

Sermon 10, How to Deal with Sin, Pt. 3: The Way of the Paraclete, 1 John 2:1

Proposition: Don't sin. But when you do, you have an Advocate: Jesus Christ.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have seen the last two Sundays two different statements from the apostle John about how to deal with sin. We have looked at the way of confession, in which you freely admit your sin. We have looked at the way of the word, in which you let the word of God define your identity. And today, we look at the way of the Paraclete, in which you throw yourself unreservedly on the merits and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are these three separate ways? Of course not. They are all facets of the one way of dealing with sin that God used when He set forth His Son as a propitiation. We claim and experience that forgiveness by following the way of confession, the way of the word, and the way of the Paraclete simultaneously, for these three ways are one.

What we'll see this evening, then, is the absolute command "Do not sin" and God's infinite provision for sinners. We'll see the heinousness of our sin and the grandeur of our Paraclete. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, then listen to this description of His grandeur. And if your sin bothers you, then listen to hear about how God has dealt with it in Christ. He is the propitiation for our sins!

I. Don't Sin, v. 1a

John reminds us that he is writing this serious of a half-dozen "if" statements to us to prevent us from sinning. The reason he has outlined this theology of repentance, the word, and the Paraclete is to stop us from sinning.

In preparation for this sermon, I read an excellent, powerful sermon on this verse by the 19th-century Scots preacher Robert Candlish. He hammered on this theme of not sinning. In particular, he asked this question: Since we know that we're going to sin, should we accept that fact?

Now, that's a tough question. All of us already know in our heart of hearts that we are most certainly going to sin this week. It's not a question of *if* I'll fail to love God with all my

heart, soul, mind, and strength, but *when* I'll fail to do so. And the same is true of each of you. Candlish points out, though, to accept this fact, to reckon with it, to *plan on it*, is essentially defeatism of the worst stripe. If you can reconcile yourself with sin, then you do not have the attitude on which John insists here. He is not writing these things to you so that you can manage your sin and keep it to an acceptable level. He is not writing these things to you and me so that we can mostly not sin. He is writing to us so that we may not sin.

Is that the desire and resolution of your heart this morning? Are you okay with sin getting the better of you? I hesitate to use this illustration, but we can imagine a passionate member of the Democratic Party, perhaps even a Democrat who sits in the House of Representatives. If you ask this political partisan "Is Donald Trump going to be president at the end of next week?" he will probably answer "Yes, unfortunately." But if you ask him the further question, "Are you going to be okay with that?" he's certainly going to answer "No way."

Brothers and sisters, if in the ordinary political struggles of this world people can keep up that kind of passion and energy, that sort of loathing against a political platform or candidate, *how much more* should you and I be able to resist sin? We know for a fact that there are many, many Democrats among the American people who have never yet reconciled themselves to the presidency of Donald J. Trump. But how many Christians are there among Christ's people who have drawn up a truce with sin and agreed to live and let live? If we're honest, every single one of us would raise our hands. If not with sin across the board, then certainly with some sins we have completely given up the idea of not sinning. The most we're willing to hazard is that these sins are less than ideal and it would be good if we could stop engaging in them. Brothers and sisters, *that is not the vision that John has for God's people*. It's not right. You and I have got to stop planning on sinning! The world says "If you can't be good you can at least be careful." Hence sexual education campaigns and the free distribution of condoms. But the Bible says simply "Be good." Don't sin! You have a whole book in front of you to help you with that. You have an entire Person of the Holy Trinity resident within you to help you with that. You have an entire church full of people who live where you do to help you with that. All of these things are there so that we may not sin. But what else do you and I desperately need? A mind to not sin. We have to make up our minds that sinning is not something we're going to plan on or be reconciled with, *even though it's true that we are going to sin*. We rightly regard people who are comfortable with certain sins as being awful moral monsters. My parents' church has a particular leader who for years would ask in the pastoral prayer that God would forgive us for yelling at our wives this week. We always wondered why that guy couldn't stop yelling at his wife! But the thing is, if you and I plan on and reconcile ourselves to *any* sin, we are in the same boat. We might as well stand up in church and say "Lord, you know that this week I'm going to make some ribald jokes to my female co-workers. You know that this week I'm going to berate my children for failing to pick up their toys properly. You know that this week I'm going to tap into my neighbors' power supply in order to make my own electric bill smaller. That's just who I am, and I hope you'll forgive me, Lord."

Brothers and sisters, don't sin! Don't plan on sinning. Don't reconcile yourself to sinning. Don't think of sinning as something harmless. Don't say, "Well, since I'm going to do it anyway I might as well get it over with." You have all kinds of things to keep you from sin — but above all, turn your mind away from sin so that you might focus on something better: Your Savior.

Notice how John puts it. Even though he does say that we are going to sin, he attempts to indicate that we should never let ourselves plan on sinning by saying "*If* anyone sins" rather than "When you sin." He makes it a hypothetical and he makes it third-person. But if anyone sins, what do we have? A Paraclete.

II. God's Provision for Sinners: A Paraclete, v. 1b

So this is the provision. We have Him. He is an advocate. And He is righteous.

A. We Have Him

If anyone sins, this is what we have: an Advocate. All the English translations are united in this rendering. But before we talk about what that means exactly, let's just take a second to glory in the language of possession that John uses here. Brothers and sisters, Christ is yours! He belongs to you. He is someone you have. He's not just an acquaintance, not just someone you know, not just someone you think might help. He is yours. This is only one of many instances of the covenantal language of possession that we encounter all through the Bible, where God promises "I will be their God and they shall be my people." Notice those pronouns, "their" and "my." That is the language of ownership. That is the language of "having." He is my God. He is my Christ. He is my advocate.

Brothers and sisters, do you have this confidence? Can you speak of Jesus Christ as yours? Do you genuinely know and feel that He belongs to you? We talk all the time about "my spouse," "my kids," "my church." But how often do you call Jesus yours? "My Jesus." "My Savior." "Our Lord."

This is the first step down the way of the Paraclete. This is where dealing with sin begins: with a knowledge and a trust that Jesus Christ the Son of God is yours — your Savior, your Lord, your Messiah, your Redeemer, your Advocate. How do you get this trust? By actually giving Him something to do. By letting Him advocate for you, and living in light of the results.

B. He Is an Advocate

So with that said, what does it mean that He is an Advocate? The Greek word here is "paraclete," someone called alongside to help. You have probably heard this word before; it's a good Christianese vocabulary item, right up there with "fellowship." It is famous because it is the word Jesus uses in John 14-16 to talk about the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, Jesus says, is another Paraclete — implying that Christ Himself is our first and original Paraclete.

You have two Paracletes: Jesus and His Spirit. Both of them have come alongside you to help you by delivering you from your sinful condition and making you into the righteous, holy, blameless son of the Father that you have been called to be. The Spirit does this by testifying internally, by speaking to your heart, calling to mind everything that Jesus said, telling your spirit that you are a child of God and therefore a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

1. He speaks on our behalf

But how does Christ do it? The Spirit as Paraclete testifies and speaks *internally*. The Son as Paraclete testifies and speaks *externally*. In classical and Hellenistic times, the word paraclete was used to describe someone who testified on a friend's behalf. The word was general; it could refer to anyone testifying, including professional legal counsel but by no means limited to that professional legal counsel. The word describes a friend who speaks on your behalf, whether he's a professional lawyer or just a friend or something in between. Brothers and sisters, this is what we have. We have an Advocate, someone who speaks on our behalf. We know that one place where He speaks externally to us is His word. There He tells us on our behalf everything we need to know for life and godliness. But John is not focusing on either the internal advocacy of the Spirit or the Biblical advocacy of the Son. He is focusing on Christ as Paraclete who speaks on our behalf in the most important forum of all: the Heavenly Courtroom/Throne Room of His Father.

You see, in the book of Job we see how Satan comes into God's throne room and gets to speak up as the accuser of the brethren. He gets to badmouth Job's character in front of God, and God agrees to test Job. In the book of Zechariah, we see that Satan stands by the high priest to accuse him. The overall picture seems to be that in the Heavenly Courtroom of God Almighty, the prosecutor had an outsize role. He got to do exactly what his name suggests. "Satan" means "accuser" or "adversary." He was the prosecutor, and he loved his job and was very good at it. But now, John says, don't think about Satan standing up to get God to disown you. The opposite is true.

2. He intercedes with His Father

Rather than Satan standing against you when you sin, you have Christ standing for you. Your defense attorney is the best in the business. He literally died for His clients and does His work pro bono. He's independently wealthy and infinitely benevolent. And He always lives to make intercession.

Now, a number of theologians have pointed out that we should not imagine Jesus on His knees before the Father begging, as though the Father were eager to punish and Jesus had to talk Him out of it. Especially we should not think of the Father as representing the claims of justice while Jesus represents the claims of love. John cuts that off at the pass by insisting that the key attribute that characterizes Jesus as Paraclete is righteousness or justice. Rather than love pleading with justice, the picture drawn here is of justice pleading with love!

Now, do you think there is the slightest chance of judge who is love, hearing the pleas of an advocate who is perfectly just, failing to let you off? Brothers and sisters, Jesus intercedes with the Father by presenting His own blood. He simply says "It's already been paid for. That sin has already been taken care of. Father, I discharged that debt already. Caleb owes nothing."

Jesus' claims are perfectly just. If we can imagine a Government Accountability Office in Heaven, the bean counters are over at their table nodding their heads and putting up very slickly produced slides that graphically demonstrate that the debt is now \$0 and that the account is

balanced because Jesus paid it all. There can be no doubt in the mind of anyone in the Heavenly Courtroom, including the prosecutor Satan, that the person being accused is going to be declared “Not guilty” and the sentence will be “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.”

Brothers and sisters, how do you deal with sin? By following this way of the paraclete. In a criminal trial here on earth, you pretty much have to entrust yourself entirely to your defense attorney. He who undertakes to defend himself has a fool for a client. How much more do you need to entrust yourself entirely, body and soul, to your advocate in heaven? Don’t undertake to defend yourself in the Heavenly Courtroom. Let’s just say that I know that not a single person here could survive 30 seconds of cross-examination by the Prince of Darkness. That’s why you don’t speak; you let your Advocate speak for you. Don’t sin! But if anyone does, we have an Advocate. We have a defender who will prove that you should be let go because He, the defense attorney, already served your sentence.

C. He Is Righteous

And He does it all in His righteousness! This not posturing. This is not stretching the truth. Everything He says is fact-checked by the Heavenly Accountability Office on one side of the courtroom and Snopes on the other. Both of them put up slide after slide that shows that green checkmark and says “True!” Not a single word that would get a “mostly true” has ever come out of His mouth, never mind one that would garner a “pants on fire” rating. Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ the righteous one speaks for you. You have the truth itself on your side, and with a perfectly just judge, you need nothing else.

In an earthly courtroom, sadly, sometimes innocence is no defense. But in the Heavenly Courtroom, innocence dearly purchased and paid for with the most precious substance ever known on earth, the blood of Christ, will be your defense every time.

You have an advocate with the Father. If you understand what this means, you will not want to sin! If you realize that essentially, if we can put this into our human understanding of how time works and how causes and effects travel through time, every time you sin you’re lashing your perfect and perfectly generous defense attorney with a cat o’ nine tails, you won’t want to sin anymore! You’re sitting in the dock. You’re the accused. Satan, with horns, tail, pitchfork, and a powerful smell of brimstone about him, is standing up to accuse you. And at that moment, are you going to reach out and savagely jab your finger into your Advocate’s eye? Especially knowing that your Advocate is the judge’s favorite person? Oh, brothers and sisters, may sin be unthinkable to us because our hearts are overwhelmed with the grandeur and glory of Jesus Christ, the righteous Advocate who pleads for us with perfect justice before our Father of perfect love. Amen.