

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



THAT YOU MAY KNOW – A STUDY OF 1,2 & 3 JOHN *The Key to Holiness - 1 John 2:1-2*

“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.” – John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

BACKGROUND AND SETTING FOR 1ST, 2ND, & 3RD JOHN:

(1) AUTHOR = The Apostle John – If you will notice, the letter of 1 John bears no inscription (name, autograph, signature). It doesn't give us a name of an individual in the actual letter itself. For that reason 1 John is often called an “anonymous letter,” but 2 and 3 John do carry an inscription. They are written by someone called “the Elder,” a reference to one of Jesus' closest disciples/apostles who was a part of Jesus inner circle, John. The moniker “Elder” does indicate that John is advanced in years when these letter were written. The language and style of all three letters are identical to each other as well as to John's Gospel, so the traditional view and the most commonly held view is that all three were written by the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24). There is no reason to doubt this and early church leaders titled these three little book by John's name.

John actually wrote 5 books in the New Testament... not just these three.

5 Books Written by the Beloved Disciple:

- 1. The Gospel of John**
- 2. First John**
- 3. Second John**
- 4. Third John**
- 5. The Book of the Revelation**

And this I think is significant... all of his books were written later in life and after all the other books in the Bible were recorded.

Here are some facts we know about John:

- **He was the son of Zebedee and Salome (Mt. 4:21; 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41)**
- **He and his brother James were fishermen with their father (Mk. 1:19-20)**
- **He and James were called Boanerges or Sons of thunder by Christ because of their fiery behavior at times (Mk. 3:17; cp. Lk. 9:53-54)**
- **He was one of the 3 most intimate disciples of the Lord (Mt. 17:1ff; 26:37)**
- **He was a close associate of Simon Peter... the first ones to arrive at the tomb (Jn. 20:2-8), they suffered imprisonment together after healing a lame man (Acts 3 & 4), and they traveled together to Samaria after the gospel was preached (Acts 8:14-17) not to mention that they were the disciples closest to Jesus**
- **He was one of the pillars (prime leaders) of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9)**
- **From external and extra-biblical sources (history/tradition), like Polycarp, Papias (*pappy-us*), and Justin Martyr (early church fathers) we are told the following about John from his writings – These early church fathers often quoted John and used his writings**
- **Polycarp and Papias were identified as pupils of John - They have writings dated as early as the 2nd century**
- **John was eventually banished to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, from where he received the visions and wrote The Revelation (cp. Rev. 1:9)**
- **He returned to Ephesus to live out the rest of his life, from where he wrote these three epistles as well as the gospel that bears his name - Archeological remains bear his name in ruins of churches and shrines**
- **John outlived all the other apostles**
- **The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John probably close to the same time he wrote these small epistles which bear his name.**
- **Remember the book of the Revelation was written about the vision that John saw while banished to the Greek island of Patmos on the Aegean sea.**
- **Tradition says that this was after John had been sentenced to death by martyrdom.**
- **We know little about John's later life and death from the Bible**
- **The most insightful bit of information comes from John 21 when the risen Christ was talking to Peter about Peter's death - After Jesus told Peter that he would not live long Peter asked about John's death. Jesus replied that if John lived until Christ's return, that was not Peter's concern. This was not a promise that John would live until the Lord returned, but it does seem to indicate that the Lord knew John would live a long time (John 21:19-23)**
- **Tradition holds that John was sentenced to death in a boiling vat of oil, yet he emerged unharmed from the experience**

- **Again tradition tells us that John lived into old age perhaps dying sometime after AD 98... He is thought to have died in Ephesus** – But in fact the mystery and unknowns concerning John’s death and what happened to him are not known and are varied...

God Questions? How Did the Apostle John Die?

We know that the apostle John was exiled for his faith late in life (Revelation 1:9). The Bible does not give us details on how the apostle John died, but tradition gives us a few theories.

The most plausible theory of John’s death states that John was arrested in Ephesus and faced martyrdom when his enemies threw him in a huge basin of boiling oil. However, according to the tradition, John was miraculously delivered from death. The authorities then sentenced John to slave labor in the mines of Patmos. On this island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea, John had a vision of Jesus Christ and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation. The apostle John was later freed, possibly due to old age, and he returned to Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. He died as an old man sometime after AD 98, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Another theory concerning John’s death is associated with a second-century bishop named Papias of Hierapolis. According to one commentary on Papias’s writings, John was killed by a group of Jewish men. However, many historians believe Papias was misquoted or misread and doubt the credibility of this theory.

There is also a legend that says John did not die but rather ascended straight to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. There is no biblical evidence to lend validity to this story.

Ultimately, it is not essential to know how the apostle John died. What is important is the fact that he was not ashamed of Christ (see Luke 9:26) and was willing to die for his faith. A man will not die for something he knows to be a lie. John knew the truth that Jesus had been resurrected, and he was willing to die rather than to renounce his faith in his Savior.

- (2) **DATE = A.D. 90-95** - As with most books in the Bible, we cannot know for certain when and from where these epistles were penned. As to a date, it is commonly believed to have been written close to the end of the 1st century, with a fairly wide possible time frame... somewhere between 90-95 A.D. Again, we don’t know the exact time or order of the books having been written, but here are some possible dates for John’s writings...

Dates for John’s Biblical Writings:

- 1. The Gospel of John = AD 80 to 98**
- 2. First, Second and Third John = AD 90 to 95**
- 3. The Book of the Revelation = AD 94 to 98**

Of course we know God inspired the Bible and that it was written with His leading, but this may explain why the book of John seems so applicable to the readers of today. **Think of**

this... John had more time to think about what questions were raised in the 50 or more years after the resurrection of Christ. He knew what doubts had been raised and how to answer the questions before we knew to ask them.

(3) PLACE OF WRITING = Ephesus – Again, as with most books in the Bible, we cannot know with certainty when and from where these small letters of John were written. Some guesses are better than others, but are still just that guesses. It is believed by most Biblical scholars that John wrote these letters from Ephesus, the place believed to be where he died. It is usually accepted that John wrote them late in his life. Supporters of this point to 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. In both verses, the author calls himself “the elder.” In the original text, there is a definite article before “elder.” Thus, the reference is probably to an older man rather than to one who serves as an overseer in a local church. Also, 1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 5:21; and 3 John 4 all reference John’s readers as his “little children.” Such a fatherly concern points to John as an older man.

(4) RECIPIENTS = 3 different audiences - The Epistles of John were written to various audiences. They were all written after John was an old man living in Ephesus.

3 Recipients of John’s Letter:

1. **Letter 1 = The Ephesian church (and/or surrounding churches)** - The first epistle was not addressed to anyone in particular, but was written more as a sermon
2. **Letter 2 = Elect lady** - The second was written to an unnamed “elect lady.”
3. **Letter 3 = Gaius** - The third to a man name Gaius. There are three men who bear that name to whom the letter could have been written. There was a Gaius in Macedonia (Acts 19: 29), Corinth (Rom. 16:23), and Derbe (Acts 20:4).

(5) PURPOSE = Multiple purposes - In terms of a positive stated purpose, John actually gives us reasons why he wrote these epistles:

3 Stated Positive Purposes for These Letters:

1. **That your (our) joy may be made complete = 1 John 1:4**
2. **That you may not sin = 1 John 2:1**
3. **That you may know that you have eternal life = 1 John 5:13**

Like the gospel of John, the 3 letters of John were written to supply evidence essential for the building of credible faith.

It also seems evident that John had a purpose to write that was negative in nature.

Three Stated Negative Purposes for These Letters:

1. **He addresses false doctrines that threatened the faith of the early saints = 1 John 2:26).**
2. **There were some who even went out from among the believers = 1 John 2:19 (see also Acts 20:30)**

3. Of particular concern during these days was the threat of Gnosticism-

- The word “Gnosticism” comes from gnosis, which meant “knowledge.”
- It was “the philosophical result of the blending of the cosmology (*Cosmology deals with the world as the totality of space, time and all phenomena. Historically, it has had quite a broad scope, and in many cases was found in religion*) of Greek thought with the theology of oriental religions, esp. Judaism” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 3, p. 648).
- Gnostics believed they had superior knowledge, and such knowledge was limited only to their select group.
- According to them, salvation came from knowing theories rather than faith in a Savior.
- Such a claim obviously puts them at odds with the Lord’s apostles who were promised to be ‘guided into all truth’ (Jn. 16:13).
- It also contradicts the promise made to those who, upon reading inspired documents, would have apostolic insight into previously hidden mysteries (Eph. 3:3-5).
- To meet such a threat, the error of gnosticism had to be exposed. Gnostics believed that all matter was evil, and the spirit of man was good.
- They believed the human body and the spirit within had no effective contact with each other.
- A redeemed soul inside a sinful body was not affected by immoral behavior.
- Thus, a person could engage in all sorts of wickedness and it would not endanger the soul.
- This “theory” puts them in conflict with the Incarnation, or God dwelling in bodily form (cp. Phil. 2:7; Col. 2:9; Jn. 1:14).
- In terms of everyday application of such a doctrine, usually one of two extremes were practiced: (1) man should abstain from everything that would satisfy the sinful flesh (2) since the soul could not be affected by sinful behavior, man was at liberty to do anything that would satisfy the flesh
- Generally, gnosticism fell into 2 categories:

2 Categories of Gnosticism:

- (1) **Docetic Gnosticism** – Docetic gnostics (from dokein, ‘to seem’) did not believe that Christ came in bodily form. He only seemed to have been physical; it was “imagined.” If He did come, He was not perfect while in the flesh (cp. 1 Jn. 4:1-3).
- (2) **Cerinthian Gnosticism** - Cerinthian gnostics (named after Cerinthus, an Ephesian gnostic) attempted to make a distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ. They taught that Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism, and ascended shortly before His crucifixion. Thus it was not Christ who suffered, died, and rose again but Jesus (cp. 1 Jn. 5:6). In order to combat these heresies,

John provides proof of the reality of the Lord's fleshly body. He offered testimony using 3 of his 5 human senses (1 Jn. 1:1). Also, to refute the notion that sinful activity can be indulged in without consequences, John pointed out the following: (1) only those who are pure have an eternal hope (1 Jn. 3:3) (2) only those who do righteousness are righteous (1 Jn. 3:7) (3) those who habitually practice sin are of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8)

Some words and phrases that confuse holy/holiness: Match the words or phrases on the left with the correct response on the right...

(1) Holier than thou!	<i>Stirring things up or making trouble</i>
(2) Holy Cow!	<i>Something unbelievable</i>
(3) Holy Joe!	<i>The Superbowl</i>
(4) The holy grail of football!	<i>Self-righteous</i>
(5) Raising holy _ _ _ _!	<i>A minister, priest or preacher</i>

- What might be wrong with these phrase and words and how they use the word "holy"?
- What affect might these idioms and saying have on our understanding of "holiness" and what it means to be "holy"?
- In what ways might phrases and sayings like this trivialize "holiness"?
- Why might this be important?

Holiness and the very concept of holiness is something that seems to be lost in today's culture and in the church itself. The very concept of God and His holiness has been dismissed.

➤ This is a lengthy quote but worth our contemplation and hearing. This from **Greg Morse** of Dr. John Piper's "Desiring God," ministry. Listen to this and let it soak in what he is saying. Morse writes, "With many today, it appears, worship of the Almighty is slight and carefree. Some women give more thought to their makeup, and men to the game after service, than that we have gathered to *meet with God*. The assumption seems to be that the Deity is content — thankful even — that we have set aside our precious time on our Sunday to give him some of our attention. He is ever-smiling, even when some barely bother to rise from their beds, happy to 'worship' virtually week in and week out with their 'online churches.' They wouldn't engage with the mailman with so slouched and slovenly a disposition, but here they are worshiping before God. Many approach the burning bush every Sunday with their sandals (or bedroom slippers) still upon their feet, spiritually and otherwise. What happened to reverence? When did respect and awe for the Holy God become so unserious? When did it become an endangered species? Has God not the right to ask many professing Christians today, as he did the negligent priests of Israel in Malachi 1:6, 'A son honors his father, and

a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?' And I ask this not to the bizarre outliers given to almost unbelievable forms of irreverence, like spraying the congregation with water guns, drive-thru 'means of grace,' water slides into baptistries, and dance contests in the worship service. I ask this to the normal, seemingly respectable church-attender, flippantly going through the motions: Do you approach the Lord with fear and trembling? And I ask this of myself, Do I consciously worship every Sunday before the Holy God, the untamable Lion of Judah?"

You get what he is saying right? It an observation on what he perceives as a lack of reverence and recognition of the holiness of God. *What do you think about that quote? Do you think He is on to something? Why do you think we might have lost something of our sense of reverence, awe, wonder, sense of the Holy in our worship today?*

➔ According to Dr Steve DeNeff, author of the book "The way of Holiness: Experiencing God's Work in You," he says, "So, as a rule, the less we think of God, the better we think of ourselves. If God is the jolly good fellow we think he is, we have less to feel sorry for and nothing to fear. So the doctrines of holiness and sin either rise or fall together. What we do to the one, we have done—whether knowingly or unknowingly—to the other. As such, we, as a people and culture, lower our view of God, if indeed we believe in Him at all. God then becomes "The Great Santa Clause in the sky."

The problem with holiness:

- (1) God is holy and we are not
- (2) We are separated from God because He is holy
- (3) The only way we can be right with a holy God is through Christ
- (4) Once we come to God through Christ, He calls us to be holy
- (5) We aren't holy and can't be holy on our own

Some verse to consider that may beg some questions about holiness:

- (1) Psalm 24:3-4 - *"³ Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully."* (then who can stand in His holy place... no one)

The questions raised:

- *How may I clean my own hands and heart? **You can't!***
- *How pure, how holy do we need to be? **100% pure, completely holy!***
- *Can we be holy and still have some contaminations from the world? **No, none!***

The Christian's heart is no different from a jar of peanut butter with rodent hairs and insect fragments. Once the jar is spoiled it is all spoiled and how can you separate out what spoils it from the rest that the rest may be restored. Our hearts must be cleaned to properly guide the believer.

- (2) **Psalm 51:10** – *“¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* These are the words King David cried out (after he was called down by Nathan the prophet concerning his sin with Bathsheba)... “Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Now here’s the problem.

The questions raised:

- *Does anyone here live a life with totally pure motives? **We don’t, we can’t!***
- *Are not all sinners? **We are all sinners!***
- *And have we not all missed the glory of God? (Romans 3:23) **We have!***

- (3) **1 Peter 1:15-16** – *“¹⁵ But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”* Peter here quotes from Leviticus, 1 Peter 1:16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.” This is the central theme to the book of Leviticus. This phrase can be found in 3 places in the Book of Leviticus. The whole theme of this book is just how do we approach a most holy God? The words holy and holiness, to be sanctified and sanctification (from the same root word in the Hebrew and the Greek), in all its forms, appears in the Bible over 900 times. There must be something to this word. To be holy is to be completely separate, set aside, and devoted to God. Our hearts and attitudes must be pure; Jesus Christ 100% pure.

The questions raised:

- *How may I make myself holy? **You can’t!***
- *He may command me to be holy, but how may I? **You can’t!***
- *And how may my holy ever match His holiness? **You can’t!***

- (4) **Matthew 5:48** – *“⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”* Jesus said, Matthew 5:48, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The questions raised:

- *How may we be perfect? **You can’t!***
- *How is that possible? **No, it’s not on your own!***
- *Look at the world compared to those in the church, is there a difference? **???***

Have we lost sight of what is holy and what holy lives look like. As Christians, we have whole Christian denominations falling away from the faith, striving to please and to accommodate world, rather than God. Who sets the standards by which we, as God’s people, live? Does God set our standards or does the world?

- (5) **Romans 12:1-2** - *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

The questions raised:

- *How may we present ourselves as holy in an of ourselves? **You can't!***
- *How may we prove what is truly good and acceptable and perfect? **We can't!***

We are called to set our minds on things above, on godly things. But in reality, what do we really do? Do we fill our minds with the things of the world and conform to it, or of those things of God?

Have you ever heard the saying... maybe seen it in a bumper sticker or somewhere else, "Christians are forgiven, not perfect"? I want to add another line, "But, they're striving for (or should be striving for) holiness." As it stands, the bumper sticker seems to say, "God accepts me, faults and all, so you need to accept me, too!" Okay, but please give me some assurance that you're working on things! As the author of Hebrews states in **Hebrews 12:14**, "¹⁴ Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." The English Standard Version says it... we are to "*strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*"

- Holiness is not an optional accessory that you may add to your Christian life at some point, if you so choose.
- Holiness is essential.
- If you are not striving to grow in holiness in the sight of God, you need to examine whether you know Christ as Savior at all.
- Every blood-bought child of God desires to please the Lord Jesus who gave Himself on the cross to save us from our sins.

Since holiness is such an important matter, it's not surprising that the enemy of our souls (the devil) has infiltrated the church with confusion about how to attain it...

Things the enemy uses in the church to confuse holiness:

- (1) **Legalism** - One of his lies is that legalism leads to holiness. The legalist tries to be holy by keeping certain man-made rules, religious rules, duties... "Do this, don't do that, and you will please God." The legalist does not deal with matters of the heart, but rather with outward performance. He thinks that his relationship with God is just fine when he keeps the rules, even if his heart is far from God. Jesus hit the Pharisees with this problem when he said (Mark 7:6-8), "*Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.*" Concerning the rules of the legalists, Paul said in **Colossians 2:23**, "²³ *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*" ***Legalism does not produce true holiness. It produces "holier-than-thou-ness."***
- (2) **Licentiousness** - Licentiousness is decadence, indulgence, immorality, dissipation, debauchery... taking license with things. In other words, "I'm free to do whatever I want

in Christ! After all I am forgiven and I can't lose it! God knows my weakness. I'm only human!" That is another tactic that Satan uses, often with a person who has been under legalism, is to whisper, "You're too conscientious, too uptight, too straight laced, too rule-bound... loosen up! You have been too concerned about keeping the rules and about all of your failures. But God is a God of grace. He forgets your sins, so you should forget them, too! Everyone sins; you're just normal. Accept yourself, faults and all. Stop worrying so much about your sins." And so the person swings from legalism into licentiousness.

Legalism and licentiousness are not opposites, but two sides of the same coin. Both are a fleshly approach to the sin problem. And, both are opposed to the true grace of God, which is the key to holiness (see Rom. 6:14).

John, in our passage, is combating the erroneous teaching and practice of some heretics.

- They said, "We have fellowship with God," but John says that they are walking in the darkness, lying, and not practicing the truth (1:6).
- Those who experience true fellowship with God walk in the light, as He Himself is in the light (1:7)... holiness
- The heretics were saying that they had no sin and that they had not sinned.
- John says that they are deceiving themselves and making God to be a liar (1:8, 10).
- But John does not want his readers to conclude that Christians are characterized by sin.
- So before he says, "*If anyone sins...*" he clarifies his purpose (2:1), "*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.*"
- "*These things*" refers to the message that God is holy (1:5) and to the importance of walking in the light, not in the darkness (1:6-10).
- It also refers to what he writes in 2:1-2. By calling them, "*my little children,*" John reflects both his pastoral heart for them and his longer experience as an old man.
- He cares for them as a father or grandfather does for his little ones.
- He has lived longer than they have and speaks with experience about how to live a holy life.

So we should pay close attention to his message:

The key to holiness is to understand God's grace as seen in Christ's sacrifice for our sins.

Legalists always pounce on God's grace with the warning that it will lead to licentiousness. When Paul taught God's grace, he anticipated that response (Rom. 6:1), "*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?*" His immediate answer was (Rom. 6:2a), "*May it never be!*" (See, also, Rom. 3:8.) This means that if we teach God's grace with biblical clarity and balance, the thought of continuing in sin that grace may abound will pop into people's minds. If we hedge God's grace so carefully that that thought would never occur to anyone, we have not taught God's grace properly.

John's thought here (in line with Paul) is that you need to realize that God graciously has forgiven you completely in Jesus Christ. He is at the right hand of the Father, pleading your case, even when you sin. Your standing before God does not depend on your performance, but rather on Jesus' blood and righteousness. Properly understanding that truth will not lead you to sin more, but rather, to sin less.

★ The key to holiness is to understand God's grace that was lavished upon you when Jesus Christ died for your sins. Let's begin with trying to grasp what that means and then we will see how it leads to holy living.

2 Important Aspects to Understanding Holiness as it Relates to God's Grace:

- (1) Understanding God's grace must be seen in light of Christ's sacrifice for our sins
- (2) Understanding God's grace in Christ's sacrifice will lead us to holiness

WE MUST UNDERSTAND GOD'S GRACE AS SEEN IN CHRIST'S SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS

"¹My 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. ²And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." – 1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

John uses three terms to describe Christ's sacrifice for our sins... notice them in our passage...

Terms and a reminder John uses for Christ's sacrifice for our sins:

- (1) **Jesus Christ is our Advocate with the Father** - "*Advocate*" is from the Greek word that is transliterated, "*Paraclete.*" It is used of Jesus Christ only in our text. Jesus uses it of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). It refers to one who is called alongside to help, especially in a court of law. If you have been accused of a crime, you need an attorney to come to your aid by pleading your case before the bench.

The Holy Spirit comes to believers in Christ's stead to testify of Him and lead us into all truth. He assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). But here John says that Jesus is our Advocate in heaven, "*with the Father.*"

- "*With*" is the same word used in John 1:1, "*the Word was with God.*"
- It means that Jesus is always before the Father.
- He never takes a vacation or a break.
- Whenever we need Him (which is always!), He is there, coming to our aid.
- When we sin, Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10; Zech. 3:1-5), charges us as guilty before God.

- Jesus Christ, our defense attorney, steps to the bench, but He does not enter a plea of “not guilty.” That would not be true.
- We *have* sinned. Rather, He enters a plea of guilty, but then He argues for pardon because He paid the penalty for that sin by His substitutionary death.
- Therefore, His client is not liable for punishment.
- And, although we should confess our sins (1:9), John does not say, “If we confess our sins, we have an Advocate.” Rather, he says, “*If anyone sins, we have an Advocate.*”
- Our forgiveness and our standing with God do not depend on anything we do, but rather on the finished work of Christ.

If we are His children through the new birth, He is there before the Father on our behalf, pleading His blood, even before we confess our sins! This is another way of stating the heavenly ministry of Christ’s intercession for us. Hebrews 7:25 says, “*Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*”

- ➔ John Calvin (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], on 1 John 2:1, p. 171) writes, “*The intercession of Christ is a continual application of his death for our salvation.*” Because Jesus Christ is perpetually in heaven presenting His shed blood, every person that draws near to God through Christ can know that the accuser has no grounds for conviction. We are guilty as charged, but the penalty has already been paid by our Substitute, who pleads our case for us!

Note also that John does not say that our Advocate pleads our case before *the Judge*, but rather, with *the Father*. God is not a hostile Judge who has to be won over grudgingly. Rather, He is the loving Father who sent His own Son to pay the penalty that we deserved! The Father did not compromise His own righteousness or justice in any way, because His sinless Son fully met the demands of His holy law. Thus, as Paul puts it (Rom. 3:26), God is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” In other words, God’s grace does not mean that He tolerantly sets aside His own righteous demand that the penalty of sin be paid. Rather, His righteous demand was fully satisfied by the death of His Son. If we have trusted in Him, our sins are paid in full!

- (2) **Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ the righteous** – Notice, John calls Him “*Jesus Christ the righteous.*” Each name points to an essential part of our forgiveness.

The kind of Savior we need:

1. We need a **human** Savior – *Why do we need a “human” Savior?* In the first place, we needed a human Savior, *Jesus*. Only man could atone for the sins of people. Jesus was completely human, not just in appearance, as some of the heretics maintained, but in His nature

2. We need a **divine Savior** - *Why do we need a “human” Savior?* We also needed a divine Savior. Jesus is *the Christ*, God’s anointed one, sent to bear our sins (Isaiah 53). A mere man’s death would only pay for his own sins. But as God in human flesh, Jesus’ death had infinite merit to atone for the sins of all that the Father had given to Him.

But, also, He is Jesus Christ *the righteous*. Jesus had to be “a lamb unblemished and spotless” (1 Pet. 1:19). If He had sinned, He would have had to die for His own sins. But He fully kept God’s law, in dependence on the Father. His righteousness is freely imputed to the one who trusts in Him. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” This means that Jesus Christ alone is an adequate Savior. He is all that we need to stand before the holy God, not in a righteousness of our own, “derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9). We can add nothing to what Christ has done.

(3) **Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins** – “*Propitiation*” is an unusual and interesting word to us... I wonder if we really get what he is telling us. The word that John uses (also in 4:10; a similar word is used in Rom. 3:25 & Heb. 2:17) was used in ancient pagan writings to refer to the appeasing of an angry god, usually by a sacrifice or offering. If you had done something to make one of the gods mad, you had to do something to placate him and get in his good graces.

Because of the negative connotations of this idea, some scholars argue that the word does not focus on God’s wrath, but rather on man’s sins. Thus they translate the word “expiation,” which means to blot out the guilt of our sins by making atonement.

While we should reject any idea of God being angry in a capricious human sense, we cannot do away with the biblical concept of His wrath, which is His settled hatred of and opposition to all sin... after all, He is “holy”... completely “holy.”

The difference between the pagan and the biblical concepts is that in the Bible, it is never man that takes the initiative to placate God. Rather, God took the initiative to satisfy His own wrath so that His love may now be shown to the guilty sinner.

Rather than man piling up good works or sacrifices to placate God’s wrath, the Bible says that God did what all our good works or efforts could never do. He sent His own Son as the righteous substitute to bear His wrath on the cross.

John Stott (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 88) aptly defines propitiation as “Propitiation is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift

of God.” *What do you notice about that definition? We aren’t involved at all in securing it (we only receive it)*

All that we can do is trust Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf. It is all of God’s grace. It is precisely at this point that legalists object. They fear that if you say that *all* of our sins are remitted *completely* by God’s grace through Christ’s sacrifice, people will take advantage of that grace by sinning. So, they add human works to hedge in God’s grace, to protect it from licentiousness.

But, he adds another phrase at the end of verse 2 to impress us with the magnitude of God’s grace:

John adds (2:2), *“and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”*

(4) **God’s grace through Christ’s sacrifice extends to the whole world** - John says at the end of verse 2, *“and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”* I think that John intended to counter the heretics, who claimed that the knowledge of salvation was exclusive and secret. They restricted it to the enlightened few. Instead, John throws open the door to the entire world, as if to say, *“God’s grace is far more extensive than you imagine! Christ’s sacrifice is not just for the enlightened few; it is not just for the Jews; it’s for the entire world!”*

Anyone, anywhere who trusts in Christ’s sacrifice for his sin will be saved. John’s point here is to emphasize the magnitude of God’s grace in Christ’s sacrifice. It extends to the whole world.

The application of this is:

UNDERSTANDING GOD’S GRACE IN CHRIST’S SACRIFICE WILL LEAD US TO HOLINESS.

“¹My 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. ²And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” – 1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

John steers a careful course that does not shipwreck on the rock of sinless perfection, nor on that of licentiousness...

What John tells Christians about holiness:

(1) **Holy living is a possibility** - John writes (v.1), *“so that you may not sin.”* While we will never attain sinless perfection in this life, we can and must live with consistent victory

over sin. As John states 1 John 3:7-8a, “*Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; ...*” He adds in 1 John 3:9, “*No one who is born of God practices sin....*” Christians can and must live holy lives.

- (2) **Perfectly holy living is not a possibility** – Notice John adds in verse 1, “*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate ...*” The “we” includes the apostle John... he was including himself in that group. Although he was an old man who had walked with the Lord for many, many years, he knew that he was not beyond the possibility of sinning. While the general tenor of our lives should be growth in holiness, we will never in this life get to the point where we never sin. If someone claims to have achieved sinless perfection, just hang around him for a while and you will see that the “emperor” of sinless perfection is only deceiving himself (1:8). He really has no clothes!
- (3) **Understanding God’s gracious, sacrificial work through Christ will lead to consistent holiness** - This is John’s point here. If you understand what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross, you will not take advantage of it by sinning more. Rather, as you think about God’s amazing grace shown to you, who deserved His wrath and you think about His love that sent His Son to be the propitiation for your sins (1 John 4:7), it will make you hate sin and strive to live to please the Savior.

The apostle Peter urges us to add godly character qualities to our faith in Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-8). Then he adds 2 Peter 1:9, “*For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.*” Remembering what Christ did for you on the cross will motivate you to cut sin out of your life and grow in holiness.

CONCLUSION

As a teenager, **Robert Robinson** lived in London and ran with a gang of hoodlums, living in debauchery. When he was 17, he went to hear the famous evangelist, George Whitefield, to scoff at what he called “the poor, deluded Methodists.” But instead he got saved and subsequently became the pastor of a large Baptist church in Cambridge. At 23, he wrote the hymn, “*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.*” (*see Hymn Book, #15*)

Later, however, Robinson went through a time of severe depression because of his sin. He was traveling when he struck up a conversation with a young Christian woman. She realized that he was well informed on spiritual matters, so she asked him what he thought of a hymn she had just been reading. To his astonishment, he found it to be the very hymn that he had written in his younger days. He tried to evade her question, but she kept pressing him. Finally, he began to weep and said, “*I’m the man who wrote that hymn many years ago. I’d do anything to experience again the joy I knew then.*” The lady was surprised, but she assured him that the same “streams of mercy” mentioned in the song still flowed.

Robinson had written in the third verse, “O to grace, how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be! Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.” Robinson’s own hymn was used to turn his wandering heart back to the Lord. (Taken from “Our Daily Bread,” Summer, 1983, plus Kenneth Osbeck, *Amazing Grace* [Kregel], p. 343.) That same grace of God flows freely to you, no matter how great your sins. Understanding God’s grace in Christ’s sacrifice is the key to holiness.

Application Questions

1. Why is it unwise and unnecessary to hedge in God’s grace with manmade rules? How does this apply to churches and families?
2. How can a person know when he is turning the grace of God into licentiousness? What warning signals are there?
3. What are the practical benefits of the doctrine of particular redemption? What are the cautions to avoid?
4. What is the problem with the teaching that we can be sinlessly perfect? What is the danger of teaching that we cannot attain sinless perfection?