, but that's not all. Look at verse 28. There was an ephod for his shoulders, there was a breastpiece that covered his chest. Verse 28, "They shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod," so it's joined together, "with a blue cord, so that it will be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece will not come loose from the ephod." So there are two pieces joined together by a cord. "Aaron," here's what I want you to see, "Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually." So this breastpiece had the names of the sons of Israel written on stones also, on his shoulders and over his chest, and the high priest carried the names of the tribes of Israel on him as he was doing his work in the holy place, as he was offering sacrifice. These were his holy garments as he made atonement for the sons of Israel.

Listen to me, this is exactly what Scripture wants you to see: he carried their names on the strength of his shoulders and over the affections of his heart. The physical location of that explaining the spiritual significance of what the high priest was doing. And here's what I want you to see: that picture shows you what is happening in heaven right now for you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ bears the names of his elect, bears the names of the ones that he has saved on the strength of his omnipotence and in the love of his heart before God the Father in heaven. John says, what John is saying in 1 John is, "That is the kind of help you have in heaven when you sin as a believer, our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who existed before all of eternity and entered into this world, died, rose again, ascended into heaven, when Jesus ascended into heaven, he did, as it were, he took your name, your representation, he took you with him on the strength of divine omnipotence which accomplished salvation and in the affection of divine love which motivated it all in the first place and now he is settled as your intercessor, your helper in heaven, representing you by name before God the Father." And that's where your life really is. That's where the truth really lies. God accepts you always as a believer not because of you, not because you had a really good quiet time today. No, forget all of that stuff. God accepts you always because he always accepts his Son as your intercessor. Jesus' intercession assures you that God will always favorably receive you. God is perfectly satisfied with his Son. Christ names you as his own in heaven continually and God accepts you based on the merit of Christ. That's how fully you have been redeemed from sin, beloved. There is a settled place in heaven for you. These matters are settled. They cannot be changed. If God has justified us, who can bring a charge against us?

So, let's bring this down to earth again. You know, whenever you talk about what's going on in heaven, you really don't even want to come back, do you? You just kind of want to...you get there mentally and you just want to stay there. Why would you want to come back except that we're here and we have to? When my mind goes to that mental realm, I don't want to come back. These things are so glories, but bring that glory down to your daily life. Bring it down to where you're sitting at this moment. If you came today as a Christian who has fallen into sin and you feel the weight and the anxiety that that brings,

these words could not be any sweeter to you. Don't try to fix it before you go to God in prayer, just run into his presence and say, "I remember again my Redeemer. Not on my merit but on his I am here to confess and seek your forgiveness. Lord, I know it's settled, it's clear in your word. To deny that, to have any other reaction would be a greater sin to go against your word when you invite me to come and I say I'll wait until I'm ready." No, just run into his presence and say, "God, I confess the sin not out of fear but out of confidence that you will accept me and receive me because Christ is right there in heaven on my behalf and I know that you want the same thing Christ wants. I'm not trying to get you to change your mind. Salvation was your idea in the first place." And what that means for you as a Christian here today is that you can find perfect relief for your troubled conscience at the throne of grace because if anyone sins, we have a helper with the Father. God will receive your confession willingly, gladly, fully, unreservedly, unqualifiedly because he is satisfied with Christ. Go to Jesus. He will receive you.

That's why he came. He came to save sinners. I belong to that club, don't you? Pour out your heart in confession and in confidence that the Lord is receiving you with the same grace now that he received you with when you first went to him for salvation. It's wonderful. And when you get that settled in your mind, you can walk with a greater confidence. When these things are settled in your mind, God intends for this to be as settled in your mind as it is settled in heaven and to live life from that position of strength. And if you're here today and you're not a Christian, let me just say that this gift of salvation is freely available to you. The same Christ who received me will receive you also. I had no special in with him. His offer goes out to everyone, "Come to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth." That's what we worship him. That's why we love him.

Bow with me in prayer as Scott comes to lead us again in music.

Our Father, we thank you for these wonderful realities, for the unspeakably great realities of our salvation. And Lord Jesus, we thank you that you represent us by name in heaven. Our salvation when it's true and real could no more be lost than your omnipotence could fail or your love could be turned away from us. You are a perfect Savior and you have accomplished a perfect salvation on our behalf and we love you for it and we offer you our praise and pray that you would settle these things, drive them deep into our hearts so that they would utterly control the way we view you and the way we view our lives and that this worthy life of being a Christian would flow from a settled understanding that you are holy and that Christ has saved us from sin. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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