

Prayer

We thank You, O Lord, for all the good things in the world. Save us from being ungrateful, and prevent us from making too much of our troubles and forgetting our blessings. Give us the strength of spirit to live as those who trust in the promises of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Saviour; and reassure us by Your Holy Spirit that love will conquer all in Your Kingdom of grace. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Finance

The world continues to go through uncertain times with respect to its financial affairs, and consequently, many people are still suffering. Pray for honesty and integrity in finance.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Great Britain and its current political instability*
- *Lift up to God in prayer the plight of those affected by drought*
- *Give thanks for God's protection for you and your family*

Meditation

Be sensitive, my spirit, like the Lord who listens;
And seeks the truth before He judges. He is the One

Who hears the cry of the lonely;
Who feels the anguish of the bereaved;
Who bears the anger of a wounded soul;
Who knows the damage that words can do;
Who attends to the cry of the downcast;
Who takes heed of those who search;
Who understands the pain of the unloved;
Who takes notice of all who cry out to Him;

Be sensitive, my spirit, and let the Lord show you
What to do with what you know.

Bible Study - 1 John 2:1,2

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

Review

Yesterday, we read John's clear and direct call for God's people to 'walk in the light'. The message of this great description of discipleship was not that a Christian should be able to live a sinless life, but that a Christian should live 'in the light' of the One who deals with sin, that is, Jesus Christ. In saying this, John was not ideological in his approach to the problem of sin; he was profoundly practical. He knew that God's people were called to live in a sinful world and could never escape sin or its consequences, but he insisted that it was

possible to 'walk in the light' by living a lifestyle that actively allowed Jesus to deal with the darkness of sin, and defeat it for us. It is not surprising therefore that John continues his letter by urging his readers to reject sin, and allow Jesus to do this work of grace.

So, in the two verses that make up our reading today, John firstly urged his readers to refrain from sin, and reject it; but such advice was impossible without saying more about how to deal with sin. He explains; 'if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ...' (2:1). This begins to unpack how sin is dealt with, and describes Jesus as 'an advocate with the Father'. The phrase is interesting because in the Gospel of John, the exact same word is used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit; 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth ...' (John 14:16,17). Some may feel confused here, for John's Gospel says that our advocate is the Holy Spirit, but 1 John says that the advocate is Jesus Christ! We should not be worried, though, for two reasons. Firstly, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are One and the same God with the Father, and this is what is meant by the Trinity. We cannot separate Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit, even though we speak about them as if they were different. Secondly, the word 'advocate' is only an adjective that describes the work of helping, so the Bible therefore suggests that we see both Jesus and the Holy Spirit as 'helpers'. In our passage today, the work of Jesus helps people deal with sin (and in John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit 'helps' people by continuing the work of Jesus after his death).

Jesus helps us deal with sin by standing as our 'advocate' before God's throne of Judgement and Grace. He is worthy of standing before God as 'righteous' because of His sinless death for all people, and so He can defend us successfully in God's court. This, of course lies at the heart of all Christian faith, and to deny this is to cast aside the truth about how God has designed everything in this world, and especially the means He has created through His son to enable sin, evil and death to be overcome for our redemption.

Verse 2 continues to explain this work of grace, this time using a different word to describe the saving work of Jesus. The word is 'hilasmos' in Greek, and it is translated in various Bible versions as 'atoning sacrifice' or 'propitiation'. What does this mean? The English word 'propitiation' is closest to the meaning of the Greek here, meaning 'that which satisfies'. John is saying that Jesus is the one who satisfies God's requirements to set aside the penalty of sin, thus enabling us to defeat it and have peace with Him. Some Bible translators feel that by writing 'atoning sacrifice', they help the reader understand this concept, because the Old Testament describes the need for an atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (see Leviticus 4:20f. 5:10f. etc.). Jesus Christ is therefore our 'atoning sacrifice' by which we are acceptable to God. However, because many people today are not aware of what this means, I prefer to translate this in a different way. I have written, 'He is the means of forgiveness for our sins' because this points us towards understanding that Christ has done what is necessary to satisfy God's requirement for the forgiveness of our sins. This is what we need to know from the text, and if we wish to explore the matter further, then Scripture does indeed tell us that this is done by the sacrifice of Jesus' life. This translation, however, does not stop people in their tracks so that they say 'I don't know what this means'!

Although the whole passage is profound and uses some complex words, John was attempting to be crystal clear to the people of his day. To 'walk in the light' meant sticking close to Jesus so that He could dispel sin immediately and effectively. All of us know what it is like to suddenly discover that we have done or are doing something quite wrong. We do not know how we arrived at this state of affairs, but we cannot escape it. If we are walking 'in the light' then Jesus is on hand, alongside us, and able to deal with our

circumstances immediately. I am convinced that this is the life of faith John advocates here, and there is much more for us to discover about it in 1 John.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What does it mean to say that Jesus is our 'advocate', and what does it mean to say that the Holy Spirit is our 'advocate'?
2. How do you think that Jesus achieved our salvation? In your group, answer this question, one by one, to each other!
3. How does this Scripture help you know what it means to 'walk in the light'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

John's first letter is a masterpiece of language. Every time you try to explain the letter, you need far more words than are used in the first place! Yet it is so important to try and explain what the letter means. It challenges us to try and explain ourselves, which is no bad thing. We certainly need to be able to say what Jesus has done to save us from our sins. We certainly need to be able to explain to people how it is that we can 'walk in the light' and not exactly claim to be 'sinless'!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Use a Bible dictionary, or use 'Google' or another search engine to explore the word 'propitiation', and see what you come across. You may find that you will be directed to Wikipedia, but this can be a good start; follow links and form your own judgements about the quality of the information you find!*
- *Pray for God's people to find a fresh call to 'walk in the light' and deal with sin, rather than just accept that it exists.*

Final Prayer

Heavenly Father, Your majesty shines through all You have done; so give us eyes to see the glory of the Cross and all Christ has done for us. Then, may we accept this gift of our salvation and walk with confidence into the future You have planned for those who do Your will. Make our joy complete as we live to praise Your Name. AMEN