

05. The Epistle of 1 John—2:1-2

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As we have pointed out in previous studies—the book is hard to outline, but perhaps John has helped us a little, because, he seems to have built his epistle around '4 reasons' for writing' this letter (a 'love letter' to the people of God).

Four times in this epistle John says, *"These things I write to you..."* or *"These things I have written to you..."*—

- *"That your joy may be full" (1:4)*
- *"That you may not sin" (2:1)*
- *"That you be not deceived" (2:26)*
- *"That you may know you have eternal life" (5:13)*

The first of these is rooted in the idea of fellowship with God (both positional and practical fellowship) which, once we are connected to Him thru the new birth, allows His divine nature (attributes) to grow in us.

Joy happens to be one of those divine attributes or what Paul called in Galatians 5—one of the "fruits" of the Holy Spirit.

For a Christian to experience **"fullness of joy"** (1:4) we have to stay in close fellowship with Jesus or, as Jesus Himself taught us and John recorded in his gospel chapter 15—we must continue to **'abide'** in Him. This will allow us to continue to grow in our faith and produce "fruit", "more fruit", and "much fruit" proving we are in fact Jesus' disciples (John 15:4-8).

This will bring glory to our God—which is something Satan *absolutely* wants to keep us from doing!

And the only way he can keep our lives from bringing God glory is to 'break' our fellowship with Him—and the only way he can do that is thru temptation in the hopes he can get us to sin.

Sin will break our fellowship with the Lord (Isa.59:1-2) and that will cause the flow of God's Spirit in our lives to stop, the fruit to shrivel and our 'light' to go out—which is something John is warning us not to let happen in our lives.

And that's why he opens chapter 2 with the second *"These things I write to you..."* statements—

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write 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 the whole world.

Maybe John begins verse 1 of chapter 2 with the words, *"I'm writing this so that you may not sin"* because he has just gotten done saying that—we're all going to sin at times as Christians—in fact, he went as far as to say:

1 John 1:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Now in saying this, John doesn't want us to think that because it's inevitable that, as Christians, we're all going to sin at times—he doesn't want us to say, *"If I'm going to sin anyway and when I do, if I confess it God will forgive me—then why not go ahead and sin?! I mean, if it's going to happen anyway and God will forgive me if I just say I'm sorry—then let's give in to sin!"*

And so John quickly adds—*"Now listen, just because I said no Christian is going to be sinless in their walk this side of heaven doesn't mean I'm telling you to take sin lightly and give in to it as long as it's inevitable!—I'm writing to you so that you don't go out and sin...!"*

1 John 2:1 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The word 'sin' is a Greek word that literally means *"to miss the mark."*

It was an archery term for hitting the bull's eye on a target.

The Bible in Romans 3:23 says that *"all have sinned (all have missed the mark)."*

Of course, the next question is *"what does the 'mark' or the bull's eye represent?"* → the glory of God.

Even as Paul said in Romans 3:23—*"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

"What is the glory of God?" → It's perfection.

"Yes, but perfection with regard to what?"

The perfection that Paul is referring to (Romans 3) is perfectly keeping God's righteous standards as set forth in His divine law.

In the O.T. God's law contained 613 commandments—to break anyone of them was to miss the mark (sin) and to be guilty before God. But let's not deal with all 613, let's just limit ourselves to the ten we are most familiar with—the 10 Commandments (not the 10 suggestions).

These commandments are like the wooden boards that make up the hull of a boat—it doesn't matter if most of them are there—if only one is missing or broken that boat is going under.

The same is true for the person who chooses to try and get to heaven by living a moral life and keeping the commandments of God. It doesn't matter if he or she keeps *most* of them—if any commandment is broken even once that person is sunk (condemned).

James 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

This is why Paul calls the law a curse (Gal.3:10, 13)—it's because it makes salvation dependent upon a person keeping all of it without fail.

In other words, the law demands moral perfection from a person to gain access into heaven. And yet when I ask people, *"If you were to die tonight would God let you into heaven?"* They almost always tell me—"Yes".

When I ask them to explain why they respond, *"Because I'm a good person. I know I'm not perfect—but I still think I'm good enough to get into heaven"*.

Listen to what God's Word is saying—If you're not morally perfect you're not good enough to get into heaven!

It's all or nothing. There is no *"good enough"* or *"I'm better than most..."*—it's either sinless perfection or eternal rejection (hell)!

Matthew 19:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ ...No one is good [morally perfect] but One, *that is*, God...

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

...for all have sinned (missed the mark) and fall short of the glory of God (sinless perfection),

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

...the wages of sin is death...

So, without Jesus dying in our place—we were 'sunk' (hopelessly lost) because none of us could live a sinless life on the earth—which means all of us would be condemned to hell for eternity. Jesus didn't come to save 'good' people, He came to save sinners—those who acknowledge their sin and need for a Savior.

1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write 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 the whole world.

Here in these verses, John uses two words that describe two vital aspects of the ministry of Christ on our behalf—two ministries that only He could fulfill and perform.

These two very important words are—**Advocate** and **Propitiation**.

Let's take the second word first—*Propitiation*.

The dictionary tells us that **propitiation** means, *"to appease someone who is angry"*.

Now, if you apply that definition to the concept of biblical redemption it means that Jesus died on Calvary's cross to appease an angry, red eyed, fire-breathing God who was about to destroy the world until Jesus appeased Him with His own blood!

However, that is not the God of the Bible nor a proper picture of salvation.

It is true that God hates sin (because He is infinitely holy and righteous)—but it is also true that God loves sinners—

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God ‘so loves’ (not hates or is angry towards) the world of sinners that He gave His only begotten Son to die on Calvary’s cross to save them (us) from His eternal judgement in hell.

The word “propitiation” does not mean the *appeasing of an angry God*—rather, it means “*the location or place where sins are forgiven and God’s righteousness is satisfied.*”

Psalms 85:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

This verse deals with the cosmic problem of the ages—

- How can God show mercy to fallen man by not sending him to hell and still be true to His Word—“*The soul that sins shall surely die?*”
- How can a righteous God ever have make peace with unrighteous sinners so as to enter into fellowship with them?

The answer of course is the cross—“**He Himself is the propitiation for our sins...**” (v.2)

Or in other words, “*He Himself is the ‘place’ (drawing on the biblical definition of ‘propitiation’) where God’s holy law was satisfied.*”

He is the ‘**Place**’—what does that mean?!

Well, to fully understand and appreciate what John is saying, we need to understand how sin was atoned for and God’s righteousness was satisfied in the Old Testament.

When a Jew sinned back then, God had instructed that they were to bring their animal sacrifice to the priest at the Tabernacle and later the Temple where the priest would offer it to God to make atonement for their sin—so that their fellowship with God would be restored again.

However, there was always the problem of sins that were never atoned for—many unknown or forgotten sins would accumulate throughout the year for which no sacrifice had been made. And so, to deal with those sins, God established a national day of atonement called **Yom Kippur**—which literally means “*Day of Covering*”.

This was the day when all unknown, forgotten or un-atoned for sins could be covered and forgiven—a great day for the *liberation* of the conscience (see Leviticus 16).

The Israelites knew that whatever sins they may have missed throughout the year would now be taken care of—the slate would be completely wiped clean (at least symbolically for a while).

Yom Kippur was a time of release and relief—the devout Jew longed for the Day of Atonement! It was on this day (and only on this day) that the High Priest (and only the High Priest) could enter the revered Holy of Holies.

Upon entering the Holy of Holies, the High Priest would stand before the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was made up of two separate pieces—the lower ‘box’ and the lid that went on top.

The bottom box measured 3’9” long by 2’3” high by 2’3” wide—and originally held 3 items: the two tablets of stone upon which were written (with the finger of God) the Ten Commandments; a golden pot containing some manna; and Aaron’s rod that had budded (Heb.9:4).

This box was covered with gold inside and out and topped with a lid made of pure gold called the **Mercy Seat**.

On top of the Mercy Seat there were cherubim (two angels), one at each end kneeling facing each other with their heads bowed and their wings outstretched upward and nearly touching tip to tip directly above the Mercy Seat.

It was on that Mercy Seat between the cherubim that God was symbolically understood to dwell—it was His throne on the earth.

The lid was called the **Mercy Seat** because on the Day of Atonement the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the Mercy Seat.

This was intended to atone for all the ‘sins of ignorance’ committed by God’s people on a national level which then allowed God to show mercy to them as a nation. One additional comment—if you study the Tabernacle and Temple, you will quickly see that there was no seat or chair in either.

The reason there was no chair was because—the priest’s work was never finished and so he never sat down! The reason for that was because the blood of animals could never *take away sin*—it could only temporally *cover* sin until the next sin was committed.

Consequently, the priests never sat down because their work was never done—that is until Jesus, our Great High Priest, offered Himself for our sins!

He was the Lamb of God whose blood didn’t just cover but completely took away our sins once and for all time which meant His work was done—as He Himself stated from the cross, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30).

Hebrews 1:3 (NKJV)

...and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

When we looked at the Tabernacle in our Exodus study, we said that every piece of furniture in it (Menorah, Table of Showbread, Golden Altar etc.)—everything in and about the Tabernacle pointed to Jesus in some way—and this was especially true of the **Mercy Seat**.

The words “**mercy-seat**” (Hebrews 9:5) and “**propitiation**” (1 John 2:2)—are the same word in the Greek—which means that Jesus is our “**mercy seat**”, our “**propitiation**”!

He is ‘the Place’ where sin is forgiven—the place where God’s righteousness is satisfied through the blood of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ!

The second word that John uses to describe the work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is the word—**Advocate**:

1 John 2:1 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The Greek word for **Advocate** is '*parakletos*'—which literally means "*one who is called alongside to help.*"

This happens to be the same word Jesus used when He promised His disciples (the night before His crucifixion) that He would send them another Helper (*parakletos*), who would come alongside them to help, comfort and give them power to do the work He (Jesus) had begun.

In John's day, the word **advocate** was used of an attorney who would come alongside a person who had been charged with a crime to defend them in a court of law.

Now look, Jesus' work as our Propitiation is done—He said it was finished on the cross when He died in our place and thereby satisfied the righteous standard of God. So that work is done—but when Jesus ascended back to His Father in heaven, He began another work on our behalf as our Great High Priest.

He is now in heaven as our *Advocate* (Attorney for the defense)—Who is defending us before God the Father's throne. And who is He defending us against?

He is defending us against the *Accuser* ('prosecuting attorney') of the brethren—Satan! (Explain—Revelation 12:10)

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 7:23-25 (NKJV)

²³ Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. ²⁴ But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

That is one of the most blessed verses in the Bible right up there with John 3:16—(Explain what this verse (Hebrews 7:25) is actually saying to us as Christians).

There is one final statement that John makes at the end of verse 2 that we really need to comment on—

1 John 2:2 (NKJV)

² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, **and not for ours only but also for the [sins of the] whole world.**

I believe that what John is saying is that, Jesus' death on the cross didn't just satisfy God's righteousness for a small group known as the 'elect'—but for every person who would ever live! Now, by saying that I'm not saying that every person in the world *is* automatically saved (universalism)—I'm saying that every person in the world *can* be saved.

The payment has been made and all anyone has to do to go to heaven is to *believe* in Jesus Christ and *receive* God's gift of eternal life by faith (John 1:12).

This goes against the Calvinist doctrine of “Limited Atonement” (the “L” in their acronym ‘TULIP’).

Calvinists interpret 1John 2:2 this way, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins (the apostles), and not for ours only but also for the whole world—or in other words, *“the whole world of the elect” or “the elect scattered throughout the world”*—but only for the elect!

They do the same thing with other verses that universally call all men and women to Christ to be saved and yet interpret those verses to only be speaking about the elect—

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world [of the elect] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever [of the elect] believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 12:32 (NKJV)

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself [all different peoples from all over the world that God has elected to salvation]."

I categorically and vehemently disagree with those interpretations and with the whole idea of ‘limited atonement’ (and with the whole ‘TULIP’ acronym).

I believe that when Jesus said, *“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”* (John 12:32)—He meant all people!

I believe that Jesus was clearly saying that after His crucifixion He would (thru the Holy Spirit) draw all peoples to Himself—or in other words that salvation would be available to everyone on planet earth.

And that anyone who came to Him for salvation He would accept and not turn away!

Romans 10:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, *“Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”* ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*

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