

Provision for sin

17/11/19 dkm

Read: Genesis 22:1-14, 1John 1:1- 2:2

Text: 1John 2:1-2

Psalms: 65:1-7, 130, 85:1-7&10-13, 117

Some years ago I got a letter in the mail- one of those double window letters! When I opened it sure enough it was a 'penalty notice'. It said I had driven through a red light and had to pay a fine. I protested, 'I have never driven through a red light'. But the photo taken by the red-light camera showed my car next to a red light. I had broken the law and had to pay the penalty.

When God, through Moses, made a covenant with his chosen people he gave them laws to obey; in fact there were laws, or creation ordinances, before this time, laws about marriage and about the Sabbath. When God set down his holy law he also set down penalties for breaking his law. He declared, 'The soul who sins shall die' (Ezek 18:20), and 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom 3:23). He also provided a way for sins to be forgiven. He told Moses to build a box called the Ark of the Covenant. Sinners would be forgiven if they sacrificed an animal and sprinkled its blood on the cover of this Ark; this cover was called the 'mercy-seat' or '*hilasterion*' in Greek (Heb 9:5).

When Adam and Eve sinned and were thrown out of the Garden of Eden the need of atonement for sin arose. God is holy and hates sin; he cannot look upon sin. God is just and cannot overlook sin. Blood sprinkled on the cover of the Ark covered the sin of the repentant sinner- for a time or until they sinned again. Animal sacrifices were made daily in the temple. Sprinkling of blood on the mercy-seat was done once a year, on the Day of Atonement. This ceremony was a picture of substitution, the blood of the animal victim being accepted by God in the place of the sinner.

Blood sacrifices are no longer part of our worship. Why? Because Jesus fulfilled this requirement when he died on the cross. The Jews want to rebuild the temple and start blood sacrifices again. Other

religions have blood sacrifices. But Jesus is the great High Priest who offered up himself: 'With his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all having obtained eternal redemption' (Heb 9:12). We must not try 'sanitize' the truth of the cross. 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (Heb 9:22). Jesus was not simply a good man or a prophet being unjustly executed; other 'good men' have not risen from the dead! Jesus was a sinless man; which means he is the Son of God. And it was God's will and purpose that he die for the sins of the world (Acts 2:23, John 1:29, 3:16, 1John 2:2).

John takes us to the heart of the gospel in these few verses. He has already made it very clear that sin is a reality for every one of us. He has already spoken of the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleansing us from all sin (1:7). He now teaches us more of the gospel through terms like 'Paraclete or Advocate' and 'propitiation'. So we have these subheadings: 'Perfection- No', 'Paraclete', and 'propitiation'.

1. Perfection-No!

These verses continue with the concern about sin, about acknowledging and confessing sin, rather than denial and claiming to be perfect. John is writing to the church, as shown by the opening words of this chapter: 'My little children' (Greek '*teknia*'). Who was in a position to address the church in this way? Jesus addressed his disciples as children, even little children (John 13:33, 21:5). The apostle Paul calls believers, 'my beloved children' (1Cor 4:14). With John, these words not only point to his status as an apostle but also to his advanced age. He is like a grandfather calling us his little children. It is a term of endearment and love.

John is writing to believers urging them not to sin. False teachers were telling them that sin was not really a big deal, that sin belonged to the body and did not contaminate the mind: 'God hates sin but loves the sinner'. They were saying 'everyone sins', that sin is being human. Some were saying they no longer sinned. John, of course,

urges us not to sin, but goes on, 'And if anyone sins'. He is not talking about wilful, habitual sin, about walking in darkness. He is saying that while ever we are in this body, and in this world where Satan roams, we will be tempted and may succumb to temptation. 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' said Jesus (Mat 26:41).

To the believer, knowing the depths of Christ's love and wanting to please our Saviour and Lord, committing sin is distressing. We sense that our Lord and Master is disappointed and hurt by our sin. We want to be in a proper relationship with him, a relationship of love, but sin has soured this relationship. As a believer we do not make excuses for our sin, nor do we become downcast or disheartened. We do not turn to self-flagellation, although it is important to exercise control over our bodies. What we do is turn to the Lord against whom we have sinned, confess our sins and remember his words, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1John 1:9). The blood of Jesus Christ is the only thing that will cleanse us of our sin. Only in this way can our relationship with the Father, and hence with one another, be restored.

2. Paraclete

'If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' (2:1). 'Advocate' translates the Greek '*paracletos*'. In John's gospel the same word refers to the Holy Spirit; it literally means, 'one who stands bedside'. The Holy Spirit is called the helper, the comforter, or the counsellor. The NIV interprets the word to say, 'we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence' (2:1 NIV). Advocate is a legal term; in America lawyers are called advocates. When you go before a judge you take an advocate, hoping he will plead in such a way that the judge will set you free. Another driver who got booked for going through a red light took the matter to court. With the help of a lawyer pleading on his behalf he was let off without a fine.

Sin is lawlessness (3:4). We are all guilty of breaking God's law, guilty of 'missing the mark', the meaning of the Greek word. When we break God's law we are brought before the judge; God is the judge. John is not here writing about justification, the time when, as unbelievers and enemies of God, we were brought before God to answer for all our sins; 'those who God loved he predestined, he called, and he justified (Rom 8:30). He gave us faith to believe and cleansed us in the precious blood of Christ (1Peter 1:19, Rev 1:5). Being justified we became children of God; we were adopted into his family.

John is writing to children of God. Children still sin and still need forgiveness in the same precious blood of Christ. But we now come before God as our 'Father'. We are children not strangers. God of course, is still holy and just, and breaking one of his commands is still sin, and sin must be atoned for. We are brought to court but have an Advocate or Intercessor to plead our case (Heb 7:25). He does not plead our innocence, or extenuating circumstances, but acknowledges our guilt and pleads his own vicarious work.

We have in Jesus one who is righteous (2:1, 1Peter 3:18). In fact, he is the only one who is righteous. When you come into a human court your lawyer does not plead on the basis of his merits. Nor does he represent you for free! Jesus is the only advocate permitted to appear in God's court and he does so *pro bono*. In our next subheading we will look to the temple rather than the court and see that only one man was permitted to enter the temple, and that once a year, and that not without blood. A proud king called Uzziah presumed to go into the temple, and was struck with leprosy (2Chron 26:16f). If you try to represent yourself in God's court, as some proud people try to do, you will be thrown out on your head.

John makes the point that Jesus Christ is righteous; he is the only one qualified to represent us when we sin and need forgiveness. 'The Father', who is 'Our Father in heaven', is 'faithful and just' or loving

and just (1:9, 2:1). He wants to restore the relationship he has with us, the relationship broken by our sin. His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is crucial to this restoration. He also loves us; he loves us so much that he 'laid down his life for us' (3:16). Love and justice are paramount to both Father and Son; in no sense is the Father forcing the hand of his Son, or the Son reluctant to do what is required by the Father. Father and Son are on the same page, and we need to be on that page; we must not be concocting new ways of dealing with sin! Sin is so serious that nothing but the precious blood of Jesus can wash us clean. Only Jesus is able 'to present you faultless before the presence of His glory' (Jude 24).

3. Propitiation

With the word 'propitiation' we move from courtroom to temple. We have already pictured the temple with the Ark of the Covenant and the curtain of separation, and the high priest entering just once a year with the blood of the sacrifice; the place was called the Most Holy Place. The word 'propitiation' belongs to this scene. It speaks about the wrath or righteous anger of God against sin being appeased by the precious blood of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Some reject this word because they think of propitiation in terms of pagan religions where a capricious, unpredictable god has to be appeased with bribes or gifts. The word 'propitiation' was dropped from the RSV Bible in 1952 in favour of the word 'expiation'. A scholar called C. H. Dodd was influential in this move. He and others did not like the idea of a wrathful God being appeased. To them it smacked of being primitive. It is good that the word 'propitiation' has returned in the now-popular ESV Bible.

When we read this word 'propitiation' in the Bible, as we do, note that God's anger is righteous anger against sin, not arbitrary or capricious, and that God himself provides the means of turning away His wrath, namely the blood of his own Son. God, in the blood of Jesus, propitiates himself: 'He Himself is the propitiation for our sins' (2:2). God 'sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'; he did this

out of love for us (4:10). John uses this word in these two places in his letter: 2:2 and again in 4:10. He is the only NT writer to use the word in this form, '*hilasmos*'. Paul uses the same word in a different form in Romans 3:25. They found the word '*hilasterion*' in the LXX where it refers to the 'mercy-seat' of the Ark.

We noted that the word 'propitiation' continues in the NKJV Bible and has returned to the ESV Bible. But this does not mean that the teaching of divine wrath against sin has returned to the church. Too many Christians take sin too lightly. Too many presume upon the grace of God in forgiveness; they confess on Sunday and return to a life of sin on Monday- unless they are already sinning on Sunday and have no time to confess. The apostle Paul in Romans 6, like John, appeals to the truth that being saved means being in a new relationship with Jesus, a relationship based on love and commitment, a relationship established in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In closing verse 2, with this teaching about Christ being the propitiation for our sins, John writes, 'and not for ours only but also for the whole world' (2:2). Some preachers of Reformed doctrine tie themselves in knots trying to explain this phrase. John of course, is not teaching universalism, the idea that every individual will be saved in the end. Some think that John's 'our' refers to Jews and his 'also for the whole world' refers to Gentiles; such a distinction means going back and saying 'little children' and all the 'wes' refers only to Jewish converts. Others offer to help John by saying he should have written 'the elect' instead of 'the whole world'. John writes 'the whole world' not meaning the sins of every individual will be propitiated or forgiven by Jesus but that this is the only way for our sin to be forgiven. Jesus' death is sufficient for all but only efficient or effective for some. Jesus' 'sufficient death provides the basis throughout all human history for God the Father to extend... his divine longsuffering'.