

## WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE: JESUS CHRIST

1 John 2:1-14

Key Verse: 2:1b

“But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”

In chapter 1 we learned the nature of Christian fellowship and how we can participate in it. It is amazing that the source and basis of this fellowship is God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. God provided this fellowship through Christ's incarnation and atonement. This fellowship truly satisfies our souls, gives us joy and peace, and helps us to walk in the light, overcoming all the power of darkness. The biggest hindrance to this fellowship is sin. Surprisingly, when we confess our sins, God does not condemn us. Rather, he forgives all our sins and the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. But this great grace can easily be misused to justify a sinful lifestyle. Moreover, it is not given just for our personal enjoyment, but to be practiced in Christian community. In today's passage we learn how fellowship with God and others can build up a healthy Christian community.

One of our prayer topics is to establish a loving Christian community. The Christian community is not just a human organization. It is originated by God and sustained by God. God dwells among us and guides us each to grow to be like Jesus, to love one another, and to be a blessing to the world. During the past three months we have seen the world change dramatically since Covid-19 broke out. We abruptly stopped meeting together in person. We no longer shake hands or hug each other. Our watchwords are: “keep your distance” and “wear a mask.” As service industries have shut down, over 30 million people have lost their jobs. Schools have closed. Fear, stress, and frustration have increased, leading to selfishness and indifference. On top of this, endemic injustices have led to rioting that has filled major cities with violence and hatred. This is our reality. How can we have a loving Christian community in this environment? We can learn from today's passage. It is through Christian fellowship which builds up a Christ-centered community (1-2), is obedient to his command to love one another (3-11) and is steadfast in assurance of his saving grace (12-14).

First, Christ is our advocate (1-2). Verses 1-2 are both a conclusion to chapter 1 and an introduction to chapter 2. “My dear children” tells us that John dearly loves the recipients of the letter. He was their spiritual father who had a deep concern for their well-being. He said, “I write this to you so that you will not sin” (1a). He warns them not to abuse God's grace. When we hear the words, “If we confess our sins...he will forgive us our sins,” it is tempting to think lightly of sin. Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), a German poet and writer, said as his last words, “Of course God will forgive me. That's his job.” It sounds like he took God's forgiveness for granted. This leads people to justify living in sin, not acknowledging

the seriousness of sin. But John made a truly clear statement that they should not sin. Some people wonder how much sin they can get away with and still be acceptable to God. The answer is: none at all. God is holy. He never condones sin. We should not abuse God's grace of forgiveness. These days most people take coronavirus very seriously. But sin is more serious: it kills not just our bodies, but our souls. Christian life requires struggle against sin. Hebrews 12:4 says we should struggle "to the point of shedding our blood." In the past we enjoyed sinful life. But as children of God, we must fight against sin tenaciously.

Though we may struggle against sin, even to the point of shedding blood, we fall into sin unintentionally or intentionally, due to our sinful nature. Paul realized that he was sold as a slave to sin because of the power of sin working in him. What he wanted to do; he did not do. But what he hated, he did (Ro 7:14-15). Whenever we sin, Satan comes uninvited and whispers, "You cannot come to God. How can God forgive a sinner like you again? You are hopeless." Satan's accusation makes us powerless. But this is the time to come to God. Verse 1b says, "But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." "Advocate" is a legal term, suggesting a courtroom scene. God is the supreme Judge. His standard is the law, which is holy, righteous, and good (Ro 7:12). No one can stand before his judgment without guilt. But believers can stand because we have an Advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ. In John 14:16, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "another advocate," meaning that Jesus is the first advocate. "Advocate" means "one who comes alongside" as a helper. Jesus is always with us and ready to help us in our time of need. If we are accused of a crime and must appear in court, it is especially important who our attorney is. The problem is, to get the best attorney, we must pay a lot of money. But Jesus helps us free of charge. He is the best Advocate who has never lost a case. He understands our weaknesses, for he has fully shared our human experience (Heb 2:17-18). He knows the Judge; it is his Father. He is an incomparable Advocate who always gains acquittal for those who trust in him.

Though Christ is our Advocate, the basis of his plea for us is not our innocence. Defense attorneys hope that their clients are innocent. But Jesus has never had an innocent client because all have sinned (Ro 3:23). He accepts all sinners who come to him. Christ pleads with the Father, not based on our merit, but based on what he has done for us. Christ's advocacy is effective for two reasons. First is his righteous character: "He is the Righteous One." He is sinless and perfect in nature. He does not have to try to be righteous, he just is righteous (Heb 7:26).

Secondly, he himself is the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Verse 2 says, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." The phrase "atoning sacrifice," or "propitiation," means "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favor." God's wrath is not arbitrary or capricious. It is his righteous anger toward sin. Sin demands just punishment; it requires the death penalty, for the wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23). We have to die for our sins. Is death the end? The Bible says that just

as man is destined to die once, we all must face God's judgment: eternal punishment in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Heb 9:27; Rev 21:8). However, God had mercy on us and sent Christ to die for us as our atoning sacrifice. He paid the full price of sin on our behalf. His sacrifice was once for all and pays for all our sins, past, present, and future. His sacrifice is so effective that it saves everyone in the world who believes in him.

We have an Advocate! He is Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Since we have such an advocate, our fellowship with God can be renewed again and again, even though we sin again and again. A baby does not walk all at once. He falls down and gets up repeatedly. But as he gains strength and balance, he can walk by himself. In the same way, every time we fall into sin and come to our Advocate, Jesus Christ, we become strong in God's grace and grow to be like Jesus. It takes a lifetime and will not be complete until Jesus comes again, but we will surely be like Jesus. It is because we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ! Thanks be to Jesus!

Second, the marks of being a genuine Christian (3-11). While verses 1-2 tell us how to maintain fellowship with the Father and Son, verses 3-11 teach us the marks of a genuine Christian and how to discern truth and lies in the Christian community. As Jesus mentioned in the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13:24-30), not everyone who associates with the Christian community is a genuine believer in Christ. Christian fellowship is vulnerable to false teachings and evil influences. So we need discernment. In John's time, some people were influenced by gnostic ideas. The Gnostics claimed to know God on the basis of special knowledge which they alone possessed through inner enlightenment. John did not deny the possibility of knowing God. But he emphasized that their knowledge was not valid unless it was demonstrated by their lives (Tit 1:16). In verses 3-5 the word "know" is repeated 4 times. It comes from the Greek word "ginosko" which means not merely knowing a fact, but experiential truth. How can we know that we ourselves are genuine believers? John gives us two marks: obedience to God's commands (3-6), and loving brothers and sisters (7-11).

The first mark is to obey God's command (3-6). Verse 3 says, "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands." The commands John has in mind are to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another (3:22-23). The word "keep" stresses the idea of ongoing, watchful obedience. This is not a prerequisite for salvation, but evidence that one has been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. One who claims to know God but does not live according to what he says is a liar. The truth is not in that person (4). Knowing God is not just a matter of words, it must be reflected in our actions. Verses 5-6 say, "But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." As Jesus obeyed God's command out of love for God, so will all those who love God. When we have a genuine love relationship with God, obedience naturally follows.

Jesus said, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching...anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching” (Jn 14:23-24).

The words “we know him” or “we are in him” describe a mutual love relationship. When we know God, his love, light, and holiness circulates within us. As it does, all the elements of hatred, darkness and sin vanish, and we are filled with his goodness. It is a vibrant and dynamic relationship which gives life, energizes, and produces spiritual growth that bears good fruit. As we see evidence that we obey Jesus’ commands and are growing to become like Jesus, we can know that we are genuine Christians.

The second mark is to love brothers and sisters (7-11). As we have seen, obeying God’s command is the mark of a genuine believer. In verses 7-11 we find that this specific command is to love one another. In verse 7, John explains that he was not writing a new command but an old one, which they had heard from the beginning. To love one another had been part of the gospel message they heard at first. They heard it so many times that it was not new at all. Nevertheless, it was new because its truth was seen in Christ, who filled the command with a richer, deeper meaning (8a). First, it was new in the emphasis he gave it. He brought Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the Lord your God,” and Leviticus 19:18: “love your neighbor as yourself,” together and declared that the whole Law and Prophets hung on these commands. Secondly, it was new in the quality he gave it. A disciple was to love others not just in the way he loved himself but in the same way Christ had loved him, with self-sacrifice even unto death. Thirdly, it was new in scope, showing in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the neighbor we love is anyone who needs our help and compassion--irrespective of race and rank--and includes our enemy. Fourthly, it continues new by our fresh apprehension of it, for though doctrinal Christianity is old, experiential Christianity is always new. In these ways it was a new command and will always remain new.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 8b says, “...its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining.” The love command was actualized in both the life of Jesus and the lives of his followers. When Jesus’ true light shines in our hearts, all the elements of darkness are gone and Jesus’ love and truth, joy, and peace overflow from our hearts. Then everything becomes new. As Jesus’ light advances day by day, the darkness recedes and will finally be gone completely.

Verses 9-11 contrast those who hate a brother or sister with those who love them. The word “anyone” is repeated at the beginning of three general statements and indicates that there is no exception. Anyone who claims to be in the light but bears grudges against a brother or sister is still in the darkness (9). If we hate even one person in the Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, John R. W., *The Letters of John* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press Academic, 1988), p. 97-98.

fellowship, we are not in the light. On the other hand, anyone who is genuinely concerned for brothers and sisters and helps them practically in their time of need, lives in the light. There is nothing in them to make them stumble (10). Such people are living before God with a clear conscience. But, again, anyone who gossips about others, judges others, or habitually ignores others' needs is still in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them (11). They have no spiritual discernment. They have no peace in their hearts. In fact, they experience hell. Hating one person in the Christian fellowship is not a small matter. It breaks fellowship with God and with brothers and sisters. The problem is that we cannot love a brother or sister by our own strength. In the morning we may pray sincerely to love a certain brother or sister. But when we see that person, hatred flares up immediately. Then everything they say or do, even their hairstyle, is unbearable. It is because the power of darkness works in our hearts. We cannot overcome it with our own strength. But when Jesus' light shines in our hearts all the darkness disappears. As we began 1 John study, I prayed to discover anyone I did not love properly. To my surprise the Lord revealed my judgmental spirit toward a dear friend. When I brought this to Jesus, he cleansed my darkness and gave me a new love for this dear brother. Afterward I could love him genuinely from my heart and could have great assurance that I am in Christ. Only Christ enables me to walk in the light.

Third, Christian assurance (12-14). John's words in verses 3-11 were intended to help believers discern the presence of unregenerate people in their fellowship. However, he must have anticipated how his words would affect genuine believers. Sometimes they did not obey God. Sometimes they hated a fellow believer briefly. Did this mean they were unregenerate? In verses 12-14 John reassures believers with six successive affirmations. In the first set of three, John uses the present verb tense, "I am writing to you." In the second set, he uses the aorist verb tense, "I write to you."<sup>2</sup> In this way, he repeatedly assures them that they are genuine Christians and tells them why.

John addresses three different groups of believers two times each: dear children, fathers, and young men. While John uses the same Greek word each time for fathers and young men, he uses two different words for dear children. In verse 12 the Greek word "teknion" refers to those born of their parents. Since all believers are born of God, this could be a general affirmation to all believers. In verse 14 the Greek word "paidion" refers to those who are under the mentorship of their parents. This seems to refer to a distinct group of babes in Christ in the Christian fellowship.

Verse 12 says, "I am writing to you dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name." Christians are not those who hope to be forgiven or are looking for forgiveness, but those who have already been forgiven. We are forgiven sinners.

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<sup>2</sup> Other versions, KJV, NASB translate this "I have written to you."

We do not need to try to obtain forgiveness by doing good. Rather, we believe that Jesus has already forgiven our sins. Christ died for our sins once for all as the atoning sacrifice. When we repent and believe in Jesus, he forgives all our sins, past, present, and future. Jesus compared believers to a person who has taken a bath. Fundamentally, we are clean; we are justified by faith. But we still need to wash our hands throughout the day (Jn 13:10) as we are sanctified.

In verse 14a, John writes to “dear children,” who are spiritual babies. They have accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord and tasted the joy of his grace of forgiveness of sins. They know the Father, much like a little child knows how to call out “Daddy.” But they need to grow in knowing God. In verses 13a and 14b John says to fathers twice: “you know him who is from the beginning.” They have progressed in a deep communion with God. They are already consciously living in eternity. They are a blessing to the Christian fellowship. They always build up, support, and serve with the mind of Christ quietly and prayerfully. In verses 13b and 14c John addresses young men. He assured them that they have overcome the evil one. Young Christian men are strong, not because of their healthy bodies, but because the word of God lives in them (2Ti 2:1). When they are strong, they can overcome the evil one and have a sense of victory. Whatever our level of spiritual maturity, we can have the assurance that our sins are forgiven, we have a relationship with God, and we have victory over the evil one. When we have this assurance, it is the evidence we are genuine believers, and this is vital to be a blessing in the Christian fellowship. This assurance comes, not from our human struggle and experience, but from Jesus Christ, our Advocate, who is the source of life. Let us come to Jesus our Advocate, obey his command to love one another, and build up a loving, healthy Christian community.