

# KNOW THE WONDER AND GREATNESS OF SALVATION

## 1 JOHN 01:10–02:02

### *Introduction*

Sin is a terrible thing. We see it blazed across the headlines of news reports every day: murder, mayhem, assault, fraud, cheating, lying, deceit, adultery, divorce, fighting, wars. Sin is so corrupt and common that every conceivable sin is seen or heard about in one form or another practically every day. Sin is so much a part of human life that we hardly pay attention to it unless it is some major crime or else it involves our own lives and families. Sin is just everywhere. No matter where we turn we see people mistreating others — criticizing, back-biting and gossiping about them. We see people verbally tearing other people down. We see husbands and wives living together but lacking true love. They are just together, living in coldness and being withdrawn from one another. We see all kinds of selfishness in children and fellow workers. We see lying, deception, stealing, cheating and all sorts of sexual immorality. We see people dressing in tight clothes or else exposing parts of the human body in order to attract attention, and then we see all kinds of promiscuity and rapes, assaults and murders. The list of sins and shortcomings in life could fill a book.

But the point is this: some people say they have not sinned. Despite all the sin in the world — all the sin that swirls around and engulfs human lives and society — some persons say that they can become righteous on their own. They say they can become so righteous that God will approve their behaviour — that God will accept them because of their own righteousness and sinlessness. They say they do not need a Saviour; they are able to save themselves. They say that the Son of God does not need to die for the sins of man because man can become righteous and sinless enough on his own, righteous and sinless enough to become acceptable to God.

This is the subject of the present passage. There are those who object to the idea that Jesus Christ *had to die* for the sins of man. They object to the preaching of sin, the idea that they are sinners, to the idea that they need the blood of God's Son to cleanse their sins. They object and declare that man can become righteous and sinless on his own.

- I. We can become righteous and sinless on our own (v. 10).
- II. The truth: we are sinful, but we should not sin (Ch. 2:1).
- III. The provision is made if we do sin (vv. 1-2).
  - a. Jesus Christ, the Advocate.
  - b. Jesus Christ, the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, for our sins.

### **I. *John 02:10 Sin, Self-righteousness***

The misconception is forcefully stated — “we have not sinned.” How could any person conceivably claim this? Who would claim such a thing in light of all the sin that swirls

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and engulfs man and society? Many people! There are many people who object to being called sinners, and they are insistent in their objection. They believe they are righteous and sinless enough that God would never reject them. They believe they can become good enough and sinless and righteous enough for God to accept them. They accept Jesus Christ as a great moral teacher and as the founder of Christianity, one of the great religions of the world. And they claim to be Christians; they follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. But they reject His deity, the fact that He is the Son of God who had to die for the sins of the world. They look upon the death of Jesus Christ as the death of a martyr, as a great man who was showing us how we should be willing to pay any price for what we believe — even death.

Who would make such a claim? Who would say “we have not sinned”? Who is it that objects to being called a sinner?

=> There is the *religious perfectionist*. This is a person who actually believes that he can achieve a state of sinlessness. Often he believes in Christ, but he believes that once he is saved, he can live so righteous and so pure a life that he can achieve a state of sinlessness and righteousness before God. He believes that the Holy Spirit will help him to *walk perfectly* before God.

=> There is the *social perfectionist*. This is a person who is a social Christian, who accepts Jesus Christ as a great teacher but rejects Him as the Saviour from sin. He objects to being called a *sinner*; he objects to the fact that he is sinful enough that he can be termed a *sinner*. He believes that he is righteous and sinless enough for God to accept, that God would never reject them. He believes he is too good for God to reject. He cannot accept the fact that he is bad enough and sinful enough for God to condemn him.

Note what the problem is with these two objectors. They just do not have a clear view of what sin is. To them sin is the gross violation of law and morality, the thing that society looks upon as gross sins: murder, fraud, and abuse — the kind of things that would grab a neighbour’s attention and cause talk. They fail to see what sin is to God. God is perfect; therefore, to God:

=> Sin is any imperfection.

=> Sin is falling short of God’s glory.

=> Sin is missing the mark of God’s perfection.

This is the reason no person can ever live with God. God is perfect; therefore, only perfection can live in His presence. Man is imperfect and short of God’s glory; he is sinful. Therefore, man can never live in God’s presence. This is what the objector needs to see. To God man is a *sinner*, a person who is ever so short of God’s glory, a person...

- who fails to use his mind to the fullest degree and who focuses it upon evil.
- who sometimes thinks impure and wrong thoughts and who commits impurity.

- who sometimes acts unlovely and mean to people.
- who sometimes acts impatiently and abuses others.
- who sometimes acts selfishly and steals.
- who sometimes owns too much and banks and hoards instead of living sacrificially to meet the desperate needs of the world.

All men are short in so much — short in worshipping God like they should, short in praying and fellowshiping and communing with God. No person obeys God perfectly all the time. All men come short of loving others like they should, short in witnessing and sharing Christ and in sacrificing and reaching out to help everywhere they should. No person is perfect; all are ever so short and sinful, so sinful that to God we are all sinners. We are sinners who need a Saviour, the very Son of God Himself, to save us from our sins. Now, note what the verse says:

*If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (v. 10)*

God's Word plainly tells us that we are sinners, and it tells us often. If we, therefore, deny sin, we make God out to be a liar. In addition, we show that God's Word is not in us; that is, we are not acceptable to God. No matter what we may claim, we are not acceptable to God...

- if God's Word is not in us.
- if we call God a liar.
- if we say we do not need God's Son to save us from our sin.
- if we say we can become good enough and righteous enough and sinless enough to be acceptable to God.

**Rom 3:23** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

**Titus 3:3** *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

**James 4:17** *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

**1 John 1:8** *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

**1 John 5:19** *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

**Eccl 7:20** *There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.*

**Gen 6:5** *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*

**Psa 53:3** *Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

**Prov 20:9** *Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"?*

**Isa 64:6** *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

**Isa 53:6** *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

## II. **John 02:01 The Believer's Spiritual Struggle**

The truth is that we are sinful, but *we should not sin*. This is a tender exhortation: John addresses the believers “my dear children.” They are very, very dear to him. He was their pastor, their spiritual father; and they were his spiritual children, the ones under his care. He loved them with the love of a strong and caring father. Therefore, he must exhort them. He must exhort them in the areas where they needed strength. Where was that? In sinning. Note exactly what John says:

**1 John 2:1** *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.*

“I write this” refer to the things John has just said, to the fact that all have sinned and all do sin. Because of man’s nature, the very fact that he lives within a corruptible world, he *cannot keep from sinning*. But note the strong exhortation: “I write this to you so that you will not sin.” The believer lives in a corruptible world, and he is housed in a body of flesh that is so easily aroused and attracted to eat more, take more, have more, be more and receive more. But the believer is to struggle and fight against sin. He is not to give in to sin. He is to *cast down imaginations, demolish arguments* and struggle to captivate every thought for Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). He is to do all he can to become more and more like Christ and to be a stronger and stronger witness for righteousness in the world. He will never achieve perfection; he will never be sinless so long as he is in the flesh and in this corruptible world. But he is to struggle to be as good as he can. He is to be as righteous as possible and he is to gain ground; he is to grow in righteousness. The believer is to become more and more like Christ as long as he is on earth.

**Thought 1.** Believers must prove they are sincere when they come to Christ for forgiveness of sins. Christ has no patience with hypocrisy and no place for half-hearted commitment. He can look at our lives and tell whether we love Him or not, whether we are sincere or not. He can watch our struggle against sin and tell if we really want to follow Him or not. The genuine believer struggles against sin; he fights, wrestles and wars against sin with every ounce of energy he has. He does all he can to please God and to receive God’s approval.

**Isa 1:16** *Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong.*

**John 5:14** *Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”*

**John 8:11** *“No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

**Rom 6:12** *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

**1 Cor 15:34** *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.*

**Job 11:14** *If you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent.*

**Isa 55:7** *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

**Eph 4:22** *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.*

**Heb 12:1** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

**1 Pet 2:11** *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*

**1 John 2:1** *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

### III. **John 02:01–02 The Death of Jesus Christ**

There is the great provision. The believer is not to sin, but if he sins he has the most wonderful provision — that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself. Two things are said about Jesus Christ that show the wonderful provision God has made for us.

1. Jesus Christ is our “Advocate” (parakleton), the one who speaks to the Father in our defence. The word “*advocate or defender*” means someone who is called in to stand by the side of another. The purpose is to help in any way possible. (This is the word [parakletos] used of the Holy Spirit. See *Comforter*, Jn. 14:16.)
  - => There is the picture of a friend called in to help a person who is troubled or distressed or confused.
  - => There is the picture of a commander called in to help a discouraged and dispirited army.
  - => There is the picture of a lawyer, an advocate called in to help a defendant who needs his case pleaded.

There is no one word that can adequately translate paracletos. The word that probably comes closest is simply *helper*. Sin causes the believer to be distressed and confused, discouraged and dispirited. Sin separates the believer from God and makes him guilty of transgression and worthy of condemnation and punishment. But Jesus Christ is

the believer's *Advocate*. Jesus Christ stands before God and pleads the case of the believer. Note two significant points.

- a. What is it that gives Jesus Christ the right to plead the case of the believer? Note exactly what the verse says: Jesus Christ is *the righteous One*. He is the Son of God who came to earth and lived a sinless life as man. He is the One who secured the *perfect and ideal righteousness* for man. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the *only Person* who has the right to stand before God. Why? Because God is perfect, and only a perfect person can stand in God's presence. This is the reason man must approach God through Jesus Christ: He alone is perfect and righteous. He alone has the right to stand in the court of God as the Advocate or attorney to represent man. There is no other righteousness, no other goodness that is acceptable to God; only the perfect and ideal righteousness of Christ has been approved to stand as the advocate in the court of heaven.

This means a most wonderful thing. God will never turn down a person who has Jesus Christ as his advocate. The person who has Jesus Christ to approach God for him will never be turned down, for Jesus Christ has the right to stand as the advocate before God in the court of heaven.

- b. What is it that Jesus Christ pleads?

=> He does not plead the reputation of the believer.

=> He does not plead the good works of the believer.

=> He does not plead *not guilty*, that the believer did not commit sin.

=> He does not plead the personal righteousness of the believer.

=> He does not plead that the believer has been as good as he can be.

What is it that Jesus Christ pleads? Again, note the verse:

**1 John 2:1** *We have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

He pleads His own righteousness. How can He do this? This is the discussion of the next point.

**Rom 8:34** *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

**Heb 2:17** *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

**Heb 4:14-15** *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.*

**Heb 7:25-26** *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*

**Heb 8:1** *The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.*

**Heb 9:24** *For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.*

2. Jesus Christ is the *propitiation, the atoning sacrifice for our sins*. “Atoning sacrifice” (hilasmos) means to be a sacrifice, a covering, a satisfaction, a payment, an appeasement for sin. It means to turn away anger or to make reconciliation between God and man. Remember: God is holy and just. He is perfect love, but He is also perfect holiness and justice. Therefore He must execute justice against the sinner. He must judge and condemn sin. His justice must be perfectly satisfied. Now there is only one way God's justice can be perfectly satisfied: His justice has to be cast against the perfect sacrifice. If there was a Perfect and Ideal Man, then that Man could accept the guilt and punishment for sin. The Perfect Man could step forward and bear the punishment for sin and satisfy the justice of God.

This is the glorious gospel, the wonderful love and provision of God. Jesus Christ is the Ideal and Perfect Man. Therefore, He sacrificed His life for man and His sacrifice covered all men. As the Ideal Man, Jesus Christ accepted the guilt and punishment of sin for all men. He died for all men. When He died, He died as the perfect sacrifice for sins. Therefore, God accepts His death...

- as the *sacrifice* for our sins.
- as the *covering* for our sins.
- as the *satisfaction* for our sins.
- as the *payment* for the penalty of our sins.
- as the *appeasement* of His wrath against sin.

When Jesus Christ carries a man's case before God, He pleads His own righteousness and death, and God accepts His righteousness and death for man. It is by this, by the sacrifice of His death for our sins, that we become acceptable to God.

Note one other point: Jesus Christ is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the *whole world*. He is the eternal Son of God, the Ideal and Perfect Man. Therefore, all that He ever did covers eternity. His sacrifice for sin covers the first man ever born and spans all of time over to the last man, and then continues right on throughout all of eternity. Jesus Christ paid the penalty of sin for all sinners of all generations. He died for the sins of all people, no matter who they are or what they have done.

But note a critical fact: a person has to come to Jesus Christ and trust Him to be his advocate before God. Jesus Christ is the only Person who has the right to stand as an advocate in the court of God's perfect justice. He is the only Person who can present man's case before God and have man declared righteous. Therefore, a person is not covered by the advocacy of Christ unless he comes to Christ and has Christ represent him before God.

**Heb 2:17** *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

**1 John 2:1-2** *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

**1 John 4:10** *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ■*

## JOHN 02:02

### ATONING SACRIFICE; PROPITIATION (HILASMOS)

*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. **John 02:02***

To sacrifice in order to appease; to satisfy; to cover; to pay the penalty for. It is a sacrificial word. In the Old Testament when a man sinned or something went wrong, he brought a sacrifice to God. The idea was that the sacrifice would appease and pacify and satisfy God. He thought God would be gracious to him and place the punishment for his sin upon the animal. When things go wrong, man has always offered to fast and pray and serve with renewed vigour, or else he has offered to give up some meaningful pleasure or possession. There is a feeling that this kind of denial or renewed sacrifice appeases and satisfies God.

It is true that God told Israel to offer sacrifices. But He did it for a reason: to teach Israel, and through them the world, that the answer does not lie in human or animal sacrifice. A human sacrifice cannot bring about a right relationship with God. Man's problem is too deep for human sacrifice; his contamination too severe; his disease too terrible; his infection too deadly. The paraphernalia of earthly sacrifice can never put things right with God.

The reason is simply stated. Man's sin has cut him off from God, severed his relationship with God, put God out of *arm's reach*. Man instinctively senses this. Thus, when man fails to get satisfaction from his sacrifice, he often returns to his former behaviour and practices.

What man needs is to be disinfected, to have his sins covered. He needs to know beyond a doubt that God does accept him and is satisfied with him. And then he needs a power to live for God.

This comes about through propitiation. Four things need to be said about propitiation.

1. God is the One who has to be appeased, satisfied and propitiated. The Bible is not speaking of reconciliation. The Bible never says that God has to be reconciled to man. God is already the friend of man; He loves man. It is man who needs to be reconciled to God. Man is the one who holds enmity, who ignores, neglects and rejects God. Thus, God is the One who has to be appeased or propitiated (cp. Lk. 18:13).

There is another thought here as well. God is righteous and holy, and His righteousness and holiness have to be satisfied. He can only accept a person who is perfectly righteous and holy. It might be said that anything less than perfection would contaminate the very atmosphere around God. And the presence and dwelling place of God would no longer be the utopia which God has prepared for the believer and for which man dreams.

2. Jesus Christ is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, the satisfaction for sins. Christ was completely righteous and holy; therefore, He was the perfect and ideal Man. This means that His death was the perfect and ideal sacrifice. God was able to satisfy His justice against sins by casting it against Christ. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ completely satisfied and appeased the righteousness of God (1 Jn. 4:9-10).
3. Propitiation means *coverage*. Christ covers our sins so that God no longer can see them (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; Jn. 2:2).
4. Propitiation finds its type in the mercy seat, that is, in the lid of the ark (Heb. 9:5). God had said that man was to approach Him through the sacrifice of an animal, through the shedding of blood. The lid or covering of the ark was sprinkled once a year with the blood of a perfect animal. This signified that the life of the people was being offered to God in the blood of the victim. God was thereby appeased and satisfied. (Cp. Lk. 18:13; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10.) □