



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 John 2:1-2

1 John 2

"Our Heavenly Lawyer"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are, as Mark said, in the study of 1 John. We've just begun it. We have had two lessons. We've covered the first chapter. We're in our third lesson this morning. We're going to look at 2:1, 2. Brief passage, but one that's certainly filled with doctrine and challenges.

So 1 John 2:1, "My literature children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if any 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."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together. What a blessing it is, what a privilege it is, to gather with Your people, gather with the saints on the first day of the week, on the Lord's day and have fellowship, real fellowship - fellowship in Christ, fellowship in Your word, considering passages of scripture and being influenced in affected by them. Father, we pray that would be the result of our time together, that You will teach us and build us up in the faith as we come to a very encouraging passage. We have an Advocate with the Father.

We have a great high priest. He's not only our Advocate who argues our case. He is one who prays for us constantly and we need

that all the time, every moment of our life. We need that intercession. And we have the privilege of interceding as well, functioning as believer-priest, and what a privilege that is at this moment, to be able to pray for those in need and there are certainly many who are in need. We have a list of some on the back of our bulletin, but that's just a few. There are so many others, Father, who are in difficult circumstances, some friends of those who attend this church, some family members.

We pray thy will be done in regard to all of the circumstances of life. We know that Your will is perfect and we have that confidence and that hope that whatever the circumstance of life is ultimately for Your people, it works together for our good. Now what a comfort that is. The comfort is, Lord, that the trials of life come, and sometimes they overwhelm us, and sometimes, many times, they are far greater than we are able to handle them, they're greater than our strength. Our strength is weak.

But they're not greater than Your strength and You can give us the strength and the endurance. And give us the encouragement that through it all Your will is done for our good and You're preparing us for an eternal way to glory through all of these difficulties.

So Lord, we pray for those who are physically weighed down, either through sickness or through the trials of life, through the pressure at work or at home, and the difficulties that seem to just weigh heavily upon us emotionally, physically. Bless them, encourage them, and give them a sense of Your presence and give them the focus upon Your word and the promises we have, the great promises that we have. We give You thanks for that.

We thank You that we have a great high priest and an advocate with You, and one who is constantly watching after us. So, Lord, we pray for Your blessings now. We pray for Your blessings upon us spiritually, physically as well. We look to You for all of these blessings. We pray not only for ourselves. We pray for our nation. We thank You for the blessings that we have received in this country for

so many years, for so long a time, and we pray, Lord, that You would continue to bless us. We pray for our leaders. We recognize that You have put them in positions of power. We pray that You give them wisdom and give them protection, and we pray, Lord, that You would bless this land with a spiritual revival. Bring many people to Yourself and may we be used to that end.

And to that end, we pray that You would bless us in our study this morning. I pray that You would build us up in the faith, that You would teach us and strengthen us and prepare us for the week to come. We look to You to do all of these things. We pray this in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] When I look around the auditorium on a Sunday morning, I see all kinds of people and among those are usually a number of lawyers, first service and the second service, so I don't tell lawyer jokes. But for all of the grief they sometimes take, almost as much as preachers, still, for all of that, at sometime or other, most people need a good lawyer, and when they do and when their case is perilous, then as they say, a lawyer is their best friend.

Which brings us to our passage, because according to John, we all need a lawyer and our case is perilous, because we are all guilty. He wrote in 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." That includes law-abiding citizens. Not only that, we're not only guilty, we have an accuser - the devil.

In Revelation 12:10, he is pictured before God's throne accusing us day and night. He is making his case against us in heaven's courtroom daily. Now that's very discouraging. We know that we are sinners. We are not accepting of sin. We fight it. That's what John tells us to do at the beginning of chapter 2. "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." Sin is common. It's the norm. We all do it. We shouldn't. We shouldn't let it be the norm. We should resist it, and must, but the reality is, as we all know

from experience, sin is strong and often it gains the upper hand in our struggle with it and we give in. We're all guilty. We confess that.

But that confession really only strengthens Satan's case against us and he's a clever prosecutor. He is an aggressive D.A. He wants to send us all up the river and he's able to make a solid case against us. Again, that's discouraging. We need help. We need a defender. We need a lawyer in heaven to represent us and win. The good news is we have one.

That's what John says next. "Don't sin," he says. "That's why I've written to you, so that you may not sin. But if you" - and we will - "don't be discouraged. We have an Advocate with the Father." The New International version paraphrases this, "We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense." That's what an advocate does. He pleads the cause and the case of a person on trial.

The word that is used here for advocate is a word that's used throughout the upper room discourse in John's gospel in chapters 14-16 is the word "parakletos." And sometimes we speak of the paraclete. It literally means "one called alongside of." And the idea is one who's called alongside to give help. Jesus uses this term of the Holy Spirit who is called "The Helper" and "The Comforter." He gives encouragement. He gives strength.

In Romans 8:26, 27, Paul describes the Spirit's ministry as that of interceding for us, which he later says in verse 24, Christ does for us as well, and He does that at the right hand of God. So the Holy Spirit prays for us on earth and the Son of God prays for us in heaven. Christians are secure. The God head is praying for our needs and strength in every situation of life, and we need their prayers. We're weak. We are weaker than any circumstance we face. We're not sufficient for any circumstance in life. And we are subject to all kinds of challenges in life, all kinds of attacks, from the world, from the flesh, from the devil. Later in this very chapter, in verse 15, John takes up that very situation. The enemies that are arrayed against us.

They're overwhelming. They're outside. They're inside. They're all about us. So we face all kinds of attacks.

John has written so that we don't succumb to that, that we don't succumb to the temptations of the world, the temptations of the flesh, the moral temptations of life, the doctrinal temptations of life. That particularly I think is in John's mind here, because this is the issue that he's dealing with in this book.

But we do give in. We do fail often. But God has provided for that failure. We have a defender in heaven who daily takes up our case and pleads it for us, our lawyer, our advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is righteous because He's sinless. He is God and He is man. As man, He lived a perfect life. As God, He is light and there is no darkness in Him at all. He is flawless. He is wise. He is righteous.

So His case for us is always flawless and righteous. The devil can never within against Him. He can never find an inconsistency in our Lord or in His argument. His case is air tight. It's flawless. Christ pleads perfectly for us. He pleads intensely and intimately for us. That's the sense of the statement "and Advocate with the Father." It has the idea of being not only in the presence of the Father, but turned toward the Father.

He is, as it were, face to face with the Father, speaking to Him in very intimate terms, in the most personal way, in continual pleadings for us, Jesus Christ the righteous. But how can that be? We're guilty. We are sinners. Someone said, "As salt flavors every drop of the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature." We're guilty, so how can Christ defend the guilty and still be righteous? Well, the answer is given in verse 2 and it is encouraging. He is taking care of all our sins, all of our sins - past, present, and future - every one of them.

The basis of His case for us is sound. It is indisputable. It is the cross, "and He Himself," John writes, "is the propitiation of our sins." Again, the New International version replaces the word "propitiation" with atoning sacrifice for our sins. The reason, according to the

theologian Roger Nicole was the translators of the New International version felt that an average high school graduate would not understand the word propitiation. Now, that may be, but if so, we need to learn the meaning of that word, because this is an important word. It's a Biblical word and it's a word with a special meaning. It's a word with a precise meaning that John wants to communicate.

Very simply, it means turning away wrath by an offering. So high school graduates, now you know - turning away wrath by an offering. Now, having said that, that is really what is troubling to a lot of people and has affected a lot of the translations. Or I shouldn't say a lot, but some of the translations have been affected by that, because the idea of wrath is troubling to many in modern times, not only in our generation, but the previous generation. People feel that the notion of a wrathful God is primitive, that it fits more the profile of an angry pagan deity than the Christian God of love.

So the Revised Standard version, for example, translates this expiation, which means the removal of sin, but what without any reference to wrath. The problem is, wrath is written all over scripture. Paul writes of it in Romans 1:18. "The wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and all ungodliness." Hebrews 12:29, "God is a consuming fire." Leon Morris has written that in the Old Testament there are over 20 different words for God's wrath against sin, and it is referred to some 585 times. The wrath of God is inescapable. God is holy. He cannot ignore sin. His holiness will not permit Him to ignore sin. He is tolerant, He is patient, but He must deal with sin and deal with all of it, and He must deal with it with absolute justice. Propitiation, like atonement, is turning away that righteous wrath by satisfying God's justice, not in a pagan way, not as though Christ bribed an angry God with an offering in order to rescue mankind from destruction, and not as though He is some kind Son who loves us and is placating a fiercely angry Father and trying to make Him love us.

The Trinity is united in all of this. The Trinity is united in the work of salvation and in its love for God's people. In fact, the Father is the one who offered the Son in our place. The Father's the one who takes the initiative. He planned salvation. We see that in one of the best known verses of all, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." God there is God the Father - gave His only begotten Son, His unique Son, for us.

Well, that's 1 John 4:10. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He sent His Son to be our substitute in judgment so that on the cross Christ absorbed God's wrath fully and completely. That satisfied God's justice toward us and removed His wrath from us. That's propitiation. It is satisfaction. It is an act of love, the greatest act of love, and of justice. The two meet in the cross. Someone said, "Love and justice meet or kiss in the cross of Christ."

And because Christ did this, He is righteous in His defense of us. He's not defending guilty people, not legally. Legally, before God, we're righteous. Our sins have been atoned for. We've been clothed in the righteousness of Christ so that every time that Satan makes an accusation against the Lord's brothers and sisters, He can state before the throne of justice, "He's innocent, she's innocent, I paid for that sin." It's all paid for, every single sin that you as a believer in Jesus Christ have committed, are committing - maybe you're committing right now, or will ever commit, has been paid for. The slate that was full of indictments against us has been wiped clean. Our guilt is gone. Our sins have been removed, as far as the east is from the west.

We suffered their punishment in our substitute. And that includes all kinds of people. "He is the propitiation," John says, "for our sin, but not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." That's almost a repetition of John 3:16. The object of God's love is the world, and here John adds, "The whole world." The scope of God's love and propitiation is wide. It is universal. That indicates the

breadth of God's love and also the greatness of our Lord's sacrifice. It is worldwide.

There's little disagreement on that, but many today extend the atonement beyond all kinds of people to all people. Jesus died for and actually saved human being, and at the end of it all, when history comes to its conclusion, all will be in heaven, all will be saved. That's universalism. It's very popular today. Some years ago I was at a Catholic university and heard the dead, a priest, explain the school's mission. That school's mission was to educate. It wasn't, he said, to save the world. We don't need to that; that's already been done. And I knew what he meant, that there's no need for evangelism. All are going to be saved.

Now, as I said, that's a very popular position today among liberals, but has no support from scripture. We won't go into all of that. We've done that before. But there are a lot of evangelicals who interpret John's statement in a universal sense as well, that Christ died for everyone without exception, but only in a provisional or potential way. In other words, He died to save everyone, from Adam to antichrist, elect and non-elect alike. But He didn't actually save anyone.

Salvation is now possible for everyone, but only happens when it is appropriated by faith. So ultimately it's left to us. Our faith makes Christ's work successful. Our unbelief frustrates that work. Now I'm not completely unsympathetic with that position. I think as you read the text you can understand why one would take it, and in fact that was the position or the interpretation that I held at one time. But I find a great many problems with it. John didn't say that the propitiation was possible. The word "potential" or "possible" is not in the passage. Just the opposite. John wrote that Christ actually accomplished His purpose in dying. He is the propitiation - not might be, but He is the propitiation. Christ's death was effective. It actually did what it was designed to do.



He said that very thing, really, when He gave that triumphant declaration at the end of the cross when He had completed His work. He said, "It is finished," John 19:30. That means there's nothing left to do. He did it all. There's nothing hanging in the balance. It's finished. He suffered the penalty fully and He paid the debt completely. And yet we know that people still perish eternally. The antichrist and the false prophet will be thrown alive into the Lake of Fire. We read of that in Revelation 19:20. Multitudes will follow them.

How can it be that that is the case that some will suffer this eternal perdition if all their debts had been paid in full? What is left for the sinner for whom Christ died to pay? The Lord paid it all. He can't require double payment. He can't pay the penalty for all the sins of a person on the cross and then punish that person in eternal perdition. That's not just. In fact, Spurgeon put it quite well. He said, "If God punished Christ for your sins, He will not punish you. Payment God's justice cannot twice demand first at the bleeding Savior's hand and then again at mine." I think that's correct. Now, someone might say, as has been said, "Well, not all their sins or our sins have been paid for. The sin of unbelief wasn't paid for. That is removed when a person believes." But at the end of it all, on the cross Christ declared in John 19:30, "It is finished." He had a complete payment, a complete sacrifice. He paid for all our sins, even the sin of unbelief. In fact, I would say especially the sin of unbelief, because it's the root of all sin, as Paul demonstrates or says in Romans 14:21. "And His death ensured that we would have faith, that we would trust in Him."

But the text does say He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. If that doesn't mean every person who has ever lived or ever will live, all without exception, then what does it mean? I think John helps us with the answer to that question in other passages, which show clearly that the word "world" and the expression "the whole world" is not universal in that absolute sense. That is, in the sense of every single individual who has or ever will live.

For example, in John 12:19, at the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the crowds cried Hosanna. They were enthusiastic for Him. They were welcoming Him as their king. They were enthusiastic, but the authorities were worried and said, "The whole has gone after Him." Well, they didn't mean the barbarians in Germany and England, or all of the Chinese are going - they didn't mean everyone who's ever lived or ever will live. They meant that a lot of people were following Him. People from all over the land, from Galilee and Judea, young and old. It was a popular movement for Him. And the meaning of "world" and "the whole world" in John 3:16 and here doesn't mean every single individual. It's not the world without exception, but the world without distinction.

And we have, I think, a precise definition of the world, as John uses it in his gospel and as he uses it here in his epistle in another one of his writings, in the book of Revelation, in 5:9, when the 24 elders sing praise to the lamb. "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Now, that's the whole world. He purchased it. He did it. He bought people, literally, according to the Greek text. He bought some out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Not every individual was bought. Not every nation was bought. Not everyone is saved. But people from every nation are - every walk of life, every ethnicity, gender, and age were purchased by Christ. That's the Christ. And it will be an innumerable multitude.

The redeemed are some small group as an elect few. They are the elect only. They are men and women who were chosen by God unconditionally from all eternity and who believe in Jesus Christ, but they're not few. They are a vast host of people, like the sand of the seashore, like the stars at night, like the dust of the earth. That's a vast number of people. In fact, some Calvinists, men such as Charles Spurgeon and Charles Hodge, believe that they would vastly outnumber the non-elect. Well, I can't prove that. I'd like to believe

that, but I do believe that there is going to be an innumerable multitude, because that's what the Lord Himself said.

So when John the Baptist said in John 1:29, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" He didn't mean if they believe. But He will save multitudes, Jews and Gentiles alike. And that's John's meaning here. It's all kinds of people whose sins or debts had been paid in full, even the sin of unbelief. We must believe; don't misunderstand me. A person must come to Christ through faith and trust in Him. But it's Christ's sacrifice that ensures that that will happen. We will believe and Christ will not lose one of His sheep. Now that's encouragement. That's the encouragement that John is giving here. Remember, he is discouraging sin and he's calling us to holiness. We all sin. We know that. If we say we don't say, John said we make God a liar and His word is not in us. We sin.

But to prevent a kind of defeatism and the feeling that struggling against sin is pointless since sinning just seems to be inevitable, we always seem to fail, he said, "I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin." We're to fight sin and not be discouraged. We're not left to ourselves in this fight. It's not a fight that we fight alone. We have an advocate. He prays for us. He argues our case before heaven's bar of justice. And He can do the effectively and righteously because He has paid for all our sins.

Not every advocate in a human court of law does that. There are corrupt lawyers. Mob bosses have their **consular** who keeps them out of jail, who knows all the loopholes and can maneuver in that way. The Lord's different. The Lord is righteous. He presents a perfect case. He pleads our innocence, not on the basis of our deeds, not on the basis of our own worth. Our deeds, our own nature, would condemn us in and of itself. He pleads our case on the basis of His deeds, on what He has done, on His payment for our debts. And the reality is every believer in Jesus Christ, everyone who has attached himself or herself to Him through faith is all paid up. Every debt is paid. We are innocent. We are righteous, only because of Christ and

what He's done for us at Calvary. He is our propitiation - not might be - He is our propitiation. He is our atonement and His wounded hands prove that.

But John wants to emphasize that Christ's work on the cross is vast in its scope. It includes Gentiles as well as Jews, so he says, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Now, put this in its context, because he's writing to encourage people who have been discouraged and confused by heretical teaching. The heretics elevated themselves and their followers as enlightened people, as, really, the enlightened few, as an elite group of spiritually initiated people who are close to God, who had the real knowledge, the inside knowledge on things.

And that at least is a major part of Gnosticism, which this heresy seems to have been, a kind of incipient or beginning form phase of Gnosticism. And what John is doing here is he's assuring the church that it does not have an elite class. "We," he said, "We apostles, we Jews, with all of our privileges." And the Jewish people had and have great privileges. They are God's chosen people - still are. They're the apple of His eye. And he's saying here, "We, with all of our privileges, have the propitiation, but not more than you Gentiles have it." Christ is for the whole world - Jew and Gentile alike, for all who believe in Him. He's our Advocate and priest who prays for us in our weaknesses and gets blessings for us due to His sacrifice.

In fact, the Biblical background for all of this may be the great day of atonement, when once a year Israel's high priest offered a sacrifice for the nation. The priest slaughtered a goat on the altar, then he brought its blood into the holy of holies and he sprinkled it on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. It was a propitiation for the people's sins. The word "mercy seat" is related to this word, "propitiation." In fact, in Romans 3:25, where Paul writes that God displayed Christ "publicly as a propitiation in His blood." That word, "propitiation," is the word for mercy seat. Some people, some

scholars, have suggested that's the way it should be translated - not propitiation, but mercy seat - because that's what Paul has in mind.

Well, regardless of how we translate that, Christ is our mercy seat. He is the place where atonement is made, where God's justice was fully satisfied toward the sinner and His wrath was turned away from us forever. John is saying that Jesus fulfilled the pattern of that Old Testament sacrifice for His people. But His people are not just Israel. They now include Gentiles - Jews and Gentiles equally. He bought us. He is our propitiation. The propitiation on the day of atonement wasn't provisional. The sacrifice atoned for Israel and kept the nation safe for another year.

Christ has done that for us, but not for another year - for all eternity. And He's presently constantly applying the merits of His death to us. He is supplying us with life and forgiveness and restoration. We are secure forever. And we're to rest in that. We are not to seek our rest, our refuge, in anywhere else other than the cross of Christ and all that that means for us.

But how does all of that, all that I've been saying here, accomplish John's purpose in this book, which is that we may not sin? Don't security and guarantee forgiveness encourage sin, rather than discourage it? Won't people say, "Well, I'm completely forgiven. I have a lawyer who will never lose a case against me. I am secure for all eternity so I can sin with impunity"? No, that is a false understanding of things. Paul answers that, of course, in Romans and he said, "May it never be. How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" Grace don't encourage sin. grace enables victory over sin.

Anyone who uses grace as an excuse for sin don't understand grace at all. The child of God, the one who walks in the light, who has fellowship with God, resists sin and does so naturally. And grace is the greatest motivation for doing that, not fear, though fear is a motivation. Another thing, it's a legitimate motivation. Sin is dangerous. Sin is deadly. It results in discipline in the believer's life. It can result in physical death. It results in terrible consequences for

everyone who chooses that path in life, to go his or her own way. Proverbs 13:15 says "The way of transgressors is hard." Sin is a hard way. It may have give us pleasure for a season, as the Lord said, but the consequences are terrible.

So that is a motivation. Don't touch fire; it will burn you. But the greatest motivation is not fear; it's love. And that's what John is instilling here - a sense of the debt that we owe our Lord. That, more than anything, produces gratitude, which is incentive for effort. That's the greatest incentive for effort. Paul says that in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, "The love of Christ controls us," or the love of Christ constrains us, "so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf."

The more we realize what Christ has done for us and at what cost He did that for us, the more we will want to do for Him, the more we will want to resist sin and please Him, because we love Him. And not simply because we have to, but because we desire to please Him, the one who has done so much for us.

Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? His death for you was very personal. He didn't sacrifice Himself for you in some general way to just sort of capture everybody perhaps, if that might happen. It wasn't a general kind of sacrifice with a hope that all or some might come. He died for you specifically and effectively. As Paul put it, "Who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul knew this was a very personal thing. And I can say that; you can say that. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you can. He came for me. He came for you. Your name was on His heart personally. You were personally in His thoughts. He went to the cross joyfully, as the author of Hebrews tells us, because it would save you in particular. And He succeeded. He bought your freedom. He snatched you like a brand from the burning. He didn't simply make salvation possible so that you could complete it by your faith. He did it. He saved you. He's your Savior. He even obtained your faith for you through His death. He saved you when He bought you on the cross.

Now that was the purpose of His coming. That was the reason He came into this world, and He never fails in His purpose - never. That guarantees us that our eternal salvation and our future glory are certain. They're not held up to question, up to doubt. They're not hanging on some thread of doubt. They are certain.

But also, Christ's death for me, for you, is the measure and pledge of God's love - the Father and the Son's love for us. It shows how firm it is, how devoted it is. It cannot fail us. And right now at this moment Christ is serving as our Advocate. He's pleading our case at this very moment. He's praying for our welfare and our strength and our protection. He never stops doing that and He always succeeds.

There's no greater security than that, and security and victory are incentive to fight the good fight and prevail over sin. His love and sacrifice for us constrains us to love and serve Him. His victory at the cross and His effective prayers for us as our Advocate and as our great high priest in heaven gives us courage - should. Courage to strive against that which opposes us and strive against the temptations that face us and live a holy life.

There is no greater blessing than having Jesus Christ as your advocate and your propitiation and your great high priest. Is He yours? He is if you have believed in Him. That's all that a person must do to have that blessing - simply receive Christ as Savior. If you haven't and you're worried that, well, maybe He didn't die for me, you can settle that very easily. He died for sinners. Are you a sinner? He receives everyone who believes in Him. Believe in Him. You'll be received and know that He died for you.

So trust in Christ if you've not done that. And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ and you're under the difficulties of life, the temptations of life, the challenges of life, know you have an advocate with the Father pleading your case and you are absolutely secure He never loses and He will bring you through every trial and difficulty. He will strengthen you and you will prevail by God's grace. Let's pray.

Father, we give You thanks for the build of Your Son, for sending Him into this world to die for sinners such as us, to be the propitiation for our sins, to turn away your righteous wrath and gain for us eternal life. We have nothing to boast of in ourselves, but we certainly do in Christ. We thank You for Him, for the salvation we have in Him, and for His present work of being our Advocate and priest. Give all glory to You and we thank You in Christ name. Amen.