

1 John Chapter 2

Exegetical Notes

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

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teknia - little born ones

paraklhton - advocate - our representative before the bar of God (TDNT V:812-13.)

In this verse, and the next, we find the basis for our forgiveness. We can confess our sins all we want, but unless God has a reason to forgive, our confession is meaningless. Put another way, unless the price for our sin is paid, God is unable to forgive.

The first foundation stone of forgiveness is Christ's intercessory work. He is our advocate, or lawyer, who always stands before the bar of God on our behalf. In Romans 8:34 Paul writes, "*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*" We cannot get one sin up on God before Christ is there making intercession on our behalf. Satan can make no sin stick to a true child of God. In Hebrews 7:25 we read, "...seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Since John is viewing salvation from its regenerative since, that is, one is either alive or dead, his tone is black and white. However, we see a glimmer of reality here in that John is acknowledging that when we do sin, we have an advocate. He is not denying the possibility of sin to a believer, but on the other hand affirming its possibility. The difference between the true believer and the lost person is that when we sin, we have an advocate.

The reason Christ can be our advocate is that he is righteous. This is a reference to his sinless nature and perfect character. He, and he alone, has the necessary qualifications to intercede for us before the bar of God.

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

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ilasma - propitiation or mercy seat. This word also can mean "covering." Christ's blood is the covering that keeps the sinner from the wrath of God (TDNT III:318ff.)

kosmou - world in terms of its fallenness

The second foundation of our forgiveness is Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. The word for propitiation means "satisfaction." God can forgive our sins because there is a satisfactory payment for them, the blood of Christ.

Note that this satisfaction is global and complete in nature. Some want to say that Christ's death was sufficient only for those who believe and no more. However, that is not true as is obvious by this verse. Not only is Christ's death the propitiation for our sins (the sins of the elect) but for the entire world's sins. Christ's death is sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world, but only efficient for those who believe. Christ's death and sacrifice was an infinite payment for sin.

Another way to see this is that Christ's death was infinite in value, but finite in scope.

LIMITED ATONEMENT - teaches that Christ's death was enough to pay for only the sins of the elect.

PARTICULAR REDEMPTION - Christ's death is sufficient for every sin ever committed, but only efficacious for the elect.

UNLIMITED ATONEMENT - Christ's death is unlimited, both in its value and efficaciousness. Forgiveness is available to all who believe of their own free will.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

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ginwskomen - deep, experiential knowledge as opposed to a mere head knowledge

thrwmen - keep, present tense, which denotes an habitual practice

Verses 3-6 gives us the obedience test for true salvation. How can we know that we really know Christ? If we keep his commandments.

The tense for the word keep is the present tense, and denotes an habitual practice. Although as believers we may falter in our obedience now and then, nevertheless our lives are characterized by obedience to Christ and his words.

Christ said this same thing in John 14:21-24. In that passage he basically says that whoever loves him will keep his commandments, and those that do not keep his commandments do not love him.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

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The negative aspect of this test is found here. Those that make a claim to know Christ and yet live in a pattern of continual disobedience evidence the fact that they are not true believers at all. Not only do they deceive others, but they deceive themselves as well.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

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thrh - present tense

On the other hand, those who keep the commandments of God as a manner of life evidence true fellowship with him. John puts this in terms of perfecting the love of God. How do we bring to full fruition the evidence of our love for Christ, by keeping his commandments (John 14:21-24).

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

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menein - present tense, continual dwelling as opposed to hit and miss

John sums up the test of obedience in this verse. Those that say that they abide in Christ should walk even as Christ walked. How did Christ walk? He walked in continual obedience to the Father.

Many times we downplay the necessity of obedience, desiring to substitute a theology of feeling and emotion. Most of the Christian life can be summed up as obedience to God's commandments. Those that are mature in the faith have made it a practice, over a long period of time, to be in obedience to God's commandments.

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

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John now expands the test of the previous four verses to include other believers. Some would make the test of obedience to Christ and the test of love to others two separate tests (e.g. Stott), but perhaps it is better to see them as two sides of the same coin (Burdick). Either way, the implications are the same.

John starts out by stating that he is not giving the readers a new commandment, but one which they had from the beginning. The beginning of what? Certainly not eternity past (as seen in 1:1) but the beginning of the new life in Christ as experienced by John's readers. In other words, the beginning of their salvation experience.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

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Having just stated that the commandment he is writing is an old one, John turns right around and says that it is a new one! How so? Stott offers the following four points (Stott, p. 98):

1. It is new in its emphasis in that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the command to love one another (Matthew 22:37-40).

2. It is new in its quality. A true disciple is to love another believer unto death (John 15:13).
3. It is new in its extent, extending even to enemies (Matthew 5:44-47).
4. It is new in the sense of our fresh comprehension of it.

Why is this command seen as new, it is because the darkness is passing away and the light is now dawning. It is a new commandment for a new era in God's dealings with people. It was a well-known fact to the Jews that the Messiah would usher in the "age to come." When Christ came, that age started and will be fully realized in the Kingdom. One of the characteristics of this new age is love for one another as Christ gave us commandment and as Christ served as our example.

Note that in John's repetition of these tests that walking in the light is equated with obedience which is equated with having fellowship with Christ which is equated with loving our brethren. All are different aspects of the same reality.

1. Those that fellowship with Christ walk in the same light he does (1:5-7).
2. Those that keep Christ's commandments evidence their love for him (2:3-6).
3. Those that love other believers keep Christ's commandments and walk in the light (2:7-11).

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

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John now applies the test. If a person says that they are in the light, that is, the light of the new era as evidence by fellowship with Christ and obedience to Christ, and hates their brother, they are in darkness.

Not only is the person presently in darkness, but they have never been in the light. One cannot claim to be in fellowship with Christ while at the same time walking in darkness.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

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John gives the positive aspect of the love test in this verse. He that loves his brother abideth (continual action) in the light and there is no possibility of stumbling in him. This is a most apt metaphor, because when one exists in physical darkness there is a great possibility of stumbling over something. However, when the sun is shining or the light is bright, one can clearly see and avoid the obstacles that would cause one to trip and fall.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

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On the other hand, those that hate their brother give every indication that they are in darkness. Note that this encompasses three aspects:

1. They walk in darkness (present tense pattern of life).
2. They do not know where they are going (spiritually).
3. The darkness has blinded their eyes (state of existence).

This entire section is best summed up by the words of Christ in John 13:34-35:

John 13:34 -35A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

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teknia - toddlers

We now have two digressions (Stott. pp. 100ff. and Burdick pp. 35ff.) The first one deals with the recipients of the letter, the second with the readers relationship with the world. Another way to see these next two sections is as two tests. A true believer is characterized as a growing member of God's family and as one who is not a friend of the world.

In the first digression, or test, John addresses himself to his readers in six parallel statements to three distinct groups, children, young men, and fathers. This is not in relation to their physical age, but their spiritual age. In other words, all believers start out as children, mature to young men, and move on to older men. A believer who does not grow is no believer at all.

How does John address himself to the children? He characterizes them by two statements:

1. Spiritual children know that their sins have been forgiven (verse 12). If a new believer knows anything, they know this.
2. Spiritual children know the Father (verse 13). A new believer has been given a divine revelation of the Father, and as such they know the voice of the Shepherd.

13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

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paidia - little children (grade school age)

What about the spiritual young men? John gives them two characteristics as well:

1. Spiritual young men (verse 13) have overcome the wicked one (Satan). Those who are young men have engaged the enemy and have overcome him, not in their own power, but in the power of the indwelling spirit (1 John 4:4; 5:4-5).
2. Spiritual young men (verse 14) have the word of God abiding in them. In other words, they know the Bible, and because of that they are able to wage warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

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And finally, what about spiritual fathers? They have a singular characteristic, they know God. "*Him that is from the beginning*" is no doubt a reference back to 1:1.

Knowledge of God is not head-only, but experiential. All of us know people by name or face that we have never met. Those who know God know him through a close, personal relationship that has taken many years to develop. Knowledge *about* God is not knowledge *of* God.

The entire goal of life for the believer is seen as developing a knowledge of God. This knowledge is manifested in the way one lives, and in the way one views life.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Inherent in John's description of spiritual children, young men, and fathers, is the notion of growth and progression. Just as it is natural for a baby to grow into a man (or woman), so it is natural for a spiritual baby to grow into a spiritual father. This is done as one gets to know God through the Word of God and through the experiences of life. A non-growing Christian is a contradiction in terms. In other words, if a person does not exhibit spiritual growth in their life, then there is every indication that they are not true believers.

One of the deadly heresies sweeping the church is the idea that one can be a Christian and yet exhibit no spiritual fruit. This is an impossibility. Those that are in Christ are new creations, and as such they will exhibit a changed life. Where there is no changed life, there is no salvation. Spiritual fruit is not a *cause* of salvation, but it is an effect of true salvation.

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

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agapate - imperative mood which is better translated "Stop Loving"

The second digression, or test, has to do with the world. Those that are truly born again exhibit this in their relationship with the world.

What is the world? It is:

1. The world system as headed by Satan (John 14:30-31).
2. The sphere of fallen humanity (Ephesians 2:2).
3. The values, principles, and mores of a fallen society.
4. Anything that is part of this fallen system, headed by Satan, that draws our affections away from God and our eternal home.

Note John's very decisive statement, those that love the world do not have the love of the Father in them. This is because we are not of the world, but of heaven. Christ told the disciples this in John 15:18-19:

John 15:18-19 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

James puts this injunction against loving the world in even stronger terms. In James 4:4 we read that if anyone is a friend of the world, they are the enemy of God. In other words, God declares war on anyone who loves this world!

James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

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John lists for us three things that are in the world.

1. The lust of the flesh. The flesh is the unredeemed and incorrigibly evil fallen humanity that we all carry around until we die (Romans 7). In our flesh dwells no good thing, and the lusts of the flesh are those fleshly desires that seek fulfillment regardless of the cost.
2. The lust of the eyes. The eye is the entry point for many lusts. In Genesis we read that when Eve saw the fruit, and that it was good, she ate it. Christ tells us in Matthew 5 that whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart.
3. The pride of life. Ultimately all sin is an exaltation of self. Satan's great sin was his exaltation of self over God. When we sin, there is a part of us that says "I know how to satisfy my needs better than God."

Each of these aspects of temptation evidence themselves in the lover of the world. Those of us who claim to be lovers of God must run from these vices. One cannot claim to love God while at the same time satisfying their flesh with evil pleasures. One cannot claim to love God while at the same time coveting all that their eyes see. And finally, one cannot claim to love God while at the same time they exalt themselves over God by assuming that they know how to meet their need or satisfy their soul better than God himself.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

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Not only is the love of the world to be avoided by Christians because God is against the world, but also because the world is temporary. Everything we see and touch is temporary, and one day will be thrown on the great bonfire of God’s judgment (2 Peter 3:10-14). Why should the believer pour their life into something that is transitory in nature. Only that which is eternal will abide forever.

Christ pointed this out Luke 12:16-21. Someone asked Christ to arbitrate their inheritance, to which Christ responded with the Parable of the Rich Fool. Man’s life does not consist in material possessions, but eternal treasures. It does not profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul (Matthew 16:26).

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ encouraged his listeners to lay up for themselves treasure in heaven. When one has eternal treasure they do not need to worry about someone stealing it, or having its value diminish over time. For the believer, our inheritance is in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-4).

18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

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As we have already noted, the problem John is addressing in this letter is an incipient gnosticism which denies the deity and/or humanity of Christ. Those who are of this neo-gnostic movement deny Christ as revealed in Scripture, and substitute a mystical Christ of their own making. John needs to address this subject for his readers.

The Greek word *antichristos* can be understood in one of two ways. The first is one who is *against* Christ, the other is one who is *instead* of Christ. Although the former is certainly true, it is probably better to see the latter meaning as having priority. The real Antichrist of the last time is not only one who exalts himself against Christ, but he is one who pretends to be the Christ, and deceives many.

How are we to understand the phrase “last times?” After all, John wrote nearly 1,900 years ago. This phrase is often used to refer to the time after the cross (Hebrews 1:2, 1 Peter 1:20, Mark 10:30). It is during this time that many antichrists will come ultimately culminating in the Antichrist of Revelation 13. In fact, it is the arrival of these antichrists that tell us we are living in the last times.

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

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How can we tell who these many antichrists are? We can tell them by the fact that they leave truth for error. The word "out" is *ek*, and means a departure from one thing to another. These antichrists originally appeared to be true believers, but their lack of salvation was ultimately evidenced by the fact that they left the truth for a lie.

Christ talks about this group a little bit in Matthew 13 in the Parable of the Sower. Some receive the word gladly, but after a while the cares of the world or persecution causes them to fall away. Their lack of true salvation is evidenced by the fact that they do not continue in the faith.

John makes the point that true believers continue, false believers do not. Their departure is proof that they were true believers at all. It is not that they were once true believers and lost their salvation, they were never really saved in the first place. All their departure did was externally evidence their lack of true salvation.

20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

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Unlike the antichrists which claim to have the deep, spiritual truth (*gnosis*), we have the real truth. This truth is given to us through the anointing which we have received. Some think that it is the Holy Spirit which does the anointing, but a careful reading of verse 27 says that this anointing teaches us all things. Therefore, we conclude that the anointing is the Holy Spirit and not a work of the Holy Spirit.

Christ told the disciples in John 14:26 that he would send another Comforter which would bring all things to the remembrance of the disciples. In 2 Corinthians 2:14 we are told that is the Spirit of God which gives us spiritual understanding. The anointing which we have from God, who is the Holy Spirit, enables us to discern the real truth from false truth. It is not that we automatically know everything, but we do have access to the Holy Spirit who does.

21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

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John addresses his readers as those who know the truth. How? It is by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. John is not writing a polemic against false teachers, rather he is writing to true believers to encourage them to remain in the faith and as a result of that remaining to evidence true salvation.

John also reminds his readers that no lie is of the truth. In other words, truth does not produce falsehood. Those that left as antichrists, and who claim to have real knowledge, evidence by their very departure the fact that they do not know the truth. The most efficient vaccination against error is a knowledge of the truth.

22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

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Who are the real liars? Who are the ones that do not know the truth, they are the ones who deny the deity of Christ. It is critical and important to note that anyone who denies the deity of Christ has denied the Father as well. One cannot claim to know the Father while at the same time rejecting the Son.

The phrase, "Jesus is the Christ" refers to the truth that Christ is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. He was not a great teacher, nor was he a great rabbi, but he was the very promised one of Isaiah 9:6-7. Those who deny this aspect of Christ are not true believers but in fact, antichrists. The gnostics, by denying the full deity and humanity of Christ were guilty of denying the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

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John restates this truth again in both a negative and positive way. Those who deny the Son do not have the Father, since it is only the Son who can reveal the Father to us (John 14:7ff.) Similarly, those who acknowledge the true identity of the Son and believe in him, acknowledge the Father as well. One cannot accept the Father and deny the Son, or deny the Father and accept the Son. It is both, or neither.

24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

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Perseverance of the saints, the doctrine that teaches that those who are truly redeemed will continue in the faith until the end, is one of those doctrines that appear paradoxical in the Scriptures. The Bible clearly teaches it is God who keeps those that are saved (1 Peter 1:7), nevertheless the Bible is also full of warnings against those who would fall away (Colossians 1:21-23). The Divine side is God's keeping power, the human side is a call and exhortation to remain in the truth.

John encourages his readers to remain in that which was heard from the beginning. Although this could be a reference to the Gospel only, it is probably better to understand it as referring to the truth of the incarnation of Christ in particular. John is telling his readers to remain in the truth of Christ's person and work in order that they will evidence the true nature of their salvation. If in fact, they remain from the human perspective, it is merely evidence that they have been kept by God's power from the divine perspective.

The word behind abide, remain, and continue is *meno*. It means to "dwell" or "set up permanent residence." It is not a transitory abiding, but a permanent abiding. Those who remain in the truth will permanently abide in the Father and in the Son.

25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

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This verse is not a contrast between bold and ashamed believers, but true and false believers. That is the whole context of the book of John, and specifically is the context of this passage.

29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

ean eidhte oti dikaiou estin ginwskete oti kai pav o poiwn thn dikaiosunhn ex autou gegennhtai

This verse actually belongs to the next section, and not to verses 18-28. The New Testament does not refer to believers as being “born of Christ” but as being “born of God.” Those who exhibit righteous conduct and behavior are those who show their relationship with God, the one who is alone perfect righteousness.

Note that the evidence of true salvation is characterized more by the righteousness of one's life as opposed to the so-called knowledge one possesses. It is possible for a person to have all the right answers about God and Christ, and still be lost since they do not have a righteousness of life which only God can give.