

Christ Our Advocate

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[0 : 00] Can we turn again to the passage of Scripture that we read from the first letter of John and the words of chapter 2.

Our text is verse 1. Now, 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. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Christ, our advocate, is our focal point this evening. John's language throughout this letter, you will find, is always balanced.

You find that his words are firm, but also gentle. At times, his language can be uncompromising.

[1 : 28] Yet, you find that his language is fueled with compassion. And indeed, he begins the second chapter by addressing his readers using a term or expression of endearment.

He refers to them as his little children. And he does so in a very warm, brotherly, fatherly manner.

Now, some might look at the language of John and say, well, is there not something just a little condescending in the way that John addresses his readers?

Is there not something of talking down in these words? Well, not at all. Because John speaks with affection.

And he does so in no uncertain terms. It's important for us to appreciate that John is an old Christian man himself.

[2 : 39] And he considers the recipients of this letter as his spiritual children. And he writes to them, conscious of the fact that they are in need of a word of encouragement, that they need a word that might bring an element of assurance where assurance is lacking.

Perhaps from a previous generation, there were old Christians in our community, I can recollect from my own past, something of this kind of language being used, something similar to this term or expression of endearment.

And as a young Christian, there was something comforting, something consoling or soothing by being addressed in this manner from someone whom you consider to be perhaps a mother in Israel.

And very often, there would be that element of compassion, but also peppered with an uncompromising approach to the day-to-day life of the Christian or the pilgrim.

And we touched on this this morning. There was more often than not a question that was often put was, as you would say in Gaelic, Kemara hatanem.

[4 : 15] Is it well with your soul? And at times, that question was put to you, so that you were led to consider whether all was well with respect to your spiritual welfare.

And there's more than an element of that in John's approach. He is the beloved disciple. He's the disciple whom Jesus loved.

And he is concerned for the spiritual welfare of the recipients of this letter. He has a concern for their souls.

But his approach is to convey the love of the Lord Jesus Christ through pastoral concern. He appreciates the need for conveying a word of encouragement and a message of assurance.

And you find that as you read this letter, how it is packed with language that, again, is uplifting and full of warmth.

[5 : 30] And there's perhaps a lesson there for ourselves. There is that need for encouragement in the Christian life. It's a ministry that you and I are called to fulfill in the Christian life, the ministry of encouragement.

Sometimes you can read books on the marketplaces flooded with them that encourage you and I to reach the spiritual high in the Christian life and to retain that.

But the raw reality is that in the Christian life, there are times of disappointment and times of discouragement. There are times when you are downcast and you are in need of a word that will bring some encouragement, a word in season, as we say.

And there's something to be said for beginning your day by immersing yourself in the word of God. Personal devotion is crucial in the Christian life, not least in the morning, so that as you read the word of God, you can at least bring something from the scriptures, bank that word, meditate on it, cradle it in your heart so that when the opportunity arises, you can part with it and share that for the benefit of your Christian brother or sister who may well be in need of that word in season.

There's a wonderful extract from William Wilberforce's diary or memoirs, and it simply goes like this.

[7 : 13] It says, walked from Hyde Park Corner, repeating the 119th Psalm. And the point is that as you and I immerse ourselves in the word of God, then as we bank that word, we too will be in a position to engage in a ministry of encouragement.

Somebody once said that a well-read Bible is a sign of a well-fed soul. And if your soul is well-fed, your soul has more than a grain to impart to perhaps someone who is impoverished and in need of encouragement.

You can see in Paul's approach, very similar to John, as he addresses the church in Rome, in Romans chapter 1 verse 11, you can see how he echoes the sentiments of John when he says, I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.

That is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. And again, you can see that coming through in the language of John.

Look at chapter 1 verse 4. We are writing these things that our joy may be complete. So there is a need for you and I to consider whether we are engaging in a ministry of encouragement.

[8 : 50] Do I have a spiritual gift? Do I have a word to impart to someone who is in need of a word of encouragement? Well, we should all strive to be a Barnabas, to be sons and daughters of encouragement.

But John has a specific purpose for writing this letter. I am writing, he says, these things so that you may not sin.

This reference that he applies by way of a cautionary note brings us back to verse 9 in chapter 1.

There we have one of the many precious promises of scripture. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

But John is anxious that that promise of verse 9 should not be embraced irresponsibly or interpreted or understood as a license to sin.

[10 : 04] He is anxious that the words of verse 9 are not misunderstood understood in any way. There are those who have a warped approach to confession.

There are those who say, well, perhaps as I go along, I can confess my sins as appropriate and necessary on some kind of revolving basis.

As my sins accrue and as they accumulate, I'll simply bring them to the throne of grace because there, you know, God promises to be faithful and just.

And so I can confess my sins, my slate will be wiped clean, and I can just continue from where I left off. Again, Paul, he applies a cautionary note, not unlike John when he writes again to the church at Rome, chapter 6, are we to continue in sin that grace may abound by no means.

John goes on to write, no one who abides in him has a license, a warrant to keep on sinning. There is a danger that you and I can warp the promises of Scripture to suit to suit our own warped lifestyle.

[11 : 39] And it's important that you and I should be sensitive to that danger of abusing or misapplying the promises of Scripture to suit ourselves.

There is always that danger. John stresses that sin is a contradiction. It has no place in the Christian life.

Sin is incompatible with the path of discipleship. It's a bit like trying to mix oil and water. The two just don't gel.

Sin is unacceptable in the Christian life. That is the message that John is anxious to convey. I am writing these things to you that you may not sin because sin has no place whatsoever in the Christian life.

In fact, in chapter 3 verse 4 he defines what sin is. One word, lawlessness. Sin in the Christian life grieves the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 49] it hinders the work of God's free grace with respect to sanctification. That work through which we are made more and more able to become dead to sin and alive to righteousness.

It's very important that we don't miss the point with respect to sin because there were those who were who considered the theology of John in 1.9 as an opportunity to sin to push the boundaries and live an alternative lifestyle so that as I keep on sinning then I can reach a point where I can ask God for forgiveness and because he is faithful because he's the covenant God he is just he is faithful he will forgive me but note what John says forgiveness and cleansing yes these things flow from the faithfulness and justice of God but John highlights in chapter 1 verse 9 these things are conditional upon confession these things hinge upon heartfelt confession if we confess our sins there are many many warnings in the scripture concerning the danger of trying to conceal our sins it's something which the Bible emphasizes time and again we sang in

Psalms 66 if in my heart I had cherished sin the Lord would not have heard so there are many many dangers with respect to concealing sin but by contrast there are many promises of blessing if we confess our sins with heartfelt confession repentance penitence and there is one blessing in particular that becomes a point of emphasis in verse 1 in the words of our text one such blessing with respect to heartfelt confession is the presence and intervention of an advocate one who speaks to the Father in our defense now look at what

John says but and thank the Lord for this conjunction but says John if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous John acknowledges as we all do in the Christian life with a heavy heart he acknowledges that sin is that inescapable reality in the Christian life he acknowledges the inescapable reality of sin in the Christian life its existence its actuality as something which indwells something which casts a dark shadow the principle of sin is something that does exist and John acknowledges it it is something that is indwelling and

John defines it in referring to it as that which represents lawlessness yet its law is a reality in the Christian life it was John Owen who once said that the principle of sin however it may be dethroned corrected impaired and disabled yet it is never holy and absolutely dispossessed and cast out of the soul in this life and he goes on to say it is sin only that makes a saviour necessary and John draws our attention to this necessary saviour and he draws the spotlight onto the person of the

[17 : 51] Lord Jesus Christ and we are introduced to the advocate whom you and I have with the father one who speaks not unlike a barrister in a court of law on behalf of a defendant a special one who has special specific responsibility as counsel for the defense to plead the cause of the person who is on trial in other words in God's court our advocate is the Lord Jesus Christ the righteous one the sinless one who stands there before the father in our room in our stead as not just our as not merely our advocate but our mediator and our sympathetic high priest our Emmanuel God with us but then someone might say well but is the courtroom not reserved for the guilty and the condemned well again we go back to the inescapable reality of sin in the

Christian life because are there not times when friend you feel and I feel guilty and worthy of condemnation indeed there are times when we are unworthy recipients of God's mercy and loving kindness there are times when the inescapable reality of sin rears its ugly head in the Christian life and there are times when you and I have to confess that we perhaps claim to have fellowship with the Father and yet we find ourselves walking in darkness we find ourselves steeped in disobedience we find ourselves backslidden wayward individuals going off on a tangent leaving the path of discipleship engaging in rebellion from time to time the inescapable reality of sin manifests itself through these avenues of waywardness

Paul knew the reality of the inescapable reality of sin in the Christian life he knew what it was to engage in spiritual warfare do you not know something of that this evening can you not to stand shoulder to shoulder with the apostle Paul and say for the good that I would I do not but the evil which I would not that I do sin is a contradiction it is a paradox and you're led to cry as the apostle cried wretched man that I am and to add insult to injury the accuser of the brethren is always in close proximity to the believer the old serpent the devil diabolus the accuser the slanderer and he will take every opportunity to heap one accusation after another concerning your guilt and your condemnation before

God he is the father of lies he will commend sin to you and as you engage in sin he will condemn you for that very sin that he has just commended to you but the bible says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus who have this sinless sin bearer as their barrister he who is described as the propitiation for our sins our advocate and our atoning sacrifice again you find how

Paul and John are singing from the same theological song sheet Paul states as he declares this language of no condemnation he states concerning the the propitiatory element by sending his own son the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh now these things are foundational for us as we consider the advocate that John is introducing us to Christ the righteous one the sinless one Christ who in his incarnation became truly a man by assuming a real body and a reasoning soul but unlike all other men was sinless and what do we see in the crucifixion of the incarnate son of

[23 : 59] God we see sin condemned so that now all its claims to have you and I condemned have become invalid case dismissed forgiveness granted through your advocate with the father there is a very moving account told of a lenient doctor a Scottish doctor many many years ago and one day he found out that many of his patients were having difficulty paying his fees many who were unable to meet the medical fees of that day and when he found out the difficulties with respect to settling these bills the doctor would write in red ink across the record of their indebtedness just one word forgiven and so frequent was this occurrence that there were very few pages in his record book that was not filled with red ink this red lettered word appeared on one page after another forgiven but the good doctor died and after his death his executors thought that the doctor's estate would greatly benefit it could be greatly benefited if some of the forgiven debt could be collected and there were many applications that were sent out from the executors but these applications proved to be unsuccessful the poor patients were in no position to pay what had been forgiven so the executors took legal action to recover the outstanding amounts and the matter was referred to a court of law but the judge examining the case book when he saw the word forgiven cancelling one entry after another he made this legal declaration there is no court in the land that could enforce payment on these accounts marked forgiven and he dismissed the case and there is a sense in which that spirit of forgiveness is conveyed through the language of

John for everyone in Christ there is no case to answer because as the psalmist puts it as far as east is from the west so far does he our advocate with the father remove our transgressions for us the slate has been wiped clean and where do you and I this evening see the removal of our transgressions at the foot of the cross in Christ's broken body and shed blood by faith you and I embrace the reality of our advocate with the father and this declaration of forgiveness and no condemnation forgive me again for quoting the apostle Paul but it's remarkable how you have many complementary components when you link one text with another as

Paul writes to the church at Colossae in chapter 2 verse 13 onwards Paul states God in Christ has forgiven all our transgressions how by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands Paul Paul goes on to say this he set aside nailing it to the cross he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him our advocate with the father it was John Calvin who said that Christ's intercession Christ our advocate our sympathetic high priest Christ's intercession is the continual application of his death to our salvation it is that sense of redemption accomplished and applied through this blessed advocate but then you may look at this and you may ask well the difficulty

I have is embracing this for myself I can understand how this was applicable to the original recipients of this letter but how are these things how can I embrace these promises this evening in the here and now well listen to the words of verse 2 he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world are you saying that you are a special case the whole world Christ's atoning sacrifice is not just applicable to John and the early church but for a diversity of sinners on the international stage throughout the far ends of the earth and this is as applicable to you this evening as it was some 2000 years ago to the original recipients of this letter in need of being uplifted in need of being reassured of the presence of this advocate our time has all but passed but in the remaining time we have

I want us to note from verse 3 to verse 6 the manner in which this theme of assurance is applied we see how John stresses that we know in verse 3 that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments there is a sense in which blessing is found along the pathway of duty what is that duty in particular well it is that duty that we emphasized at the very outset the need to read your Bible the need to immerse yourself in the word of God so that you too can again siphon from the scriptures these great promises that are yes and amen in

[32 : 23] Christ Jesus because the reality is that active participation in sin sinful behavior disobedience deliberate waywardness backsliding these things can lead inevitably to a loss of assurance and how do you and I know that we know him how can you say this evening my beloved is mine and I am his because the Bible tells you so keep his commandments but then we have the cautionary note in verse four whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments that person is described as a liar and the truth is not in him that person is living his life in a false economy he claims to know

God but he is engaged in a life of wayward darkness disobedience and backsliding verse five but whoever keeps his word whoever reads the word who takes this word seriously who immerses himself or herself in it what is true of that individual the love of God is perfected we read of how that individual knows of that completeness that verse four in chapter one draws our attention to that sense of our joy being made complete that sense of knowing with that blessed assurance that

Jesus is mine he is my advocate I know that because the statute book the Bible the that contains the commandments of God the statute book this book of the law there is one declaration after another Psalm 119 verse 16 I will delight in your statutes I will not forget your word but the reality is that you and I do forget God's word we don't give it the attention it deserves we don't soak ourselves in scripture we neglect the truth we don't read it when we get up in the morning because we don't get up early enough to put time aside and read the word of God the reality not keep the word as we should but

John encourages us to nonetheless whoever keeps his word in him truly the love of God becomes a matter of personal awareness it was Anna Bartlett Warner who wrote the well-known hymn Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so and there is wonderful theology in these simple words Jesus loves me how do I know that because the Bible tells me so if I focus on my advocate with the father I see his love I see his mercy I see his grace it's interesting that that particular hymn was written for a little child not unlike the words of

John little ones to him belong they are weak but he is strong and you and I are encouraged this evening to focus on our advocate whether you are young or whether you have been a pilgrim over many many years just as we close if you go back to the old testament you will find those in Israel who were in need of assurance in Isaiah 49 you see how Zion said something that perhaps reflects your own heart this evening Zion said the Lord has forsaken me the Lord has forgotten me but the prophet intervenes and he says no the

[37 : 43] Lord speaks through the prophet to Israel and conveys a message of assurance by asking a question can a woman forget her nursing child it's possible says God she may forget it's unlikely but it's a possibility yet I will never forget you behold God says I have engraved you on the palm of my hands and as you read the word of God you too will discover that your name is written on the palms of his hands as you read as you reflect as you contemplate as you meditate may you and I be encouraged to walk in the same way in which he walked because blessing follows obedience in the

Christian life you and I are urged we are exhorted to exercise covenant faithfulness to our covenant God who excels in faithfulness so friends let us hold fast our confession this evening as we approach the Lord's table may you be encouraged in the knowledge that you have an advocate with the father a sympathetic high priest one who is righteous all together who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet who is without sin come to the throne of grace there you are assured of mercy and grace and all its sufficiency to meet you at your every point of need this evening without exception come to the advocate that you have with your father in heaven and may you and

I know the joy of the lord as our strength as we seek to do his will amen let us pray we give you thanks oh gracious god for your goodness your grace your loving kindness through your son we marvel at our advocate with the father we give thanks this evening that he is our abiding refuge and strength continue with us go before us encourage us for christ's sake amen to and you love