

Lesson 3 – 1 John 2:1-2

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Review/Introduction

From people's perspective, a Christian is someone who has exercised the gift of saving faith in Jesus the Christ as their Lord and Savior. Saving faith is not mere intellectual assent to facts about Jesus or the gospel or "believing in God". True saving faith involves repentance from sin (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 20:20-21; Hebrews 6:1), a heart to follow (John 10:27-28) and obey Jesus (John 3:36), denying self (Luke 9:23-26), forsaking all (Luke 14:15-33), and confessing Christ as Lord (Romans 10:8-10).

Those who have exercised the gift of true saving faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) have been made new in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). True saving faith is a living faith, a faith that demonstrates itself true (2 Peter 1:5-11), a faith that exhibits fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8; 1 Peter 1:8-9; John 14:23; 1 John 2:3-6), a faith that works (James 2:14-26), a faith that is progressing in sanctification (Philippians 1:6). The result of true saving faith is the visible manifestations of persevering, progressive sanctification.

Assurance of salvation is an amazing blessing for the redeemed. Peace and security flows from this blessing. Yet there are those that are misinformed or deceived (either from false teaching or self-deception) in thinking they have assurance when they, in actuality, do not.

The objective basis of salvation is the finished work of Christ and His promise to those that exercise true saving faith (John 1:12; 6:47; 1 John 5:11-13).

The subjective evidence for assurance is the witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:24), fellowship with God's people (1 John 1:3), walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7), hatred and confession of one's own sin (1 John 1:5-2:2), walking in obedience (1 John 2:5; 3:5-6), walking like Christ (1 John 2:6), not loving the world (1 John 2:15), purity (1 John 3:3), love (1 John 3:14; 18-19), overcoming the world (1 John 5:4), etc.

Often times, people who are self-deceived will only look at the objective basis and ignore the subjective evidence.

There are three groups of people when thinking about assurance and salvation.

1. Those who are saved, but not sure. Individuals here have surrendered their life to Christ. They have exercised the gift of true saving faith, but because of immaturity or their choice to sin, they do not currently have assurance of salvation.
2. Those who are "sure", but not saved. Individuals here are professing Christians, but not possessors of eternal life. They have not surrendered their life to Christ, but because of accepting a false gospel or because of pride in their own works they are self-deceived and believe they are saved when they are not.
3. Those that are saved and sure. Individuals here have been regenerated and are being sanctified. They see fruits of their salvation in their life.

John is writing a letter to believers so they (and we) might know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13), so they may know they are possessors of Christ and not just professors. He wants to make sure that people who have connected themselves to a body of Christians and profess to be a Christian actually possess salvation. He is doing this by presenting tests to determine if true saving faith has been exercised or are the readers (us) deceived. Woven into these tests is John's attack on Gnosticism which emphasized a special knowledge (gnosis), denied the deity and saving work of Jesus, and resulted in immoral lifestyles.

John presents his tests in four spirals laying out doctrinal and conduct tests or evidences of true, real, actual regeneration. Each spiral starts with a doctrinal test then presents conduct tests. The spirals all have similar topics that are expanded on and/or reiterated in each spiral.

This morning we will finish first doctrinal test, the test of the truth of sin and how sin is dealt with. Today is the final sin-truth in this doctrinal test – the provision for sin.

Spiral 1 – Doctrine (Hold fast to truth) – The way of salvation from sin (1:5-2:2)

1. Sin Truth – The Standard (1:5)

⁵This 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.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (ESV)

God is morally perfect, holy, without sin (light and no darkness at all). If you would have fellowship with God, something must be done about your sin; if you have fellowship with God, something is being done about your sin.

2. Sin Lie – Willful Ignorance (1:6)

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (ESV)

A false professor thinks that a person can have union with Christ and not have a changed life; that they can have regeneration without the fruit that flows from regeneration. Walking (as a habitual pattern of life) in darkness is a characteristic of the unregenerate. The saying must match the doing as an increasing pattern of life or you do not have confidence that regeneration has truly taken place.

3. Sin Truth – Walking Demonstrates Cleansing (1:7)

⁷but 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.

⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (ESV)

Walking in the light demonstrates regeneration; it is a characteristic of the regenerate. Walking in the light is demonstrated by body fellowship and continual cleansing.

4. Sin Lie – Denying Depravity is Deception (1:8)

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (ESV)

A false professor denies the sin nature (or conversely claims that one has the inherent capacity for good) either actively by a verbal denial or through blame shifting. This is again a demonstration that true regeneration has not taken place.

5. Sin Truth – Confession Brings Forgiveness and Cleansing (1:9)

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (ESV)

Regeneration results in a lifestyle of confession (agreeing with God that you are a sinner and sin). That initial confession results in forgiveness and cleansing as completed, one-time acts by God. The active confession of sin for the believer is related to ongoing repentance that enables being kept being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18+).

6. Sin Lie – Perfection is a Lie (1:10)

¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (ESV)

A false professor says that they have not actually sinned. Not only do they have the capacity for good, but they actually do good. This person might weigh their good and bad and think they come out on the winning end. This is a characteristic of the unregenerate.

7. Sin Truth – Provision for Sin (2:1-2)

¹My 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; ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (ESV)

John has been hitting hard the thoughts of false professors: say they have fellowship (union) with God yet walk in darkness, say they have no sin nature (have inherent capacity for good), or say they have not sinned (actually do good).

But what about the believers to whom he is writing? They have union with Christ yet sometimes sin. They have a lifestyle of confession of sin because they have been made new so they know they sin. In fact, as one grows in their relationship with Christ personal sin is seen more clearly.

John has spoken in polarizing terms so they could be tempted to think, “I sin. Do I have any hope at all?” John now comforts them, and us, starting with his address as “my little children”. John’s goal in this section is to ensure that none of his readers (nor us) are false professors of Christ; that none of them (nor us) thinks they have union with Christ but no regeneration. He is writing in strong terms so “you may not sin”.

❖ **Are you encouraged to strive to excel still more in your walk?**

“And if anyone sins” grammatically could be rendered “if anyone sins, and it will happen”. You will sin, because you fight the flesh (Romans 7). “Anyone” is John’s “little children” or believers.

“An unregenerate heart is as hard as a stone, full of pride and presumption. It is quite unmoved by the sufferings of Christ, in the sense that they act as no deterrent against self-will and self-pleasing. But the real Christian is moved by the love of Christ, and says, how can I sin against His dying love for me? When overtaken by a fault, there is passionate relenting and bitter mourning. O my reader, do you know what it is to be melted before God, for you to be heartbroken with anguish over sinning against and grieving such a Savior? Ah, **it is not the absence of sin, but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors.**” (A. W. Pink in “Studies on Saving Faith”)

And if you sin and you will, you have an “Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous”. “Advocate” literally means one called alongside. It describes one who stands by to help or render aid (especially in a court of law) or one who is summoned to the side of another to help, comfort, encourage, counsel, or intercede for, depending on the need. The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is by John in his gospel referring to the Holy Spirit who is with believers.

¹⁶I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Helper**, that He may be with you forever; (John 14:16 see also 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7)

Here the Advocate is “with the Father” or literally “facing the Father”. One commentator (A. T. Robertson) noted that “the Holy Spirit is God’s Advocate on earth with men, while Christ is man’s Advocate with the Father”. Christ is our Advocate with the Father in the court of law sense and Satan is the “accuser of the brethren”.

⁹And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. (Revelation 12:9-10)

¹Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. (Zechariah 3:1; see also Job 1-2)

Satan stands before God and points to you and accuses you of sinning and not worthy of salvation. Christ, your Advocate, stands facing the Father and renders aid and intercedes saying “I paid the penalty for that one and he/she is covered in my righteousness.” (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

❖ **Do you strive in the Spirit to live as one covered in Christ’s righteousness?**

Christ is our Advocate, but also “is the propitiation for our sins”. “Propitiation” refers to a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God. It is an appeasement or satisfaction of God’s wrath against your sin. God is holy. He is too pure to approve evil (Habakkuk 1:3), with Him no evil dwells (Psalm 5:4), He will not leave the guilty unpunished (Nahum 1:3), and He hates all who do iniquity (Psalm 5:5). Therefore, because God is holy and just, He must punish sin.

The death of Jesus satisfied God’s wrath (Romans 1:18) toward sin (Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Romans 3:25). Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross satisfied the demands of God’s justice, thus appeasing His holy wrath against your sins. Christ and only Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient to turn away the deserved wrath of God against your sin.

❖ Does your life overflow in gratitude for Christ’s propitiation?

This next phrase, “but also for *those of the whole world*” brings to light a disagreement among those who hold a reformed soteriology (see Gerry Andersen’s “Issues in Reformed Theology—Limited Atonement” on the VBC website for a more thorough treatment of the issue).

John echoes this thought later in the letter.

¹⁴We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the **Savior of the world**.
(1 John 4:14)

First, we need to be clear that John is not teaching universalism (i.e., all the world will be saved irrespective of their fellowship with God through Christ) since he just laid out several points against universalism.

The issue at hand is one’s stance on the “L” of the Calvinism “TULIP” acrostic.

1. Total depravity (or Total inability or Total corruption)

Every aspect of a person is corrupted by sin; therefore, they cannot choose to come to God of their own volition (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10-18; 23; 5:12; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 9:3 Titus 3:3; Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Ephesians 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 2:25-26; John 3:19-20; 6:44; 65; 8:33).

2. Unconditional election

God’s unconditioned choice (not conditioned upon any action by the elect) before the foundation of the world of those individuals whom He would save (Matthew 22:1-14; Romans 3:10-13; 8:27-30; 9:6-24; 1 Corinthians 1:18-19; Ephesians 1:3-11; 2:8-9; 2; Acts 13:48; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:10; 2:13).

3. Limited atonement (Definite Atonement / Particular Redemption)

Christ died for the elect only.

4. Irresistible grace

The call of God (efficacious grace) in the heart of His elect cannot be rejected (Romans 8:30; John 6:37; 44-45; Acts 16:14).

5. Perseverance of the saints (eternal security)

Once a person is elect, they are always elect and will persevere to the end and in persevering will be progressively sanctified (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; 14:15; Romans 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; 8-9; Jude 24).

There are no texts in the Bible that explicitly teach the doctrine of Limited Atonement.

- The doctrine flows from a logical deduction rather than clear statements of scripture.
- The doctrine flows from a fear that if Christ died for the whole world yet the whole world does not believe, then Christ died in futility.
- The doctrine flows from a fear that if limited atonement is not true then people will believe universalism.
- Those passages that are used to support Limited Atonement (particularly those used that refer to the “world”) are studied eisegetically from a five-point Calvinistic presupposed viewpoint.

So, to save Christ from a supposed futile and contradictory act, they particularize redemption.

Historic Calvinism teaches limited atonement – Christ died only for the elect. The thought process can be found in John 10:

- Jesus lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)
¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)
- Jesus will lose none of his sheep. (John 10:28)
²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27-28)
- Many people will not receive eternal life (e.g., Matthew 7:13-14). Therefore, Jesus did not die for everyone but only for those who will ultimately be saved.

Many Scriptures indicate that Christ died for a particular people (e.g., Matthew 1:21; John 17:9; Ephesians 5:2; 25), though none state explicitly that he died ONLY for those people.

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who **gave Himself for our sins** so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (Galatians 1:3-4)

²⁸Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.** (Acts 20:28)

Other Scriptures seem to say that Jesus died for the sins of the world (everyone) (e.g., Acts 2:21; 17:30-31; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 4:10; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2; 4:14).

³⁰Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,** ³¹because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31)

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “**Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” (John 1:29)

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him shall not perish**, but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (John 3:16-17)

⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹Many more believed because of His word; ⁴²and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, **for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.**” (John 4:40-42)

It is clear that Christ’s sacrifice is not applied to everyone because the Scriptures are clear that not everyone exercises true saving faith and are regenerated (i.e., not elect or chosen). At the same time, the Scriptures indicate that He died for everyone. Perhaps a way to look at it is: Jesus’ sacrifice was “big” enough to cover the sins of the whole world, but it is only applied to those that have been chosen to salvation and exercise the gift of saving faith.

One commentator (Henry Morris) notes, “The value of Christ's blood was infinite, sufficient to cover all the sins of all the men and women of every age of history. The fact that it is efficacious unto eternal salvation only for the elect (a term that includes all and only those who believe on Him) is no argument that its value was thereby limited.”

❖ **What practical things are you doing to get the gospel to the world?**

Conclusion

John is laying out tests or evidences of true, real, actual regeneration. This passage laid out the first doctrinal test. Does profession match practice regarding dealing biblically with the knowledge of sin? I pray that we would not be influenced by a cultural view of sin and salvation, but would hold to a biblical view.

Additional Study

1. Each time you come to the Scriptures, pray for the Spirit to give you understanding.
2. Read 1 John once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for five days).
3. Re-read today’s passage and ask yourself what John is trying to convey.
4. Re-read the notes from today and contemplate the thought questions.
5. Pray that God would show you personal applications from this passage.