

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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SUBJECT: THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN

TITLE: THAT YOU SIN NOT

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:1-2

INTRODUCTION. The Gospel According to John was written to convince people that Jesus is the Christ, God's Own Son Who was sent to die on the cross for our sins and to convince them to trust Him for salvation. The First Epistle was written - against a background of false claims made a developing heresy - to help believers to know they are saved. The heresy was a budding Gnosticism, a Greek philosophy which would become a major world view over the next several generation, one which would influence Eastern Mysticism, and in turn influence the New Age Movements of our day. In case you think "New Age" is old news, substitute the word, "Postmodernism." It is still with us, but it covers up much of the subversive, anti-Christian dogma. It is the driving force behind the more radical environmentalists, behind moral relativism, globalism, and many other influences that have found their way into education, politics, and even the church.

In Chapter One, John, especially in verses 1-4, delivered a lethal blow to the Gnostic heresy - and to all similar heresies. In the following verses, he stresses the opportunity we have for fellowship with God. If we walk in the light, we may have fellowship with God; if we walk in darkness, fellowship with God is broken. Walking in the light means walking in the power of the Holy Spirit; it means living a holy life. While a lost person can only walk in darkness - he has never seen the Light of the World - Christians walk in darkness when they submit to their old sin nature, the sin principle which, though they are saved, is still seeking to assert itself in their lives. If we claim to have fellowship with God while we are walking in the power of the flesh (the sin principle, or old sin nature), we are lying and do not know the truth (1:6). If we deny that we have a sinful nature, or if we say we never sin, we are lying (1:8) and make God a liar (1:8). However:

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1:10).*

John will refute the claim of sinlessness - the claim that we do not sin at all, and the claim that we do not have a sinful nature - but first he will stress his desire that we do not sin, and then reveal the solution to sin in our life.

I. THIS EPISTLE WAS WRITTEN THAT WE MAY NOT SIN, 2:1a.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.

A. John Addresses the Readers as “my little children.”

To the aged John, this is a serious matter, and he addresses the initial readers as a father addressing his children - or grandfather addressing his grandchildren. There is a spiritual kinship between them. In the words, “my little children,” we can learn a lot about how to view sin, and how to treat the sinner. Both sin and claims of sinlessness are uncompromisingly condemned, but the sinner is loved as a member of one’s family. To John the response to sin was not to spread gossip, or lead others to condemn the sinner, but to encourage him and reclaim him. What is the first response in your church to the news that a member has “gotten into trouble”?

B. The Stated Purpose of This Epistle Is That We May not Sin.

The First Epistle of John is as relevant today as it was at the end of the First Century. Then, it was Gnosticism that tried to redefine sin and righteousness. Today it is Postmodernism, more specifically, many New Age religious movements, philosophies, and claims. In his book, *Saviors of the Earth?*, Michael Koffman insists that New Age environmental forces have had a more radical influence on America than anything else since the Civil War. Gnosticism was introduced into the church when some of the Gentiles who were coming into the church in large numbers refused to totally give up this pagan philosophy. They sought ways to get the church to accommodate an ungodly world-view. If you think that is strange, consider how quickly America embraced evolution following the Scopes trial. Within fifteen years of that trial, evolution was being taught, not as an alternate view of origins, but as the only view allowed in many high schools and colleges across America.

An ungodly, atheistic Humanism pushed evolution in our schools with an evangelistic zeal - and, I might add, with phenomenal success. They did this in order to impact society. But in the early nineteen eighties, when polls began showing that the atheistic aspects of the movement were being rejected by more and more Americans, many Christians thought the Gospel was overcoming Humanism. The fact - and this was a fact that most Christian leaders missed - was that New Age Movements were injecting Humanism with a spiritual dimension. Millions of Christians today are totally unaware of the influence of Postmodern (New Age) influences in their lives, their homes, and in their churches. They sign petitions to keep the television program, *Touched By an Angel*, on the air because it is “clean,” without realizing that New Age guru, Dela Reese, is serving up a “Christianity” without Christ!

Add the influence of moral relativism within the church membership right now and you will see how desperately the church needs to study the First Epistle of John. Grossly immoral people talk about praying for other people. Professing Christians are trying to give immorality a marriage-like respectability - “we have been together

five years.” The popularity of social drinking is such that many professing Christians think only a religious fanatic would find anything wrong with it. I have even heard of churches that inform a new pastor that he is not to say anything against it!

What does all that have to do with 1 John? Everything! We must return to a biblical view of sin. Many of John’s first readers were trying to minimize the importance of sin and its consequences. Moral relativism does the same thing today. Sin impacts lives, it impacts homes, it impacts governments, and it impacts churches. Contrary to the claims of many social scientists, only Jesus Christ can deal with sin. Secular counselors try to help rid people of guilt feelings. Only Jesus can get rid of the guilt! There is a lot of difference. Let’s see how He does it.

II. IN JESUS CHRIST WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, 2:1b.

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

A. All People Commit Sins (See Rom. 3:23).

1. Lost people are dead in sin and face God as the Judge, Who will sentence them to hell.
2. Christians will commit sins, and must face God as a loving Father.
 - a. As our Father, He cannot ignore our sin.
 - b. His goal is to forgive and restore us to fellowship with Him.
 - c. His options in dealing with His children are limitless.
 - d. You had better take your sins seriously because He does.
3. “If Anyone Sins” is the condition of the second class, assumed to be true.

The idea is, “if anyone sins,” and he will sin. We might say, “When you sin,” because you will sin (see 1:6, 8). God’s desire is that you will not sin, but He has made provisions for you when you do sin. This should not be taken lightly. If you sin with the attitude that you can live in a sin-and-repent cycle, you can be sure of two things: (1) you will not be forgiven, and (2) your heavenly Father is going to deal with you. Sadly, God may well be dealing with you right now and you do not even recognize it. Many Christians complain because they do not see God answering their prayers. He may well be withholding His answer until they repent. There are blessings available to those who are walking in the light - walking in fellowship with Him - that are not available to those who are walking in the darkness. Joy is withheld from those who persist in walking in the darkness rather than in the light.

B. Jesus Christ Is Our Advocate With the Father.

1. God's desire for us is that we do not sin.
2. But, when we do sin we have an Advocate.

The word translated "Advocate" (*parakletos*,) is a familiar one to students of the Gospel According to John, where the beloved disciple of our Lord, uses it four times. The interesting thing is that in the Gospel, it is used all four times to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

"While the Holy Spirit is Jesus' Advocate on earth, Jesus is the Advocate of believers in heaven . The term 'Advocate' portrays Jesus as both an 'attorney' and an 'intercessor,' one who represents the cause of believers in the presence of the Father. Thus, the contrasts within 1:6-2:2 depict two different approaches to sin" (Believer's Study Bible Notes).

This speaks specifically to the Gnostic heresy - and to moral relativism today. Whereas the false teachers were minimizing the significance of sin, believers are encouraged to acknowledge their sin and let Jesus Christ deal with it. Jesus Christ is the only real solution to the sin problem. The lost person is dead in sin and in danger of facing Him in judgment. The believer is a child of God and God deals with him as a Father dealing with a wayward child. He does not ignore sin - ever. He deals with it in and through Jesus Christ.

3. You need to know when you need a lawyer.

ILLUSTRATION: Greg Irwin is the attorney for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. As a member of the Executive Board of the LBC, I had seen Greg and heard Dr. Dean Doster, our Executive Director, introduce him. Before, or after meetings Mr. Irwin and I would shake hands and exchange greetings. However, I never had any idea how much we needed him until I was asked to serve on the Documents Study Committee to try to determine how the documents of all agencies of the Louisiana Baptist Convention related to the convention and exactly how well they met the current requirements of laws of the State of Louisiana.

I did not know what to expect when we met for our organizational meeting. For one thing, I did not expect to be elected vice-chairman of the committee. I thought they might reserve that position for someone who knew what he was doing, and if other committee members had known what they were doing the probably would have.

I had no idea how much we would need our attorney until he began to explain Louisiana Law to us and show us how our documents might be interpreted in light of existing state laws. When I began to see how much time Greg was spending on the work of our committee alone, the thought occurred to me that this was going to cost us a small fortune! It was then that Dr. Doster explained to us that Greg gives much of his time and his expertise to the causes of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. He considers it his ministry. Now I appreciate Greg, not only because he serves as our attorney, but also because of the spirit in which he serves.

ILLUSTRATION: Recently, after meeting my brothers, James and Mike and my sons, John and Mark for lunch, Mike said, “You will never guess who I got a phone call from the other day.” When he told me the young lady’s name it brought back a lot of memories. When this young lady was about three or four years old her mother was killed in an automobile accident when a truck driver topped a hill at a high rate of speed and was unable to stop before hitting the woman who was making a left turn. The child’s father and grandfather asked me to see if Mike would represent him. They said they wanted Mike to represent the husband and daughter because I had made the statement in the service that my own father had lost his father when he was about the same age as this little girl. They felt that Mike would put the child’s interests first.

Mike’s speciality is injury litigation on the defense side, but he agreed to take this case to help them, and perhaps as a favor to me. After months of preparation, the day came when they appeared in private with a judge. During the meeting the judge expressed his concern for the provisions made for the child, and added, “I don’t know what kind of arrangements you have with the family, but...” Mike replied, “I’ll tell you what my arrangements are.” When he told him, the judge paused, and then said, “Well, you are certainly one of the last of the breed.”

Mike saw to it that this child would be cared for, not only in childhood but for the rest of her life, with checks going to her when she graduated from high school, when she was 21 years old, and at intervals of five to ten years until the last check at age 65. Mike was determined that no one would ever be able to touch her money as long as she lives. This young lady had just received a check and called to express her appreciation to Mike for the way he had represented her.

ILLUSTRATION. I was in a doctor’s office when a young mother began telling me how much my son had helped her and how much she appreciate it. She said, “I don’t know if he would remember me or not, but I won’t forget how he helped me.”

She and her children been abandoned by her husband, who was not sending child support. She called and reached John by mistake. He was an assistant district attorney in the juvenile section and her call was put through to him. I checked with

John and he did not remember this particular call. He said that when he was not in court, he spent a good part of his time with a troubled parent, either in his office or on the phone.

The lady went on to explain that she was at her wit's end when she called, and even though she had the wrong person, "He spent an hour with me on the phone and he never rushed me or became impatient with me. He counseled me and encouraged me, and I really needed it. I just felt that he cared."

4. You had better have the right attorney.

Over the years I may not have learned much about law, but I have learned a little about lawyers. For one thing, if you need an attorney, you had better be sure you find one you can trust. I also discovered that if you want to find a good, competent, trustworthy attorney, don't ask the average layperson to recommend one. Ask a competent Christian attorney to recommend one. I once listened to a conference I could not avoid in a restaurant. Some of the members were that loud. At one point, one man said when we go to Baton Rouge, I think we need to get so-and-so (he gave the name) to go with us. I know him and he will really fight for something if he believes in it." I could hardly believe my ears. The last time I had heard that name some lawyers were trying to determine whether or not that was the worst lawyer in town!

5. Jesus is the only Advocate Who can represent us before our eternal Judge.

III. JESUS IS OUR PROPITIATION, 2:2.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

A. Propitiation Carries the Idea of Satisfaction.

1. The sacrifice Christ made satisfies the just demands of God's judgment against sin (1:7).

Christ is the only offering that satisfied God concerning sin (Rom. 3:25). In Hebrews 2:17, we read:

*Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people** (NKJV).*

2. Jesus is both our Advocate before the Father, and the propitiation for our sins.

Jesus Christ not only represents believers before God (as our Advocate, v. 1), He also provides the grounds for their forgiveness. Jesus is our Advocate, the High Priest Who offered the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and the atoning sacrifice.

“Jesus' provision of propitiation does not mean that the Father is uninvolved in salvation; in actuality, God's love is the ultimate source of Christ's work (4:9). The universal extent of the atonement of Christ is nowhere clearer than here (cf. John 1:29), but this does not guarantee that everyone's sin is automatically forgiven. Christ's work applies only to those who believe in Him (cf. 4:15; John 5:24)” [BSB].

B. Jesus Christ is the Propitiation Not Only for Us But Also for the Whole World.

1. His sacrifice is sufficient for any sinner

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life, John 3:15.

2. He does not want to see anyone perish.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9.

CONCLUSION. How could be better conclude this than with another word from the beloved apostle: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

INVITATION