

***Do not sin. . . but if you do . . .***

1 John 2:1-2

Think with me about a scenario that's not all that unlikely for some of you. You have a 16-year-old son who just got his driver's license. You're going away for the weekend and leaving him at home . . . with your car in the garage. Before you leave on Friday afternoon, you give him very specific instructions: "Do not drive the car while I'm gone." You have all sorts of reasons for this directive: the brakes need some work, the weather is going to be bad, and he's never driven by himself before. Plus, you've made other arrangements for him to get wherever he needs to go.

But in addition to telling your son, "Do not drive the car while I'm gone," you tell him, "But if you do drive the car, here are some things you should know. If you get in a fender bender, call your aunt who lives nearby and she'll be there for you. And if you get low on gas, here's \$20. And if you get a speeding ticket, I'll pay for it. See you Sunday night."

At this point you're probably thinking, "That's irresponsible parenting. I'd never do that." I wouldn't either. But in today's passage, 1 John 2:1-2, John's instructions follow this very pattern. John tells his readers that he's writing so that they ***don't*** sin, then he quickly tells them that if they ***do*** sin Jesus has them covered. Instead of being irresponsible, his assurance of God's grace reflects the reality of indwelling sin and the sufficiency of Jesus' death on the cross.

Throughout 1 John, John argues that those who know God should put away sin in a very decisive way and live as His daughters and sons, showing the family resemblance, especially when it comes to loving one another (since God is love). At the same time, John was very aware of our struggle with sin. He doesn't pretend that genuine believers in Jesus can't or don't sin. So in today's passage John gives us a foundational perspective on sin: 1) God's desire that we ***not*** sin, and 2) God's provision if we ***do*** sin (which we all do). Again, I think we'll see that John's instructions reflect the reality of indwelling sin and the sufficiency of Jesus' death on the cross.

***God's desire that we not sin.*** (1 John 2:1a) Notice how John expresses himself in the first half of verse 1.

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. . .

John addresses his readers as "my little children." John is expressing the affection of a spiritual father; he had led them to Christ and had invested in them deeply. He uses this term to remind his readers that he's not coming to them with heavy-handed and unreasonable demands; he is appealing to them as a father who only wants the best for his children.

Significantly John tells them, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." He is referring to the things he's just written in verses 5 through 10 of chapter 1 about walking in the light and about confessing our sins to God. I love John's transparency here. It's as if he tells them, "Just so you know, I'm not just writing about

walking in the light so that you'll have more abstract spiritual knowledge. I am writing these things so that you may not sin. I am equipping you with a perspective about sin so that you can be done with the sins that slow you down and trip you up."

This informs how we read 1 John (and the rest of Scripture). For example, back in 1 John 1:7 John wrote, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another. . ." The prospect of genuine, substantive fellowship with other people should give us a vision for walking in the light (as opposed to skulking around in the darkness). Hidden and unconfessed sin will result in superficial relationships in the body of Christ. But if you and your Christian friends are all walking in the light - welcoming God's scrutiny and God's discipline and God's cleansing - then you have life-giving fellowship with one another.

So when John says, "My little children, I am writing these things so that you might not sin," he is letting us know how to read this letter. In chapter 5 John gives his ultimate goal for writing: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." As we'll see in coming weeks, obedience (not sinning) is one of the core indicators that a person has eternal life. Since John wants us to have the assurance of eternal life, he writes to help us put away sin in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our encouragement to each of you is that you read through the book of 1 John once a week throughout this series (it's only 5 chapters). As you do, ask the question, "How does this teaching help me put away sin in my life?" A guy who disciplined me in college like to tell me that "The bible wasn't given to make us smart sinners. It was given to change our lives." So true. . .

After telling us he's writing so that we **don't** sin, he talks about God's provision if we **do** sin.

**God's Provision if we do Sin.** (1 John 2:1b-2) The New Testament always takes us back to the person and work of Jesus Christ as a deterrent for sin ("the love of Christ controls us" - 2 Corinthians 5:17?) **and** as God's provision when we do sin. In the second half of verse 1 John mentions the first provision for us when we sin: Jesus is our **advocate**.

1 . . . But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

An advocate is someone who speaks on behalf of another. The term was used in legal proceedings in the first century of someone who spoke up for someone who was accused. An advocate wasn't a defense attorney but a friend or patron who spoke in favor of the accused.

The advocate here in this verse is Jesus who speaks up on our behalf with/before the Father when we sin. The term advocate is used four times in the gospel of John, always referring to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an advocate for Jesus in the sense that He

“speaks in favor of Jesus over against a hostile world” (Kruse, p. 78). The Holy Spirit speaks through people as well as to people (in their hearts). The Holy Spirit is a powerful and truthful advocate for Jesus; if He weren’t nobody would come to faith in Christ and nobody would remain faithful to Christ.

In a similar way, Jesus is our Advocate before the Father. He powerfully and truthfully speaks on our behalf when we sin. It may be that John is painting a scenario similar to that in Job 1 when “the satan” (the accuser) comes before God and makes the accusation that the only reason Job is loyal to God is because God had blessed him with great prosperity. “Remove the hedge you’ve put around Job and he will curse you to your face.” In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called the accuser of believers who “accuses [believers] day and night before our God.” It may be that when we sin Satan makes the accusation, “That person you say is your child doesn’t love you or know you or want you. That person belongs to me.”

At that point, our Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, speaks on our behalf. And Jesus isn’t telling God why we deserve another chance. No, our Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, speaks up and says, “I endured the cross, despising its shame, as the sacrifice for that sin.”

If you’re like me, there are times when you wallow in self-condemnation when you sin. You say things to yourself that you would never say to somebody else. You’re pretty sure that God has given up on you as a loser and a fraud. John wants us as believers to know that if/when we sin, we have an Advocate before the Father who doesn’t condemn us and doesn’t reject us; He speaks up for us!

This should be a powerful encouragement for us to keep walking in the light and abiding in Christ. The fact that Jesus speaks up for me makes me want to draw closer in trust after I sin instead of pulling away in shame.

In verse 2 John mentions the second, more foundational, provision for us when we sin: Jesus is our **propitiation** (a theological term that’s worth understanding).

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

What does propitiation mean? And what issue does it address? The Scriptures speak about what Jesus accomplished on the cross using a variety of terms and images. For example, we’re told that Jesus won the **victory of the powers of evil** (Hebrews 2:14-15), addressing the reality that evil spiritual beings rule this world. As another example, Jesus **redeemed us** (He bought us by His own blood), addressing the issues of our slavery to sin (Matthew 20:28, 1 Timothy 2:6, etc.). Another image is **reconciliation**, bringing peace between two estranged parties (Romans 5:10-11). The term propitiation addresses the issue of the wrath of God against sin and sinners.

Even though this is sometimes troublesome to modern ears, many Scriptures in both testaments speak of the wrath of God against sin (and sinners). For example, Paul said

in Ephesians 2:3 that “we were by nature children of [God’s] wrath, like the rest of mankind.” In Romans 2:5 after saying that “God’s kindness is meant to lead [us] to repentance,” Paul wrote:

5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

In John 3:36, we read Jesus’ statement:

36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

How are we to understand the wrath of God? God’s wrath is NOT the wild, irrational anger of someone who is out of control and who is looking for someone to punish. God’s wrath is His settled abhorrence of sin. Therefore, God’s wrath against sin isn’t an eternal attribute of his; his wrath “arises from his holiness in response to human rebellion” (*Evangelical Convictions*, p. 125).

On a human level, we expect those in power to abhor and to punish evil (as opposed to tolerating evil). On a cosmic level, we should also expect God to abhor and punish evil. God would be justified if He therefore poured out his wrath on all sinful people. But in his great mercy and love, He provided a substitute in Jesus Christ.

The term propitiation means that ***the wrath of God that we deserved was satisfied by Jesus’ death on the cross***. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:6 which says that “the Lord has laid on him [the suffering servant] the iniquity of us all.” The brutality of the cross reflects the sinfulness of sin and expresses the wrath of God that we deserve for our sins. This isn’t “divine child abuse” (as it’s sometime slanderously charged). No, the Father sent the Son and the Son willingly laid down his life for us. The love of the Father and the Son led to our propitiation.

With that understanding, John writes that when we sin, we need to remember that:

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

Anybody in the world who want to avoid the righteous wrath of God, can turn to Jesus in faith. John brings up the fact that Jesus is our propitiation to remind us that when we sin we don’t need to cower in fear or flee to the darkness. Why? Because if we are in Christ, God doesn’t have a hint of wrath toward us. His wrath has been satisfied by Jesus. That reality should humble us to the core.

Milton Vincent (*A Gospel Primer for Christians*, p. 63) describes what propitiation means for us as believers in this way:

30 Consequently, God now has only love, compassion, and deepest affection for me, and this love is without any admixture of wrath whatsoever. . . . 34 When I sin,

God's grace abounds to me all the more as He graciously maintains my justified status. . . 35 When I sin, God feels no wrath in His heart against me. [1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, 1 John 2:2]

God can be displeased with us and can be grieved by us, but "there is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

The provision God has made for us when we sin helps us hear all of the commands to not sin. Understanding that we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also our propitiation should make us draw near in worship and obedience.