

In the courtroom, a man who professed to be a Christian, tried to explain away his responsibility for breaking the law and he got an interesting response from the judge. He said to the judge, “Your Honor, as a believer in Christ I am a ‘new man,’ but I still have an old nature, and it was the ‘old man’ that committed the crime. The judge replied, “Since it was the ‘old man’ that broke the law, we’ll sentence him to 30 days in jail, and since the ‘new man’ was his accomplice, we’ll give him 30 days as well. I therefore sentence you to 60 days in jail!”

If the Apostle John had been a judge back in his day, that might have been a sentence he would have handed down to the Gnostics and their followers. If you remember, the Gnostics believed their human spirit – their inner being was sinless and separate from their physical bodies, and therefore, they claimed their human spirit could live in full fellowship with God while at the same time their physical bodies could live like the devil. That false teaching made absolutely no sense to John, especially when considering the nature of God described in one word – God is Light.

As I mentioned last week, this expression of Light tells us that God is all good, with nothing bad. He is all pure, with nothing corrupt. He is all clean, with nothing dirty. He is all right, with nothing wrong, and He is all truth, with nothing false.

God has revealed Himself in the flesh, and in this revelation – in this Light, He makes His righteousness, and His holiness, His goodness, and His purity known to us. In this Light, God brightly shines and makes visible – in the person of Jesus Christ, His moral perfection, and because He is Light, there is no darkness in Him at all – no sin, no falsehood, no ignorance, no error, and no evil, period. So, because God is Light, His followers are to walk in the light – meaning, our way of life should be characterized as walking with God.

Now, if you recall from last week, we looked at **verses 5-10** in the first chapter, and I want to read that passage again for the sake of context. John tells us,

⁵This 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. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

In that passage, John shed some light on the nature of man, explaining to Christians that just because they are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, they still have a fallen sinful nature. Yes, it is true, we are no longer slaves to it – we are no longer under its dominion and control, in fact, the Apostle Paul tells us our fallen nature has been crucified – it’s dead – but like a chicken with its head chopped off that continues to flop around for a while, our fallen nature continues to flop around in our lives – still intent on influencing us.

For example, you know you should forgive someone, the Bible is clear about it, you know that’s what the Holy Spirit is convicting you to do, but you also hear the whisper from your old nature that that tells you – I wouldn’t forgive that person. Look what they did to you. They don’t deserve forgiveness. They don’t care about you, so don’t do it. That’s an example of the kind of spiritual struggle I am talking about with our fallen nature.

For those in Christ, sin is no longer our master, we don’t have to give into its temptations, but be that may, our fallen sinful nature continues to flop around in our lives. Instead of “*dead man walking*” it’s a “*dead chicken flopping*” and we still struggle against it, and on those occasions where we do sin – we are to confess it. We can be honest with God about our sin because we are forgiven by the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Now, on the heels of all of that, we are picking up where we left off with this same train of thought about sin, so if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 2**, and we will read the first two verses. John says,

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

John, whose now an old man, probably in his 90’s, begins with the words, “**My little children**” which literally means “*little born ones*” and that tells us a couple of things – first, we know he is writing to fellow believers – all that stuff he said about sin is for us. He’s not just talking about those “*other people*” with their sin problems, he’s writing to Christians – he’s writing to us, and secondly, he has a fond affection for them – they are his spiritual children so to speak.

Now, from what John has already said in his letter, he has made it clear that sin is still a reality for a believer, there is continual cleansing of our sin by the blood of Jesus, and yet he says here, **I am writing these things to you so that you may not**

sin. In other words, just because we struggle against sin, and just because we have forgiveness of sin, does not mean we have a license to sin.

God's desire is that we may not sin – that's the goal – that's the standard that has been set for us as believers, and under the power of the Holy Spirit we can have victory over sin – but if there are those moments where we do sin – and John has already told us there will be those moments, we have a personal **Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**

So, what does John mean when he calls Jesus our Advocate? Well, that word “**advocate**” is from the Greek word “*paraclete*” – not parakeet as in the bird, but “*paraclete*”, and it refers to someone who comes alongside to provide help or counsel to another, and in the context here, this advocate would best be described as a *defense attorney*. We could say that Jesus is our lawyer – He's our defense attorney, and seeing Him in that kind of role presents to us an image of a courtroom setting and that brings to mind a legal matter that is often missed when it comes to our relationship with God – beginning at our salvation.

When we think about salvation, we tend to think of it under the umbrella of God's love, and grace and mercy, and His forgiveness. I mean we are all about **John 3:16** – that's what we tend to think about, it's what we want to think about, and there's nothing wrong with that, but there's also a legal matter to consider – it's the matter of justice – and like a strong unseen undertow – it cannot be escaped.

God is holy and just, and because He is holy and just, He cannot turn a blind's eye to sin. He cannot make a holy law, establish the penalty, and then not follow through when the law is broken. God has to uphold His holy law – He has to punish sin – it's a matter of justice. Yes, it's true that God is loving, and He's merciful, and He's forgiving – but at the same time He is also just. Now, that might seem somewhat contradictory to us, but it's not to God.

Listen to how God described Himself to Moses in **Exodus 34:6-7**. We are told,

⁶ Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

It was going so well until God used that three-letter word “*yet.*” Yet, He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. Later, we are told in **Numbers 14:18**,

The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty.

So yes, God is loving, and yes, He is merciful, and yes, He is forgiving, but when it comes to sin – there is this legal matter that must be satisfied – it’s a matter of justice, and the guilty will not go unpunished. Because God is just, every sin, ever committed, by every person will be punished.

As believers, *when* we fall into sin, and I did not say *if*, but *when* – we are told that Jesus – our Advocate pleads on our behalf before the throne of God, and although we are not told here, there’s also a prosecutor – it’s Satan, our accuser and he has plenty of evidence to use against us.

Now, in a typical courtroom setting, the prosecutor makes their case to support their charges against the accused, while the defense attorney argues for their innocence. In this legal proceeding, the defense attorney might challenge the evidence and the witnesses being presented against the accused. The attorney may bring into question the methods that were used to bring forth the charges. The attorney might offer excuses for the actions of the accused, or maybe provide some legal justification for their behavior – or go so far as to suggest their behavior was actually right even though the law said it was wrong – warranting the need for some kind of special exception to the law. That’s what we typically see of defense attorneys in our courtroom settings, but this isn’t so for Jesus.

As our Advocate, before the accuser and the Judge, Jesus admits our guilt – all of it – He has to. He can’t say, “*Your Honor, my client is not guilty*” for that would be an outright lie, and He can’t make a defense based on our own righteousness for it’s already recorded in the transcript that there are none who are righteous – no not one.

So, when we sin, Jesus speaks on our behalf and enters a “*guilty*” plea, and then He argues for our pardon, and maybe it goes like this:

“Father, as You know, this one belongs to Me. We both know he has sinned against us, but I took his place. I paid the debt that he owed, and My righteousness was applied to his account when he believed. I exchanged My righteousness for his wickedness. With My own blood, I took the full wrath and punishment from this court that he deserves, and therefore, there is no debt left for this one to pay.”

For those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, He is our Advocate, but He's much more than that as John will explain. Let's look at **verse 2** where John says,

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

So, here we are given the reason why Jesus can serve as our Advocate. In this verse, John tells us that Jesus is the **propitiation for our sins**.

That word “*propitiation*” is not a word we use in our vocabulary, at least I have never heard it, so, **what in the world does it mean?** In the Greek, that word is “*hilasmos*” and it means “*to appease or to satisfy an offended party.*” It's a word that is used to describe an offering given by a guilty person to someone they have offended.

A pastor tells the story of going home with a member of his church who had tucked under one arm a gift-wrapped box and in his other hand a bunch of flowers. Both of those things seemed out of place with this man's character, so the pastor asked him “What's up with the flowers and the gift?” and with a grim look on his face, the man replied, “They are to propitiate the wife!”

In that context, I guess that's a good example of propitiation – this man knew he had offended his wife and brought something to hopefully appease her, but when it comes to Jesus, He does not bring an offering – He is the offering. He Himself is the sacrifice – the atoning sacrifice that satisfies God. Jesus is the sacrifice who absorbs the wrath of God so that sinful man can be reconciled to a holy and just God who must punish sin.

As I was thinking about this – this convergence of love and justice, I thought about another passage. Turn with me to **John 3** beginning with **verse 14**. This is Jesus talking, and He says,

¹⁴ “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

In this passage, Jesus is talking with Nicodemus, and Jesus makes reference to a story from the Old Testament – a story that Nicodemus would be familiar with.

In this story, found in **Numbers 21**, we are told the Israelites were out in the desert dying because they had been bitten by poisonous snakes, which was part of God's punishment for their rebellion against Him. Well, after many people died, they pled with Moses to pray that God would take away the snakes. So, Moses interceded for the people and God told him to make a bronze snake, put it on a pole, and lift it high for everyone to see, and for those people who believed, all they had to do was simply look at this bronze snake on a pole and they would be healed from their snake bites. That's all they had to do – just look up – and so with that story as the backdrop, Jesus then tells Nicodemus that much like the bronze snake that was lifted up on a pole to bring physical life to those who were bitten, the Son of Man must also be lifted up, so that everyone who looks to Him will have eternal life.

Here Jesus spoke of the cross that was awaiting Him, where in one defining moment in history, we see both God's love and God's justice come together and Jesus Himself would be the propitiation – the offering for the sins of the **world** – meaning that for those who believe, for those who enter into relationship with Jesus, His sacrifice would turn away the wrath of God on their behalf.

That's the picture that **John 3:16** paints for us – it illustrates the greatest love, the greatest gift, the greatest rescue, and the greatest promise, but if we continue onto **verse 18**, which may not be as familiar to you, we are also presented with the greatest contrast. We are told,

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

God did not send Jesus into the world to bring judgment, but at the same time – judgment is coming none the less. God's wrath over sin will be completely satisfied one way or another – it's a matter of justice for Him, and for those who do not believe, for those who reject Jesus Christ, for those who refuse the salvation that is freely offered to them – then by default, they have chosen condemnation for themselves – and whether they know it or not, they are just waiting for their sentence to be carried out – and it's a "*hell-fire and brimstone*" kind of sentence. That's what Jesus is talking about here.

For those who reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord, they will have no Advocate to plead their case, and they will have to pay the full price for each and every sin they have ever committed to satisfy the wrath of God.

Now for those who believe – for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, there is no judgment and no condemnation because Jesus has taken our punishment for sin upon Himself. On the cross, Jesus has absorbed the wrath of God for those who believe. So, when we sin – and we will, we have an Advocate who pleads our case.

There was a soldier in the Union army, a young man who had lost his older brother and his father in the war. He went to Washington, D.C., to see President Abraham Lincoln to ask for an exemption from military service so he could go back and help his sister and mother with the spring planting on the farm. When he arrived in Washington, after having received a furlough from the military to go and plead his case, he went to the White House, approached the doors, and asked to see the President.

*He was told, “You can’t see the president! **Don’t you know there’s a war on?** The President’s a very busy man. Now go away, son! Get back out there and fight the Rebels like you’re supposed to.”*

So, he left, very discouraged, and was sitting on a park bench not far from the White House when a young boy came up to him.

*The boy said, “Soldier, you look unhappy. **What’s wrong?**” The soldier looked at this young boy and began to spill his heart out about his situation, about his father and his brother having died in the war, and how he was the only male left in the family and was needed desperately back at the farm for the spring planting.*

*Well, the young boy took the soldier by the hand and led him around to the back of the White House. They went through the back door, past the guards, past all the generals and the high-ranking government officials until they got to the President’s office itself. The young boy didn’t even knock on the door but just opened it and walked in. There was President Lincoln with his Secretary of State, looking over war plans on the desk. President Lincoln looked up and said, **“What can I do for you, Todd?”** Todd said, “Daddy, this soldier needs to talk to you.” And right then and there the soldier had a chance to plead his case before President Lincoln, and he was exempted from military service due to the hardship he was under.*

We all need an Advocate, and for those in Christ, we have one – one who not only knows the Judge, but actually calls Him “Father”. Even now, Jesus pleads our case – and He’s the only one who can, because He’s the only one who made Himself an offering for our sins.

On the cross – a symbol of God’s love and God’s justice converging together at the same time, Jesus took our death sentence to satisfy the wrath of God so that we might be reconciled to Him in love.

Jesus is our Advocate, and oh by the way, He never loses a case.

Source Material:

David Walls and Max Anders, I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).

Our Divine Defense Attorney – John MacArthur

Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude, vol. 14, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2018).

John D. Barry, Douglas Mangum, Derek R. Brown, et al., Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck

Thomas L. Marberry, Shaw Craig, “Commentary on the Books of 1, 2, 3 John,” in 1, 2, 3 John & Revelation, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, First Edition., The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2010).

John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

Curtis Vaughan, 1, 2, 3 John, Founders Study Guide Commentary (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2011).

Enduring Word – David Guzik