

## Christ as Our Advocate, and Two Tests of Christian Fellowship

### 1 John 2:1-11

1 John 2:1-2 - *“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”*

#### Background Notes

The theme of the First Epistle of John is “Christian Fellowship.” In chapter 1 we saw that Jesus Christ alone is the basis of Christian fellowship, and we saw that joy is the result of Christian fellowship. Apart from Christ, there can be no true and lasting joy in this life.

Chapter 1 also listed two requirements of Christian fellowship. The first requirement is that we must “walk in the light.” We must practice righteousness and purity as a way of life. The second requirement is that we must confess our sins.

The first two verses of chapter 2 actually belong with the last section of chapter 1, continuing the subject of confessing our sins. The good news is that if we acknowledge our sinful nature and confess our sins (1:9), God will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Notice, by the way, that God does all the work! There is no mention of believers doing “acts of penance” for forgiveness of their sins.

The good news of 1 John 1 continues in chapter 2: *“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.”* That’s God’s standard of perfection: *“that you may not sin.”* What kind of holy God would He be if He said here, “My little children, I’m writing this letter to tell you to sin as little as possible”? No, God’s moral directive and standard is that, as believers, we should not sin.

Did you know that we don’t have to sin? We do sin - but we don’t **have** to sin! As a Christian, you can never say that you simply **had** to sin - that you had no other choice. There’s always a right way to go, so we never have to sin. Unfortunately, we do sin. In fact, if we say that we don’t sin, we’re lying, and we make God out to be a liar (1:10)!

When we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ. The Greek word that’s translated “advocate” here is the same Greek word used for the Holy Spirit, and it is translated “Comforter” in John’s Gospel. The word means “one who comes alongside to give help and assistance in time of need.”

The word “Advocate” here is sometimes translated “defense lawyer” - and rightly so. But the Lord Jesus is **more** than our Defense Lawyer! Yes, He defends us against any satanic accusation (Satan is called the accuser of the brethren in Revelation 12:10.) But our Lord has done much more. He has paid the penalty for our sins. He charged our sins to His account. No earthly defense lawyer does that!

Notice that we have an Advocate, not just with God, but with the **Father**. Sin in the Christian’s life does not take the believer out of the family of God. We’re there by birth! Our fellowship will be broken when we sin - but our relationship will not be broken. We have an advocate not just with God, but with our Father.

Verse 2: *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins - and not for us only, but also for the whole world.”* What does *“He is the propitiation for our sins”* mean? It means that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He satisfied the wrath of a Holy God directed against sin. Propitiation here does not convey the idea of appeasing a vengeful God (as in pagan religions). No! The sacrifice Jesus Christ satisfied the wrath of a Holy God that was **directed against sin**. And not for our sins only, but also the sins of the whole world!

*“...and not for us only, but also for the whole world.”* If Jesus made propitiation for the sins of the whole world, does that mean that everyone is saved? No. The work of Christ on the cross was sufficient to save everyone in the world. Unlimited atonement was provided – but the atonement is limited to those who believe –those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The atonement is sufficient for the sins of the whole world, but it is effective only for those who believe - not for those who reject.

In verse 3 John began to describe the test of Christian fellowship. Remember – the term “Christian fellowship” as used here doesn’t mean Christians drinking coffee together! We’re talking about fellowship with Christ and with those believers who are walking with Christ.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Obedience to Christ’s commands is a test of Christian fellowship.

Verses 3-6 - *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. <sup>6</sup> He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”*

People who say that they are believers and “in fellowship with the Lord” - but are not willing to obey the Lord - are liars (v4)! There’s no way a committed Christian can be involved in fornication, for example. A lifestyle of disobedience puts a

big question mark on a professing believer's salvation. Although we're not perfect, and we're not failure free, we should **want** to be obedient – and we should **strive** to be obedient! So if we're seeking to be obedient Christians, then we know that we are abiding in God, and the love of God is in us, and we are in fellowship with Him (v5).

Notice the progression of obedience in verses 3-6:

- keeping His commandments (v3-4).
- keeping His word (v5) - not only obeying His commands, but doing what we know would please Him.
- keeping his example (v6) - walking as Jesus walked.

Do you want the love of God to be perfected in you (v5)? Are you an obedient Christian? Obedience to Christ's commands is a test of Christian fellowship.

## 2. Love for fellow believers is a test of Christian fellowship.

Verses 7-11 - *“Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.”*<sup>8</sup> *Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.*<sup>9</sup> *He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.*<sup>10</sup> *He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*<sup>11</sup> *But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”*

What is the “old commandment” and the “new commandment” mentioned in verses 7-8? It's the commandment to **love one another**. It was an old commandment, because the Lord Jesus taught this commandment from the beginning. In fact, He summed up the whole Old Testament Law as loving the Lord first, and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

But it's also a new commandment because, as believers, we now have God's law of love written on their hearts. In addition, we now have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that strengthens and enables us to obey this commandment.

The darkness of the past is passing away because Christ, the True Light, has come. Now He is shining in us and through us. Therefore, if a person says that he or she is a Christian and in the light, and yet that person has no love for fellow believers, then he or she has failed this test of Christian fellowship. *“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now”* (v9).

This does not mean that there will never be any tensions or disagreement between committed brothers and sisters, but interpersonal problems should not be **habitual**. It should not be a way of life.

John used the Greek present tense quite significantly in this epistle. The Greek present tense implies *continuous action*. “Hate” here is in the Greek present tense. So a true Christian does not live a life of hatred, or continue to hate a fellow believer. A true Christian will seek to get differences straightened out. If continual hatred characterizes a person’s life, then that person is blinded - and still in darkness. He or she has not yet come to Christ as the Light (v11). I trust that persistent hatred does not characterize any of you.

If, on the other hand, the practice and pattern of your life is love for your fellow believers, you are abiding in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in you (v10). You’re not stumbling yourself - and you’re not stumbling someone else.

When I was a young Christian, I was “stumbled” by some older believers who didn’t show kindness or love to one another. They actually hindered my growth in faith. What a sad testimony!

Are you hindering the faith of some younger brother or sister because you refuse to be reconciled with a fellow believer? Remember, love for fellow believers is a test of Christian fellowship.

## Practical Application

### Remember the illustration of the GI Bill.

*Verse 2: “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not just for ours only, but also for the whole world.”*

After World War II, the United States government passed the “GI Bill.” It provided payment for a college education for anyone who had served in the armed forces. Perhaps some of you received educational benefits under the GI Bill. I served in the U.S. Army, and my GI Bill benefits helped to pay for my graduate school and seminary studies – and I’m very thankful for this!

I think the benefits of the GI Bill are a good illustration of the “unlimited” and “limited” aspects of Jesus Christ’s atoning work on the cross at Calvary. How much payment did the U.S. government provide for educational benefits under the GI bill? The provision was unlimited. Under the GI Bill, every veteran could have gotten a college education at government expense; payment was provided. But how many received the benefits? Only those who chose to go to college. It was ***unlimited in provision***, but it was ***limited in effectiveness*** to those who accepted it.

So it is with Christ’s atoning work on the cross. It is unlimited in provision for the whole world – but it is limited in saving results to those who come to Christ for salvation.

I hope this illustration is helpful. Remember the illustration of the GI bill.