



2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Oct 30th - Nov 5th

Sermon: October 29th



October 30

Hebrews 7:25

In our text from Sunday's message, we read that when we sin, "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word "advocate" is not one that I imagine we use often. In fact, it is most likely blended in with the idea of intercession. A far more familiar verse is found in Hebrews 7:25 where it is written, "Therefore He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make *intercession* for them." We understand this to mean to intercede on behalf of another. We think of a person standing in between two others who are at odds for one reason or another. Someone, a third party, stands between them to try to intervene and work out the situation.

Advocacy is similar to that, but it is not the same thing. To intercede is to mediate between two parties while to advocate is to align oneself with another person. An advocate joins one person and makes the case to the other as a partner with the one he/she has joined. Jesus is of course both an intercessor and an advocate. The little epistle, known as 1st John, was written so that we would know Jesus and know whether or not we have saving faith in Him. John also wrote in our passage from Sunday that he was writing so that we may not sin (2:1). Please understand that he is writing about motivation not to sin. He is clearly aware of the reality of sin in every person's life and the fact that if we say we have no sin in us or do not sin that we are liars and God's truth is not in us.

Now, right after he says that he writes "so that we may not sin", he writes, "When you do sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." The fact that we are sinners demands that we need Jesus not only as our King, but as our Friend. We need Him to be not only over us, but next to us. Praise the Lord that He does indeed stand with us as friend to sinners and as our Advocate. The word for advocate is *paraclete* in Greek. It is used four other times in the New Testament, all in the gospel of John. Each time it is translated as *Helper* and refers to the Holy Spirit. Some translations use the word "comforter" and "companion." The idea is that of someone who appears on behalf of another person. I want to point out a beautiful and much needed observation from the text.

John does not write that we will have an advocate at some point after we sin. I think of that moment at the judgment seat. You may be tempted to imagine Jesus standing up at that point and defending you before the Father. Please note that the Bible says, "WHEN you sin...you HAVE an advocate." It does not say that you will someday have one. It does not mean that on the day of the trial He will show up on your behalf. No! It says that when you sin, He is already serving as your Advocate. In the very moment of your need, there is the Lord Jesus speaking on your behalf. One of the differences between His intercessory ministry and the fact that He is our Advocate is that the Bible says in Hebrews 7:25 that He is always making intercession for us whereas His advocacy only happens when we need it. It is when we sin that He immediately stands up with us and for us as our advocate before the Father.

- I write this today because I want you to be encouraged as you wrestle with your sin. I know that for many of us, we hate our sin and wish that we were so much more like Jesus. Our sins tend to feel even more sinful the closer we walk with the Lord. I want you to be more aware today of the reality that when you sin, Jesus Christ, as your Friend and Advocate, stands up for you. Don't give up but lean in. His advocacy rises higher than any of our sins and speaks louder than our failures. It is from His heart that He advocates for us. It is from His own suffering and death that He stands up for you and me in our weakness and failures. Praise God for this wonderful truth.

October 31

Romans 1:17, 3:25

We are all fairly familiar with the often emphasized reality that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). Typically, we are encouraged by thinking on the grace of God as well as His mercy as it is extended to “wretched sinners” like us. True indeed is this beautiful aspect of God’s redemptive plan to save us. We should marvel at and be humbled by the fact that we are not good enough to earn our salvation and there is nothing in us that prompted God’s decision to save us. But, there is more to what happened in our salvation than just the “loving” pieces to His plan.

John wrote in 1 John 2:1 that we have an advocate as well as One who was the propitiation for our sins (v.2). These are not terms of love in the normal sense of the word. These are terms that relate to justice like that which you would find in a courtroom. The reason that I choose to write about this today is because I hope we will see both His love and justice balanced beautifully in redemption and that we will better understand that we truly had no standing before Him and that our sin was not overlooked, disregarded, or somehow swept under the rug. God was perfectly just in how He saved us and did not loosen any of His demands for justice or the fact that sin had to be punished. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) and that wage was paid.

The point that John is making in our current epistle of study is that “If (when) we sin, we have an advocate before the Father in heaven.” Dear ones, that is legal talk. We actually have a defense attorney in heaven who stands for us and with us when we sin as the “little children” of God. It is the imagery of the court of divine justice. God is on the bench. His responsibility is to uphold the perfection of His holy law. He is just, and He will execute justice. We are the guilty sinner in the courtroom. Jesus Christ is the defense lawyer who pleads the case on our behalf before the bar of holy God.

My desire is that we will see that salvation is not just an act of grace, it is not just an act of love and mercy, but it is an act of justice, so that God’s love did not disregard His law, His mercy did not neglect His wrath, His compassion did not overwhelm His justice; rather, they worked together in perfect harmony. It is most common for people to have a very shallow understanding of the gospel that fails to see how our salvation is not only by grace but by justice accomplished. Again, my hope is that this will make His salvation even more amazing in your mind and your heart. Also, I hope that you will better understand a passage like Romans 3:24-25 that says, “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was to demonstrate His righteousness.*” The plan of redemption certainly highlights the grace of God, but it also intends to demonstrate his righteousness. How is that?

The answer lies in the fact that Jesus is our Advocate and propitiation for our sins. You see, God did not wink at sin, He paid the penalty for it. All that His perfect holiness and justice demanded was satisfied in Jesus Christ. Justice was not ignored or compromised in any way. It was not set aside; it was perfectly satisfied. Notice too that in Romans 1:17, Paul wrote that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. So, the gospel is not just about mercy and grace. It is also about justice and righteousness. More on this tomorrow.

November 1

Romans 1:17; 1 John 1:9

I have an interesting point to ponder at the outset of today's devotion. In 1 John 1:9, a familiar verse, we are told that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins." The word translated as righteous in the NASB is translated as "just" in the ESV and KJV. It carries the same meaning in both cases, but I want to utilize the word "just" today because I think it will make the point clearer. How does the fact that He is just lead Him to forgive us of our sins? I would think it would be just the opposite. I think it would be natural for us to assume that His justice would require our punishment whereas His mercy would give us forgiveness. The verse says that He is just in His forgiveness of our sins. We are guilty sinners who deserve punishment and yet it is in His justice that He forgives.

Mercy and justice seem to contradict one another. Either you get mercy, or you get justice. If you get mercy, that means you didn't get what you deserve. How can that be justice? If you get justice, you get what you deserve, how can that be mercy? They seem mutually exclusive because the common understanding of justice is that it requires the guilty to be punished. If God is just, then we ought to be punished. How can He be merciful and just to the same person at the same time? I am reminded here of a passage like Exodus 34:6-7. There we read of some beautiful attributes of God that speak of His compassion, grace, mercy, etc. But then in verse 7 it says, "He will not leave the guilty unpunished." Well, there it is. If you are guilty, you will be punished. Solomon wrote that the evil man will not go unpunished (Prov. 11:21). There are many other texts in the Bible that make it explicitly clear that God is just, God is righteous, God is holy, God will judge sinners, and God will not let sin go unpunished. To do so would raise serious questions about the character and certainly holiness of God.

Preachers love to talk about mercy, grace, and forgiveness. The shame is that seldom do they talk about the perfect justice of God that demands punishment for sin. While justice demands punishment, mercy cries out for rescuing the sinner. The gospel is not that God is going to punish every sin. That would not be good news at all. The good news is that every sin will be punished, and yet the sinner will be forgiven. God will save sinners, satisfy His mercy and satisfy His justice. Don't miss for a minute a truth that helps when you grasp it. Many years ago, the late R. C. Sproul asked the question, "What are we being saved from?" His answer shocked the listeners. He said we are being saved from God.

Now, before you go off the deep end, remember that it is God who wrote the Law, who interprets the Law, and who upholds the Law. It is God who is offended when we sin, and it is God who demands payment for our sin. He said from the beginning, sin will bring on death! It is God's justice that must be satisfied not Satan's. It is God's Law that is broken. Jesus said, "...fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28b). So, as we stand in the courtroom guilty as charged before the Judge who has every right to throw us under the jail, we can rejoice knowing that we stand with our defender, our Advocate – the Lord Jesus.

Before you start thinking that God is against us and it is up to Jesus to win Him over, remember that God appointed our defender. God chose a court-appointed public defender for us. He chose the best one in the universe, the only one who could successfully argue our case. He did that because God by nature is merciful as well as just. Let's talk about propitiation tomorrow.

November 2

Isaiah 53; 1 John 2:2

Today we are going to look at that big word found in 1 John 2:2 – propitiation. The Bible refers to Him as Jesus Christ the righteous and then proceeds to call Him the propitiation for our sins. That simply means that He was the satisfaction. He is more than our defense attorney. He is our Advocate and He provided satisfaction for the justice of God. This is a fantastic truth that is far too often neglected or maybe just unknown. God chose Christ not only to be our advocate, but He chose Him to be our substitute. Through Christ, the penalty that was demanded by our Holy God was paid. He stood and died in our place and that satisfied the righteous demands of holiness. He was our propitiation.

All of our sins were placed on Christ, and He bore that punishment in our place. 1 Peter 2:24 says, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.” By His wounds, you were healed (Isa. 53). “The Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering” (Isa. 53:10) In other words, He became our substitute and was the guilt offering for our sin. Verse 11 says, “He was the servant who justified many by bearing their iniquities.” Verse 5 adds, “He was pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our wellbeing fell on Him, and by His scourging, we are healed.” He made atonement for us by becoming our substitute. He could do this because He was Jesus – the Righteous.

Yesterday I mentioned what R.C. Sproul said about us being saved *from* God. Look at what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. “...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” He did this by being the satisfaction, the propitiation for our sins, and dying in our place. So, He is not just our defense attorney, He’s our substitute, and He ever lives to defend us. Our names are being dragged before the bar of God all the time by the enemy who’s always accusing us before God (Rev. 12:10), and the interceding advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, is ever living to take our case and to reiterate that He has paid for all our sins. Thus, the justice of God is satisfied in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ in which all our sins were paid for, and the mercy of God is satisfied because the sinner, having had his sins paid for, can now receive mercy.

John MacArthur wrote, “How could God do that? How could God manifest His justice? How could God manifest justice apart from law? Justice is based on law. How could God, if He sets His law aside, manifest His justice? Answer? Romans 3:25. Because He publicly displayed Christ Jesus as a satisfaction in His blood. He didn’t set aside His law in the truest sense, He set aside the punishment that His law rendered to us. He set it aside in terms of withholding it from us, but He put it on Christ, who became a satisfaction in His blood. Verse 26 says this was to demonstrate His justice.” He showed the world that sin was indeed paid for.

God demonstrated His righteousness in the death of Jesus Christ. Notice that it was the Father’s plan all along. “This man delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God...” (Acts 2:23). This tells us that Jesus was crucified by the will and foreknowledge of God. So, when we sin, what happens? When we sin, here comes the devil to declare us guilty and to show the records that we are. The advocate comes in and says, “I paid for that sin” and He ever lives to advocate and intercede before the bar of God on our behalf because God was satisfied with His payment.

November 3

Romans 8:1

Have you ever read a book or passages like many that we find in 1 John and walk away feeling a bit discouraged? The litmus tests for genuine saving faith in this little book can be quite intimidating. The reality is that we all have sin in our lives and we all fall short of the perfect, holy standards of God, so how do we read this and not feel like we are failing. Who measures us to this plumb line that John dangles in front of us for assurance. It may feel like just the opposite happens as we read. We may walk away feeling defeated and even hopeless as we see how far we have to go to be close to all of these Christian characteristics. Let me show you what I mean.

Before we go any farther, let me remind you that John talks about forgiveness and the work of advocacy that Jesus does on behalf of all of His followers. This is meant to give us peace at the outset. I am so thankful that as I read through 1 John I get to a verse like 2:12 that says, "I am writing to you little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake." Whew! Still the piercing and penetrating verses are there too. In 1:5 we quickly learn that God is light and if we walk in the darkness the Truth is not in us. Don't you worry a little that sometimes you do. Chapter 2:3 can hit pretty hard too. It says that we know we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments and if we don't then we are liars. There again, I do often but not always. Where does that leave me? There are more but let us jump to 2:29 where we read that Christians follow and practice righteousness. How about 3:6, "No one who abides in Him sins." Ouch! I know that means practices sin habitually but still I am left a tad bit nervous sometimes. There are hard validating verses like this throughout 1 John. Again, how do we read this and feel confident? Should only perfect people, people better than you and me, feel okay about all of this or is there some reason for us to be confident and hopeful too?

This is where the beauty of 1 John 2:1 rings loud and comforts us deeply. When you sin, you have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. That is beautiful news and it is calming news. It is necessary news in light of the reality of our own weaknesses and propensity to sin. We can dig in and keep pressing on toward Jesus and the high calling because He is at work for us and will always be. God's standards are absolutes and are rigid, but this should drive us to Jesus our Savior. We need Him. Don't you see how desperate would be our situation if we did not have Jesus? God's divine justice demands requirements that only our Advocate can handle. WE NEED JESUS and He does not disappoint.

Ponder more amazing truth from God's Word today. Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus." Why? Because Jesus took our sin and our punishment as propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins. We are not condemned because He was in our place. God was just in that He punished sin and He was merciful in that He poured it on Jesus and not us. Therefore Romans 8:33 & 34 says, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the One who justifies." No one can because God is the one who justifies. Verse 34, "Who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God who also intercedes for us." No one can bring a successful accusation against us because God has already declared us just, because justice was satisfied when our sins were paid for by Christ. And Christ Jesus is there at the right hand of God, ever and always interceding for us and advocating when necessary. The price the judge demanded was met. The judge affirmed His satisfaction by raising our propitiator, our defender, from the dead, and exalting Him to His right hand, where He represents us.

November 4

John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7

Each of the verses that I chose for today contain the word *paracleté*, which is the Greek word for Advocate or Helper. In each of these verses, it is rightly translated as Helper and refers to the Holy Spirit. I want to focus a bit today on the reality of our *Helper* being with us here on earth. We have learned from our text from Sunday that Jesus Christ, who is currently in heaven, acts as our Advocate when we sin and need Him to stand, on our behalf, before God the Father. The picture we get is of One who is defending us against the attacks of Satan who is intent on hurting God by leading us into sin and forced judgment.

We have a defender in heaven watching over us and standing with us, and today we learn that we have a *Helper* who is standing with us on earth. It reminds me of the intercessory ministry of Christ on our behalf described in Hebrews 7:25 alongside the intercessory prayer ministry of the Holy Spirit that is mentioned in Romans 8:26. I have always found great comfort in knowing that God the Son is praying for us from the throne room of heaven AND God the Spirit is praying for us here on earth; obviously we need them both.

The love that Jesus Christ has for us is deep, wide, and all encompassing. As He was preparing to go to the cross, He prayed a beautiful priestly prayer that is recorded for us in John 17. In that prayer, He demonstrates a precious love for His disciples in His concern for them while He is on the cross and ultimately placed in the tomb. He prays, "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name...While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name...and I guarded them" (John 17:11-12). Jesus had watched over them all the while they were together. Now He knew that He was leaving and would not be able to be there with them so His prayer is that, in His absence, God the Father would watch over them and keep them as He had done. Jesus was leaving his little children in the care of someone else and so He prayed.

He does the same thing as He is about to ascend back to heaven after His resurrection. He knows that He is leaving them, but He is not going to leave them alone or without care and protection. So, in John 14:16, we are told that the Holy Spirit is coming to abide with them and will be with them forever. That is true for all of us who are followers of Jesus Christ. We read in John 14:26 that the *Helper*, the *paraclete*, will come alongside us to help us in our walk and in this verse in particular, will teach us and bring to mind what Jesus, or in our case the Word, has taught us. In John 15:26 we read that the ministry of the Holy Spirit will also include His convincing testimony, to the heart and mind of believers, of the truth of Christ and His redemptive work. Finally, we are told in John 16:7-12 that our Helper will guide us into Truth as He discloses to believers what is to come.

The point that I want you to ponder today is simple and clear. We have God the Son and God the Spirit working to guide us and keep us as we walk this often challenging path of being Christ followers in a dark and dangerous world. It is not easy to maintain our Christian walk in the midst of the worldliness and sin that pervades our land. We need help dear ones, and the fact of the matter is that we have been given all the help that we need. Peter said that we have been given everything pertaining to life and godliness by God for our journey (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus and the Holy Spirit are intent on making sure we are covered forever. They are really good at keeping an eye on us. We need not fear for we are never alone, never out of their sight, and never without their protection.

November 5

1 John 2:2

John records at the end of 1 John 2:2 that Jesus is the propitiation, not only for us but for the whole world. This is one of those places where you must allow the whole counsel of God to help you rightly interpret this one particular verse. It cannot be that John actually believes that Jesus is going to satisfy the wrath of God against every single person on the planet. If that were the case, then everybody would be saved. We know from Scripture that is not the case. A simple verse like one that I often use from John 3:36 quickly dispels that erroneous thought. There it says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him." There is a just wrath aimed at all who reject Christ and rebel against their Creator that is only propitiated for (satisfied) by the work of the Righteous One (Jesus) for those who believe and obey. So, what does John mean when he says, "For those of the whole world?"

Take a look for a moment at John 11:52 where Caiaphas says, "...that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that he might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." Jesus said it this way in John 10:15-16, "...I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also." The point is that there are children of God (sheep) scattered throughout the world that must be brought in, over time, to the family of God. John wrote in Revelation 5:9, "Christ was slain and purchased for God with His blood men from every tongue and people and nation." He did not ransom everybody. He gave his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He did not propitiate the wrath of God against everybody. But he laid down his life for the sheep. They are scattered throughout the world in every tongue and tribe and people and nation. This is one of the reasons that, even though we believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation, we also understand that we are called to the ends of the earth to share the gospel with all people because God has people all over the world that will respond by faith to the gospel and be saved. We do not know who they are so we must try to reach them all.

As we wrap up another week of points to ponder, I close with a simple summary of what the first two verses of 1 John 2 hold. It simply says, that as the children of God, we should do our best not to sin. This is most effectively accomplished when we consider the life changing and inspiring facts about Jesus and the fellowship that He calls us into as His followers. This fellowship is more than eating chicken together once in a while. It is not less than that, it is more. It is a fellowship that is created by an actual union with Christ. This union binds us to Him and places us "in" Him so as to receive all of the blessings of our kinship. In Him we are received and accepted as righteous because He took our sin and imputed to us His righteousness. Remember, He is Jesus the Righteous which qualified Him to be our substitute, the spotless Lamb of God, and to make propitiation for us.

The facts that we know and are being taught by the Spirit are meant to put steel in our spines and inspiration in our hearts to obey Him. He captures our hearts, and we follow. We are told by John not to sin, but when we do, we are not to despair. Why? Because we have an Advocate, a Defender, who is actually the Son of the Judge. He stands alongside us, so we need not despair when we stumble sometimes. Don't give up dear ones, He is set on making sure we make it to the finish. Finally, we should remember that there are others for whom He died, and we should be concerned about being faithful to share the good news of Jesus so that the rest of the family of God will be brought into the fold because as they are, "our joy will be made complete" (1 John 1:4).