

1 John 2:1-2

My children, I write these things to you in order that you may not sin. And if a certain one sins, we have an advocate with the Father, [the] righteous Jesus Christ. 2 And he is the propitiation for the sins of us, but not for our sins only, but also for all the world.

Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μη
ἀμαρτητε και ἔαν τις ἀμαρτη,
παρακλντον ἔχομεν προς τον πατερα
Ἰησοῦν Χριστον δικαιον 2 Και αὐτος
ἵλασμος ἐστιν περι τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν,
Οὐ περι τῶν ἡμερων δε μονον ἀλλα και
περι ὅλου τοῦ κοσμου.

Introduction

The child of God is a new creation but he still has a problem with the old self. Our daily walk involves having to confront the fact of our own sin. Our growth in Christ sometimes comes at great cost as we have to deal with our sin. Sometimes refusing to give up those sins results in severe consequences but God provides an Advocate for us. In the Old Testament Mosaic system the faithful would bring a morning sacrifice. He would have hand on the bloody mess every morning which spoke of the seriousness of the individual's sin. That sacrifice served as a substitute in the offerer place. Today, we do not bring a morning blood sacrifice, because Jesus Christ is that blood sacrifice and even more, He is a propitiation, a complete satisfaction of the demands of a righteous God. He was offered up once and it is His current position as priest that He intercedes for us.

2:1. **Τεκνια μου, ταῦτα γραφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μη ἁμαρτητε.** (My children, I write these things to you in order that you may not sin). John calls out, addressing them in the vocative, **τεκνια** (teknia) v.n.pl., “a little child,” and in the NT used as a term of kindly address by teachers to their disciples. First, it should be pointed out that John says in his gospel that those who received the Word, God gave them the right to become “children of God.” These children are born, not of any human activity, but of God (John 1:12-13).

But here, “children” is in reference to their spiritual maturity, their level of understanding about the things of God. The Christian's understanding relates to their daily relationship with Christ, and in the sense of understanding, one's maturity in Christ, that is, John means their walk. All Christians are little children with respect to the Apostles, so the reference is appropriate. Jesus called the disciples children. He alone could do that since He alone had a perfect knowledge and walk. In like manner, John uses the possessive personal pronoun **μου** “my little children.” He is acting as the teacher to his disciples. That is how the process is supposed to work. It is a teacher to disciple relationship that continues from generation to generation. The Great Commission involves making disciples and the pattern involves the knowledge of good and evil and the practice of good and the shunning of evil.

John's use of the first person verb **γραφω** (grapho) Pres. Act. Ind. 1sg., “I continue to write,” indicates a personal desire for him to convince them as children to belong to the family of God and not to sin. This is a *hina* clause – a purpose clause that states, “since you are children (or because you are children), I am writing these things to you for the purpose of letting you know so that you might not sin.” The negative aorist subjunctive provides the idea of possibility of not sinning. The constantive aorist regards the action as a whole, taking no interest in the internal workings of the action, but it is possible that if they heed the things written, they will not sin, they will overcome the sin at hand.

Και ἐὰν τις ἁμαρτη, παρακλιντον ἔχομεν προς τον πατερα Ἰησοῦν Χριστον δικαιον (And if a certain one sins, we have an advocate with the Father, [the] righteous Jesus Christ). With the purpose given for the writing of this letter, the reality of sinful man comes into focus, that is, in

the case where one has sinned, he or she has been given an advocate with God the Father. The clause is a third class condition relating certainty of fulfillment, or, “when we sin, then we have an advocate.”

The εαν (ean) cond.part., “if, in case,” with the aorist subjunctive verb αμαρτανω (hamartano) 2 Aor. Act. Sub. 3sg., “to be without a share,” “to miss the mark,” “sin,” “trespass,” makes this a third class condition; “If a certain one might sin, then we possess a legal advocate before God the Father with the Righteous One – Jesus Christ.” The thing to point out concerning this phrase is that John uses the indefinite pronoun τις (tis) pron. n.m.sg., “a certain one, some,” as the subject, then writes εχομεν Pres. Act. Ind. 1pl., “to have, hold”: “we (continue) to have an advocate.” Both the tenses and the definiteness of the pronouns are significant in interpreting this. “In the case of anyone who sins (in a generic sense), we, as believers collectively, have someone close to God the Father to present our case; that perfect Advocate – the righteous One, Jesus Christ.”

The word for advocate, παρακλητος (parakletos) a.m.sg., “summoned,” “called to one’s side,” “comforter,” “advocate,” has historically had both a legal forensic use and a common use. The basic meaning is “one who appears on another’s behalf, a mediator, intercessor, or helper.” When used with the Holy Spirit, the word is used in a general sense and translated with the sense of a “helper,” or “comforter” (cf. John 14:16, 16; 15:26; 16:7). The use seems to be more limited when used with Jesus Christ. Here it serves the legal aspect as an advocate, a lawyer representing our case before God the Father as Judge so the added word δικαιος (dikaios) adj.a.m.sg., “righteous One,” “just One.”

John adds the descriptive adjective the “righteous One” to the direct object of the phrase, “the Father, Jesus Christ.” In other words, the Father and Jesus Christ are seen as one and the same. The language of the Bible frequently speaks of all the members of the Godhead as if they are one person, so that the word “trinity” need not be found in the Bible since the grammar clearly points out the three in one relationship.

Notice the basic grammatical construction of the last phrase. The subject is a “certain one who might sin,” the verb is “he possesses,” and the object is “an advocate.” The rest of the accusatives all point to who the advocate is, namely, the Father and Jesus Christ. Further, it is the righteousness of both the Father and Jesus Christ that is most important in the advocate relationship. This righteousness is further developed in the next verse.

2:2. Και αὐτος ἵλασμος ἐστὶν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (And he is the propitiation for the sins of us). The reason why the characteristic of the Advocate is given as possessing righteousness is because He continues to serve as a propitiation “in the place of us.” This statement serves an important theological construct. First, the fact is stated that the propitiation is a continuous resource on our behalf as the present tense is used. This is grammatically consistent with man’s continuous acts of sin since sin is always and forever covered by Jesus’ work on the cross. But more, that death on the cross is past tense and completed, but its propitiatory effect is seen as both past and present.

Propitiation, ἵλασμος (hilasmos) n.m.sg., “propitiation,” “a means of appeasing,” is the subject of the phrase and is regarded as an adjective modifying “him.” It might better be read, “Him, the propitious One.” The idea of a propitiation is more of an Old Testament Jewish concept than a Greek one. The word is related in the Greek OT to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant – the Mercy-Seat, or the “place of atonement” (Ex. 25:17; 37:6; Lev. 16:14). This is

the place where the High Priest would go into the Holies of Holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the mercy seat seven times and this sprinkling of blood signified a satisfaction of the righteous demands of God, covering the sins of the whole nation for one year (Lev. 16:14; 34). What was involved in that important ritual with respect to propitiation was the sin offering and the burnt offering. The two goats, and the lot to select the goat that was to be the scapegoat and the other goat for the Lord as a sin offering (Lev. 16). The slaughtering of an animal started with the first sin (Gen. 3:21) and moved to the chosen nation Israel in the form of ritual in the Mosaic law and finally was seen as complete in the slaughter of the perfect Lamb of God - Jesus Christ Himself. He was our substitute, taking our place, His blood was shed as a complete satisfaction of the demands of God so the Rabbi's used the Greek word ἱλασμος (hilasmos) "a satisfaction." The typology of the OT Day of Atonement is made complete in Jesus Christ our Savior, dying once for all (Heb. 10:9).

Paul links propitiation with Christ's righteousness in his great theological work to the Romans like this:

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. [Rom. 3:21-26]

John will further develop the doctrine of the great propitiation in chapter four using his typical Jewish spiral reasoning. He links the great propitiation to God's love as he writes in 1 John 4:9-10:

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The next important grammatical fact found here is in the preposition *περι* which is a two case preposition (acc. & gen.), when used with the genitive it means "about, concerning," or "on account of." It has the idea of representation and can be translated "on our behalf," "for our behalf," or more theologically, "in our place." That is, His death and shed blood is seen as a substitute in our place.

The picture is made complete by this progressive buildup of words. Jesus is our Advocate, our legal representative before the Father, he himself is (continues to be) the propitious One, a satisfaction, the blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat in the throne room of God (Heb. 9:23-25). His shed blood continues to cover our sin and He is there in the throne room representing us and proclaiming that His righteousness and not our own is the thing to be brought as evidence before the Father. That His blood satisfied the righteous legal standards of God who

has said “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus is the Passover Lamb that serves as a substitute in our place. The Old Testament typology of the sacrificial lamb is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Salvation – the great rescue from eternal punishment, is found only in the acceptance of that great propitiation – that sprinkling of Jesus’ blood that was shed on the cross and is seen as sprinkled upon the mercy seat between the cherubim, those great protectors of God’s holiness and righteousness. The blood is represented as evidence in the very throne room of God and Jesus Christ is there in His resurrected body, the hole still in His side visibly present as physical evidence to the fact. He really did die on the cross and He really did physically rise from the dead and ascend to the right hand of the Father continuously offering legal representation for the individual who sins. First in the salvation of the individual, then on a continuous bases as the faithful sins He acts as Priest. Here, the term advocate seems to indicate a legal aspect and it involves Jesus’ death as the propitiation.

Οὐ περι τῶν ἡμερῶν δε μονον ἀλλα και περι ὅλου τοῦ κοσμου (but not for our sins only, but also for all the world). This section ends with the most important theological highpoint - the subject of the extent of the propitiation. This answers the question, “what does the propitiation [the satisfaction of the shed blood] cover?” The answer is, the propitiation is given on behalf of the whole world! The great theological debate over the extent of the death of Christ is settled by John. As I understand the debate it seems to be more philosophical than grammatical, more emotional than contextual.

On the one hand those who are advocates of limited atonement argue that Christ’s death on the cross atoned (covered) only the elect. “The Reformed position is that Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving the elect, and the elect only.”¹ On the other side are those who argue that Christ’s death was sufficient for all people, but efficient only for the elect. I have been on both sides of this debate and have come to the point where I must use the grammar and precise terminology to settle the debate in my mind.

First the plain sense of the text is that the propitiation [His shed blood on the mercy seat as a satisfaction of the righteous demands of God] is on our behalf, namely, John and the believers he is addressing in this letter (i.e., a limited group). But John moves outside this limited group to “the world,” as he adds the contrastive conjunction, “but not on our behalf only [or alone]” signifying he is about to move outside the limited group, it is not only for the select group, “but also on behalf the whole world.” The conjunction *ἀλλα* means “but” and has its root in the word *ἄλλος* “another of the same kind.” By using this word, John means to link the same kind of propitiation for John and the believers to the world, but not just the world in general, but he modifies the *κοσμος* with the word *ολος* (*holos*) “all,” “whole,” or “complete” world.

Notice the second phrase is just a chain of genitives. The first phrase contains the subject [lit. Him, propitiation] and the verb [“he is,” or “he continues to be,” a state of being] then the chain of genitives follows speaking of the extent of the propitiation. Both the believer and the whole world [of sinners] are included.

Now the subject of who is the world. The word for world is *κοσμος* (*kosmos*) and means the “order,” “ornament,” “decoration,” “the circle of the earth,” the inhabitants of the earth.” The context used here is man’s sin so the world is restricted to mankind all of which are sinners who are in need of a Saviour, all of which need to be reconciled back to God. The idea is that Jesus Christ died on the cross and His death served as a propitiation for the whole of mankind, and that propitiation continues to function in a forensic sense as a means to defend us as we sin. He died

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996) p. 394

once and does not need to die again and again, the sin issue is settled and He is seated at the right hand of the Father as physical evidence of the fact.

This doctrine teaches that Jesus' death served both a salvation aspect and a continuous sanctification aspect. It is equivalent to the Old Testament concept of the Day of Atonement where the high priest offers up the sacrifice for the whole nation to cover the sins of the nation for a year. Jesus' death covered the whole world but only those who have been born again have eternal life and have an Advocate in heaven. The picture is that of Satan in heaven bringing evidence of our sin against us and Jesus saying "but I paid the price for that." Those the Father has given the Son will not be lost and speaks of eternal life as secure in Christ (John 6:39-40; 10:28-29; Rom. 8:29-30, 33-34; Heb. 7:25; Rev. 12:10).

The sobering aspect of this is that each sin we commit is presented in heaven and Jesus our Advocate has to present His case for each occurrence. Do we understand the extent of it all? Will this understanding move us to put away whatever sin we refuse to hold onto? This also speaks of the great patience God has with us. How many times will He have to defend you and me for the same sin? How long will it take before we finally hear the Word and are convicted by the Spirit and act to put away that sin?

2:1 – τεκνια μου ταυτα γραφω υμιν ινα μη αμαρτητε (My children, I write these things to you in order that you may not sin) : τεκνιον (teknion) v.n.pl., a little child (in the NT used as a term of kindly address by teachers to their disciples); εγω (ego) pers. pron. 1g.sg., I, me; ουτος (houtos) dem. pron. a.n.pl., this; γραφω (grapho) Pres. Act. Ind. 1sg., to write: I am writing; συ (su) pers. pron. 2d.pl., you; ινα (hina) conj., that, in order that; μη (me) part., not; αμαρτανω (hamartano) 2 Aor. Act. Subj. 2pl., to be without a share, to miss the mark, sin, trespass: you sinned.

και εαν τις αμαρτη παρακλητον εχομεν προς τον πατερα ιησουν χριστον δικαιον (and if a certain one sins, we have an advocate with the Father, [the] righteous Jesus Christ) : και (kai) conj., and, also, even, indeed; εαν (ean) conj., if, in case; τις (tis) pron. n.m.sg., a certain one, some; αμαρτανω (hamartano) 2 Aor. Act. Sub. 3sg., to be without a share, to miss the mark, sin, trespass: he/she/it might sin; παρακλητος (parakletos) a.m.sg., summoned, called to one's side; comforter, advocate; εχω (echo) Pres. Act. Ind. 1pl., to have, hold: we have; προς (pros) prep., to, towards, at, near, by; πατηρ (pater) a.m.sg., with def. art., father; Ιησους (Iesous) a.m.sg., Jesus of Hebrew origin from יהושוע (Yehoshua') Joshua or Jehoshua "Jehovah is salvation"; Χριστος (Christos) adj.a.m.sg., Christ from χριω (chrío) to anoint; δικαιος (dikaios) adj.a.m.sg., righteous, just.

2:2 – και αυτος ιλασμος εστιν περι των αμαρτιων ημων (And he is the propitiation for the sins of us) : και (kai) conj., and, also, even, indeed; αυτος (autos) pers. pron. 3n.m.sg., him; ιλασμος (hilasmos) n.m.sg., propitiation, a means of appeasing; ειμι (eimi) Pres. Ind. 3sg., to be, exist; he/she/it is; περι (peri) prep., about, concerning, around, near; αμαρτια (hamartia) g.f.pl., with def. art., sin, to miss the mark, to be without a share; εγω (ego) pers. pron. 1g.pl., I, me.

ου περι των ημετερων δε μονον αλλα και περι ολου του κοσμου (not for our sins only, but also for all the world) : ου (ou) part., not; περι (peri) prep., about, concerning, around, near; ημετερος (hemeteros) pron. 1g.f.pl., our, your; δε (de) conj., but, moreover, and; μονον (monon) adv., only, alone; αλλα (alla) conj., but; και (kai) conj., and, even, indeed, also; περι (peri) prep., about, concerning, around, near; ολος (holos) adj.g.m.sg., all, whole, completely; κοσμος (kosmos) g.m.sg., with def. art., world, from the primary verb komeo "to take care of," "tend."