

1 John
The Believer's New Relationship to Sin (Part 4)
I John 1:5 – 2:6
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This morning, we're back in John's first letter. When I was at "Grace To You," for the sixteen years that I served there, there were a number of occasions for my regular interaction with those who listened to the radio program. One of those interactions was over a five-year period from 1993 to 1998. It was one that stood out to me because, for those five years, I corresponded with a man who was sitting on death row here in Texas. His name was Johnny Pyles. Two weeks before his execution back in 1998, he wrote me this letter. I want to read, not all of it, just a couple of excerpts. I believe this man came to genuine faith in Christ. I served in prison ministry when I was in college and early seminary, and I had the chance to interact with a lot of people who claimed jailhouse conversions. Many of them were not legitimate; they got out and nothing had really changed. But this was a man I believe was truly changed, and you can tell it by the way he owns his own sin and guilt.

Listen to what he wrote me; this is May 26, 1998:

Dear Tom,

I wanted to write and let you know that I have an execution date set for June 15th. (Two weeks after this letter. He went on to talk about the many people who had ministered to him, some living, some dead. He talked about the Puritans. He's thankful for the sovereignty of God, for reformed theology. He goes on to say.) We have a Bible study here on death row, and I have had the opportunity to teach it a few times. (And he said.) I would ask for prayer for the Bible study that the

Lord would bless it with a man who would teach sound doctrine. (He goes on to ask me to pray as well for the mother of his victim. He had killed a deputy sheriff while he was committing a burglary, and he asked prayer for the deputy's mother. He's convinced, in his letter, that she's harboring a great deal of hatred and bitterness toward him, and he says.) Pray that she will not find peace in my death, but that she will find it in the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord.

When I consider the effects of sin on others, I think of what my sin caused in her life. I can only thank our Lord and God for the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ. I know that the consequences of my sin have not been removed; I don't like the idea of being executed, but I'm anticipating the event with great joy for it is a date of departure with heaven as the destination, and there I will be in the very presence of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Love, Johnny

(He finishes with a P.S.) In heaven we will meet.

In his last public statement on the day of his execution, Johnny expressed his deepest regret to the family of the man whom he killed; he asked their forgiveness, and he shared his faith in Jesus Christ. He finished that public statement with a very interesting observation. He said this, he said, "Neither human nor divine justice can be satisfied without my death;" neither human nor divine justice can be satisfied except by my death.

That is the spiritual point that we learn in the text we come to this morning. In 1 John, chapter 2, that divine justice can only be satisfied by either our death, or the death of someone in our place.

Just to remind you of the context of this letter, John wrote this letter to give us assurance that we're truly Christians; and, in the letter as a whole, he presents three recurring tests of eternal life. And he does so in three movements; so, these three tests come back in three movements. All three tests recurring in each of those movements. We're studying the first movement that runs from chapter 1, verse 5, through chapter 2, verse 27. And in this first cycle, the first test is this, "You can know that you are truly a Christian, you can know that you have eternal life because you now have a new relationship to sin." You can look at your life and you can evaluate the legitimacy of your profession of faith in Christ by your current relationship to sin; it ought to be different than before you came to know Jesus Christ.

Now, this test is based, as I've noted for you, on two fundamental biblical truths. The first is found in verse 5, and that is, "God's Essential Nature of Holiness." "God is Light, and in Him...is no darkness at all." God is perfectly holy, and there's not even a hint of sin with God. And that produces a second reality. When you truly come to know this God who is Light; there is, in the true believer, "A New Relationship to Sin." That begins in chapter 1, verse 6, and runs down through chapter 2, verse 6.

Now, the believer's new relationship to sin is shown in several ways. We've seen three of them so far. First of all, it's shown by the pattern of his life in verses 6 and 7, "Is he walking as a

pattern in darkness, that is in sin, or is he walking as a pattern in the light?" Doesn't mean he is perfect, but what characterizes his life? More light or more dark? You can look at the pattern of a person's life and see if they have this new relationship to sin.

Secondly, in verses 8 and 9, this new relationship to sin is shown by an admission of inherent sinfulness. I'm not talking about acts of sin here; rather, were talking about the willing admission that I am a sinner, and that's why I sin.

Before Christ, it's the admission of what we've studied together, what theologians call total depravity, that every part of my being has been affected by sin, and I can't operate without expressing that because I am inherently sinful. As David said, "I was conceived in sin, and it was in sin that my mother gave birth to me," meaning I've just been a sinner since the beginning. When you come to Christ, you receive a new nature, but you still have your sinful flesh, and true believers admit that; they admit that sin is still an ever-present reality with them. But they don't tolerate it. Instead, verse 9, they confess that sin. So, they admit that they are inherently sinful; and when they sin, they confess their sin, seeking God's forgiveness and its granted, verse 9.

Their new relationship to sin is shown, thirdly, by an admission of actual sins. Now, we're talking about actual acts, or thoughts, or words that are sinful. Let's read it together, 1 John, chapter 1, and I'll just read verses 10 through chapter 2, verse 2, because this is where we're learning about the admission of our actual sins. You follow along as I read it, 1John 1:10:

If we say that we have not sinned, (that is committed specific acts of sin) we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

My little children, I'm 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.

Now, we started studying this last time we were in 1 John together. Let me just remind you that we discovered in chapter 1, verse 10, that a false Christian, that is a person who says, "Yes, I am a Christian," but really isn't. A false Christian denies or downplays his sins. And we learned at the beginning of chapter 2, that a true Christian, one who's genuinely been converted, and this is long but we're breaking apart into parts, so just stay with me, a true Christian admits and hates his sins, pursues holiness, and trusts the work of Christ alone as the only solution for his sins. That's the message of the first two verses of chapter 2.

So again, we're taking it apart and so far, we've considered this: He admits and hates his sins and pursues holiness. The false Christian denies he commits sins by redefining them, "Well, it's not really sin. It's more like a weakness, it's a struggle; it's not my fault, it's somebody else's fault."

But in verse 1, of chapter 2, we learn, "A True Christian Hates His Sins." He has the same desire for himself that John has for his readers. Notice what John writes, "...I am writing these

things to you so that you may not sin.” John says, “Listen, don't misunderstand; the things I wrote at the end of the first chapter where I said, ‘You're **going to** sin, and when you sin, confess it and seek God's forgiveness.’” He said, “Don't think I'm encouraging you to think lightly about your sin, or to in some way become comfortable with sin. No! I don't want you to sin at all!”

That's John the Apostle; that's his desire for us; and if you're a true Christian, that's your desire as well. You see, true Christians sin, but what distinguishes true Christians and false Christians is true Christians sin, but they hate that sin, they don't want it in their lives, they don't want to sin. Whereas false Christians are frankly pretty comfortable with many sins; oh, they may want to get rid of one or two that sort of embarrass them or make them uncomfortable, but they're pretty comfortable with the rest of it. Not so with true Christians; they desire not to sin, to be holy. That's their goal; that's their mindset; that's their attitude. So, a true Christian admits and hates sin and pursues holiness.

Now secondly, “The True Christian Trusts Christ and His Work for His sins;” this is the message in the middle of verse 1 through verse 2. He trusts Christ and His work for his sins. This verse-and-a-half touch on two aspects of the work of Christ. When you sin, you should fall back on these realities about Christ. First of all, “We Trust in His Intercession as Our High Priest,” His intercession as our High Priest. Notice verse 1, “If anyone sins (And we do.), we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Literally, the Greek text says, “If anyone sins, we are having an Advocate.” This is Christ’s constant activity in heaven. He is an Advocate, He’s a friend who speaks up on our behalf. This refers, of course, as we noted, to Christ’s work as our High Priest, and the primary focus of His work as our High Priest today, is His intercession. Romans 8:34, “Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, (Listen to this.) who also intercedes for us.” Hebrews 7:25, “...He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

So, what exactly is Christ interceding on your behalf for? I noted these last time, and I’m not **going** to develop them; I just want to remind you of them because we need to finish this thought together. So, here’s the nature of Jesus’s intercession; here’s how He intercedes. He entered the true Holy of Holies and presented His perfect sacrifice on your behalf to the Father. He prays for the eventual salvation of all the elect. He defends us against all the charges that Satan brings. He prays for our sanctification. He prays for and supplies grace for us in our trials and temptations. He prays for our spiritual protection and our perseverance; you’re **going** to make it into His presence because of the intercession of Jesus. He sanctifies or sets apart, makes holy, our prayers, our worship, and all of our spiritual activities to make them acceptable to God. And He prays for the eventual glorification of all of His people; not one of His people will fail to make it to glory. That’s what He intercedes.

Now, before we leave this point, and the reason I wanted to remind you that is, I want us to consider what does He argue? I mean, think about this, if you’re Christ and you’re our Advocate in heaven, when we sin, what does He argue? He doesn’t say, “Oh, they’re not

guilty!” He can't say that because we are when we sin. So, what does He argue? Let me give you the arguments of His intercession. Here is the basis of His arguing with the Father for our forgiveness.

They're right here in this text. First of all, He argues His own relationship with God. Notice verse 1 says, "...if anyone sins, we (are having) an Advocate with the Father." That same expression 'with the Father' occurred back in chapter 1, verse 2. Our Advocate enjoys an eternal relationship with God, that's the point. This preposition 'with' here is not the normal Greek preposition for 'with.' It literally means 'to or toward.' It's used in John 1:1 to describe Christ. It's used in 1 John 1:2, to describe Christ. It has the idea of face-to-face; it means He has an intimate relationship with God. Well, there's a good starting point for His being our Advocate, right? He's not like a stranger to God; He has an intimate relationship with God; He is God, He is one of the members of the Trinity and can appeal on our behalf. There's a great argument for intercession.

There's a second argument that he presents, and that is, "our relationship with God." Not only is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Father of all believers. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven." So, Christ, our Advocate, reminds the Father that we are no longer strangers; we're no longer His enemies, but we are, in fact, His adopted children; it's with the Father. John Stott writes:

Once the sinner has been justified by God his Judge, he has entered the family of God and becomes related to God as his Father. If he should sin, he does not need another

justification from the Divine Judge; he's a child of God. He needs his Father's forgiveness.

Listen, Christian, do you see out how big this is? When you sin and when you feel like you have no right to go back to God, remember that Christ has become our Advocate, and in Christ, God has become and always will be our Father! That's His argument.

A third argument is “Christ's Salvation of Us,” Christ’s salvation of us. Notice again verse 1, “...if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus.” Of course, that's our Lord’s human name. He became man; He became one of us, and therefore, He understands us. But there's more here than that. Jesus, as you know, is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua or ‘*Yeshua*,’ which means, ‘Yahweh saves.’ And Jesus was given this name by Gabriel, ultimately by God, through Gabriel.

You remember when Gabriel appeared to Mary at the enunciation, that I hope to study in a couple weeks, he said to her, “Name the boy ‘Jesus,’” but he doesn't explain why. But later when he appears to Joseph, recorded in Matthew 1, he explains. He says, “Joseph, call Him ‘Jesus,’ (Here’s Matthew 1:21.) call him ‘Yahweh saves,’ for He (this boy) will save His people from their sins.” This is what He can appeal to in the presence of God. Christ reminds the Father that “He is the Savior, and that I am one of His, one of His people whom He came to save.” There's a great argument for forgiveness.

Number four, “He Argues the Plan of God.” Again, verse 1 says, “...if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.” Now, I think most of you understand that Christ is not

Jesus's last name; it's a title, it's *'christos,'* it's the Greek translation of the Hebrew, *'hamashiach,'* or 'Messiah.' He is 'the Anointed One' is what it means. The One God anointed for this very purpose.

In other words, he can say, "God, this is your plan; you anointed me to accomplish this, I am the *'christos,'* I am the Messiah, I am the Anointed One." Lloyd-Jones writes, "Comfort yourself in this thought, the Advocate has been appointed by the Judge." Let me read that again, "Comfort yourselves in this thought, the Advocate has been appointed by the Judge." The Father, in His everlasting love, has Himself set His Son apart and anointed Him for this task.

You see, God isn't reluctant to forgive you, Christian, and Christ is sort of trying to argue Him into it. This was the Father's plan; this was His plan, and Christ was "the Anointed One to carry it out." That's why even John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He (sent) His only begotten Son." Or, you have 2 Corinthians 5:19, "...God (the Father) was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Galatians 4:4:

When the fullness of time (had come), God sent forth His Son, (to be) born of a woman,
(to be) born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who (are) under the Law.

It's the plan of God; and when we sin, Christ can argue that He is the Messiah, the One God appointed to accomplish this purpose.

Number five, "He argues His Own Righteousness." "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Of course, that's referring to the fact that Jesus lived here on this planet in a place you can still visit, for thirty-three years, and for those thirty-three

years, He never sinned; He never failed to love God perfectly; He never failed to love others as He loves Himself; He never failed to obey God in one thought, one attitude, one word, or one act! Thirty-three years! He is the Righteous. Hebrews 4:15 says, "... (He was) tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

Now, why is this important? Well, think about it. When we sin, this One has the very thing we lack, the righteousness required to enter God's presence; and in justification, which is the heart of the gospel, we are declared righteous with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You see, if you've believed in Jesus Christ, it's not just a matter that your sins have been forgiven, they have been, but that's not all that's happened, that's only half the story. Your sins were credited to Christ; and on the cross, Christ paid for those sins so that the debt is fully paid! But then God does something amazing; He takes the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, "Jesus Christ the Righteous," and He takes those thirty-three years of perfect obedience, and He credits them to your account, and forever treats you as if you had lived Jesus's perfect life. That's the gospel; He is the righteous, and He can argue that before the Father.

Number six, "He Can Argue the Results of His Sacrifice." This is the word, 'propitiation.' "He Himself," verse two says, "is the propitiation for our sins." Christ reminds the Father when we sin and we're confessing that sin and Christ is interceding on our behalf, He reminds the Father that He Himself died in that believing sinner's place, that He Himself suffered the awful wrath of God that we deserve, and therefore there's none left for us. Romans 8:1, "...There is... therefore now (What?) no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Now, we're **going** to look at this concept more in a moment, so I'll just leave it there for now. But I don't want you to

miss the fact that Christ intercedes for us, and we can be confident that the Father hears Him because these are His arguments; this is what He argues before the Father.

Now, what do you do with this, Christian; how do you handle what we've just learned together? Well remember, it's when we sin, "If anyone sins," and we do, and we come to confess those sins, what do you do with those arguments? You do two things and I do this all the time, and I would encourage you to do the same. Number one, remind yourself, remind yourself that you have an Advocate with the Father, and that He is making these very arguments on your behalf. Why do you do that? Because, what happens when we've sinned? Maybe I'm the only one here like this, but when I sin, I get this sense of, "I'm the last person in the world God wants to see; He doesn't want to see my face! How can I sin again against His goodness, against His grace, against His mercy, against all that He's done for me, both temporally and eternally?" Well, remind yourself, Christian, when you're tempted to think that way, that you have an Advocate with the Father, and this is what He argues, this is what He presents, and so you can come, you can come boldly to the throne of grace to receive the help you need in your time of need. So, remind yourself.

And secondly, what do you do with this? Remind the Father in your prayer of confession. I do this all the time as well. "Lord, I don't deserve to be heard, I'm not here because you need to hear me again. In fact, you have every reason to turn me away. But it's not on the basis of who I am or what I have done that I come to seek your forgiveness; it's on the basis of who Christ is and what He's done. And that even now, He takes my terrible repentance, even my repentance, Father, needs to be repented of, and He takes it and through His intercession, He makes it

acceptable to you and you receive me, and you forgive me even though my repentance is so far from what it ought to be. He is the Savior, He is the Anointed One, He is the Righteous One, and it's only because of who He is that I come seeking your forgiveness.” This is how you respond when you sin. So, when we sin, the first aspect of Christ's work that we must rehearse and trust and depend on is His intercession as our High Priest. That happens, believer, every moment of your life.

The second aspect of the work of Christ that we must trust in when we sin is this, “His Propitiation as Our High Priest,” His propitiation as our high priest. This is the message of verse 2, “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” True Christians continue trusting entirely in the work of Jesus Christ as we deal with every day the reality of our sins.

This word ‘propitiation’ is such a crucial concept. In fact, I'll be honest with you, as a teacher, I'm always faced with the challenge, “How much of this should I explain now, versus just sort of briefly explain it and keep moving,” because I always feel that tension of, “I want to make sure we understand what the Scripture is teaching; at the same time, I don't want to so drag that your dragging with me, you know.” So, how do I determine that? I have to say that I just could not leave this passage without making sure that we spend some time on this issue, because, folks, this is the gospel, this is the heart of our faith. If you don't understand this, you don't even understand the gospel. And so, we need to do this. So, let's look at what it means that, “He is the propitiation for our sins.”

Let's begin by considering the very meaning of the concept; the meaning of propitiation. Verse 2 says, "and He Himself is (Notice this.) the propitiation for our sins." He is the propitiation for our sins. Now, that is not a word that you probably, you know, use in your texts, probably not a word you use in everyday language, but it's a crucial biblical word and we need to understand it. The Greek word that's translated 'propitiation' here is '*hilasterion, hilasterion.*' In all of its forms, it occurs only six times in the New Testament, and here they are just so you have them for your own notes. First of all, the noun, '*hilasmos,*' which occurs in two places; here in our text 1 John 2:2, and in chapter 4, verse 10. Secondly, you have a different version of the noun, '*hilasterion,*' *hilasterion*' is what I mean, and this is in Hebrews 9:5, and Romans 3:25, and Lord willing, next time we'll look at Romans 3:25 in a little more detail because it's crucial to our understanding of this concept.

And then finally, you have the verb, '*hiloskomai, hiloskomai.*' Now this occurs in two places, in Hebrews 2:17 where it says it was necessary for Him "to be made like his brethren in all things...that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest... (that He might) make propitiation for the sins of the people."

But the other one isn't as clear; in Luke, chapter 18, verse 13, this is the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee. You remember Jesus said these two men go up to the temple to pray, and you know, the Pharisee is all full of himself, and thanks God for how good he is. The tax collector, on the other hand, won't even lift up his eyes to heaven, but he beats his chest, and you remember what he says? In English, it's translated like this, "Be merciful to me the sinner." Well, the word 'be merciful' is actually this word. What he literally says, now remember when

he's praying at the temple in Jerusalem; people went up to the temple two times a day. They went up at the time of the morning sacrifice and the afternoon sacrifice to pray; you see that in the book of Acts. And so, here he is at the time of the sacrifice, the animal is being killed, its life is being offered for the sins of the people, and what this tax collector says in Jesus's story is, "God be propitiated to me, the sinner. Be satisfied, may your justice and wrath against my sins be satisfied with the sacrifice that's being offered right now inside the temple," (Paraphrased). So, those are the only occurrences of this word.

But, despite the number of occurrences in the New Testament, this word group is foundational to our faith. If you don't understand it as I said, you don't understand the gospel. What does it mean? Well, the word 'propitiation' and the word group I've just shown you, means 'the satisfaction or turning away of God's wrath, the satisfaction of or the turning away of God's wrath.' That is what it means in secular Greek when you find it in the secular Greek writers; it's what it means in the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was translated before the time of our Lord, a hundred to two-hundred years before Christ; it's the Bible that was used predominantly in the New Testament era, the Septuagint. That's the Hebrew Scriptures translated into the Greek. This word and this word group is used often in the Septuagint.

One of those uses is very enlightening; it's used of the mercy seat. Now, you have to remind yourself here of the structure of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. There was a place inside of it called the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwelled. And in there was the Ark

of the Covenant, that box, gold-covered box that had inside of it the Law of God; it had the Ten Commandments written with the very finger of God Himself.

On top of that box was a lid, that lid was called the mercy seat. And, on the Day of Atonement, one day a year, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrifice, first for himself, and then for the people, and he would go into the holy of holies; they actually tied a rope to his ankle in case he went in and he wasn't really prepared and God struck him dead; they didn't hear the bells, they would pull him out with the rope. But he would go in there to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat as it's called, on the lid of that box. And he would sprinkle the sacrifice, why? What was that symbolic of? Well, remember inside that box was the Law of God; above that box was the symbolic presence of God and the glory cloud. When he sprinkled the blood, the blood covered the Law from the sight of God. In other words, it's as if our breaking the Law was covered by the blood of the sacrifice; that's the picture behind this word, the satisfying of God's just anger against the breach of His Law.

Now, the Christians to whom John wrote this letter were very familiar in first century Asia Minor with the concept of satisfying the wrath of the gods. If you're familiar with ancient history, you know that not only the Romans, but also the Greeks had a pantheon of gods. You can read about them in Greek mythology, and the gods of Greece were often angry. And so, some well-intentioned and some not well-intentioned liberal commentators, both, have come to this word and said, "Oh, that concept can't be true of the true God, then this word must mean something else. It can't mean what I've just defined it as, it needs to be interpreted some other way." And so, they'll say it just means forgiveness or it means cleansing.

Well, if you study the word, I promise you that doesn't stand up. And, if you want a defense of that, I'm not going to take time now to argue every one of those details, but if you want to delve into that further, you can read the classic Christian defense of the meaning of the word I've given to you. It's in a book by Leon Morris called, The Apostolic Preaching of The Cross. By the time you're done with that book, I promise you, you will be more than thoroughly convinced.

But while we're talking about God's anger, we need to understand that there are profound differences between the pagan gods and their anger and the pagan attempts to satisfy their gods' anger and the satisfaction of the one true God. Let me point out the three main differences. You've got to get these out of your mind, alright? First of all, the anger of the pagan gods was sinful, petty, and capricious. You read Greek mythology, you know that you never knew when they would become angry, and you never knew what would set them off.

But when you look at the Scripture, the anger of the living and true God grows solely out of his pure and undefiled holiness. The wrath of God, listen carefully, in biblical terms, the wrath of God is simply the blazing white-hot response of His holy character to everything that stands opposed to what is good and right and pure. In other words, it is the holy response of His character to everything that is contrary to who He is. There is only one thing that makes our God angry and that is sin. He's not like the pagan gods.

Second difference is that the wrath of the pagan gods was a sinful, uncontrollable outburst like our own anger. Their anger was like the emotional outburst of an immature child. If you read the Old and New Testaments, you will find that God's wrath is not like that at all. God's wrath is very, very slow; in fact, He describes Himself as (What?) “slow to anger.” It takes God a long time to get hot. God's wrath is a settled holy disposition against sinners and their sin; it's not some immature outburst.

There's a third difference and this one's absolutely key. In pagan religions, the worshiper had to satisfy the offended deity; you had to come up with some way to satisfy, to placate, the anger of the god who was picking on you. J. I. Packer puts it this way:

The various gods take offense at the smallest things, and then they take it out on you by manipulating circumstances to your hurt. The only course at that point is to humor and mollify them by an offering. The rule with the offerings is, ‘The bigger the better.’

Human sacrifice, in particular, is expensive but effective. Thus, pagan religion appears as calloused commercialism, bribery, and the appeasing of celestial bad tempers.

That's pagan satisfaction of the gods. But instead of demanding, in the case of the true God, instead of demanding a bribe from us, instead of demanding some sort of payment, some sort of propitiation or satisfaction that we supply to curb His anger against us, the true God set forth His own Son as the propitiation, the satisfaction of His just and holy anger. So, there's an understanding of its meaning.

But, let's go next to, "The Need for Propitiation." Why is this even necessary? What's the, backdrop, the background, as to why this word even comes into play when it comes to our interaction with God? Well, look at verse 2 again, "and He Himself is the propitiation (Notice!) for our sins." There's the reason we need propitiation; it's because of our sins. Now, there's so much behind that I just want to take a moment and step back and give you the theological grid, the biblical framework, for understanding what he says here. Here's why you and I need propitiation.

Let me just give you several biblical assertions. Number one, God is perfectly holy and entirely without sin. We saw that in 1 John 1:5, "...God is Light, and in Him...is no darkness at all."

Secondly, God created moral laws for us that reflect His holy character. In other words, God said in 1 Peter 1:16, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." In other words, I want you to live in keeping with the way I am as your Creator." What are those laws? What does it mean to be holy? Well, our Lord defined it in the broadest possible terms in Matthew, chapter 22, verses 36 to 39. You remember there, He's asked the question, "What's the greatest commandment?" To which He replies:

"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL...WITH ALL YOUR (STRENGTH)." ... (and) "the second is (likened to) it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'"

Jesus said, "Here's God's Law; love God and love other people and love them perfectly with your whole being."

By the way, if you want to earn your way to heaven, there's your checklist. You just love God perfectly every moment of your life, and you love your neighbor unselfishly where you never say a sinful word, never have a sinful thought, never have an outburst of anger, never misspeak the truth, never do anything that would be a sin against your neighbor, and you'll be in.

Obviously, you see that's not possible. That's why we need a Savior. But that's God's Holy Law; it's love God and love your neighbor. So then, He gives us a sort of further breakdown of that in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. You remember? God speaks with His own voice from Mount Sinai, and He gives the ten Hebrew words. The first four of them tell us what love for God looks like; and the final six tell us what love for man looks like.” And so, he flushes it out a little bit. I wish I had time, I'd take you back there and show you that every single one of us, without exception, have shattered every single one of those commandments. If not with our actions, with our attitudes and thoughts. But they're a reflection of God's holy character.

Romans 7:12, “...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

Thirdly, “In His Holy Justice, God is Righteously Angry with the Sinner and His Sin;” in His holy justice, God is righteously angry with the sinner and his sin. You see, there are these mistaken ideas out there about how God responds when we sin. Some unbelievers see sin as a kind of harmless peccadillo; it has no personal or legal ramifications at all. They see God's response to their sin something like that of a doting grandparent to their grandchild; they say, “Okay, well maybe you shouldn't have done that, but it's okay.” That's not our God; that may be your grandparent, that may be your own grandparenting, but that's not God!

The other mistake unbelievers make is to see sin solely as a personal offense against God that has personal ramifications. They picture God's response to their sin something like that of a good friend who's predisposed to accept us and like us, but we've personally offended them by our actions and it's **going to** be okay. "Yes, I shouldn't have done that, I shouldn't have said that, but you know, they love me, they appreciate me, and we'll make it up and it will be okay." A lot of people think of God like that. But the biblical picture of sin is much different. In biblical terms, our sins are crimes against the very person of God Himself. They separate us relationally from God, but more importantly, listen carefully, they render us legally guilty before God our Judge in the courtroom of His justice. That's our big problem, and as a righteous Judge, He is rightly filled with anger because of the nature of our crimes.

Can you imagine being the judge at some of these high-profile cases that we've seen in the last five to ten years in our country where it's clear that a crime, an egregious or horrific crime has taken place? Can you imagine being the judge in that setting and sitting there listening day after day, after day, to the detailed testimony of what this person has done, the horrific nature of their crimes? How could you be that judge and not be angered by that sin? Well, how much more would be true of God!

You see, we do get this, with certain sins we understand what it is to get righteously angry. I mean, most of us get righteously angry when we think about the genocide that Hitler did to the Jews. Six-million of them killed! We're all filled with righteous anger when we hear about the sexual abuse of a child, and rightly so! We're all filled with anger when we hear about an act of terrorism against innocent bystanders. We're filled with anger when we hear about a gratuitous

murder in which a person just picks a human being at random and takes his/her life for no good reason; we're filled with anger.

But our problem is, we're filled with anger toward those sins, but that's not our response toward many sins, especially our own. And so, we kind of grade on a curve, God doesn't! Because of His perfect holiness, God's hatred of sin and His anger toward it is provoked, not just by the worst of sins, but by all sins including yours and including mine.

Now listen, I get this is a very unpopular concept; you know, if some of you knew I was speaking on the wrath of God today, you wouldn't have come, right? But this is the reality, folks. We can put our head in the sand and pretend this isn't true, but this is what the Bible teaches. Scripture pictures sinners as living under the shadow of the approaching wrath of God. You go back to the Old Testament; in the Old Testament, you find God's wrath against man and his sin described 585 times in the Old Testament, using more than 20 Hebrew words.

For example, Ezra 8:22, "...The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." You say, "Yeah, but that's the Old Testament." You know, there are a lot of liberals out there who would say, "Well, you know the God of the Old Testament; He had a problem, He was filled with anger, but you know, the New Testament is all about God's love." I want to say to those people, "Have you even read the New Testament?" I mean, we're in Revelation; guess what the end is, "the wrath of the Lamb and Him who sits on the throne." You come to the New Testament and you read just a few verses after John 3:16, a wonderful promise of the gospel, but what if you don't

respond to that, that wonderful message of the gospel? John 3:36 says this, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” It stays on him like a stain he can't get rid of, God's wrath.

Listen, if you're here this morning, and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, it doesn't really matter how you feel about your relationship to God. If you haven't repented and believed in His Son, John 3:36 says, “God's wrath is on you this very moment, it is lingering over you, and someday it will break out in its full fury just like a thunderstorm.” (Paraphrase.) It's just what scriptures teach.

Look at Romans, chapter 1; Romans, chapter 1, verse 18, as Paul begins the bad news so that the good news of the gospel makes sense. He says in Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is (being) revealed from heaven against all ungodliness;” that's rebellion against God's person, that's a refusal to fear God, a refusal to love God, a refusal to worship God, that's ungodliness. And “(His) wrath is (being) revealed... against all...unrighteousness;” that's rebellion against God's Law, that's a refusal to do what God said. His wrath is being revealed. The rest of Romans 1 is talking about the wrath of abandonment where God gives people over to their sin, “He gave them over, He gave them over, He gave them over. . .” But that's not the only kind of wrath.

Look at chapter 2, verse 4, “...do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience?” He says, “Listen, when you look at your life, and you see all the good things God has brought in your life, if you're an unbeliever, if you don't believe in Jesus Christ this

morning, God has been very good to you. He has showered you with good things; He's filled your heart (Acts 14:17.) with food and gladness this week.

What do you think God intends for that to tell you? Let me plead with you, "Don't think, for a moment, if you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, that all those blessings means God's okay with you, it's okay, things are **going** to work out." Notice what it says here:

Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that (God's) kindness (is intended to lead) you to repentance? (If you don't repent, verse 5), ...because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up (more of God's anger) for yourself in the day of wrath and (the) revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who **WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.**

Listen, don't you, for a moment, believe that God's patience with you and His goodness toward you somehow means that you and God are okay. If you haven't repented and believed in His Son, you are storing up God's wrath for the future, and it will come. I hate to be the bearer of that news, but that's what the Scriptures teach. Ephesians 2:3 says we "were (all) by nature children of wrath." The catechism asked, "What does every Sin deserve?" The answer: "The wrath and curse of God." Unbelievers live constantly under the wrath of God.

Number four, in His holy justice and wrath, God must punish our sin and rebellion with spiritual, physical, and eternal death. God must punish our sin and rebellion with spiritual,

physical, and eternal death. Eternal death is the second death as it is described in the end of Revelation, eternal death and hell.

Genesis 2:17 says, "...from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." They died spiritually that very day. Ezekiel 18:4, "...The soul who sins will die." Romans 5:12, "...through one man sin entered into the world (Adam), and death (came) through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Death of all its varieties: spiritual, physical, and eternal. Romans 6:23, "...the wages of sin (what you get paid for sin) is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in...Jesus...Christ...our Lord."

And number five, God's wrath is only satisfied when the just payment of death has been made. Hebrews 9:22, "...without the shedding of blood." It's not talking about cutting your finger, it's talking about death. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." You see, the penalty is death, "the wages of sin is death;" somebody has to pay, death!

If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, understand this, the wrath of God abides on you this very moment, and someday you will face that reality when you stand before Him. Don't misunderstand His patience and goodness with you. It's intended to lead you to repentance. I plead with you to understand.

You have two choices before you: One choice is for you to refuse to repent and believe in Jesus, God's Son, and then you will bear the wrath of God forever. The other is for you to

repent and believe in the propitiation, He Himself is the satisfaction of God's wrath for our sins; and if you will believe in Him, then Jesus, on the cross, suffered all the wrath that your sins deserved, and you can be forgiven. His life in exchange for yours, "...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." But the good news is, and we'll get to it next week, He did shed His blood. That's your hope; that's my hope.

Let's pray together. Father, today, we've only been able to consider the difficult news, the hard news. But, Father, thank you that this sets the stage for the most wonderful news ever that Jesus Himself is the satisfaction of your just anger against our sins. Father, for those of us who know and love you through your Son, this is the best possible news. And I pray that when we sin, we would put our trust in Jesus's work as our propitiation. Lord, help us to live in the shadow of that reality.

And, Lord, I pray for those who may be here who don't know the Lord, who don't know you through your Son. Lord, may this be the day when they run from your wrath to your mercy in Jesus Christ. May they flee your coming wrath against their sin by finding shelter in Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Father, for the gospel, for the great exchange, and on the cross, for all who will believe, you treated Jesus as if He had lived our sinful lives so that forever you could treat us as if we had lived His righteous life. We thank you for the gospel; may we live in its reality every day. We pray in Jesus's name, Amen.