

*1 John 2:1-6 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup>He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. <sup>3</sup>And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

## Confidence – 03 Transformation

A quick read through First John will remind you of some of those phrases that fill Christianity with such wonder. Walk in the light. Abide in him. We should be called Children of God; and so we are! God is love. These are phrases that are as unique among world religions, as Jesus is among people. John is writing to a group of Christians who have recently witnessed a small exodus from their ranks. They have seen respected people leave the faith and this has caused their faith to be shaken. As we move out of our series on the Kingdom of Heaven, a common question I've been hearing is "am I in it?" Am I in the Kingdom? First John is a letter written directly to this tepid heart. His letter is meant to inspire two things, that we'll see are deeply connected, a true confidence in Jesus, and a true fellowship among each other.

We left off last week discussing the importance of confession with regards to our fellowship. It is confession of our sin to each other, that brings us into the light so that we can walk in confidence that Christ cleanses us from our sin and restores us to righteousness. Confession makes up this critical aspect of Christianity, one which will mark our entire lives as Christians. We will never outgrow confession. That said, confession is not the entirety of Christianity. Without it, we have no confidence or fellowship, however with only confession we do not have transformation. This week John is showing us what it is in our faith that causes us to change. Not just behavior modification, but an utter transformation of our hearts, so that we become people that are truly different. People of whom it can be said, "they walk how Jesus walked." John writes so that we may not sin, and so that we may know that we know Christ. These together manifest in a transformed life.

## 1. That We May Not Sin

*1 John 2:1-6 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup>He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

John begins a new train of thought with a term of endearment. He refers to his readers as “my little children.” It is not that John means to be patronizing, but rather that he is the spiritual father of those to whom he is writing. It is he who initiated the relationship with them, not the other way around, and he shares in the joy of their faith as though he were their own father. You can hear the depth of this care echo through his letter.

For the second time now, John informs us of one of the reasons that he is taking the time to sit down and write this letter to these churches, the first time was in 1 John 1:4 when he says he is writing these things so that the joy of the apostles might be complete. This time, he states explicitly that he is writing so that you may not sin. John must set out this guardrail because the last thing he said, could be interpreted as precisely the opposite. John had just said,

1 John 1:10 *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

This could be read, as a way of describing the height of Christian obedience as owning our sin. In communities, where people begin to confess to one another and experience the freedom of the gospel, it is easy for that component of our transformation to become the end in itself rather than an aspect of a life that is being transformed by the gospel. This is the group that revels in our sinfulness, and values above all else authentic confession, rather than lives that have been transformed by the gospel. It is an immediately cathartic and enjoyable fellowship one that can feel incredibly safe, but it lacks real hope of change.

That is why John, immediately after stating that if we say we haven’t sinned, we make God a liar, he then clarifies why he is writing this letter in the first place.

1 John 2:1a *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.*

So then, John is not calling us towards an authentic understanding of our sinful condition in order to provide us with license to sin, he is writing so that we will not sin. What John says next, in light of this verse is actually quite surprising, as we’ll look at the counterintuitive nature of the way the gospel transforms us and acts on our hearts so that we don’t sin. As we read through these next verses, keep in mind, that the reason John says he is writing them is so that we don’t sin. John writes,

1 John 2:1b *But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup>He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

So let's lay out the things John wants us to know. If you say you're without sin you're a liar. Likewise you shouldn't sin. So then with these two realities in mind, what happens if we do sin? Well if we do sin we need to know two things, Jesus Christ the righteous is our advocate with the Father, and Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. Let's look at what both of these things mean, and then address why John would say he is writing them to us so that we don't sin.

First of all, When we consider our sin, we often think of it in subjective psychological terms. It is a feeling of guilt that we can't seem to shake, or a lack of peace that we would like to overcome. But that isn't the way in which John discusses our sin in this section. He does not address the subjective reality of our sin at all, instead he takes us directly to the objective facts of our sin. Things which can be known, irrespective of how we feel. So if we do sin, we need to know that we have an advocate with the father. What does this mean?

This word advocate is exclusive to John, but the principle is throughout the New Testament. In secular contexts the word for advocate is used to describe a legal representative or lawyer who would intercede before the court on behalf of someone else.<sup>1</sup> This means Jesus makes a case to the father on our behalf. John intentionally adds a descriptor to Jesus, so that we can more fully grasp what is happening. Jesus Christ the righteous is appealing to the father on our behalf when we sin. Jesus's righteousness is of particular importance in our understanding his advocacy for at least two reasons.

First of all Jesus must be righteous in order to be in the father's presence to be able to advocate for us. This makes him utterly different from us who have sinned. What hope of appeal could we have? Our sin is fact, and therefore we have no argument to make before God. Therefore, our only hope is that we would have someone who is righteous advocate for us. In so many ways this is the baseline cry of a person's heart. How is it that we could possibly have a hope of appeal against a perfect and Holy God. Look at Job,

*Job 9:32-33 For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. <sup>33</sup>There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.*

Job is likely the oldest book in the Bible, and so much of the book is a cry for a mediator between man and God. We are utterly guilty, and unable to stand before God, who is there that could lay their hand on both of us?

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<sup>1</sup> Seal, D. (2012, 2016). Paraklētōs. In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Secondly Jesus's righteousness is important to him advocating for us because it clarifies how it is exactly that he will be advocating. He is representing us in the highest imaginable court, for a sin of treason against our very creator, and he is righteous which means he will not lie. In fact Jesus in his righteousness will never deviate from pursuing justice before God. Jesus being our advocate is not good news because he will be able to slide up next to God and say, "look I know James just lied about starting that report. But trust me, he's good for it." And then the Father says, "Okay, I'll trust you Jesus, but this isn't because I trust James it's because I trust you." And then you think okay good Jesus bought me some time until my next sin. There is no such place for this type of one sided advocacy because Jesus is righteous, this means that whenever he is advocating for us he is advocating for the truth.

That is why we must understand the next point that John makes about Jesus and how he relates to us as an advocate.

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

Jesus is our propitiation, and that means he has in his person born the wrath of God on our behalf. This has caused the wrath of God which rests upon all sinners to be expressed upon Jesus, in his body, on the cross, resulting in his dereliction and death. Jesus has died for the sins of all who will be saved all over the whole world, and in Christ's sure reception of the wrath of God, sin has been justly punished, once for all time. This means, because Christ took sin upon himself, God no longer counts our sins as our own, but instead treated Christ as though he had committed all the sins of his church. Likewise, because Jesus bore our sins, God is able to count his righteousness as belonging to us.

So then When Christ intercedes for us as our advocate, he is not advocating for anything praiseworthy in ourselves. Instead, he holds up his hands and demonstrates the wounds on his hands, and shows the wound in his side, and pleads his own blood on our behalf. It is him and his actions that make us righteous in the sight of God.

*The intercession of Christ is a continual application of his death for our salvation.<sup>2</sup>*

It is worth noting that it is not as though God the Father is at his core an anger that needs to be satisfied, for it is God the Father and the Son and the Spirit

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [\*Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles\*](#) (p. 171). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

who purposed to present Jesus as a propitiation for sin, so that God might take our sin upon himself so that we might be saved. His propitiation is the height of his grace and the basis of his intercession. We have an advocate. It is Jesus, who advocates because of the good news that he gave himself for us, because God so loved the world that he purposed to save sinners even at the cost of his son.

So you shouldn't sin. And yet you just sinned. Now what do you do, where does your mind go? Remember, John is teaching us what to remember if any of us do sin. We must remember that Christ is our righteous advocate and our propitiation for sin. This is why you never, in your Christian life, graduate from the fundamental mechanics of the gospel. I doubt however that this is the default pathway that your mind begins to take in the midst of your sin. Instead it is likely that you either seek to advocate for yourself and minimize the depth of sin that you have truly been living in. Denying it in yourself and hoping that if you ignore it and add enough time, perhaps God will forget, or you'll grow out of it, or you yourself will change because of an understanding of the guilt from your sin. Or you live exclusively in the identity of your sin, wallowing in a hopeless despair that you have fallen once again, crushed by the impending wrath of God and frozen in your walk with him.

In the former case you act as though you need no propitiation, and in the latter you act as though you could be your own propitiation. Don't you see that both are a denial of your own depth of sin, and of the required righteousness of the one who can atone for us? It is only in seeing Christ, in the midst of your sin, that you are humbled enough to say you that your sin is so bad and you are so basically evil that you could never atone for it. Likewise it is only in seeing Christ that you are able to hope and trust that God will not treat you according to your sin, but Christ is our advocate, who has been the sacrifice we need, that we might be set free from our sin. You fight sin in yourself by understanding the mechanics of the Gospel. So then how do we know that we get the gospel. How do we know we have understood that Christ is our sufficient sacrifice and advocate? John heads their next.

## 2. How to Know We Know

*1 John 2:3-6 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

This is the first of the tests that John provides us with so that we might know, reflectively about ourselves, whether or not we know Christ. It is a test of obedience. We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments. If your life is not transformed by the gospel, then you simply don't know it. If you can't look back on your actions and consider that you have been able to keep the commandments of Jesus, or not recognize any growth in your pursuit of his of commandments than John is saying that you shouldn't have confidence that you know him. In fact if you make the claim that you know him cognizant of the fact that you don't in any way keep his commandments you are a liar.

So let's quickly look at keeping Jesus's commandments. What are these, but that you love the lord your God with all your hear soul mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. All of his commandments find their source in these. This is precisely in keeping with what Jesus says about loving him:

*John 14:23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."*

The gospel will change you, and if you see it properly you will be driven towards such an incredible love towards Christ that you will then desire to be obedient to him. You will change, you will be transformed. This is not meant to be a mysterious part of our Christian walk, but rather something that is evident. If the gospel truly resonates, then we will walk as Christ walks. We will imitate his presence in the world. We will live in this depth of love that we have seen him demonstrate towards us which has transformed our lives so that we might demonstrate that love toward others.

This is the person who has been utterly transformed by the gospel. It is not that our obedience is somehow disconnected from God having saved us, but we are saved so that we might be obedient. If you don't understand the mechanics of your salvation, you will not love as you ought. You will continue in your sin unredeemed, untransformed, and constantly unsure of your salvation. If you love him, be obedient. If you sin, remember the gospel. Then be obedient. You see the gospel is deeply connected to your obedience. It is by Christ's atoning death and his sending of his Spirit that we might have any present hope to conquer sin. The message of the gospel is that we have been made new, if you see no newness of life that you are walking in, it is because you haven't seen the gospel.

