

I John
The Believer's New Relationship to Sin (Part 3)
I John 1:5 – 2:6
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Well, I do encourage you to take your copy of God's Word and turn to the book of 1 John as we continue our study of this wonderful letter. This week, I was thinking about an English idiom; you know our language is filled with these word pictures; and many times, we don't even know where they came from. One of those word pictures is the expression, "caught red-handed." You understand that expression essentially means that someone is caught in the middle of a crime or so soon after the crime that the evidence is absolutely overwhelming. That expression, "caught red-handed," was actually used first back in the 1400's in Scotland, and it literally describes somebody whose hands were red either with the blood of the person they had killed in committing murder or with the blood of an animal that they had killed in poaching land that was not their own. They were literally caught red-handed.

As I thought about that expression, it occurred to me how funny it is that we often use that expression, that someone was caught red-handed, at the very time the person who was caught red-handed is denying that they're guilty, denying of what they've done. I mean, this tendency starts with children. Maybe you even remember your own childhood in this way; if you have children, you certainly can remember how often you have caught your children red-handed, and then you say, "Okay, what just happened here?" To which our slightly brain-damaged children, because of 'The Fall,' say, (What?) "I don't know, I don't know." That is a less than subtle way of denying any wrongdoing.

Sadly, the human tendency to deny wrongdoing never goes away until Christ changes the heart. Then and only then, do we stop denying and begin admitting and taking personal responsibility, and that's John's message in the text that we come to this morning. When we are caught red-handed, we, instead of denying, instead of saying, "I don't know," we say, "It's me. I'm the one."

John wrote, you remember, to give us assurance in this book that we are truly Christians. So, this letter is really positive. Yes, there are some hard confrontations here, but it's written to

those he loved, those who were in the church, those were truly believers, and he wants to encourage us to give us assurance that we're truly Christians. And so, in this letter, he presents three tests of eternal life. There's a moral test-obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word; there's a social test-love for God and His people; and there is a doctrinal test-faith in Christ and His gospel. So, the tests are obedience, love, and faith.

Now, after the prologue in the first four verses of this letter, the rest of the letter presents those three tests again and again. Specifically, those three tests in three cycles or movements, and each of the three test shows up in each of those three cycles or movements. We're studying the first cycle of the first movement that runs from chapter 1, verse 5, to chapter 2, verse 27.

Now, in this first cycle or this first movement, the very first test we come to as to whether we have eternal life is the moral test, our obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word. And every time he comes back to one of these tests, he does so with a unique nuance. And here the first time, he deals with this test of obedience, he focuses this test specifically on, "Our New Relationship to Sin." Let's read it together, 1 John, chapter 1, beginning in verse 5, and this first test runs down to chapter 2, verse 6. You follow along.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His

commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Here, as we encounter this first test, John essentially tells us this, “You can know that you have eternal life, you can know that you are a true Christian, because you now have a new relationship to sin. Now this test is based, as I've noted, on two fundamental biblical truths. We've looked at both of them; let me just remind you. First of all, the first truth is “God's Essential Nature of Holiness.” That's found in verse 5. Notice he says, “...the message that we have heard (we've announced is) that God is Light, (He is perfectly holy.) and in Him there is no darkness at all.” He is totally without sin of any kind. Now, because that is God's nature, His essential nature is holiness, you can't know God, you can't be in the fellowship with God, have a relationship with God, and continue to have the same relationship with sin that you did before you claimed to become a Christian, that's his point.

That introduces us then to the second fundamental biblical truth. Because of God's essential nature of holiness, the believer's new relationship to sin is clear and obvious. This begins in chapter 1, verse 6, and runs down through chapter 2, verse 6. So, in the rest of this section that we just read together, John shows how our relationship to sin reveals whether we are genuine Christians or whether we're false Christians.

Now, let me just define that again in case you haven't been here. By false Christian, I mean somebody who is attached to Christianity, attached to the Christian church, attends a church like this one, and says, “Yes, I'm a Christian,” but isn't really a Christian, has never truly been changed, doesn't truly know the Lord. How can we distinguish in our own hearts whether we're the real thing or whether we're something that's a lie?

Well, it comes down to our relationship to sin. The believer's new relationship to sin, we've noticed, is first shown by “The Pattern of His Life” in verses 6 and 7, the pattern of his life. In verse 6, a false Christian habitually lives in sin; to use John's words, he walks in the darkness. In verse 7, we learned that a true Christian habitually lives in holiness; he walks in the light. It

doesn't mean true believers don't sin; it means the basic shape and tenor of their lives is in the light, it's habitual holiness, it's habitual obedience.

Now, last time we saw that the believer's new relationship to sin is shown, secondly, by "The Admission of Inherent Sinfulness." In verse 8, we learned that a false Christian denies his inherent sinfulness; he denies that he was totally depraved before he was born again, and he denies his sinful flesh now after conversion. On the other hand, verse 9, a true Christian admits he's a sinner and confesses his sins.

Now, today we learn, thirdly, that the believer's new relationship with sin is shown by, "The Admission of His Actual Sins," by the admission of his actual sins. We see this in the last verse of chapter 1 and the first two verses of chapter 2. True believers and false believers can be identified, they can be distinguished by how they respond to their sins. Let's look first of all, as John does here, at the false Christian. In verse 10, we learn this, "A False Christian Denies or Downplays His Sins," a false Christian denies or downplays his sins. Notice his false claims in verse 10, this is the false claim that a false Christian makes, "If we say that we have not sinned." Now, the tense of the Greek verb here implies that this person is making an audacious claim; he's claiming that at no point, in the past and continuing up until the present, has he ever sinned.

Now, just to make it clear, the distinction, back in verse 8, the person there claims to not have any inherent sinfulness. In verse 10, you have instead a blatant denial of any sinful actions. Now, the first question that should pop into your mind if you're a thinking person at all is, how can anybody in their right mind say, "Yup, that's me, haven't sinned." How does that happen? Well, obviously everyone sins; you know that, and I know that. So, how does anyone come to this position? Well let's, first of all, start with the first century and the position John's addressing then. The false teachers that had been a part of the churches that he was ministering to and had left, chapter 2, verse 19, "...they went out from us because they were not of us," the false teachers and their followers believed in a sort of Greek dualism. They believed that because their bodies were matter, consisting of matter, they were, therefore, evil. And what that meant was their bodies were irredeemable, and they had nothing to do with their spirits, the immaterial part of them which was good. And so, whatever they did with their bodies wasn't

truly sin; it wasn't morally culpable, it didn't affect their relationship to God. That's pre-Gnosticism and that's what John was dealing with.

Now, I doubt there are any pre-Gnostics here this morning; I don't think I've ever met one who would make that specific claim. But that's only one way that people deny their sins. Let me give you several other common ways that people, today, deny their sins. I'll give you a little list. Number one, some people today deny their sins by denying God's existence and, therefore, the reality of a moral standard. There are a lot of atheists who say, "You know, there is no God, and, therefore, there is no standard, there is no standard of right and wrong." So, what do we do to decide that standard? Well, we redefine sin and we say, "Well, it's only wrong if it hurts somebody else, so what I do doesn't hurt anybody else, so it's not wrong, it's not morally culpable." Or, others will say, "No, it's not just that, let's take a vote, and whatever the majority decides is wrong, we'll all agree together is wrong, and will hold everybody to that standard; and if we all agree together it's not wrong, then it's not wrong." Some even go so far, a small minority, go so far as to even deny that any behaviors are moral or immoral. That doesn't work really well in the real world because very few people want to say that what Hitler did wasn't immoral, but there are some.

A second common way that people today deny their sins is they re-classify sinful behavior as a physiological problem, as a physical problem that has solely to do with the body. For example, drunkenness or sexual sin is re-classified as solely a physical addiction. Now, I'm not saying there isn't a physical element to sin, obviously we're two-part beings, and they bleed into each other significantly. But I'm talking about the person who essentially escapes all culpability for sin by saying, "No! No! No! That's not me, that's my body, it's that's a physiological problem that I have."

A third way that people deny sin today is to reclassify sinful behavior as a psychological problem or as a mental illness and to put all the fault on sinful behavior on some sort of a problem with the synapses in the brain.

Number four, to shift the blame and guilt for your sin to other people, your environment, or your circumstances. There are some people who don't deny the fact of sin, they just deny that it's a fact for them. "I only do this because of what this person has done to me, or what I have encountered, or my circumstances, or because of some other circumstance in my environment."

Number five, another way people deny their sin is to exchange newly defined cultural sins for biblical sins. This is rampant in our age. Let me give you an example. Two new sins that have been defined and preached from the housetop in our era is failing to recycle and failing to accept those who are transgender. Now, here's how it works. For those who embrace those as the "new sins," as long as they keep those new culturally defined sins, they can feel like they're moral even if their life lives is are filled with biblical sins. It's a bait and switch.

A sixth way that people deny their sins is to affirm as morally good what the Bible calls sin. This is the end of Romans 1, where they not only knew that what they did was wrong, but they said it was good; they approved of it and approved of those who did it. This is, today in our culture, turning homosexuality into a moral good, turning pride into a moral good, turning lust into something that's normal and natural and should be celebrated.

A seventh way that people deny sin is to downplay or minimize sin by renaming it and justifying it. Drunkenness becomes "alcoholism;" adultery becomes "having an affair;" stealing becomes "taking some of the perks that I have earned by all my hard work;" selfishness becomes "standing up for my rights;" pride becomes "I deserve this." You see, these people don't deny any wrongdoing, but they downplay the sins that are there, and they redefine them as weaknesses or struggles or even as good, but what they will not say is that these things are acts of rebellion against their rightful King, acts that deserve His eternal wrath.

Often, the person who makes the claim in verse 10, lives an outwardly good-looking life. Often, he or she is religious, outwardly moral; they just don't think they need saving or forgiving. They're happy to attach themselves to Jesus and to the church because Jesus is their moral hero; He's like the perfect moralist, and so they tend to think of Jesus not as a savior to deliver them from their sins, but as an example or pattern to follow.

They're like the religious leaders of Jesus's time, Mark, chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, "When the scribes and the Pharisees saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples. 'Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?' And hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a (doctor), but those who are sick.'" Now don't misunderstand, Jesus wasn't saying there are some people who are spiritually well, and they don't need my help. No, He's saying, "I didn't come to help people who are terminally ill but are convinced that they're okay; I only came to help those who acknowledge their desperate condition." And then He says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." So, the false Christian claims that he has not sinned; he denies sin in one of those ways I just gave you.

But notice verse 10, his true condition, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him (That is, God.) a liar." If we respond to sin by claiming that we're not sinners, that we don't need a Savior, then we make God out to be a liar. Now, if you think you're a moral person who really doesn't need God's help and forgiveness, doesn't need to be saved, then let me just have you listen to the clear testimony of Scripture.

Let me start by pulling out a few passages that talk about all of us, without exception, are sinners. Here (are) just a few, 1 Kings 8:46, "...there is no man who does not sin." Proverbs 20, verse 9, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from...sin.'" Ecclesiastes 9:3, "...the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives." Isaiah 53:6, "All of us (comprehensively) like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way (no exceptions)." Isaiah 64:6, "...all of us have become like one who is unclean." And then, of course there's Romans 3, verses 10 to 12, listen to the 'none's' and 'not even one's.'

As it is written,

THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.

And then there's Romans 3:23, "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So, Scripture clearly teaches that all people commit sins, but Scripture also teaches that all believers sin.

Listen to Psalm 130, verse 3, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?" Lord, if you kept track of sins and you treated me like those sins deserve, who could stand before you? The answer is "No one! We would all be swept away." Psalm 143:2, "...do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous."

Romans 7, verses 18 and 19, this is the Apostle Paul:

...I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not ...but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

So, all people, all believers, commit sins and there are hundreds of other verses that teach exactly the same thing. Get it in your mind, you are a sinner, and you have committed sins, and you continually commit sins, and so do I. There is only one exception; He's found in verse 1, "Jesus Christ the righteous," Jesus Christ the righteous; He's the only one.

So, to deny that you've sinned, either denying it outright, redefining sins, or downplaying sins, is to deny those passages, and, therefore, it is to call God a liar. By the way, notice this isn't simply saying that God was wrong about this, that God lied about this one thing, but it's to say that, in His character, God is a liar. Why? Because God has said so much about human sinfulness; that's the whole point of the gospel. It's essentially making God out to be the devil, because John 8:44 says, "...the devil...is the father of (liars) and lies." When someone denies or downplays his sin, He is calling God a liar.

He's also, notice, showing that he's not a Christian. Verse 10 goes on to say, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." If you deny or downplay your sin, you make it patently clear that His Word, His Word, collectively, and probably here

especially the gospel, isn't in you; you're not a Christian if that's your response to sin. A false Christian denies his sin or downplays his sins.

But notice, this brings us to verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2, and I'm going to give you a longer statement because this is a little more complex and we'll break it apart. A true Christian admits and hates his sins, pursues holiness, and trusts the work of Christ alone as the only solution for his sins. Let me say that again, "A true Christian admits and hates his sins, pursues holiness, and trusts the work of Christ alone as the only solution for his sins."

Now, we're not going to get through both verses in the rest of our time, but let's get started. There's so much here.

Verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Notice that expression, "My little children," it translates a word that occurs seven times in the New Testament, always in John's writings. Jesus used it for His disciples in John 13:33, and John obviously loved it and adopted it for himself. It's a term of endearment from this aging Apostle to those who are younger in the faith and those for whom he feels a great weight of responsibility. So clearly then, by using that expression in the beginning of verse 2, these two verses are addressed to genuine Christians.

John says a true believer and now let's kind of break that longer statement apart and look at the components. First of all, he says a true believer admits and hates his sin and pursues holiness. Now back in verse 10 of chapter 1, we saw that a false Christian denies that he commits sins by redefining them or minimizing them. But here in verse 1, we learn that the true Christian hates his sin. Why do I say that? Because how does John the Apostle feel about sin in those to whom he is writing? He says, "I don't want you to sin." All John is doing is reflecting the heart of every true Christian. Every true believer feels the same way about his sin that here John feels, and John puts it. He hates his sin. A true Christian has the same desire for himself that John has for us, "I am writing these things to you."

Now, “these things” there refers back to what he has written in verses 5 through 10, of the previous chapter. “...I am writing these things to you (about the believer’s new relationship to sin) so that you may not sin.” Now, why would John say that? He doesn’t want us to misunderstand his comments in chapter 1 as some sort of an excuse to take our sin lightly. It’s true, verse 7, that, “...if we (are walking) in the Light...the blood of Jesus His Son... (keeps on cleansing) us from all sin.” It’s true, verse 9, that, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and (just) to forgive us our sins.” It’s true that sin continues to reside in our flesh and will until we’re with the Lord, verse 8, unlike the claim of the false Christians. And it’s true that we will still commit sins as a believer, unlike the claim of the false Christian in verse 10.

All of those things are true, but John’s purpose in telling us those things was not to make us more comfortable with our sins or to make us take our sin lightly. John’s real purpose, he states here, literally, if you take the tense of the verb, you could translate it like this, “I’m writing these things to you that you may not commit even one act of sin.” In other words, he’s saying, “If you’re a true Christian, you don’t want to sin. Sin is a reality you have to deal with, but it’s not like it’s something you desire or want to participate in. You hate it and you want to be done with sin; you want never to commit sin again.

Go back to Romans, chapter 6. This is exactly what Paul said, you remember? In fact, start back in chapter 5, verse 20, as he finishes talking about Christ as our representative and He stood in our place as Adam did, verse 20, he says this, “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

In other words, His mercy is more. True! But Paul realizes as soon as he says that that there might be some who take that and twist it and misunderstand his point. And so, notice chapter 6, verse 1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” Well, listen, it doesn’t really matter, grace covers, His mercy is more, let’s just do whatever we want. No, that’s not the spirit. Verse 2, “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” He says, “Listen, if you’re a Christian, there has been a radical change in you; you are not the person you once were. You died; the person you used to be died when you came to Christ. You were born again; you were given new life; you were made a new creation; given a new

nature, and you don't want to sin. You want to live the new life that represents the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's what you want!"

1 Peter 1, verse 14:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the holy one who called you (Listen to this.), be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

That's the heart of a true Christian. Yes, a true Christian sins; but when he sins, he confesses it, he turns from it, he wants never to commit that sin again, he hates it, and he desires to be like Jesus Christ. That's the heart of a true Christian.

Now, go back to 1 John, chapter 2, verse 1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." John obviously doesn't mean that he expects sinless perfection; he's just said that false Christians deny acts of sin, true Christians actually confess sin every day of their lives. So, he doesn't mean sinless perfection! What he does mean is this, Christians don't deny or excuse their sin; instead, they hate it, and they desire not to sin; they desire not to sin once; they desire to be holy; that's their goal, their mindset, their attitude. And that becomes a reality; remember chapter 1, verse 7, the true Christian experiences a decreasing pattern of sin in his life, an increasing pattern of righteousness. So, a true Christian admits and hates his sin and pursues holiness.

And secondly, he trusts Christ, as we continue to break this larger statement apart, he trusts Christ and His work for his sins. That runs from the middle of verse 1 through verse 2. And this verse-and-a-half, actually, they touch on two aspects of the work of Christ. When you sin, your mind goes to Christ; your mind goes to what He is accomplishing and has accomplished for you, that's what should happen.

First of all, we trust His intercession as our high priest, His intercession as our high priest. Verse 1 says, "...And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

righteous.” Here is a word of hope for us who are conscious of our sin, conscious of our failure, conscious of our unworthiness. “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father.”

Let me let you in on a little bit of Satan's deception. I know you've experienced this because I've experienced this; this is what all believers experience. Before you sin, Satan comes and he says, “Listen, this is really not that big a deal. It won't hurt, do it once, you'll enjoy it. You move on, there are no issues; it's a little thing;” and then you choose to sin. And what does Satan say then? He comes back to you, and he says, “Oh my word! I cannot believe how badly you blew it. Don't you dare go back to God. You are the last in the world He wants to see. Don't you even think about going back and repenting now. That's just easy. You need to live under little penance for a while, that's what you need to do.” This is how Satan works.

Lloyd-Jones puts it this way, “The devil is constantly present; he is the adversary of our souls. And if we find ourselves having sinned, he comes to us and whispers, ‘You have no right to go back to God. How can God ever forgive you?’”

Well, this passage is for us. Notice what he writes, “And if anyone sins.” Now, this is clearly adversative, so it's better to translate this word, and it can be translated, “but.” So, let me read it, “My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone sins...” And the Greek verb tense here points to individual acts of sin, not a continuing pattern of life like we saw back in chapter 1, verse 6. Instead, this verse and chapter 1, verse 9, these two verses together, make it clear that acts of sin are part of every Christian's experience. And I love what he writes. Notice what John says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate.

As an 80-year-old plus Apostle, John includes himself with those who sin and those who need an advocate. Literally, the Greek text says this, “If anyone sins, we are having an Advocate.” In other words, this is Christ's constant activity in heaven. But what is an advocate? Well, the Greek word is *parakletos*, which appears only in John's writings, here in this letter and four times in his gospel. In John 14 through 16, those chapters in the upper room discourse, it occurs four times where it's translated ‘helper,’ and every time it's a reference to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word is a compound word that literally means ‘to call to one's side.’ It came to mean

‘someone called in for your aid, your help, an advocate, one who pleads the cause of another.’ Christ is explicitly called our *‘parakletos,’* our helper, here in 1 John 2:1, but he implies that he is in a statement he makes in John 14:16, there in the upper room discourse. He says, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (that is a helper in addition to me who will) be with you forever.” So, we have two advocates: The Holy Spirit, according to Romans 8:26, “...the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words,” and our Lord, Romans 8:34, “...Christ Jesus...is at the right hand of God...(and) intercedes for us.” We have two intercessors.

Now, this word ‘advocate’ here has, or it has often, and it does here, a legal connotation. That’s led some to refer to Jesus as our divine defense attorney. And that’s okay as far as it goes; I’m not convinced that’s the best direction to go because that language implies an adversarial relationship between us and God, and Jesus has to be our defense attorney. In addition, this word, when it’s used in secular Greek in legal contexts, doesn’t refer almost always to a defense attorney; instead, it refers to a friend, a friend who testifies in court on your behalf. That’s Jesus, He is our advocate, He is a friend who speaks up on our behalf.

Now, when this word refers to Christ, the word ‘advocate,’ it really refers to one specific activity: His work as our High Priest. Do you understand that Jesus right now is continuing to serve on your behalf; He serves in heaven as your High Priest? He continually represents us before the Father because His priesthood is an eternal priesthood, Hebrews 7, verse 23, and following.

The former priests, (of the Old Covenant) on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 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.

Jesus will never stop being your High Priest. And, oh by the way, His priestly representation is for His own, John 17, verse 9. Jesus is praying in his high priestly prayer there and says, “I ask on...behalf (of my disciples); I do not ask about half of the world, but of those whom you have given Me; for they are Yours.” His advocacy, His intercession is for His own.

Now, let me just ask you honestly, “Do you think,” I’m not saying this is your theology, I’m more saying, “Is this how you practically think, that what Jesus did at the cross was really important and nothing right now is going on that’s that important?” Obviously, the cross is the center of everything, we’ll talk about that in verse 2 the next time we study this passage, but I don’t want you underrate what Christ is doing now.

In fact, listen to Hebrews 7:25 again, “...He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him.” How can Christ ensure that your salvation is forever? Here it is, “Since He always lives to make intercession for them.” The primary ministry of Jesus’s priesthood is intercession, and that’s the heart of what we’re talking about when we say, “He’s your advocate, He is your High Priest who intercedes for you.”

But what do we mean when we say, “Christ intercedes for us?” Well, let me just give you a little list, and I’m not going to be able to go into them, but I hope you will jot them down, I hope you’ll think about these and meditate on them. Here’s what Christ does in His intercession for you as a High Priest. Number one, He entered the true Holy of Holies in heaven and presented His perfect sacrifice to the Father. Hebrews 9:24, “...Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now (Listen to this.) to appear in the presence of God for us,” now to appear in the presence of God for us. You see Christ’s constant presence before God as the sacrifice for our sins is in itself part of His intercession for us. Because, by His very presence, He constantly reminds the Father that He made perfect provision for our forgiveness through His sacrifice.

John Calvin writes, “Christ’s intercession is the continual application of His death to our salvation.” Charles Wesley, in a hymn that we’ve begun to sing again with a new melody, puts it this way,

Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary.

They (That is the wounds.) pour effectual prayers. They strongly plead for me.

“Forgive him, Oh, forgive.” they cry,

“Forgive him, Oh, forgive.” they cry,

“Nor let that ransomed sinner die!”

That's Christ's intercession.

Number two, He prays for the eventual salvation of all the elect. John 17:20, again in His High Priestly Prayer that is recorded for us in Scripture, He prays this, “I do not ask on behalf of these (That is the Eleven.) alone, but for those also who (will) believe in Me through their word.”

That's us! Jesus was praying for those who hadn't been born yet, for those who hadn't come to faith yet. Jesus prays for all the elect whether they have believed yet or not.

Acts 18:9 and 10, “...the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, (He says.), “...go on speaking...do not be silent...I am with you...for I have many people in this city.” This is before they trusted in Christ, before they came to genuine faith. The Lord says, “I have many people in this city,” so you keep on preaching because the Father is going to draw them to Himself through your preaching. So, He prays for the eventual salvation of the elect.

Number three, He defends us against all charges Satan brings against us. This gets to the heart of 1 John 2:1. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is described as, “the accuser of our brethren,” listen to this, “...he who accuses them before our God day and night.” You understand that Satan shows up in heaven, just like you read in Job 1, and he accuses Christians to the Father again and again and again, and boy does he have material to present his case. But because Christ intercedes for us, the Father will never receive those accusations! Romans 8:33 and 34:

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies (Who declared us right with Him through the work of Christ.); who is the one who (can) condemn? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

In other words, Jesus prays for our forgiveness from our daily sins so that those sins will never condemn us, and nothing Satan says about us will ever stick. The Father simply will not receive it.

Number four, He prays for the sanctification of all true believers. Again, back to John 17, verse 17, He prays, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” He prayed for the sanctification

of the Eleven, and He prays for your sanctification and mine, that we would grow in holiness and likeness to Him.

Number five, He prays for and supplies grace for us in our trials and temptations, He prays for and supplies grace for us in our trials and temptations. Hebrews 2:18, "...since He Himself was tempted in that which He...suffered, He is also able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." But I love Hebrews 4, in fact, look at it with me, look back a few pages to Hebrews, chapter 4. You need to be familiar with this passage. Verse 14:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are.

Stop there for a moment, "tempted in all things as we are." That doesn't mean Jesus faced every single possible temptation to sin; what it does mean is He faced temptations in every category you face temptation, "... (and) yet without sin." "Therefore," and I love this verse. How do you respond to that knowledge? "Therefore let us to draw near with confidence, (When? When we are tempted and when we sin.) let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy (the mercy of forgiveness, the mercy of help) and find grace to help in time of need"

Again, when we sin, Satan comes to us and says, "Don't you even think about showing your face before God; He doesn't want to see you, you need a little time to pass." If you haven't heard that lie, you're probably not a Christian. I've heard it many times!

But what's our response to be? Verse 16, "...let us draw near with confidence to the throne of God's grace (where grace is dispensed), so that we may receive (His) mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Why? Because of our High Priest who makes it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

Number six, He prays for our spiritual protection and perseverance. The best example of this is Jesus's prayer for Peter in Luke 22, verses 31 and 32. You know what was about to happen; he was about to be tempted to betray our Lord, and he did. But listen to what Jesus says to Peter, Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat." In other words, Satan wants to destroy your faith, Peter, and guess what, he wants to destroy your faith too; he wants to destroy my faith. So, how does that not happen? Now our Lord goes on to say this, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail." Christian, you're going to make it; your faith is not going to be destroyed because Christ is interceding for you; He is praying for you to ensure that you will make it all the way to glory.

Number seven, He sanctifies our prayers, worship, and all our spiritual activities to make them acceptable to God. You say, "That needs to happen?" Absolutely that needs to happen! I love what one of the Puritans said, he said, "Even our repentance needs to be repented of." That's so true. Everything we do has sin all mixed in with it; our motives are always distorted, some good some bad; our hearts are never fully free from sin. So, even our worship, our best moment this morning. Do you believe that the worship you have offered to God, this morning in this place with God's people, is truly worthy of the God that we worship? The answer is, "Absolutely not!" And neither is mine. So how does God receive it? And the answer is, "the intercession of Jesus Christ."

Listen to 1 Peter 2:5, "...you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house (The picture here is of us as Christians together framing a temple; we are like a temple, you and I, the people of God; we are like a temple in which worship happens to God. And then he says this.) ...to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God." How can you and I offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God? Listen to the next phrase, "...through Jesus Christ." You see what He did, even this morning as we worshiped Him, and even in the study of His Word is He's interceding on our behalf before the Father. He's saying, "Father, they're mine, they're yours, and, yes, they're still fraught with sin, their motives are still mixed; yes, they still don't worship with their whole heart as they ought; they still don't get how great and how powerful and how merciful and how good you are and, therefore, worshiping you as you deserve, but they belong to us; receive the worship that they bring through me because of me."

Number eight, He prays for the eventual glorification of His people. John 17:24, at the end of the great High Priestly Prayer, He says, “Father. I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world.” Jesus prays, “Father, bring them all the way to glory! I want you to save them, I want you to make them like me, and I want you to bring them in my presence so that they’re always with me, always praising, always reflecting my glory in their moral characters.”

Christian, you’re going to make it because Christ is interceding, that you will one day be just like Him and in His presence forever! That’s His prayer, and here’s the really good news, as you look at those eight ways Christ intercedes, the really good news is that what Jesus prays for always happens! John 11:42, He says to the Father, “...You always hear Me”; You always hear Me!” God always answers the prayers of His Son!

So, Christian, coming back to 1 John 2, in this moment as you sit here, in every moment of your life, and don't miss this, this is the context of 1 John 2:1, at the moment that you have sinned, at that moment, you have an Advocate with the Father; you have one interceding on your behalf in all of the ways that we’ve just learned together, One who constantly intercedes on your behalf.

Before the throne of God above, I have a sure and perfect plea; a great High Priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on His hands; my name is written on His heart; I know that while in heaven He stands, no tongue can bid me, “Thence depart.”

That's our High Priest who intercedes and that, friends, is how true Christians respond to their sins. They don't deny them, they admit them, but they hate them. They don't want to commit them anymore; they want to grow in holiness, they want to put sin off, and they trust solely in the work of Jesus Christ.

Next week or next time, we'll see His work of propitiation as a substitute, but today, His work as a High Priest in His intercession. That is our hope!

Let's pray together. Our Father, forgive us, forgive us for thinking so badly of you, for believing Satan's lies when you have told us so much about your mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. Thank you that we not only have a substitute, One who satisfied your justice in our place, but we also have a High Priest who constantly intercedes on our behalf. And even now, at this moment, He stands before you, speaking for us. Thank you for the ways we discovered that He represents us before you. But Father, thank you most of all for what John the Apostle has reminded us in this passage, that at the very time of our greatest need, when we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. Lord, help us when we sin not to believe Satan's lie, not to linger and stay away, thinking that we somehow have to earn our way back into your favor, but help us to come through our Advocate, knowing that you will receive us, that when we come to your throne of grace, we will find mercy and grace to help in time of need; not because of us, but because of Him.

And Father, I pray for those who may be here this morning who are false Christians, who are downplaying or denying their sins. Lord, help them see that truth this morning, break through the veneer that they have put in front of themselves, and Lord, even blinded themselves with, and help them to see the reality and to truly come to you through your Son in repentance and faith for the salvation that He offers. I pray it in Jesus's name, Amen.