

We Have an Advocate

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 July 2023

Preacher: Colin Horne

[0 : 00] And turn in your Bibles to 1 John. 1 John, we'll begin reading in chapter 2, and we'll read verses 1 through 6.

1 John 2, 1 through 6. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, I know him, but does not do what he commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

[1 : 13] Do you need help? It's a question that maybe we are more apt to offer than to receive.

We'll say to someone else, do you need help? When we see them in need. Perhaps you're at the home improvement store. And you see someone with a large, awkwardly shaped box or object they've just purchased trying to get it into their vehicle.

And so you run over to help them and ask, do you need help? But then when the question is asked of you, we're quick to say, no, no. I'm okay. I'm fine, thanks. Or something is just out of reach.

I'll offer help, but receiving it is harder. I want to appear competent. I might be struggling with pride. Sometimes in life, we need help.

Oftentimes, we need help when we don't think we do. There are lots of times that we need help in life. And lots of times that we reject that help.

[2 : 22] What about when it comes to sin in your life? Do you need help? Do you need help with your sin? And of course, the answer is yes.

We need help with our sin. We saw that last week. We are tempted to say, no, I'm fine, thanks. We're tempted to say, I'm without sin.

I have no sin. But God, in his word, brings us face to face with our sin. We have it. And if we have sin, we need help.

So what help do we have? Two answers this evening to that question and one qualification. So two answers and one qualification.

What help do we have if we sin? Here's the first answer. We have Jesus and he stands up for us. We have Jesus and he stands up for us.

[3 : 22] Read again with me verse one. 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.

So in writing this letter, John is likely an older man, well advanced in years. And so he calls his readers little children.

It's a little bit like when somebody in their 80s calls somebody in their 60s young. Again, when you hit the certain age, everybody's a kid. There's something of that in what he says.

It's not just that this letter was written for little children, though it is children. It is for you. But it's for all of us. And John, as an old man, writing to these people, this church, likely the church in Ephesus, he writes to them with affection.

They are beloved. So my little children is a term of endearment. And we see that love and that affection. It spills over into his purpose statement.

[4 : 33] Here in verse one. I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. I love you so much that I don't want to see you fall into sinful ways.

I want you to avoid sin. I want you to enjoy fellowship with God and with us. I want you to share in our joy that it might be complete. I want you to avoid sin.

So I'm writing to you. Now, John here. He says, I'm writing to you so that you may not sin.

He was convinced that his writing to these believers could help them in their struggle against sin. And John's writings are inspired, which is just a great reminder to us.

In a broad sense, Scripture helps us to keep from sinning. And in these verses, John shows us a couple ways that Scripture helps us. He gives us a couple answers.

[5 : 36] What help do we have if we sin? Also, I want to draw our attention to the fact that Jesus says, or John says, if. John says, if we sin.

I might be prone to say when. But I think it's helpful for us to consider if we sin. Not that we're without sin. John is making it abundantly clear. We have sin.

So couldn't he have just said when we sin? But it's good for us to remember that we shouldn't resign ourselves to sin. That we should strive to not sin.

We should strive for holiness. So it's not that John is somehow leaving the door open to the possibility that maybe we'll go the rest of our lives without sinning. That's not what he's doing here.

But it is helpfully reminding us, don't just assume I'm going to sin. No, we should strive to not sin. And so here is our help that we desperately need.

[6 : 34] It's the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our help. We have Jesus and he stands up for us. Or he speaks for us before the Father.

He's our advocate. An advocate comes to the help of the helpless. An advocate publicly appeals for another person or a cause.

They vouch for the interests of others. They plead the case of others. And so Jesus pleads our case. He enters into the throne room of the Father.

And he pleads our case. He comes on our behalf. He stands in our place. And he says, they're with me. He vouches for us.

Because we have nothing to say for ourselves. We are helpless in every sense of the word. Standing before a holy, righteous God. Hebrews 10.31 says, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[7 : 37] In and of ourselves, we have nothing to say. We have no defense on our own merits. And so with the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, we can say, All my hopes are slain.

Or with Moses, in Psalm 90, we say, For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath, we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you.

Our secret sins in the light of your presence. God sees it all. Our sins are set before him in the light of his presence. Because God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

And so our sins laid bare before him. Nothing hidden from him. He sees it all. We are sinners. Filthy, defiled, unclean. And so like Isaiah, we say, Woe is me.

I am lost. And Satan, the great accuser, He eagerly agrees. That's right. They are lost.

[8 : 37] They say it themselves. God, look at their sin. Satan delights to bring charge after charge against us. Look at the record of their wrongs.

It is immense. What wretches. And so Satan, he condemns us. They're unworthy to stand before your throne. They're deserving of your wrath.

What are you waiting for? Pour it out on them. You have said that the wages of sin is death. Look at their sin. Give them what they've earned.

Show yourself to be just. You can't let their sin go unpunished. They've said it themselves. They're lost. Satan is right.

We have no defense in and of ourselves. We have no defense. But our great accuser is no match for the great advocate.

[9 : 33] He comes to our defense. And Jesus, he pleads our case, but not with our merits.

He pleads our case with his. Because John says, indeed, we have an advocate. His name is Jesus Christ, the righteous.

And so with the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, whom we said, all my hopes are slain, we now can say confidently, let your blood plead for me. Because Jesus is not like us.

He has a defense. He has a perfect ironclad defense. And it's not like any of the ironclad defenses that we might hear of in ordinary court cases.

Jesus isn't saying, well, I wasn't there and I can prove it. He doesn't have some kind of alibi. His hand wasn't too small to fit in the glove. His DNA doesn't match.

[10 : 30] He's not saying that his description doesn't fit the eyewitness testimony. It is a way better defense than that. And here it is. I have no sin.

I am righteous. If you remember in our consecutive readings through the Psalms, in the morning service, we were in Psalm 15 just last week.

And it begins with this all-important question. Oh, Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

And it's implied that's what we want and we should want. If we're in Christ, we want to dwell on his holy hill. We want to be with him. So what qualifies us?

What person can enter into a perfect holy God's presence? Who can stand before him? Here is Psalm 15's answer. He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

[11 : 34] Who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend. In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord.

Who swears to his own hurt and does not change. Who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

And our advocate, our advocate is entirely, perfectly righteous. He is the only person who can say in every way at every time I have walked blamelessly and done what is right.

He was tempted in every way and he never gave in. Jesus will never be moved. He will stand secure. Not so for the wicked.

Psalm 1 introducing the entire Psalter. Psalm 1 begins by saying the wicked will not stand at the judgment. The wicked in Revelation 6, they cry out on the day of the Lord, that great day, the coming day of judgment.

[12 : 43] They cry out to the mountains and to the rocks. And they say this in Revelation 6, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

For the great day of their wrath has come. And who can stand? The wicked are looking and saying, we know now we cannot stand at the judgment.

So who can stand before the throne? Sinners like us surely can't. That means only Jesus Christ can. Because he is sinless in every way.

Sinless by nature. Sinless in every thought and attitude, every word and action. He stands before the throne faultless. And so Satan has every accusation to levy against us.

Satan has no accusations to levy against Christ. We have nothing to say for ourselves. And Satan has nothing to say for Christ.

[13 : 44] Because he is Jesus Christ, the righteous one. And he's not just standing to represent himself. He could come into the presence of God and stand for himself.

He stands to represent us. He vouches for us. He says they're with me. But why? Why does Jesus advocate for us?

That's the second answer to our question that we must consider. So what help do we have if we sin? And the first answer, we have Jesus. And he stands up for us.

But we also must grab a hold of the second answer. We have Jesus. And he takes God's wrath for us. Let's read verse 2 together. He is the propitiation for our sins.

And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. You see, when Jesus stands before the Father, when he intercedes for us, when he speaks for us, he speaks for us in terms of what he has accomplished for us in our place.

[14 : 52] And this is what he has accomplished. John says he is the propitiation for our sins. Or your translation may say he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

So he advocates for us because of what he has done on the cross. His past work, atoning for our sins, it is directly connected to his present work of advocating for us.

So what does it mean? What does it mean for Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins or the atoning sacrifice for our sins? Atonement simply means to cover over or to make amends, to set right.

Sometimes you'll hear people say that they need to atone for mistakes they've made or wrongs they've committed against others. A family member of mine served in World War II, and he was deeply troubled.

I mean, it was like you could see into his soul the depths of his grief over what he had done, over what he had seen in the war.

[16 : 02] And he would often say to me, I must atone for what I've done. I have to atone for what I've done. He's in his 90s, and he could say these kinds of things to me. But here's what the Bible says about atonement.

We can't. We can't atone for what we've done. That's why we have the book of Leviticus in our Bibles, to help us to understand that there's punishment for sin, that blood must be shed for sin.

And so in Leviticus, we see how the sins of God's people under the Old Covenant could be covered. It required sacrifice, the shedding of blood, animal sacrifices.

So they were necessary in the Old Testament because sin must be dealt with. God can't overlook sin. In his justice, sin must be punished. The guilty deserve death.

And so animals were sacrificed in the place of sinners. Their blood was spilt to pay for the sins of God's people, to cover the sins of God's people.

[17 : 13] It was necessary. It had to happen. Hebrews 9.22 says, Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

But animal sacrifices, they were only a temporary fix. Hebrews 10.4 says, For it is impossible for the blood of goats and bulls to take away sins.

But Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, his sacrifice was different. Listen to the contrast. Hebrews again, verse 11.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

So in the death of Christ, our sins were fully atoned for. Our sins and the sins of all God's people. That's what John means by for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

[18 : 26] John is talking about all God's people who live in all the world. All God's people who have ever lived in any place at any time. Christ died to take away God's wrath, not for all people in all the world.

Christ died to take away God's wrath for his people in all the world. A simple way to think through our salvation. God the Father elects his people.

God the Son dies for his people. And God the Spirit indwells his people. And who are his people? All of those by grace through faith who repent, put their trust in Christ, having been drawn by the Spirit.

So the invitation, the command is to all repent and believe. Believe the good news that Christ's blood was shed for his people.

And so tonight, if you have not believed that good news, believe it. You can be joined to the people of God. You can say, Christ's blood was shed for me.

[19 : 37] If you turn from your sins and trust in him, plead not your case before God, plead Christ. Our guilt was removed.

Our sins were forgiven. He is our atoning sacrifice. And then through that sacrifice, the wrath of God was turned away. That's what propitiation means.

The atoning sacrifice of Christ, it turned away God's wrath. And in place, we now experience God's favor. The idea of propitiation, it's not really commonplace in society today.

I've said it more times tonight than we've probably heard it in the last six months. But in the ancient Near East, worshipers of pagan gods were familiar with it. They would appease the wrath of their gods with bribes.

And so critics of the Bible will look at Christianity and they will say, that's the same sad, twisted story. It's an angry, out of control God that must be appeased by petty bribes.

[20 : 41] But this is so far from the truth. God is justifiably angry with sin, but he's not out of control. His wrath burns hot, but it burns with righteous indignation.

And we have no bribes to offer him. Instead, this God who is full of wrath, sent his own son, because he is full of love for sinners such as us.

And the son, he went willingly. He didn't go kicking and screaming to the cross. This is not cosmic child abuse. This was the perfect united plan of the Godhead.

And so that's why we can read in the high priestly prayer of our savior in John 17, these words, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

And now father glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. And so what the father planned, the son willingly accomplished to restore sinners to right relationship with God.

[21 : 50] And that necessarily involved his sacrificial death in our place to turn away God's wrath. His burning anger towards sinners, it was absorbed by the sinless one.

We have Jesus and he took God's wrath for us. And so now God looks at us, not in anger, but with pleasure. His wrath was replaced with his favor.

The face that was hid from us in anger now shines on us with warm blessing. Because Christ died in our place as an atoning sacrifice. And in his death upon the cross for us, his righteousness was credited to our accounts.

We were clothed in his righteousness. So God looks upon us and he's pleased. God looks upon us and he sees his son. God looks upon us and he says, righteous, not worthy of condemnation, but of acceptance.

That's why in Romans eight, Paul can ask the question, who can condemn? That would be a scary question to ask. If we weren't really sure who can condemn, but he can confidently answer.

[23 : 05] Jesus Christ is the one who died more than that. Who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

So do you see the connection there that our advocate is the one who also went to the cross in our place? He stands up for us, but he doesn't plead our innocence.

He doesn't say, yeah, they're, they're pretty good. Yeah, they're okay people. He pleads his death in our place. I died for them. I gave my life that they might live.

So we've considered two answers to the question. What help do we have if we sin? And we've seen that Jesus, he stands up for us and he took God's wrath for us.

But now we must consider one very important qualification. Try as I might, there was no way to get three of these points altogether on one under one heading. So two answers in one qualification.

[24 : 03] And here is that qualification. We must know Jesus to have Jesus. We must know Jesus to have Jesus. Read with me again, starting in verse three.

And by this, we know that we have come to know him. If we keep his commandments, whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments is a liar.

And the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word in him. Truly the love of God is perfected. By this, we may know that we are in him.

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. I'm thankful that we sang this morning. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

And I love the line. What gift of grace is Jesus, my redeemer? There is no more for heaven now to give. There's no more that heaven needs to give.

[25 : 06] What an incredible gift that Christ is ours. He is our righteous advocate. He's the sacrifice for sins that turns away God's wrath from us. But he is only this.

If we know him, this is an incredibly important qualification. It's not just an answer. It is a qualification that John makes. You have Christ. You have all of his saving benefits, but only if you know him only if you are in a saving relationship with him, trusting him as your only hope of salvation.

If you don't know Christ, if you don't know Christ right now, you have no advocate. No one stands in your place. No one pleads your case.

And one day you will stand before God alone with your life laid bare. No defense, no excuses, no second chances, and you will have no saving sacrifice.

God's wrath remains on you. You will have no answer to give before the throne of God. Satan, Satan stands to accuse you and he rejoices in your condemnation and he's right.

[26 : 23] It's true. There will be nothing that you can do on that day. What sobering words we read in Hebrews 9 27. It is appointed for man to die once.

And after that comes judgment. You will have no help available to you that day, but there is great help available to you in Christ today.

You must know him to have his help. That's what John is telling us in these verses. You must know him to have his help.

And those who truly know him, John says, they live in obedience to his commandments. They walk in the same way in which he walked. And so how you live your life matters.

It is an evidence of your salvation. We know that we're not saved by our obedience. Our obedience is not how we know him, but our obedience is how we may know that we have come to know him.

[27 : 27] Our obedience is evidence that assures us. Our obedience gives us confidence. Yes, I am really truly saved. Yes, I really truly love Christ. Our obedience is that evidence.

We love Christ. Because those who know Christ, who truly know him, they love him. And those who truly love him, how is our love for him demonstrated?

We obey him. What did Jesus say in John 14, 15? Simply put, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And so John says, whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

Or, if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly complete in him. So we can have confidence. We can have confidence confidence that we know Christ and are known by him.

We can have confidence that we love God and we are loved by him as we keep his commandments. That is one of the ways that God grows us in our assurance, in the confidence that we really are Christians.

[28 : 43] But we don't want to just look at our outward actions. We need to look at our hearts. We don't want to just get caught up in appearances. We don't want to get caught up in some kind of spiritual checklist of sorts.

We need to look at our hearts. I know my heart better than any other person on earth does. And yet I am often slow to want to consider my motives.

But we need to ask the question, do the motives of my heart align with the outward obedience that I'm displaying? Or am I like the Pharisees?

Many sermons just recently preached in our church on the Pharisees by Pastor John. Am I like the Pharisees that Jesus rebuked in Matthew 23? Whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

So I may outwardly appear righteous to others, Jesus says, but within I am full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. So you can know, you can have confidence that you're in Christ.

[29 : 55] You may know that you know him by looking at the evidence of your life. You walk in the same ways that he walked. You keep his commandments, and not just outwardly, but inwardly from the heart as well.

We have Jesus if we truly know Jesus. Now, John has talked a lot about sin in just the first couple chapters of his letter.

And he's not done. There is plenty more to come. He writes so that we may not sin. In other words, he writes so that we strive for holiness.

He writes so that we would work out our salvation with fear and trembling. But if we do sin, if we stumble in our striving, we have help.

We strive for holiness, but our striving for holiness is not our plea before God. And thank God for that. Because who can say they have no sin?

[30 : 56] Your plea before God is not your holiness. Your plea before God is Jesus. We rest all our hope in him. He is our righteousness.

Our right standing before the Father depends on him and entirely on him, not on ourselves. We rest in Jesus. And then we work hard to fight against sin.

And if we do sin, Jesus is our help. He stands up for us. He took God's wrath for us. But only if we have Jesus. But we only have Jesus if we know him.

So do you know him tonight? Here is the simplicity of the gospel message from John 3, 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.

Believe in the Son that you might have life, an eternal life in him. And then walk in the light as he is in the light. Obey his commandments out of a deep, overflowing love for him.

[32 : 04] Believe in the Son. Walk in his ways and rejoice. You have Jesus. And you can confidently approach the throne of grace. That you might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because the one who died for our sins ever lives to make intercession for us. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, what a Savior we have.

That right now, as we come into your presence and even call you Father, you warmly welcome us. You welcome us in as your children.

Because your Son went to the cross on our behalf. He speaks for us. Thank you, Father. What a perfect plan you have revealed to us.

Accomplished through your Son. We pray, Lord, that we would not take that lightly. That we would not be slow to come into your presence with gratitude and thankfulness.

[33 : 13] We pray, Lord, that we wouldn't treat such a privilege as this in a manner that is unworthy. That we wouldn't come into your presence flippantly, but with reverence and awe and gratitude for what your Son has done on our behalf and what he continues to do even now before your throne.

We give you praise in your wisdom and in your kindness that your Son pleads our case because he took your wrath for us. So, Father, help us as we go into this week that we would live lives that are worthy of the gospel.

That we would live lives that are pleasing to you. That we would strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord, while at the same time that we would rest in the assurance that we have Jesus if we know him.

We pray, Lord, that you would be our help this week. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Let's stand for one final song together and let's sing of our great advocate before the throne of God above.

For our sake, he made him who knew no sin to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[34 : 35] We are dismissed. Thank you.